CHAPTER 9

An Attempted Morisco Settlement in Early Seventeenth-Century Tuscany

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Under the Livornina, the Leghorn constitution published 30 July 1591 by Grand Duke Fernando I de’ Medici, merchants of all nations were invited to establish themselves at Leghorn and Pisa. Although the decree was designed to attract Jews in general and New Christians in particular, assuring them of protection against any form of persecution even if they returned to practicing the religion of their ancestors, we should still not forget that the invitation was also directed to “Turks, Moors, and Persians.”

Previously known sources mention the fact that a handful of Moriscos reached Leghorn and Tuscany, journeying from Marseille and elsewhere in southern France, but that they stayed only briefly before embarking toward Muslim lands. Very little has been written about the Morisco settlement in Tuscany, how long it lasted, or the socio-economic circumstances under which it existed, despite its importance for reconstructing the paths to exile of the expelled. To what extent did the Moriscos respond to the Medici’s encouragement to settle in Tuscany, and what traces did they leave behind in their passage through Italy? With the help of unpublished documents from the archives of Florence in Italy and Simancas in Spain, I will compare the reception accorded by the Medici state to Jewish and Muslim refugees from the Iberian Peninsula,

* Translated by William Childers

It is a genuine pleasure to thank the staff of the Archivio di Stato di Firenze and the Archivo General de Simancas, in particular Francesca Klein and Isabel Aguirre, for their assistance while working at this research. I was very fortunate to find scholarly guidance from the following individuals to whom I am especially grateful: Luis Bernabé Pons, of the Universidad de Alicante, Bruno Pomara, of the Universitat de València, Dr. Marcella Aglietti, of the Università di Pisa, Lucia Frattarelli Fischer, of the Universitat de València, and Gennaro Varriale, of the Università di Genova, Francisco Zamora Rodriguez, of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Jorge Gil Herrera, of the EHESS-Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Léa Bénichou, of the Universite Paul Valery de Montpellier I for their invaluable suggestions. In particular, I owe much to Cesare Santus for his generosity in sharing with me the first documents concerning the Moriscos in Tuscany that he had just discovered in Florence while working on his doctoral thesis.
within the context of the Grand Duke's Mediterranean policy, and his conception of reason of state, in the attempt to discover the reasons for its failure.

The trajectories followed by Moriscos expelled from Spain can be divided into two broad categories: the first includes all routes taken by those who established themselves in Islamic lands, particularly in the Barbary Coast, where the majority settled, either by choice or under duress; while the second consists of the paths by which they were led to various Christian lands. To this second category belong: many who feared a poor reception by Muslims due to the suspicion that they had remained faithful Christians; those who did not wish to separate from their children under eight years old, as the decree of expulsion established for those who desired to relocate directly to Islamic lands; and finally those who feared maritime insecurity or could not afford the expenses of the journey.

For obvious geographic reasons, the two European territories that received the largest number were France, the obligatory conduit for any Morisco choosing to go into exile by land; and Italy, from whose ports they could afterwards embark for the Ottoman Empire.1 The Morisco presence in southern France is better known at present, thanks to Louis Cardaillac, Henry Lapeyre and other scholars, influenced by Braudel and the Annales School.2

As for Italy, up until recently scholarship provided only sporadic and inaccurate mention of the passage of Moriscos as a result of their persecution and final expulsion.3 All the main histories about the Morisco Diaspora have in

1 The bibliography on the Morisco diaspora is constantly increasing in the last years. I will only mention Luis Bernabè Pons and Jorge Gil Herrera, Los moriscos fuera de España: Rutas y Financiación, Valencia, 2010 and the most recent and up-to-date collective work edited by Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers, Los moriscos: expulsión y diáspora. Una perspectiva internacional, Valencia, 2013.


3 The majority of these contributions have appeared after I first presented the results of my researches in the Italian archives at the conference in Alcalá de Henares in 2010 organized by Kevin Ingram and while this article was in print. I would like at least to mention, together