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JESUIT HISTORIOGRAPHY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Many scholars assert that ecclesiastical historiography from the early modern age, formally humanistic but apparently medieval in content, is well demonstrated by Jesuit historical works. However, all of their works, including their historical texts, were, in fact, carried out *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* – to bring major glory to God exclusively.

I assume that Jesuits and humanists shared much more than just attention to rhetorical aspects. From Antiquity, they received much more than just formal models. A deeper analysis of historical products could demonstrate the persistence of a humanistic method and, consequently, of classical concepts.

The intention of my study is to investigate Jesuit historiography from the point of view of its actual production, trying to distinguish a connection between the humanistic method and the persistence of the concepts of classical antiquity. I will show that Jesuit historiographical works were closer to modern critical investigation than many of the worldly ones. The fact that they adopted the modern methods of critique only to be more influential on the cultured upper classes does not change the evaluation of their works. Consequently, my paper will focus mainly on Jesuit writings more than on their theoretical premises.

The novelty of this research resides, therefore, in the methodological approach. On one hand, the theoretical works, referring to the function and aims of history and historiography, could represent a more direct and clear source for scholars who aim to understand Jesuit historical thought. On the other hand, these sources can easily lead to a misinterpretation: that most Jesuit historical work did not respect the “Jesuits’ historical canon” and represented a real humanistic masterpiece.

The selection of texts presented in this article is a direct consequence of the methodological approach adopted. Not a single theoretical work was taken into account. On the contrary, I focused on the partisan, exploitable but con-

crete historical products. The texts mentioned in this article simply represent the most glaring examples of certain recurring aspects of the way Jesuits made history.

Until the second half of the 15th century, the ecclesiastical orders had a negative relationship with humanism. As a consequence, they neither fostered nor cultivated humanistic historiography. The Jesuits, on the contrary, were willing to fight using the same “weapons” of modern culture. They subdued humanistic historiography to their aims. It is true that protestant theological historians used to accept some exterior traits of humanism. However, the Jesuits were not limited to this. They believed that their works had to be expunged of all medieval stagnation. Their historical expositions had to be at the same level, at least formally, as the most famous works of Italian humanists. They wanted to attract not only the semi-educated middle classes, but also the refined readers of the upper classes. Numerous Jesuit historical works were *“better than the productions of Bembo and Giovio in the matter of the purity of language, the elegance of diction and harmony of speech: mainly because they cultivated the empty archaistic rhetoric less readily than humanists.”*¹

The Jesuits even adapted, to a certain extent, their historical method to that of humanists. They had recourse to criticism (I refer to the selection of sources according to chronological criteria and to a linguistic study of the material along with the use of logic). The famous Jesuit writer, Antonio Possevino, criticized David Chytraeus for having believed the “false Berossus”.² Chytraeus had recommended Berossus as providing a good account of the history of the first world monarchy. Possevino, pointed out with good reason, that by referring to such a falsification, the authority of the Bible was not strengthened, but made even weaker.

The connection with humanism is even easier to characterize through the formal aspects of historical works. Loyola’s biography, for instance, was soon well known all around the world, but not in its original version. This was considered to have large literary imperfections, too significant to allow it to be printed. The first edition of Loyola’s biography was written by Pedro Ribadeneira.³ He reported the original text quite literally but embellished and stylistically revised some passages. Ribadeneira, in terms of the form of his biography, chose to use the humanist model because he did not want his work to look like medieval hagiography. His Latin was *“classically pure,*

naturally elegant and harmonious as in the work of humanists."⁴ He arranged the contents according to the model of Suetonius, as humanists used to do.⁵ Finally, concerning the modernity of Ribadeneira's work, it is necessary to point out that he kept Loyola's biography free from the ingenuous miracles of medieval hagiography. His biography was a fully humanistic masterpiece. It was so humanistic that soon the new baroque generation was not able to understand it anymore, consequently forcing Ribadeneira to rewrite it adding the necessary reference to miracles.⁶

Jesuits were the first ecclesiastical order to adopt the structure of humanistic chronicling for non-secular purposes, writing the history of the Society of Jesus. It was a revolutionary decision because, by doing it, the history of the Society was placed at the same level as territorial history, for which the humanistic model was used exclusively. Niccolò Orlandini⁷ was a humanist in every aspect. In 1599 he was invited to Rome and was elected the Society's historiographer. In this role he wrote the *Historia Societatis Jesu*, which has been printed for the first time in Rome in 1615.⁸ Adopting the structure of humanistic chronicling, Orlandini did not fall into the ingenuous credulity of the Middle Ages. He adapted his history to the cultured, sceptical, contemporary public. In his history of the Society, miracles play a marginal role. They are not yet stylized in the baroque manner.

