

THE *THRENODIA HIBERNO-CATHOLICA* (1659) AND THE IRISH FRANCISCAN COMMUNITY IN THE TYROL



By Nienke Tjoelker

This article focuses on Maurice Conry's Threnodia Hiberno-Catholica (1659) and the Irish Franciscan community in the Tyrol. Conry's work is an example of many Latin works written by Irish exiled clergy on the Continent in the mid-seventeenth century. In this contribution, after outlining the authorial issues, a summary of the contents of the Threnodia is given and then placed in the context of the expatriate clerical Irish of the 1650s. The piece concludes with a section on contemporary reactions to itinerant Irish friars, mainly from within mendicant circles.

The *Threnodia Hiberno-Catholica, sive Planctus Universalis Totius Cleri et Populi Regni Hiberniae* was published under the pseudonym of *F. M. Morisonus, ordinis observantiae, S. Theologiae Lector, Praefatae Crudelitatis testis ocularis* in Innsbruck, 1659. Although often mentioned by historians as an important source for our knowledge of the atrocities of Cromwell against the Irish in the 1650s, little research has been done into this work since Brendan Jennings published his edition of the work in 1947 with a short introduction.¹

In this article, I will address the question of why this book was published in Innsbruck, and not in any of the more famous Irish centres on the continent, such as Prague, Paris, or Louvain. The historical context of the Irish Franciscan community in the Tyrol (modern day Tirol in Austria, and Südtirol and Trentino in Italy) seems to me a gap in the existing research on Irish exile communities on the continent.

In the first part of my article I will clarify the name used by the author, *M. Morisonus*, and provide some biographical details. Secondly, I will

¹ Jennings 1947.

briefly introduce the contents of the work, focusing on how the Irish are presented as exemplary Catholics. Finally, I will place the work in its historical context, by considering the role the Irish Franciscans played in Innsbruck and the Tyrol during this period, arguing that it was greater than usually thought. I also analyse it in the broader context of Irish exiles elsewhere in Europe.

I. The author Mauritius Morisonus

The Latin name *M. Morisonus*, in the approbations written out in full as *Mauritius Morisonus*, caused some confusion about who wrote the work. Some modern scholars simply name the author Maurice Morison, even though there is no Irish Franciscan from this time period known to us.² Other scholars assume that the name was a pseudonym for Bonaventure O'Connor, O.F.M.,³ basing themselves mainly on an eighteenth-century source, the Franciscan *Chronicon Reformatae Provinciae Sancti Leopoldi Tyrolensis* (1777). The author of this work, Vigilius Greiderer, states about the *Threnodia*:⁴

Ex Biblioth. Conv. Suaz. traho, quod *Morisonus*, qua Lector Theol. Bulsani Libellum in lingua latina elaboraverit sub titulo: *Threnodia Hiberno-Catholica, sive Planctus universalis totius Cleri et populi Regni Hiberniae*, Oeniponti in 8. an. 1659. impressum. In Monum. nostrae Prov. mihi pro hoc tempore non occurrit alius Lector extraneus, ac Bonaventura Conorus, l. I p.220 expressus: unde hic erit Author istius opusculi, sub hoc nomine vulgati.

From the library of the convent of Schwaz I learn that Morison, at the time lector of Theology at Bolzano, wrote a booklet in Latin: *Hiberno-Catholic Threnody, or universal Lamentation of the whole clergy and people of the Kingdom of Ireland*, published in Innsbruck in octavo format in 1659. In the records of our province I do not find any foreign lector other than Bonaventure O'Connor, indicated in book I, page 220. Therefore he must be the author of that little work, published under this name.

Since the author knew of only one Irish lector of theology in the province at the time, namely Bonaventure O'Connor, he concluded this had to be the author of the book. This, however, seems unlikely, since Bonaventure O'Connor was also the author of one of the approbations of the work.

² For example, O'Neil 1985, 39; Barnard 2000, 318.

³ On Bonaventure O'Connor Kerry, cf. Giblin 1984 and also Millett 1964, 482–484.

⁴ Greiderer 1781, 671.

There are more reasons to believe that the true author of the work was Father Maurice Conry, as Brendan Jennings concluded in 1947,⁵ and as Benignus Millett also argued in his book on the Irish Franciscans.⁶ Maurice Conry, or Muiris O Maólchonaire, was born at Ardkellyn in country Roscommon around 1620. His father's name was also Maurice Conry. This is a clue to the name, as *Morisonus* is the Latin patronymic of Maurice (or Muiris in Irish). Mauritius Morisonus could therefore easily be translated and completed as Maurice, son of Maurice, Conry. In March 1639, Conry was admitted to studies at St Isidore's college in Rome and he is, therefore, probably the Mauritius Connus who we know was ordained subdeacon in Rome on 3 March 1640.⁷ In the late 1640s, he was in Louvain, writing a now lost Irish-Latin dictionary.⁸ After that, we know that he lectured on theology at the Irish Franciscan college in Prague (the College of Immaculate Conception, founded in 1629) from 1650 to 1652, and then that he was active as a missionary in England, and spent some of this time back in Ireland. In August 1655 he was arrested in England and put in jail for 30 months.⁹ A letter of recommendation from London, dated 12 February 1658, which Conry procured from the vicegerent of the English Franciscans, Father Giles of St Ambrose, states that he had recently been released after spending thirty months in prison.¹⁰ In the *Threnodia* Conry himself also writes briefly about these thirty months of imprisonment.¹¹ Part of his imprisonment had been spent in Bristol and there he met James Nayler, the well-known Quaker.¹² After two and a half years in prison he was released early in 1658 and banished from the kingdom.¹³

