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Author
Zeldes, Nadia

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Legal Status of Jewish Converts to Christianity in Southern Italy and Provence

Nadia Zeldes

A comprehensive approach to the history of the Mediterranean European Jewish communities that emphasizes common factors is relatively recent.[1] Among the first to draw attention to these common factors was Maurice Kriegel in his *Les Juifs à la fin du Moyen Age dans l'Europe méditerranéenne*.[2] Kriegel's study focuses on social, cultural, and economic aspects of Jewish-Christian interrelations, tracing the decline in the status of the Jews in the Iberian lands and Southern France from the thirteenth century to the age of the expulsions (1492-1501). According to Kriegel, the increasing segregation of the Jews contributed to the deterioration of their image and the weakening of their position in Christian society, which in turn led to expulsion and conversion.

The thirteenth century saw a general decline in the status of the Jews in Christian Europe. The reasons for the deterioration of the status of the Jews in this period are manifold, and probably cannot be attributed to a specific factor or event. Most scholars now agree that changes such as increased urbanization, the attempts to create a cohesive Christian community, the rise of the universities, and new intellectual trends, as well as the founding of the Mendicant orders and their increasing influence in the later Middle Ages, played an important role in the worsening image of the Jew and the marginalization of the Jews. Urbanization meant that Jewish merchants and craftsmen became economic rivals instead of much needed suppliers of unique services, as was the case in the early Middle Ages. The attempt to build a cohesive medieval society entailed rejection and even demonization of outsiders and marginal groups such as heretics, lepers, and Jews. The spread of literacy and the birth of a new intellectual elite encouraged the study and reinterpretation of scripture, the rediscovery of classical texts, and a reappraisal of the role of the Jews in Christian society. For example, the emphasis on reason and logic led to the conclusion that the Jews' refusal to acknowledge the truth and logic of Christianity meant that their attitude was illogical, unreasonably stubborn, even diabolical. Moreover, the study of the Old Testament revealed to Christian scholars that the Jews living among them did not adhere to the "letter of the law," and instead of preserving a Judaism frozen in time and therefore fulfilling their role of witnesses as defined by the Augustine doctrine, they lived according to post-biblical

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[1] "A Mediterranean society" was the term coined by Shelomo Dov Goitein referring to the Jewish communities of Muslim lands represented in the Cairo Geniza documents (mainly in the 11th century): S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, I-VI (Berkeley, 1967-1988). Discussing the status of Jews and Muslims in the Christian world, David Abulafia argued for a different interpretation of the term of "*servi camerae*" in Mediterranean lands as compared to its meaning in northern Europe: D. Abulafia, "The servitude of Jews and Muslims in the medieval Mediterranean," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*, 112:2 (2000), 687-714. Bar Ilan university published two volumes titled *The Mediterranean and the Jews: The Mediterranean and the Jews: Banking, Finance, and International Trade,* eds. A. Toaff and S. Schwarzfuchs, (Ramat Gan 1989) and *The Mediterranean and the Jews. Society, Culture and Economy in Modern Times*, eds. E. Horowitz and M. Orfali, (Bar Ilan, Ramat Gan. 2002). But the most comprehensive work so far on the Mediterranean Jewries at the end of the Middle Ages is Maurice Kriegel's, see note 2 below.

[2] M. Kriegel, *Les Juifs à la fin du Moyen Age dans l'Europe méditerranéenne* (Paris 1979).

rabbinical teachings, embodied first and foremost in the Talmud.[3] The rise of the Mendicant orders and their increasing influence on popular attitudes regarding the Jews gradually changed the Church's views on Judaism. In fact, Mendicant teachings went so far as to equate post-biblical Judaism with heresy. These developments undermined the status of the Jews in Christian society and attacked the legitimacy of their existence.[4]

Various measures were adopted in order to separate Jews from Christians during the thirteenth century. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council decreed that Jews should wear a distinctive badge, a measure intended primarily to prevent sexual intercourse between Jews and Christians, and it forbade Jews to employ Christian servants and wet nurses. The Church, as well as secular authorities, strove during the fourteenth century to further the separation of Jews from Christians by forbidding Jews to live among Christians. In this vein, Pope Benedict XII wrote in 1340 to Peter IV of Aragon asking the king to stop Jews and Muslims from living together with Christians. In Sicily, King Frederick III attempted in 1312 to expel the Jews of Palermo from the city center, relegating them to quarters outside the walls. Similar orders were also sent to the seneschal of Provence to restrict the Jews to a segregated quarter.[5] Nevertheless, segregation and the enforcement of the Jewish badge were not uniformly applied in this period.

In the fifteenth century, segregation became official Church policy. In 1415, the first general order for the segregation of the Jews was issued by Pope Benedict XIII. It should be noted that these provisions were almost identical with the Castilian legislation of the same time. Indeed, the attempts at segregation gathered strength in the Spanish kingdoms after the riots of 1391, the massacres, and the widespread conversions. In Italy, the segregation was not enforced as strictly, and it was in fact introduced only at the beginning of the sixteenth century.[6] It should be pointed out that segregation of the Jews and the enforcement of distinctive dress, social, and economic restrictions were all intended to encourage conversion to Christianity.[7]

Conversion of the Jews had from its inception been the aim of Christianity. Early Christian theological thinking, however, understood the Pauline interpretation of the prophecy "a remnant shall be saved" as meaning that the conversion of all the Jews everywhere would occur only in the distant future.[8] This view did not preclude the

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[3] R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society. Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*, Oxford, 1990; J. Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization* (trans. Julia Barrow), (Oxford, 1998), esp. Ch. 8; W. Pakter, *Medieval Canon Law and the Jews* (Ebelsbach, Germany, 1988); G. Dahan, *Les Intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1990); Anna Sapir Abulafia, "Twelfth-Century Humanism and the Jews," *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews*, eds. Ora Limor and Guy Stroumsa, (Tübingen, Germany, 1996), 161-75; J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law. Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*, (Berkeley, 1999), 147-363; S. Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, Toronto 1991, Vol. I, 133-79.

[4] Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 313-63.

[5] S. Simonsohn, *The Jews in Sicily*, Leiden, 2000, Vol. II, No. 341; Idem, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, I, 138-140.

