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# Between Religion and Violence in Medieval Sicily

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## ABSTRACT

In the light of contemporary world events, historical scholarship has increasingly focused on the various dimensions of religion and violence in different contexts. In the traditional rendering of pre-modern history, the role of violence seemed to mark the major turning points in the making and unmaking of past societies, and violent behaviour and ideology predominated a world view pivoted on the law of survival of the fittest. The purported nexus between religious belief and violent practice may be studied in the case of medieval Sicily, an island which exchanged hands between three dominant civilizations in the Mediterranean in the course of the medieval millennium. The relationship between religion and violence marked some of the defining moments of medieval Sicilian history. In this chapter, the relationship between the two phenomena is examined against the backdrop of the history of events, but also in the light of recent discussions of social and economic developments in the island kingdom. After providing a historical overview, religious realities are discussed in relation to the various time periods. There follows a discussion of two traumatic developments in the island's history, namely the end of Islam and Judaism in the 13th and 15th centuries respectively. Some representative historiographical positions are discussed, with a view to contextualizing Sicily in the wider discussion on religion and violence in European history.

*Fid-dawl tal-grajjiet kontemporanji, l-istudju storiku tar-relazzjoni bejn reliġjon u vjolenza qed jiffoka iżjed fuq id-dimensjonijiet differenti ta' dawn iż-żewġ fenomeni. Fil-kwadru tradizzjonali ta' l-istorja dinjija, l-era pre-moderna kienet imtebba' bil-vjolenza f'kull waqt importanti fit-tiswir u t-tmiem ta' soċjetajiet tal-passat, u l-imġiba vjolenti u l-ideoloġija li ppermettietha ppredominaw fehma globali msejsa fuq il-liġi ta' min jiflah l-aktar. Ir-rabta mistħajla jew vera bejn twemmin u vjolenza tista' tkun studjata fil-kwadru ta' Sqallija medjevali, fejn tliet ċiviltajiet gawdew il-kontroll wara xulxin tad-destin tal-gżira Mediterranja. F'dan l-artiklu, ir-rabta bejn twemmin u vjolenza hija studjata skont l-istorja ta' l-avvenimenti ewlenin li sawru l-esperjenza medjevali ta' Sqallija, imma wkoll b'lenti fuq l-iżviluppi soċjali u ekonomiċi tagħha. Wara li jintiseg l-isfond storiku għal din*

*id-diskussjoni, l-artiklu jistudja fid-dettal żewġ waqtiet trawmatiċi fl-istorja ta' Sqallija, tmiem l-Islam fis-seklu tlethax u t-tkeċċija tal-Lhud fis-seklu hmistax. Xi interpretazzjonijiet storjografici rappreżentattivi huma wkoll diskussi, bil-ħsieb li l-kapitlu trawmatiku tal-gżira titqies fil-kwadru wiesa' tar-rabta bejn twemmin u vjolenza fl-Ewropa medjevali.*

The unfolding of post-Cold War world events has influenced historical scholarship to focus increasingly on the various dimensions of religion and violence in different contexts. Ideology and religious belief have shaped human behaviour in numerous ways, and this moulding effect has not failed to extend itself to violent forms and norms of behaviour. With religions and religious identities defining some of the most important characteristics in civilizations, it is understandable that a decade of writings in the shadow cast by the 9/11 attacks echoes the deep disquiet that the school of thought behind 'clash of civilizations' has expressed – "the most dangerous cultural conflicts are those along the fault lines between civilizations"<sup>1</sup>. The clash of civilizations thesis underscored the importance of cultural realities, pointing to the purported differences in political value systems which are often said to have their roots in contrasting cultural and religious systems. The thesis elicited numerous critical responses, especially with the formulation of alternative models stressing how cultures very often overlap and synergize, and how different civilizations across time have been able to enter into fruitful dialogue<sup>2</sup>. In particular, it has been noted that "the presumption that people can be uniquely categorized based on religion or culture" is (or can become) "a major source of potential conflict in the contemporary world"<sup>3</sup>.

The example of medieval Sicily seems to offer an interesting space for testing some of the historical concerns relating to violence and religion<sup>4</sup>. The civilizational fault lines seemed to converge in Sicily, where the cliché of the island stepping stone nonetheless holds true<sup>5</sup>. Exchanging hands between civilizations, Sicily was also a cultural crossroads which reflected the wide diversities layered into its social and cultural structures as a result of centuries of competition and contestation. The centuries from the 6th to the 9th witnessed the integration of the island among the Eastern Roman dominions. In the wake of Islamic expansion in the central Mediterranean, the island became a major Byzantine outpost. The Aghlabid Muslim invasion of Sicily carried out in the period 827-902 led to the partial Islamicization of the island<sup>6</sup>. By the 11th century, Sicily was home to a large Muslim population, but considerable Greek Christian communities survived from Byzantine times especially in the north-eastern corner of the island, while a network of Jewish communities flourished in the main urban centres. The Latin Christian conquest led by the Normans from 1061 to 1091 did not initially cancel the island's chequered cultural realities<sup>7</sup>. Latin Christian government, in the form of the Norman regime, presided over a feudalized countryside inhabited largely by Muslim and Greek Christian villagers. An 'orientalizing' palace culture where Muslim handmaidens and eunuchs staffed the service of the Christian kings, dazzled contemporaries

and left foreign observers wondering at the true religious identity of the ruler. For instance, Roger proudly styled himself a defender of Christianity and the Church, yet he was also careful to remind his Muslim subjects that he enjoyed his authority “through the grace of Allah”<sup>8</sup>. Muslim local communities were allowed to keep their separate laws and structures, safeguarding the autonomy of their way of life from the avidity of the Christian authorities.

