

Luke Wadding and Irish Diplomatic Activity in Seventeenth-Century Rome

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Abstract:

The aim of this article is to provide a new assessment of the diplomatic role played by the most prominent Irishman in seventeenth-century Rome: the Franciscan Luke Wadding. Hitherto, the available analyses on Wadding have focused on his literary and theological activity, with the consequence that, with the exception of one old essay, the 'diplomatic' role he played for the Irish Confederates during the years from 1641 to 1649 has been neglected. Indeed, during this crucial period, he acted as the agent of the Irish Confederates at the papal curia, thus strengthening his role as the most influential Irishman in Rome. The article will illustrate how this appointment placed Wadding under growing pressure from Ireland, and how this led him to play a seminal role in shaping or influencing the decisions taken by the Holy See concerning his country.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Ireland, Irish Confederates, Rome, Wadding

1. The Beginning of Wadding's 'Diplomatic' Role

In his book *The Old English in Ireland*, Aidan Clarke asserted that Luke Wadding's capacity to understand the events in Ireland during the first half of the seventeenth century must have been limited because he left the country at an early age never to return (Clarke 2000, 24). After Clarke's critical assessment, Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin remarked how the real extent of Wadding's diplomatic activity in Rome has still to be demonstrated (Ó hAnnracháin 2006, 407).

Both these statements seem too simplistic since they do not do justice to Wadding's complexity. A quick glimpse at his career in Rome clearly reveals

an exceptionally gifted man who succeeded in obtaining and playing a series of prominent roles within the papal curia. Born in 1588 to a Waterford merchant family, Wadding entered the Irish College, Lisbon, in 1603. He joined the Franciscan order in 1604, entering the friary of the Immaculate Conception in Matozinhos, where he was ordained in 1613, teaching theology there until 1618 (Harold 1931, 1-17).

Following his arrival in Rome in 1618 as the official theologian of the Spanish embassy, Wadding had a meteoric career. Between the 1620s and 1630s, he was appointed chief compiler of the *Annales Minorum*, a general history of the entire Franciscan order since its foundation, and was also consultant of the Congregation of the Index, consultant at the Sacred Congregation “de Propaganda Fide”, the Roman ministry founded in 1622 to oversee missionary activity in Protestant and non-Christian regions, founder, in 1625, of Saint Isidore’s College, the first Irish Franciscan college in the city, and co-founder in 1628, with cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi (1595-1632), of the Irish College for the training of the secular clergy (Harold 1931, 63-65; Jennings 1953, 310-311)¹.

Given the prestigious roles to which Wadding was appointed, it is hardly surprising that, in October 1641, he was the first Irishman in Rome to be informed of the outbreak of the Ulster rebellion. Despite lacking a professional diplomatic background, Wadding soon displayed a commitment to supporting to the Irish cause by playing a dual role: reporting updated accounts of the military operations of the Irish insurgents, and lobbying Antonio Barberini (1607-1671), cardinal protector of Ireland, to fund the Irish cause and dispatch an agent to survey the situation. Wadding’s efforts resulted in cardinal Barberini’s agreeing in March 1642 to grant 12.000 crowns to the Irish insurgents for the purchase of artillery and ammunitions (Historical Manuscripts Commission, shortened in HMC Franciscan 1906, 109-111, 113-114, 127-129; Lenihan 2001, 51-53)².

The importance of Wadding’s role grew at the same pace as the Irish insurgents evolved into a proper political body. On 7 June 1642, a number of lay leaders and Catholic bishops met in Kilkenny to draw up an oath of association which paved the way for the formation of the Irish Confederates,

¹ Archivio della Sacra Congregazione “de Propaganda Fide”, Vatican City (hereafter APF), Acta 3, f. 1; Archivio Segreto Vaticano (hereafter ASV), Archivio Boncompagni-Ludovisi, Armadio IX, protocollo 317, part IV, no. 1, ff. 458-465; no. 2, ff. 466-469; for the different roles that Wadding had at Propaganda Fide, see APF, Acta 7, ff. 179v.-182r., 254v., 307-309; 10, ff. 79, 114, 156-158v., 160-162, 178v.-185, 199-201, 323-324; 12, ff. 154v.-159, 180-183; 16, ff. 9v., 108v.

