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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Conquering the Idols: English Iconoclasm in Ireland, 1649–1660

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The English Parliament's conquest of Ireland in the mid-seventeenth century left memories of violence that persist even in modern Ireland. This article considers one important but neglected dimension to the English campaign and subsequent rule: the attack on Irish Catholic devotional objects, including statues, images, vestments. The damage to the physical fabric of Irish Catholicism coincided with the wider effort to suppress all its public rituals and structures and must be considered as a key element to Parliament's campaign to punish, reform, and convert the Irish. Reconsidering both older and recently published sources allows for significant new insights and contextual questions surrounding parliamentarian iconoclasm, its Irish manifestations, and indeed early modern iconoclasm more widely. In particular, it is argued here that this is not and cannot be an Irish story alone: while previous accounts have emphasized Ireland's tragedy in these years, there are wider English and British contexts that must be brought to bear. Irish iconoclasm can be placed into a chronology of English violence since the late 1630s and points to a wider British preoccupation with popish plots and idolatry, in which the Irish were central characters. The iconoclasm unleashed in Cromwellian Ireland underlines the braided nature of conflict across the mid-seventeenth century.

Keywords: Early Modern Ireland; Early Modern England; Violence; Iconoclasm; Clergy; Military

I. Introduction

Memories of Oliver Cromwell and the English Parliament's conquest of Ireland run deep, even in contemporary Ireland.[1] The decade following their landing in August 1649 is one associated with death, disease, dispossession, discrimination, and destruction—a disaster, even in modern perceptions. This article explores one part of this apparent catastrophe: the English attack on Irish Catholic devotional culture, including statues, images, vestments, places, and more. Assaulting the physical fabric of Irish Catholicism must be seen as part of the broader effort to suppress it—especially public rituals and ecclesiastical structures. Iconoclasm was thus a key part of Parliament's campaign to punish, reform, and convert the Irish. Placing this iconoclastic violence back

[1]John Cunningham, *Conquest and Land in Ireland: The Transplantation to Connacht, 1649–1680* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), 1.

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into the story of the conquest and the subsequent Cromwellian regime gives substantial weight to recent debates concerning the relative severity of both the military campaign and the regime's religious policies, as violence is recognized as a central (even if not the sole) tactic.[2] The deliberate ruin of sacred objects must be added to the discussion, as it aimed towards undermining Irish Catholicism and was a key part of its hoped-for total eradication.

Iconoclasm in Ireland is not, however, solely an Irish story. Previous accounts of the conquest and Cromwellian religious policies have tended to focus on it as an Irish tragedy above all, with some exceptions such as the massacres at Drogheda and Wexford that have attracted comparative study.[3] However, this literature often does not see the links between Irish religious violence and the iconoclasm that wracked England from the later 1630s, nor with a broader British context in which fear of idolatry and of popish plots were both intertwined and a spur to action; the backdrop of European and Atlantic confessional conflict, in which iconoclasm was a crucial element in seeking to transform religious life, have also not been to the fore in examining the Irish case. This article argues for the important connections between English anxieties about, and actions against, "superstition" and "idolatry" and Irish iconoclasm a decade later. The attacks perpetrated (mostly) by soldiers in Ireland point to continuities from the English context: a shared vocabulary of ritualized destruction and an overlap in responsible personnel. However, there were some features that made the Irish case different, arising from the particularities of devotional life there, especially the prominent role of natural sites, such as holy wells and trees, and places of pilgrimage.[4] Examining the Irish case not only forces a rethink of the chronology of iconoclasm during the civil wars, arguing for its continuation beyond the mid-1640s in a Three Kingdoms context, but also prompts reflection as to the nature of iconoclasm itself, especially its conceptual and practical flexibility in responding to shifting targets informed by local contexts.

The story also possesses important British dynamics, as Ireland confirmed its place in the Protestant English and Scottish imagination as a bastion of international popery and a serious threat to the Protestant revolution underway.[5] The Irish rebellion of 1641, and especially its cast of devious priests and bloodthirsty rebels, was evidence of popish conspiracies threaded across Britain and Ireland and the imminent threat posed by the forces of international popery. Prominent in such discussions was the Irish love of idolatry, fostered by their priests; print publications in the 1640s consistently described Irish Catholics as idolatrous and linked them and their priests to the insidious efforts to promote idolatry and superstition across the archipelago. The strongly anticlerical nature of

[2]Cunningham, "Lay Catholicism and Religious Policy in Cromwellian Ireland," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 64, no. 4 (October 2013), 770–771.

[3]See, for example, John Morrill, "The Drogheda Massacre in Cromwellian Context," in *Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland*, ed. David Edwards, Pádraig Lenihan, and Clodagh Tait (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 242–265; Matthew Rowley, "Godly Providence: Military Providentialism in the Puritan Atlantic World, 1636–1676," unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Leicester (2018).

[4]Michael P. Carroll, *Irish Pilgrimage: Holy Wells and Popular Catholic Devotion* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1999), 6.

[5]"British" is here used as a useful, if imperfect, means of referring to the cross-national relationships and influences between England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and the emerging British North America and Caribbean spheres, even pre-1707. Contemporaries deployed both the word and a concept of "Britishness" in the mid-seventeenth century: Joan Redmond, "Religion, Civility and the 'British' of Ireland in the 1641 Irish Rebellion," *Irish Historical Studies* 45, no. 167 (May 2021), 18–20.

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attacks on Irish popery would prove significant when considering iconoclasm more broadly: the inseparability of clergy and the idolatry they fostered would see many priests and friars subjected to violence, "making an image" of them that mirrored assaults on objects and spaces.[6] A sense of religious peril consistently informed conflict from the Bishops' Wars onward, with the Irish Catholic threat to Protestant Britain being an important strand that informed polemic and, especially from 1649, practice.

Previous accounts of the parliamentarian conquest and the religious policies that followed have included some discussion of English iconoclasm. Many such studies were confessional in nature, such as those by Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran and Denis Murphy S. J.; both nineteenth-century accounts, they were influenced by rising Catholic and nationalist sentiment, as well as by folk memory of the invasion and subsequent Cromwellian rule.[7] These confessional perspectives have come under revision in the effort to shed sectarian binaries; one result has been the argument that Cromwellian policy was less harsh than previously thought, with a practical toleration often the order of everyday interactions.[8] Toby Barnard has argued that Protestantism could well have succeeded in mid-seventeenth-century Ireland as the regime's policies enjoyed a modicum of success, as measured by conversions to Protestantism, even as the severity of persecution lessened over the decade.[9] This apparent laxity and decline in persecution as time went on has been questioned by John Cunningham, who pointed to the continued use of force and coercive tactics late in the decade, and that persecution, and indeed violence, were central to the Cromwellian approach to Catholic Ireland, even if never the sole tactic.[10] Recent studies of the conquest itself, including Micheál Ó Siochrú's account of "God's executioner," have underlined the sense of "racial superiority and religious bigotry" that lay behind the campaign and included discussion of the oppression of clergy—but not other kinds of religious violence, such as attacks against the devotional fabric of Irish Catholicism.[11] Other works have pointed to popular memory of the period as focused especially on the land settlement—indeed, where such tales talk of destroyed sacred objects it was often through motifs of land

[6]Nicholas M. Beasley, "Wars of Religion in the Circum-Caribbean: English Iconoclasm in Spanish America, 1570–1702," in *Saints and Their Cults in the Atlantic World*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 155–156.

[7]Patrick Francis Moran, *Historical Sketch of the Persecutions Suffered by the Catholics of Ireland Under the Rule of Cromwell and the Puritans* (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1862); Denis Murphy S. J., *Cromwell in Ireland: A History of Cromwell's Irish Campaign* (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1883); Sarah Covington, "'The Odious Demon From Across the Sea': Oliver Cromwell, Memory and the Dislocations of Ireland," in *Memory Before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Erika Kuijpers, Judith Pollmann, Johannes Müller, and Jasper van der Steen (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 149–151; Toby Barnard, "Irish Images of Cromwell" in *Images of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. R. C. Richardson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 180–188.