By the second half of the 12th century, many Muslim villagers were enclaved into specific areas which became controlled havens. From 1189 to 1246 a rebel Muslim ‘state’ in the mountains of western Sicily declared its autonomy from the Latin Christian kingdom. Following the denouement of the Norman regime in 1194, its Hohenstaufen successor Frederick II (1197-1250) unleashed a programmatic extermination of Islam, which was accomplished by the mid-13th century<sup>9</sup>. Following the War of the Vespers (1282-1302), the island was integrated into the Catalan-Aragonese sphere. The surviving non-Christian, Arabic-speaking minorities in Sicily were constituted by the numerous Jewish communities, who were able to flourish there until the 15th century<sup>10</sup>. In a second major traumatic rupture, in 1492 the Catholic monarchs expelled all Jewish subjects from their dominions, including Sicily. By 1500, the *populo dotata trilingui* of Peter of Eboli’s day and the quadrilingual inscriptions of Roger II’s era had long become a thing of the past, as centuries of conquest and conflict finally eroded the island’s cultural diversity, a major characteristic of the island’s crossroads status<sup>11</sup>.

In the traditional rendering of pre-modern history, acts of violence seemed to mark the major turning points in the making and unmaking of past societies, and violent behaviour and ideology predominated a world view pivoted on the law of survival of the fittest. The grand narrative framed by the modern historiography of the Latin Christian annexation of Sicily completed in the 1090s, may fit only uncomfortably the numerous questions which continue to arise. A critical reading of the historical developments in the island kingdom has led to a substantial revision of traditional views, centred around the image of a palace-led religious and cultural coexistence reinforced by a multilingual administration and a multiethnic class of followers. Similar to the problem of *convivencia* in medieval Spain, the question of coexistence in Sicily has become a test paper for assumptions and sensitivities<sup>12</sup>. It is becoming increasingly clear that the series of violent ruptures which progressively undermined the contrived coexistence of diverse religious communities in Sicily<sup>13</sup> emerged from the very inequalities around which the feudal regime of the Norman rulers had been structured, which periodic instabilities and tensions helped to unmask. The subject communities themselves were forced to devise long-term survival strategies in order to manage their situation and their chances. The ability of some Sicilian Muslims in managing their survival up to 1200, in contrast to other Muslims whose ability to resist was overwhelmed by contrary external factors, is echoed in similar differences between one Jewish subject and another, and calls into question the above-mentioned notion of the fittest elements, and cautions

the writer against the collective categorization of people. There were fitter conquerors, as well as fitter conquered. Social and economic borderlines not only cut along, but also frequently across, religious, cultural and ethnic ones, with some evident material similarities between wealthier and poorer Christians and Jews serving to remind us that religious identity was only one factor in the equation, albeit a very important one.

Byzantine Sicily was subjected to the jurisdiction of Rome until 732-3, when the conflict over iconoclasm led it, together with southern Italy and Illyria, to be transferred by Leo III to the patriarchate of Constantinople. This development made the island a religious frontier within Christendom. Early and late Byzantine rule in Sicily was marked by efforts to convert the island's Jews to Christianity. A significant Jewish population reportedly existed in Sicily at the end of the 6th century, as Gregory I's letters instructed the authorities to induce the Jews to convert to Christianity, by relaxing some of their fiscal obligations rather than through violent methods. Rome's programme of systematic conversion seems to have borne fruit, although there was at least one backlash, documented in one of Gregory's letters in 593, where it was alleged that a Jew of Sicily, Nasas, had erected an altar in honour of Elijah, and had managed to deceive many Christians to worship there<sup>14</sup>. In the 870s, it was Constantinople's turn to attempt the conversion of all Jews, when the emperor Basil I ordered the compulsory conversion of all Jews in his dominions<sup>15</sup>. The effects of this enactment must have been temporary, as the Muslim conquest of Sicily was by then halfway completed.

The Muslim conquest of Sicily was launched in 827 and the first Arab successes immediately placed substantial Christian populations under Muslim rule. As *ahl al-Kitāb*, Christians and Jews were normally protected and allowed by the Muslim authorities to retain their religious identities in return for supporting specific fiscal burdens. In 888 the Aghlabid rulers were said to have ordered all Christians to wear a badge depicting a pig, while all Jews were to be ordered to wear a badge showing a monkey<sup>16</sup>. The intriguing evidence of religiously and ethnically mixed communities resulting from Muslim-Christian intermarriages in 10th-century Sicily, called *mušāmidūn* by Ibn Hawqal, reveals the practical compromises which might result in frontier societies of the Muslim world like Sicily<sup>17</sup>. Sicily's Jewish communities in the Muslim period are best known from documents of the Geniza collection, which from the 970s onwards attest to a thriving population which was very well connected socially and commercially to other parts of the Mediterranean world<sup>18</sup>.

The Latin Christian conquest of Sicily under the Norman leadership of Roger I and Robert Guiscard from 1061 to 1091 subjected thousands of Greek Christians, Muslims and Jews to the new rulers. During the decades of conquest and thereafter in the territorial consolidation of the Norman government, community intermediaries came forward to negotiate terms of subjection with the conquerors. Religious identity and community membership were key factors in establishing one's tributary status. The conquered Muslim communities were subjected to the juridical constraints and fiscal

obligations associated with dhimmitude, soon Latinized in government charters as *servi camere regie*, but were normally guaranteed in return royal protection to be able to practice their faith. In the age of the crusades, the large subject non-Christian populations of Sicily and the Spanish Reconquista came to share some of the same social and economic characteristics which marked the colonial subjection of native Muslim communities by the Frankish overlords in the Latin east<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless, few rulers desiring to be seen as pious defenders of the faith were immune from the impulse to convert non-Christian subjects. According to Romuald of Salerno, towards the end of his reign Roger II, “inflamed with zeal for the Christian religion”, actively encouraged the conversion of Jews and Muslims to Christianity, in a marked departure from previous royal policy<sup>20</sup>.