² Luke Wadding to Antonio Barberini (January 1642), Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (hereafter BAV), Vatican City, Barberini Latini (hereafter BL), Ms 6,483, f. 4; Wadding to Barberini (February 1642), Rome, BAV, BL, Ms 6,485, f. 11r.

the birth of which was officially sanctioned by the general assembly held at Kilkenny from 24 October to 21 November 1642 (Ó Siochrú 1999, 42-44). Official recognition of Wadding's diplomatic role came about in early December 1642 when the Irish Confederates appointed him official agent and procurator for their affairs in Rome (Bellings 1882-1891 [1641-1649], II, 117-118). Wadding's appointment was part of the strategy of the council of the Confederates which established a network of agents at the main European courts in order to seek external recognition and support for their rebellion. The Confederate 'diplomatic corps' relied on a series of prominent Irish clerics who, in most cases, had been educated in continental Europe. Apart from Wadding, this diplomatic network included the Franciscan Hugh Burke in Brussels, his confrere Francis Magennis in Madrid, and the Jesuit Matthew O'Hartegan (1600-1666) in Paris (Ohlmeyer 1995, 91-95).

At a first glance, the establishment of this diplomatic network had two concrete advantages: the first was that it relied on a series of trustworthy clerics devoted to the Irish cause; the second was that they did not require the expensive means of support needed by professional ambassadors. Yet, at the same time, there was one major disadvantage concerning their non-professional status: they lacked practical experience in diplomacy (Frigo 1999; Onnekink, Rommelse 2011). In Wadding's case, this problem was compounded by Rome's distance from commercial routes linking Ireland with the Iberian Peninsula and Spanish Flanders; the city did not have an established Irish lay community whose members might funnel first-hand reports.

In its early stages Wadding's diplomatic activity seemed characterized by a sense of prudence that took into account his distance from Ireland. In the early months of 1642, he was the first Irish cleric in continental Europe to feel the need to dispatch a secret papal agent to Ireland in order to survey the situation and achieve union among the Irish rebels. Wadding initially put forward the appointment of Hugh Burke as papal agent because of his "authority and credit with the lord chiefs" (HMC Franciscan 1906, 129).

The position of papal agent was entrusted to Pierfrancesco Scarampi (1596-1656), an Italian Oratorian priest. Wadding was instrumental in his selection and appointment. Indeed in early March 1643, he wrote to Scarampi to invite him to come to Rome and prepare for his mission to Ireland³. Scarampi's mission to Ireland was also a further demonstration of Wadding's ability to use his influence in Rome to provide financial support for the Irish Confederates. A tangible example of this was the 30,000 crowns with which Scarampi arrived in Ireland and which Wadding had collected from the Barberini, Pamphilj, Spada and other Roman noble families (Meehan 1846, 73).

³ Wadding to Cardinal Antonio Barberini (4 March 1643), Rome, BAV, BL, Ms 6,485, f. 47r.

2. *A Difficult Task*

In the period 1643 to 1644, Wadding was exposed to growing pressure from the Irish Confederates who constantly appealed him to urge the papal curia to provide more and more financial and military support. Wadding also began to assist the Irish clerics close to or associated with the Supreme Council of the Irish Confederates who came to Rome (Bellings 1882-1891 [1641-1649], III, 99).

Wadding's mounting responsibilities were a direct consequence of the confidence that the Irish Confederates placed in Wadding. A clear example of this was the Confederates' appeal to Urban VIII (1568-1644), in mid-June 1644, asking him to confer the title of cardinal on Wadding. Their request was motivated by a "view to further advance the Catholic faith", and as a way of acknowledging the merits of Wadding who "has ever cherished the Irish with paternal affection" (Bellings 1882-1891 [1641-1649], III, 194). While this request might have strengthened Wadding's prestige in Rome, it brought no concrete benefits for the Irish Confederates. Indeed the capacity of Wadding to lobby for the Irish cause clashed with the costly war for the conquest of the duchy of Castro which drained most of the resources of the Holy See (Ó hAnracháin 1997, 103).

A noteworthy feature which characterized the Confederates' appeals and requests to Rome is that, apart from Wadding, they never sought to contact other Irish clerics who resided in the city where, by the early 1640s, there were two Irish colleges. Possibly their decision was influenced by the detachment displayed by the Irish clerical community in Rome towards the Irish situation. In the case of the secular seminary, which since 1635 had been under the control of the Jesuits, none of its residents played any role in Rome for the Irish Confederates. This contrasts with the fact that, since its outbreak, the Jesuit Superior generals had taken a keen interest in the Irish rebellion about which they were informed thanks to reports sent by members of the Order both at home in Ireland and in continental Europe⁴. Even the members of Saint Isidore's showed no interest in supporting the Confederates' appeals, or in increasing the level of Irish lobbying within the papal curia. Only of a few of the students trained at Saint Isidore's played a proactive role for the Irish Confederates. Yet their experiences were simply isolated attempts which developed outside Rome and the official diplomatic network of the Irish Confederates (HMC Franciscan 1906, 183, 194, 219).