[8]R. Scott Spurlock, "Cromwell and Catholics: Towards a Reassessment of Lay Catholic Experience in Interregnum Ireland," in *Constructing the Past: Writing Irish History, 1600–1800*, ed. S. Forrest and M. Williams (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), 157–179.

[9]Toby Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland: English Government and Reform in Ireland, 1649–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 297–298.

[10]Cunningham, "Lay Catholicism," 785–786.

[11]Micheál Ó Siochrú, *God's Executioner: Oliver Cromwell and the Conquest of Ireland* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 249–250. For discussions of the clergy, see for example Ó Siochrú, *God's Executioner*, 84, 227, 233–234; Morrill, "Drogheda Massacre," 257; Clodagh Tait, "Adored for Saints: Catholic Martyrdom in Ireland c.1560–1655," *Journal of Early Modern History* 5, no. 2 (January 2001), 138, 142, 144–145.

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and landscape.[12] The desire to de-confessionalize the scholarship also often meant de-emphasizing clerical sources,[13] but in fact these are among the most important bodies of evidence for iconoclastic attacks: the publication of new editions of key documents —such as the Jesuit annual letters,[14] together with insights into the mechanisms of narrative, the providential, and the martyrological in such accounts[15]—means they are ripe for fresh interrogation.

The long-term legacies of iconoclasm for both Irish Catholicism and Protestantism were significant. It is difficult to substantially disagree with Barnard's assessment that, for many, "the use of Catholicism as a marker of guilt in the 1650s made the faith the focus of nationalism and anti-English sentiment."[16] The campaign to destroy the physical fabric of Irish Catholicism—its sacred objects, vestments, holy places—must form part of our picture of Cromwellian efforts to suppress the faith, strongly influenced by the contemporary example of English attacks on idolatry and fears of popish plots and imminent destruction. The association between the regime's anti-Catholicism, including its iconoclasm, and the land settlement is important since many of those same iconoclasts benefitted from the dispossession and transplantation of Catholic landowners and former soldiers.[17] While in practice often not as draconian as it appeared, there was nonetheless the perception among the Irish population that the Cromwellian land policy was sweepingly anti-Catholic, aimed at total dispossession and the ruin of all Irish Catholics.[18] The desire for Protestant-only enclaves was justified on the grounds of Irish Catholic blood guilt and fears of new rebellions: Irish Catholics, in English eyes, could never be trusted again.[19] By the end of the 1650s, a "revolution in land-ownership had taken place," a situation that was largely preserved following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, "reinforc[ing] the foundations already laid in the 1650s for the Protestant-dominated landed ascendancy which would persist until the nineteenth century."[20] Even as this landed Protestant interest contained diverging political and religious opinions, there was agreement on the need to secure Protestant authority over Ireland for the future. Cromwellian soldiers and their descendants formed only a minority of this group, but their mere presence was seized upon by Catholics, who labelled them the "scum of England."[21] Their seeming victory in the political, religious, and land-ownership battles of the 1650s and 1660s engendered resentment—a resentment I would argue that was anti-English but more specifically anti-Protestant. It was Protestant zealotry that had smashed altars, crucifixes, and

[12]Covington, "Oliver Cromwell," 160–161.

[13]Cunningham, "Lay Catholicism," 770–771.

[14]Vera Moynes, ed. *Irish Jesuit Annual Letters, 1604–1674*, 2 vols. (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2019).

[15]See, for example, Naomi McAreavey, "Portadown, 1641: Memory and the 1641 Depositions," *Irish University Review* 47, no. 1 (May 2017), esp. 25–28; Tait, "Adored for Saints," 146–150; Joan Redmond, "'Universal Martyrdom': Resistance and Religion in 1650s Ireland," in *Miracles, Political Authority and Violence in Medieval and Early Modern History*, ed. Matthew Rowley and Natasha Hodgson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 173–189.

[16]Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 297.

[17]Cunningham, *Conquest and Land*, 32–33, 76–77, 116–118; S. J. Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland, 1660–1760* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 13–14.

[18]Cunningham, *Conquest and Land,* 43.

[19]Cunningham, 24–25, 27, 28.

[20]Cunningham, 118, 148.

[21]Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, 15–16.

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tombs, and the perpetrators—even if only technically the minority of the victorious Protestant party—went not only unpunished but rewarded. The violence of the 1650s, including iconoclasm, would have bitter and long-lasting legacies in hardening sectarian division as the chief marker of inclusion and exclusion, power and powerlessness, haves and have-nots, even if never the sole marker. These confessional binaries would also feed into battles over Irishness and the future of Ireland itself. The longer-term legacies can only be hinted at here, but the ongoing interest in and debate surrounding the 1650s, including both the land settlement and religious policies, will surely enable further enquiry.

This article seeks to contribute to that enquiry and does so through two main sections. The first outlines the violence against objects that formed a key part of the parliamentarian conquest, highlighting the shared vocabularies of violence between Ireland and other episodes of religious conflict, especially (though not solely) the English precursors that heavily informed the Irish case. The second articulates a wider "British" frame for Irish iconoclasm, tracing the stress on Irish idolatry and superstition in contemporary print culture, with violence against the fabric of Irish Catholicism justified on the grounds of smashing a broader popish conspiracy. The linking of the Irish with the worst elements of the popish international, which sought the destruction of Protestantism, underlines the braided nature of anti-popery and religious conflict across Britain and Ireland in these decades.

II. Iconoclasm and conquest, 1649–1660

The campaign of the "tyrant Cromwell" and the "great furor of the heretics against Catholics" cast long shadows in Irish Catholic memories.[22] While the suffering of priests was omnipresent, popular tales of the conquest also described the suffering of sacred objects and places, typically at the hands of soldiers while their owners or protectors sought desperately to conceal and save them.[23] It is difficult, to impossible, to pin down precise responsibility in most cases, but the apparent prominence of soldiers is not surprising given both English precedents and the nature of the Irish army. Crawford Gribben has shown how anti-Catholicism united Cromwellian Protestants of all stripes, while the Baptist influence on and in the army was especially strong during the period of the active military campaign, and as some incidents below show, far beyond it in some localities. It was Baptists, Gribben argues, that possessed some of the most negative views of Irish Catholicism, often supporting repressive policies[24]—with support for the pulling down of blatant idolatry thus not seeming too much of a stretch. As with many episodes of English iconoclasm, explicit authorization or official direction was often absent (or not mentioned), with an implicit legitimacy drawn from Parliament's ordinances and the widespread condemnation of idolatry. Gribben has demonstrated how in Cromwellian Ireland, including among the army, preaching was the foremost means of communication for religious ideas rather than print.[25] This means that tracing a fiery camp sermon through to an iconoclastic spasm in a particular location is extremely difficult—but it is possible to see how threads of strong

[22]"1662 Letter," in *Irish Jesuit Annual Letters*, ed. Moynes, vol. 2, 874.

[23]Covington, "Oliver Cromwell," 149–151

[24]Crawford Gribben, *God's Irishmen: Theological Debates in Cromwellian Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42–45.

[25]Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 35.

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Baptist influences, sermon culture, and previous experience of destruction weave a convincing tapestry showing Parliament's army as heavily responsible for attacks, even beyond the end of active military hostilities.