When he was released from captivity, he immediately travelled to Rome, in fulfilment of a vow he made while in prison.¹⁴ By June, he was in Rome and was deputed by the Inquisition to examine two Quakers who had come to Rome to convert the Pope!¹⁵ While in Rome, Conry asked the Pope to be

⁵ Jennings 1947, 67.

⁶ Millett 1964, 243, n. 4; 493.

⁷ Jennings 1947, 67. The report of Conry's examination in the State Papers in the 1650s is very different: according to this, Conry studied about 2 years in the university in Paris, but took no degrees. From there he is said to have gone to seek out his fortune in Germany, where he served as a soldier in the emperor's army for four or five years. Presumably Conry was lying to the English authorities during this examination. Birch 1742, 263–264.

⁸ Ua Súilleabháin 2004, 392–405. Cf. also Millett 1964, 493.

⁹ Millett 1964, 277.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Conry 1659, 62–63.

¹² Conry 1659, 38.

¹³ Millett 1964, 277.

¹⁴ Millett 1964, 278, referring to APF, *Fondo di Vienna* 14, f. 300r (*non vidi*).

¹⁵ Conry 1659, 37; Bruodin 1669, 626.

sent back to the Irish mission, but, because of Conry's "appearance and general manner of behaviour", this request was turned down.¹⁶ Apparently this decision was made because of a secret report, based on comments from fellow-Irish Franciscans from Louvain and Prague, who had painted a very negative picture of his turbulent character.¹⁷ For example, it is said that he had disagreements with his confrères in Louvain, and it recounts an unfortunate series of events, which was said to have taken place in Ireland, where Conry was criticised for bearing arms as a Franciscan friar, and subsequently, possibly accidentally, shot a man dead.¹⁸ After the refusal, Conry was sent back to Prague, and on the way there he seems to have published his work in Innsbruck.

2. The Irish in the *Threnodia Hiberno-Catholica*

The *Threnodia Hiberno-Catholica* is a short work of only 72 pages. After a dedication to the Archbishop of Salzburg, Guidobaldus, and four approbations by fellow Franciscans, the author addresses the kind reader and tells them his book will be on the cruelty and tyranny of the Anglo-Atheists against the Catholics of Ireland ("De crudelitate ac tyrannide Anglo-Atheistarum contra Catholicos Hiberniae").¹⁹ The Irish are exemplary Catholics, whereas their English enemies are generally described as atheists. Nevertheless, Conry specifies that he does not see the complete English nation as such, since there are many good English Catholics. He speaks only "de amurca et faece hujus nationis" (about the dregs and scum of this nation): those who support the tyranny of Oliver Cromwell.²⁰

The actual book is divided into six chapters. The first, entitled "De oppressione et persecutione Magnatum ac nobilium regni Hiberniae in rebus temporalibus" (On the oppression and persecution of magnates and noblemen of the kingdom of Ireland in worldly matters), discusses some of the atrocities against the Irish nobility by the English, who are here described as heretics, starting from 1651. Conry emphasises that it is not just men who are targeted by this oppression, but also women and children. The second chapter, "De oppressione mercatorum, civium et vulgi catholici regni Hiberniae in rebus temporalibus" (On the oppression of merchants, citizens

¹⁶ Millett 1964, 329.

¹⁷ Millett 1964, 278 and 329–330, basing himself on the document 'Relatione della persona del P. fra Mauritio Conri raccolta da persone ben informate di sua vita', in APF, *Fondo di Vienna* 14, f. 309r (*non vidi*).

¹⁸ Millett 1964, 330.

¹⁹ Conry 1659, 11.