[6] On the policy of degradation, see: S. Grayzel, *The Church ad the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, New York, 1966, 41-75; the provisions of Lateran IV: Idem, 308-309. Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews, History*, Vol. I, 133-41.

[7] These themes were constantly broached by the charismatic Dominican preacher Vicente Ferrer of Valencia whose sermons played a crucial role in the mass conversions of Aragonese and Castilian Jews in the years 1411-1415. On the activities of Vicente Ferrer, see: Y. Baer, *A History the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia 1992) (2nd edition, revised), II, 166-169, 170ff; Kriegel, *Les juifs*, 218-20.

[8] Romans, 9:27-28; Augustine's teachings do not put a great emphasis on the conversion of the Jews, focusing instead on their role as witnesses: Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, Vol. I, 4-6. For a recent discussion of the Jews' role as witnesses and "bearers of the books" in Augustinian thinking, see: Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 23-71.

encouragement of conversions but did not see any urgency in bringing about the baptism of the Jews, neither did it endorse the use of coercion in order to achieve this aim. In the first centuries after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, individual Jews that either converted out of conviction or in order to improve their lot, usually became integrated into Christian society without being stigmatized as former Jews. The laws of the late Roman Empire attempted to safeguard their rights of inheritance and strived to prevent their persecution by their former coreligionists, otherwise their status had not been subject to special legislation. In other words, secular rulers at that time favored conversion but did not pursue it too diligently.[9]

Attitudes changed with the advent of mass conversions. Suspicion of insincerity in matters of faith, accusations of Judaizing, and the discrimination of converts and their issue appear already in Visigothic Spain in the canons of the Fourth Council of Toledo in 633. The decrees of Toledo were later regarded as a precedent in future generations.[10] However, these measures were confined to a limited geographical area and had no immediate effect on Jewry laws of the early Middle Ages. Similar attitudes surfaced again in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries following the mass conversions in Spain, Southern France, and Southern Italy. The presence of large groups of converts in these areas led to the creation of a special social class, the community of converts, which "enjoyed" the status of a legal entity. It is my premise that this legal anomaly, the special status of converts in Mediterranean Europe, was not simply the result of discriminatory policies towards new converts, but rather an application of the existing Jewry laws to include those of Jewish descent, albeit converted.

Southern Italy, despite its image of relative religious tolerance towards its Jewish population, was twice the scene of mass conversions: once at the end of the thirteenth century and again at the end of the fifteenth century. The victims of persecution and mass conversions in the thirteenth century were local Jewish communities, which existed in Southern Italy since the fourth century of the Common Era. The later wave of conversions affected local Jews, as well as immigrants from the Iberian Peninsula and Sicily who found refuge in the kingdom of Naples in the aftermath of the 1492 expulsions. The presence of large numbers of unassimilated Jewish converts to Christianity in both these periods led to the creation of a legal anomaly as the "*neofiti*" [the New Christians] came to be regarded as a legal entity. Whereas initially there was no special designation for this group, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries some official documents from Southern Italy mention the term '*universitas neophitorum*.'

Now '*Universitas'* in the terminology of medieval legists from the twelfth century onwards usually designated a group of people having juridical existence, and it was also used to denote "collectivity." In the Italian South, the term '*universitas'* also referred to the commune, a body of people living in the same place, recognized by the authorities as having common interests and a certain autonomy.[11] '*Universitas neophitorum*' can be therefore understood to refer to a group of converts forming a legal body.

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[9] A. Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Jerusalem-Detroit 1987), 79-80 and Docs. Nos. 8, 10.

[10] The decrees of the Fourth Council of Toledo (633): A. Linder, *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit-Jerusalem 1997), 488 (the English translation is Linder's).

[11] Astrik L. Gabriel , "Universities," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* ed. J.R. Strayer, (New York 1982-1989), Vol. 12, 282. For a general discussion of the term and its many legal ramifications, see: P. Michaud-Quantin, *Universitas. Expressions du movement communautaire dans le moyen-age latin* (Paris, 1970). Canon Law is not very specific in its definition and it simply equates "universitas" with collectivity: "rempublicam vel universitatem," "universitas fidelium," *Decretum Gratiani*, (see: *Wortkonkordanz zum Decretum Gratiani*, ed. T. Reuter and G. Silagi, (München, 1990), Vol. 5, 4694). In the Italian South, the term 'universitas' was equivalent to an urban community, denoting the city as a corporation or legal body. The employment of this term usually referred to self-government and intended, in fact, a limited political participation in the

The earliest use of the term '*universitas neophitorum*' in Southern Italy can be found in a Sicilian document from 1497 referring to the taxation of recently converted Jews after the expulsion (1492-1493).[12] The same term is mentioned in a notarial act regarding property made out in 1511 in Montalto Uffugo, Calabria.[13] Furthermore, special taxes were also imposed on the "*communitas novorum christianorum*" in Provence at the beginning of the sixteenth century.[14] The common factor in all three places is the use of this particular term in the context of property, taxation, and legal representation, always referring to the local New Christians as a separate legal entity. What is the link between the kingdom of Naples, Sicily, and Southern France? How did this concept arise?

All three areas under discussion were ruled during the second half of the thirteenth century by the house of Anjou. Charles I of Anjou, brother of King Louis IX of France, became Count of Provence in 1246, and in 1266, he was crowned King of Sicily (which at the time included the Italian South).[15] A causal link exists between the political developments that affected all three areas during the later Middle Ages and their repercussions as regards Jewish policy.

Historical background

After the death of the last Norman king of Sicily, Tancred (d. 1194), the island of Sicily and the Italian South were conquered by the German emperor Henry VI Hohenstaufen. Although the conquest displaced some of the Norman aristocracy, the rule of the house of Hohenstaufen in this area is perceived by modern historians, as well as by the contemporaries, as a continuity of Norman traditions.[16]

It is beyond the scope of this paper to expound on the conflict between Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen (1198-1250) and the papacy in the first half of the thirteenth century[17]; suffice to say that after the emperor's death, the papacy searched for a suitable candidate to replace the Hohenstaufen rule in Southern Italy. The choice fell on Charles, Count of Anjou and Provence, brother of King Louis IX of France. With the full support of the papacy (first Pope Urban IV and then Pope Clement IV), Charles mounted a crusade

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administration of the city: G. Galasso, *Il regno di Napoli. Il Mezzogiorno angioino e aragonese (1266-1494)*, (Torino 1992), 416-19. The author traces the introduction of this term to the Angevins in both Sicily and the kingdom of Naples. This is also relevant for the discussion at hand.