According to surviving sources, most areas of the country witnessed attacks on devotional culture. Parliament's soldiers appear to have concentrated their wrath especially on churches and monastic houses as they encountered them; while objects were taken from private houses and destroyed, such discoveries were often coincidental with the search for fugitive priests.[26] Natural sites, such as holy wells and trees, together with places of pilgrimage including St Patrick's Purgatory, also fell victim to iconoclastic fury in keeping with their prominence in Irish devotional life, with their targeting highlighting the Cromwellian regime's concern with public rituals and open displays of faith as most problematic. There are evident parallels between violence in Ireland and English violence in arenas such as the Caribbean: later in the same decade, the Western Design saw churches and their contents prove particular targets, an overlap that would certainly reward future study.[27]

Many of the sources that discuss iconoclasm are clerical in nature; it is a body of material that fell somewhat out of favor with modern historians, as Cunningham has argued, due to perceived unreliability, including the use of secondhand (or even further distant) accounts. Time passed from the actual event, and its recording seemed to allow for distortion and contemporary polemic to creep in; they frequently contained a rich seam of providentialism, which was often seized upon as demonstrating their lack of credibility.[28] Those written later than the events portrayed, such as John Lynch's *Cambrensis Eversus* (written in the 1660s), reflected distress not only about the conquest but also the land settlement and the sufferings of Irish Catholics ostensibly loyal to the crown; for Lynch, it was the Catholic Old English especially who were in need of relief, with the consequent desire to highlight the atrocities of the parliamentarians on many fronts.[29]As Vera Moynes (*née* Orschel) has argued, clerical sources' desire for "edification" does not preclude historical fact, and attention to chronology and to the conventions of the providential and martyrological allow much insight.[30] I would argue too that Restoration accounts such as Lynch's, while embroiled in their own politics, nonetheless often rested on extensive research, even if some information was gained secondhand or more.[31] Polemic exaggerated, but it could not completely misrepresent given the dire straits of many Irish Catholics and their need for royal favor and relief. Further, even if some accounts do not fully match the "empirical criteria" of truth by modern standards,[32] the importance of perception, rumor, and the passing of down of stories (both by contemporaries and those who came after) is significant since it

[26]Cunningham, "Lay Catholicism," 774–776; Ó Siochrú, *God's Executioner*, 227, 233; in England too, private houses were excluded from ordinances, though this was not always observed in practice; see Julie Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm During the English Civil War* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 118–120.

[27]Beasley, "Wars of Religion," 164–165; Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Conquest of Jamaica: Oliver Cromwell's Bid for Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2017), 111; Nicole Greenspan, *Selling Cromwell's Wars: Media, Empire and Godly Warfare, 1650–1658* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), 90.

[28]Cunningham, "Lay Catholicism," 770–771.

[29]Éamon Ó Ciosáin, "Lynch, John, c. 1599–1677," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, https://www.dib.ie/biography/lynch-john-a4945 (last accessed 16 August 2022).

[30]Vera Orschel, "'Uniting the Dispersed Members': The 'Annual Letters' of the Irish Jesuits," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 103, no. 412 (Winter 2014), 406–408.

[31]Ó Ciosáin, "Lynch."

[32]Orschel, "Irish Jesuits," 407.

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speaks to expectations, fears, and connections that those who lived through events felt and drew upon, as well as the structures created to make sense out of conflict and turmoil, including feelings of persecution and loss. The apparent campaign against the very stuff of their faith evidently played a prominent part in Irish Catholic stories and histories of the period.

Before delving into specific iconoclastic incidents, it is important to outline how the Irish case contributes to wider debates concerning definitions of iconoclasm. These discussions have centered around issues including defining the action, such as destruction, defacement, even looting; the role of intent, including the distinction between iconoclasm and vandalism; concepts of power, legitimacy, and authority that lay within and behind targeted things, including human agents and institutions; and indeed what even "counts" as a target of iconoclasm—traditionally this was "images" but has expanded to include "things" both material (such as landscapes) and conceptual (such as philosophies and dogmas).[33] What then might a student of iconoclasm gain from examining Cromwellian Ireland? Certainly, it contributes to arguments that targeted "images" must be conceived of broadly. As the following paragraphs illustrate, there were "expected" objects such as crucifixes and statues among the "victims," but the drive to eliminate idolatry and superstition also extended to places and the Irish sacred landscape more generally: both sacred sites and the rituals performed there were destroyed through decreasing or destroying the ability to access holy wells, to perform "rounding" rituals, or to leave votive offerings on sacred trees or other sites.[34] English iconoclasts, while seeking out familiar "idols" from their homegrown experiences, adapted to Irish particularities, underlining iconoclasm's flexibility as both practice and idea.

The military nature of many attacks prompts consideration of both act and intent, usually seen as key in defining iconoclasm.[35] Should looting be considered, or the defacing of monuments and significant sites in the search for treasure?[36] I would argue that the Irish case provides a compelling example of how such acts can be considered a form of iconoclasm, since an object was attacked or removed, but within a wider interpretative framework that pitted Catholic against Protestant in every sphere of life, including economic: if stealing or looting sacred objects, including from tombs, contributed in some way to the ultimate downfall of the Church of Rome, it came under the broad

[33]Good introductions to many current debates can be found in Stacy Boldrick, "Introduction: Breaking Images" in *Striking Images, Iconoclasms Past and Present*, ed. Stacy Boldrick, Leslie Brubaker, and Richard Clay (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 1–12, and in Rachel F. Stapleton and Antonio Viselli, "Introduction: If It's Broke, Don't Fix it: The Back to Front Logic of Iconoclasm," in *Iconoclasm: The Breaking and Making of Images*, ed. Rachel F. Stapleton and Antonio Viselli (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 3–20; for landscape iconoclasm, see Henry Chapman and Benjamin Geary, "Iconoclasm in European Prehistory? Breaking Objects and Landscapes," in *Striking Images*, 32–33.

[34]Carroll, *Irish Pilgrimage*, 30–35, 40.

[35]Anne McClanan and Jeffrey Johnson, "Introduction: 'O for a Muse of Fire,'" in *Negating the Image: Case Studies in Iconoclasm*, ed. Anne McClanan and Jeffrey Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2016), 4; Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism Since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 18.

[36]Beasley, "Wars of Religion," 150–151; Greenspan, *Selling Cromwell's Wars*, 70; Kristine Kólrud and Marina Prusac, "Introduction: Whose Iconoclasm?" in *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Kristine Kólrud and Marina Prusac (New York: Ashgate, 2014), 8; Andrew Spicer, "Iconoclasm on the Frontier: Le Cateau-Cambrésis, 1566," in *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*, 17; Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 83.

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umbrella of iconoclasm. Though rooted in its Byzantine origins, iconoclasm has acquired many meanings since; this was something that early modern people themselves were aware of given the contestations surrounding both what constituted an image and the means to deal with them.[37] The Irish case adopts an approach that defines the targets and acts of iconoclasts broadly, while seeing an underlying unity of intent—that of eradicating the Church of Rome and all its agents: human, object, and in the natural world.

In the search for targets, images, statues, and crucifixes appeared as prominent—and unsurprising—focuses for attack. Lynch described the "fury against all sacred things and places consecrated to the worship of God"; "paintings and images were torn; the statues were cloven in pieces with the axe and either thrown into the flames, or consigned to stables and brothels."[38] The reference to brothels recalls the powerful associations between profanation, uncleanness, and heresy on both sides of the confessional divide; many English Protestants, including the author of Parliament's own military catechism, explicitly linked whoredom with popery through frequent reference to the Whore of Babylon.[39] Father John Young recounted in a contemporary letter how altars, bells, and images were destroyed, with statues of saints "hanged on a scaffold," crucifixes beheaded, and both holy ornaments and relics mockingly paraded by triumphant troopers in 1650. One Galway incident in 1656 claimed that an image of the Virgin was burned, thus indicating the apparent focus on statues and images across the decade.[40]

Vestments were also apparently favored targets of parliamentarian soldiers, mostly against the Catholic clergy—though further research into Protestant clerical dress in this period may shed further light on whether intra-confessional tensions over vestments also manifested in Ireland. During the disturbances in the late 1630s among the Scottish settlers, as the National Covenant arrived on Irish shores, vestments were a favored target, with surplices stolen and torn up, with threats levelled against conformist ministers for their use of both the surplice and the Book of Common Prayer.[41] With the arrival of Parliament's army in 1649, Catholic clerical vestments were seemingly similarly treated, as key participants in, and symbols of, superstitious rituals. At Galway, one account claimed that the vestments were "made secular cloths of,"[42] similar to the surplices made into shirts and other garments by troops in England, part of the deliberate "challenge [to] any notion that the sacred could reside in mere cloth."[43]

[37]Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts, Volume I: Laws Against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 17–18. 77–83.