²⁰ Conry 1659, 12.

and of the common Catholic of the Kingdom of Ireland in worldly matters), discusses a number of laws discriminating against the Irish. The third chapter, “De oppressione Catholicorum Hiberniae in rebus spiritualibus seu de inauditis mediis et modis, quibus nituntur haeretici Angliae Catholicorum fidem extinguere” (On the oppression of the Catholics of Ireland in spiritual matters, or on the unheard-of instruments and ways, by which the heretics of England try to extinguish the faith of the Catholics), explains in what cruel ways the English try to impose their *Satanica doctrina*²¹ (Satanic doctrine) upon the good Catholics of Ireland. Chapter 4, “De extremis Anglo-haereticorum conatibus suas haereses propagandas” (On the extreme attempts of the Anglo-heretics to propagate their heresies) discusses the various ‘sects’ of Protestantism in England. In this chapter Conry emphasises his role as witness of the fact that the English not only practice these sects in England, but also intend to convert the whole world, including the Pope, to whom they sent their apostles in 1658. As stated above, Conry himself was present in June 1658 at the *examinatio* of two Quakers, who had come to Rome to convert the Pope. Further, he discusses the cruelties against Catholics in England which he himself saw during his stay in Bristol. The fifth chapter is entitled “De antiquitate, constantia et immobilitate Hibernorum in fide Catholica” (On the antiquity, constancy and immovableness of the Irish in the Catholic faith). It is a description of the important role the Irish (*sancti Hiberni*) played in spreading the faith all over Europe (England, Scotland, France, Belgium and Germany) from ancient times. Finally, chapter six gives a *Synopsis quorundam magnatum ac Nobilium ab Haereticis suspendio nocatorum* (Synopsis of some magnates and noblemen killed by hanging by the heretics): a list of high-placed victims of the English suppression.

The Catholic identity of the Irish and the oppression of the Irish by the English are, thus, central themes of the work. In contrast to the Irish, the English, and Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) in particular, are heretics. Indeed, Cromwell is described on the title page as *Arco-tyrannus* (Archtyrant). There are many comparisons between the Irish and other good religious peoples who are prosecuted for their faith, such as the Israelites. However, no other Catholic people in history are said to have suffered so much misery and to have been so constant in the faith as the Irish. For Conry’s purposes, they were unified by their common enemy, Oliver Cromwell.

In reality, the Irish were not as united as Conry had made it appear. The Irish population was an amalgamation of peoples of various ethnicities, which can be divided roughly into three groups. Among the first group, the

²¹ Conry 1659, 26.

Gaelic Irish (also Old Irish), a distinction existed between the more extreme Ulster Irish and the Munster Gaelic Irish. The second group, the Old English, sometimes also called Anglo-Irish (the descendants of Norman settlers who came to Ireland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries), was also divided because of regional differences. Finally, the New English were the settlers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: English, Scots and others, who were mostly Protestant. Although ethnic tensions existed between the Gaelic Irish and Old English, by the beginning of the seventeenth century a common interest in religion, land and political power had become more important. By means of the various plantations, the New English confiscated many lands from the Gaelic Irish and the Old English, particularly in Ulster in the early seventeenth century. In 1641, the Old Irish in Ulster went into revolt, driven by a lack of political and economic influence. In 1642, in an attempt to restore order and stability the Catholics in Ireland forged an alliance, which was later known as the Confederation of Kilkenny. Until 1649 they effectively ruled Ireland, while engaging in a bitter conflict with various factions representing British rule, such as Scottish, royal and parliamentary forces. Through intermediaries (first James Butler, the Protestant first duke of Ormond, later Murrough O'Brien, Lord Inchiquin) they were involved in peace negotiations, but internal political divisions within the Confederation complicated these negotiations. Catholic landowners mainly wanted a quick restoration of the existing social and economic order. A second group of Catholic bishops, returned exiles and others in the circle around the Italian papal nuncio, Giovanni Battista Rinuccini, demanded major religious concessions. Rinuccini eventually went as far as excommunicating those supporting the peace (the Inchiquin truce) accepted by the confederates, an action that not only caused the failure of the Confederation, but also damaged the reputation of Irish clergy abroad. A third group was more moderate in its religious demands.²² The internal conflicts eventually resulted in the failure of the Confederation.

In contrast to Conry's work, many other works on the Irish written by itinerant Irish clergy on the continent in the same period, had highlighted these tensions among the different groups of Irish. The Gaelic Irish Capuchin Richard O'Ferrall, for example, submitted a memorandum to *Propaganda Fide* in 1658.²³ In it, he gave practical suggestions about how to reconstruct the Irish church after its destruction by Cromwellian persecution, including a list of names of those recommended by O'Ferrall for the various bishoprics in Ireland. O'Ferrall justified the rebellion of the Gaelic Irish and

²² This three-party model of the Confederation of Kilkenny was proposed by Ó Siochrú 2008, 17–20.