[12] Archivio di Stato di Palermo (ASP), Real Cancelleria reg. 227 f 126r-127v, published: N. Zeldes, *The Former Jews of this Kingdom. Sicilian Converts after the Expulsion (1492-1516)* (Brill, Leiden 2003), 315-17.

[13] In a property list made out by notary Bernardino Bottiglieri in March 1511: C. Nardi, *Notizie di Montalto di Calabria* (Soveria Mannelli 1985), II, 519.

[14] The terms used in the Provençal documents are: "*comunitas novorum christianorum*," "*dictam universitatem novorum christianorum*" and "*comunitateque et consortium novorum christianorum*," D. Iancu, *Juifs et néophytes en Provence. L'example d'Aix à travers le destin de Régine Abram de Draguignan (1469-1525)* (Paris-Louvain, 2001), 618-20.

[15] On Charles of Anjou, see: J. Dunbabin, *Charles I of Anjou. Power, Kinship and State Making in Thirteenth-Century Europe*, (London and New York, 1998); D. Abulafia, *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms 1200-1500. The Struggle for Dominion*, (London and New York, 1997), 57-81; S. Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers. A History of the Mediterranean World in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1958).

[16] There is an enormous number of relatively recent studies on the Norman Kingdom of Sicily. Here are just a few comprehensive books in English on this subject: G. A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard. Southern Italy and the Norman Conquest* (Harlow, Essex, 2000); J. Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily. The Royal Diwan* (Cambridge 2002); D. Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily* (Cambridge 1992); H. Houben, *Roger II of Sicily. A Ruler between East and West* (Cambridge, 2002).

[17] E. Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194-1250* (London 1931); D. Abulafia, *Frederick II. A Medieval Emperor* (London 1988). On Frederick II and the Church, see: J.M. Powell, "Frederick II and the Church in the Kingdom of Sicily, 1220-40," *Church History* 30 (1961), 28-34, and Idem, "Frederick II and the Church. A Revisionist View," *Catholic Historical Review* 44 (1962/3), 487-97.

against King Manfred, son of Frederick II and the ruler of Sicily and the South of Italy. Manfred was killed in 1266 in the battle of Benvento, and Charles became master of the kingdom. Angevin rule over the island of Sicily was relatively brief as it ended in 1282 with the revolt known as the Sicilian Vespers. One of the consequences of these events was the political separation of Sicily from the mainland. The revolt also resulted in the crowning of King Peter the Great of Aragon (1239-1285) as king of Sicily. The latter political development brought the island within the political and cultural sphere of the Hispanic world. For almost a hundred years, Sicily was ruled by a dynasty of kings of Catalan descent belonging to a younger branch of the ruling house of Aragon. In 1416, Sicily lost its independent status and became a subject kingdom ruled by viceroys appointed by the kings of Aragon.[18]

In 1468, Prince Ferdinand of Aragon, later known as the Catholic, was crowned king of Sicily. In 1469, the young king married Isabella of Castile. From 1479 onwards, Ferdinand ruled both Aragon and Sicily, as well as the various lands of the Crown of Aragon.[19]

Angevin rule on the mainland continued until the conquest of Naples in 1442 by King Alfonso V of Aragon, known as the Magnanimous.[20] Alfonso was succeeded by his illegitimate son, Ferrante I (1458-1494). In 1494-1495, King Charles VIII of France invaded Italy and took the Kingdom of Naples by force in an attempt to recover his Angevin heritage. His rule, however, was short lived (he died in 1498). The French claim to South Italy was finally decided by war with the Spanish armies headed by the Castilian general Gonsalvo Hernández de Aguilar de Córdoba, better known as El Gran Capitán. War ended with Spanish victory, and in 1503, Ferdinand the Catholic incorporated the kingdom of Naples into his domains.[21]

Persecution of the Jews in France and in Southern Italy – The thirteenth century

At the time Charles of Anjou established his rule in the Italian South, his brother, King Louis IX of France was pursuing a strong anti-Jewish policy in his realm. In 1240, following the condemnation of the Talmud and other Jewish rabbinical writings by Pope Gregory IX, King Louis ordered the confiscation of the texts and summoned the rabbis to a disputation held in Paris to answer the charges of Nicholas Donin, a Jewish convert to Christianity; in 1242, he

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[18] On the Sicilian Vespers, see: S. Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers: A History of the Mediterranean World in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1958). On Aragonese Sicily: C. Backman, *The Decline and Fall of Medieval Sicily: Politics, Religion and Economy in the Reign of Frederick III, 1296-1337* (Cambridge 1995); P. Corrao, *Governare un regno. Potere, società e istituzioni in Sicilia fra Trecento e Quattrocento* (Napoli, 1991); V. D'Alessandro and G. Giarizzo, *La Sicilia dal Vespro all'Unità d'Italia*, Serie Storia d'Italia, ed. G. Galasso, (Torino 1989), Vol. 16. See also: Abulafia *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms*, 156-71.

[19] Ferdinand king of Sicily and Aragon: J. Vicens Vives, *Fernando El Católico, Principe de Aragon, Rey de Sicilia 1458-1478* (Madrid 1952); J. N. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms* (Oxford, 1975), vol. II.

[20] For a concise history of the Angevins in Naples and the political struggles to rule the area, see: Abulafia *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms*, 195-222. See also: M. Reynolds, "René of Anjou, king of Sicily and the Order of the Croissant," *Journal of Medieval History* 19 (1993); A. Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous King of Aragon, Naples, and Sicily 1396-1458* (Oxford, 1990); Galasso, *Il regno di Napoli* .

[21] The history of this period is related in the sixteenth century account of Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia* (I used the modern edition: F. Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, ed. E. Mazzali Garzanti (Milano, 1988); among the modern studies, see: K. M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, II, (1204-1571)* (Philadelphia, 1978), Vol. II; *The French Descent into Italy*, ed. D. Abulafia, (Aldershot 1995); Abulafia *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms*, 248-49; E. Belenguer, *Ferdinando e Isabella. I re cattolici nella politica europea del rinascimento*, (Roma: Salerno Editrice , 2001) (the Italian translation of the Barcelona edition of 1999 includes additional material that concerns Italy), 209-35. On the Spanish side, see: Hilgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, Vol. II, 534-77; Luis Suárez Fernández, *El camino hacia Europa* (Madrid, 1990).

ordered the burning of the Talmud in Paris in the Place de Grève.[22] Although the papacy relented and there were no further burnings of the Talmud in this period, the Church and the lay authorities in France continued to investigate and confiscate rabbinical literature.