⁴ Robert Nugent to Muzio Vitelleschi (24 March 1642), Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome (hereafter ARSI), Fondo Anglia, 6a, f. 12; Nugent to Vitelleschi (24 April 1642), ARSI, Fondo Anglia, 6a, f. 14; Matthew O'Hartegan to Vitelleschi (2 June 1642), ARSI, Fondo Anglia, 6a, f. 17; O'Hartegan to Vitelleschi (16 June 1642), ARSI, Fondo Anglia, 6a, f. 18; O'Hartegan to Vitelleschi (5 August 1642), ARSI, Fondo Anglia, 6a, ff. 20-24.

More broadly, the only significant change within the Irish diplomatic framework in Rome took place in mid-June 1644 when the council of the Irish Confederates appointed Edmund O'Dwyer, a secular priest, assistant to Wadding in order to help him "in promoting our affaires in the Courte of Rome" (Bellings 1882-1891 [1641-1649], III, 182-183). This appointment was made by the Confederates who simply fulfilled a request advanced by Wadding himself who deemed O'Dwyer a worthy and experienced cleric and who, since the early 1630s, had acted as Roman agent of the Connacht bishops (Jennings 1953, 606, 612-613). However this co-operation was short-lived because in the spring of 1645 O'Dwyer returned to Ireland following his appointment as bishop of Limerick⁵.

It is striking to note how, after O'Dwyer's departure, none of the most prominent members of the papal curia sought to provide another assistant to support Wadding. This clashed with the strategy of the Irish Confederates who, in late 1644, sought to increase their level of diplomacy in Rome and in the Catholic courts of Europe through the appointment of Richard Bellings (1613-1677) as their ambassador (Bellings 1882-1891 [1641-1649], IV, 69-70)⁶.

However Bellings' appointment, and in particular his diplomatic mission to Rome, in early March 1645, would be a source of strong disappointment for the Irish Confederates for two crucial reasons. The first was that Bellings did not succeed in convincing the Pope to grant the half a million crowns which the Confederates estimated necessary in order to win the war. Lack of evidence prevents an assessment of whether Wadding, who hosted Bellings at Saint Isidore's and presented him to the Pope, had any responsibility for the failed outcome of this mission (Bellings 1654, 128; O'Ferrall, O'Connell 1932-1949, I, 701). Despite Wadding's influence and prestige in Rome, the financial request put forward by the Irish Confederates was clearly excessive for the Holy See whose finances had dramatically worsened in the 1640s with a debt balance of more than 50,000 crowns (Reinhard 1984, 361).

The second reason which greatly disappointed the Irish Confederates was that, during Bellings's mission to Rome, Innocent X (1574-1655) decided to appoint as nuncio to Ireland Gianbattista Rinuccini (1592-1653), who had been archbishop of Fermo since 1625 (Kybal, Incisa della Rocchetta 1943-1946, I, 700-701; Ó hAnnracháin 2002, 82-113). The Pope's decision shocked Bellings. At the same time, it is difficult to gauge whether or not, and how, Wadding influenced Rinuccini's appointment. Given that he personally selected Scarampi, it seems natural to suppose that he was the logical promoter of the nunciature.

⁵ *Dataria Apostolica*, ASV, *Processus Datariae*, vol. 24, ff. 29r.-36v.

⁶ Supreme Council to Innocent X (23 November 1644), ASV, *Segreteria di Stato*, *Particolari*, 17, f. 389; Supreme Council to Cardinals of Propaganda Fide, APF, *Scritture Originali Riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali*, 143, f. 259rv.