The work that obtained major success in the field of political historiography was Famiano Strada's *Decades*.⁹ Strada, on behalf of the Duke Alessandro of Parma, wrote a history of the secession of The Netherlands from 1555 to 1590 entitled *De Bello Belgico Decades II*.¹⁰ This work could be taken as model representing the more general aspects of Jesuit historiography. In this history, Strada attempted to hide the characteristics of confessional writing. Even in the polemical passages, he seems to let only his sources speak. The edifying aspect of his work is not prominent, as is common in the works of Jesuits. It sometimes left room for a more sceptical attitude and a deep knowledge of human nature. Moreover, his narrative perspective is not one-sided but, political, military and social aspects received attention alongside the confessional point of view. To understand Strada's linguistic skills, commentary by Fueter again is useful: in his opinion, the Latin of Strada was vivacious and avoided the monotony of imitators of Livy. Some aspects of his manner fitted the taste of the new baroque generation. He refers principally

to Strada's detailed portraits, an insurmountable obstacle for most classicists, which made the narration intuitive and satisfied the reader's needs.¹¹

An even more surprising writer for his attitude toward history was the French court historiographer and member of the Society of Jesus, Gabriel Daniel. He was, without any doubt, a representative of the school of Flavio Biondo as well as the first to systematically apply the critical erudite method to the history of France.¹² Daniel eliminated the last traces of the annalistic style and the "rhetoric proper" of this literary genre (such as frequent use of dialogue and direct speech); he cited all his sources accurately; he referred to a wide variety of sources such as documents, books and minutes of councils. His history follows a short introduction in which Daniel explains his methodology and critique of the historiography of the humanists. In this preface, it is easy to identify some of the germs of critical principles adopted by Voltaire himself.¹³ With Daniel, for the first time, a history of France began with Clovis, consequentially referring skeptically to Gregory of Tours and Fredegar.¹⁴ Daniels actually cites the legendary story of Childeric (taken from Gregory of Tours), but warns that it is only "*derived from a romance*".¹⁵

Among the Jesuits that had to deal with ecclesiastical history, the Frenchman, Louis Maimbourg, also deserves some attention. In 1680, Maimbourg wrote, a history of Lutheranism published in Paris as *Histoire du Luthéranisme*.¹⁶ The first edition was in two duodecimo volumes. The smart format was itself a sign of the author's desire to seize the attention of courtly society. In the hands of Maimbourg, ecclesiastical history acquired not only a worldly tone, but also a bawdy character. Moreover, he was able to produce a succinct style that made the narration "light" and direct, quite easy for readers who were searching for an entertaining, rather than a polemic read. The polemical aspects, in fact, occupy a secondary, or even marginal, position. Not surprisingly, this work enjoyed great success and reprinted in several editions.

A group of Jesuits distinguished for its groundbreaking historiographical thought was the Bollandists.¹⁷ Their works deserve to be treated as an independent branch of Jesuit historiography mainly because of their ability to further develop the achievements of the school of erudite historiography. The Bollandists did not limit themselves to the critical collection of sources but attempted to logically connect and understand them as a unified whole.

Fueter states *"The honour of being the first to undertake the criticism of sources can be attributed to the Jesuits"*, when introducing the historiography of the Bollandists.¹⁸ They, when compiling the most exhaustive selection of histories of saints,, even if pursuing an apologetic purpose, adopted a methodic critical of sources (mainly a chronological one). The *Acta Sanctorum*¹⁹ attempted to save the cult of the saints from the attack of Protestants and humanists. To achieve this, Bollandists sacrificed most of the legends that could cause derision in the opponent. They understood historical critique (both internal and external with reference to chronological criteria). The absurd histories of saints that gave humanists a motive for mockery were traced back to a second phase of embellishment of the original legend. These histories were declared as not trustworthy, and were substituted, according to a chronological analysis, with the oldest and more modest reports. Consequently, in the introduction to the saints' lives, it is possible to distinguish the first example of methodical critique of sources. Moreover, the Bollandists made the first-ever attempt to systematically arrange the sources according to their age and credibility.²⁰

