

Yet, while this might cause (justifiable) consternation among historical geographers, it does not diminish their value to the historian. Where maps are absent, other sources fill the gap.

As the book's title suggests, one of the main findings is that medieval town formation, whatever its territorial context, was overwhelmingly the result of lordly initiative. Aristocrats, kings, bishops, and abbots all founded towns within the context of their own expression of lordship – their domination and exploitation of a particular locality. Yet this commonality makes local differences all the more striking, thus highlighting the highly contingent nature of town planning. So, twelfth-century northern Italian cities developed a sense of civic responsibility which mitigated (if it did not exclude) seigniorial interference, while to the north (yet still in the Empire) German towns tended to be more deferential to their founding lord, who could refer to the inhabitants as 'our men and merchants'. As one might expect, along the periphery town formation was often a self-conscious act of colonisation. As in the 'core' territories, geography played its part. For instance, easily-surmountable land borders seemingly allowed for organised migration on a much larger scale than more difficult passages over seas or mountains. As a result, German colonisation of west Slavic territories, which utilised professional *locators* (who enticed settlers to the new foundations), was much more intensive than the concomitant English colonisation of Ireland. The result was a grand network of new towns in central Europe, and a legacy of under-inhabited 'rural boroughs' in Ireland. However, it is clear that the central functions of administration, trade, and defence conditioned almost every peripheral foundation.

In an age of Festschriften and conference proceedings, it is refreshing to read a multi-authored volume with such academic coherence. Readers may be tempted to read one or two chapters in isolation, but this would be a great shame. Each study complements the others, so that the whole is genuinely greater than the sum of its parts. It is quite a boon to have so many interrelated studies available in English. It must also be said that the timing of the volume is quite apposite, showing the benefits of European collaboration and an open, transnational approach to history.

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THE GERALDINES AND MEDIEVAL IRELAND: THE MAKING OF A MYTH. Edited by Peter Crooks and Seán Duffy. Pp 445. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2016. €50.

The essays collected together in *The Geraldines and medieval Ireland* originated in papers given at the inaugural Trinity Medieval Ireland Symposium in 2013. The quality of the fifteen individual articles involved would alone equate to a strong volume, treating of the Geraldines from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries. But the editorship of Peter Crooks and Seán Duffy has elevated the book further by producing a highly cohesive volume exploring the 'myth' of the Geraldines. Indeed the volume's exploration of the misconceptions which have developed surrounding the Geraldines begins even before the invasion of Ireland, with Seán Duffy dissecting the many myths that have all too readily been accepted concerning the origins of the family. Many of these misconceptions, Huw Pryce then informs us, were actively fostered by one of the more famous family members to visit Ireland, Gerald of Wales.

The volume proceeds apace like this through the medieval period with many articles reassessing key moments in the Geraldine experience. For instance, Peter Crooks is anxious in his article on the fate of the Desmond Geraldines under the Lancastrian and Yorkist kings to demonstrate that the house of Desmond was buoyant in the fifteenth century. Indeed he speculates that had it not been for the execution of the seventh earl of Desmond and the subsequent retreat of the family from the Dublin administration that

the earls of Desmond may have played a role on a par with their Kildare counterparts in the lordship in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Often these myths have proliferated through pure misconceptions. For instance, David Edwards demonstrates that the fourteenth earl of Desmond was not, as commonly believed, some simple-minded wastrel whose erratic conduct doomed the Desmond lordship to destruction following the decision to rebel in 1579. Here he emerges as a figure who, between his return to Munster following six years of enforced exile in 1573 and the onset of the rebellion in 1579, strove intelligently to balance his own interests with proper deference to the government of Elizabeth I. His rebellion was the by-product of being repeatedly undermined by the queen's officials in Munster in his efforts to balance his own interests with loyalty to the crown.

Yet often the myths surrounding the Geraldines were intentionally constructed. Ciaran Brady's paper examines how Thomas FitzGerald, tenth earl of Kildare, who led the Kildare Rebellion in 1534, was mythologised into 'Silken Thomas' (called so for the manner in which his retainers allegedly wore livery of silk) and depicted as a poor leader of a wholly misconceived rebellion. As Brady notes, there is no evidence to substantiate this depiction of Thomas in contemporary documents from the 1530s. Rather, he posits that the myth of 'Silken Thomas' was based almost entirely upon an imaginative and self-serving construal of Kildare written by Richard Stanihurst in his contribution to Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* published in 1577. This view, solidified as the myth, was picked up in the eighteenth-century by historians such as Thomas Leland and has proved largely enduring. Similarly, in the final article, Ruairi Cullen demonstrates that the Geraldines became a contested legacy between nationalists and unionists in the nineteenth century, leading to many gross distortions of the Geraldines' actual actions in Ireland.

Beyond this core concern the volume is rich in texture. Linzi Simpson's article, for example, provides a major study of the castles built by the early Geraldines in Ireland. In doing so she demonstrates that these castles were often ahead of developments in castle-building in England and that this underlines the Geraldines' connections to wider European developments. This theme is picked up for the later period by Aisling Byrne in her study of the reading habits of the earls of Kildare in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Collectively these articles do much to remind us that the Geraldines were part of a wider European aristocracy. Yet within Ireland they were also confronted by two aristocracies and this too is a major thread of the book, featuring strongly in articles by Katharine Simms and Sparky Booker. Booker's piece queries how the earls of Kildare managed their relationship with Irish society in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries by focusing on three issues: intermarriage, ecclesiastical patronage and the status of their Irish tenants. In doing so she argues that their engagement with Irish society has to be seen as more nuanced than hitherto appreciated. They were deeply immersed in Irish society but were equally wary to retain their English colonial identity. Thus, *The Geraldines and medieval Ireland* ranges over a wide array of topics for the five hundred-year period it encompasses.

Reviewers must nit-pick when presented with little to substantially criticise. The present reviewer would like to have seen articles covering aspects of the Geraldines that have been more neglected than some of the material traversed in certain essays here: for example, the Geraldine League of the late 1530s is sorely lacking a modern study. Yet such an observation does little to detract from the present volume. In years to come as the quincentenary of the Kildare Rebellion of 1534 approaches there will be renewed interest in the Geraldines. For whatever work is published as that date approaches, the present volume has set a very high standard.

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