



“Introducción”

p. 7-12

Las bulas alejandrinas de 1493 y la teoría política del papado medieval. Estudio de la supremacía papal sobre islas 1091-1493

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INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure that I comply with Dr. Luis Weckmann's request for a few introductory words to his present book, the beginnings and growth of which I have followed with increasing interest. In the course of my own studies I had become curious about the history of the papal claim to island sovereignty; but when suggesting this subject to Dr. Weckmann as a theme for his doctoral dissertation, I was hardly aware of the possible returns which such a study might eventually yield, nor of the great number of new aspects which it might open up. What I had in mind was a simple investigation of the origin and the chief applications of what Dr. Weckmann so felicitously has called the "Omni-Insular Doctrine". It was Dr. Weckmann's final idea to combine this theory with the famous bull of Pope Alexander VI, of May 4, 1493, by which the great Borgia Pope, as the saying goes, had parcelled out to the great sea-powers of his day, Spain and Portugal, a newly discovered world which did not belong to him. Dr. Weckmann has thus given to the problem, from the outset, an unexpected slant by which a new perspective was gained. At the same time he gave to his subject an importance, especially in view of the Americas, which exceeded by far a purely factual or antiquarian collection and evaluation of places relevant to that subject.

It is always pleasant and gratifying for a teacher to see the pupil "catching fire". I happily recall the numerous conversations, the considerable number of telephone calls, and the notes placed on my desk by the means of which Dr. Weckmann kept me *au courant* and informed me about his most recent discoveries and the progress of his work. Also it was pleasing to notice that the initial impetus never died away, and to watch the new "Explorer of Islands" shuffling through the aisles of the stacks in the excellently equipped University Library, or murmuring: "There are



too many islands on this globe”. Owing to his scholarly passion and assiduity, Dr. Weckmann was able to accomplish his thesis in three semesters out of the four which he was granted to spend as a visiting Graduate Student at the University of California; and it was due to the solid training which previously he had received at the University of Mexico that he mastered so quickly and easily the superabundant material, and composed his thesis in a clear and attractive form.

The results of Dr. Weckmann’s thesis are so obvious they hardly require an interpretation. One of his principle discoveries—Pope Alexander’s document as an effluence of the Omni-Insular Doctrine—is happily countenanced by the investigations of a Swedish scholar, Dr. E. Staedler, notice of which Dr. Weckmann could take only on the day of his departure from Berkeley ¹. Dr. Staedler has demonstrated strikingly that the Holy See itself considered the charter of 1493 an instrument of feudal investiture. For in the papal archives Pope Alexander’s bull was registered finally in the *Leonicus Collection*, a collection compiled by Leonicus of Este at the orders of Pope Paul V (1605-1621) to contain excluded such documents (*ca.* 1000 items) as referred to the secular feudal overlordship of the Holy See over various countries, beginning with the pontificate of Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085). The incorporation of the Alexandrine bull into that collection proves beyond doubt that the papal administration itself had deemed the “Americas” feudally dependent on the Holy See. Now, quite independently, Dr. Weckmann has proved that this papal claim to overlordship derived from the Omni-Insular Doctrine. Hence, the investigations of the two scholars support each other most pleasingly: the “Americas” were treated as an “Island”: as an island they were feudally dependent on Rome, and the acts were registered accordingly. From the papal point of view, therefore, and on the basis of the Omni-Insular Doctrine, the Holy See was fully entitled to invest the crowns of Spain and Portugal with the newly discovered lands. This elucidates the legal theory supporting the investiture of the two kingdoms. It shows also the

¹ E. STAEDLER, “Die Urkunden Alexanders VI. zur westindischen Investitur der Krone Spaniens von 1493”, *Archiv für Urkundenforschung*, XV, 1938, pp. 145 ff. and “Die Cruciata Martins V. vom 4. April 1418”, *ibid.*, XVII, 1942, pp. 304 ff. Owing to their war, those volumes of the German periodical became accessible to the users of the University Library only a few months ago.

flaw in the common opinion which falsely alleges that the Borgia Pope awarded something that did not belong to him. The studies of Dr. Staedler and Dr. Weckmann have settled once and for all, it seems to me, the problem of Pope Alexander's famous line of demarcation. The student of the Era of Discoveries will have to take those conclusions into consideration. That Brazil today speaks Portuguese and that the Philippines became Spanish was—so the student will realize—an effluence of the Omni-Insular Doctrine and, in the last analysis, a result of the “Donation of Constantine”, of a forgery of the eighth century.