Despite the gradual marginalization of non-Christian communities with the intensification of Latinization in the capital Palermo and in some major towns, Muslim communities flourished alongside their Christian and Jewish counterparts well into the second half of the 12th century, and their members could freely work their trades and run their businesses as part of a thriving market economy. The island’s trade was richly connected to north Italian and other markets hungry for its wheat<sup>21</sup>. As the wealth of the Sicilian kingdom increased, fuelled also by the immigration of thousands of new settlers from the Italian peninsula and beyond<sup>22</sup>, the economic power of the Latin ruling class grew disproportionately, and so did the underlying social and ethnic inequalities. These realities frequently surfaced in periods of instability and conflict, as happened in the decade or so following the loss of the island’s African possessions in 1160<sup>23</sup>, and in the uncertainty created by the death of William II in 1189. Sporadic localized riots would sometimes not be enough to ventilate anger against the non-Christian scapegoat, leading to more systematic pogrom campaigns. In particular, the areas of dense Lombard settlement were subjected to systematic anti-Muslim pogroms from the 1160s<sup>24</sup>. Led by Tancred of Lecce (future king of Sicily, 1189-1194) and Roger Sclavo (an illegitimate great-grandson of Henry del Vasto), the Muslim communities in eastern Sicily all the way from Catania to Syracuse were attacked by fighters from the ‘Lombard’ strongholds. Hundreds of villagers were massacred, while the rest were expelled. Many Muslims fled across the island to the better-defended, mountain top safe havens in western Sicily, especially Corleone, Jato, Cinisi, Platani and Calatrasi. In reprisal, William I ordered the destruction of Piazza, Butera and the nearby Lombard settlements. Nonetheless, these settlements were re-established soon afterwards.

The Crown sought a safeguard in the inclusion of at least one councillor of Muslim background in the circle of royal familiars<sup>25</sup>. The feudal and arguably colonial society which evolved across the chequered landscape of 12th-century Sicily witnessed the progressive enclaving of the subject Muslim population, notably on the massive holdings of the abbey of Monreale established in the 1170s<sup>26</sup>. By the 1190s, the surviving Muslim population was in rebellion, overturning the relatively downcast acceptance which had characterized preceding generations living under Christian subjection.

Nevertheless, the extent of acculturation and conversion in different parts of Sicily is highlighted by the intriguing evidence of cultural crossovers such as the Arabic-speaking women dressed in eastern attire frequenting Greek Christian churches in Palermo, attested by Ibn Jubayr. The modern observer's difficulty in distinguishing between the different cultural elements is in itself an indication of the strong overlap between them<sup>27</sup>. For the individual, conversion created insurmountable difficulties with one's own community, as apostasy could not be forgiven. Some converts would be impossibly caught between two worlds, as would be the case with the relapsed Christian converts from Islam hounded by the friars at Lucera in the 1290s<sup>28</sup>. The study of thousands of Arabic and Greek names of villeins surviving mainly in the Sicilian land registers enable the historian to chart some of the stages in the process of acculturation<sup>29</sup>. It illustrates some of the difficulties faced by the cultural and linguistic historian seeking to identify and classify individuals who seem to do their best to defy these attempts at classification. Evidently, the respective religious leaderships at the core of these communities would regard acculturation as dangerous contamination, but the survival strategies devised by people in their everyday life, including linguistic solutions such as bilingualism, as well as *taqiyya* or dissimulation, reflected pragmatic choices best suited to their needs<sup>30</sup>. In particular, recent research has highlighted the previously overlooked role of Arabic as 'a language of acculturation', and Arabic Christianity as an important intermediary in the conversion – whether genuine or pretended – of Sicilian Muslims, including those communities that escaped the anti-Muslim pogroms from the 1160s onwards<sup>31</sup>. The communities were severely affected by an incessant haemorrhage – thousands left the island in the course of the 12th century, abiding by the orthodox Muslim teaching that it was sinful to choose to live under a non-Muslim ruler. The frequently cited fatwa of al-Mâzarî of Mahdiyya had ruled that a *qadi* appointed by a Christian lord could not exercise legitimate authority over Muslims<sup>32</sup>.

The open rebellion of the Muslims of Sicily and the 'declaration of independence' by an emirate in western Sicily, in a sense marked a watershed in Christian attitudes towards Islam in Sicily. Until the 1180s, there were pogroms and persecutions, but also periods of relative calm where forms of cultural and religious coexistence could still be found. The series of revolts which broke out from 1189 at the death of William II, effectively led to the 'withdrawal' of Sicilian Islam from the kingdom's structures of life, leading to mass migrations to the mountain strongholds from where the Muslims were to defy Latin Christian rule for decades. Arguably the rebels took advantage of the state of near-total chaos which engulfed the island with the destabilization of Hohenstaufen rule from 1197, until an adult Frederick II would assert his royal authority in Sicily, "the mirror of empire". In the ensuing "time of troubles", Muslim rebels pillaged and burned Christian villages and made daring, long-distance raids miles away from their mountain fortresses. As a result of their *razzie* some notable hostages were taken, including Christian prelates from larger towns. Innocent III, guardian of the young Fre-

