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MATTHEW OF AGRIGENTO. THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT OF A FRANCISCAN IN THE CATALAN-ARAGONESE KINGDOMS (1425-1442)*

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ABSTRACT: *The re-reading of the documentary sources retrieved in the Spanish and Sicilian historical archives allows, here, to reflect on the figure and activity of Matthew da Agrigento. This Franciscan has been considered, for too long, a personality of secondary importance by historians who have dealt with questions related to the observance. A few years ago, only Paolo Evangelisti was able to place the contribution made by this friar to the construction of the political identity of the Trastámara in the right perspective. In this contribution, an attempt has been made to make his role more perceptible, highlighting, on the one hand, the initiatives pursued by the Franciscan within the city contexts and, on the other, emphasizing his ability to move dexterously between the crown and the papacy, at a time when the intentions of Martin V and Eugene IV often clashed with those of the Aragonese sovereign. Their different positions generated, in fact, tensions and clashes of a certain importance, that only Matthew was able to resolve, acting as an intermediary between the popes and the Trastámara.*

KEYWORDS: *Sicily, Spain, Matthew of Agrigento, Observant Friars Minor, Alfonso V the Magnanimous, Queen Mary, Pope Martin V, Pope Eugene IV, Preaching, Instruments of peace.*

MATTHEW DI AGRIGENTO. L'IMPEGNO POLITICO E RELIGIOSO
DI UN FRANCESCANO NEI REGNI CATALANO-ARAGONESI (1425-1442)

SOMMARIO: *La rilettura delle fonti documentarie conservate negli archivi storici spagnoli e siciliani ha permesso, in questa sede, di poter riflettere sulla figura e l'attività di Matthew da Agrigento. Su una personalità che, per troppo tempo, è stata considerata di secondaria importanza dagli storici che si sono occupati di questioni legate all'osservanza francescana. Solo Paolo Evangelisti, qualche anno fa, ha saputo collocare nella giusta prospettiva il contributo dato da questo francescano alla costruzione dell'identità politica dei regni Trastámara. È un ruolo che ora si è cercato di rendere più percepibile evidenziando, da un lato, le iniziative perseguite dal francescano all'interno dei contesti cittadini e, dall'altro, la sua capacità di muoversi con una certa destrezza tra la corona e il papato. In un momento in cui le intenzioni dei pontefici Martino V ed Eugenio IV si scontrarono spesso con quelle del sovrano aragonese, generando tensioni e scontri di un certo rilievo. Matthew, però, godendo della piena fiducia sia dei papi sia dei Trastámara, poté spesso fungere da intermediario per ricomporre i vari contrasti.*

PAROLE CHIAVI: *Sicilia, Spagna, Matthew da Agrigento, Frati Minori Osservanti, Alfonso V il Magnanimo, Regina Maria, Papa Martino V, Papa Eugenio IV, Predicazione, Strumenti di pace.*

1. A forgotten protagonist

On Matthew of Agrigento, a Friar Minor of the Observance, active in the first half of the fourteenth century, several scholars of Franciscanism have dedicated their investigations. The earliest research

* Abbreviations used: Aca: Barcelona, Archives of the Crown of Aragón; Asp: Palermo, State Archives; Bvn: Nocera Umbra, Bishop's Library.

conducted on the friar from Agrigento, during the first half of the twentieth century aimed to clarify the role he played in the process of establishing the observance in Sicily. Nevertheless, the contributions that appeared during this period were often based on unverified information taken from works published during the seventeenth century by ecclesiastical scholars or those belonging to the Franciscan order itself¹. It was thanks to Agostino Amore's investigations, conducted within the Spanish historical archives, that a substantial number of unpublished documents on Friar Matthew could be found. The scholar thus succeeded in shedding new light both on the relationships that subsisted between the friar from Agrigento and the Catalan-Aragonese sovereigns and on the preaching activity that Matthew carried out in a number of Iberian cities, where he was able to popularize the religious and ethical-social aims theorized within the Observant movement². In the same years in which Amore conducted his investigations, Jordi Rubió i Balaguer also expressed his opinion on the presence of the Sicilian Franciscan in Catalonia and in the kingdom of València. He contributed, in a decisive way, in highlighting the scope of the preaching carried out by Brother Matthew in the Spanish city contexts between the end of the 1420s and the 1440s³.

About twenty years after the appearance of the studies of Amore and Rubió i Balaguer, it was Serafino Gozzo who dealt with the figure and activity of Matthew. His investigations, however, while they demonstrated the Agrigento friar's ability to still arouse particular interest in Franciscan scholars, were unable to bring significant novel-

¹ See the studies by A. Gioia, *Notizie biografiche del Beato Matthew de Gallo da Girgenti dell'Ordine dei Frati Minori*, tipografia Istituto Gualandi, Firenze 1923; Id., *I frati minori della regolare osservanza*, Libreria Editrice Pantaleone, Palermo 1940, and Id., *L'apostolato del B. Matthew d'Agrigento nella Spagna*, «Frate Francesco», 13 (1940), pp. 38-42.

² See the works of A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew d'Agrigento a Barcellona e Valenza*, «Archivum franciscanum historicum», 49 (1956), pp. 255-335, and Id., *Nuovi documenti sull'attività del B. Matthew d'Agrigento nella Spagna ed in Sicilia*, «Archivum franciscanum historicum», 52 (1959), pp. 12-42. The scholar was also responsible for editing the edition of Matthew of Agrigento's sermons: B. Matthaei Agrigentini OFM., *Sermones varii*, a cura di Agostino Amore, Edizioni Franciscane, Roma 1960.

³ Refer to J. Rubió i Balaguer, *El beat Mateu d'Agrigento a Catalunya i a València: Notes sobre la vida religiosa en una Cort del Renaixement*, «Spanische Forschungen. Reihe 1. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kulturgeschichte Spaniens», 11 (1955), pp. 109-121. Regarding observance in Aragon, cf. the studies of C. Mancinelli, *Teoria e pratica economica francescana. Il convento del Santo Spirito del Monte (Gilet, Valencia)*, Aracne editrice, Roma 2017, and Ead., *La observación franciscana en la provincia de Aragón (1380c.-1517): aproximación a un estudio*, «Archivo iberoamericano. Revista de estudios históricos», 77 (2017), pp. 53-67.

ties for a better understanding of his complex personality⁴. It was, however, Filippo Rotolo who, through the discovery of additional unpublished documents, contributed to the understanding of Matthew's presence in Sicily. The scholar has, thus, given to print a biography, which set out to answer multiple questions concerning not only the figure of the Franciscan from Agrigento, but also the development of the observance movement in Sicily⁵. Nevertheless, Rotolo's work seems to lack, several times, a proper use of the methodology of historical research: so it is, for example, when the author traces certain events that happened to Matthew "to the will of God"⁶.