[38]John Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus,* ed. and trans. Rev. Matthew Kelly, vol. 3 (Dublin: Celtic Society, 1848), 183.

[39]John Walter, ""Abolishing Superstition with Sedition'? The Politics of Popular Iconoclasm in England 1640–1642," *Past & Present* 183 (May 2004), 90; Robert Ram, *Cromwell's Soldier's Catechism* (London: E. Stock, 1900), 9.

[40]Letter of Rev. John Young S. J., August 14, 1650, in *Spicilegium Ossoriense*, ed. Patrick Francis Moran, First Series (Dublin: W. B. Kelly, 1874), 350; Paul Walsh, "An Account of the Town of Galway," *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 44 (1992), 77.

[41]Papers connected with proceedings in the Irish Parliament and other affairs of Ireland, London, British Library Egerton MS 2541, fols. 229r–230r.

[42]Walsh, "Account," 77.

[43]Walter, "Politics of Popular Iconoclasm," 90.

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The emphasis on destroying public Catholic worship, especially the Mass, meant the destruction of altars and other church furniture by soldiers was commonly reported. Rituals of humiliation and of demonstrative profanation accompanied this violence. At the Abbey of Ross in Co. Galway, the arrival of soldiers saw the altars "overturned," together with the destruction of images and the great cross.[44] Other instruments associated with the mass, such as sacred vessels, were desecrated in a variety of ways. In Galway, the chalices were apparently turned into common drinking cups, in parallel with the turning of vestments into ordinary clothes.[45] Indeed, Lynch decried that churches now held "taverns instead of altars," while also taking a swipe at Protestant sermon culture in complaining that instead of "pious and orthodox sermons" resonating around the church, it was now filled with the "cursings of heretics. . . obscenity and impurities instead of chaste conferences."[46] Lynch's disdain for the hypocritical zealotry of the parliamentarians is clear, and with it the effort to underline the constancy of Irish Catholics.

Public monuments also came under fire, with reports of market crosses defaced by victorious troops. Jesuit sources claimed that the market cross in Kilkenny served as target practice for parliamentarian soldiers, as they "shot at it frequently, so that part of it was shattered."[47] The Jesuit letter detailed the regular observances of the faithful in Kilkenny before the conquest, including processions centered on the main square and open-air sermons, all of which likely had the cross has an important focal point to the devotions.[48] The strong associations of the cross with such rituals, including the display of a statue of the Virgin in the square, may have partly lain behind the animosity of the soldiers: idolatry was not simply about objects but encompassed behaviors and places too, with iconoclasm as a response to all of these. Public crosses were objects of controversy in England and North America,[49] with Ireland serving as another example of the interaction of physical things with places, gestures, movements, and meaning in both shaping understandings of popery, and its perceived pernicious influence far beyond the church building.

Other markers on the landscape—including holy wells and springs and natural features such as trees—became targets where it was clear that they were of spiritual importance to the Catholic Irish. These places were regarded as superstitious leftovers of a bygone time, with the Irish believed to have a particular love for miraculous wells and other natural features—evidence of the ignorance in which they lived.[50] It is perhaps not unsurprising then to find reports of English hostility toward such sites, suppressing devotions as well as sending clear signals as to the superstitious nonsense that surrounded them. In Ballymore, Co. Westmeath, could be found the Well of Jesus, a popular site of pilgrimage and devotion; an important part of the site was a large

[44]Oliver J. Burke, *The Abbey of Ross, Its History and Details*, 2nd edn. (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1869), 27.

[45]Walsh, "Account," 77.

[46]Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus*, vol. 3, 183; Lynch also described how some attempted to save sacred vessels and ornaments, including priest Daniel Delany's servant who was killed upon discovery of concealed objects as he fled: see Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus*, 183–185.

[47]"1641–1650 Letter," in *Irish Jesuit Annual Letters*, ed. Moynes, vol. 2, 836; see also the account by Richard Archdeacon S. J., *Theologia Tripartita*, cited in Murphy, *Cromwell in Ireland*, 315.

[48]"1641–1650 Letter," 836.

[49]Susan Juster, "Planting the 'Great Cross': The Life, and Death, of Crosses in English America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (April 2017), 249–252.

[50]Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 174–176.

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tree that sheltered both well and pilgrims, and likely held votive offerings from those who came there.[51] Following their taking of the town, some of Parliament's forces took it upon themselves to cut down the tree "in order to obliterate the entire memory of the ancient observance," with the intention to create firewood—a natural parallel to the transformation of sacred garments and vessels into prosaic, everyday objects stripped of their spiritual power.[52]

Similarly, the pilgrimage site of St Patrick's Purgatory was attacked; the cave was filled and the "beds" destroyed to prevent the performing of the rounding rituals that were so distinctive of devotion there.[53] The parliamentarian onslaught against holy wells, trees, and other sites in the Irish sacred landscape underlines both the flexibility and contextual specificity of iconoclasm, as these would not have been typical targets during their previous experiences of iconoclastic violence in England: this suggests that concepts of idolatry and superstition could adapt to local practices, encompassing traditional images but also sacred trees or the saints' "beds" of rocks. It highlights too the connections with previous episodes of iconoclasm in Ireland. Pilgrimage to St Patrick's Purgatory was suppressed in 1632, with bishop of Clogher James Spottiswoode ordering the destruction of sacred structures on the island, as described by Henry Jones in a 1647 publication—the same Jones who was later closely involved with the parliamentarian military campaign, including serving as scoutmaster-general, and possibly an important influence in the parallel campaign against superstition and idolatry that was underwritten by "Papall Authority."[54]

A prominent—and emotive—target was tombs. At Galway in 1654, one report claimed that troops "broke down the monuments and coffins of the dead" in St Francis's Abbey, with the tomb of Sir Peter French attracting the particular attention of both the soldiers and the author of the "Account" concerning Galway.[55] The soldiers broke off carved marbles from the tomb, including a crucifix and other "spiritual costly works engraven on fine marble stones," with gilding and other beautiful features. The tomb was ultimately demolished completely and converted into a "chimney" by the governor of the city, named as Colonel Stubbers, with two "Anabaptists" as his sheriffs.[56] The author of the Galway narrative evidently believed this vandalism to be linked to other episodes of violence seen countrywide, and more specifically to the irreligion of "sectarians" who had acquired power in the city that year and then seized the opportunity to desecrate sacred monuments. Indeed, he accused the soldiers (and by extension their commanders) as being "illiterate and covetous," with no regard for the "ruin of the poor inhabitants," with "the sword then being in lieu of the law, our unhappy iron age." He further accused the soldiers of breaking open other tombs and resting places of the dead, "as though some treasure had been within the said coffins," with the hunt for treasure apparently a prime concern in the troops' fury.[57] Such stories echo frequent criticisms of parliamentarians from both English and Irish quarters as

[51]Carroll, *Irish Pilgrimage*, 33–35.

[52]"1651–1654 Letter," in *Irish Jesuit Annual Letters*, ed. Moynes, vol. 2, 862.

[53]Carroll, *Irish Pilgrimage*, 84–91.

[54]Henry Jones, *Saint Patricks purgatory: containing the description, originall, progresse, and demolition of that superstitious place* (London, 1647), 135; Aidan Clarke, "Jones, Henry," in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, https://www.dib.ie/biography/jones-henry-a4326 (last accessed 14 September 2022).

[55]While the published account is a composite of sources, a core element is TCD Ms 886, a copy of an account written c. 1660, likely by Geoffry Lynch fitz Dominick; see Walsh, "Account," 48–49.

