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Oration “Britones hodie” of Pope Pius II (26 November 1459, Mantua). Edited and translated by Michael von Cotta-Schönberg. 5th version. (Orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius; 50)

Michael Cotta-Schönberg

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Michael Cotta-Schönberg. Oration “Britones hodie” of Pope Pius II (26 November 1459, Mantua). Edited and translated by Michael von Cotta-Schönberg. 5th version. (Orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius; 50). 2019. hal-01184852

HAL Id: hal-01184852

<https://hal.science/hal-01184852>

Submitted on 16 Nov 2019

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(Orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius; 50)

Oration “*Britones hodie*” of Pope Pius II (26 November 1459, Mantua). Edited and translated by Michael von Cotta-Schönberg

5th version

2019

Abstract

In autumn 1459, Duke Francois II of Bretagne sent an embassy to the Congress of Mantua. The object of the embassy was to present the duke's declaration of obedience to the pope and to represent him in the negotiations concerning the crusade against the Turks. The pope replied to the address of the ambassadors with the short oration "*Britones hodie*", in which he gave a resumé of the history of the Bretons, and thanked the duke for his declaration of obedience and for the contribution to the crusade promised by him.

Keywords

Enea Silvio Piccolomini; Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini; Æneas Silvius Piccolomini; Pope Pius II; Papa Pio II; Renaissance orations; Renaissance oratory; Renaissance rhetorics; Responses to ambassadors; Bretagne; Brittany; 15th century; 1459; Crusades against the Turks; Declarations of obedience; Congress of Mantua; Francois II, Duke of Brittany

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Foreword

In 2007, I undertook a project of publishing the Latin texts with English translations of the orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II. Altogether 80¹ orations (including papal responses to ambassadorial addresses) are extant today, though more may still be held, unrecognized, in libraries and archives.

At a later stage the project was expanded to include ambassadors' orations to the pope, of which about 40 are presently known.

I do not, actually, plan to publish further versions of the present volume, but I do reserve the option in case I – during my future studies - come across other manuscripts containing interesting versions of the oration or if important new research data on the subject matter are published, making it appropriate to modify or expand the present text. It will therefore always be useful to check if a later version than the one the reader may have previously found via the Internet is available.

I shall much appreciate to be notified by readers who discover errors and problems in the text and translation or unrecognized quotations.

12 September 2019

MCS

¹ 81 orations, if the "*Cum animadverto*" is counted as a Piccolomini-oration, see oration "*Quam laetus*" [18], Appendix

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II. TEXT AND TRANSLATION

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Context¹

In autumn 1459, Duke Francois II of Bretagne² sent an embassy consisting of the duke's nephew and Jean Lespervier, Bishop of Saint Malo, together with other distinguished men to the Congress of Mantua. The object of the embassy was to present the duke's declaration of obedience to the pope and to represent him in the negotiations concerning the crusade against the Turks.³ The pope replied to the address of the ambassadors with the short oration "*Britones hodie*". In this oration the pope gave a resumé of the history of the Bretons and thanked the duke for his declaration of obedience and for the contribution to the crusade promised by the ambassadors.

In his *Commentarii*, the pope wrote about the event:

When Brittany's ambassadors arrived in Mantua and heard that the French were putting off making their submission to the pope, they decided not to wait for them and asked for a consistory so they could deliver a message from their prince. When this was granted, the bishop of St. Malo spoke as follows:

"We come as envoys of the duke of Brittany, your most dutiful son. We offer you obedience and reverence as our ancestors have always done. We acknowledge you as the Vicar of Christ, the true successor of St. Peter, the head of the Church Militant and its master. We are Christians and we follow you as the captain of the army of Christ. Since our ancestors embraced the Christian religion, they have never fallen away from it. They have abided by the laws of Rome and have never rebelled against the orders of the Holy See. They reject the Pragmatic Sanction of the French. They have remained loyal to your predecessors. Our prince follows in the steps of his fathers. At your command he has sent us to this congress. He is ready to hear and to do your bidding. He knows you wish to lead a crusade against the Turks. He applauds your purpose and declares the undertaking you propose as both necessary and sacred. He will not fail you. He is eager to share in this glorious work. He can send arms, horses, ships, and men (to the extent of his resources) whenever you direct. He will follow you. His only advice is that you make a strong start against a strong foe."

