



**Ruth Dudley Edwards.** *An Atlas of Irish History*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005. xii + 299 pp. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-27859-1.



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### A Visual Directory to Patterns in Irish History

Ruth Dudley Edwards's *An Atlas of Irish History* is an excellent resource for teachers and mid- to advanced level students of Irish history. The third edition of this book has been written in conjunction with Bridget Hourican, whom Edwards credits with being "the main author of most of the new material relating to the Republic of Ireland" (p. xii). This work is full of usable and informative maps covering a wide range of topics. The maps are plentiful, well drawn, and, for the most part, easily comprehensible. This book avoids delving into the myriad of historiographical debates involving Ireland and the value of the work is having over one hundred maps and charts on hand as reference and teaching aids.

*An Atlas of Irish History* is organized thematically rather than chronologically. Chapters include topics such as "Military Developments," "Religion," "Land," and "Social Change," among others. Each chapter's contents are then arranged chronologically and each section is paired with a map to illustrate a specific point of Irish history. For example, the chapter on religion begins with a brief overview of five thousand years of Irish religious change. The first section of the chapter, titled "The Com-

ing of Christianity," consists of approximately a page of text and a map that shows what the authors refer to as "some of the more important" ecclesiastical foundations from the fifth through the eighth centuries in Ireland (pp. 107-108). This map does an excellent job of portraying the pervasiveness of Christianity in Ireland at this time by visually presenting to the reader the ubiquitousness of the ecclesiastical foundations on the island. The chapter then goes on in similar fashion to cover "Medieval Ecclesiastical Ireland," "Post-Reformation Ireland," "The Dissolution of the Monasteries," "Dissenters in Ireland," "Religious Affiliations," and "Catholicism in Crisis," each with an accompanying map.

One of the strongest chapters is that which covers "The Irish Abroad." Rather than only covering the all-too-obvious emigration of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, the authors expand their examination as far back as the fourth century. They begin with a section that maps the existence of ogham stones throughout Ireland and western Britain, showing an Irish influence that went beyond the shores of Ireland itself. The next two sections and their maps show, respectively, the

location of colonies of Irish scholars throughout Western and Eastern Europe between the years 500 and 800, and the location of Irish colleges, both religious and secular, on the European continent. These two maps are prime examples of the value of this book. The maps make an entirely different impression upon the reader than a simple list of place names would by illustrating the widespread impact of Irish religion and scholarship throughout Europe. The significance of these maps does not end there as they would also be useful in any European history class to demonstrate the vibrant interconnectivity of people and ideas as far back as one thousand years ago. These maps well illustrate that Ireland was not “on the edge of Europe” but an integral part of the whole. The chapter on “The Irish Abroad” continues on to cover other topics of emigration and touches on nearly every location in the world to which the Irish traveled in substantial numbers. The chapter includes sections on the emigration inspired by religious fervor, military/administrative posts, and economic and social upheaval. Unsurprisingly, more time is spent on Britain and America than most other locales.

While the maps are incredibly useful for all levels of interest in Irish history and the visual nature of the work may draw newcomers to this book, the thematic structure and the lack of a clear chronology may be confusing for those who do not already have a strong grasp of the field. Also, the text accompanying each section generally does not contain enough information for a neophyte; complexities are glossed over and statements can at times be misleading. For instance, in the discussion of “Irish-Speakers: 1851-2004,” the only explanation given for the decline in the number of Irish speakers is that English was the language of business and commerce and

Irish “gradually became the language of the poor and uneducated” (p. 225), ignoring the impact of the important events such as the famine and mass emigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the shape of the Irish language. The authors go on to say that “the Gaeltacht is facing inevitable decline: the young do not wish to be restricted by their language to an extremely limited range of jobs or locations” (p. 227), when in reality the opposite is quite true today. The Irish speaker of the twenty-first century is almost definitely bi-lingual and their linguistic flexibility, although not necessarily required for every job, is a sought-after mark of a strong educational background and a promising future. Footnotes are not used in the book and the only source listed in the bibliography for this section is *A View of the Irish Language*, which, having been published in 1969, may be the reason this section is not entirely up-to-date.

These problems, however, do not limit the usefulness of this work. This volume would be a great asset to anyone teaching a class on Irish history. They cover a vast array of topics and are thoughtfully laid out and well drawn. The select bibliography would be helpful for beginning scholars who are looking for a more in-depth treatment of a specific topic or period. Also, although the thematic structure might be confusing for those unfamiliar with the overall chronology of Irish history, this format admittedly serves the map-based work well. While a newcomer to the study of Irish history might appreciate the visual orientation of this book and its short treatments of each period and subject, *An Atlas of Irish History* would best serve those who are already well acquainted with Irish history and who would certainly use this book as a reference and teaching aid on many occasions.

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