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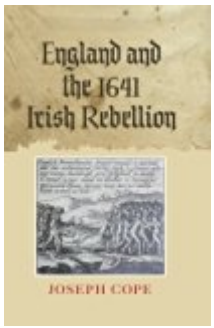
Joseph Cope. *England and the 1641 Irish Rebellion.* Studies in Early Modern Cultural, Political, and Social History Series. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009. xii + 190 pp. $95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-84383-468-7.



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The significance of the rebellion that erupted in the north of Ireland in October 1641 is usually defined in two ways: first, in terms of its influence on the crisis that led to the so-called Wars of the Three Kingdoms between 1641 and 1653; and second, in terms of its enduring relevance to sectarian relations in Ireland. Its most powerful legacy was the creation of a paradigm of Irish Protestant suffering, often used to justify repressive measures against an Irish Catholic community collectively assumed to have committed appalling atrocities in the past, and of being inclined to do so again in the future.

This perception of 1641 as brutal sectarian genocide, perpetrated by Catholic natives on Protestant settlers, was largely distilled from the experiences of the settlers. These had been recorded in the enormous corpus of "depositions" taken from Protestant survivors in the 1640s and 1650s, and eventually bequeathed to Trinity College, Dublin (where they are currently in the process of being published online).[1] The veracity of these accounts has been hotly contested since they were collected. But most modern scholars writing on 1641 have, at some point, used the depositions as source material, most recently in terms of mining them for their insights into the history of a colonial society. In this regard, Joseph Cope's *England and the 1641 Irish Rebellion* is no exception, but the subject of its inquiry is one that has been surprisingly neglected: the survivors themselves.

Cope's book roughly falls into two sections. The first examines the experiences of Protestant settlers in 1641-42, as recorded in the depositions. Surprisingly, these accounts have rarely been examined as narratives on their own terms, and Cope uses them here to vividly illustrate both the localized experiences of certain settlers in Ireland and the means by which they survived the rebellion. The second section deals with the immediate legacy of their survival, most especially in terms of the impact made by Irish Protestant refugees in England. It does so by examining the responses of a variety of clerics, polemicists, politicians, and of-

ficials to the past experiences and current plight of these new arrivals.

Ultimately, the perception of 1641 as "a war of religious extermination" (according to the blurb on the cover) is the issue at the core of the book. This interpretation of the rebellion proved potent, as it was disseminated and believed amid the crisis that eventually led to civil war in England. The rebellion in Ireland could be interpreted as merely one episode in the universal struggle between "popery" and the reformed faith; one of the great strengths of Cope's book is its awareness of this broader, international perspective. More immediately, the flurry of lurid accounts of alleged Irish atrocities that flowed from printer and pulpits in England galvanized opinion there in favor of the refugees who were soon arriving on its western coast. Cope weaves a richly detailed account of how Irish refugees were received in England, and the tensions that this caused at both national and local levels. A key theme of the book is the "discontinuity" between the depositions that reflected the experience of the survivors and the propagandist depictions of 1641 that emerged in its aftermath. The bridge between the two sections is the useful figure of the puritan artisan Nehemiah Wallington, whose horrified responses to (often exaggerated) accounts of the Irish rebellion are used to illustrate the process by which the interpretation of these events began to shape both opinions and, by extension, actions. For Cope, the most concrete English response to the rebellion came in January 1642, when parliament passed the Act for a Speedy Contribution and Loan to provide for the relief of Irish Protestant refugees. But the money collected through this and other fundraising drives was often siphoned into military coffers, and many Irish Protestants remained out in the cold, so to speak. By the summer of 1643 such charity had been completely discontinued, as the decision was made to concentrate on funding the parliamentarian war effort in Ireland.

Cope has unearthed a great deal of fascinating material, and his suggestive research provides an extremely useful avenue by which to examine both the complexities of the 1641 rebellion itself and the impact it had on the neighboring island. Yet the title is somewhat misleading. In terms of its ostensible, purely English subject matter, this book seems unsure of precisely what it is. Cope is aware of the significance of his subject in both historiographical and actual terms. But the focus of the text is often too narrow. For example, the English response to 1641 involved calls for retribution as much as charity: the 1642 act that Cope devotes so much attention to is only one element of that response. A full study of the significance of the 1641 rebellion in England (let alone Britain as a whole) would have to include not just the subject opened up by Cope, but also a study of the significance of 1641 within the broad theater of the "Wars of the Three Kingdoms" (including the Cromwellian invasion of 1649-53). It would also have to take cognizance of the enduring and iconic significance of 1641 in the rhetoric of English anti-popery. Indeed, Cope's discussion of the manner in which 1641 was represented to a prospective audience is the weakest aspect of the book; and this is, after all, of fundamental importance to his subject. The manner in which the depositions mutated into printed accounts of 1641 was a complex process, one shaped by the mental frameworks through which seventeenth-century polemicists made sense of their world.[2] And such accounts were the means by which an English audience was most likely to engage with 1641; Wallington was not the only one to be affected by the depictions he had read.

There are also cosmetic issues that, try as one might, remain difficult to ignore. Even aside from its grammatically awkward title, the early sections of the book are marred by some extremely poor copyediting: for a publisher to produce a book at this price without meeting such basic

standards is unfair to both author and reader, and is simply not good enough.

But such caveats should not detract from the fact that Cope has written an extremely useful and suggestive book. It is a substantial addition to the existing historiography of the "Wars of the Three Kingdoms," and will have to play a significant part in any future attempt to make sense of the cataclysm of 1641 and its contested legacy.

Notes

[1]. The pilot Web site for the project can be found at http://1641.eneclann.ie/ (accessed April 21, 2010).

[2]. This is the subject of Eamon Darcy, "Politics, Pogroms and Print: The 1641 Depositions and Contemporary Print Culture" (PhD diss., Trinity College, Dublin, 2009).