²³ Cf. Tjoelker and Campbell 2008 for O'Ferrall's memorandum of 1658.

argued for the exclusion of the Old English from patronage and promotion within the church. The Old English exile priest John Lynch reacted angrily to O’Ferrall’s memorandum in his *Alithinologia* (published in 1664 in St Malo).²⁴ He defended the Old English, arguing that Irish Catholicism should be seen as an ethnic and political unity. He presented the Old English as fully Irish and worthy citizens, and accused O’Ferrall of causing discord and sedition among his own people.²⁵

Also elsewhere in Europe, Irish exiles were involved in debates over the role of the Old English in the failure of the Confederation and the Rinuccinian censures. In Paris, the leading figures of the debate were the Franciscan Paul King for the Rinuccinian faction, and John Callanan for the supporters of the truce. Internationally, the confederate wars had given the Irish Catholic Church a political importance that resulted in a politicised view of the clerics on the continent and made them more defensive of church rights than clerics of the previous generation.²⁶ Catholics in Ireland and Rome saw Ireland as a potential springboard for further Catholic advances in England and the rest of northern Europe.²⁷

Seen in this context, it should come as no surprise that Conry’s work is not only intended for other Irish exiles on the continent. Its precise description of the atrocities, as well as the self-representation of the Irish as the first Catholics, who helped spread the faith over the whole of Europe, rather seems to address other Catholics on the continent, especially those who might be able to support the Irish cause, i.e. it reads as a text that begs any good Catholic to help his fellow Catholics in Ireland. The dedication to the Archbishop of Salzburg, Guidobaldus, supports this propagandistic purpose of the work. In it, the author states that he fled to Salzburg from the English, the same way that the *Threi (populi Threiorum)* fled from the Persians to the Thracian city of Abdera, and he asks for the compassion and support of the Archbishop and other members of the Church. He states that he hopes that his book will give an edifying example of Catholicism, which will pay honour to God. He concludes with a final request for a good reception of his book:

Hunc ego libellum solita in afflictissimam Hibernorum nationem clementia, vostra autoritativa potestate praeservate, protegite et fovete.

²⁴ Lynch 1664. Cf. Tjoelker 2010.

²⁵ On Lynch and O’Ferrall, cf. Corish 1953, 217–236; Tjoelker 2012, 167–192.

²⁶ Cf. O’Connor 2008, 198 and 324–330 and Silke 2009, 614–615.

²⁷ Ó hAnnracháin 2002, 206–209 and 253–255; Ó hAnnracháin 2015, 31.

I beg you to favour, protect and cherish this little book with your customary clemency for the most afflicted nation of Irish, and with your authoritative power.

Therefore, from the tone of the work, as well as the statements in the approbations, we can conclude that Conry, through his *Threnodia*, aimed to muster support for the Irish in their war against Cromwellian persecution. The work is clearly no objective historical study, but a work with a propagandistic purpose. The virtue of the Irish Catholics, who are opposed to the English Protestants, who are presented as evil and cruel heretics, plays a central role in this.

3. Innsbruck: Irish Franciscans in Tyrol

The four approbations also represent the religious character of the book, and play a role in the formation of the author's identity. All the authors are Franciscans. The first is by Jesse Perchoffer, vicar general in Brixen. In his general approbation of the Catholic and virtuous character of the work, he notes that the book was written in Bolzano. The second is by Pater Ruffin Laxner of Bludenz (1612-1687), who was the Franciscan provincial (of the *Provincia Tyrolis S. Leopoldi*) in Innsbruck from 1656 until 1659, the time of publication of the *Threnodia Hiberno-Catholica*. We will return to him later, as a document from his hand is important for our story of the Irish Franciscans in the Tyrol. The third is by the Franciscan Guardian in Bolzano, Wolfgang of Munich, and the final is by fellow-Irishman Bonaventure O'Connor, lector of sacred theology in Bolzano.

The final approbation seems to me to provide a key to understanding why Conry published the work in Innsbruck. I believe there might be more to the matter than simply the opportunity to publish his work in Innsbruck during a stopover (which was common for many who travelled from Rome to other parts of Europe) on his journey from Rome to Prague.

First, Conry's Franciscan background must have been a factor in his choice of publisher.²⁸ As discussed above, all approbations for his book were written by local Franciscans. The publisher of the book, Michael Wagner, whose company still exists in Innsbruck today, published many other religious works, one of them being a Latin translation of an Italian life of St Philip Benizi, written by fellow-Irishman Cherubin O'Dale, a Servite, in 1644,²⁹ as well as many works written by Franciscans. Secondly, the inclu-

²⁸ On the significance of Irish (and English) expatriates to the history of the Franciscan order in central Europe, cf. Worthington 2012, 171; Millett 1964.

²⁹ O'Dale 1644.

sion of Bonaventure O'Connor should draw our attention to the importance of the Irish community in the Tyrol. Contrary to what Greiderer said (quoted above), I believe O'Connor was but one of many Irish Franciscans in the Tyrol. The Irish community in the Tyrol should be considered in the field of Irish studies as a relevant community for the Irish exiles in Central Europe.