However there are few sources which indicate that Wadding was instrumental in Innocent's choice and decision. The only two hints which might prove Wadding's influence on the nunciature's genesis come from Francis Harold (d. 1685) and O'Hartegan, respectively his nephew and cousin. In his biography of his uncle, Harold clearly stated that "Luke procured and obtained the honour of an apostolic nuncio" (Harold 1931, 126). O'Hartegan was, on the other hand, vaguer: he declared, in a letter sent to the Council of the Irish Confederates in mid-November 1644, that Wadding had informed him that "his Holiness hath a favour in readiness for you, and intends to add fare greater" (Bellings 1882-1891 [1641-1649], IV, 61-62). A further element which might reveal Wadding's potential influence emerges in the instructions given by the Pope to Rinuccini. The *incipit* of the papal document left no doubt that the key aim of Rinuccini was "to restore and re-establish the public exercise of the Catholic religion in the island of Ireland", thus demonstrating how the nuncio's mission had to reform the Irish Catholic church according to a Tridentine model (Ó hAnnracháin 1993, 78). Yet the supposed influence played by Wadding on the drafting of these instructions also revealed his isolation from Ireland. Wadding's distance from Irish opinion emerged in the "Istruzione", where he described Sir Thomas Wentworth (1593-1641), lord deputy of Ireland from 1632, in laudatory terms, a judgment which clashed with his broad unpopularity among Irish Catholics (Perceval-Maxwell 1994, 211-212; Clarke 2000, 124). The only certain role played by Wadding was to seek funding. Proof of his commitment were the 26,000 crowns he collected, half of the sum handed over to Rinuccini (Harold 1931, 126). A further demonstration of Wadding's commitment to providing a steady financial support for the Irish Confederates emerges in the plea that he addressed to cardinal Giulio Roma (1584-1652) in mid-December 1644. Wadding clearly stated that "it is time in which these 10,000 [crowns] will do and will be worth more than other 100,000 [crowns]". He concluded his letter exhorting the cardinal that "I return to beg His Reverence that he admit to His generous and Christian consideration these my pious and clear reasons and, by doing so, he will give example to others to imitate them"⁷.

In the early stage of the nunciature, the relationship between the nuncio and Wadding seems to have been smooth. The latter appreciated the way in which the former "had entered in these business with noble spirit", despite there having been "different opinions and a different language" (O'Ferrall, O'Connell 1932-1949, II, 208-209, 253). Equally the Irish Confederates con-

⁷ Wadding to Cardinal Giulio Roma (12 December 1644), Rome, Archivio Doria Pamphilj, Archiviolo, 196, ff. 328r., 328v., 329r., 329v.: "ch'è il tempo, nel quale questi 10.000 milia (?) faranno e valeranno piu che altri cento millia; Di nuovo torno a supplicar a v. Ra. Voglia admettere alla sua generosa e Christiana considerazione queste mie chiare e pie ragioni, e facci di maniera, che dia essemplio alli altri de imitarli".

tinued to trust Wadding in whom “implicit trust may be placed” (Bellings 1882-1891 [1641-1649], V, 357-358).

The implicit trust placed in Wadding meant that, in 1646, the Irish Confederates still hoped for substantial financial support from the Holy See. He clearly understood how this was crucial for supporting the Irish rebellion. Throughout that year he sought to collect all the funds which might be available from the Pope and Cardinal Camillo Francesco Maria Pamphili (1622-1666). Once again the level of funding obtained through Wadding’s intercession was outstanding if we consider that, by the end of November 1646, the Pope promised to send 75,000 crowns to Rinuccini (Aiazzi 1844, XXXV; O’Ferrall, O’Connell 1932-1949, II, 380)⁸.

3. An Unsuccessful Outcome

Wadding’s commitment to the Irish cause appeared indisputable but, from the second half of 1646, Rinuccini and his Gaelic supporters began to question his loyalty to the Irish Confederates. The early suspicions of the nuncio, who deemed Wadding a secret informer of James Butler (1610-1688), the Protestant earl of Ormond and chief commander of the royalist forces in Ireland, soon turned into open hostility (O’Ferrall, O’Connell 1932-1949, IV, 240). The accusations against Wadding grew exponentially and targeted him for Bellings’s unsuccessful mission to Rome in 1645, and for being the supposed promoter of a secret plot through which Owen Roe O’Neill (1590-1649), general of the Ulster army, would be named king of Ireland (Bellings 1654, 182-183; Aiazzi 1844, 419; O’Ferrall, O’Connell 1932-1949, III, 60-61; IV, 237).

These accusations, which are not supported by any evidence, were influenced by the context of disillusionment and disunity, which fragmented the Irish Confederates in Ireland. The lack of support promised by Innocent X, combined with the utter failure of Rinuccini to understand the need to deal with the Protestants, worsened the situation with the consequence that Wadding’s role as the Confederates’ agent in Rome lost importance (Corish 1976, 324; Ó hAnnracháin 1993, 84; Lenihan 2001, 99-107).

