

A Companion to Ignatius of Loyola

Life, Writings, Spirituality, Influence

Edited by

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Introduction

The Quest for the Historical Ignatius

Robert Aleksander Maryks

Ignatius of Loyola founded perhaps the most influential modern Catholic religious order. He was baptized Íñigo as Christopher Columbus was getting ready for his first transatlantic voyage and the so-called Catholic Monarchs were preparing an edict expelling their Jewish subjects. These two events of 1492 would profoundly affect the development of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits.

Íñigo spent the first few years of his life in the castle of Loyola, which belonged to his noble Basque family. An orphan, he was later sent to the household of Juan Velázquez de Cuéllar, the chief treasurer of the Spanish Crown (Map 1.1), in Arévalo (province of Ávila in Castile), where he served several years as the treasurer's page and acquired chivalric skills expected of a Spanish nobleman. He also became aware then of the importance of the *converso*, or "New Christian," network, of which Velázquez de Cuéllar was part. After his patron's death in 1517, Íñigo enlisted in the military service of the duke of Nájera, Manrique de Lara, in the Kingdom of Navarre. In 1521, he participated in the battle of Pamplona that Lara fought against the French. Wounded by a cannon ball, Loyola returned to his family's castle, where he spent his convalescence in the company of devotional books, including the *Leyenda de los santos*, and experienced a religious conversion. It resulted in, among other radical changes in his life, a strong desire to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. On his way to embark in the Mediterranean harbor of Barcelona, he stopped at two places: at the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat and in nearby Manresa. In the former—known for being influenced by *devotio moderna*—Íñigo made his long general confession. In the latter he composed the basis of the *Spiritual Exercises*—the fundament of Ignatian and Jesuit spirituality. In Manresa, he first engaged in his apostolate with other lay people, in a fashion similar to the *converso* Juan de Ávila (1499–1569).

In 1524, after completing his pilgrimage and retracing Jesus's life in the Holy Land, Loyola came back to Barcelona and undertook some schooling that would allow him to enroll two years later at the University of Alcalá de Henares to study philosophy. There, distracted from studies, he met a number of people influenced by the *alumbrado* and *Erasmian* ideals, which drew attention of church authorities and the Inquisition and resulted in his incarceration and trial. His troubles with the ecclesiastic authorities continued during his brief studies at the University of Salamanca. In 1528, he decided to enroll in the faculty of arts and theology at the University of Paris.

During his long seven years of studies there, Ignatius attracted to his spiritual exercises and apostolic ideals a group of students who became companions of his religious mission. After their ordination in 1537 in Venice and failed attempt to embark for Jerusalem (where they planned to proselytize among Muslims), Ignatius and his companions moved instead to Rome to offer their services to the pope. There they decided to found a new religious order which was officially approved by Pope Paul III in 1540, when Ignatius was almost fifty. A few months later, he was elected superior general of the order. With the help of his *converso* secretary, Juan Alfonso de Polanco, whom he recruited some years later, Ignatius addressed his confreres around the world through numerous instructions and letters, and composed the Society's rules—the *Constitutions*—which to the Jesuits became much more than just a legal text. Loyola governed his order for fifteen years until his death in 1556.

After his death, devotion to Ignatius grew, a fact demonstrated by numerous artistic representations of him commissioned from the most famous artists of the time, Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) included. These images were an important means of gaining support for Loyola's beatification in 1609 and canonization in 1622.

Ignatius's spirituality quickly crossed the borders of the Society of Jesus itself to influence other religious congregations, especially women's orders. Some modern scholars have investigated the impact of the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions* on the transition from medieval to modern conceptions of humanity and the world in general, and on the formation of the modern self and objectivity in particular. Others have looked at the reverberations of Ignatian spirituality in influential European writers who, despite their Jesuit formation, sometimes became Ignatius's vitriolic critics.