Very timely, however, appear the works of Mario Sensi, who has contributed to delineate the movements of the Agrigento friar in northern Italy, and especially that of Paolo Evangelisti, who has, on the other hand, placed in the right perspective the contribution made by Matthew to the construction of the political identity of the Catalan-Aragonese crown⁷. Evangelisti is credited with having determined the scope of the action carried out by the Sicilian friar in the domains of Alfonso V the Magnanimous, in which the friar carried out preaching

⁴ S. Gozzo, *Studi e ricerche sul beato Matthew O.F.M., vescovo di Agrigento, Araldo del SS. Nome di Gesù. Propagatore dell'Osservanza. Apostolo dell'Italia, Sicilia, Spagna. Fulgida gloria della minoritica provincia sicula (1376-1377-1450)*, s.e., Roma 1987. Just two years earlier, the same scholar had published the contribution: Id., *Due Sermoni del Beato Matthew di Agrigento (secolo XV)*, in I. Vázquez Janeiro (a cura di), *Noscere Sancta. Miscellanea in memoria di Agostino Amore O.F.M.*, Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum, Roma 1985, pp. 245-281.

⁵ In addition to F. Rotolo, *Il beato Matthew d'Agrigento e la provincia francescana di Sicilia nella prima metà del sec. XV*, Officina di Studi Medievali, Palermo 1996, by the same author see Id., *L'episcopato del b. Matthew da Agrigento (17 settembre 1442-23 luglio 1445). Revisione*, in N. Grisanti, I. Craparotta (a cura di), *Francescanesimo e cultura nella provincia di Agrigento*. Atti del convegno di studio (Agrigento, 26-28 ottobre 2006), Officina di Studi Medievali, Palermo 2006, pp. 249-294.

⁶ Cf. F. Rotolo, *Il beato Matthew d'Agrigento* cit., p. 95, where, regarding Matthew, the author reports that "the intervention of God's grace will have completed the work, prompting him to want to implement that inner change". Numerous passages of this same tenor are found within the volume (there, p. 142).

⁷ Of interest are studies by M. Sensi, *Il Quaresimale del B. Matthew da Agrigento minore osservante († 1450)*, «Bollettino storico della città di Foligno», 19 (1995), pp. 7-74; Id., *Osservanza francescana e politica: gli esempi dei beati Matthew da Agrigento e Andrea da Faenza*, in G. Musotto, A. Musco (a cura di), *I Francescani e la politica (secc. XIII - XVII)*. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi (Palermo, 3-7 dicembre 2002), Officina di Studi Medievali, Palermo 2007, pp. 997-1034, and Id., *Il beato Matthew da Agrigento: il dramma di un vescovo resignato*, in N. Grisanti, I. Craparotta (a cura di), *Francescanesimo e cultura nella provincia di Agrigento* cit., pp. 331-342. Also, see the contribution of P. Evangelisti, *Fede, mercato, comunità nei sermoni di un protagonista della costruzione dell'identità politica della corona catalano-aragonese. Matthew d'Agrigento (1380 c.-1450)*, «Collectanea Franciscana», 73 (2003), pp. 617-664.

that was pregnant with religious, political, economic and social concepts, matured in the context of the Italian Minorite dialectic.

Here, on the basis first of all of the reflections proposed by Evangelisti, we want to intervene to try to reconsider the activity conducted by Matthew in northern Italy and in the domains of the Catalan-Aragonese crown during the first half of the fifteenth century. Although Rotolo published a bulky biography, it seems to be useful to go back to the issue to try to place Matthew's activity within a precise political project carried out by the Aragonese sovereign. Documentary sources, published since the mid-twentieth century, had already made it possible to summarily reconstruct the movements of the friar from Agrigento and also to clarify, in part, the relations that bound him to the Trastámara. The rereading of the documentation, conducted on the basis of a better knowledge of Matthew's sermons⁸, now seems to allow us to be able to better frame the Franciscan's intervention in the domains of the Catalan-Aragonese crown. In fact, his return to Sicily from northern Italy, as well as his presence in the Iberian Peninsula, arose not only from the will of the Observants, who were interested in expanding their presence in Europe, but also and above all from the intentions of Alfonso V, who took advantage of the work of Matthew and his confreres to pacify urban societies, normalize relations between the crown and the city's ruling classes and, therefore, instruct the latter in a solidaristic use of their wealth.

2. From Sicily to northern Italy

About Matthew's origins there is no certain information; all that is known is that he was born in Agrigento, between the 1370s and 1380s, possibly to a family of Catalan origin, whose surname was Gimena⁹. There were, in fact, several Catalan kinship nuclei, belonging mainly to the merchant class, settled in the city at the end of the 14th century. Their presence was part of a very complex urban context, marked by strong social tensions that had sharpened during the 1390s. During

⁸ On sermons, in addition to the works already mentioned in the previous notes, see also the contribution of C. del Popolo, *Un quaresimale del beato Matthew di Agrigento*, «Giornale italiano di filologia», 57 (2005), pp 35-70.

⁹ As for Matthew's surname, it is learned from the bull of election to the bishopric of Agrigento, where it is stated: «Dilecto filio Matheo de Gimena», as well as again from the privilege by which he was granted thirty onze after renouncing the Sicilian episcopal chair. Both documents can be found published in *Bullarium Franciscanum*, Nova Series, 1, Ad Claras Aquas, Quaracchi 1929, p. 293. It has been assumed that the surname Gimena was a corruption of the Catalan surname Guimerà. For this, cf. V. Martínez Colomer, *Historia de la Provincia franciscana de Valencia de la Regular Observancia de San Francisco*, s.e., Valencia 1803, p. 19.

this decade, in fact, Duke Martino di Montblanc, by executing Andrew Chiaromonte, had put an end to the lordship he exercised over Agrigento¹⁰. It is not known whether the Gimena family was involved in the clashes that occurred during this period in the city between the different consortiums, which were strongly interested in filling the power vacuum that had arisen. In this sense, it seems highly likely that these episodes, marked by numerous bloody events and the eagerness of the different factions to accumulate power and wealth, had conditioned Matthew's future choices¹¹. It does not appear, then, to be a coincidence that the Agrigentine, who had probably already joined the ranks of the Order of Friars Minor, had, in the early years of the fifteenth century, moved closer and closer to the observance movement. A movement that – if at first it set out to follow the Franciscan rule in all its rigor – during the first two decades of the fifteenth century, appeared resolutely committed to advancing an urban pastoral, aimed at resolving the conflicts that arose within the cities and condemning the profits derived from usury, fraud, whoring and the trade in the sacred¹².

An unconfirmed report would have it that Matthew joined the observance once he arrived in Aragon, from which, at an unspecified date, he moved to northern Italy¹³. Here, he would come into contact with Bernardine of Siena, beginning to follow him during his itinerant sermons. It was certainly next to the Tuscan friar that Matthew was able to acquire the broad technical and content toolkit, which he used

¹⁰ Asp, Real Cancelleria, Registro 21, cc. 175v-176v.

¹¹ The city of Agrigento, during the 15th century, was repeatedly addressed by P. Sardina, *Il labirinto della memoria. Clan familiari, potere regio e amministrazione cittadina ad Agrigento tra Duecento e Quattrocento*, Salvatore Sciascia editore, Caltanissetta-Roma 2011, and Ead., *Tessuto urbano, ceti sociali e governo cittadino ad Agrigento nei secoli XIV e XV*, in V. Caminetti (a cura di), *Vivere nell'età di mezzo. Archeologia e Medioevo nel territorio agrigentino*, Regione Siciliana, Palermo 2011, pp. 24-34. Regarding the persistent state of tension in fifteenth-century Sicily, see A.F.C. Ryde, *The incidence of crime in Sicily in the mid fifteenth century: the evidence from composition record*, in T. Dean, K.J.P. Lowe (eds.), *Crime, society and the law in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1994, pp. 59-73.

