

elegant production. In the entire work, apart from a couple of (very minor) misprints, I have noticed only two errors of fact — both of which relate to place-names: p. 269, Castledermot, said to be situated in County Carlow, is actually in (nearby) County Kildare; and p. 409, Lough Ramor, said to be in County Meath, is in (nearby) County Cavan.

There is, however, one shortcoming that deserves mention. Despite running to ten pages, the index is quite inadequate for a book of this calibre. To take just three omissions — from many that could be cited — a search for ‘Bruce’ will prove fruitless, but at least one may expect to find it at the beginning of chapter 4 (albeit with no indication that ‘Bruce invasion’ occurs on p. 125); likewise with the ‘Remonstrance of the Irish Princes’, referred to on pp 111–12; likewise, too, with the notorious Lord Lieutenant Tiptoft, earl of Worcester (mentioned on pp 190–93). A rather less significant irritant is the occurrence of three extensive quotations from the *State Papers* — given on pp 217–18 — surely a rendering in modern orthography, rather than that of the time of Henry VIII, would be more user-friendly?.

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THE FIRST IRISH CITIES. AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY TRANSFORMATION. By David Dickson.
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The first Irish cities vividly delineates the eighteenth century as a unique era in Irish urban history. It begins with a deeply fortified urban landscape, built to withstand the cruelties of siege warfare, in which political and economic instability were decidedly unpropitious for urban growth. It ends in the 1820s, when new tariff arrangements proved the death knell for much of Irish manufacturing and sent urban economies spiralling into decline. The period between was one of demographic growth and physical expansion with a thriving urban culture in which the ideals of the enlightenment were widely shared. Yet, this is a phenomenon that the emphasis upon Ireland’s rural past in the emergence of the modern Irish nation, a narrative in which towns and cities are often seen as loci of British imperial power, has often overshadowed. It is Dickson’s achievement to bring these back into focus.

In the last forty years or so, the historiography of eighteenth-century urban England has evolved from a focus upon London to acknowledgement of the vitality and variety of provincial English towns. A similar process may be seen in Scotland, where the long shadow cast by Edinburgh is beginning to recede as attention turns towards provincial studies, most notably in the recent volume by Bob Harris and Charles McKean (*The Scottish town in the age of the Enlightenment*). Dickson’s volume, based upon case studies of what were then the ten largest cities and following upon the heels of his magisterial study of Dublin, now means that the long-standing Anglo-centricity of much of our eighteenth-century urban historical scholarship can be replaced by an approach that acknowledges the commonalities, connections and interdependency that existed between urban communities across Britain and Ireland, while also highlighting the disparities and contrasts engendered by the contrasting economic, political and religious contexts. It is salutary for British readers to be reminded, therefore, not only of the size, wealth and influence of Dublin — larger than any of the other provincial cities of England — but that cities such as Cork, Limerick, Galway and Belfast would have ranked alongside the larger provincial cities of England for much of the eighteenth century.

With the onset of peace, after the turmoil of the 1690s, and greater economic stability, Irish towns and cities started to grow in population, expanding beyond their city walls and repurposing their fortifications, and Dickson draws on the full potential of the work of the Irish Historic Towns Atlas in documenting these changes. Demographic data for most cities, however, is not abundant — significantly the table of population estimates includes only two

dates 1660/1 and 1821 — but nonetheless the figures tell a story of sustained growth, driven by internal migration rather than natural increase. English towns grew similarly, of course, but the movement of rural Catholic population to Protestant urban communities had far reaching implications; in all but Sligo, Derry and Belfast, the proportion of Catholics in the urban population steadily increased. The changing confessional profile and the geographical distribution of the confessional communities — and the consequences for social relations and cultural developments — are a key line of analysis explored through subsequent chapters. Overall growth, however, concealed problems of poverty and disease; life expectancy in Irish cities was certainly no better than in other European cities at the time — possibly worse, if we take the notoriously high mortality rates of Dublin's Foundling Hospital into account.

Demographic growth was fuelled by economic expansion: Dickson's cities were both market places for Ireland's rural economy and hubs in the burgeoning networks of British imperial trade. Tellingly, all of Dickson's case studies, bar Kilkenny, were ports. Trade flourished but Dickson does not shy away from acknowledging the extent to which Irish cities were implicated in the traffic of people — as well as goods — whether through the transport of indentured labour or through the provision of the shipping, stores, or sailors that underpinned the slave trade. Cork, he notes, might be regarded as 'the larder of the British slave islands' (p. 60), while merchants in Limerick attempted to raise funds for slaving vessels to exploit the slave trade. It is also helpful to be reminded of the strength of Ireland's commercial links with Europe, especially along the western Atlantic seaboard: the evidence of the Cadiz census of 1773 which recorded 243 adults of Irish extraction, of whom the majority came from Waterford is particularly striking. In cultural terms, port cities were the channel through which goods, people, fashions and ideas entered and left the country and while familiar questions the extent to which Irish urban culture followed fashions set in England or further afield are rightly addressed, Dickson also challenges the reader to consider how the Irish diaspora of merchants, craftsmen and others helped to shape culture further afield.