derick, addressed the Muslims of Sicily in 1206 offering them protection in return for their return to obedience and “the observance of good customs”<sup>33</sup>. But this was also the age of the Fourth Lateran Council, whose notorious Canon 68 decreed that henceforth Jews and Muslims in Spain and Sicily were to be distinguished from Christians by their dress, in particular to avoid sexual ‘pollution’<sup>34</sup>. In the crusade against Markward von Anweiler, the allegation of the latter’s alliance with the Muslims of Sicily had a potent effect: “he called on their help against the king and the Christians; and so as to stimulate their spirits more keenly to the slaughter of our side and to increase their thirst, he has spattered their jaws already with Christian blood and exposed captured Christian women to the violence of their desire”<sup>35</sup>. The Sicilian Muslim leader was a prince of believers for Muslim authors, but in Christian versions was the classic example of the ‘untrustworthy Saracen’ who struck an alliance with the worst elements in Christendom. Christian chroniclers like Alberic, monk of the abbey of Trois-Fontaines, later linked the leader of the Muslim rebels in Sicily, Ibn Abbad alias Mirabet or Benevet, to Guillelmus Porcus of Genoa (who was an admiral of Sicily) and Hugo Fer of Marseilles, the two notorious figures in the accounts of the so-called Children’s Crusade of 1212 who were reported to have ‘sold the children into slavery’<sup>36</sup>. Frederick’s secret pact with the rebel leader Ibn Abbad, which allegedly was to have permitted the Muslim and his entourage to sail to North Africa, was broken when Abbad was thrown overboard by Frederick’s soldiers. In revenge, Abbad’s daughter tricked Frederick into sending three hundred knights to deliver to them her stronghold of Entella; she had them all killed, then took her own life<sup>37</sup>.

The systematic destruction of Sicilian Islam, including the self-proclaimed ‘emirate in the mountains’<sup>38</sup>, from 1221 to 1246 was evidently intended to assert Frederick’s authority while also contributing the perceived benefits of getting rid of ‘the evil Saracens’<sup>39</sup>. Blamed for the loss of Damietta in 1221, excommunicated for failing to depart on crusade in 1227, Frederick II’s treaty with the Ayyubid ruler in 1229 seemed to confirm his willingness to use diplomacy rather than the sword with regard to Islam<sup>40</sup>. Nevertheless, Frederick adopted an uncompromising approach against his Muslim subjects at home. Deportations to the Apulian town of Lucera started in 1223, and continued at least until 1246. Lucera’s population around 1300 has been estimated between 15,000 and 20,000, considerably lower than the figures of 60,000 or even 80,000 Muslims cited in the past<sup>41</sup>.

By the end of Frederick’s reign in 1250, thousands of Sicilian Muslims had been forced either to flee to North Africa, or to face deportation to Lucera. A small minority chose the path of conversion. Late medieval Sicily’s only documented Muslim community survived on the small island of Pantelleria until around 1500<sup>42</sup>. Mendicant preaching in the 1290s paved the way for the destruction of the Apulian haven of Sicilian Islam<sup>43</sup>. Eight years after the forced conversion of the Jews in the Angevin domains of southern Italy, Charles II of Naples dismantled the Muslim community at Lucera in 1300, citing the



dangers that the Saracens posed to the spiritual welfare of his subjects. The majority of Lucera's Muslims were sold into slavery, while some were relocated to nearby villages<sup>44</sup>.

The early 13th century destruction of Sicilian Islam marked the first major traumatic rupture, cancelling from the religious map of the island a religion and a culture which had been a principal element there since the 9th century. By the late 13th century a new collective Sicilian identity had emerged; indeed Henri Bresc has termed the revolt of the Vespers in 1282 a "national revolution"<sup>45</sup>. The triumph of Latinization at the expense of the Greek Christian heritage, in a process which Bresc has termed "*résorption de l'hellénisme sicilien*"<sup>46</sup>, was all the more ironic when one considers the Greek Christian identity of Sicily up to the Muslim conquest, and the key role Greek religious activism played in the 12th-century conversion of Muslims<sup>47</sup>. In contrast to the major cultural standing of the Greek language and letters under the Norman administration, a systematic search in the original acts after 1300 yielded only ten occasions where at least one signatory signed in Greek characters<sup>48</sup>. Thirty-three Basilian monasteries were recorded in 1308, from the original 88 founded by the Norman overlords (as against 47 12th-century Latin monastic foundations). These had decreased further to twenty establishments by 1457<sup>49</sup>. Home to a 'virulent nationalism' which effaced linguistic and cultural diversities, late medieval Sicily was characterized by a remarkable success story: the spread of ascetism paved the way for the later diffusion of mendicant confraternities<sup>50</sup>.

A mendicant campaign in the 1290s proved disastrous for the Jews of the kingdom of Naples. Accusations of ritual homicide paved the way for a systematic campaign of conversion. It has been estimated that about half of southern Italy's Jews, some 7,000 out of 15,000, opted to receive baptism, under the pressure of the conversionist policy adopted by Naples in the early 1290s<sup>51</sup>. With the exception of localized persecutions, such as Trani where the local synagogue was transformed into a church in 1382, the Jewish communities of southern Italy enjoyed Angevin protection for much of the 1300s. After the Aragonese annexation of Naples, the Jewish subjects there came to share the generally favourable conditions enjoyed by their Sicilian counterparts. By the late 15th century, the Jewish population of southern Italy may have reached 50,000<sup>52</sup>.

