CHAPTER 9

The Distinctiveness of the Society of Jesus’s Mission in Pedro de Ribadeneyra’s *Historia ecclesiastica del scisma del reyno de Inglaterra* (1588)

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“Two more private and particular considerations encouraged me in the work. The first, that I am a Spaniard; the second, that I am a priest of the Society of Jesus.”1 Such was the explanation offered by the priest and scholar Pedro de Ribadeneyra (1526–1611) for the production of the *Historia ecclesiastica del scisma del reyno de Inglaterra* (henceforth, the “Historia”), his polemical account of the English Reformation. Troublingly, virtually all scholarship on the Historia has concentrated on the former factor, to the detriment of our appreciation of the latter. This chapter, and my larger project of an annotated translation of the Historia, is an attempt to rectify this imbalance.

First published in Madrid in 1588, the Historia was an immediate success, seeing another Madrid edition and printings at Valencia, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Lisbon, and Antwerp within the same year.2 Ribadeneyra’s work grew out of a prior Latin text, Nicholas Sander’s (c.1530–81) *De origine ac progressu schismatis*

The author wishes to express his gratitude to the staff of the Woodstock Theological Library at Georgetown University for their kind assistance; to Thomas M. McCoog, S.J., for his thoughtful comments; to all of the conference participants—especially Emanuele Colombo, Claude Pavur, S.J., Andrew Redden, and Rady Roldán-Figueroa—for their insights; and to Robert Aleksander Maryks for his guidance and mentorship. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are the author’s. The original spelling and orthography of texts have been preserved, save where altered by a secondary source.

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1 Pedro de Ribadeneyra, *Historia ecclesiastica del scisma del reyno de Inglaterra* (Madrid: Pedro Madrigal, 1588), 8v: “dos cosas mas particulares y propias me han incitado tambien a ello. La primera, ser yo Español: y la segunda, ser religioso de la Compañia de Iesus.”


In 1593–94, Ribadeneyra published a second part to the history, resuming the narrative from the defeat of the Spanish Armada. This chapter will confine itself to the first edition, and to Ribadeneyra’s sense of the Society and history before the catastrophe of the Armada.
Anglicani (henceforth, “De origine”), published in Cologne in 1585, four years after the author’s death. Characterizations of the relationship between the two texts have varied: in 1935, the Australian church historian Thomas McNevin Veech (1907–82) classed the Historia among the translations of De origine, while more recently Fátima Cid Morgade, working in a more literary vein, has highlighted the substantial changes made by Ribadeneyra, shifting the emphasis from England to Spain. The historian Freddy Cristóbal Domínguez has further nuanced this account by clarifying that Ribadeneyra worked from the 1586 edition of De origine, and thus many of the alterations highlighted by Cid Morgade originated with the subsequent editors to Sander’s text, Edward Rishton (1550–85), Robert Persons (1546–1610), and William, later cardinal, Allen (1532–94). Both the recognition of Ribadeneyra’s actively creative role and a more realistic picture of the textual history are, of course, developments much to be welcomed. Yet, the analyses of Cid Morgade and Domínguez leave something to be desired, for they neglect the importance of the quidditas jesuitica—the uniquely Jesuit “way of proceeding”—that is our subject.

I believe this to be the consequence of examining—as most scholars have—the Historia solely in the context of anti-Elizabethan polemic, without reference to the rest of Ribadeneyra’s oeuvre. Domínguez, for one, is explicit in his focus on what he calls “Spanish Elizabethans,” more specifically on “spaniolized” Englishmen. Both Domínguez and the literary scholar Victor Houliston (1954–) draw direct textual genealogies from Sander to Rishton, Persons, and Allen to Ribadeneyra, without much discussion of the fact that, unlike the other three, Ribadeneyra was neither English nor an exile, and had interests beyond the state of Christianity in England.

Scholars of Ribadeneyra’s other works, by contrast—among them the historians Jodi Bilinkoff (1955–) and Jonathan Edward Greenwood and the Latinist Claude Pavur (1952–), S.J.—have stressed the utter centrality of the Society to

4 Veech, Nicholas Sanders, 237.
6 See Freddy Cristóbal Domínguez, “‘We Must Fight with Paper and Pens’: Spanish Elizabethan Polemics 1585–1598” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2011), Chapters 2 and 3.