A document from another author of an approbation of the book, Pater Ruffin Laxner, seems to point to this as well. In a manuscript text entitled "Relatio Fratris Ruffini de Bludento Prouinciali Ministerio defuncti" (Account by brother Ruffin de Bludentz, having fulfilled his duties as provincial minister), held in the Franciscan archives in Schwaz, Tyrol, the author gives an elaborate report on the events during the period 1654–1659, when he was Provincial in Innsbruck.³⁰ In his introduction he states that this was a turbulent time for the Franciscans in Innsbruck. He is particularly critical about the high number of foreign Franciscans, and in particular Irish and Italian brothers, who take away precious time from the Commissary because of their frequent requests:

Nam cum Pater Commissarius omne tempus cum extraneis Fratribus, quibus illa tempestate Provincia nostra scatebat, Italis et Hybernis tereret, eosque ipse conueniens, dies noctesque auscultaret traducentes mordentesque eos, quorum oderant disciplinam, spreuerant auctoritatem, inuidebant aemulabanturque gratiam Principum benevolentiamque, adeo tum in praecipuos duos Prouinciae Patres, natione Bavaros, professione Tyrolenses, clauum Ministerii Prouincialis diutius, sed bene, sed legitime, sed necessarie tenentes, tum in alios quosdam Conuentus Oenipontani alumnos Serenissimis Archiducibus familiares ac gratos, ab eis concitatus est (...)

Because the Father Commissary was wasting all his time with the foreign brothers, the Italians and Irish, with whom our province abounded during that commotion, and listened to them, while meeting them personally, for days and nights, as they disgraced and attacked those, whose discipline they hated, whose authority they despised, and whose favour and benevolence among the princes they envied and jealously strove after, he was stirred up by them not only against the principal two Fathers of the Province, of Bavarian nationality, but Tyrolian by declaration, who held the rudder for too long, but well, legitimately, and necessarily, but also against some other *alumni* of the Innsbruck assembly, familiar and welcome to the most serene archdukes (...).³¹

³⁰ Laxner, *Relatio Fratris Ruffini de Bludento Prouinciali Ministerio defuncti*.

³¹ Laxner, *Relatio Fratris Ruffini*, 1.

That there was some friction between German and Italian Franciscans in the region is very well known, as is how the Italian Franciscans came to be there. Although the majority of the Franciscans in Innsbruck was German or Austrian, a lack of friars required for the court in Innsbruck forced the General to agree on the 30th of December 1584 to invite a number of Italians to Innsbruck.³² In spring 1585 ten Italian brothers arrived in Innsbruck. They worked together with their German-speaking colleagues for a number of years, despite language issues, as most of the Italians did not know a word of German. But the two groups came into conflict. A young Italian, Bonaventura ab Aquila, who came to Innsbruck as Commissarius Generalis for Oberdeutschland on the 28th of January 1586, was the victim of so much slander that he regularly saw himself forced to make arrangements for his accommodation with the Poor Clare Sisters in Brixen. In 1603, at the urging of Archduke Maximilian, the Italians were let go and the cloister was given back to the Tyrolean province. Nevertheless, if we read Laxner's account, it seems that some Italians remained in Innsbruck.

So too did a group of Irishmen, though the events which led to the Irish Franciscans being in Innsbruck in the first place is less well known. It is clear that there was a significant enough community there, however, for Laxner to complain about. For example, in addition to the passage above while describing events for the year 1657, Laxner again complains about the Italians and the Irish:

Infestabatur grauitur hoc tempore provincia nostra ab extraneis fratribus Italis et Hybernis (ut supra paucis tetigi) ab istis quidem clam, ab illis autem maxime Terrae Sanctae Vice Commissariis palam.³³

At this time, our province was gravely troubled by foreign brothers, Italian and Irish (as I said in a few words above), by the latter secretly, by the former very openly as vice-commissaries of the holy land.

Thus, while the Italians openly 'infested' his province, the Irish did so in a secretive manner.

Later in the chapter, he complains about one Irish father in particular, Eugene O'Callanan, an Irishman who was lecturing on Sacred Theology with the Cistercians in Stams:

Interea Pater Eugenius Occallanan Hybernus apud Cistertienses in Stams Sacrae Theologiae Lector, suae gentis more vagus et instabilis Bulsano, quo nuper mentita ad S. Antonium Paduanum peregrinatione etsi praeclusi causa pestis Italiae aditus non ignarus, imo Oeniponti

³² Cf. Schöpf 1860, 50; Pecher 2007 49–52; Grass 1961, 137.

³³ Laxner, *Relatio Fratris Ruffini*, 7.

expresse de eo admonitur, pergere tamen, sed alio fine (ut dicetur suo loco) uoluit, vix redux, ostensa, sed (sicut Oeniponti confessus est) procurata, Superiorum suorum, non tam auocatione, sed et obiurgatione, quasi ab eorum se se obedientia et iurisdictione eximere uellet, medium illius studii et stadii iter abrumpens, licentiam abeundi a Reuerendissimo Domino Abbate [13] petiit et obtinuit, sed amplius indignato et Superiorum eorundem indiscretionem carpente, quam si ad pluries instantias, plures fuisset passus repulsas. Inde (cum insigni quidem probitatis et doctrinae testimonio, nobis derelicto) dimissus, suam Oeniponti expeditionem adeo accelerauit et ursit, ut meum ex Conuentu Reuttensi citiorem aduentum neque ad triduum aut biduum tam expectare, sed inde ad formandas obedientiales chartam albam sibi mitti uoluerit, cuius causam adhuc latentem, suo loco referam. Praedictum eius testimonium habetur.