Dr. Weckmann has limited his study to the Middle Ages. For that reason we find only a few notes indicating the effect of the papal theory in later times. However, as late as 1885, Spain, in the course of her dispute with Germany concerning the Carolinas, invoked, indeed for the last time, the validity of Pope Alexander's line of partition and its antipodal version regarding the Pacific, when, at Bismarck's suggestion, the whole issue was submitted to the arbitration of Pope Leo XIII.

In addition to clarifying the legal background and the premises of the Alexandrine bull, Dr. Weckmann has made a remarkable contribution to mediaeval historical studies in general. In some respects the student of mediaeval thought and political theories is likely to profit most. Professor Percy Ernst Schramm, in a recent study on *sacerdotium* and *regnum* in their mutual exchange of prerogatives, has pointed out to what extent the *imitatio sacerdotii* on the part of the secular power, and the *imitatio imperii* on the part of the papacy, have been among the leading ideas of mediaeval political thought². To this very complex problem Dr. Weckmann's present study has added some remarkable new evidence. He has convincingly shown that the papal claim to omni-insular suzerainty had certain antecedents in Roman imperial law. He has further shown how that papal adaptation of imperial law falls in with the general curial trends to imperializing the papacy, and how this item compares with the essence of the canonistic doctrine *Papa versus imperator*. Finally new light has been shed on the Donation of Constantine,

² P. E. SCHRAMM, “Regnum und Sacerdotium im Austausch ihrer Vorrechte”, *Studi Gregoriani raccolti da G. B. Borino*, Roma, Abbazia di San Paolo, 1947, II, pp. 403-457.



its key-position within mediaeval political theory and its ramifications during the Gregorian Age when, very logically, the Omni-Insular Doctrine was formulated as a papal claim. Those passages in Dr. Weckmann's book are all the more important when we consider the fact that even the most recent American textbooks on mediaeval history have hopelessly failed even to guess at the dynamism and radiations of that compound of ideas which French and German scholars have so brilliantly elucidated during the last decades.

More problematic perhaps, though no less stimulating, is Dr. Weckmann's thesis concerning the interrelatedness of papal omni-insular claims and the exaction of Peter's Pence during the High Middle Ages. It is a new aspect of known facts when we read that, for instance, Scandinavia became subjected to papal omni-insular claims, and had to pay Peter's Pence, because on the basis of mediaeval geographical knowledge Scandinavia was considered an island! Those interested in legal problems might raise the question whether legally the Scandinavian kingdoms are not entitled to demand the refunding of sums paid erroneously on the ground of an erroneous premise. However this may be, in this case as well as in a few others (for instance, the case of Sicily) more detailed local research work, which could not possibly have been carried out on the Pacific Coast, will have to broaden the basis of Dr. Weckmann's hypothesis. The last word has not yet been said. But even though corrections of Dr. Weckmann's views are most likely to come, it is at any rate a challenging and most stimulating theory which he has advanced, and an imaginative hypothesis—we may think of Pirenne's "Mahomet and Charlemagne"—is often more productive and fertile than the mere correctness of an isolated and unrelated fact.

The reader of Dr. Weckmann's book will chance upon many another interesting side-issue. The solid foundation and the skeleton of the book is what Dr. Weckmann has called the *Rotulus Insularum*, that is, the collection and stylistic comparison of all diplomata referring to papal island suzerainty so far as they were available without access to European archives. This method, so successfully developed by the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, has shown once more that only through assembling the complete diplomatic tradition may the scholar hope to be led to the right understanding of an individual charter and to its correct interpre-



tation. For the historian of the Americas, too, it pays to be a mediaevalist. This much, at any rate, has been demonstrated by Dr. Weckmann's fine study on "Constantine and Columbus".

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