¹² The figure is evident from the analysis of the sermons of Bernardine of Siena and his disciples. Regarding the sermons of Matthew of Agrigento, see, again, especially to B. Matthaeei Agrigentini OFM., *Sermones varii* cit. Instead, for the sermons of the Sienese, see Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul campo di Siena 1427*, a cura di C. Delcorno, Rusconi, Milano 1989.

¹³ Regarding Matthew's presence in Aragon, see P. Tognoletto, *Vita del beato Matthew di Agrigento riveduta e corretta dal R.P. Ludovico dott. Mariani O.F.M. con prefazione e note di Alessandro Giuliana Alaimo*, s.e., Palermo 1955, p. 29. On the proximity of the Agrigentine to Bernardine of Siena, news can first be found in J.B. West, *Andreae de Biliis, O.S.A., Tractatus ad Barcinonenses de litera h in nomine Ihesu, «Antonianum»*, 3 (1928), p. 65, and then in S. Gozzo, *Studi e ricerche* cit., p. 85.

extensively during his sermocinal activity conducted from the first twenty-five years of the fifteenth century, especially in the Catalan-Aragonese dominions¹⁴. The sermons of Bernardine and his disciples, whose contents were sensitive to social moral issues, were distinguished for being agile, picturesque, incisive and with familiar and at times dramatic accents. It was because of this, that the faithful people thronged the public squares, becoming impassioned, disturbed and moved as they listened to the sermons delivered by the observants. Their sermons were not configured as a mere exercise in asceticism and humility: they sought, rather, to restore to the poor and the marginalized the hope of a better life, arousing in the wealthy classes forms of generosity, which often, however, also stemmed from the mystery of the afterlife and the fears that hell instilled¹⁵.

Between 1417 and 1424, several cities in northern Italy were visited by Bernardine and Matthew's¹⁶. This was reported by James della Marca, one of the closest collaborators of the Sienese friar, who did not hesitate to reveal that the Agrigento had been his spiritual father¹⁷. It appears, however, still impossible at the present time to be able to determine whether the two Franciscans operated alongside each other during these seven years or whether, instead, they, by mutual agreement, conducted their missions separately. The fact remains that both Bernardine and Matthew conducted their sermocinal activities in the same cities, among which Orzinuovi, Ostiglia, Piacenza, and Verona are mentioned¹⁸. The two observants were really tied by the themes exposed in their sermons. They appeared to be committed, in fact, to the pacification of opposing city consortiums and to the condemnation of a number of practices deemed anti-social, which undermined the building of the ideal political community¹⁹. Thus, Matthew in Verona

¹⁴ Matthew of Agrigento was among the first disciples of Bernardine of Siena as noted in the *Chronica Nicolai Glassberger*, Ad Claras Aquas, Quaracchi 1887, p. 396.

¹⁵ Reflections along these lines can be found in A. Ghinato, *La predicazione francescana nella vita religiosa e sociale del Quattrocento*, «Picenum Seraphicum» 10 (1973), pp. 24-94, and in S. Tramontana, *Gli osservanti a Messina. Qualche riflessione sulla fondazione di un convento e di una chiesa nel secolo XV*, «Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche», 7 (2010), pp. 55-86.

¹⁶ M. Sensi, *Osservanza francescana cit.*, p. 1012.

¹⁷ Montepreandone, Municipal Historical Archives, codex 46, c. 72v. Cf. also, S. Iacobus de Marchia, *Sermones dominicales, IV*, a cura di R. Lioi, Biblioteca Francescana, Falconara 1982, p. 32.

¹⁸ For this, cf. again M. Sensi, *Osservanza francescana cit.*, p. 1012. It is also known that Matthew preached in Orzinuovi, near Brescia (Bvn, MS 18.11.3 c. 180r); in Ostiglia, near Mantua (Bvn, MS 18.11.3, c. 185r); in Piacenza (L. Oligier, *S. Bernardino e l'introduzione dell'Osservanza a Piacenza*, «Buletino di Studi Bernardiniani», 2 (1936), pp. 265-280), and in Verona (B. Matthaei Agrigentini OFM., *Sermones varii cit.*, p. 143).

¹⁹ Cf. P. Evangelisti, *Fede, mercato, comunità cit.*, pp. 633-634.

arranged to reconcile the opposing factions, in Piacenza to convert three harlots, while, in southern Italy, notably in Salerno, to deplore the profits from usury²⁰. It was, thus, often the city councils themselves or the lords of important urban centers who requested the presence of the observants to elevate the customs of individuals and improve the conditions of society. Even Pope Martin V, in 1424, made use of the oratorical and persuasive skills of Matthew and John da Capestrano: the pope, in fact, sent the two Franciscans to Naples to urge the ruling classes and the Neapolitan population to reject the coming of Alfonso V the Magnanimous and to support, at the same time, the claims of Louis III of Anjou²¹. In this circumstance, the pontiff could further test the abilities of the observants, who had managed to establish themselves as privileged interlocutors of the different components of the city.

By the first two decades of the fifteenth century, Bernardine of Siena and his companions had visited many cities on the Italian peninsula, becoming indefatigable itinerant preachers. To cope with their constant travels, they needed lodgings in which they could find shelter at night. Thus it was that the friars obtained their first modest dwellings from the city authorities, always located outside or close to the city walls²². It is likely that the Franciscans had obtained such convents, thanks in part to the support of the pontiff, who most likely saw in them a powerful tool for the implementation of precise institutional, political and religious projects²³.

Between 1424 and 1425, it is presumable, thus, that Martin V had finally made up his mind to support the Observants' intentions of expansion in Sicily. This is evidenced by the fact that, on April 23, 1425, the pope granted Matthew permission to be able to found three

²⁰ See B. Matthaevi Agrigentini OFM., *Sermones varii* cit., p. 165.

²¹ About the presence in Naples of Matthew of Agrigento, news can be found in Bvn, Ms. 18.11.3, c. 86v, and then especially in B. Matthaevi Agrigentini OFM., *Sermones varii* cit., pp. 108-117. On the events surrounding the seizure of Naples, and on Alfonso V the Magnanimous in general, see A.F.C. Ryde, *Alfonso the Magnanimous. King of Aragon Naples, and Sicily, 1396-1458*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990.

²² It was a constant for the Friars Minor Observant to found their first convents outside the urban perimeter. The figure was also confirmed for Sicily by M. d'Alatri, *Gli insediamenti osservanti in Sicilia nel corso del Quattrocento*, in D. Ciccarelli, A. Bisanti (a cura di) *Francescanesimo e civiltà siciliana nel Quattrocento*. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Palermo, Carini, Gibilmanna 25-31 ottobre 1992), Officina di Studi Medievali, Palermo 2000, pp. 41-50.

²³ On the support given by the pontiffs to the Friars Minor Observant, see M. Fois, *I papi e l'osservanza minoritica*, in *Il rinnovamento del francescanesimo, l'Osservanza*. Atti dell'XI convegno della Società internazionale di Studi francescani (Assisi, 20, 21, 22 ottobre 1983), Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani, Assisi, 1985, pp. 29-105.

convents on the island²⁴. Authorization that was confirmed on May 7 of the same year with a special privilege, by which the friar was allowed to be able to preach anywhere, even without the prior consent of local bishops and parish priests²⁵. Evidently, however, the obstacles encountered by the friar along his journey must have been many, so much so that he implored the intervention of the Count of Urbino Guidantonio da Montefeltro. The pope's nephew thus wrote, on May 18, 1425, to the papal curia to request a new privilege that would allow, this time, however, Bernardine of Siena and John da Capestrano as well, to be able to preach everywhere and absolve anyone from sins²⁶.

