
BOOK REVIEWS

Henri Bresc, *Arabi per lingua, Ebrei per religione: L'evoluzione dell'ebraismo siciliano in ambiente latino dal XII al XV secolo*. Messina: Mesogea, 2001, 382 pp.

Here is another monograph which is related to Friedrich II and his epoch¹.

It is peculiar that *Mesogea* publishing house in Messina published the Italian translation of Laura Sciascia in 2001, while the announced simultaneous publication of the original French text in a Paris publishing house *Bouchene* only took place in 2002.

Arabic-speaking Jews of al-Andalus are well-known as they left an extremely rich literary heritage. Sicilian Jews were in the concerned period (from 1290 till the proscription year of 1492) mostly craftsmen and merchants and did not leave any such written heritage.

The book consists of the introduction and four large sections: school (ch. 1—3), home (ch. 4—7), market (ch. 8—10), assembly (ch. 11—12).

In the introduction H. Bresc marks that the present research cannot be called fully Hebraistic as there have been discovered no Hebrew funds on Sicily dating to these centuries and the researcher only possesses mediated materials: all documents exist only in translation supplied for affirmation to *Corona siciliana*. Originally the author only planned to present subsidiary material from notarial funds for architects studying Jewish quarters of Sicily.

The previous two centuries are documented by Hebrew materials preserved at the *Fuṣṭāṭ geniza* which have been published. This is what the first chapter called "To the Sources of the Sicilian Jews Origin: Sicily in *Geniza*" begins with. Merchant correspondence, judging by the type of calligraphy, was kept by special penmen, although the spelling while transcribing an Arabic text in Jewish letters was irregular, which is typical of all small Judaic languages. There is an interesting observation about the role of the Arabic language among Sicilian Jews: in the Muslim epoch it served to the integration of the Jewish community, while after the Norman Conquest it, on the contrary, became a means of preservation of the community's particular features. In the Muslim world they were an integrated mi-

nority, while the Romanic world — the land of Edom, has become alien to them.

In the second chapter called "The Language and Culture" this idea is further developed: if Arabic-speaking Christian population stopped using the Arabic language by the first third of the 14th century, the Jews ("Arabs in everything except religion" according to C. Roth) preserved the Arabic spoken and written language in the 15th century as well. The author disproves the characteristic of Sicilian Jews' culture as poor, but considers it more religious than scientific or philosophical but democratic. Judging by posthumous inventories even merchants possessed libraries consisting of ten to several dozens manuscripts or printed books. There were penmen and at least one miniaturist. Around the Mediterranean there was brisk trade of books with the Sicilian Jews. The information on the prices for books is of special interest.

From the third chapter called "Religious Practice and Ritual" one can learn about the combination of the Christian and the Jewish calendars and find interesting information about the culinary preferences of the community.

In the fourth chapter called "Jewish Settlement in Medieval Sicily" which is rich in plans and tables one can find interesting data on legal conversions of Muslim slaves into Judaism on one hand and only isolated instances of accusation of Marranism on the other hand.

The fifth chapter called "Family Relations" contains ethnographical materials on Jewish weddings and funerals on Sicily.

In the sixth chapter called "Home and Household" basing on notarial acts H. Bresc reconstructs the inner design of a Jewish home. Of special difficulty here is interpretation of the names of objects of religious use as the Christian notary did not understand them.

In the very short seventh chapter called "Clothes and Other Distinctive Features" which is based on the same materials, the author, arguing against J. Katz and R. Bonfil, comes to the conclusion that Sicily Jews did not tend to emphasize their difference by their outfit when there was no discrimination. However, as the author mentions, this is true if the preserved inventories are full, and, as we should

¹ See: Review by I. Wojewódzki to M. –D. Glessgen, *Die Falkenheilkunde des "Moamin" im Spiegel ihrer volgarizzamenti: Studien zur Romania Arabica* in: *Manuscripta Orientalia*, VI/2, pp. 71—2; and review by *idem* to B. Pabst, *Gregor von Montesacro und die geistige Kultur Süditaliens unter Frederick II* in: *ibid.*, IX/2, pp. 71—2.