In 1269, probably at the instigation of the Dominican friar Paul Christian, another disputation took place in Paris under the auspices of King Louis IX;[23] in the same year, the king enacted an edict forcing the Jews to attend the missionary sermons of Paul Christian.[24] The actions of Paul Christian, himself a Jewish convert to Christianity, exacerbated Jewish-Christian relations in France and elsewhere. Moreover, it is probable that the campaign against the Talmud and its wholehearted support by the French king played a role in Charles I of Anjou's policy towards the Jews in his realm.

Given this background, it is not surprising that when Charles of Anjou became king of Sicily, his policies towards the Jews living in his realms were not exactly favorable. The fact that in Sicily itself he confirmed various privileges previously accorded to the Jews and did not attempt to change their status as it was formed during almost two centuries of Norman rule can be explained by his relatively short reign there and his lack of interest in Sicilian internal affairs, an attitude that probably played a part in the 1282 revolt. But it was Charles II of Anjou, son of the former king, who introduced an even harsher policy towards the Jews and the Muslims in his kingdom. The Jews were forced to convert in the 1290's, and the Muslims who had been transferred from Sicily to Lucera by Emperor Frederick II were sold into slavery in 1300.[25]

Umberto (Moshe David) Cassuto, writing at the beginning of the last century, was the first to point out the role of mendicant friars and, in particular, that of the Dominican inquisitor general, Bartholomeo de Aquila, in the persecutions and the ensuing conversions. According to Jeremy Cohen's *The Friars and the Jews*, these events – like the disputations of Paris mentioned above – should be considered within the framework of the rising mendicant spirit of anti-Judaism. A crucial argument against the Jews was that they had forfeited their right to tolerance because Talmudic Judaism represented a heresy. According to Pope Gregory IX the Jews were "not content with the Old Law which God gave in writing through Moses, and even ignoring it completely, they affirm that God gave them another Law which is called the Talmud"[26] Later popes expressed a more tolerant attitude towards the Talmud, but on the whole the attacks on rabbinic Judaism had a negative impact on Christian-Jewish

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[22] There is a vast literature on the Disputation of Paris of 1240 and the burning of the Talmud in the thirteenth century. See Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews. The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, N.Y, 1982), 51-99 (and the literature cited there); Idem, *Living Letters of Law*, 317-342; E. Rembaum, "The Talmud and the Popes: Reflections on the Talmud Trials of the 1240's," *Viator* 13 (1982), 203-23; S. Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews* (Toronto 1991), Vol. I, 300-42; R. Chazan, *Daggers of Faith* (Berkeley, 1989), 33-37.

[23] J. Shatzmiller, *La deuxième controverse de Paris,* in the *Collection de la Revue des Études Juives*, (Paris, 1994); J. Cohen, *Letters of the Law*, 334-42. For the history of the Jews in France in this period see : W.C. Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews. From Philip Augustus to the Last Capetians* (Philadelphia, 1989), 129-54.

[24] Chazan, Ibid., 44-45

[25] U. Cassuto, "Sulla storia degli ebrei nell'Italia meridionale," *Il Vessillo Israelitico* 59 (1911), 282-85, 338-41, 422-42; Idem, "The Destruction of the Jewish Academies in Italian South in the Thirteenth Century," *A. Gulak and S. Klein Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem 1942 [Hebrew]), 139-52; J. Starr, "The Mass Conversion of Jews in Southern Italy (1290-1293)," *Speculum* 21 (1946), 203-11. On Angevin policies towards the Jews in the island of Sicily, see: S. Simonsohn, *The Jews in Sicily* (Leiden, 1997), I, The Introduction (and esp. L-LIII). On Angevin policies towards the Muslims of Lucera see: D. Abulafia, "Monarchs and minorities in the medieval Mediterranean c. 1300: Lucera and its analogues," *Christendom and its Discontents. Exclusion, Persecution and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, eds. P. Diehl and S.Waugh (Cambridge, 1996), 234-63.

[26] Cohen, *Letters of the Law*, 322.

tolerance towards Jewish presence in Europe and led to an increasing pressure on the Jews to induce them to convert.[27]

At the same time, the legal argumentation of the High Middle Ages closed every loophole that might have allowed unwilling converts to revert to Judaism. In the twelfth century, certain canonists, relying on the precedent of the Fourth Council of Toledo, formulated new rulings regarding forcible baptism.[28] The new rulings distinguished between absolute coercion and conditional coercion. Absolute coercion was interpreted as a situation whereby a person was physically restrained (i.e. held by another and tied down), so that there was nothing that person could do to prevent the pouring of holy water. Only in that case an unwilling Jew was not to be constrained to hold the Christian faith. But in conditional coercion, that is, whenever a person was being threatened with death unless he consented to be baptized, there was, they argued, an element of free choice and that individual should be constrained to hold the faith. Pope Innocent III accepted the distinction between conditional and absolute coercion, stating in 1201 that even "he who is dragged violently by torture and fear and accepts the sacrament of baptism to avoid loss, receives the impressed character of Christianity, as does one who comes to baptism in dissimulation. Such a person is to be compelled to observe the Christian Faith as one conditionally willing. . . .[29] Such an interpretation of coercion and free will denied any redress even to Jews who were converted by force.

It is possible that given the growing intolerance towards the Jews in Europe in general and the atmosphere engineered by the second disputation of Paris, coupled with the activities of Paul Christian, served as a trigger for the mounting campaign against the Jews of Naples. It was probably no coincidence that in 1270 Charles I of Anjou published an edict that authorized the seizure and confiscation of the Talmud and other works of rabbinic literature. Unfortunately, there are no surviving documents on the condemnation of the Talmud in Naples comparable to those that record the disputations of Paris. Surviving sources, in fact, say very little of the exact circumstances that led to mass conversions, retaining only the name and role of a zealous convert named (or nicknamed) Manuforte, who incited the authorities against rabbinical writings.[30] So much information regarding these events had been lost already during the Middle Ages that the author of a sixteenth-century Hebrew chronicle began his account of the persecutions in the Italian South by stating that he could not find the cause for the apostasy of the Jews of Naples and Trani.[31]

The persecutions resulted in the formation of large communities of *neofiti* in Salerno, Trani, and Manfredonia and probably in other places as well.[32] In view of the new definition of coercion, even if these Jews had initially been forced to accept baptism, they had no other

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[27] Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 85-89. See also: Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*.

