

Reviews and short notices

IRELAND AND THE CRUSADES. Edited by Edward Coleman, Paul Duffy and Tadhg O’Keeffe. Pp 256. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2022. €55.

In an essay published in 1995, John Gillingham remarked that Ireland was ‘perhaps the only corner of Christian Europe to display no interest in the Crusades’. He was referring in particular to the Third Crusade but his use of the plural for the relevant noun suggests that he had more than this single campaign in mind. In fact, there is plenty of evidence of interest on the part of inhabitants of Ireland in the Crusades and their consequences. In 1105 Muirchertach Ua Briain, king of Thomond, received from the king of Scots the gift of a camel, while twenty years later another claimant to the high-kingship of Ireland, Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair, king of Connacht, commissioned the production of the expensive and beautiful processional cross known as the Cross of Cong in order to display a fragment of the true cross that had been transported from the Holy Land to the most westerly part of Christendom. Add to this the numerous references in thirteenth-century annals to the journeys of Irish people to Jerusalem and to the activities of Christian armies there, not to mention the presence in Acre at the end of the thirteenth century of a church dedicated to St Brigid of Kildare, and it is clear that Ireland shared in the wider Western sense of investment in the crusade experience. The country was, as Jean-Michel Picard puts it (p. 51), ‘quite close to the centre of the action’.

It is a surprising feature of the collection of essays under review that none of the evidence cited above appears between its covers. It is certainly the case, as Edward Coleman argues in his introductory essay, that the crusades are an underwritten topic in Irish historiography. They were such an obvious and important manifestation of the church reform movement — which no one could claim has been ignored in medieval Irish scholarship — that their absence from discussions of that phenomenon appears quite peculiar. Perhaps the most positive impact of this volume will be to encourage the filling in of this gap. To identify one potentially fruitful trail worth following, traced in initial detail in the essays by Jean-Michel Picard and Paul Duffy, the Cistercian order, at least from the time when St Bernard of Clairvaux became its leading representative, placed the promotion of crusade at the heart of its identity and mission. How was that manifested at Mellifont and the other Cistercian houses founded by Irish lords before (and after) the English conquest of the 1170s?

Recently published work by Kathryn Hurlock and Denis Casey, and the 2016 edited volume by Browne and Ó Clabaigh on the military orders — details of which can be found in the very welcome bibliography included in this collection — have anticipated much of what is contained in *Ireland and the Crusades*. The military orders are discussed in worthwhile essays by Paolo Virtuani, Thomas Ivory, David McIlreavy and Tadhg O’Keeffe, while Helen Nicholson makes important points about the involvement of these orders in administering the finances of the Irish lordship from the 1220s onwards. A refreshing reconsideration of the use of crusade rhetoric in sixteenth-century Ireland is provided by Kathryn Hurlock, while in relation to the same topic in the setting of the twelfth century, Maevé Callan succeeds in carving out space for yet another new interpretation of its status in the historiographical congested district that is *Laudabiliter* studies.

Dave Swift and Emer Purcell aim in their short essays to lay to rest some familiar crusader-related myths — respectively, crossed legs on images of medieval warriors tell us nothing about whether they went on crusade; the unfortunate corpse displayed for the entertainment of the ghoulish in the crypt of St Michan’s church is not that of a crusader — but one can be

certain that these staples of popular perceptions of the Crusades will persist. A short but intriguing study by Catherine Swift of the appearance of the surname ‘Palmer’ in early thirteenth-century Dublin records could be usefully developed into a more substantial project. Paul Duffy’s analysis of the possible existence of a cult of Simon de Montfort in medieval Meath is stimulating, while Ciarán McDonnell traces Geoffrey de Genenville’s crusader credentials.

Was the crusade preached in Ireland with the same frequency as it was in England? Can any useful comparisons with respect to Irish attitudes to the Crusades be made from consideration of Archbishop Baldwin’s successful crusade precaching tour in Wales in the late 1180s, as detailed by Gerald of Wales? Was the Irish financial system altered by the need to raise cash for Richard I’s ransom in the early 1190s as he returned from crusade? What sums were raised for crusading in medieval Ireland? These rather obvious questions are not raised in a volume which advances understanding of its subject incrementally but which eschews setting a new and much needed agenda for research.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2023.11

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IRELAND’S ENGLISH PALE, 1470–1550. By Steven G. Ellis. Pp 200. Woodbridge: Boydell Press. 2021. £75.

This is a fascinating book, a study of the English Pale in Ireland by a great doyen of the history of Tudor Ireland and other Tudor borderlands. It is based on almost half a century of study of the records of the time, deep reflection and engagement with scholars with different perspectives. It is an indispensable read for anyone with an interest in Tudor Ireland. The core of the book is the analysis of the emergence of the English Pale in Ireland late in the fifteenth century, the close study of English lordship in each of the ‘four obedient shires’ around Dublin that constituted the Pale, and the demonstration that the Pale expanded westwards and south-westwards in the reigns of the first two Tudor monarchs. Ellis’s starting point is the ‘inspirational work’ of James Lydon. However, he deploys a wealth of new evidence to challenge Lydon’s contentions that the Pale was the ultimate outcome of the decline of English power in late medieval Ireland, and that the English crown’s frontier policy in Ireland ‘was, on the whole, a complete failure’ (p. 3).

Ellis is highly critical of historians who regard the Pale as synonymous with the Maghery whose boundaries were repeatedly defined by statute in the second half of the fifteenth century and given physical manifestation in the form of earthworks, fortalices and tower houses. He puts great emphasis on the marchlands beyond the Pale ditch as being an integral part of the Pale, for which he makes an indisputable case. On the other hand, the Pale ditch and its associated defensive structures marked a significant boundary within the area subject to English authority, significant enough to justify the considerable investment of resources needed to create and maintain it, and contemporaries certainly regarded it as such. Its significance is open to justifiably varying interpretations by historians.

Nonetheless, the great strength of this book is its focus on the strengthening of English authority in the marches after a nadir in the second half of the fifteenth century that coincided with the later stages of the War of the Roses. Ellis delineates the fluctuating outer boundaries of the marches of the Pale with unprecedented precision, and shows that they were expanded westwards and south-westwards by marcher lords of English descent. He explains how the marches were defended, and how efforts were made to extend English law in the marches. Yet one might point out that the act for the division of Meath in 1542 shows that there continued to be severe limits to the effectiveness of royal control and the administration of royal justice beyond the Pale ditch even at that date.

For Ellis the Pale was an English border region that was ‘set apart from the surrounding Irishry by the population’s English identity’ (p. 38). Palesmen remained highly sensitive to