Sicily remained home to a substantial population of Jewish subjects, who like the people of Malta, Gozo and Pantelleria spoke a native variety of Arabic: *Arabes de langue, Juifs de religion*<sup>53</sup>. Estimates for the Jewish population of Sicily in the late 15th century have varied between 24,000 and 30,000<sup>54</sup>. The difficulties of establishing precisely the figures of former Jewish *neofiti* or converts to Christianity have been discussed in detail by Zeldes<sup>55</sup>. Around two thousand of these converts appear later on in the records of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily, but there may have been several others who escaped the controls of that institution<sup>56</sup>. The 'religious resistance' and 'counter-acculturation' of Sicilian Jews was illustrated in the substantial autonomy enjoyed by the island's *aljamas* or local communities. Jews were able to organize their own community structures, and were liable to separate taxation by the Crown. A *dayan kelali*, or chief justice of the

Jews, was appointed by the Crown until the abolition of the post in 1447. In 1466, the Jews of Sicily obtained the authorization to set up their own *studium generale*, which project did not materialize. Attempts by local Christian communities to create a Jewish ghetto, such as in Malta, were rejected by the Crown. On his way to Jerusalem in 1488, Obadiah de Bertinoro described the Jews of Palermo, whom he calculated at 850 households, as being mostly impoverished manual labourers. Nevertheless, he also remarked about the prosperity of the Messinese community. As has been remarked by Zeldes, “Sicilian Jewry is a poor example of the usual image of the Jew as a moneylender”<sup>57</sup>, mainly because of legal restrictions imposed since the days of Frederick II.

Sicilian Jews were subjected to increased pressure in the 15th century, mainly due to rising messianism and the intense campaigns waged by mendicant orders. The numbers of converts appearing in notarial contracts reportedly rise from the 1470s onwards<sup>58</sup>. The anti-Jewish pogroms in the county of Modica in 1474 were the most notable act of violence. Nonetheless, Bresc was able to document six cases of tumult and pillage against Jews in the 14th century, at Palermo (1339, 1348), Trapani (1374), Monte San Giuliano (1374), and Syracuse (1392). The number of anti-Jewish attacks increased to 21 in the period 1400-1492, with attacks taking places notably in Syracuse (1449, 1487), Marsala (1402, 1466), Noto (1443, 1474), Palermo (1454), Taormina (1455), Polizzi (1457), Licata (1458), Castoreale (1460), Girgenti (1462), Modica (1474, 1477, 1490), Naro (1474, 1490), Sciacca (1474, 1487, 1490), Messina (1475), Augusta (1478), Mineo (1480), Trapani (1480), Ragusa (1477, 1490) and Caltagirone (1490). On eight occasions, the attacks took place during Holy Week or on Good Friday, while on at least four occasions the attacks followed upon religious sermons<sup>59</sup>.

In the aftermath of the Edict of Expulsion of 1492, Ferdinand of Aragon reasoned that, “as the expulsion of the Jews was brought about by their own transgressions”, they would be made to compensate for the Crown’s loss of revenue. The tribute to be exacted from departing Jews of Sicily amounted to 120,000 florins, while converts were faced with a 45% impost<sup>60</sup>. Thousands of Sicilian Jews found their way to the kingdom of Naples, where the ruler Ferrante of Aragon granted them his protection, forming collectively what was termed a *nazione de Siciliani hebrei*<sup>61</sup>. Nevertheless, the French invasion of Naples as well as popular riots there led to mass conversions. In Sicily, neophytes hardly found a welcome reception as they took their place in the Christian communities, especially those who were determined to collect old debts. They frequently found themselves treated ‘worse than Jews’, and the situation became more difficult with the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in 1500<sup>62</sup>. Converts were frequently accused of relapsing and therefore of committing apostasy.

The two traumatic events discussed above – the end of Sicilian Islam in the 13th century, and the expulsion of Sicilian Jews in 1492 – were arguably defining moments in the island’s history. In both cases, the island lost a vast human heritage which harked back hundreds of years – to the 9th century in the Muslim case, and to antiquity in the case

of its Jewish communities. Moreover, both populations represented the island's intimate past ties with the North African side of the Mediterranean, when it had been a thriving crossroads in the trading world of the Geniza. Both events led to serious economic as well as social and cultural losses. While the Sicilian Muslim may have represented a vanquished former master, the undisputed enemy in the age of the Crusades, the Jew was the universal scapegoat of medieval Christendom, held responsible for biblical events. As has been seen in the 9th- and 12th-century examples cited in regard to Basil I and Roger II respectively, conversionist policies were not new to Sicilian history. Nevertheless, the effect of Frederick II's Saracen Wars, leading to the eradication of Islam from Sicily, set a new model of royal behaviour towards rebel non-Christian subjects who had switched their loyalties in favour of a self-declared Muslim prince. Arguably, the fundamental pact of protection extended by the Crown was deemed to have been broken through the subject's act of rebellion. The vanquished rebel communities could be disposed of at will. Unlike other defeated Muslim populations in the high medieval Mediterranean, which were sold off into slavery, Frederick uprooted and deported thousands of former Sicilian Muslims to Lucera, creating there a final haven of Sicilian Islam. In contrast to the armed resistance of the Muslims and their break-away 'state' in western Sicily, which created a military pretext for a 'final solution', in the case of the Sicilian Jewish communities the expulsions of 1492 citing "Jewish transgressions", were principally the result of developments external to the kingdom of Sicily, a direct consequence of the island's membership in the dominions of the Catholic monarchs. Moreover, the violence against the Jews was mainly rooted in religious and ideological hatred, while fear of diversity, social competition and economic interests evidently also played an important role. Significantly, scarcity of resources has been linked to the rise of religious violence<sup>63</sup>.