The Inchiquin truce of 1648 between the Irish Confederates and the English royalist forces and the subsequent censures of Rinuccini against those who agreed to the treaty brought Wadding’s diplomatic role in Rome to a drastic conclusion (Ó Siochrú 1999, 170-204). Indeed he was fully engulfed by the harsh criticisms of the nuncio who openly accused him of having inspired “with all trickery” a letter from cardinal Giulio Roma (1584-1652) critical

⁸ “Viaggio in Irlanda di Dionisio Massari”, APF, *Miscellanea Varie*, 9, ff. 290-293, 297.

of Rinuccini's censures (O'Ferrall, O'Connell 1932-1949, III, 685, 687). In 1648 Wadding was also accused, by friars supporting the nuncio, of being involved in a scheme, elaborated by Ormond and supported by Pierre Marchant, the Franciscan commissary general with responsibility for Ireland, to divide the Irish Franciscan province into two. Once again, lack of documentation hampers any assessment of Wadding's role: did he deliberately choose to plot against his country and the Irish Franciscan province (Gilbert 1879-1880, II, 220; O'Ferrall, O'Connell 1932-1949, IV, 53-54; Mooney 1957, 36-37)?

What is certain is that, despite the breakdown of the Irish Confederates and the chaotic situation brought about by Rinuccini's censures, Wadding continued to support the Irish cause. A tangible example of this was the animated appeal that he drafted to Innocent X, during the spring of 1648, and in which he asked for the continuation of papal support for the Irish rebels (HMC Franciscan 1906, 247). There is no evidence to demonstrate whether or not this appeal was actually delivered to the Pope who, by 1648, was no longer displaying any enthusiasm for, or interest in, the Irish scene (Ó hAnracháin 2002, 207-208).

The dissolution of the Irish Confederates and the unsuccessful conclusion of Rinuccini's mission in 1649 was the prelude to a gloomy period not only for the Irish Catholics at home, but also for Wadding in Rome where, from the late 1640s, he was no longer consulted on Irish affairs (Hynes 1932, 264, footnote 2). Furthermore, Wadding was also severely opposed at Saint Isidore's where a group of his confreres openly denounced him for Rinuccini's failure and for the disunity among the Irish Confederates. These accusations led to a rapid waning of Wadding's prestige in Rome. For his part, Wadding, in a letter written in 1654, simply stated that his activity had always been appreciated and that "all the works I did can testify it for me"⁹.

4. *Conclusions*

In conclusion, analysis of Wadding's diplomatic activity in Rome can be divided into two periods: the first from 1642 to 1645, and the second from 1646 to 1649. The first period was characterized by the steady relationships between the Irish Confederates and Wadding. During this phase, he made many efforts to promote the requests for financial assistance that arrived from Ireland. His commitment was revealed in his ability to collect 68,000 crowns in three years, a sum which no other Irish cleric in continental Europe succeeded in obtaining within such a short period. His devotion to the Irish cause met with the approval of the Irish Confederates who, during the

⁹ Wadding to Pedro Manero (23 August 1654), Rome, Archivio del Collegio di Sant'Isidoro, Section W 8, no. 9.

years from 1642 to 1645, always demonstrated their appreciation of Wadding's conduct and lobbying in Rome.

In contrast, the second phase of Wadding's diplomatic activity witnessed a quick deterioration in his relationship with the Irish Confederates. Lack of papal support, combined with inner divisions among the Irish Confederates, led Wadding into a situation which was impossible to manage and which drastically worsened following the arrival of Rinuccini in Ireland. While it was he who initially conceived the project of sending a nuncio, Wadding seems not to have had any role in the selection and appointment of Rinuccini, a prelate who, prior to his departure, had never had any contact with a Protestant (O'Connor 2008, 14-23).

Being the leading and most influential Irishman in Rome played against Wadding who, given his many tasks in the city, was embroiled in a dramatic and confused context in which he had to defend, simultaneously, both Irish and Roman interests. The fact that, in his diplomatic activity, he was not supported by other Irish clerics meant that Wadding was the only man in charge, and thus both the first to be praised and the first to be blamed. What might be questionable about his diplomatic activity is the way in which he acted, but not what he did: the latter was dictated by the genuine desire of a mature man to assist the mother country he had left as a child.

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