Most would agree with Eugenio Garin, that the education of each member of the Society of Jesus could be attributed to the *Exercitia Spiritualia* that Loyola taught to his disciples.²¹ In my opinion, their education cannot be reduced religious education alone, in any case. It is clear that simple ecclesiastical education could not have instructed writers and historiographers how to reproduce the manner of the humanists with such accuracy. In order to fight in the non-ecclesiastic world with the same weapons as the humanists, the Jesuits had to be educated in the culture of renaissance classicism.

According to Garin, Jesuits saw humanistic education as a precious instrument, not for its ideals but simply for his formal and rhetorical aspect.²² Jesuits perceived Latin as a linguistic instrument and used the classics to obtain useful repertoires of manners and persuasive expressions. Their education did not aim to create good men but good soldiers of the Church instead. *"So the eloquence and all the sciences...are finally brought to the citadel of God as maidservants, they are shields erected against the enemy of the church."*²³

Garin was right in saying that the apparently humanistic education of the Jesuits was, in fact, only an instrument to serve the church, and that that Jesuits wanted to know the humanistic culture only to improve their ability to fight it. Garin also affirmed that there was *"nothing of the Erasmian*

humanism left in the humanistic school of the Jesuits but the external form: the classical rhetoric."²⁴ However, a deeper analysis of Jesuit education would, in some way, readjust this judgment. This task is particularly easy to achieve when studying the Jesuits compared to other groups as their educational system was standardized and codified in 1586 (and ratified in 1599) in the *Ratio Atque Institutio Studiorum*.²⁵

The syllabus consisted of three basic courses: grammar, philosophy and theology. I will briefly survey the material Jesuits referred to in their grammar course (including rhetoric), because this is particularly illustrative of the relationship to classicism referred to above. The grammar studies were divided into two sections: *Metodica* and *Historica*. The former referred to Virgil (which had to be rote-learned) for prosody and to Cicero for the elegance of style; for Greek they usually referred to the humanist manual, the *Erotemata* of Crisolora. Historical studies focused on the mythological tales of Virgil, the *Tebaide* of Statius, and the *Metamorphosis* of Ovid. Less popular but still used in the programmes were Seneca (tragedy only) and Terence, as a master of elegance. Rhetorical studies were dedicated to interpretation. The authors analysed were Hesiod, Virgil, Homer, Quintilian and Statius.

This is a short but significant list. It reads like the course programme of a humanistic school. The *Ratio* is also extremely precise about the amount of time to be dedicated to each part of the lesson. Therefore, it can be surmised that at least three hours in the morning and one hour in the afternoon were dedicated to such studies.

Even if it is true that these studies aimed to teach about the humanistic culture to provide a contrast, it seems impossible that the ideology, philosophical concepts or general understandings of humanism did not influence students reading these classical texts for at least four hours a day, for over five years. In other words, studying the classics in order to learn their style implied being acquainted with their ideology. It would have been impossible for Jesuits to produce writings that, not only rhetorically but also in terms of their content and methodological planning, fully satisfied the taste of humanists and attracted the cultured reader of the upper classes, without the writer being a bit of a humanist themselves.

If the historical production analyzed above could still leave some doubt about the validity of this statement, in one case there is no doubt about the persistence and proliferation of classical and humanist ideology in the

writings of the Jesuits: their repeated and widespread apology for tyrannicide. This classical doctrine survived through centuries, in secular thought, until its peak during the French revolution.