[28] S. Grayzel, "The Confession of a Medieval Jewish Convert," *Historia Judaica* 17 (1955), 89-120; A. Kleinberg, "Depriving Parents of the Consolation of Children: Two Legal Consilia on the Baptism of Jewish Children," *De Sion exibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem, Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy, and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder*, ed. Y. Hen (Brepols 2001), 128-44.

[29] Quoted and translated by Aviad Kleinberg, Ibid., 132.

[30] Starr, "Mass Conversion," 203-05.

[31] "And the reason for this apostasy I could not find": Shelomo Ibn Virga, *Shevet Yehudah* [Hebrew], ed. A. Shohat (Jerusalem, 1947), 66.

[32] The formation of a large New Christian population in Italian South in the thirteenth century: N. Ferorelli, *Gli Ebrei nell'Italia meridionale*, ed. Filena Patroni Griffi, Napoli 1990, 67-69; A. Marongiu, "Gli ebrei di Salerno nei documenti dei secoli X-XIII," *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane* 62 (1937), 261-66; Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 85-89; V. Bonazzoli, "Gli ebrei del regno di Napoli all'epoca della loro espulsione. Il periodo aragonese (1456-1499)," *Archivio Storico Italiano* CXXXVII (1979), 512-16. Manfredonia: C. Colafemmina, "Cristiani novelli a Manfredonia nel secolo XV," *Atti del 11 Convegno Nazionale sulla Preistoria – Protostoria della Daunia Dicembre 1989* (San Severo, 1990), 269-78.

option but to live as Christians. Coerced or not, the lay authorities, probably following the decisions of the Third Lateran Council (1179), which decreed that "converts ought to be in better circumstances than they had been before accepting the Faith," offered material inducements. In 1294, a short time after the initial conversions, the New Christians of Salerno were granted tax exemptions, a privilege that was later extended to all converts in the kingdom.[33] This act of generosity recalls similar measures taken by King Louis IX of France, who provided Jewish converts to Christianity with a pension of 3 *deniers* a day, each.[34] In fact, Umberto Cassuto had already drawn the attention to the anti-Jewish policies that were enacted almost simultaneously in both the Italian South and Provence by Charles II of Anjou (1285-1309).

Mass conversion, as both Cassuto and Starr pointed out, met with only partial success. The New Christians of the Italian South did not become integrated into old Christian society, retaining instead a separate identity for generations to come.[35] The converts and their descendants were eventually relegated to the status of a religious minority, in much the same way as were the Jews. Further proof of this policy can be found in the fourteenth century during the reign of Robert "the Wise" of Naples (1309-1343), when the authorities ordered the segregation of the converts of Apulia, forcing them to live *in vico separato a cristocolis*, that is, a street apart from "Christ worshippers."[36] Their separation from the general population indicates that they were socially marginalized and excluded on the grounds that they were not truly Christian. The special status of the descendants of converts persisted for centuries to come, eventually taking a legal form. Thus, when in 1413 King Ladislas of Naples issued certain dispositions regarding the communal administration of the city of Trani, he decreed that the university [*universitas*] of Trani would have the right to elect a governing body of sixteen citizens consisting of eight nobles, six commoners, and two *neofiti*.[37] The *neofiti* of the city of Trani were therefore duly represented in the city council as if they were a socially distinctive class. The need for this provision probably arose from the continuing existence of a large convert population that retained a separate identity. This state of affairs did not escape the ecclesiastical authorities, who suspected this group of Judaizing. During Pope Nicholas V's pontificate (1447-1455), the Franciscan Matteo de Reggio, apostolic Inquisitor in the Kingdom of Naples, accused the *neofiti* of marrying only among themselves.[38] The accusation was followed by a collective fine. Petrus of Mistretta, a Dominican inquisitor appointed to the kingdom of Sicily, was ordered by the pope to exact an indemnity of 2,000 florins from the *neofiti* in order to finance the war against the Turks.[39] This is the first recorded case of a fine set on a collectivity of New Christians. Individual fines, and even the confiscation of property, would have been the normal consequence of the

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[33] Offering material benefits to converts: Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, 16-19. Decree of Third Lateran Council: Ibid. Doc. No. 1. In Italian South: Marongiu, "Gli ebrei di Salerno."

[34] Southern France: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "The Inquisition and the Jews of France in the Time of Bernard Guy," *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970), 317-76; J. Shatzmiller, "Jewish Converts to Christianity in Medieval Europe 1200-1500," *Cross Cultural Convergences in the Crusader Period. Essays presented to Aryeh Grabois on his sixty five birthday*, ed. M. Goodich, S. Menache and S. Schein (New York 1995), 316, note 81, 83).

[35] Cassuto, "The Destruction," 146.

[36] Salerno: Marongiu, "Gli ebrei di Salerno," 261, 265; segregation: C. Minieri Riccio, *Notizie storiche tratte da 62 registri angioini nell'archivio di Stato di Napoli* (Napoli 1877), 34 (cited by Ferorelli, 69, note 109).

[37] "ac libere universitas ipsa possit et valeat sexdecim ex suius concivibus octo videlicet ex nobilibus, sex ex popularibus et duos ex neophidis" (my emphasis): G. Beltrani, *Il Libro Rosso dell'Università di Trani*, a cura di G. Cioffari e M. Schiralli (Bari 1995), 35-36, No. XXII. See also J. Starr, "Johanna II and the Jews" *JQR* 31 (1940-41), 72.

[38] This accusation was based on the enquiries made by the Franciscan Matteo de Reggio, Apostolic Inquisitor in the Regno: L. Amabile, *Il Santo Officio della Inquisizione in Napoli* (Città di Castello, 1892), I, 80-81.

[39] S. Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews* (Toronto, 1991), Vol. I, 365.

discovery of Judaizing tendencies among the converts, but their punishment as a group is unusual and has no parallel.

