

Shlomo Simonsohn, ed. *The Jews in Sicily*. Volume 7: 1478–1489.

A Documentary History of the Jews in Italy 21. *Studia Post-Biblica* 48.3. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005. xii + 658 pp. index. gloss. bibl. \$269. ISBN: 90–04–14809–4.

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The two volumes under review are part of the massive *A Documentary History of the Jews in Italy*, whose general editor is Shlomo Simonsohn. There have been four volumes on Milan (Simonsohn), three on Piedmont (Renata Segre), three on Umbria (Ariel Toaff), two on Liguria (Rosanna Urbani), and I myself have produced two on Rome. Projected volumes will cover Tuscany and Southern Italy. Simonsohn has now undertaken what will be the largest single contribution, that on the Jews of Sicily. Including the present volumes 7 and 8, the series now numbers twenty-three volumes. The next ten volumes will also be on Sicily, including a monographic study due out by 2011.

Volumes 7 and 8 deal with the most dramatic period for Sicilian Jewry, the years 1478 to 1497. Many documents are fully reproduced, but not all, which would have trebled the volumes' size. In 1492, these Jews — scattered in communities throughout the island, as well as the islands of Malta, and Pantelleria (document no. 5,458: the numeration is consecutive from volume 1), and all subjects of the Crown of Aragon — were expelled together with the Jews of Spain.

The rich documentation allows readers to use their imagination in stringing the materials together. A great deal is suggested: in particular, that Maurice Kriegel's thesis that the expulsion of 1492 was decided at the last minute is correct (*Revue Historique*, 1978). In the fifteen years leading up to the event, only hindsight would have offered the faintest clue about what surely came as a bolt out of the blue. The order itself (no. 5,439) was hidden for about three months, likely to ensure that Jews would not run off with money and property before officialdom organized. Indeed, with no more than a handful of exceptions, Jews were protected from despoliation and violence (no. 5,276), in part to guarantee that they would pay off an enormous fine of 10[5],000 florins. Their property was sequestered and held until payoff, as no. 5,636, perhaps, best illustrates. Jews tried to smuggle property out and paid Christians to do so (no. 5,941 [March 1493]). No. 5,990 (early 1494) lists contributions to the huge fine by various communities, excluding Palermo. Jewish debts, and their collection, are listed in many complete registers, which are detailed in the instances listed in no. 6,102 (1497).

There was some Christian protest. No. 5,497 (1492) lists concerns of Sicilian officials about what the Jews' absence augured: those who lost revenues from Jewish tenants had to be compensated (no. 6,059), while those who received Jewish property were themselves to pay taxes on it (no. 6,079 [January, 1496]). The actual departure took about a year. No. 5,796 (1492) reports concerns about dishonest boat owners, and 5,865 (December, 1492) suggests some Jewish passengers were defrauded. The expulsion also accelerated conversions. Often a husband converted, claimed his children for the Church, but his wife refused to follow (no. 5,635 [1492] is poignant), although not always (no. 5,431 [1492]). No. 5,454 (1492) is the first of various royal letters protecting converts, who were to enjoy the same rights as Christians and suffer no monetary loss (nos. 5,535 and 5,559).

Yet besides expulsion, these two volumes record the living world of the Jews. Documents issued by the viceroy and other officials order that Jews be protected from exploitation, guaranteeing, for example, a Jewish wine monopoly and exemptions from wearing the badge. Slaves who converted, however, had to be handed over. Other documents guarantee propriety in criminal and civil proceedings when one of the parties to a complaint is a Christian, or they ensure that taxes be correctly apportioned. No. 4,892 (1486) grants permission to enlarge a synagogue, hardly anticipating expulsion. No. 4,999 (1487) grants two Jews a five-year charter to run a mine for copper, gold, and silver.

A central issue is Jewish self-governance. Until 1447, Sicilian Jews were subject to the often arbitrary rule of the Jewish *Dienchelele*, *dayyan kelali* (overall judge). Individual communities had their *prothi*. However, the real deciders were meddling royal officials. Thus, in no. 5,177 (1489), the viceroy orders Palermitan Jews to hold a general council, and in no. 5,194, he approves a Jewish petition (following the 1489 council). In no. 4,860 (1485), the viceroy orders new Jewish officials elected, and in no. 4,733 (1484), he insists that *prothi*, who appear to have

just been released from jail, take office. Jews were not the masters of their own house.