This doctrine, first presented by John Mariana, a member of the Society of Jesus, soon achieved widespread success among the theologians of the order.²⁶ His treatise *De Rege et Regis Institutione* is quite interesting. In the sixth chapter the question, whether it is lawful to overthrow a tyrant, is freely discussed and answered in the affirmative, a circumstance which brought much contempt upon the Jesuits. One volume, entitled *Tractatus VII. Theologici et Historici*, was put upon the *Index Expurgatorius*, and led to the confinement of its author by the Inquisition. The Jesuit Order has been blamed for the teaching of Mariana. Even if Mariana stated that his teaching of tyrannicide was his personal opinion, it is meaningful to know that the Jesuit General Aquaviva not only ordered to "correct" the book, but, on July 6 1610, forbade any member of the order to teach publicly or privately that it is lawful to make an attempt on the life of a tyrant. It is a clear, even if involuntary, confirmation of the diffusion of this doctrine among Jesuits. The Spanish scholar seems to refer to the classical doctrine of tyrannicide as expounded in Cicero (when he states that every man that kills a tyrant is not soiled with homicide, but has performed a glorious act). In Mariana's work, the models of Hipparchus, Brutus and Longinus are elevated to icons of freedom. This is a sign of continuity between classical antiquity, humanism and the revolutionary thought of the 18th century. The French revolutionaries used Mariana's thesis to justify their acts in front of the believers as well as the classical doctrine of Cicero and the model of Brutus in front of the republicans.

In conclusion, it has been illustrated how Jesuits imitated humanistic historiography and subdued it to their own aims.

Jesuits, in order to have more influence on the educated upper classes, paid attention to rhetorical and stylistic elements in their works: the first edition of Loyola's biography was that of Pedro Ribadeneira and not the original one of Loyola's. This decision was due to stylistic and literary reasons.

To attract the most erudite scholars, no longer sensitive to the edifying legends, Jesuits kept their works free from the ingenuous miracles of the medieval hagiography. For instance, in Famiano Strada's work the tendency of edification is not prominent. At times, it lends itself to a skeptical attitude and to a deep knowledge of human nature.

Jesuits adopted a rudimentary but innovative form of criticism. The Bollandists did not limit themselves to collecting sources critically but attempted to logically connect and understand them as a unified whole. It is significant that Fueter states, “the honor of being the first to undertake the criticism of sources can be attributed to the Jesuits”, when introducing the historiography of the Bollandists.

Jesuit education aimed to provide them with the rhetorical skills needed to be more influential on the upper classes. This kind of education, based on the model of classical antiquity, also influenced their general understanding and cultural background. The doctrine of tyrannicide, widespread among the Jesuits, is one of the most typical classical concepts that survived from the antiquity to the French revolution. Only scholars permeated with the spirit of classical renaissance could have accepted and promoted such a doctrine.

References

- ¹ Fueter Eduard. *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie*, Munich, 1936, p. 361.
- ² Possevino Antonio. *Bibliotheca selecta de ratione studiorum in Historia, In disciplinis, in salute omnium procuranda*, Venice, 1593. See also Possevino, Antonio. *Aduersus Daudis Chytraei haeretici imposturas, quas in oratione quadam inseruit, quam de statu ecclesiarum, hoc tempore in Graecia, Asia ... inscriptam edidit, & per Sueciam, ac Daniam disseminari curauit*, Ingolstadt, 1583.
- ³ He was born in 1526 in Toledo, since when a child met Loyola and became his favourite disciple. Since 1540 member of the Society of Jesus, died in 1611 in Madrid.
- ⁴ Fueter Eduard. *Op. Cit.*, p. 364.
- ⁵ Suetonius has been for the humanistic biography what Livy was for the chronicling. He was a clever erudite, a diligent antiquary but he has never been an historian. He did not even take in consideration historical problems. He simply created a rigid scheme to organize his material. The historical analysis was superior of his forces. Humanists, in fact, borrowed from him only the scheme to organize the contents.
- ⁶ Completed in 1609 but published posthumous in 1612 in Madrid.
- ⁷ Orlandini was born in Florence in 1572, entered in the Society in Rome and died in Naples in 1606.
- ⁸ See Ranke, Leopold. *Analekten zur Geschichte der romischen papste, in Ueber einige Geschichtschreiber des Jesuiterordens*, 83, 1950.
- ⁹ Famiano Strada born in Rome in 1572; in 1591 entered in the Society as professor of eloquence in the Roman College; died in 1649.
- ¹⁰ Strada Famiano. *De bello Belgico decas prima ab excessu Caroli 5. imp. usque ad initio*

praefecturae Alexandri Farnesii Parmae ac Placentiae ducis 3. Additis hominum illustrium ad historiam praecipuae spectantium imaginibus ad vivum expressis, Rome, 1643.

¹¹ Fueter Eduard. Op. Cit., p. 369.

¹² Fueter Eduard. Op. Cit., p. 186.