¹ CO, III, 36-37; Rainaldus, ad ann. 1459, nr. 66-67; Picotti, p. 261-262; Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, II, 714-720; Voigt, IV, pp. 80, 89

² Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, II, 714-715: *Lui ... se vit, du jour au lendemain, l'objet des prédilections du Saint-Siège. Attentions intéressées qui avaient pour cause l'attachement des Français à la Pragmatique, la haine du pape pour cette acte et la répugnance qu'il lui inspirait pour Charles VII*

³ The ducal court was quite aware of the risks of a crusade: *il importait de ne pas se lancer à la légère dans une aventure qui pouvait être désastreuse* (Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, II, 716)

The pope was delighted with the embassy from Brittany and praised their duke and their nation to the skies.^{1 2}

2. Themes

Apart from the brief sketch of the history of the Bretons, emphasizing their loyalty to the papacy, the oration contains the elements common to Pius' responses to ambassadors come to present the obedience of their master:

- Acknowledgement of the declaration of obedience³
- Praise of the prince
- Assurance of papal goodwill

Spun subtly into the text was the theme of Breton independence from France:

There they have lived and still live, unvanquished and enjoying sweet liberty. They are a strong people, skilled both in war and in letters. They were initiated into the sacraments of the Christian religion long before Clovis, said to be the first Frankish king to receive the light of Faith. After the Britons first sucked the breasts of their mother, the Roman See, and learnt to drink the milk of divine law, they have never fallen from the Faith, they have never opposed their mother, they have never taken in foreign teachings, and they have never followed unorthodox interpretations of Scripture, something that many others have done, stirred up by every wind of doctrine. Solid, stable and truthful is the Briton nation, and - as it has now been shown - it is genuinely faithful and obedient towards its superiors. [Sect. 3]

At this point, Pius may have regretted that he had not given Brittany an individual chapter in his *Europa*, finished the year before, but only dealt with them in his chapter on France.

¹ CO, III, 36-37 (Meserve, II, pp. 161-163)

² Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, II, 718: *Ravi de ces propos, le pape répondit en laissant couler à pleins bords les flots de son érudition tendancieuse*

³ Rainaldus, ad ann. 1459, nr. 67-68; Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, II, 718

3. Date, place, audience and format

The oration was delivered on 26 November 1459, at the Congress of Mantua, probably during a public consistory.¹

The audience consisted of the cardinals, ambassadors, and members of the Papal Court present in Mantua and other participants in the congress.

The format was a papal oration from the throne, in reply to an ambassadorial address.

4. Text

The oration is included in a Collection of Pius II's Responses (1460),² largely consisting of responses to addresses by ambassadors, extant in at least five manuscripts:

4.1. Manuscripts³

- **Lucca / Biblioteca Capitolare Feliniana**
544, ff. 168r-169r **(G)** *
- **Roma / Archivio Segreto Vaticano**
Arm. XXXII 1, ff. 40r-41v **(J)** *
- **Roma / Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana**
Barb. lat. 1499, ff. 47r-49r
Barb. lat. 1692, ff. 64r-66v
Chis. J.VII.251, ff. 160r-161v **(H)** *

The Chisianus is the eldest of the five and identical with or very close to the oration as actually delivered by Pius.

¹ Picotti, p. 261; Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, II, 719

² See *Collected Orations of Pope Pius II*, vol. 1, sect. 5.1.2.

³ Manuscripts for which an orthographical profile is given in *Collected orations of Pope Pius II*, vol. 11, are marked with an asterisk

4.2. Editions

The oration was published by Mansi:

- Pius II: *Orationes politicae et ecclesiasticae*. Ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi. 3 vols. Lucca: Benedini, 1755-1759. // II, pp. 225-227 [After Lucca, *Bibl. Cap. Fel.*, 544, G]

4.3. Present edition

For principles of edition (incl. orthography) and translation, see *Collected Orations of Pope Pius II*, vol. 1, ch. 9-10.

Text:

The present edition is based on the manuscripts from Lucca, the Archivio Segreto Vaticano and the Chisianus, with the Chisianus as the lead manuscript.

Pagination:

Pagination is from the lead manuscript.

5. Sources¹

In this brief oration, no direct or indirect quotations have been identified.

