

Fabrizio D'Avenia, *La Chiesa del re. Monarchia e Papato nella Sicilia spagnola (secc. XVI-XVII)*, Rome: Carocci, 2015, 183pp. ISBN 978-88-430-7954-4.

Few ecclesiastical provinces in early modern Europe had politics as complex as Sicily. The Sicilian Church was unique in having had so many of its richest benefices re-founded by the Norman kings who conquered the island from the Arabs in the eleventh century. Yet the island had later also become a papal fief, invested on Charles of Anjou in 1269. The Habsburgs, who were Sicily's ruling dynasty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had inherited it as part of the Crown of Aragon, by this time a sprawling conglomerate of territories in the Western Mediterranean. Conflicts between King and pope about the exercise of their respective rights on the island were almost as numerous as those between the Crown and Sicily's old medieval feudal class. Ferdinand II, the last Trastámara King of Aragon, won an important concession from pope Innocent VIII in 1487 such that the pope recognized a royal right of presentation (appointment) to the ten Sicilian bishoprics, two quasi-bishoprics, thirty-two abbeys and thirty-one minor benefices. But for the next hundred and fifty years or so Ferdinand's Habsburg successors and their local agents had to fight hard to exercise this right as they saw fit. They feared, not unreasonably, that popes would obfuscate or attempt to rein the privilege in; they also found themselves constrained by the *Alternativa*, a convention by which the holders of benefices alternated between 'native' Sicilians and 'foreign' Spaniards. Indeed, the *international* conflict, between Spanish King and Italian pope, intersected many other conflicts: the *local*, between Sicily's many competing ecclesiastical jurisdictions, the *centre-periphery*, between the Viceroyalty's officials and the central government in Madrid, and the *central*, within the government in Madrid itself. The process of asserting royal control over the Sicilian Church – making it 'The King's Church' – was thus a slow one which involved diverse actors in multiple roles.

Fabrizio D'Avenia's short study charts how royal control over the Sicilian Church consolidated during this period. It is packed with detailed archival research, argumentation, and statistical analysis, and, as such, should prove indispensable to scholars working not only on Sicily itself, but also on the Spanish Monarchy and/or the Italian Church. Four chapters advance D'Avenia's case: the first ('One king, one Church, so many jurisdictions') offers an effective snapshot of the tangled web of interests, institutions, and players in Sicilian ecclesiastical politics, and also of how Spanish kings invoked the *Legazia Apostolica*, the inherited right through which they claimed control of the Sicilian Church. The second ('A privilege without privileges') analyses the history and effects of the *Alternativa* together with its implications for ecclesiastical patronage. The third ('Sicilian Career Clerics') shines new light on who held ecclesiastical office in Sicily and how they used those offices to pursue wider strategies. The fourth ('Ecclesiastical Jurisdictions and Pastoral Reform') considers how the Tridentine ideal fared in this most crowded of ecclesiastical landscapes. Throughout the book D'Avenia does his best to eschew what he identifies as a prevalent tendency within the island's scholarship to 'Sicily-centrism'. By and large he succeeds laudably, as the rich integration of his research findings into the Counter-Reformation's multi-lingual historiography attests.

Interested readers will find some of the themes in this book explicated in English in the author's valuable article on 'Elites and Ecclesiastical Careers in Early Modern Sicily' in the *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 109 (2014). However, the fuller picture presented in this book modifies and extends D'Avenia's positions in several ways. First, Spanish dilemmas are constantly emphasized: was it better for the Crown to reward its closest supporters within the Sicilian nobility or to try to cast its patronage net as widely as possible? How far should its agents press popes to clarify or confirm their predecessors' concessions? Second, the conflicts internal to each side of the Spanish-Italian divide are brought out consistently here (for example between the Inquisitorial and vice-regal officials or between the ecclesiastics from within Sicily's local elites and their curial counterparts in Rome). Third, D'Avenia makes a case for why the constitutional struggles within the Sicilian Church took the shape they did, not least because of acute papal concern that a sort of Spanish Gallicanism might emerge. Though much of D'Avenia's focus is on the period 1550-1621, the latter year being when pope Gregory XV finally conceded royal control over the Sicilian Church 'in perpetuity', a brief epilogue takes the story beyond Philip IV's reign towards the eighteenth century. The War of the Spanish Succession saw renewed papal efforts to extinguish the Crown's privileges over the Church, though not with much success. In the end, the King's Church became, perhaps necessarily, a 'Church without the pope', as D'Avenia puts it (p. 158). That situation profoundly affected Sicilians and their institutions throughout this contentious period.

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