After expelling its two non-Christian 'others'<sup>64</sup>, Sicily could no longer claim to be a multi-cultural haven, as it had been projected under Roger II. In truth, the constructed image of benign Norman multiculturalism has been shattered by modern research on the conflictual and unequal character of 12th-century Sicilian society<sup>65</sup>, and has been revealed as little more than an artificial extension of the oriental climate created at court. The "conundrums of multiculturalism" continue to pose a significant challenge to historians<sup>66</sup>.

Similarly, the model of a *terra senza crociati* [a land without crusaders]<sup>67</sup> may also be disclaimed. The conquest of Sicily from the Muslims, completed in 1091, opened up the largest Mediterranean island for Latin Christian settlement and colonization<sup>68</sup>, but until the mid-12th century this immigration did not come in sufficient numbers to radically alter the character of the territory. The Christian reconquista of Sicily achieved by Roger I paved the way for a feudal regime which provided the material base for the ostentatious government and ambitious foreign policy of the Norman kings. The myth of a crusade-free land is, furthermore, severely challenged with religious violence and

ethnic tensions surfacing in the anti-Muslim campaigns of the 1160s and 1170s, and the Church's direct involvement against the Muslims of Sicily in the 'time of troubles'. The Norman ruling class of the island arguably subjected the Muslim population in ways which were not dissimilar to the Frankish colonial regime in Syria and Palestine, creating dependent manpower which could be controlled through imported feudal structures<sup>69</sup>. In both cases, there were Muslims under the rule of Latin elites who were determined to transform the land into an extension of their Latin Christian world<sup>70</sup>.

Dissenting voices have emerged to question the idea that religions can be the root cause of violence<sup>71</sup>. Nevertheless, the Sicilian medieval case study leaves little doubt that religious differences did create long-term opportunities for violence. 'Religious fury'<sup>72</sup> was a familiar phenomenon in Antiquity<sup>73</sup>, left its deep mark across the Middle Ages, and would continue to do so in modern times. The violent social and cultural ruptures of the 13th and 15th centuries also proved that despite its Mediterranean insularity, the island of Sicily was closer to medieval Latin Christian Europe than its past links with the worlds of Islam and Byzantium, and its geographical context, would suggest. In truth, following the long period of transition under Norman rule, a new Sicily had come into being, which thought, spoke, behaved and acted in ways which may be comfortably located within the same general framework applicable for medieval Latin Christianity. The full implications of the conquest of 1061-1091 were gradually taking shape under the Norman rulers, but were finally realized only in the course of the 13th century, with the expulsion of the island's Muslims, and further confirmed in 1492.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, London 1996, p. 28.
- <sup>2</sup> See how an individual 'traveller between civilizations' achieved this in the 1500s: N. Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels. In Search of Leo Africanus A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds*, New York 2006.
- <sup>3</sup> A. Sen, *Identity and Violence: The illusion of Destiny*, London 2006, p. xv.
- <sup>4</sup> See discussion of medieval violence in M.D. Meyerson, D. Thierry, O. Falk (eds.), *'A Great Effusion of Blood'? Interpreting Medieval Violence*, Toronto 2004.
- <sup>5</sup> D. Abulafia, *The two Italies. Economic relations between the Norman kingdom of Sicily and the northern communes*, Cambridge 1977, p. 13; on the 'convergence of civilizations', see also E. Adler, F. Bicchì, B. Grawford, R. Del Sarto (eds.), *The Convergence of Civilizations. Constructing a Mediterranean Region*, Toronto 2006.
- <sup>6</sup> Sources in M. Amari, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula*, 2 vols., Turin - Rome 1880-1881; also Id., *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia, 1854-1872*, rev. ed. C.A. Nallino, 3 vols., Catania 1933-1939.
- <sup>7</sup> On the conquest, G.A. Loud, *Conquerors and Churchmen in Norman Italy*, Aldershot 1999; Id., *The Age of Robert Guiscard: southern Italy and the Norman Conquest*, Harlow 2000.
- <sup>8</sup> H. Houben, *Roger II of Sicily: a ruler between East and West*, Cambridge 2002, p. 131; on titles adopted by the Norman rulers, see also J. Johns, *I titoli arabi dei sovrani normanni di Sicilia*, in "Bollettino di Numismatica", 1986, 6-7, pp. 11-54; Id., *Malik Ifriqiya: the Norman kingdom of Africa and the Fâtimids*, in "Libyan Studies", 1987, 18, pp. 89-101.