Persecution and conversion of the Jews in Southern Italy – The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries

Most scholars now agree that between 15,000 and 20,000 exiles reached the kingdom of Naples in the aftermath of the expulsions from the Iberian Peninsula and Sicily.[40] King Ferrante I welcomed all the new immigrants, but shortly after his death (January 1494), hostility toward the Jews broke out throughout the kingdom. The invasion of the French headed by Charles VIII, who claimed the Neapolitan throne as heir of the Angevin dynasty, further disrupted order and authority and unleashed an unprecedented (for the Italian South) outburst of violence against the Jews. At Lecce, the crowds cried: "*moiarono, moiarono li iudei, hover se facciano cristiani*" [Death, death to the Jews unless they become Christians],[41] forcing the Jews to choose between death and conversion. The cry was echoed in other places and resulted in wide spread conversions. Faced with such choices, many Sicilian exiles decided that conversion and return to Sicily were preferable to remaining in the kingdom of Naples. In 1497, migration from the kingdom reached such proportions that the authorities tried to put stop to it by ordering every Jew or New Christian to obtain a special permit before being allowed to sell his property and depart.[42]

After the restoration of Aragonese rule, the presence of so many New Christians in the kingdom became so prominent that it had to be addressed in the dispositions [*Capitoli*] issued in 1498 by King Federigo, referring to "the New Christians who converted since the coming of the French to this day" [*li Cristiani novelli baptizati dala venuta deli Francesi in qua*].[43] In other words, the dispositions acknowledge the link between the coming of the French and the mass conversions, or forcible conversions. Nevertheless, as it happened in other places in the later Middle Ages, the authorities may well deplore the violence and forcible conversion but did nothing to allow the Jews to return to their former faith.

The "*Capitoli*" of King Federico reflect the long history of discrimination and segregation that characterized the existence of converts and their descendants in the Italian South. Although at the origins this was an Angevin policy, in time it became an established local tradition. The "*Cristiani novelli*" of the late fifteenth century never became integrated and continued to be treated as a separate group, just as were their forebears two hundred years before. In certain circumstances, this proved to be of advantage, as happened when they

[40] It is hardly likely that Ferorelli's estimate of 100,000 exiles who reached the kingdom of Naples is correct: Ferorelli, *Gli ebrei*, 93-98, 103-04; a much lower estimate is given by R. Bonfil, "Italia: un triste epílogo de la expulsión de los judios de España," *Judios. Sefaraditas. Conversos. La expulsión de 1492 y sus consecuencias, Ponencia del Congresso Internacional celebrado en Nueva York en noviembre de 1992* (Valladolid, 1995, 148-24, and D. Abulafia, "The Aragonese Kings of Naples and the Jews," *The Jews of Italy: Memory and Identity, Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture*, ed. B. D. Cooperman and B. Garvin (University of Maryland, 2000), 82-106 (esp. 93-95); Regarding Sicilian Jews, see: C. Colafemmina, "The Jews of Reggio Calabria from the End of the XVth Century to the Beginning of the XVIth Century," *Les Juifs au regard de l'histoire, Mélanges en l'honneur de Bernhard Blumenkranz* ed. G. Dahan (Paris, 1985), 255-62; N. Zeldes, "Spanish and Sicilian Exiles in the Kingdom of Naples: Settlement, Community Formation and Crisis," *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 6 (2008), 237-65.

[41] The cry is in the Neapolitan dialect as reported in documents and chronicles of this period.

[42] Camera Summaria, Privilegii, 57 bis f. 47 cited by Ferorelli, *Gli ebrei*, 206-07 note 52.

[43] On the riots against the Jews: Ferorelli, *Gli ebrei*, 199-201; Abulafia, "The Aragonese Kings," 96-98; B. Ferrante, "Gli statuti di Federico d'Aragona per gli ebrei del regno," *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane* XCVII (1979), 147. The text was also published by C. Colafemmina, *Gli ebrei a Taranto. Fonti documentarie* (Bari, 2005), No. 98, 149-61.

acted in concert in an attempt to prevent the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in the kingdom of Naples.[44] But in 1511, Ferdinand the Catholic expelled both Jews and New Christians from the kingdom of Naples. It is unclear whether some families of New Christians were allowed to remain until 1541, as were 200 families of privileged rich Jews.[45]

An increasing number of studies concerning the expulsion from Spain and its aftermath reveal that after 1492 there was a continuous movement of conversion and return, emigration and resettlement, which went on for several generations. This movement started shortly after the expulsion came into effect. A royal edict issued in November 1492 by the Catholic monarchs permitted converted Jews to return to the Iberian Peninsula and allowed them to recover their former property.[46] Conversion and return were individual decisions, as was the repossession of property left on Iberian soil, but something different happened to Sicilian exiles. An agreement concluded in 1495 between King Ferdinand of Aragon and a Sicilian convert, a physician baptized as Ferrando de Aragona, who acted as the representative of the Sicilian Jews and converts, formulated the terms of return. The agreement allowed those described as "the former Jews of this kingdom" [*los que se fueron judios desse reyno*], to recover their property left in Sicily after ceding 45 percent of its value to the royal court.[47] Numerous documents attest to the collection of the special tax that amounted to 65,000 florins. The legal implications are significant as the New Christians were apparently regarded as a corporate body. They were officially represented by an elected leader: the same Ferrando de Aragona, who was described as "general procurator of the whole community of Jews and converts of the said realm in all matters pertaining to property, elected in the kingdom after the general expulsion of the Jews from the kingdom" [*generalis procurator totius universitatis neophitorum et iudeorum regni predicti de bonis, et electus in regno post ipsorum iudeorum generalem expulsionem a regno*].[48] This title poses a number of questions of legal nature: Was Ferrando de Aragona elected (or appointed) general procurator of the exiled Jews who later converted? Was he elected in Sicily, as this description seems to convey, or in the kingdom of Naples, where most exiles settled after the expulsion? Although there are many documents concerning Ferrando de Aragona, his exact role in the negotiations remains obscure. It can be also inferred from that letter that there were several groups of Jews and converts forming a community [*universitas*]: "*totius universitatis neophitorum et iudeorum.*" It is possible that this body was either formed in the kingdom of Naples (as noted above), or perhaps various groups were formed according to their place of origin, as it

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[44] According to the Spanish historian Jeronimo Zurita, they approached in 1503 the Great Captain, Gonsalvo Fernández de Córdova, and reached an agreement that ensured their safety (from inquisitorial investigation) but this accord was later considered to be invalid because it was against the faith: J. Zurita, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando El Católico de las empresas y ligas de Italia* ed. A. Canellas Lopez (Saragossa 1991), Vol. VIII, Book, XXXIV, 376. Some sources even attribute the strong reaction of the Old Christian population of Naples in 1510 to the frightening propaganda spread by the converts describing the terrible consequences of the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition: Amabile, *Il santo officio*, 93-119.