During a roundtable sponsored by the *Journal of Jesuit Studies* at the 2013 Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, David Myers of Fordham University suggested that one of the most important foci for scholars of Jesuit history today should be "the quest for the historical Ignatius," recalling Albert Schweitzer's attempt in the nineteenth century to reconstruct and separate the life of Jesus from the devotions and beliefs that sprang up about him. Certainly this quest had already started with the publication initiative of the *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu* in the late nineteenth century, but today, over a hundred years later, we still lack a comprehensive biography of Ignatius that would meet contemporary academic standards. What is necessary now first is to critically reassess approaches that have been used in studying the complex and fascinating figure of the founder of the Jesuit order.

Of course, this *Companion* does not pretend to be as groundbreaking as Albert Schweitzer's quest for the historical Jesus, but we do want to offer the

academic community a panorama of current scholarship on Loyola. It goes without saying that a more critical insight into the life of the founder and his charisma will help us better understand the origins of the Society of Jesus and its impact on modern history—a subject that fascinates so many academics regardless of their background.

Scholars of Ignatius are today in a better position than scholars who study the historical Jesus but still far from being able to reconstruct the real Ignatius, for his disciples and followers, and after them artists, writers, and historians, have anxiously hurried—especially after his death in 1556—to cover him with so many layers of theological and rhetorical paint that it is often very difficult, if not impossible, to discern history from myth in Loyola's life. Ironically, these myths were actually constructed by his own disciples: the myth of ultra-orthodox Ignatius, of Ignatius the soldier, of Ignatius the general of papal Counter-reformation troops, of Ignatius (David) risen to fight against Luther (Goliath), and so forth.

The main difficulty in the process of demythologizing we attempt here comes from the nature of primary sources which are indeed abundant but which have often been analyzed without historical criticism. First of all we do not possess a first-hand account of Loyola's "pilgrim years." Since the mid-twentieth-century publication of the critical edition of the so-called *Autobiography*, many scholars have been perhaps too excited about the possibility of recovering the real Ignatius from this text. However, as some very recent publications on the subject show, scholars continue to interpret this text a-critically, as if it were written, or at least dictated, by Ignatius himself. Scholars have overlooked the principles of textual criticism, the history of text transmission, and the theological and rhetorical (rather than historical) goals Câmara and Nadal had in mind in redacting, manipulating, and circulating this text. A critical synoptic analysis of its language and sources—similar to something Cândido de Dalmases did in his unpublished dissertation on Ribadeneyra's biography of Ignatius—might lead us to determine what was historically more accurate, although perhaps without being ever able to recuperate the *ipsissima verba* of Ignatius, which is possible only from his relatively brief *Journal*. Loyola's (and Polanco's) style and language in the *Constitutions* have been recently studied with more acumen, but we are still awaiting a critical analysis of Ignatius's (and Polanco's) numerous letters.

The publication since 1894 of many volumes of the *Monumenta Historica* concerning the life of Ignatius was a monumental effort to provide material for the quest for the historical Ignatius but were its editors perhaps selective in their choices of documents? Consider, for example, the documents dealing with Ignatius's presumed daughter and some of his letters addressed to women. Moreover, the editors' footnotes are impressively detailed, but what we need

more are references that put these documents into a broader historiographical context. The discipline of history builds on archival material *and* narratives interpreting it and describing their historical setting. As some chapters in this volume show, we know more today about the religious and intellectual environment of Montserrat, Alcalá, Paris, and, of course, Rome, in the time of Ignatius, but have we been provided with sufficiently critical scholarship on the years Ignatius spent in Loyola and Arévalo? And yet Ignatius's family background and the chivalric and political formation he received at the court of Velázquez de Cuéllar left an indelible quixotic mark on his worldview that continued to slowly expand as he moved beyond the Iberian late-medieval milieu.

Because Ignatius was born on the threshold of a new historical period that began in 1492, we find at least two worlds that continue to coexist in his imagination. A good example at hand is Ignatius's attachment to the popular medieval devotional booklet, *Imitatio Christi*. It certainly represented new spiritual directions of late Middle Ages but was deeply rooted in its monastic culture. Now, what Loyola and his collaborators envisioned as the Jesuit ideal of religious life was a polar opposite to the medieval ideal of secluded religious life that the *Imitatio* represented. Jerónimo Nadal used to repeat to young Jesuits across Europe that the Jesuits were not monks and their home was the world (not a monastery). Yet Ignatius recommended that his confreres keep using the *Gersoncito* as their spiritual reading. At least this is what Gonçalves da Câmara tells us.

