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Brendan Scott, ed. *Culture and Society in Early Modern Breifne/Cavan.* Dublin: Four Courts, 2009. Illustrations. xviii + 241 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84682-184-4.

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Contextualizing the Local

Over the past decade, Four Courts Press has supported a growing list of solid local studies in Irish history. *Culture and Society in Early Modern Breifne/Cavan*, edited by Brendan Scott, is a fine addition to this catalog. The thematic sweep of this interdisciplinary collection is broad: essays examine Gaelic poetry and devotional literature, landscape and historical geography, ecclesiastical history, the social history of the Ulster plantations, and the political and cultural significance of the 1641 Irish Rising. Taken as a whole, this volume represents a significant contribution to our understanding of issues in early modern Irish history and demonstrates the important ways that local studies can shed light on broader historical problems.

The essays in this collection approach early modern Breifne (inclusive of the modern counties of Cavan and Leitrim) as a frontier society. By the sixteenth century, the region reflected a hybridized political order, in which, as Christopher Maginn puts it, "English structures of local government were superimposed onto Gaelic lordships" (p. 69). County Cavan's shared border with the Pale looms large in this work, with many of the essays emphasizing the ways that kinship ties, cultural practices, and economic and legal structures linked Gaelic, Old English, New English, and Scottish interests in the region. Jonathan Cherry's essay on Cavan town, for example, demonstrates the extent to which the O'Reilly family developed significant connections to Dublin and the Pale in the decades before the Ulster plantation. Cavan's status as a Gaelic market town reflected these connections and also differentiated the settlement from other parts of Gaelic Ulster. Raymond Gillespie's examination of representations of Brian Ballach O'Rourke's inauguration in 1536 demonstrates the other side of the coin. This essay focuses on the creative ways in which an ambitious Gaelic lord used intermarriage with powerful Ulster families and the reconfiguration of bardic material to cement his local authority and prestige. O'Rourke's 1540 participation in surrender and regrant–conceived in part as a means to construct O'Rourke supremacy over other Gaelic lordships in Leitrim–likewise demonstrates the ways in which an enterprising Gaelic lord could shore up his local political power by playing on English structures of authority.

The plantation accelerated the hybridization of Breifne, resulting in the emergence of ethnically and religiously diverse communities by the mid-seventeenth century. William Roulston's essay explores the significant Scots presence in county Cavan. Elsewhere in Ulster, Scottish undertakers tended to settle Scottish tenants. In Cavan, by contrast, Scottish undertakers like Sir James Craig and the Hamilton brothers presided over a mix of English, Scots, and pre-plantation era Irish tenants. Several of the other essays in the collection underscore the religious diversity of this frontier society, highlighting the (predictable) presence of Irish and Old English Catholics, and English and Scottish Protestants; less predictably, English and Scottish Catholics and Scottish Episcopalians had a significant presence in the region.

Pursuing a theme that has been prominent in the recent historiography of seventeenth-century Ireland, a number of the essays highlight tensions within the confessional communities. Brian Mac Cuarta explores tensions arising out of the Counter-Reformation, particularly "between prelates educated abroad in the tridentine mould, and a clerical body accustomed to the more relaxed style of an earlier age" (p. 160). Tensions were also evident among the Cavan Protestants. John McCafferty presents a well-rounded essay on William Bedell, Bishop of Kilmore and Ardagh, and persuasively delineates the complicated position in which evangelically minded Protestants could find themselves in the seventeenth century. In his commitment to rooting out the institutions of the Roman Catholic Church in the 1620s and

1630s, Bedell reached out to Irish Catholics by supporting the Gaelicization of the Church of Ireland. To many New English planters and clergy, however, this accommodation was itself objectionable and suggested a "softness to popery" (p. 177).

Whereas McCafferty's essay suggests the significant disagreements that could emerge among committed Protestants, several essays on the 1641 Rising point to the ways that religious identity could be deformed and jettisoned in the midst of crisis. Roulston's coverage of the Scottish planters' responses to the 1641 Rising, for example, articulates the tensions between Scottish and English Protestants and explores the ways in which Irish rebels opportunistically manipulated these divisions. Scott's discussion of Protestants who converted to Catholicism in the midst of the rising likewise underscores the ways in which varying degrees of religious commitment played out in the context of widespread social dislocation. Scott's work further complicates this picture, offering tantalizing accounts from the 1641 depositions of recent English converts to Catholicism who found themselves despoiled by Irish rebels in spite of their religious profession.