Finally, in mid-1425, having almost certainly obtained the consent of Alfonso V the Magnanimous, Matthew decided to head to Sicily. During his journey, the friar from Agrigento did not miss the opportunity to preach in many cities in Campania and Calabria. In this way, in Salerno he was able to reconcile the opposing factions, while in Cosenza he managed to obtain for his brethren a monastery that had previously belonged to the Poor Clares²⁷.

3. The return to Sicily

In December 1425, Matthew arrived in Sicily, landing in Messina. It was a return for him to the island, which he had left several years earlier. Unknown remain the reasons why the Agrigentine had moved away from his hometown, just as unknown remain both the evolution of his path within the Order of Friars Minor and the regions where he stayed until the first decade of the 15th century. One can only try to speculate that, after having donned the habit of the saint of Assisi in Sicily, Matthew had later moved to Aragon, in whose region he approached the Franciscan observance movement. From there, he had to head to northern Italy, where he came into contact with Bernardine of Siena. Several doubts persist, however, about his journey to Aragon. Nevertheless, it is nevertheless true that no documentary source attests to the presence of observant communities on the island in the years when Matthew joined the ranks of the Franciscan Order: this has led Filippo Rotolo, therefore, to believe that the friar approached

²⁴ *Bullarium Franciscanum*, Nova Series, 7, Ad Claras Aquas, Quaracchi 1929, p. 623.

²⁵ J. M. Pou y Martí, *Commentatio S. Bernardini Senensis et Joannis de Capistrano ac B. Matthaevi ab Agrigento*, «Archivum franciscanum historicum» 35 (1932), pp. 555-559.

²⁶ There, p. 557.

²⁷ Regarding obtaining the convent in Cosenza, cf. *Bullarium Franciscanum* cit., 7, p. 714.

the reform movement in an extra-Sicilian context²⁸. It was not until 1421, in fact, that there is evidence of the presence on the island of a number of friars who had decided to observe the Franciscan rule in all its rigor. In that year, Alfonso V had, thus, made himself the interpreter of their petitions to the viceroy of Sicily, who was asked for his help in finding a suitable and functional site for the foundation of an observant convent²⁹. In this sense, the letter sent to Nicolò Speciale seems to detect all of the Aragonese sovereign's interest in the Franciscan movement: in an Order that, during the first decades of the fifteenth century, was proving to be a reliable instrument capable of acting positively within the urban societies of the Catalan-Aragonese dominions³⁰. The intervention, then, in the island of Matthew, who had already demonstrated his ability to make an impact within the city contexts, especially in northern Italy, fitted well with the political logic of Alfonso V.

Thus, in Messina, the first stop on his return to Sicily, the friar from Agrigento was able to devote himself to preaching and spreading the cult of the most holy name of Jesus³¹. This was a devotion to the name of Christ, which had been strongly advocated by Bernardine and later by his disciples, as a means of salvation and peacemaking value³². The cult was the bearer of a true political message, in that, it, according to the observants, was able to restore assurance and credibility to the communities that welcomed it³³. In Sicily, then, its spread must have been considered by Matthew to be particularly important, since, here, Christianity found itself coexisting for centuries with a large Jewish and Muslim presence³⁴. The preaching of the friar from Agrigento must

²⁸ Cf. F. Rotolo, *Il beato Matthew d'Agrigento* cit., pp. 93-94.

²⁹ Aca, Real Cancilleria, Registros 2811, f. 84v (cf. A. Amore, *Nuovi documenti* cit., p. 23).

³⁰ See P. Evangelisti, *Fede, mercato, comunità* cit., p. 628.

³¹ The Observants were tireless itinerant preachers. Therefore, news in R. Rusconi, *La predicazione minoritica in Europa nei secoli XIII-XV*, in I. Baldelli, A.M. Romanini (a cura di), *Francesco, il francescanesimo e la cultura della nuova Europa*, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, Roma 1986, pp. 141-165.

³² On the cult of the Most Holy Name of Jesus spread by Bernardine of Siena, cf. the contributions published by E. Longpré, *S. Bernardin de Sienne et le nome de Jèsus*, «Archivum franciscanum historicum», 28 (1935), pp. 443-476; Id., *S. Bernardin de Sienne et le nome de Jèsus*, «Archivum franciscanum historicum», 29 (1936), pp. 142-168 and 443-477, and Id., *S. Bernardin de Sienne et le nome de Jèsus*, «Archivum franciscanum historicum» 30 (1937), pp. 170-192.

³³ Cf. B. Matthaei Agrigentini OFM., *Sermones varii* cit., p. 165.

³⁴ As early as the late 11th century, Sicily presented a multicultural society, consisting of Jews, Muslims, Greek-rite Christians and Latin-rite Christians. In this regard, the contribution of A. Nef, *Pluralisme religieux et état monarchique dans la Sicile des XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, in H. Bresc (édité par), *Politique et religion en Méditerranée. Moyen Âge et époque contemporaine*, Éditions Bouchène, Saint Denis 2008, pp. 237-254.

have had, in this way, a great impact on the population of Messina, if, a few days after his arrival, he managed to obtain a dwelling for his brethren. The foundation of the convent of St. Mary of Jesus represented, thus, the seal of the mission conducted by the Franciscan in Messina³⁵. But, his sermons also managed to inspire the publication of suntuary chapters. Legislation that was directed especially at the city's ruling classes and strongly advocated the measured use of wealth³⁶. Matthew believed, in fact, it was incumbent upon the perfect citizen to acquire goods not for himself, in order to achieve greater power and reveal his social status. But, to make them, rather, available for the entire civic community. The Franciscan appeared, therefore, interested in creating a model of the city, in which the solidaristic component represented the predominant element³⁷.

At the end of January 1426, Matthew left Messina to head to Palermo. In the capital of the kingdom of Sicily, the friar from Agrigento stayed until Lent, carrying out an intense sermocinal activity. It is quite likely that in this city, too, he had worked to spread the cult of the most holy name of Jesus: it was popularized through tablets on which the monogram IHS was depicted. The Franciscan, therefore, urged the people of Palermo to affix this symbol on their homes so that they witnessed their belonging to Christ. But, the sermons delivered by Matthew provoked, once again, a wider debate within the city, whose authorities were called upon to reflect on the promulgation of new suntuary chapters. Their content ranged from the control of Jewish activities to the ways in which wealth was managed by the ruling classes³⁸. According to Matthew, goods were to be considered, in fact, as part of the patrimony of the public thing, which had to be reinvested according to precise economic practices. In this sense, the friars sought to re-evaluate the profession of the merchant, whose stores allowed a proper circulation of money to take place³⁹. It had been no

³⁵ On the settlement of the Friars Minor Observant in Messina see again S. Tramontana, *Gli osservanti a Messina* cit., pp. 55-86. Also, on the foundation of their convent see J.R.H. Moorman, *Medieval Franciscan Houses*, Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, New York 1983, p. 299.

³⁶ P. Evangelisti, *Credere nel mercato, credere nella res publica: la comunità catalano-aragonese nelle proposte e nell'azione politica di un esponente del francescanesimo mediterraneo: Francesc Eiximenis*, «Anuario de estudios medievales», 33 (2003), pp. 69-117.