Despite the legal restrictions on Catholics, increasingly Catholic merchants successfully established themselves in Galway, Waterford and Cork, and even in Dublin where they formed a substantial minority, with some, such as Edward Byrne, accruing significant wealth. But Catholics — whose physical presence was increasingly visible in the urban landscape through the appearance (or reappearance) of their places of worship — were not the only minorities: Quaker merchants flourished in Dublin, Cork and Waterford, while Huguenots dominated luxury craft production in Dublin and Cork. The upper hand, of course, continued to remain with the traditional Protestant elites, particularly in the northern towns of Belfast and Derry. In Belfast, Dickson identifies a unique tendency towards partnership and communal risk sharing amongst the Presbyterians, following a Scottish model, that helped to mitigate the risks of business failure. As seat of government and place of residence for numerous elite families, Dublin was not only the political but also the manufacturing hub of Ireland. Its reputation as a centre of cultural production — of luxury goods, such as wallpaper and cabinet making, and the refined arts — meant that 'just arrived from Dublin' carried as much marketing cachet as a London association.

Demographic and economic growth put pressure on the existing urban fabric, but urban development was blighted by the limited financial resources at the disposal of urban authorities and the absence of any single agency to impose a plan. This was not, of course, a problem unique to Irish cities and inhibited large-scale redevelopments across Britain, but Dublin at least was able to benefit from proximity to politicians through whom parliamentary subventions might be awarded. The more ambitious projects relied upon the cooperation of private landowners, whether Ormonde in Dublin, Hely Hutchinson in Galway or Sexton Pery in Limerick, or the vision and ambition of a developer such as Luke Gardiner in Dublin, whose masterplan (unlike Bath's John Wood) — if he had one — can only be inferred from what he built. But, however piecemeal and constrained by financial shortfalls, the physical fabric of Irish cities underwent substantial renewal and expansion. As visitors to the country started to notice, they too could boast the wide streets,

pavements, street lighting, open squares and uniform frontages with classical facades that were regarded across Europe as the hallmarks of polite urban refinement.

Questions of urban improvement, urban philanthropy and the role of print culture are shrewdly explored, highlighting the differences, as well as the commonalities, between the cities. The eighteenth-century urban culture that Dickson depicts is in many ways similar to that of other British cities — a similarity that was facilitated by the traffic of goods, ideas and people through the ports and by the rapid growth of print culture. Less typical, however, were the evolutions in political culture in the later eighteenth century when Irish cities — and Dublin in particular — experienced the sharpening of religious, political and social divisions in the 1790s. But the climate in which the United Irishmen and insurrection emerged was one that was itself generated by the growth of cities which provided the contexts in which a critique of the status quo could be articulated, the print culture through which such criticisms could be shared, and the spaces in which they could be communicated to a wider audience. The religious tensions and democratic politics of the 1790s fractured the apparently harmonious cooperation of the 1770s and 1780s across the different denominations that Dickson delineates so clearly in earlier case chapters.

The Act of Union heralded a period of recession and decline for Dublin and other towns in the south, while Belfast took over in cotton spinning and increasingly orientated itself towards England and Scotland and away from Dublin. Dublin's decline is easily attributed to the loss of its position as the seat of parliament, with the associated departure of the Anglo-Irish elites, as well as the changes in tariffs, which crippled its textile production. But Dickson also encourages the reader to step back from the singularity of Dublin's position: many of the changes associated with the termination of its Georgian heyday were also apparent in other towns across Britain and western Europe, where elite withdrawal from the city centre to the suburbs combined with new notions of domestic respectability prompted changes in urban form, urban governance and urban sociability.

Dickson's comparative approach is one of the strengths of the volume, highlighting how differences in systems of property ownership, confessional composition and relations with the hinterland played out in the contrasting fortunes of the ten selected cities. Unsurprisingly for a book published by Yale, the volume is well-illustrated, and Dickson has tracked down a far wider range of urban topographical art than the overly-familiar Dublin street scenes by James Malton. But Ireland never saw the proliferation of topographical art that we find in eighteenth-century England; nor indeed was there a comparable tradition of urban historical writing or panegyrics. Such productions are often viewed as expressions of urban identity and a sense of place: their absence raises the question of how strong a shared sense of common identity was amongst the Irish urban elites. A thematic survey of multiple centres of this kind in itself militates against the evocation of a strong sense of place, but these are questions that are surely worth further exploration.

Necessarily, it is the Anglophone middle-class male elites who dominate Dickson's account as they were the primary agents of urban governance and urban politics; they dominated the urban economy and they generated so much of the documentation upon which Dickson's survey relies. Dickson is fully aware of this problem, but nonetheless it is worth noting that as a social history of eighteenth-century urban life, Dickson's account is noticeably unpopulated: the poor feature as the recipients of charity, the objects of social control or the inhabitants of makeshift cabins in the extra-mural areas. The Irish-speaking population in both town and country has left few traces for the historian to work with: print culture may have flourished in Dublin and in Cork, but it was monoglot until the appearance of religious tracts in the nineteenth century. Thus, the place of the Irish-speaking population within the city and in the relationship between the city and its rural hinterland remains opaque. Similarly, in the masculine sphere of urban public life, with which Dickson's account is largely concerned, women of any class feature only marginally, in discussions of urban literacy or through their appearance in trade directories or subscription lists.

It is churlish, however, to identify what might have been covered in a ground-breaking survey of this kind. While Irish cities may not be as well documented as those in England or mainland Europe, this volume represents an extraordinarily detailed synthesis, both of Dickson's own work on Dublin and Cork, but also work on eighteenth-century Ireland

and eighteenth-century urbanism more broadly. As a historian working principally on the experience of English towns, a period seen conventionally as the precursor to the great industrial cities of the nineteenth century, it is particularly striking how the familiar trajectories of demographic growth, urban improvement, rising literacy and consumption, and urban associations are the precursor to a different narrative, in so many cases, one of recession and decline.

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