A number of the essays highlight the extensive accommodation that occurred in plantation society as a result of the ethnic and religious diversity that characterized this frontier zone. Clodagh Tait's contribution, for example, makes very effective use of the 1638 will of Philip McPhilip O'Reilly. Deeply indebted at the time of his death, O'Reilly's financial situation reveals the pressures that Irish landholders faced after the plantation. Tait presents a fascinating reconstruction of O'Reilly's debt obligations to a range of Irish, Old English, New English, and Scottish creditors, and demonstrates his ability to maneuver within the English law through the creation of an "English-style jointure" to provide for his widow (p. 196). However, the essays also suggest that accommodation could itself be a source of tension and conflict. Following the microhistorical approach to the 1641 depositions pioneered particularly by Gillespie, several works in this collection address the experiences of planters in Cavan during the 1641 Rising and the interplay between individuals from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Scott's contribution is especially noteworthy in this regard, providing a persuasive analysis of experiences in 1641 that balances accounts of settler survival against evidence of opportunistic and retributive violence. As the concluding essay, Scott's work serves as a reminder of how cataclysmic the outbreak of the 1641 Rising must have been after decades of–perhaps superficial–peace and stability.

This point, however, also suggests a missed opportunity within the collection. Although the book title suggests a focus on early modern Breifne, the essays in fact stop with the 1641 Rising. This in large measure reflects historiographical conventions, with 1641 often appearing as a decisive break between two distinct periods in Irish history. However, an assessment of the aftermath of the rebellion would have been useful, particularly given this collection's focus on the themes of continuity and change and the overall presentation of Breifne as a frontier society. Several essays note that episodic violence and dislocation was in fact a normative part of Breifne's history–Jonathan Cherry's reference to the razing of Cavan town during the Nine Years' War (1594-1603) seems the most vivid example of this point. In light of this, one wonders what happened after 1641 and particularly what effect the upheavals of the 1640s and 1650s had on the diversity and accommodation that was evident in the 1620s and 30s. Scott's introduction to the volume suggests that the essays reveal how "native forces remained surprisingly resilient in the face of such interlopers and retained many of their Gaelic customs, language and dress" (p. 4). The local perspective adopted in this collection presents an opportunity to explore this resiliency in the context of the later 1640s, the Cromwellian conquest, and the Restoration, but these later developments are unfortunately not addressed here.

In general, elements of the collection seem somewhat out of balance. Several essays–for example, Nollaig Ó Muraíle's work on the Duanaire Méig Shamhradháin (the MacGovern poembook), and Annaleigh Margey's "Surveying and Mapping Plantation in Cavan"–are primarily descriptive in nature. They highlight underutilized sources for the history of this region and are suggestive of opportunities for future research, but seem out of place alongside the more analytical approaches reflected in other essays. The late medieval focus of Ó Muraíle's work and Salvador Ryan's essay on representations of women in Gaelic devotional literature represent useful scholarly contributions but likewise sit uncomfortably with the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century focus of the other works in the collection (Scott's introduction acknowledges this point). Finally, although Breifne incorporated the modern counties of Leitrim and Cavan, the essays in this volume tend to focus on the latter. Ryan and Gillespie both address the O'Rourkes and Scott's essay on the 1641 Rising incorporates evidence from the Leitrim depositions. The main focus of the collection, however, is county Cavan and in fact the essays tend to gravitate toward the central and southeastern portions of the modern county. One wonders whether this reflects

a deeper point about the declining relevance of Gaelic Breifne even before the creation of the English counties and plantations. More sustained engagement with this issue might have complicated the collection's overall argument regarding Gaelic resiliency in the region.

These minor structural criticisms should not detract from the overall value of this collection, especially in staking out an important direction for future scholarship. Scott notes in his introduction that the essays collected here reflect the fact that "the academic community [is] undertaking more localized case studies than ever before" (p. 1). Many of the essays take this a step further by situating the local in national and regional contexts. Maginn's work on Tudor state-building, Cherry and Roulston's coverage of plantation policies and the formation of multiethnic plantation communities, and Scott's comparative analysis of the depositions and print culture representations of the 1641 Rising connect local studies to wider British contexts. Likewise, McCafferty's essay on Bedell and Mac Cuarta's treatment of Counter-Reformation activism contextualize local experiences by making connections to broader themes in European history. The care with which the contributors to *Culture and Society in Early Modern Breifne/Cavan* have taken to keep these "big picture" contexts in mind models an approach to local studies that underscores the relevance and importance of this kind of perspective and is a significant strength of this volume.

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