[56]Walsh, "Account," 74–75.

[57]Walsh, 75.

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overly zealous, misguided "Up-starts" and "Scums" who had illegitimately seized power from their natural betters in a world turned upside down.[58]

Accusations of greed and of seeking booty among the dead followed tomb-breaking soldiers. Both in Galway and at the abbey of Ross, the troops were said to have forcefully opened tombs to search for hidden treasures such as gold and silver.[59] The desecration of tombs and other burial sites evidently traumatized local communities, leaving often long-lasting physical and emotional scars, such as Burke's description of the still-visible mound of bones in the old Ross abbey precincts in the 1860s.[60] In Galway, a 1666 petition asked for permission to clear the graveyard at St Francis's, as the site was disordered with "great heaps" of stones upon the graves from the destruction wrought by parliamentarian forces, such that the local inhabitants could "not be interred in their ancestral vaults and graves without much trouble."[61] The exhumation of Protestant corpses and the refusal to bury the Protestant dead were both vividly reported aspects of the 1641 rising that provide an important context for such violence: it was clearly considered as an act akin to, if not actually, iconoclasm since it took aim at ideas of holiness and consecration,[62] with destruction, disturbance, and obstruction all considered part of a wider assault on sacred sites, and the bodies of the faithful departed "made images" of in turn.

Even as things and places were subjected to destructive fury, this violence cannot be uncoupled from the intense focus on, and hostility towards, the Catholic clergy. The intertwining of idolatry and priestcraft produced an unholy menace, demanding eradication if Ireland was to be truly reformed. One reported incident during the storming of Wexford captures this close relationship. The town was described as "most deepe in superstition and darknesse," with its inhabitants "zealous against any thing of better light"—a situation encouraged by the clergy in their midst. However, the anonymous author drew on the notions of divine vengeance and the godly soldier, writing in their highly demonstrative account that the "righteous hand of God" had visited the town, with "both the deceivers and deceived" punished. The soldiers apparently met with several priests as they advanced, and reportedly the clergy "came holding forth Crucifixes before them, and conjuring our Soul-diers. . . to save their lives." As true godly Protestants, the troopers were of course neither tempted nor deceived: they "would not owne their dead Images for our living Saviour" and went on to strike the priests dead with their own crucifixes.[63] This focus on the clergy—especially friars—was characteristic of English violence elsewhere, especially in the Caribbean: Nicholas Beasley has argued that, when seen through a wider lens that encompasses violence against sacred spaces and objects, the clergy are themselves "made an image" for

[58]William Basill, *A Declaration of the Irish Armie in Ulster Sent to the Parlament in a Letter from William Basill, Esquire* (London: William Dugard, 1650), 3–4; for an example of English criticism, see *The Distractions of Our Times Wherein Is Discovered the Generall Discontent of All Estates throughout the Whole Land* (London, 1642), 8.

[59]Walsh, "Account," 75; Burke, *Abbey of Ross*, 26–7.

[60]Burke, *Abbey of Ross*, 27.

[61]Walsh, "Account," 77.

[62]Many contemporaries drew on iconoclastic language when describing thefts, looting, and so on of sacred objects, suggesting important conceptual overlaps; see Michalski, *Reformation and the Visual Arts*, 83.

[63]*A Very Full and Particular Relation of the Great Progresse and Happy Proceedings of the Army of the Common-Wealth of England toward the Reducing of Ireland* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1649), 56.

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destruction.[64] Their central practical and symbolic role in the enemy faith, orchestrating and encouraging idolatry among ignorant laity, in turn made them targets, for to fight against idolatry was to attack the Church of Rome and its agents, from the pope to the humblest friar, who all peddled false gods.[65] Margaret Aston similarly emphasized the connection between violence against things and against people: though she argued that for many people, images served as "surrogates or dummies" for the venting of anger against "inaccessible human agents", in the Irish case, those agents *were* accessible.[66] The highly ritualized, even ironic violence inflicted on priests and friars, such as beating them with their own idols, mirrors iconoclastic fury and serves to underline the all-encompassing nature of a campaign against idolatry and superstition, from the natural, through the material, to the human—for "'idolatry' is a fighting word," which presupposed removal, destruction, and conflict in a totalizing battle of right versus wrong.[67]

The English Parliament's iconoclastic drive across the country was far from the first episode of such violence in Ireland of course. In the preceding decade, Irish Protestants unleashed fury on images, places, and people, such as the 1647 sack of Cashel by the forces of Murrough O'Brien, Lord Inchiquin, which saw both significant bloodshed and iconoclasm. By then allied with the English Parliament, after taking the town below the cathedral (which stood on the famous "Rock"), troops stormed the cathedral, where there ensued a massacre of both people and things. Hundreds were reported killed, including women.[68] Soldiers were accused of breaking images, including beheading a large crucifix and a statue of the Virgin Mary among others, and "pollut[ing]" communion vessels.[69] The violence at Cashel was also intensely anticlerical: several priests were reported killed, and the archbishop of Cashel's miter became the soldiers' plaything, with Father Andrew Sall writing that Inchiquin himself wore it in parody of the Catholic incumbent who fled the oncoming troops.[70] Undoubtedly, iconoclasm did occur. However, reporting of it could be sporadic, or even absent—Inchiquin for example did not write about his victory at Cashel as he did with other victories, such as at Knocknanuss later that same year. Instead, only two relatively sanitized accounts of the storm appeared from English presses.[71] It may also be that the violence itself was sporadic and relatively infrequent: much Irish Protestant anxiety tended to focus on priests and their activities versus things—though as episodes such as the 1632 destruction of St Patrick's Purgatory indicate, there were violent spasms against "superstitious" places, practices, and things.

What is distinctive about the Cromwellian period is the relative frequency of reports of iconoclasm, as the above episodes show, and its prominence in the records. The

[64]Beasley, "Wars of Religion," 155–156.

[65]Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 6–7.

[66]Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 73.

[67]Eire, *War Against the Idols*, 5–6.

[68]Alexander Pigot, *A Full Relation of the Taking of Roche Castle: Together with St. Patricks Cathedral* (London: Humphrey Tuckey, 1647), 5.

[69]Father Andrew Sall, "Narrative by Father Andrew Sall in a Letter to Father John Young" in Murphy, *Cromwell in Ireland,* 388–391; "1641–1650 Letter," 836.

[70]Sall, "Narrative," 390–1; The Earl of Castlehaven, James, Lord Audley, *The Memoirs of James Lord Audley Earl of Castlehaven* (London: Henry Brome, 1680), 56.

[71]Inchiquin, *A letter to the Honorable William Lenthal Esquire, speaker of the Honorable House of Commons* (London: Edward Husband, 1647); the other is by Pigot, cited in note 68 above.

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violence was evidently shocking and traumatizing, prompting its recording, and suggesting it was *perceived* as especially vicious, even as it built on earlier Irish legacies. That many accounts, such as Lynch's *Cambrensis Eversus*, were written later and dwell on such violence underlines how it had ingrained itself onto Catholic memories of the decade, to be recalled in times of polemical need—but without this necessarily meaning it was insignificant at the time. As Sarah Covington has shown, many popular memories of the 1650s focused on the religious dimension to conflict, suggesting a contemporary importance that continued through later generations, as Irish Catholics sought to understand what had happened, and why.[72] Indeed, these prominent memories of iconoclasm should not be surprising amidst the ongoing debates around iconoclasm. Dario Gamboni has argued that destruction, defacement, or removal create new meanings for objects (and places) as the memory of violence transforms that thing's significance, with the attack becoming part of its history and even, in some cases, making it more holy due to suffering.[73] Cromwellian iconoclasm may figure more prominently due to exactly this process, as Irish Catholics at large looked upon destruction and desolation but found in it an important source of unity: against the furious "heretics," against the English "outsiders," and against a regime that saw their faith as an automatic "marker of guilt." The iconoclasm became a rallying cry, a gathering point in collective memory that served to strengthen Irish and Catholic fortitude in the face of religious violence.