³⁷ Cf. P. Evangelisti, *Fede, mercato, comunità* cit., p. 636.

³⁸ Asp, Real Cancelleria, Registro 56, cc. 45r-48v, and Protonotaro del Regno, Registro 27, cc. 33r-37r. The suntuary chapters also ruled on the manner of dress by the ladies belonging to the noble classes. On this topic, see S. Tramontana, *Vestirsi e travestirsi in Sicilia. Abbigliamento, feste e spettacoli nel Medioevo*, Sellerio editore, Palermo 1993.

³⁹ Cf. M. Sensi, *Osservanza francescana* cit., p. 1027.

accident, then, that Matthew had conducted his homiletic activity in Sicily primarily in Messina and Palermo, where, that is, the presence of the merchant class was dense and where their intervention made social and economic tensions more pronounced⁴⁰.

Also in Palermo, in 1426, the Franciscan was able to obtain permission from the city authorities to found a convent for Observants on land granted to him by Antonio and Betta de Mirabile⁴¹. However, the mission conducted by Matthew in the Sicilian capital did not only gather consensus, as can be seen from the exemptions to suntuary legislation approved by the viceroy⁴². A letter sent by the Aragonese ruler to Nicolò Speciale on July 31, 1426, on the other hand, reveals the obstacles Matthew encountered on his way⁴³. As early as May of that year, however, the Franciscan had moved on to Agrigento, the city where he was born, where his intervention had immediately aroused the reconciliation of several families⁴⁴. On that occasion, the city authorities granted Matthew the ancient monastery of St. Nicholas, which he was only able to restore, however, thanks to the munificence of King Alfonso⁴⁵. It is likely that Matthew's mission conducted in Agrigento was also not particularly successful. On the other hand, after the sermon conducted in Messina, relations between the Franciscan, the island's ecclesiastical hierarchies and the Friars Minor of the

⁴⁰ Concerning Sicilian cities and its ruling classes, relative to the 15th century, see the works of P. Corrao, *Città ed élites urbane nella Sicilia del Tre-Quattrocento*, «Revista d'història medieval», 9 (1998), pp. 171-192; Id., *Amministrazione ed equilibri politici nel regno di Sicilia (1416-1443)*, in G. D'Agostino, G. Buffardi (a cura di), *XVI Congresso Internazionale di Storia della Corona d'Aragona: la Corona d'Aragona ai tempi di Alfonso il Magnanimo; i modelli politico-istituzionali, la circolazione degli uomini, delle idee, delle merci; gli influssi sulla società e sul costume*. Atti, (Napoli, Caserta, Ischia, 18-24 settembre 1997), Mondiali Grafica, Napoli 2001, pp. 179-198; and Id., *Policentrismo dei poteri e contrattazione politica nel regno di Sicilia (1282-1458). La fisionomia istituzionale e la negoziazione interna (città, monarchia, nobiltà, parlamento)*. *Résumé*⁷, in F. Foronda (édité par), *Avant le contrat social. Le contrat politique dans l'Occident médiéval (XIII^e-XV^e siècle)*. Colloque international de Madrid (2008), Publications de la Sorbonne, Paris 2011, pp. 715-716.

⁴¹ Palermo, Municipal Library, Qq F 16, cc. 99r - 117. The land grant document was published by F. Rotolo, *Il beato Matthew d'Agrigento* cit., pp. 246-249.

⁴² See M. Sensi, *Osservanza francescana* cit., p. 1020.

⁴³ Aca, Real Cancilleria, Registros 2813, c. 7r.

⁴⁴ On the foundation of the convent of St. Nicholas of Jesus in Agrigento, see A. Giuliana Alaimo, *La chiesa di S. Nicola dei Cistercensi ad Agrigento*, s.e., Palermo 1953. Regarding the date, the monastery was granted to Matthew of Agrigento, cf. again J.R.H. Moorman, *Medieval Franciscanum* cit., 202. Instead, on the donation of the privilege given by the crown to Matthew, see the document preserved in Asp, Real Cancilleria, Registro 57, c. 176v. (cf. F. Rotolo, *Il beato Matthew d'Agrigento* cit., p. 250).

⁴⁵ Aca, Real Cancilleria, Registros 2813, c. 85r., (cf. A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew* cit., p. 291).

conventual part of the Order must have become increasingly difficult. In this regard, emblematic turns out to be the case of the arrest of the guardian of the convent of St. Mary of Jesus in Palermo, who, in 1427, was imprisoned by the archbishop of Monreale, apparently without any pretext⁴⁶. It was the king, on the other hand, who showed exceptional interest in the mission carried out by Matthew in Sicily, since the friar, knowing how to intervene positively within the city contexts, showed himself to be very useful to the crown's cause.

4. The first trip to Spain

After having probably defended Bernardine of Siena in Rome, together with John da Capestrano, from accusations of heresy, in 1427, Matthew left for Spain⁴⁷. On March 26 of that year, the Franciscan arrived in València, invited to preach by King Alfonso and Queen Mary⁴⁸. Quite a lot of information is possessed about the friar from Agrigento's first stay in the Iberian domains of the Trastámara: it comes first and foremost from the queen's numerous letters, sent to her officials to inquire about Matthew's work and to support him during his sermocinal activities conducted in the crown lands⁴⁹. In this way, the missives reveal all of Mary's attachment and devotion to the Sicilian Franciscan, who with his sermons was able to become an active element in the politics of the Aragonese rulers⁵⁰. Because of this, even Alphonsus, who had already experienced the reliability of the observance movement in his domains, became more and more a firm supporter of the action carried out by Matthew.

Thus, in València, the friar from Agrigento delivered his first sermons in the Iberian Peninsula, focusing mainly on the saving virtues of the most holy name of Jesus and the condemnation of luxury. His

⁴⁶ Aca, Real Cancillería, Registros 2813, c. 79v. (cf. A. Amore, *Nuovi documenti cit.*, p. 24).

⁴⁷ See F. Rotolo, *Il beato Matthew d'Agrigento cit.*, pp. 133-135. On this episode cf. again G. Gonnet, *S. Bernardino da Siena e la cosiddetta "eresia" del Nome di Gesù*, in F. D'Episcopo (a cura di) *S. Bernardino da Siena predicatore e pellegrino*. Atti del Convegno nazionale di studi bernardiniani (Majori, 20-22 giugno), Congedo editore, Galatina 1985, pp. 46-48.

⁴⁸ Aca, Real Cancillería, Registros 3170, c. 37v, (cf. A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew cit.*, p. 284).

⁴⁹ On these documents, refer to A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew cit.*, pp. 283-335 and, Id. *Nuovi documenti cit.*, pp. 23-42.