- <sup>9</sup> For historical comparisons, see M. Levene, P. Roberts (eds.), *The massacre in history*, Oxford 1999.
- <sup>10</sup> On the persecution of Jewish minorities, D. Nirenberg, *Communities of violence: persecution of minorities in the Middle Ages*, Princeton 1996.
- <sup>11</sup> B. Lewis, *Cultures in Conflict. Christians, Muslims and Jews in the Age of Discovery*, Oxford 1996, for a wider historical discussion of relations between Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
- <sup>12</sup> V.B. Mann, T.F. Glick, J.D. Dodds (eds.), *Convivencia. Jews, Muslims and Christians in Medieval Spain*, New York 1992; M.R. Menocal, *The Ornament of the World. How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*, Boston - New York - London 2002; B. Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished. Christians and Muslims of Catalonia and Aragon, 1050-1300*, Cambridge 2004; C. Lowney, *A Vanished World. Muslims, Christians and Jews in Medieval Spain*, Oxford 2006.
- <sup>13</sup> C. Dallì, *Contriving coexistence: Muslims and Christians in the Unmaking of Norman Sicily*, in Brambilla E., Deschler-Erb S., Lambole J.-L., Klemeshov A., Moretto G. (eds.), *Routines of Existence: Time, Life and After Life in Society and Religion*, Pisa 2009, pp. 30-43.
- <sup>14</sup> S. Simonsohn, *The Jews in Sicily: 383-1300*, Leiden 1997, p. 8.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- <sup>17</sup> A. Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily. Arabic speakers and the end of Islam*, London 2003, p. 176.
- <sup>18</sup> Simonsohn, *The Jews in Sicily* cit.; see also J. Johns, *Una nuova fonte per la geografia e la storia della Sicilia dell'XI secolo. Il Kitāb Ġarā'ib al-Funūn wa- Mu-lah al-Uyūn*, in "Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome (Moyen Âge)", 116, 1, Rome 2004, pp. 409-449.
- <sup>19</sup> Comparisons with Syria and Palestine based on J.M. Powell (ed.), *Muslims under Latin Rule 1100-1300*, Princeton 1990; M. Shatzmiller (ed.), *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*, Brill 1993.
- <sup>20</sup> Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*: cit., p. 110.
- <sup>21</sup> D. Abulafia, *The two Italies. Economic relations between the Norman kingdom of Sicily and the northern communes*, Cambridge 1977.
- <sup>22</sup> C. Dallì, *Migrant Society to Island Nation: Sicily*, in A.K. Isaacs (ed.), *Immigration and Emigration in Historical Perspective*, Pisa 2007.
- <sup>23</sup> D. Abulafia, *The Norman kingdom of Africa and the Norman expedition to Majorca and the Muslim Mediterranean*, in R. Allen Brown (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies 7*, Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1984, London 1985, pp. 26-49; C. Dallì, *Bridging Europe and Africa: Norman Sicily's Other Kingdom*, in J. Carvalho (ed.), *Bridging the Gaps. Sources, Methodology and Approaches to Religion in Europe*, Pisa 2008.
- <sup>24</sup> Dallì, *Migrant Society to Island Nation*: cit., p. 71; for the account by 'Hugo Falcandus', see G.A. Loud, T. Wiedemann (trans.), *The History of the Tyrants of Sicily by 'Hugo Falcandus' 1154-69*, Manchester 1998.
- <sup>25</sup> H. Takayama, *The Administration of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, Leiden 1993, pp. 98-102.
- <sup>26</sup> J. Johns, *The Monreale Survey: Indigenes and invaders in medieval west Sicily*, in C. Malone, S. Stoddart (eds.), *Papers in Italian Archaeology IV*, The Cambridge Conference, vol. 4, Oxford 1985.
- <sup>27</sup> Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily* cit., p. 179.
- <sup>28</sup> J.A. Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy. The Colony at Lucera*, Oxford 2005, p. 174.
- <sup>29</sup> A. Nef, *Anthroponomie et jarā'id de Sicile: Une approche renouvelée de la structure sociale des communautés arabo-musulmanes de l'île sous les normands*, in M. Bournin, J.-M. Martin, F. Menant (eds.), *L'Anthroponomie: document de l'histoire sociale des mondes méditerranéens médiévaux*, in "Mélanges de l'École

- Française de Rome (Moyen Âge)", Rome 1996, 108/2; Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily* cit., p. 184.
- <sup>30</sup> For parallels with medieval Spain see B. Catlos, *Contexto social y 'conveniencia' en la Corona de Aragón. Propuesta para un modelo de interacción entre grupos etno-religiosos minoritarios y mayoritarios*, in "Revista d'Historia Medieval", 2002, 12; Id., ¿'Conflicte entre culturas' o conveniència? *Identidad religiosa y realidad política en la Península Ibérica*, Actas. XVIII Congrès d'Història de la Corona d'Aragó, Universitat de València, 2006.
- <sup>31</sup> Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily* cit., p. 96.
- <sup>32</sup> Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished* cit., p. 404.
- <sup>33</sup> Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy* cit., p. 86; C. Dalli, *From Islam to Christianity: The Case of Sicily*, in J. Carvalho (ed.), *Religion, Ritual, and Mythology. Aspects of Identity Formation in Europe*, Pisa 2006, p. 160.
- <sup>34</sup> M.R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross. The Jews in the Middle Ages*, Princeton 1995, p. 38.
- <sup>35</sup> Dalli, *From Islam to Christianity*: cit., p. 160.
- <sup>36</sup> J.M. Powell, *Frederick II and the Rebellion of the Muslims of Sicily, 1200-1224*, reprinted in Id., *The Crusades, the Kingdom of Sicily, and the Mediterranean*, Aldershot 2007.
- <sup>37</sup> Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy* cit., p. 10.
- <sup>38</sup> F. Maurici, *L'emirato sulle montagne*, Palermo 1987; Id., *Breve storia degli arabi in Sicilia*, Palermo 1995.
- <sup>39</sup> D. Abulafia, *Ethnic variety and its implications: Frederick II's relations with Jews and Muslims*, in Tronzo W. (ed.), *Intellectual Life and the Court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen*, Washington DC 1994; Id., *Monarchs and Minorities in the Christian Western Mediterranean around 1300: Lucera and its Analogues*, in Waugh S.L., Diehl P.D. (eds.), *Christendom and its Discontents. Exclusion, Persecution and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, Cambridge 1996.
- <sup>40</sup> Id., *Frederick II: a medieval emperor*, London 1988.
- <sup>41</sup> Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy* cit., p. 41; D. Abulafia, *The end of Muslim Sicily*, in J.M. Powell (ed.), *Muslims under Latin Rule 1100-1300*, Princeton 1990.
- <sup>42</sup> H. Bresc, *Pantelleria entre l'islam et la chrétienté*, in "Cahiers de Tunisie", 1971, 19, pp. 105-127.
- <sup>43</sup> Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy* cit.; A. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, Edinburgh 2009.
- <sup>44</sup> Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy* cit., chap. 8.
- <sup>45</sup> H. Bresc, *Politique et société en Sicile, XIIe-XVe siècles*, Aldershot 1990; *Ibid.*, p. 4; Id., *La formazione del popolo siciliano*, in *Tre millenni di storia linguistica della Sicilia*, Atti del Convegno della Società italiana di Glottologia (Palermo 1983), Pisa 1985, pp. 243-265.
- <sup>46</sup> Id., *Un monde méditerranéen. Économie et société en Sicile, 1300-1450*, 2 vols., Palermo 1986, pp. 587-594.
- <sup>47</sup> J. Johns, *The Greek church and the conversion of Muslims in Norman Sicily?*, in "Byzantinische Forschungen", 1995, 21, pp. 133-157.
- <sup>48</sup> Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen* cit., p. 588.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 590.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 608-618.
- <sup>51</sup> A. Foa, *The Jews of Europe after the Black Death*, Berkeley 2000, p. 119.
- <sup>52</sup> Id., *The Jews of Europe* cit., pp. 119-120.
- <sup>53</sup> H. Bresc, *Arabes de langue, Juifs de religion: L'évolution du judaïsme sicilien dans l'environnement latin, XIIe-XVe siècles*, Paris 2001.