The soldiers who inflicted this iconoclasm were evidently well-versed in the ideological and practical vocabulary of iconoclasm. We have seen how they drew on much of the repertoire of rituals seen across Britain, Europe, and the Americas in the "war against the idols": burning to cleanse and purify, mocking to demonstrate contempt, and defacing to recall punishments for human crimes, such as cropping noses and ears.[74] While sitting in this broader European and Atlantic context, the violence of Cromwellian Ireland was closely tied to the iconoclasm that wracked England in the previous decade: one that progressed from fears of creeping popery fueled by Archbishop William Laud's reforms to Parliament's ordinances that gradually extended the range of targets, including images, fonts, and organs.[75] This chronological development has long preoccupied English historiography, seeing it as a key part of the "long reformation."[76] Just as with the pulling down of Laudian "innovations" and the stirring

[72]See note 23.

[73]Dario Gamboni, "Preservation and Destruction, Oblivion and Memory," in *Negating the Image*, 5.

[74]See, for example, Walter, "Politics of Popular Iconoclasm"; Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France," *Past & Present* 59, no. 1 (May 1973), 51–91; Peter Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 6; C. Pamela Graves, "From an Archaeology of Iconoclasm to an Anthropology of the Body: Images, Punishment and Personhood in England, 1500–1660," *Current Anthropology* 49, no. 1 (February 2008), 35–57.

[75]Walter, "Politics of Popular Iconoclasm," 82–85, 81, 95; Margaret Aston, "Puritans and Iconoclasm, 1560–1660," in *The Culture of English Puritanism: 1560–1700,* ed. Jacqueline Eales and Christopher Durston (London: Macmillan, 1996), 114; Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547–c.1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 274.

[76]Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 4; see also Keith Thomas, "Art and Iconoclasm in Early Modern England," in *Religious Policy in Post-Reformation England*, ed. Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16–40; Patrick Collinson, "From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia: The Cultural Impact of the Second English Reformation," in *The Impact of the English Reformation*, ed. Peter Marshall (London: Arnold, 1997), 278–308.

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of anti-popery, Ireland represented an opportunity for reform in an historically intransigent kingdom. The close links between English and Irish iconoclasm shed new light on England's chronology of religious strife and point to a wider, British understanding of conflict in these decades that was rooted in mutual fear even while sharing similar rituals of violence.

The English experience proved highly significant for Ireland in a number of ways. One was the prominent role of soldiers on both sides of the Irish Sea, as we have seen already, with Gribben's work indicating the likely influence of Baptists in the army as shaping a vehemently anti-Catholic approach to Ireland. A second influence was in processes of legitimization and organization. John Walter has pointed to the constant tension between "state-sponsored" and "popular" iconoclasm, showing how initiatives like the Protestation Oath and Parliament's September 1641 order for the "abolishing of Superstition and Innovation" created space for popular agency in enabling people to remove "this old Superstitious, Idolized stuffe" from their churches. However, the condemnation of idolatry from official quarters, while often interpreted—and then followed through—as a call to action, it was not necessarily always intended to do so, leaving open questions of official sanction, turning a blind eye, and tacit support for iconoclasts.[77] One of the foremost sites of this awkward relationship was among soldiery, with troops raised for service as early as the late 1630s involved in breaking down altar rails and "reforming" churches in many parts of England.[78] Parliamentarian soldiers were encouraged to see themselves as the "godly army," engaged in the Lord's work and the struggle against Antichrist.[79] Print reinforced these connections: in *A spirituall snapsacke for the Parliament souldiers* published in 1643, John Price described Parliament's enemies as "a most *Idolatrous, Superstitious, Delinquent, Prophane, Ignorant, or Hypocriticall* Generation," and "God's purpose' against them was 'to thrash them, and even to breake them in pieces."[80] The *Souldier's Catechism* went even further, telling readers that "God hath put the Sword of Reformation into the Souldiers Hand," and it was appropriate for him to use it when he met with superstition and idolatry—especially when religious and secular leaders had failed in previously removing it.[81] Even amidst publications such as these, explicit sanction for popular mass iconoclasm, versus organized and systematic efforts such as William Dowsing's commission from the earl of Manchester,[82] was rare—but other sources of legitimacy than commissions were readily drawn upon, creating ambiguous zones of moral authority but without clear, official authorization for action.

The Irish campaign in many respects continued and built upon these two features of military leadership in the fight against idolatry and superstition, and the often-grey area of official sanction. The Cromwellian attack on the institutions, practices, and personnel of the Roman Catholic Church itself drew on the language and imagery of iconoclasm,

[77]Walter, "Politics of Popular Iconoclasm," 115–116; Aston, "Puritans and Iconoclasm," 114; Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 59; for the importance of local concerns, see Joel Budd, "Rethinking Iconoclasm in Early Modern England: The Case of Cheapside Cross," *Journal of Early Modern History* 4, no. 3–4 (January 2000), 383.

[78]Mark Charles Fissel, *The Bishops' Wars: Charles I's Campaigns against Scotland, 1638–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 264–267.

[79]Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 52, 120.

[80]John Price, *A Spirituall Snapsacke for the Parliament Souldiers.* (London: Henry Overton, 1643), 13.

[81]Ram, *Cromwell's Soldier's Catechism,* 17.

[82]*The Journal of William Dowsing: Iconoclasm in East Anglia During the English Civil War*, ed. Trevor Cooper (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001).

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with Cromwell himself warning the Catholic clergy they would be "broken in peeces" for their deception of and deliberate keeping in ignorance of the Irish laity.[83] As in England, the condemnation of popery, of popish superstition and idolatry, could in turn be read as both authorization to act and as a key aim of the campaign as a whole. Parliament's soldiers had been primed to do this work both through aggressive polemic (as the next section will explore) and a practical training in the "last execution of the Idols" in England, with rituals of humiliation, destruction, execution, and religious cleansing everywhere apparent. The campaign in Ireland represented a moment of renewed enthusiasm for Parliament and its army when it came to smashing idolatry. Julie Spraggon argued that by the 1650s, English iconoclastic fervor had waned, and the topic was much "less of an issue" by then.[84] However, I would suggest that if iconoclastic fervor declined in England, part of the answer may also lie in a switching of focus from England to Ireland: there was in Ireland a clearly identifiable enemy to do battle with and a landscape still saturated in idolatry and superstition. Iconoclasm's "oppositional" nature, demanding an enemy to fight against,[85] made the Irish campaign an ideal vehicle to continue the struggle against the forces of spiritual darkness.

Placing the events of the Cromwellian conquest into the wider English and Irish context allows us to see continuities and differences and to open up questions about English justifications for the campaign and their approach to governing Ireland once it was completed, especially in relation to their religious policies. In many respects, the conquest built on a decade's worth of iconoclasm in England itself, representing a new front in the fight against idolatry, but one that drew on significant repertoires of ritual and symbolism as practiced in English examples—but also much further afield in Europe's religious wars and in the American colonies. The long and fraught history of English interventions in Ireland was not just a backdrop but a living force in shaping the parliamentarians' approach, both militarily and when "peace" was declared. Indeed, greater attention to the heavily religious character of the conquest, with iconoclasm accompanying the movement of troops around the island, reinforces arguments for the centrality of a forceful anti-Catholicism governing approaches to the country across the decade: a "practical toleration" did not exist for idolatry.[86] The experience of destruction during the heat of the military effort, the sporadic attacks on discovered objects (and persons), and the scars both physical and mental on the Irish Catholic landscape must surely be placed in conversation with policy for a more complete picture of English approaches to Irish Catholicism in these decades. The Oath of Abjuration, to focus on one example, followed on from the efforts to destroy the external structures and supports of Catholicism, including the hierarchy, clergy, and public rites—but also the very stuff of devotion and totems of a religious community.