Ex eius Lectura id tam commodi hausimus, quod neque Stambenses, neque alii Coenobitae facile quemquam nostrum amplius ad suas lecturas inuitaturi, nel conducturi sint.³⁴

Meanwhile, Father Eugene O'Callanan, an Irish Lector of Sacred Theology in Stams, was in Bolzano, vagrant and instable in the manner of his people, where he recently insisted to go, under the pretence of a pilgrimage to Saint Anthony of Padua, even though he was not ignorant of the fact that access to Italy was closed due to the plague, about which he was explicitly warned in Innsbruck, but with another purpose (as should be said in this place). He returned not after having been shown, but after having procured from his superiors not just a recall, but even a reproof from them (as he confessed in Innsbruck), as if he wanted to release himself from obedience to them and their jurisdiction, interrupting the course of his study and career halfway. He asked for and obtained from the most reverend Lord Abbot the permission to leave, although the abbot was very angry and was carping at the indiscretion of the same superiors. Sent away from there (with the mark of uprightness and proof of doctrine left behind for us) he accelerated and rushed his expedition from Innsbruck so much, that he did not want to wait two or three days for my earlier arrival from the convent of Reutte, but that he wanted a *carte blanche*³⁵ to compose his obediential letters³⁶ to be sent to him from there. His proof that has been discussed before is considered.

From his lesson we drew the great advantage, that neither the cloister-brothers at Stams, nor other brothers elsewhere, even though

³⁴ Laxner, *Relatio Fratris Ruffini*, 12–13.

³⁵ Presumably a blank sheet of paper with the signature of Laxner is meant here.

³⁶ I.e. a letter in which he was authorised to travel by his superior, in this case Laxner.

they belong to our order, should be amply invited, nor brought, to his lectures.

From this example, the stereotype of the vagrant and unstable Irishman in Brother Laxner's views becomes clear.³⁷ In Laxner's account, father O'Callanan lied in order to be dismissed from Stams, motivated by disobedience and, presumably, laziness. In his account, the Irish are always traveling, neglect their students, and are constantly lobbying important people. Other Irish Franciscans mentioned in the report are a lector named Franciscus Kennedy (specified as *Hybernus*) and father James White (Jacobus Vitus), lector:

Porro ad notitiam et cautelam posteriorum occasionaliter hic adnotandum venit: provinciam nostram non eam, quem ex receptione ad nostras, promotioneque seu commodatione ad aliorum monasteriorum lecturas patrum Hybernorum expectaverat, Studiosae juventutis profectum, honorem, aut retributionis fructum assecutam fuisse. Nam quemadmodum Pater Eugenius Occallanan Stamsensem et Pater Jacobus Vitus Stamgadensem, ille abrupto, iste, neque incepto SS. Theologiae cursu deseruerint, morosus autem Pater Franciscus Kinedius Oenipontanam, lacerato discipulorum suorum examine, alteri cedere debuerit lecturam, suis iam locis proditum est.³⁸

Furthermore, it should here be brought to the attention and caution of posterity, as the occasion arises, that our province did not gain the success of the studious youth, the honour or the enjoyment of recompense, which it had expected to gain through the receiving of Irish Fathers to our lectureships and to those of other monasteries through promotion or rendering them a favour. Because, for instance, Father Eugene O'Callanan deserted the monastery at Stams and Father James White that of Stamgaden, the former interrupting his course of Sacred Theology, the latter not even having started it. It is already well-known to his time that the peevish Father Franciscus Kennedy had to cede his lectureship in Innsbruck to another man, after he had torn to pieces the exam of his students.

Bonaventure O'Connor, who wrote the final approbation of our work, is seen by Laxner as the most prominent and worst of the Irish brothers:

Sed neque primus ac principalis illorum pater Bonaventura Conorus Bulsanensem tenuit sine querela, quamvis polleret ingenio, scientia et

³⁷ On the tendency to attribute specific characteristics or even characters to different nations, sometimes called *imagology*, cf. Leerssen 2007, 17–32. The insult of vagrancy and instability is commonly used in the early modern period, and can be traced back to the bible passage of *Gen.* 4:12.

³⁸ Laxner, *Relatio Fratris Ruffini*, 36.