¹³ Voltaire demonstrated to know very well this author even if referred to him only in a negative way.

¹⁴ In the previous histories of France, these two mythological ancestors were, without any doubt, included in the national history.

¹⁵ Preface, Art 2. See Fueter Eduard. Op. Cit., p. 187.

¹⁶ Maimbourg Louis. *Histoire du Lutheranisme. Par le P. Louis Maimbourg, de la compagnie de Jesus*, Paris, 1680.

¹⁷ Bollandists are a group of Belgian Jesuits, named for their early leader, Jean Bolland, a Flemish Jesuit of the 17th century. They were charged by the Holy See with compiling an authoritative edition of the lives of the saints, the monumental *Acta sanctorum*, which is still in progress.

¹⁸ Fueter Eduard. Op. Cit., p. 417.

¹⁹ Began in 1643 in Antwerp by the Jesuit Jean Bolland, interrupted in 1794 and took up again in Bruxelles in 1837.

²⁰ See also Abbé Pitra. *Etudes sur la collection des Actes des Saints*, Paris, 1850.

²¹ Garin Eugenio. *L'Educazione in Europa. 1400 – 1600*, Bari, 1976, p. 202.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ivi p. 204. See also, Possevino, Antonio. *Cultura degl'ingegni*, Vicenza, 1598.

²⁴ Garin Eugenio. Op. cit., p. 206

²⁵ *Ratio atque institutio studiorum per sex patres ad id iussu R.P. praepositi generalis deputatos conscripta*, Rome, 1586 – 1606.

²⁶ Juan de Mariana, (1536, Talavera – 1624, Madrid), was a Spanish historian. He studied at the University of Alcalá, and was admitted at the age of seventeen into the Society of Jesus. In 1561 he went to teach theology in Rome, reckoning among his pupils Robert Bellarmine, afterwards cardinal; then passed into Sicily; and in 1569 he was sent to Paris, where his expositions of the writings of Thomas Aquinas attracted large audiences. In 1574, owing to ill health, he obtained permission to return to Spain; the rest of his life being passed at the Jesuits' house in Toledo in vigorous literary activity.

Moreno Bonda Jezuītu historiogrāfija modernās Eiropas pirmsākumos

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā ilustrēts, kā jezuīti imitēja humānistisko historiogrāfiju un izmantoja to saviem mērķiem. Lai atstātu lielāku iespaidu uz izglītooto sabiedrības virsslāni, jezuīti pievērsa uzmanību retorikai un stilistiskajiem elementiem savos darbos: pirmā Lojolas biogrāfijas izdevuma autors bija nevis pats Lojola, bet gan Pedro Ribadeneira. Lēmums par to tika pieņemts, balstoties uz stilistiskiem un literāriem apsvērumiem.

Lai piesaistītu erudītākos zinātniekus, jezuīti, pretstatā pamācošajām legendām, savos darbos neiekļāva saistošos brīnumus no viduslaiku svēto dzīves aprakstiem. Piemēram, Famiano Stradas darbos nav samanāmas didaktiskuma tendences. Šāda pieeja dažkārt atstāja vietu skeptiskākai attieksmei un dziļākai izpratnei par cilvēka dabu.

Jezuīti pieņēma elementāru, bet tajā pašā laikā inovatīvu kritikas formu. Bolandisti neaprobežojās ar avotu kritisku apkopošanu, viņi centās tos loģiski savienot un uztvert kā vienotu veselumu. Nozīmīgs ir Foitera atzinums Bolandistu historiogrāfijas ievadā, ka *“pirmais ievērojamais avotu kritikas iedibinājuma mēģinājums pieder jezuītiem”*.

Jezuītu izglītība tiecās nodrošināt viņus ar retorikas iemaņām, lai vairāk ietekmētu sabiedrības virsslāni. Šāda izglītība, kuras pamatā bija klasiskais antīkās izglītības modelis, iespaidoja viņu pasaules izpratni un kultūrvidi. Jezuītu vidū plaši izplatītā tirānijas doktrīna ir viens no tiem klasiskajiem priekšstatiem, kādi pastāvēja no antīkās pasaules laikiem līdz pat Franču buržuāziskajai revolūcijai. Tikai klasisko renesanses ideju pārņemti zinātnieki spētu pieņemt un popularizēt šādu doktrīnu.