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'Hatred' or 'praise' of the English name: Catholics representing England in Rome, c. 1558–1660

This project forms part of my wider research interest in English Catholic constructions of national identity and their European context, in the century following the English Protestant Reformation. Whilst in Rome, I set out to examine how English Catholics presented themselves and their nation in the city that was global Catholic headquarters. A major point of interest is how English Catholics approached the ambivalence of belonging to a 'heretic' nation; and how they dealt with potential contradictions in exploiting their own status as Catholic martyrs and confessors, and portraying England as a persecuting nation.

I examined the extensive archives of the Venerable English College, the seminary for English and Welsh students in Rome, as well as studying the Fondo Borghese in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano and the Barberini manuscripts (as well as others) in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. I also examined some of the early printed works by or about English Catholics that were published in Italian, or in Italy. There is a range of interesting material in the English College archives; particularly useful was Libro 281, a book of sermons and speeches given by College members c. 1581–1643, including sermons preached in the papal chapel. This manuscript enabled me in particular to develop some work on Catholic representations of England's relationship with the papacy, and the importance of these to national identity. Libro 281 is a rich and diverse source, however, and I am currently applying for further funding to conduct an intensive study of this manuscript, and possibly to publish parts of it.

In the manuscript collections of the Vatican Library and Vatican Archives, I was able to examine material in which English Catholics presented themselves and events in their country to Roman patrons, and in which papal diplomats and others described English Catholic affairs. These documents include correspondence, as well as lengthier reports or 'relations' on the state of England, Scotland and Ireland and/or the possibilities of Catholic restoration. Early seventeenth-century correspondence to and from papal nuncios in key locations such as France, Spain and Flanders (found in the Fondo Borghese) offers useful insights on Rome's perception of England and English Catholics; among my particular interests was Roman responses to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, in relation to both English Catholic narratives of that event, and the agendas of the English government. This research has laid good foundations for a section in my projected monograph on English Catholic constructions of national identity, and I have been able to commence work on a journal article.

During the year, I participated in a research workshop on 'Imagining Jerusalem 1099 to the present day', and gave a seminar paper at the Institute of Historical Research (Tudors & Stuarts seminar). I also have begun a collaborative project with Natalia Petrovskaja, a BSR Research Fellow this year; we hope to investigate the mural map cycle of the Vatican's Terza Loggia, using particular maps as a way to explore and compare Roman perceptions of Britain and the East, and how they fitted into the papacy's global view of its mission. My Fellowship at the BSR has provided a unique opportunity for me to take my research in new directions, which will continue to inform and influence my work.

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