At the same time, nos. 4,813, 4,835, and 4,862 (all 1485) appoint Jews as *notarium causarum inter Iudeos vertentes* . . . to draw up contracts, testaments, and the like. Except possibly for fifteenth-century Spain, we know of Jewish notaries only in sixteenth-century Rome. Whether these Sicilian Jewish notaries were an indirect route to Jewish self-governance through consensual arbitration, as they were in Rome, remains to be decided. Their existence did not stop viceregal interference into personal matters that *ius commune* normally considered a Jewish reserve. In no. 4,563 (1480), as well as 4,845 (1485), the viceroy forces a Jew to free a widow from the obligation of Levirate marriage, in no. 4,570, he interferes in a case of suspected adultery, and in no. 4,575 (1480), he permits the marrying of a second wife when a first had proved childless. Inversely, in no. 5,311 (1490), the viceroy orders a Jew to give his wife a divorce. He even orders the promulgation of a ban (no. 4,983 [1486]), or, alternately (no. 5,065 [1487]) its annulment, although it was issued by a rabbi against another Jew.

The viceroy was wary of ecclesiastical encroachment. In no. 5,351 (1491), he instructs an archbishop to avoid Jewish affairs, and in no. 4,554 (1480), warns preachers not to create trouble. Nos. 5,008 and 5,010 call for protecting Jews during Holy Week and from the effects of violent Franciscan sermons. No. 5,102 (1488) condemns those who damaged a local synagogue, and no. 5,197 (1489) prohibits the vicar of the Archbishop of Messina from interfering in internal Jewish discipline, or acting in regard to Jewish divorce. No. 5,400 (1491) relates a clash between the viceroy and the Inquisition, which had removed a Jewish woman, accused of having sex with Christian men, from his custody, and no. 5,112 (1488) has the *Presidentes* Pietro Iuliano Centelles order legal proceedings against a Genoese merchant who had kidnapped a Jewish girl. Yet no. 4,703 is a letter of Sixtus IV from 1483 allowing inquisitorial activity. However, church courts could surprise. In no. 4,621 (1481), a woman, converted during riots, is allowed by an episcopal court to return to Judaism, even though the canons, for centuries, had normally sustained the validity of veritably-forced baptisms.

Aragonese rulers took seriously the idea that the Jews were their *servi regie camerae*, a term whose use — in Iberia itself one hears of *servi Regis* — reverts to its thirteenth-century inventor, Frederick II. *Servus*, however, did not mean *rightless*: rather, it emphasized royal concern. Hence, the term appears in no. 4,833 (1485), which instructs that the murderers of a Jew be captured. It is an error, however, to think Jews were esteemed: no. 5,352 (1491) states that those about to succor Jews on the way to the gallows must come from the lower (Jewish) classes. Jews also paid the *gisia* (poll tax), which Jews in Arab lands paid to ensure their status as tolerated *dhimmah*, continuing from the time of the Muslim hegemony on the island.

No. 4,536 (1480) offers an instance of Jewish violence that was not reckless. Jews had banded together to recoup the large sum of 2,000 florins. Another Jew carried a sword (no. 4,761 [1484]), however, at a fair, which was likely illegal. No.

4,938 (1487) pardons a Jew doubtfully convicted of manslaughter, while no. 4,997 tells of a Jew killing a Jewish rival. Yet, Jewish-Christian relations must have generally been calm, although the evidence at hand is too little to be conclusive. In no. 4,763 (1484), a Jew invites a Christian to serve as *compere* at his son's circumcision, an act that was condemned as the over-familiarity that the canons had denounced for centuries.

In no. 4,804 (1485), some Jews sail to Israel. Others followed. By 1492, all Sicily's Jews would be forced to depart. The marvelous documentation now offered to us by these two volumes will serve as a beginning for searching their full story out.

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