¹ On Piccolomini's use of sources in general, see *Collected orations of Pope Pius II*, ch. 8

6. Bibliography

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¹ References to the *Annales* are usually given in this form: (e.g.) **Rainaldus, ad ann. 1459, nr. 67** (without reference to a specific edition). In the bibliographies of the individual orations, the first edition is usually listed, but the Theiner edition is actually the preferred one since it is the easiest available on the web

7. Sigla and abbreviations

G = Lucca / Biblioteca Capitolare Feliniana / 544

H = Roma / Biblioteca Apostolic Vaticana / Chisianus J.VII.251

J = Roma / Archivio Segreto Vaticano / Arm. XXXII 1

Abbreviations

CO = Pius II: *Commentarii rerum memorabilium quae suis temporibus contigerunt* [1464]

HA = Eneas Silvius Piccolomini: *Historia Australis*. Teil 1: Einleitung von Martin Wagendorfer. 1. Redaktion ed. von Julia Knödler. Teil 2: 2./3, ed. Martin Wagendorfer. 2 vols. Hannover, 2009. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptorum Rerum Germanicarum. Nova Series; 24)

HB = Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini: *Historia Bohemica*. Herausg. J. Hejnic & H. Rothe. 2 vols. Köln, 2005. (Bausteine zur slavischen Philologie und Kulturgeschichte. Neue Folge. Reihe B; 20)

MA = Pius II: *Orationes politicae et ecclesiasticae*. Ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi. 3 vols. Lucca: Benedini, 1755-1759

MPL = Migne, Jacques-Paul: *Patrologia latina*. 217 vols. 1841-1865

RTA = Deutsche Reichstagsakten

WO = *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini*. Hrsg. von Rudolf Wolkan. 3 vols. Wien, 1909-1918

Decretum = *Decretum magistri Gratiani*. Ed. Lipsiensis secunda. Eds. A.L. Richter & A. Friedberg. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1879

Epistolarium = Eneae Silvii Piccolominei *Epistolarium Saeculare*. Ed. A. van Heck. Città del Vaticano, 2007

Rainaldus = *Annales ecclesiastici ab anno MCXCVIII ubi Card. Baronius desinit*. Auct. Odoricus Raynaldus. Tom. XVIII-XIX. Roma: Varesius, 1659-1663

Reject = *Reject Aeneas, accept Pius : Selected letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II)*.
Intr. and transl. by T.M. Izbicki *et al.* Washington, D.C., 2006

II. TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Oratoribus ducis Britanniae

[1] {160r} Britones hodie Romanae sedi nobisque praestant oboedientiam, genus acre virum, nobilitate ac virtute excellens¹. Non omnes norunt, qui sint, et unde venerint, id nunc a nobis {160v} explicandum est. Sic enim plus ponderis habere videbitur, quod in praesentiarum gestum est per vos, insignes oratores dilecti filii nostri Johannis, Britanniae ducis et nobilissimi et potentissimi. Britones populi Galliae sunt inter Guasconiam et Normandiam ad Oceanum siti, quae loca Veneti quondam tenuerunt, ex quorum nomine civitas usque in praesentem diem non ignobilis extat Venetensis appellata, quae olim tantae potentiae fuit, ut iter Julii Caesaris in Britanniam remorari atque interrumpere conata sit, quamvis frustra: victa² est³ tandem classe Caesaris et armis. Ab hac gente putat Strabo Venetos nostros⁴ terra marique potentissimos, qui Sinum maris Adriatici incolunt, factis et fama clarissimos, ortum ducere et genus esse Gallorum, sicut Insubres, Cenomanos, Boios, et alios, a quibus magna pars et ipse flos Italiae⁵ Cisalpina Gallia dicta est. Alii Venetos ab Enetis vocatos et ex Paflagonia in Italiam Antenore duce profectos arbitrantur. Sed in tanta vetustate satis est conjecturam ostendisse⁶.

¹ excellere G

² vita J

³ enim *add.* J

⁴ Venetos nostros : noster Venetos G

⁵ Asiae G

⁶ conjecturam ostendisse : ostendisse conjecturam G

To the ambassadors of the Duke of Bretagne

[1] Today the Britons declare their obedience to the Roman See and to Us. They are a fierce race of men, excelling in nobility, courage and strength¹. We shall now explain who they are and where they come from as you may not all be aware of it. Thus all will know the importance of what you have done now, distinguished ambassadors of Our beloved son, Jean,² noble and mighty Duke of Brittany.

The Britons are a people of Gaul, situated at the Ocean between Gascony and Normandy. This area was once occupied by the *Veneti*³ from whom derives the name of the noble city *Venetensis*.⁴ Once it was so powerful that it attempted to prevent and interrupt Julius Caesar's⁵ expedition to Britannia⁶ - in vain, however, for in the end it was defeated by Caesar's fleet and army. From this people, Strabo believes,⁷ descend our own Venetians, powerful both on land and at sea, who now live in the bay of the Adriatic Sea, noble in deed and fame. Thus the Venetians are a Gaulish people like the *Insubres*,⁸ the *Cenomanni*,⁹ the *Boii*,¹⁰ and other peoples, and therefore a large part and indeed the flower of Italy is called the *Cisalpine Gaul*.¹¹ Others believe that the Venetians have their name from the *Eneti*¹² and came from Paphlagonia to Italy under the leadership of Antenor¹³. In matters so old one must rely on conjecture.