For the English, while cleansing Ireland naturally followed on from their campaigns in England itself, the Irish nonetheless occupied a particular place in shaping discussions of popery, idolatry, and superstition more generally, which were critical in the highly influential discourses surrounding international popery and the need to fight it. Irish idolatry was on the doorstep, and Irish Catholics had proved themselves similarly enthusiastic in the iconoclasm wars, with attacks on Protestant bibles, churches,

[83] *A Declaration of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland: For the Undeceiving of Deluded and Seduced People* (Cork and London: E. Griffin, 1650), A2v.

[84] Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 250.

[85] Spraggon, 250.

[86] Cunningham, "Lay Catholicism," 785–786.

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and ministers widely reported features of the 1641 rebellion, all supposedly under the direction of their priests and friars.[87] Long before the invasion in 1649, Ireland was prominent in constructions of the popish "other" in English print and in popular imagination, with important ideological and practical consequences once the military campaign began at the end of the decade. How the Irish featured in the ever-evolving and flexible, but nonetheless critical, idea of "anti-popery" is a crucial aspect of the wider story since it carried such profound consequences for Britain and Ireland for a very long time to come afterward.

III. A British Problem? Idolatry and the Irish in Print Culture

The outbreak of the Irish rebellion in October 1641 was greeted with fear in England. An explosion of print supported, created, and spread rumors and atrocity stories that were avidly consumed by anxious men and women who dreaded a similar situation unfolding in Charles I's other kingdoms.[88] Scotland too was gripped by fear that the rebellion could spread to British shores with the support of English and Scottish fifth columnists, and many blood-curdling English pamphlets were reprinted by Scottish printers.[89] While usually associated with the 1641–1642 period as the most intensive moment of production, English print culture continued to be preoccupied with Ireland, Irish Catholics, and the threat posed by popery across the decade. These concerns, I argue, played a key role in shaping expectations once the invasion was launched in 1649. Indeed, the Irish were established as the idolatrous, popish enemy par excellence, and Parliament's soldiers were primed to cleanse the country of the stains of superstition and bring in sweeping reformation, just as they had in England itself. Irish iconoclasm thus becomes enmeshed in a wider British story of anti-popery and violence as the influence of an intensely hostile print culture peddling popish panic, together with deep-seated, often older stereotypes of Ireland and the Irish, were married to practical action when the invasion began. This was very much an Anglo-Irish, perhaps even British, story that linked the two islands through religious hostility, violence, and destruction.

From the start, the Irish rebellion was imbued with heavy religious significance, with both Joseph Cope and Ethan Shagan pointing to confessional struggles as underpinning the reception of the news in England. Shagan identified some interpretations of the Irish rebellion as part of a wider "Foxean" narrative in English print: the Irish rising was merely another example of extreme Catholic violence and the attempted total extirpation of Protestantism that had persisted for decades since the Reformation. In such views, England and her people were the godly remnant constantly battling for true religion.[90] Looking through lens of the Puritan turner Nehemiah Wallington, Cope also pointed to accounts of the rebellion that placed it in a longer providential history of victory over the "popish international," including the 1588 Armada, the 1605

[87]Brian MacCuarta, "Religious Violence Against Settlers in South Ulster, 1641–2" in *Age of Atrocity*, 154–175.

[88]Joseph Cope, *England and the 1641 Irish Rebellion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[89]David Stevenson, *Scottish Covenanters and Irish Confederates: Scottish-Irish Relations in the Mid-Seventeenth Century* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1981), 54; Adam Fox, *The Press and the People: Cheap Print and Society in Scotland, 1500–1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 75.

[90]Ethan Howard Shagan, "Constructing Discord: Ideology, Propaganda, and English Responses to the Irish Rebellion of 1641," *Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 1 (January 1997), 9–11.

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Gunpowder Plot, and the Spanish Match.[91] Both scholars have stressed the relevance of the rising for feeding fears of popish plots in which the Irish often had a starring role but that encompassed dangerous, hidden internal enemies too, including the queen, the Catholic nobility, and especially the bishops.[92] The Irish problem was immediate and threatening. Further, the putative links between the Irish rebellion, popish plotters in England and Scotland, and the widespread sense that events in Ireland were a "next step" in a chain of Protestant persecution that bound together Germany in the Thirty Years' War, French Huguenots, and many previous episodes of violence, meant that the rebellion demanded a response.[93]

Shagan has argued that, in many of these pamphlets, the technique of placing stories or other materials side by side sought to draw the reader to make inferences or associations between one cause and another.[94] One 1642 pamphlet, *A true inventory of the goods and chattels of superstition*, purported to be a last will and testament and household inventory from the "parish of ignorance" in the "kingdome of idolatry" and listed the house's idolatrous contents, from beads to pictures.[95] A final section reported "intelligence" of papal "agitations," especially alarm over English efforts to eradicate the "corruptions innovated into Religion"; it directly implicated Irish Catholics by describing how a rebellion had been plotted and raised to preserve the pope's power in Ireland, and to maintain idolatry there.[96] The connections between the physical fabric of superstition—the crucifixes, statues, and other "ceremonious Implements"[97]—and Irish Catholics' involvement in dangerous international conspiracies aimed at the overthrow of Protestantism were firmly fixed. Such concerns found their way into the corridors of power too: a February 7, 1642, commission to form the committee for Irish affairs, listed as its first priority the protection of Irish Protestantism, married to which was how "Idolatry, Ignorance, and Superstition [may be] diminished and suppressed."[98] The intertwined concerns of rebellion, bloodshed, and idolatry in Ireland were firmly established; as the commission went on, the difficulty was surely in how to "perform and execute all things requisite" for their suppression.[99]

The link between the Irish rebellion, Irish Catholics, and idolatry was maintained in English print across the 1640s. Even as England grappled with her own difficulties surrounding "monuments of idolatry and superstition," the Irish case was never far from the surface as fears of popery abounded: after all, the Irish were not so very physically far away. Amidst the battles surrounding Cheapside Cross, for example—a focal point for the "political face-off between king and Parliament" and subjected to numerous attacks—readers were reminded of the close association between Ireland and idolatry.[100] One pamphlet, *Articles of high treason exhibited against Cheap-side crosse*, accused the cross of attempting to "seduce" English men and women from Protestantism to Catholicism, working to bring about the pope's supremacy, and introducing "sundry and divers innovations into the Church," including images and crucifixes, firmly linking

[91]Cope, *England and the 1641 Irish Rebellion*, 77.
[92]Cope, 83; Shagan, "Constructing Discord," 23–26.
[93]Cope, *Irish Rebellion*, 102.
[94]Shagan, "Constructing Discord," 9, 25–27
[95]R. P., *A True Inventory of the Goods and Chattels of Superstition* (London: William Lee, 1642), 1–3.
[96]R. P., *A True Inventory*, 4–6.
[97]R. P., 2.
[98]*Journal of the House of Commons*, vol. 2, 1640–1643, (London: HM Stationery Office, 1802), 417–418.
[99]*Journal of the House of Commons*, 418.
[100]Budd, "Cheapside Cross," 398–400; Juster, "'Planting the "Great Cross,"' 253.

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popish plotting with these physical objects.[101] The connection with Ireland was made explicit in the cross's "last will and Testament" following her charge of high treason. "I give and bequeath all the Lead that is about me, to the *hostile Catholikes* in Ireland," one bequest read. The lead was to be used "to make *Bullets* to confound that cursed crew of *Heretikes*."[102] Irish Catholics were thus charged with continuing the fight for idolatry, armed with bullets from a destroyed cross: the symbolism was obvious and deepened the associations between the Irish and the "monuments" of superstition and idolatry that had come under sustained parliamentarian attack since the early 1640s.