[45] G. Paladino, "Privilegi concessi agli ebrei dal vicerè D. Pietro di Toledo (1535-1536)," *Archivio storico per le province napoletane*, 38 (1913), 611-22. Certain "marranos" still lived in Manfredonia during the reign of Charles V: F. Ruiz Martin, "La expulsión de los judíos del reino de Nápoles," *Hispania* 9 (1949), 202-03.

[46] Edict of the Catholic monarchs: L. Suárez-Fernández, *Documentos acerca de la Expulsión de los Judíos*, Valladolid 1964, No. 231, 487-89. For return to the kingdom of Aragon see: M. D. Meyerson, "Aragonese and Catalan Jewish Converts at the Time of the Expulsion," *Jewish History* 6 (1992), 131-49.

[47] N. Zeldes, 'The Extraordinary Career of Ferrando de Aragona: A Sicilian Convert in the Service of Fernando the Catholic', *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 3 (2000), 97-125; Zeldes, *The Former Jews*, 72-83.

[48] The procurator's title appears in a letter that Ferdinand the Catholic wrote to Viceroy Ramon de Cardona in November 1508 quoting the entire text of an agreement concluded in June 1497: ASP Real Cancelleria reg. 227 c 126r - 127v. The entire document is reproduced in Zeldes, *The Former Jews*, 315-17.

appears in several petitions addressed to the viceroys of Sicily.[49] Together these groups could have formed a legal entity, as implied by the term '*universitas*.'

Whereas there is no evidence that the term '*universitas neophitorum*' was ever employed in Sicilian documents prior to 1492, in Southern Italy there are plenty of precedents for the treatment of the local "*cristiani novelli*" as a separate community, and there is a strong possibility that the concept of a "community of converts" had its roots in the kingdom of Naples. But it was only after the 1492 that the status accorded to the New Christians in the Italian South influenced in any way the treatment of Sicilian converts. There are several factors that could explain why traditions that were first formed on the other side of the straits of Messina were carried over to Sicily only by the end of the fifteenth century. Centuries of enmity separated the Angevin kingdom of Naples from the kingdom of Sicily (also known as the kingdom of Trinacria, to distinguish it from the mainland), and understandably during that time, the status of the *cristiani novelli* in the kingdom of Naples had no bearing on the status of Sicilian converts. Even the reign of Alfonso the Magnanimous (1442-1458), when both kingdoms were united under one ruler, brought no change. As we have seen, legal measures usually followed mass conversions and the formation of a large population of recent converts. There were no mass conversions on either side of the straits on Messina during Alfonso's reign, therefore there was no need for special legislation. In fact, most of the *cristiani novelli* then living in the Italian South were the descendants of the converts of the thirteenth century (as attested by the accusations meted against them during the pontificate of Nicholas V). It was only after the formation of a community of Sicilian exiles in the Aragonese kingdom of Naples and the subsequent conversion of a large number of Sicilian Jews that the status they acquired there caused the exiles returning to Sicily to form a community unto themselves, regarded by the authorities as a legal body or "*universitas*."

Another factor to be considered is the number of converts. The agreement concluded between the Aragonese court and Ferrando de Aragona stipulated that the court would be able to collect at least 65,000 florins from the 45 percent tax set upon the property and financial assets of Sicilian converts. Letters from 1504 and 1508 confirm the receipt of the entire sum. We can surmise that the number of converts involved was indeed a large one: the records of taxation show that the largest sums did not exceed 600 onze (1,200 florins), and such sums were exacted from only a few. The majority of converts were taxed for considerably less, sometimes no more that two or four *onz*e each. Furthermore, the exaction of the tax entailed the employment of a certain number of "*commissarios ad causas iudeorum*," each in charge of a specific area. In order to pay these officials, the impost that was originally set at 40 percent was increased to 45 percent. That alone indicates a large-scale operation for the collection of the money, which in turn implies that there was a large number of people who were taxed.

The case of Provence – The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries

A first wave of conversions occurred among the Jews of Provence in the 1480's following the death of King René, who was also the exiled king of Naples. After the death of René's nephew, Charles III of Maine, Provence was repossessed by the king of France, Louis XI. But Louis XI, who demonstrated a favorable attitude towards Provençal Jews and renewed

[49] In 1499, the *neofiti* of Naro (Sicily) together petitioned the Viceroy to stop the harassments of the local population that "treated them worse than Jews": ASP Conservatoria di Registro reg. 83 c 424r – v, Zeldes, *The Former Jews*, 298-99. Another example from Sicily is the petition of the physician Giovanni Ferrante Moncata who claimed to be acting in name of all the *neofiti* of Paternò: ASP Conservatoria di Registro reg. 94 c 663r - 663v, 17/8/1508.

their privileges, died in 1483.[50] The new king, Charles VIII, showed no favors to the Jews. He was a devout Christian who dreamt of leading a crusade against the Turks and whose soldiers were responsible for much of the violence perpetrated against the Jews in the kingdom of Naples between 1494 and 1495 (see above).