- <sup>54</sup> N. Zeldes, *"The Former Jews of this Kingdom". Sicilian Converts after the Expulsion, 1492-1516*, Leiden 2003, p. 56.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-66.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105; on the image of Muslim and Jews in high medieval Spain, see also R. Brann, *Power in the Portrayal. Representations of Jews and Muslims in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Islamic Spain*, Princeton 2002.
- <sup>58</sup> Zeldes, *"The Former Jews of this Kingdom"* cit., p. 18, note 3.
- <sup>59</sup> H. Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen. Économie et société en Sicile, 1300-1450*, 2 vols., Palermo 1986, p. 636.
- <sup>60</sup> Zeldes, *"The Former Jews of this Kingdom"* cit., p. 72.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89-92.
- <sup>63</sup> H. Avalos, *Fighting words: the origins of religious violence*, Amherst 2005, p. 95.
- <sup>64</sup> D. Abulafia (ed.), *The Mediterranean in History*, London 2003; see also discussion of inter-ethnic relations in H. Houben, *Il rispetto interetnico e interreligioso da Ruggero II a Federico II*, <http://www.stupormundi.it/Houben7.htm>, accessed 2008.
- <sup>65</sup> See discussion in A. Nef, *Fortuna e sfortuna di un tema: la Sicilia multiculturale*, in F. Benigno, C. Torrisi (eds.), *Rappresentazioni e immagini della Sicilia tra storia e storiografia*, Atti del Convegno di Studi, Caltanissetta - Rome 2003, pp. 149-170, on the ups and downs of the theme of 'multicultural Sicily'.
- <sup>66</sup> A. Sapir Abulafia (ed.), *Religious Violence between Christians and Jews. Medieval Roots, Modern Perspectives*, Basingstoke 2002, p. xi.
- <sup>67</sup> F. Giunta, U. Rizzitano, *Terra senza crociati: popoli e culture nella Sicilia del Medio Evo*, Palermo 1991.
- <sup>68</sup> For a discussion of the notion of generalized servitude, A. Nef, *Conquêtes et reconquêtes médiévales: la Sicile normande est-elle une terre de réduction en servitude généralisée?*, in "Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome (Moyen Âge)", 2000, 112, pp. 579-607.
- <sup>69</sup> H. Bresc, *Féodalité coloniale en terre d'Islam. La Sicile (1070-1240)*, in *Structures féodales et féodalisme dans l'Occident méditerranéen (Xe-XIIIe siècles): Bilan et perspectives de recherches*, Rome 1978, pp. 631-647; Id., *Mudéjars des pays de la couronne d'Aragon et sarrasins de la Sicile normande: le problème de l'acculturation*, in *Jaime I y su época*, X Congreso de Historia de la Corona de Aragón, 3, (Zaragoza 1975), Zaragoza 1980, pp. 51-60.
- <sup>70</sup> On the violent ideology of the ruling elites, see R.W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, Oxford 1999; Id., *Holy Warriors. The Religious Ideology of Chivalry*, Philadelphia 2009.
- <sup>71</sup> W.T. Cavanaugh, *The myth of religious violence: secular ideology and the roots of modern conflict*, Oxford 2009.
- <sup>72</sup> C. Selengut, *Sacred fury: understanding religious violence*, Walnut Creek 2003.
- <sup>73</sup> H.A. Drake (ed.), *Violence in late antiquity: perceptions and practices*, Aldershot 2006; J.K. Wellman (ed.), *Belief and Bloodshed. Religion and Violence across Time and Tradition*, Lanham 2007; T. Sizgorich, *Violence and belief in late antiquity: militant devotion in Christianity and Islam*, Philadelphia 2009.

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