⁵⁰ Interesting facts about the relationship between Queen Mary and the Order of Friars Minor are contained in J.R. Webster, *Franciscanismo de la reina de Aragón doña María de Luna (1396-1406)*, «Archivo Ibero-Americano», 165-168 (1982), pp. 81-124.

words had to make inroads first and foremost among the women of the wealthier classes and even among the ladies of the royal court itself, as revealed in the letters of Queen Mary⁵¹. Here, too, the Franciscan had dealt with themes already widely developed in the city contexts of northern Italy and Sicily, through which he aimed to provide the faithful with a new ethical-economic code. In Barcelona, too, a few months later, Matthew uttered harsh words against luxury, usury and gambling. The Franciscan, in fact, who had come to the capital of Catalonia to bring relief to the earthquake-stricken city, believed that it was the Barcelonians with their sins who had unleashed God's wrath⁵². It was necessary, therefore, for them to atone for their sins through a solemn penitential procession, which was approved by the cathedral chapter on June 2, 1427. The ceremony took place four days later and must have been truly grand: in fact, one documentary source reports that more than thirty thousand people took part, of whom about three thousand disciplined themselves along the entire route⁵³. Probably exaggerated numbers these, but they certainly reveal the uproar aroused throughout Catalonia by the procession organized by Matthew. It is presumable, thus, that underlying the charges of heresy brought against him by the Augustinian friar Anthony in 1427 were not only problems concerning the worship of the most holy name of Jesus, but also the envies and jealousies that were mounting against the Franciscan from Agrigento and the Friars Minor of the observance⁵⁴. The support given by the rulers to Matthew had, in any case, to scale down the terms of the issue opened by Brother Anthony, so much so that the bishop of Barcelona allowed the Franciscan to continue to exercise his sermocinal activity⁵⁵. Indeed, in July 1427, the city council pledged to establish a convent for Observants⁵⁶. This abode assumed a high strategic value in political terms for Alfonso,

⁵¹ Aca, Real Cancilleria, Registros 3170, c. 38v (cf. A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew* cit., p. 285).

⁵² On the earthquake that occurred in Barcelona, see *Dietari del Antich Consell Barceloni*, imprenta de'n Henrich y Companyia, Barcelona 1892, pp. 249-252, and J. Rubió i Balaguer, *El beat Mateu d'Agrigento* cit., pp. 114-115.

⁵³ Barcelona, Chapter Archive of the Holy Church of the Cathedral of Barcelona, *Liber Camissae ab a. 1343-1497*, c. 106r. Cf. more *Dietari del Antich Consell* cit., p. 251, and J. Rubió i Balaguer, *El beat Mateu d'Agrigento* cit., p. 114.

⁵⁴ On the accusations made by Brother Anthony, see A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew* cit., pp. 264-265. In this sense, interesting news about the controversy over the preaching of the most holy name of Jesus comes from B. de Gaiffier, *Le mémoire d'André Biglia sur la prédication de saint Bernardin de Sienne*, «Analecta Bollandiana», 53 (1935), pp. 308-365.

⁵⁵ See J. Rubió i Balaguer, *El beat Mateu d'Agrigento* cit., p. 119.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Dietari del Antich Consell* cit., p. 251, and *Bullarium Franciscanum* cit., 7, p. 632. Also, see A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew* cit., pp. 267-269.

who could now count on a garrison capable of stemming the social and economic tensions existing within the city. The presence of the Observants in Barcelona was, moreover, functional in reducing the influence of the Jews, toward whom Matthew always showed a constant commitment in order to convert them to the Christian faith⁵⁷.

While the Observant was in Barcelona, the city council of Vic, perhaps on the advice of the rulers themselves, resolved to invite Matthew to preach in the city. Moreover, as had already happened in Sicily, in Spain too the friar from Agrigento turned his attentions to urban centers where social tensions were most pronounced. It was in the crown's interest, in fact, to recover that political stability, necessary for the good government of the kingdom. Strong, thus, in the support of the sovereigns, Matthew was able to arrive in Vic in the second half of August⁵⁸. His sermons were the basis for the reconciliation of many families torn apart by a long trail of cross-cutting murders. The offended parties thus pledged to forgive the murderers, swindlers, thieves and those who had been guilty of more or less serious crimes against them. It was a forgiveness, theirs, that was celebrated publicly, through the drafting of the instruments of peace, or acts drawn up by a notary public, which formally sanctioned the newfound understanding⁵⁹.

Between the last months of 1427 and the first months of 1428, Matthew visited several cities in the domains of the Trastámara. It is thus known that he was in Gerona, Huesca and Jativa, where it is likely that he preached, once again, on the most holy name of Jesus and the proper use of money⁶⁰. Even in Valencia, where the Franciscan returned for Lent, he succeeded in breaking through the population. The instruments of peace, drawn up in this city by the notary Jacopo Ferdinando, testify how, in a few days, eighty-five murders were forgiven⁶¹. This was an event of exceptional magnitude, carefully planned by Matthew,

⁵⁷ The king had to support Matthew's ideas. Thus, on July 4, Alfonso issued a measure forcing all Jews to listen to the sermons of the Sicilian Franciscan. For this A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew* cit., pp. 298-299. Furthermore, see P. Evangelisti, *Fede, mercato, comunità* cit., pp. 642-646. On the anti-Jewish propaganda carried out by Matthew of Agrigento, on more cautious positions stands V. Mulè, *Note sulla predicazione del beato Matthew da Girgenti agli ebrei di Sicilia*, in N. Grisanti, I Craparotta (a cura di), *Francescanesimo e cultura nella provincia di Agrigento* cit., pp. 205-216.

⁵⁸ Cf. A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew* cit., p. 270.

⁵⁹ There, p. 270. See also E. Longpré, *S. Bernardin de Sienne*, cit., 30 (1937), pp. 188-191.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Dietari del capellà d'Anfos el Magnànim*, editado por J. Sanchisi Sivera, Acción Bibliográfica, Valencia 1932, p. 130, and J. Rubió i Balaguer, *El beat Mateu d'Agrigento* cit., p. 116.

⁶¹ Aca, Real Cancillería, Registros 3170, cc. 110v-111r. (cf. A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew* cit., pp. 302-303), and then, Id., *Nuovi documenti* cit., pp. 15-16.

which compelled even Jews and Muslims to participate. It was a way to make them aware of the peacemaking power of the most holy name of Jesus. Queen Mary, impressed by what had happened, thus decided to found a convent for the observant in Valencia as well⁶². The opposition of the Friars Minor Conventual, however, was not long in coming: they expressed to the king all their displeasure with Matthew and his confreres, who had harshly criticized their way of life. Work on the new abode for the Observants began anyway, thanks to the protection afforded to the reform movement by Queen Mary⁶³.

The mission conducted by the Agrigentine in the Iberian domains of the Trastámara between 1427 and 1428 must have been particularly challenging for Matthew, as it was characterized by the friar's constant travels from city to city and his intense sermocinal activity. His presence in Alfonso's continental kingdoms was, however, crucial to the consolidation of the observance in Spain. After stopping for a very brief period on the island of Majorca in mid-1428, Matthew decided to return to Sicily⁶⁴.

5. Between Sicily and Spain

In mid-1428, Matthew returned to Sicily to give new impetus to the Franciscan observance movement. On the strength of the permission granted to Alfonso by the papal legate Pierre de Foix, which allowed him to found five new convents, the Agrigentine dedicated himself to establishing the new observant communities on the island⁶⁵. Two letters from the queen sent in 1428 to two of her Syracuse officials seem to betray the Franciscan's presence in this city: probably Matthew went there both to preach and to discuss the construction of the new convent of St. Mary of Jesus⁶⁶. Unfortunately, the lack of documentary sources does not allow us to shed light on the Franciscan's activities in Syracuse, much less to clarify the terms of the foundation of the Cammarata convent during the same 1428. Thus, it has been assumed that the establishment of an observant community in the latter town was intended to counter the dense Jewish presence in the Agrigento

⁶² Cf. J. Rubió i Balaguer, *El beat Mateu d'Agrigento* cit., p. 117, and, therefore, A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew* cit., pp. 272-274.