In 1484, there was an outburst of violence against the Jews of Arles that ended with the conversion of over fifty Jews. Riots and forced conversions spread to Aix, Salon, Carpentras, Marseille, and other places.[51] In 1493, Charles VIII ordered the expulsion or conversion of the Jews of Arles. A similar edict was published in 1496 against the Jews of Tarascon.[52] King Louis XII of France (1498-1515) continued the same anti-Jewish policy, ordering the expulsion of all the Jews of Provence in an edict published in May 1500 and implemented in September 1501. Departing Jews entrusted their property and the exacting of debts due to converts (a process known from other places, Sicily for example). But many converted. Among them were many of the wealthiest and most influential members of the Jewish communities.[53] In 1512, King Louis XII set a tax on "all people of Jewish descent who became Christians during the past fifty years," giving as reason his need to increase his revenues because of war expenses.[54] As was the case in Sicily in the same period, the tax was not imposed as a punishment for heretical tendencies but simply in order to increase the king's revenues. However, the only criterion for taxation was Jewish descent. In order to collect the monies, the *neofiti* elected representatives and acted as one body, referred to in notarial documents as '*communitas,*' '*universitas*.' Danielle Iancu, in her study on the Jews and New Christians of Provence, remarked that the *neofiti* collected the impost of 1512 in the same manner the Jews used to do for the *tallia* (the tax imposed on the Jewries), acting as did the Jewish community, collectively represented by the notables, as if the continuity of the Jewish fiscal system was maintained even beyond the expulsion.[55]

Was Louis XII, king of France, influenced by the model created by Ferdinand the Catholic in the Italian South? This hypothesis is not as far-fetched as it seems. The French waged war with the Catholic's armies in Southern Italy, came into contact with Jews and converts, and were probably well informed on the conditions imposed on the Sicilian exiles, as well as the older tradition of treating the New Christians and their descendants as a group apart. Moreover, Ferdinand's taxation of the Sicilian *neofiti* that ended in 1508 resulted in a nice revenue of 65,000 Sicilian florins, which could have inspired the taxation of the Provençal *neofiti* in 1512. The terms are similar, as are the appointment of commissioners in charge of the tax and the use of the juridical term '*universitas neofitorum*.'

However, the existence of the "*Universitas neophitorum*" was short lived, and the former Jews as a special legal category disappear after mid-sixteenth century. Some emigrated, some were successfully integrated into Christian society. In Sicily, it is difficult to find references to *neofiti* after 1550, even in inquisitorial records. Carmello Trasselli, who was among the first historians to draw the attention to the presence of Sicilian converts to Christianity after the expulsion, remarked that there probably still are quite a few people in Sicily who bear the illustrious names of well-known aristocratic families, yet no one can trace their origin beyond the sixteenth century because they are descendants of the *neofiti*. In other words, the former Jews became fully integrated. The *neofiti* of Provence, such as the Draguignan family, also

[50] On René see: Abulafia, *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms*, 197-204 (and the bibliography cited there); D. Iancu, *Être juif en Provence : au temps du roi René* (Paris, 1998).
[51] Iancu, *Juifs et neophytes*, 109-118. Map of riots, Ibid., 114.
[52] Ibid., 119
[53] Ibid., 310.
[54] Ibid., 226-37; E. Lhez, "La perception du subside versé au roi Louis XII par les «nouveaux chretiens » résident en Provence," *Provence Historique* XVI (1966), 573-86.
[55] Iancu, *Juifs et neophytes*, 310.

remained in place and finally blended into the local population.[56] However, the *cristiani novelli* of the Kingdom of Naples were expelled along with the Jews in 1511. The harsh decree of Naples was the result of both Spanish rule and the absence of an "effective" inquisition. When the Neapolitans rebelled against the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in 1510 and forced King Ferdinand the Catholic to abandon his plans, the king claimed he had no means to control and investigate the converted and therefore had to expel them.[57]

Conclusions

The manifold links between Southern Italy and Southern France that existed since the thirteenth century suggest that there may be more than mere coincidence in the way large groups of unassimilated Jewish converts to Christianity became recognized as legal entities and treated in much the same way as Jews in both places.

The decline and finally the expulsion of the Jews from most of Mediterranean Europe was the result of a growing intolerance that did not limit itself to religious aspects. Were that the case, the conversion of the Jews would have had the desired effect, the victory of Christianity and a smooth absorption of the newly converted into the community of the faithful. But the new perceptions of the Jew as a heretic, as impure, as an enemy of Christianity, did not disappear with conversion.

In the Iberian kingdoms, the Inquisition and its supporters fueled suspicion and resentment by constantly reminding the public that certain persons, some belonging to the political or economic elite, were of Jewish descent.[58] In Southern Italy and Southern France, new converts were usually designated in official documents as '*neofiti'* or '*neophyti'* (a term derived from the Greek which can be translated as "newly planted in the Faith"), '*cristiani novelli,' 'battiati'* [baptized], and even '*olim Iudei*' [former Jews]. In other words, there was no need to resort to secret investigations of one's origins because one's status was duly noted for all to see.[59] It is thus not surprising that in a society that was so preoccupied with hierarchies, status, and external appearance as the medieval Christian community, it was natural to create a new category in order to redefine those of Jewish descent as a group, as well as individually.

The presence of *converso* populations was essentially a phenomenon characteristic of Mediterranean Europe, where such groups formed in the wake of the destruction of the large Jewish communities of this area. The history of the "*universitas neophitorum*," however, demonstrates that the *converso* problem was not a peculiarity of the Iberian kingdoms, but rather the result of parallel historical developments that occurred in Southern Italy, Sicily, and Southern France.

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[56] C. Trasselli, *Da Ferdinando il Cattolico a Carlo V. L'esperienza siciliana, 1475-1525* (Palermo 1982), Vol. I, 168.

[57] Only 200 Jewish families were allowed to remain in the kingdom: V. Bonazzoli, "Gli ebrei del regno di Napoli all'epoca della loro espulsione. II parte: Il periodo spagnolo (1501-1541)," *Archivio Storico Italiano* CXXXIX (1981), 190-204. Isolated groups of "*cristiani novelli*" remained in Manfredonia and elsewhere at least until 1517: C. Colafemmina, "Cristiani novelli a Manfredonia nel secolo XV," *Atti del 11 Convegno Nazionale sulla Preistoria – Protostoria della Daunia Dicembre 1989* (San Severo 1990), 269-78.

[58] The *Libro Verde de Aragon*, a work of genealogy from the early sixteenth century, lists the names of Aragonese families who had *converso* blood: *Libro Verde de Aragon, documentos aragoneses* ed. D. Isidro de las Cacigas (Madrid 1929).

[59] For the case of Sicily, see: N. Zeldes, *The Former Jews*, 1-3, 81-83. The same is true for the Kingdom of Naples and in Provence where converted Jews were designated as "*neofiti*" in official documents and notarial acts.

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