The troops that arrived under the command of Oliver Cromwell in 1649 were not in fact the first parliamentarian forces dispatched to Ireland,[103] but the 1649 expedition was both far larger than anything seen before and was viewed as a watershed by contemporaries, as well as by later historians. A flurry of publications discussed the invasion before the army departed, and it was not without criticism.[104] The constant "diet of horror stories" coming from Ireland meant the desire to avenge Irish blood guilt was very apparent:[105] one commentary widely attributed to John Milton decried the "bloudy Rebels" who were guilty of the "mercilesse and barbarous Massacre of so many thousand *English*" through their "Idolatrous and Ceremoniall Superstition, the very death of all true Religion." Reform and the throwing down of the idols were near at hand however, and the Irish would be "confin'd. . . to the bare enjoyment of that which is not in our reach, their Consciences," with Parliament finally "breaking" popish power, both temporal and spiritual, in a campaign of iconoclasm that would transform this long-intransigent kingdom.[106] Another pamphlet, Edward Calver's *Zions Thankfull Ecchoes from the Clifts of Ireland*, echoed these sentiments, exhorting the Parliament to "root out" and "suppress" the "unclean spirits" and "Antichristian Beast" that had ruled there.[107] Anticlericalism ran rife in all these publications, building on both anti-episcopacy and on longstanding hostility to Catholic clergy—and with the Parliament's conquest, one pamphlet writer hoped, the "corrupted grains" planted by the "Romish seeds men" would be pulled up and true religion planted.[108]

These concerns found their way into more official publications too. In his response to the Irish Catholic prelates' declarations at Clonmacnoise, Lord Lieutenant Cromwell lambasted the "poisoning" of the poor laity with "false abhominable & Antichristian doctrine and practices," especially the keeping of scripture from the laity, leaving them reliant on "senceless Orders and Traditions."[109] The declaration drew heavily on the language of breaking and destruction, calling to mind the throwing down of images and other idols: "you shall be broken in peeces," he wrote, as well as threatening

[101]Richard Overton, *Articles of High Treason Exhibited against Cheap-Side Crosse* (London: printed for R. Overton, 1642), 3.

[102]Overton, *Articles of High Treason*, 5.

[103]Troops were dispatched to support the Lord Inchiquin in Munster in early 1647, with more arriving in the summer of that year: Ó Siochrú, *God's Executioner*, 47

[104]Ó Siochrú, , 63–65

[105]Ó Siochrú, , 63.

[106]John Milton, "Observations Upon the Articles of Peace with the Irish Rebels," in *Articles of peace, made and concluded with the Irish rebels, and papists* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1649), 46–53.

[107]Edward Calver, *Zions Thankfull Ecchoes from the Clifts of Ireland* (London: Richard Harper, 1649), 7, 19, 17.

[108]Calver, *Zions Thankfull Ecchoes*, 8–9.

[109]*Undeceiving of Deluded and Seduced People,* B1v.

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that no matter how many they drew to their wicked cause, it "shall not save you from breaking."[110] Both John Morrill and John Cunningham have highlighted the strong anticlerical stance of both Cromwell as an individual and the later Cromwellian regime, with Morrill arguing, in an echo of Milton's "bare enjoyment" of the private conscience, that public Catholic worship, and with it the ministry of priests, was to be eradicated.[111] Cunningham has pointed to this publication as one that would not compel Catholics to give up their beliefs, but underscored Parliament's hostility to "the practice of Catholicism, or of its bishops and priests."[112] In sum, external manifestations were the central problem, with restrictions necessary until it would "please God to give them another or a better minde."[113] This concentration on the physical supports of Irish Catholicism, whether clergy or crucifixes, helps explain the mass destruction visited upon churches and objects from 1649. This is not to suggest that the violence and destruction of the 1650s was somehow inevitable or predetermined, and Cromwell himself sought to reassure the Irish population that he had not come with murderous intent towards them.[114] However, the deliberate practice of English iconoclasm in earlier years; the constant associations drawn between Irish rebellion, international popery, the clergy, and idolatry; and the priming of soldiers to see themselves as instruments of reformation all point both to an extension of English anti-idolatry to Ireland and its firm integration into a wider British tale of confessional conflict. In 1649, Ireland and the Irish were in the eye of the storm that was the constant battle against the forces of international popery.

IV. Conclusion: Braided Histories

The story of iconoclasm in Ireland between 1649 and 1660 is a tapestry with Irish, English, and British threads. In Ireland, it is the tale of iconoclasm itself and its long-term consequences. The Parliament of England's campaign to conquer the country unleashed a wave of iconoclastic violence against the devotional fabric of Irish Catholic life: crucifixes, statues, sacred sites, clerical vestments, among much else. Such efforts were part of a wider hostility of the Cromwellian regime to any and all external manifestations of Catholicism: iconoclasm must be seen alongside efforts to suppress the clergy and the performing of key rites such as the mass, sacraments, and pilgrimage. The seeming fervor with which idolatry and superstition were attacked suggests a deep animosity towards Catholicism that was concerned both with skin-deep and more profound issues, and demands that we consider the decade as one of a sustained religious struggle that had important implications for political loyalties and the land question. The experience of the 1650s stood at some contrast with the decade before for Irish Catholics. While the 1641 rebellion and Confederate wars were certainly religious conflicts, patterns of iconoclasm in the 1650s differed to what came before, both in perception and likely in reality, as attacks on the physical fabric of Catholicism shocked the country. Even if only ever a minority into the Restoration, the seeming victory of the soldier "scum" in the political and land settlements, I

[110] *Undeceiving of Deluded and Seduced People*, A2v.

[111] Cunningham, "Lay Catholicism," 774–775; Morrill, "Drogheda Massacre," 248–250.

[112] Cunningham, "Lay Catholicism," 772–773.

[113] *A Declaration by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland: Concerning His Resolutions for the Peace and Safety of Ireland* (London: Robert Ibbiston, 1649), 1–2.

[114] *A Declaration*, 1–2.

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would argue, had an important influence both when looking back, as the conquest was understood as a profoundly confessional conflict, and when looking forward as a reconfigured Protestant elite held power and entrenched anti-Catholicism ever deeper.[115]

The English thread, in some contrast to the Irish, can be seen as one of continuity, and extends our chronology of iconoclasm significantly from the usual emphasis on the c. 1640 to 1644 period. Idolatry never disappeared from English concerns, but the white heat of destruction relocated to Ireland, sustained by years of print and policies that consistently linked Ireland with idolatry and superstition. While evidently seeing Ireland as part of the "popish international" and deploying many similar vocabularies and rites of violence once there, the extent and intensity of the violence inflicted on the native populations does give rise to questions: the iconoclasm took place in a wider environment of great persecution that was heavily justified by the horrific Irish atrocities against Protestants in 1641. Iconoclasm in Ireland must be knotted together with the renewed iconoclastic fervor in mid-seventeenth-century England, even as important differences existed between the targets, intentions, and outcome of the violence.

The braiding of many issues and questions in both our Irish and English threads underline how much this is, finally, a story with British implications, concerned with the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, or British and Irish Civil Wars. Many actors were shared across Britain and Ireland, as were ideas and behaviors. The common vocabularies of violence in attacks against objects highlight the deep-seated antagonisms, but also similar concerns of pollution and purification, true religion versus heresy. Each side profoundly affected the other, and viewing the story through the lens of idolatry and iconoclasm brings this into sharp focus. The effort to demolish idolatry and superstition in England wracked that kingdom; later, the violence would come to Ireland, carried out by some of the "godly" soldiers who had been primed, through this English experience, to see themselves as instruments of reformation. In turn, a key driver of the hostility to idolatry in England was the fear of popery—in which the Irish were central figures. The outbreak of rebellion in 1641 seemed to confirm the worst fears of many English and Scots about the barbarous, idolatrous Irish, but also the popish plotting ongoing in Britain itself and the important role Ireland could play in establishing the pope's toehold on British shores. The efforts against idolatry therefore had profound wider implications, and the violence unleashed on Catholic objects in Ireland is a vital part of this broader story—one that in turn creates a richer tapestry of the civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century.

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[115]Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, 15–16.

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