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present

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MEMORY AND PROTESTS: Disciplined and Violent Dissent in Medieval Sicily

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ABSTRACT

Even if protests did not lack elements of spontaneity, they were often the outcome of a slow process of identifying rights that had been denied, the most effective forms of response, and the appropriate political context in which to act. In late medieval Sicily, the main periods featuring the strategic use of protest were, first of all, the assumption of control over the island by the heads of the main magnate houses (the Vicars, 1377-1392) and then the royal restoration effected by Martin I, King of Sicily (1392-1409). The Vicars' government represented a phase of significant reduction both in the spaces of political participation and in the redistribution of resources at the local level. Conversely, the defeat of the Vicars by Martin I and his readiness to arrive at a political accommodation with the universities greatly extended their room for manoeuvre and enhanced their prospects. The suppression of local political aspirations under the Vicars and the political openness of Martin I allowed the universities to identify more clearly the margins of autonomy that, if violated, justified protests. From this perspective, it is noteworthy that the highest concentration of revolts is recorded during the reign of Alfonso V (1416-1458), that is, under a royal government that tended not to promote an invasive state but rather to extend to a significant degree the spaces of autonomy. Different instances of protests will be considered here entailing distinct strategies or modalities, ranging from violent revolt to peaceful dissent expressed through institutional channels, as well as protests in which both violent and peaceful reactions may be identified. With reference to non-violent protests, I will discuss them in terms of the adoption of a conservative strategy, described here as one of 'disciplined dissent'. With the concept of disciplined dissent I have sought to identify the con-

servative process involved in mounting a critique, whereby those who dissented might intercept and utilise the cultural baggage of those in a position of authority. This was with a view to obtaining a hearing, or even influencing the activities of the government and "decentering the exercise of power".

BIOGRAPHY

Fabrizio Titone is Ramón y Cajal Researcher at Universidad del País Vasco, Spain and the author of many publications in the field of urban history. His early research pertained to Sicily's urban institutions and society in the late Middle Ages considered in comparison with the territories of the Crown of Aragon. More recently, he has expanded his analysis and included the intersection between written and oral memory, emotion, gender history and forms of dissent with regard to social control policies in high and late medieval Sicily analysed in the broader Mediterranean context and beyond. He also approaches these themes through an analysis of rites of passage. He has been invited to present his arguments in a number of different venues, among them the University of Tokyo. His research has been supported by the Mellon Foundation, the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies (University of Toronto), the University of Notre Dame, the École française de Rome, and the Universidad del País Vasco. Since September 2014 he has been the coordinator of the research project *Policies of disciplined dissent in the western Mediterranean in the 12th to the early 16th centuries*, supported by a Spanish government grant. From April 2016 he will be Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Oxford (Corpus Christi College) during the Trinity term.