¹ "virtute"

² Francois II Bretagne (1433-1488): Duke of Bretagne from 1458 to his death

³ Veneti: a seafaring Celtic people who lived in the Brittany peninsula (France). They gave their name to the modern city of Vannes

⁴ Vannes

⁵ Julius Caesar, Gaius (100-44 BCE): Roman general and statesman

⁶ 55/54 BC

⁷ Strabo (ca. 64 - c. 24): Greek geographer, philosopher, and historian

⁸ The Insubres or Insubri: a Gaulish population settled in Insubria, in what is now Lombardy. They were the founders of Milan. Though of Celtic origin, they were most likely the result of the fusion of pre-existing Ligurian, Celtic, Etruscan, and "Italic" population Gaulish tribes who had come from what is now southern France

⁹ The Cenomani: a Celtic people, whose territory corresponded generally to Maine

¹⁰ The Boii: a Gallic tribe

¹¹ Cisalpine Gaul (*Gallia Cisalpina*): the part of Northern Italy inhabited by Celts (Gauls) during the 4th and 3rd centuries BC.

¹² Eneti or Heneti or Enete: the name of an ancient region close to Paphlagonia mentioned by Strabo whose original inhabitants had disappeared by his time

¹³ Antenor: (Greek myth.) counselor to King Priam of Troy in the legendary accounts of the Trojan War

[2] Britones autem insulam Oceani coluerunt, quam nostri Britanniam, nonnulli Graecorum Albion vocavere, et alterum paene orbem esse crediderunt, priusquam Caesaris armis quaesita et edomita cognosceretur. Appellati sunt Britones, ut eorum tradunt historiae, a Bruto quodam, qui deleto Ilio, toto profugus pelago, navigio tandem in hanc insulam appulit, et eam primus¹ excolens a se nominavit, cujus² posteri usque ad Julium invicti³ manserunt. Et quamvis tunc et postea Romanae potentiae ac {161r} virtuti cesserunt, non tamen insulam amisere⁴, cum Romani tributo contenti nihil amplius exigerent. At⁵ languente Romana republica⁶ cum Britones descivissent et inter se dissiderent, et nunc Pictones, nunc Scoti, nunc alii barbari insulam vexarent.

¹ primum J

² cui G

³ intacti G

⁴ amiserunt G, J

⁵ ac G

⁶ Romana republica : republica Romana G

[2] The Britons once occupied that isle in the Ocean which we call Britannia, and which many Greeks called Albion.¹ Before Caesar's armies went there and subjugated it, it almost appeared to be another world. As their own historians tell it, the Britons were named after a certain Brutus who after the destruction of Troy fled over the sea and came to this island by boat. He was the first to cultivate it and named it after himself, and his descendants stayed there, undefeated until [the arrival of] Julius. And though they had - then and afterwards - to submit to Roman power and strength, they did not lose the island for the Romans were content with receiving tribute and demanded nothing more. But when the Roman state faltered, the Britons rebelled and started to fight between themselves, and the island was attacked sometimes by the Picts,² sometimes by the Scots,³ and sometimes by other barbarians.

¹ Albion: the oldest known, Greek, name of the island of Great Britain

² The Picts: a tribal confederation of peoples who lived in eastern and northern Scotland during the Late Iron Age and Early Medieval periods. They are thought to have been ethnolinguistically Celtic

³ The Scots: an ethnic group native to Scotland. Historically, they emerged from an amalgamation of two Celtic peoples—the Picts and Gaels—who founded the Kingdom of Scotland in the 9th century

[3] Saxones in auxilium vocati, sicut Beda refert, cum insulae opulentiam cognovissent, non solum hostes, sed eos quoque, quibus auxilium praestaturi venerant, armis ejecerunt, et cum ipsi ex angulo quodam¹ Saxoniae fuissent² egressi sese Anglos et insulam Angliam usque in hoc aevum appellari³ voluerunt. Britones autem fortunae cedentes in Galliam confugere et Venetorum - ut diximus - sedes tenuere, in quibus invicti usque hodie⁴ perseverant et dulci libertate fruuntur, viri fortes et armorum et litterarum periti, quos diu ante Clodoveum⁵, qui primus ex Francorum regibus lumen fidei⁶ suscepisse⁷ fertur, Christianae religionis sacramentis initiatos perhibent. Hi, postquam semel Romanae sedis matris suae suxerunt ubera⁸ et lac divinae legis bibere didicerint⁹, numquam apostatarunt, numquam matri recalcitrarunt, numquam peregrina dogmata imbuerunt, numquam alienos scripturae sensus secuti ut plerique, qui omni vento doctrinae¹⁰ agitantur. Solida et stabilis et verax est Britonum¹¹ natio, et sicut modo monstratum est sine fictione suis superioribus et fidelis et obsequens.