And here we encounter another fundamental difficulty in our quest for the historical Ignatius. Many facts and sayings that we associate with Loyola come from the oral tradition which had been transmitted, and sometimes written down *a posteriori*, by his disciples—Laínez, Polanco, Nadal, Ribadeneyra, Bobadilla, Rodrigues, and others, about whom we still know very little. We should bear in mind though that each of them had an agenda, whether declared or hidden, in portraying Ignatius in a certain way that reflected their desires, fears, conflicts, and resentments. They wrote using a variety of literary genres and as such they need to be critically analyzed in order to discern the historical Ignatius of Loyola from the mythical one.

This *Companion* aims at placing Loyola's life, writings, and spirituality in a broader context of important late medieval and early modern movements and processes that have been appreciated too little by historians who explored Ignatius more as the colossal icon of the so-called Counter-Reformation than as a man influenced by the dramatic and revolutionary period in which he lived. One book will be never able to cover all aspects of such rich and controversial a figure as Ignatius of Loyola, but the following chapters indicate important directions of current scholarship that reassesses the previous scholarship and suggests new angles of studies on this pivotal figure of the early modern period.

Ignatius, Women, and the *Leyenda de los santos*

Elizabeth Rhodes

In the text now called his *Autobiography*, Ignatius of Loyola “recalls” how he was introduced to some new reading material while recovering from surgeries on his leg in 1521 (Fig. 2.1):

And because he was much given to reading worldly, false books, which are usually called chivalric, when he felt well he asked for some of those to pass the time. But in that house not a single one of the books he was used to reading was to be found, and so he was given a *Vita Christi* and a book of saints’ lives in Spanish.¹

Scholars have identified the second book as the 1520 *Leyenda de los santos*, published in Seville by Juan de Varela, an important specification because no two early modern anthologies of saints’ lives are the same. The one Ignatius read is a romance collection based on medieval, versus humanistic, versions of the *vitae*.²

Something in these imaginative stories caught the wounded man’s fancy, for he recalls that he reviewed them many times and reflected on their content, reflections initially interspersed with his more accustomed, worldly thoughts about the deeds he would undertake in the service of a certain lady.³ Little by little however, the saints overlaid the knights errant, and by his own account

1 “Y porque era muy dado a leer libros mundanos y falsos, que suelen llamar de caballeria, sintiéndose bueno, pidió que les diesen algunos dellos para pasar el tiempo; mas en aquella casa no se halló ninguno de los que él solía leer, y así le dieron un *Vita Christi* y un libro de la vida de los santos en romance” (Ignatius of Loyola, *El peregrino. Autobiografía de San Ignacio de Loyola*, ed. Josep Maria Rambla Blanch [Bilbao: 1983], 29). All translations are mine.

2 For evidence supporting the assertion that the 1520 Seville volume was the one Ignatius read, see the thorough and thoughtful introduction to his edition of the book by Félix Juan Cabasés, *Leyenda de los santos* (Madrid: 2007), xx–xxxix. Scholars of hagiography continue to sort out the many Spanish *Flos sanctorum* published in Spanish during the early modern period. The best introduction to the two branches of hagiographic compilations continues to be Billy Bussell Thompson and John K. Walsh, “Old Spanish Manuscripts of Prose Lives of the Saints and their Affiliations. I: Compilation A (The Gran Flos Sanctorum),” *La Corónica* 15.1 (1986): 17–28.

3 Ignatius, *El peregrino*, 29.

Ignatius of Loyola and the Converso Question¹

Robert Aleksander Maryks

It is now a cliché, especially among Jesuit scholars, to argue for Loyola's supposed Judeophilia by quoting Pedro de Ribadeneyra's testimonies about Ignatius's desire to be of the same blood of Jesus and Mary. These testimonies come, however, from a closet-converso Jesuit—a revealing detail that other scholars have often failed to point out—who may have had an agenda in spreading this information and concealing other information, as he not infrequently did on other occasions, when, for example, he attempted to mask the Jewish origins of Diego Laínez in his and Maffei's biography of Loyola's successor.² Let us have thus a closer look at these accounts.