Doctrina, docendique explicandi facilitate et claritate excelleret; quippe qui ad captandos animos aucupandosque favores et gratias Nobilium et Magnatum, quorum amantissimus pariter ac studiosissimus erat, variis illorum causis et negotiis sese ingerebat, agebat Theologum eorum, consilia componebat, resoluebat dubia, scribebat litteras, recipiebatque plures quam Pater Guardianus, vel ipse etiamsi Minister Provincialis taliumque ac similium aetuum occasione, occupabatur in cella, conueniebatur ceu oraculum in claustro. Discurrebat per domos quotidie, vagebatur per Castella et refrigeria nimis frequenter, vix redux ab uno, invitabatur ab alio, longius etiam excurrens in vallem venustam etque Tridentum pluries, aliquando Paduam, alia vice Assisium, denique etiam Romam, multis non tam septimanis, sed mensibus a discipulis suis aberat, non sine notabili neglectu eorum, damnoque provinciae. Nec erat, qui licentiam illi negarent, eumue cohiberet, quia et scientia inflatus, ac de meritis plurimum praesumens, vel modicum tactum, ut mons fumigabat, terrebatque cunctos.³⁹

But not even the first and most prominent of them, Father Bonaventure O'Connor held his lectureship at Bolzano without complaint, although he was esteemed for his talent, scholarship and doctrine and excelled in the facility and clarity of his teaching and explaining, because he applied himself to various matters and business of noblemen and magnates, whom he loved and was devoted to very much, with the purpose of capturing their kindness and chasing their favours and congratulations. He acted as their theologian, prepared counsels, resolved doubts, wrote letters and received more of them than the Father Guardian. Even if he himself as Father Minister Provincial, at the occasion of such and similar business, was occupied in his cell, or he was convened to an prophecy in the cloister, he hurried away to houses daily, wandered too frequently to castles and countryside houses. Hardly returning from one, he was already invited by another, also taking long excursions, more than once to the Val Venosta and Trento, sometimes to Padova, another time Assisi, then also Rome. He was away from his students not just many weeks, but months, not without notable neglect of them and damage to the province. Nor was there anyone, who denied him permission or restricted him, since, as he was as full of his scholarship as he was presuming much about his merits, he smoked his modest influence like a mountain and terrified all.

The elaborate account mentions his talents as scholar and teacher. He was clearly well appreciated as a teacher and scholar. However, in what

³⁹ Laxner, *Relatio Fratris Ruffini*, 31.

continues Laxner focuses on his deficiencies: O’Conor was constantly traveling around, deserting his students for months on end, once to the Val Venosta, then to Trento, Padua, Assisi or Rome. His pride and arrogance are also criticised. Like other Irishmen, his complaints and petitions were listened to by the superiors in Rome, something that Laxner clearly did not appreciate.

Throughout the text, the Irish, therefore, are referred to in a very negative manner. In the final paragraph of the text, they are described as *querelarum motores* that bring unrest where there was first peace and quiet:

Id quod non improbabili argumento nobis deinceps fuit, Patres Hybernos omnium retro querelarum motores, omnium scripturarum famosarum auctores fuisse, propter identitatem illarum, vel maximam affinitatem, perpensis praesertim aliis etiam circumstantiis et coniecturis valde notis, proindeque suspicionem non adeo temerariam pluribus ingessit, eos iniquum quid moliri, ac forte Conuentum Oenipontanum pro Collegio Hybernico, multis respectibus conuenientissimum appetere, et propterea obstantes sibi Patres sensatos a Diffinitorio, Serenissimis familiares ab eodem Conuentu arcere voluisse. Litteras videre est cum aliis eiusdem Reuerendissimi Patris Commissarii querelis repositas litt. in Cista.⁴⁰

We conclude from this probable argument, that the Irish Fathers, on the one hand the engines of all complaints, were the authors of writings, that were all famous, because of their identity or great connection, considering especially the other circumstances while conjectures are soon known. And therefore, it brings to many the suspicion, which is not so overhasty, that they are up to something hurtful and that perhaps they eagerly desire the convent of Innsbruck as an Irish College, most convenient in many respects, and that for that reason they wanted to keep the intelligent fathers, who are not favourable to their side, away from the Diffinitory, and those close to the most Serene [princes] away from the same convent. It is possible to see the correspondence of the same most reverend Father Commissary with other complaints, stored up in his letter box.

Laxner concludes that perhaps they wanted the Franciscan convent in Innsbruck, which is most convenient for them in many respects, to become an Irish college. This is a rather serious suspicion to express in a document of this type! Needless to say, Laxner does not agree with this plan.

Laxner’s fear might have had grounds, as the Irish Franciscans had already founded many colleges on the continent, the first being St. Anthony’s College in Louvain (founded 1607), later followed by St.

⁴⁰ Laxner, *Relatio Fratris Ruffini*, 38.