⁶³ See A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew* cit., p. 279.

⁶⁴ Valencia, General archives of nation, Registros 35, c. 100r.

⁶⁵ Cf. J. Rubió i Balaguer, *El beat Mateu d'Agrigento* cit., p. 115, and F. Rotolo, *Il beato Matthew d'Agrigento* cit., pp. 151-152.

⁶⁶ Aca, Real Cancilleria, Registros 2967, cc. 130r – 130v. (see A. Amore, *Nuovi documenti* cit., p. 29).

hinterland⁶⁷. Moreover, Matthew had already manifested an ongoing commitment in the Iberian domains of the Trastámara to convert Jews to the Christian faith. His ideas had even influenced some of Alfonso's dispositions, through which Jewish communities first and Muslim communities later were forced to intervene in sermons given by the Franciscan⁶⁸. The remonstrances of the Jew Moise de la Bonavoglia, Alfonso's personal physician, however, had to convince the Aragonese ruler, in June 1428, to order the viceroys of Sicily to limit the actions of the friar from Agrigento toward Jews and Muslims⁶⁹.

Meanwhile, in Spain, interstate relations had become very tense. In June 1429, Alfonso V and his brother John of Navarre had invaded Castile. The interventions of the papal legate Pierre de Foix and Queen Mary, who was forced to witness her husband's occupation of her brother's territories, had been to no avail. Therefore, the sovereign thought of relying on Matthew, aware of the prestige the Franciscan enjoyed with Alfonso. The Agrigentine was only able, however, to arrive in Spain in January 1430, taking advantage of the truce between the parties, which had been obtained thanks to the mediations carried out by the ambassador of Portugal⁷⁰. The role played by Matthew in this affair is not at all clear. Apparently, the queen had instructed him to travel to Castile together with her chaplain. But, it is not known whether the Franciscan had succeeded in his task⁷¹. A letter sent by the Aragonese ruler on April 10 of that year makes the matter even more problematic: in the missive Peter de Siscar was ordered to travel to Teruel to arrest a friar of the Order of Minors⁷². Agostino Love had speculated that it might have been Matthew of

⁶⁷ Cf. P. Evangelisti, *Fede, mercato, comunità* cit., pp. 629 and 643.

⁶⁸ Aca, Real Cancilleria, Registros 2613, cc. 89r – 90v. (cf. A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew* cit., pp. 298-299).

⁶⁹ Asp, Protonotaro del Regno, Registro 31, cc. 154r-157v, and Real Cancilleria, Registro 65, c. 277v. See, in this sense, B. and G. Lagumina, *Codice diplomatico dei Giudei in Sicilia, 1*, Tipografia Michele Amenta, Palermo 1890, p. 498. On the well-known Sicilian-born Jewish physician, see A. Milano, *Bonavoglia ('Hefes) Mosè de' Medici*, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 11., Istituto per l'Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma 1969, pp. 654-656. Cf. also S. Fodale, *Mosè Bonavoglia e il contestato "iudicatus generalis" sugli ebrei siciliani*, in N. Bucaria (a cura di), *Gli ebrei in Sicilia: dal tardoantico al Medioevo. Studi in onore di mons. Benedetto Rocco*, Flaccovio, Palermo 1998, pp. 99-109.

⁷⁰ See N. Cortese, *Alfonso d'Aragona*, in *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*, Istituto per l'Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma 1929, p. 399.

⁷¹ The queen issued Friar Matthew a safe-conduct to travel to the kingdom of Castile. For this, see Aca, Real Cancilleria, Registros 3221, c. 4v-5r. (cf. A. Amore, *Nuovi documenti* cit., pp. 31-32). Regarding the role played by Mary, cf. A.F.C. Ryde, *Alfonso the Magnanimous* cit., pp. 158-174.

⁷² Aca, Real Cancilleria, Registros 2692, c. 51r. (cf. A. Amore, *Nuovi documenti* cit., pp. 32-33).

Agrigento, who was thought by Alfonso to be a traitor⁷³. The fact, however, that the Agrigentine had continued to enjoy the support of the sovereign in the following years is a fact that does not seem to lend much credence to this suggestion. Not only was the friar able to continue preaching and founding convents in Sicily, but, in 1435, he was also appointed significantly provincial in Aragon, while, seven years later, bishop of Agrigento⁷⁴.

Returning to Sicily perhaps as early as during the same 1430, Matthew became interested in completing the construction work on the convents of Syracuse and Cammarata. Two years later, he obtained, instead, the Franciscan dwelling in Sciacca, which passed to the Observants without no small amount of trouble, given the opposition expressed by the captain and jurors of the city to liquidating all the assets of this convent⁷⁵. In 1432, Matthew was appointed commissary general for the Observants of Sicily. This appointment, advocated by Alfonso, allowed the Franciscan to be able to more easily found the convents of San Vito in Agrigento and St. Mary of Angels in Palermo⁷⁶.

Scarce, however, is the information on Matthew relative to the 1430s. Apart from the passage of the convents of Taormina, Piazza and Mazara to the Observant part of the Order, all that is known is that, between 1432 and 1435, the Agrigentine was commissary general for the Observants of Sicily; between 1435 and 1436, instead, provincial in Aragon; and, finally, between 1436 and 1438 vicar in Sicily⁷⁷. His intense sermocinal activity and his ability to make a positive impact within urban contexts must have restored great fame to Matthew: a notoriety that managed to cross, even, the borders of the Trastámara kingdoms and the Italian peninsula. Thus, in 1440, some Montpellier observants wrote to Cosimo de' Medici to beg Bernardine of Siena or,

⁷³ See there, p. 20.

⁷⁴ Cf. F. Rotolo, *Il beato Matthew d'Agrigento* cit., pp. 181-182. On the episcopate of Matthew, however, see F. Rotolo, *L'episcopato del b. Matthew* cit., pp. 249-294.

⁷⁵ A. Amore, *Nuovi documenti* cit., p. 21. In addition, information about the Sciacca convent can be found in F.P. Tocco, *Vita ecclesiastica e religiosa a Sciacca nel Quattrocento: linee interpretative*, in B. Saitta (a cura di), *Città e vita cittadina nei Paesi dell'area mediterranea: secoli XI-XV*. Atti del convegno in onore di Salvatore Tramontana (Adrano, Bronte, Catania, Palermo 18-22 novembre 2003), Viella, Roma 2006, pp. 617-636.

⁷⁶ On the church and convent of St. Mary of the Angels in Palermo, known as "La Gancia", cf. P. Lipani, *La Gancia. Chiesa Santa Maria degli Angeli a Palermo*, s.e., Palermo 1990, and A. Mursia, *La Gancia dei Frati Minori. Un manoscritto inedito per il convento s. Maria degli Angeli di Palermo*, «Frate Francesco», 80 (2014), pp. 125-148.

⁷⁷ Aca, Real Cancilleria, Registros 2819, c. 90r (cf. A. Amore, *Nuovi documenti* cit., p. 35).

alternatively, Matthew of Sicily to come to their city⁷⁸. Another task, however, awaited the friar from Agrigento in Sicily in about the same years. A task that, once again, he was called upon to perform on behalf of the Catalan-Aragonese crown. In 1442, in fact, upon the death of the bishop of Agrigento Lorenzo Messasal, Alfonso decided to place him in the episcopal chair of the Sicilian city⁷⁹.