Among many episodes of his spiritual father's life he collected for Ignatius's hagiography, Ribadeneyra recounted that

one day when many of us were dining together, [Ignatius] speaking of himself about a certain topic, said that he would take it as a special grace from our Lord to come from Jewish lineage; and adding a reason, he said: "Why? Imagine that a man could be a kinsman by blood [*secundum carnem*] of Christ our Lord and of our Lady the glorious Virgin Mary!" He spoke those words with so much emotion that tears welled into his eyes. This is something that deeply impressed everyone.³

On another occasion, Loyola's hagiographer observed that

on hearing our Father make the same statement, which I recounted above, he crossed himself and exclaimed: "A Jew?!" And he spitted on the

¹ See Robert A. Maryks, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews. Jesuits of Jewish Ancestry and Purity-of-Blood Laws in the Early Society of Jesus* (Leiden: 2010), 42–90.

² See also Bataillon, *Erasmus y España*, 217, who argues that Ribadeneyra falsified the account of Loyola's judgment on Erasmus's *Enchiridion*.

³ See Ribadeneyra II, 375 and *Fontes narr.* II, 476: "Un día que estábamos comiendo delante de muchos, a cierto propósito, hablando de sí, dijo que tuviera por gracia especial de nuestro Señor venir de linaje de judíos; y añadió la causa, diciendo:—¡Como! ¡Poder ser el hombre pariente de Cristo N[uestro] S[eñor] *secundum carnem*, y de nuestra Señora la gloriosa Virgen María!—Las cuales palabras dijo con tal semblante y con tanto sentimiento que se le saltaron las lágrimas y fue cosa que se notó mucho."

Conclusion

Robert Aleksander Maryks

What image of Ignatius of Loyola has emerged from the fifteen rich essays contained in this *Companion*? I hope a more historical one, for most chapters in this volume have attempted to provide—despite relatively scarce sources—a solid historical background for the times and places in which Ignatius lived. Loyola lived in a period of radical changes—on the threshold between the late Middle Ages and early modernity, marked, among others, by the rise of the Iberian national monarchies and their colonial expansion, by the Renaissance, and by the Protestant and Catholic Reformations. We cannot understand Ignatius if we do not take into consideration this historical setting. The medieval cultures of monasticism and chivalry help us understand Ignatius's fascination with the *Leyenda de los santos* and the *Imitatio Christi*. The Iberian spirit of Reconquista helps us understand Loyola's view of Islam. The crucial role *conversos* played at the royal court and in fifteenth-century Spanish church and society helps us understand Ignatius's reliance on *conversos* and his non-discriminatory admission policy, while at the same time being typically anti-Judaic. The Erasmian and *alumbrado* spirituality that influenced the early sixteenth-century academic and spiritual circles of Alcalá de Henares helps us understand certain features of the *Spiritual Exercises* and early Jesuit spirituality. It also explains why some prominent churchmen, such as the Dominican Melchior Cano, would consider them unorthodox. Finally, the Iberian milieu of Ignatius helps us understand why his eyes, and consequently the eyes of his companions in Paris (the majority of whom were Iberians), were turned not towards Wittenberg but towards Jerusalem, contradicting the myth of Ignatius as Luther's antithesis. Indeed, understanding historical setting helps us avoid the temptation—to which some of the first Jesuit biographers of Ignatius succumbed—of finding in Ignatius's life chronological coincidences that would become means of interpreting his story symbolically. Such was the case of 1521—the year of the battle of Pamplona and Charles V's Edict of Worms. These early biographers of Ignatius, especially in the context of his beatification and canonization in the early seventeenth century, contributed to the sacralization of the Jesuit founder's image, diminishing unfairly the role his companions had played in the foundation of the Society of Jesus. But downplaying the impact of some of the first companions was also a result of internal struggles led by Polanco and Nadal, who were not among the founding fathers of the Society yet who proved extremely influential in the development of the order. Ignatius chose them, for they were equipped with skills Ignatius lacked