Isidore's in Rome (1625), the College of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (1629) in Prague, the Friary of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary in Wielun in Poland (1645), a smaller residence in Paris (1653) and the Friary of Our Lady of the Plain in Capranica (Italy, 1656).⁴¹ Initially the purpose of these colleges was to educate future missionaries and friars for the Irish province, but later they also supplied other Franciscan centres with lecturers in theology and philosophy.⁴² They also acted as a refuge for friars who had escaped English oppression in Ireland. There was structured contact between these centres. In all of these colleges, however, the relationship between the Irish Brothers and the locals was not without difficulty, as the local religious often felt threatened by their presence.

The negative perception of the Irish in Laxner's account should also be seen in the context of the calamitous developments in Confederate Ireland at that time, which I referred to above. A negative stereotype of the lazy, drunk and uncivilised Irishman was widespread in Europe in various forms. The English Protestants were convinced of the inferiority of the Irish, to the point of viewing them in a way similar to the racist portrayal of Native Americans and Africans: as savages. It was their justification for the massacres committed by the Cromwellian forces and the enslavement of Irish people on the English sugar plantations in the West Indies. Catholics on the European mainland were influenced in their views of the Irish by the arrival of Irish exiles and refugees.⁴³ Apart from clergy, a considerable number of political and economic refugees fled to Flanders, Lisbon and France at various points in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many of these joined existing colonies of poor Irish, for example in Paris on the Ile de la Cité, or in Nantes, Angers or Bordeaux. The large numbers of these people, living without means of support and in squalor, brought the threat of plague and presented problems to the authorities. Rouen sent the Irish away; the Bretons dispersed them throughout western France; the French government in 1606 sent two boatloads of Irish settlers in Paris back to Ireland. Surely, this must have been detrimental to the reputation of the Irish abroad and contributed to the stereotype of the unreliable, vagrant Irishman in Brother Laxner's account.

Like Laxner, Rinuccini had also been critical of the Irish religious throughout his office. Already in his first report on Ireland in March 1646, he complained that the Irish regulars resisted the imposition of stricter standards of conventual life and even wearing the habits of their orders, which behaviour he ascribed to their experience of too much liberty prior to

⁴¹ Cf. Lyons 2009, 77–84 and Ó Muraíle 2008.

⁴² Parez & Kucharova 2015, 27.

⁴³ Silke 2009, 592–593.

the rule of the Confederation of Kilkenny.⁴⁴ Rinuccini's criticism may have also been influenced by the stereotype of the vagrant and instable Irishman.

It had been Rinuccini's bold ambition to confirm Catholicism as the established religion in Ireland, in the hope of future advances elsewhere in Europe. After the failure of the Confederation, a further request for support and money from Rome on the part of the Irish was turned down without pity: the Nuncio's attempts in Ireland had failed and he used the ultimate instrument of excommunication against Irish Catholics who supported the peace treaty agreed upon by the Confederation. The Irish envoys were told that Rome could support no peace treaty between Catholics and Protestants.⁴⁵ This lack of support from Rome may have had a further impact upon the reputation of Irish Catholic exiles on the continent.

Conclusion

It is clear from this discussion that there must have been a strong Irish community in the Tyrol, which was not very appreciated by the local Provincial. The fact that Conry published his *Threnodia Hiberno-Catholica* in Innsbruck is one of the signs of their influence in this Franciscan province. The strong Catholic identity and fame of the Irish Franciscans, as well as their connections within the wider Franciscan order, were essential in their attempts to strengthen their position. The disastrous situation for Catholics in Ireland meant that many young Irishmen traveled to the continent for their education, and that there was an influx of religious exiles, many of whom relied on Irish colleges and communities abroad. Innsbruck, positioned at the crossroads of Southern, Central and Western Europe, would have been a strategic place for an Irish college, were it not for the bad relationship with local Franciscans in the Tyrol. More archival research is needed to elucidate the role of the Irish Franciscans in the spiritual life in the Tyrol further.⁴⁶

As the account of Laxner reveals, the Irish lectors were criticised for spending too much time away from their teaching duties, and seem to have

⁴⁴ Ó hAnnracháin 2015, 94.

⁴⁵ Ó hAnnracháin 2015, 227.

⁴⁶ It will be interesting to see what John McCafferty will find on this community, if it is at all under scrutiny, in his publications resulting from the project *Making Ireland European, Making Europe Irish: the Irish Franciscan project 1600-1690*, which involved intensive study of early modern libraries in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Ireland and Italy. The website of UCD mentions this project, for which McCafferty has been awarded a research fellowship for 2010–2011.

(<http://www.ucd.ie/historyarchives/staff/johnmccafferty/home/>)

been involved in strengthening their position. Likely, they were also, like Conry in his propagandistic *Threnodia Hiberno-Catholica*, trying to muster support for their country in the war against Cromwellian oppression. Their attempts were in vain, as the failure of the Catholic Confederation had resulted in a loss of support in Rome for the Irish Catholics. This lack of support in Rome certainly was not helping the already frail reputation of exiled Irish clergy elsewhere in Europe.

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