6. The conclusion of a long journey

The re-reading of the documentation preserved within the Spanish and Sicilian historical archives has allowed, here, to be able to reflect further on the figure and activity of Matthew of Agrigento. On a personality who, for too long, has been considered of secondary importance by historians dealing with issues related to Franciscan observance. Only Paul Evangelisti, a few years back, was able to place in the proper perspective the contribution made by this Franciscan to the construction of the political identity of the Trastámara kingdoms⁸⁰. It was a role that we have now attempted to make more perceptible by highlighting, on the one hand, the initiatives pursued by the Franciscan within city contexts and, on the other, his ability to move with some dexterity between the crown and the papacy. At a time when the intentions of pontiffs Martin V and Eugene IV often clashed with those of the Aragonese ruler. Matthew, thus, enjoying the full confidence of the popes and the Trastámara, was able to act several times as an intermediary between the two authorities. It was Bernardino himself, in this sense, who publicly recalled the mediation task performed by the Agrigentine, who, in 1427, was able to bring King Alfonso closer to Pope Martin V⁸¹. On the other hand, the documentary sources up to this point examined reveal numerous episodes of reconciliation elicited by Matthew in various cities through his sermocinal activity. Already in Verona, the Franciscan

⁷⁸ See S. Gozzo, *Studi e ricerche cit.*, p. 266, and R. Pratesi, *L'introduzione della regolare Osservanza nella Francia meridionale*, «Archivum franciscanum historicum», 50 (1957), p. 194.

⁷⁹ In Sicily, the ruler enjoyed the privilege of Apostolic Legation, issued to Roger Hauteville by Pope Urban II, which allowed him to have a say in the appointment of island bishops. On this institution, cf. the works of S. Fodale, *Stato e Chiesa dal privilegio di Urbano II a Giovan Luca Barberi*, Società Editrice Storia di Napoli, Napoli 1980, 575-600, and Id., *L'Apostolica Legazia e altri studi su Stato e Chiesa*, Sicania, Messina 1991. See again, S. Vacca (a cura di), *La Legazia Apostolica. Chiesa, potere e società in età medievale e moderna*, Salvatore Sciascia editore, Caltanissetta-Roma 2000.

⁸⁰ Cf. P. Evangelisti, *Fede, mercato, comunità cit.*, p. 627.

⁸¹ See Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari cit.*, p. 157.

had pacified the opposing factions⁸². A few years later, he had intervened within the Sicilian city contexts. But, it was especially in Vic and Valencia that the observant friar was able to elicit mass forgiveness, as the instruments of peace well betray⁸³.

It is not known how much Matthew's future was affected by the environment in which he was born and lived his youth. It is known that, between the 1370s and 1380s, Agrigento was a city marked by strong social and economic tensions, also due to the presence of a discrete merchant class. It is a fact, however, that the Franciscan had come closer, perhaps already in Aragon, to the ideals of the Observants and then especially, once he arrived in northern Italy, to the positions of Bernardine of Siena. In this way, Matthew, acquiring that broad technical and content instrumentarium, matured in the context of the Italian minoritic dialectic, carried out a preaching pregnant with religious, political, economic and social concepts⁸⁴. A preaching that, while condemning usury, embezzlement, and profits from meretriciousness, also recommended the proper use of money and the need for concord⁸⁵. It is as if he, having lived his youth in Agrigento, in a city torn apart by the struggles of opposing factions and strongly marked by economic tensions, set out to acquire the necessary tools

⁸² B. Matthaei Agrigentini OFM., *Sermones varii* cit., p. 143.

⁸³ Aca, Real Cancilleria, Registros 3170, cc. 110v-111r. (cf. A. Amore, *La predicazione del B. Matthew* cit., pp. 302-303), and, then, Id., *Nuovi documenti* cit., pp. 15-16.

⁸⁴ On the subject see the fundamental works of G. Todeschini, *Un trattato di economia politica francescana: il "De emptioibus et venditionibus, de usuris, de restitutionibus" di Pietro di Giovanni Olivi*, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, Roma 1980; Id., *Usus raptus. Denaro e merci in Giovanni da Capistrano*, in M.C. De Matteis (a cura di), *A Ovidio Capitani. Scritti degli allievi bolognesi*, Bologna 1990, pp. 158-188; Id., *I vocabolari dell'analisi economica fra Alto e Basso Medioevo: dai lessici della disciplina monastica ai lessici antiusurari*, «Rivista storica italiana», 110 (1998), pp. 781-833; Id., *Ordini mendicanti e linguaggio etico-politico*, in *Etica e politica. Le teorie dei frati mendicanti nel due e trecento*. Atti del XXVI Convegno Internazionale (Assisi, 15-17 ottobre 1998), Fondazione CISAM, Spoleto 1999, pp. 3-27; Id., *Il prezzo della salvezza. Lessici medievali del pensiero economico*, Nuova Italia Scientifica, Roma 1994. In this sense, the contributions of Giovanni Ceccarelli are able to offer ideas for further reflection on these issues: Id., *Usura e casistica creditizia nella Summa Astesana: un esempio di sintesi delle concezioni etico-economiche francescane*, in M. Molina, G. Scarzia (a cura di), *Ideologia del credito fra Tre e Quattrocento: dall'Astesano ad Angelo da Chivasso*. Atti del convegno internazionale (Archivio Storico, Palazzo Mazzola, Asti, 9-10 giugno 2000), Centro Studi sui Lombardi e sul credito nel Medioevo, Asti 2001, pp. 15-58; Id., *L'usura nella trattatistica teologica sulle restituzioni dei male ablata (XIII-XIV secolo)*, in D. Quagliani, G. Todeschini, G.M. Varanini (a cura di), *Credito e usura fra teologia, diritto e amministrazione. Linguaggi a confronto (sec. XII-XVI)*, École française de Rome, Roma 2005, pp. 3-23.

⁸⁵ Cf. P. Evangelisti, *Fede, mercato, comunità* cit., p. 632.

to deal with the ills that plagued Sicilian urban societies⁸⁶. In 1442, Matthew finally had the opportunity to return to Agrigento, thanks to the wishes of Alfonso, who placed him on the city's bishopric. The friar, however, immediately had to clash with the ecclesiastical hierarchies and the Agrigento ruling classes because of the church reform he wished to bring about. Indeed, his presence created an even more tense situation, which forced him, in 1445, to put his mandate back into the hands of Pope Eugeny IV⁸⁷. Thus ended the Franciscan's long parable, which had probably begun in Agrigento some sixty years earlier. Matthew died in 1450 in the convent of St. Mary of Angels in Palermo⁸⁸.

⁸⁶ Regarding the relationship between the observance movement and city life, decidedly interested news can be found in the study of J.C.M. Vigueur, *Bernardino et la vie citadine*, in *Bernardino nella società del suo tempo*, Accademia Tudertina, Todi 1976, pp. 251-282.

⁸⁷ Cf. M. Sensi, *Il beato Matthew da Agrigento* cit., p. 340.

⁸⁸ See P. Evangelisti, *Matthew di Agrigento*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 72, Istituto per l'Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma 2008, pp. 208-212.