[4] Laudamus igitur hoc genus hominum et ducem vestrum, oratores insignes, summo dignum honore¹² censemus, qui non solum more majorum oboedientiam et reverentiam {161v} primae sedi exhibet, sed pro nostro desiderio adversus Turcos consilia et auxilia pollicetur. Magnificimus hunc principem, qui quamvis securissimus et ab omni Turcorum invasione nec sibi timere habet, tanto terrarum spatio disjunctus, hostem tamen fidei horret, et aliorum saluti consulere praesto est. Deus optimus¹³ hanc suam pietatem et religionem, ut¹⁴ non dubitamus, dignis praemiis prosequetur. Nos certe cum venerabilibus fratribus nostris sanctae Romanae ecclesiae cardinalibus nobilitati suae suorumque commoditati semper studiosi erimus ac propitii. Amen¹⁵.

¹ *omit.* G

² *omit.* G

³ vocari G

⁴ in hanc diem G

⁵ Dodoneum G

⁶ lumen fidei : fidei lumen G

⁷ sumpsisse G

⁸ suxerunt ubera : ubera suxerunt G

⁹ didicerunt G

¹⁰ vento doctrinae : doctrinae vento G

¹¹ Britonorum G

¹² honorem G

¹³ qui verum *add.* H; qui ut *add.* J

¹⁴ *omit.* H, J

¹⁵ *omit.* G

[3] According to Bede,¹ the Saxons² were called in to help, but when they became aware of the island's richness, they expelled not only the enemies, but also those they had come to help. Since they had themselves come from a corner, "*angulum*", of Saxony, they decided to call themselves the Angles,³ "*Angli*" and the island "*Anglia*", and under that name they are still known. But the Britons, bowing to fortune, fled to Gaul and settled - as already said - in the region of the *Veneti*.⁴ There they have lived and still live, unvanquished and enjoying sweet liberty. They are a strong people, skilled both in war and in letters. They were initiated into the sacraments of the Christian religion long before Clovis,⁵ said to be the first Frankish king to receive the light of Faith. After the Britons first sucked the breasts of their mother, the Roman See, and learnt to drink the milk of divine law, they have never fallen from the Faith, they have never opposed their mother, they have never taken in foreign teachings, and they have never followed unorthodox⁶ interpretations of Scripture, something that many others have done, stirred up by every wind of doctrine.⁷ Solid, stable and truthful is the Briton nation, and - as it has now been shown - it is genuinely faithful and obedient towards its superiors.

[4] Following the custom of their ancestors, they declare their obedience and reverence towards the First See and moreover, in accordance with Our wishes, they promise their counsel and assistance in the matter [of the crusade] against the Turks. Therefore, distinguished ambassadors, We praise your people and your duke, and we consider them worthy of the highest honours. We applaud this prince: safe from all invasions of the Turks and not having to fear for himself since his lands are far away from theirs, he nonetheless abhors them as enemies of the Faith and is ready to contribute to the safety of others. We do not doubt that the Best God will reward his piety and religious devotion as he merits. And We, certainly, together with Our brethren the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, shall always favour and advance this noble [prince] and the interests of his [people]. Amen.

¹ Bede the Venerable [Beda Venerabilis] (672/673-735): English monk. He is well known as an author and scholar, and his most famous work was *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (The Ecclesiastical History of the English People). Saint. Doctor of the Church

² The Saxons: a confederation of Germanic tribes on the North German Plain. They settled in large parts of Great Britain in the early Middle Ages and formed part of the merged group of Anglo-Saxons who eventually organised the first united Kingdom of England

³ The Angles: one of the main Germanic peoples who settled in Britain in the post-Roman period. They founded several of the kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England, and their name is the root of the name England. The name comes from the district of Angeln

⁴ The Bretons migrated from southwestern Great Britain to Brittany mainly in the 5th and 6th, fleeing the Anglosaxons

⁵ Clovis (c. 466-511): first King of the Franks. Converted to Christianity in 496

⁶ "alienos"

⁷ Like the Wycliffians in England and the Hussites in Bohemia