PART ONE

STATES UNDER SPANISH RULE
CHAPTER ONE

INTEGRATION AND CONFLICT IN SPANISH SICILY*

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In the pages that follow I shall reflect on the two-hundred-year experience of Spanish Sicily, focusing on integration and conflict. It is perhaps useful to state at the outset that integration and conflict should not be conceived as radically opposed categories. It is true that an entire tradition of historical scholarship has worked in a proto-nationalistic vein, stressing the opposition between center and periphery—that is, focusing on instances of resistance that led to so-called “peripherical revolutions”1—but during the last fifteen years in particular, historiography has instead insisted on consensus and on elements of permeability and exchange. To speak of integration, however, implies affirming something more than consensus and different from it; it signifies pinpointing the constants that define Sicily’s participation in the construction of the new Castilian monarchy of Charles V (1516–1556), Philip II (1556–1598), and their heirs. Moreover, it also (and to the contrary) involves noting what was specific to that participation and pointing out its limitations.

If the term “integration” requires definition, so does the term “conflict.” Here conflict is not intended to refer solely to open rebellion, but rather to the entire complex of contrasts and tensions within Sicilian society that, admittedly, went so far in some cases as to lead portions of that society to take the extreme option of insurrection and, ultimately, of calling for help from the Most Christian King of France, the only sovereign in the panorama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries powerful enough to hope to undermine the Catholic monarchy of Spain.

Obviously, a theme this broad requires a somewhat schematic approach; moreover, the long time span of two centuries makes it

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