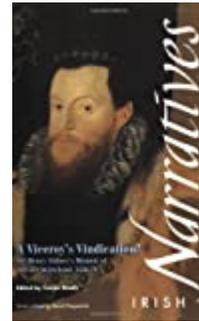




**Ciaran Brady, ed.** *A Viceroy's Vindication? Sir Henry Sidney's Memoir of Service in Ireland, 1556-1578*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2002. vi + 136 pp. \$15.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-85918-180-5.



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## The Trials and Tribulations of a Lord Deputy of Ireland

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As president of the Council in the Marches and Principality of Wales from 1559 and three times lord deputy of Ireland before his death in 1586, Sir Henry Sidney was at the forefront of the expansion of English dominion in the British Isles. He also played a somewhat less successful role as a diplomat in attempting to pacify the conflict between the houses of Guise and Condé during the religious wars in France and in the effort to discredit the claims of Mary, Queen of Scots, to the English throne.

Sidney's narrative essay of his service as lord deputy of Ireland was not the first attempt by a royal servant to address a petition to Queen Elizabeth asking to be rewarded for his services, but it was the longest (at 30,000 words) and the most elaborately contrived literary effort to justify his policies and actions, and thus has a claim to be called the first English political memoir. The editor might argue that this was also the first modern military memoir written by an inhabitant of the British Isles. A considerable part of the *Memoir* is devoted to Sidney's military exploits and campaigns in Ireland, and it seems

to have been modeled upon, in its subsequent revisions, Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, the autobiographical parts of Francesco Guicciardini's *History of Italy*, and perhaps also Blaise de Monluc's *Commentaries*, which might have been available to Sidney in manuscript form. Sidney's father, Sir William, had also been a soldier, and like Sir Francis Walsingham and Sidney's brother-in-law, Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, Sidney and his son, Sir Philip, were associated with the war party in Elizabethan England and often found themselves at odds with the carpet knights of the courtier faction. Sir Henry had also commissioned an English translation of Caradog of Llancarvan's *The Historie of Cambria* (1584) to provide his son Philip with examples of how ancient Welsh princes discovered the path to honor and valor through their "politic and martial acts."<sup>[1]</sup>

Sidney had been quite successful in his long career as president of the Council of Wales, but his tenure as lord deputy of Ireland (he held the two offices concurrently) was distinctly less successful, although he discharged his duties competently and conscientiously. His *Memoir* is devoted entirely to his Irish experiences where the prob-

lems of pacification and assimilation proved more intractable than in Wales. In each of his three “deputations” or terms as lord deputy Sidney had to subdue a major rebellion. Yet, unlike so many other English officials and planters in late-sixteenth-century Ireland, he did not attempt to explain the absence of a civil society in Ireland in terms of cultural inferiority, and he did not resort to comparing the Irish to the Scythians. He saw the problem of imposing order and obedience in Ireland in purely political terms of negotiating with individual lords and chieftains to persuade them to accept English law and customs and to live in peace. In order to accomplish this task he led a peripatetic existence constantly progressing through the Irish countryside meeting with individual lords. Some he saw as thoroughly obstreperous, but many he viewed as rational men with whom he could come to an understanding. This required him to have a detailed knowledge of the political problems specific to each of the many lordships, and few men, English or Irish, could have had as detailed an on-the-ground knowledge of Irish topography as Sidney—campaigning as he did even in the midst of winter. Sidney also made a brave effort to learn the Irish language, although he never mastered it. Sidney set out on his travels with expectation that negotiation was normal and conflict was abnormal. This meant, of course, dismantling the system of coyne and livery by which Irish lords and chieftains extorted considerable sums of money from their tenants in order to maintain their warriors and engage in cattle raids and other forms of endemic private warfare with their rivals. Instead, Sidney compelled them to pay rents to the crown. These crown rents were actually collected and helped to maintain English garrisons to impose military rule and to enforce agreements with individual lords and chieftains. This was the first step towards imposing civility. This did not necessarily make the Gaelic Irish subjects of the crown, entitled to the full protection of the crown that the English and the Welsh enjoyed (that would come only under King James VI and I), but Sidney took pride in restoring castles and properties that had been forcibly seized to their rightful owners. These persons were then expected to swear fealty, become crown tenants, and render military service when called upon to do so. Under Elizabeth, the Gaelic or Old Irish did not yet enjoy a full system of common-law courts that reached into the provinces. Sidney did, however, begin the process of shiring the Irish lordships, which pointed in that direction, as had been done in Wales, although he could not remember in what county he had placed the Glinns (or Glens). Justice, such as it was, was often dispensed by the provost marshal; and rebels, such as

Rory Oge O’More, who persisted in their defiant behavior, could expect to be hunted down by hard-bitten soldiers such as Sir Humphrey Gilbert or Sir Nicholas Malby and massacred along with their followers. However, Sidney claimed to have pacified Clondeboy and the Ards so completely that the garrisons there had nothing better to do than to hunt deer.

It is interesting to note that Sidney thought that he had his hands full trying to suppress the rebellions of Old English lords and Old Irish chieftains, and did not believe that it was his job to enforce the Protestant settlement upon the Irish church. He was willing to work with Catholics who were loyal to the queen, such as Sir Lucas Dillon, for whom he had the highest regard. As late as 1576 he was willing to receive the “Papist” bishops of Cashel and Tuam who came to declare their loyalty to the queen and to him as lord deputy (p. 86). It was not the reconciliation that the bishops hoped for, because Sidney was not prepared to accept their insistence that while the temporalities came from the queen, the spiritualities could come only from the pope. But Sidney felt obliged to treat them with respect.

Sir Henry Sidney’s analysis of sixteenth-century Ireland, in purely political terms rather than cultural inferiority, demonstrates, Dr. Brady suggests, that he was influenced by Machiavellian thought. He almost certainly read Guicciardini’s *History of Italy*, and probably acquired his knowledge of Machiavellian political analysis from his son Philip who had spent time at the court of the king of France where Machiavelli’s writings circulated in manuscript.

Ciaran Brady’s new edition of Sidney’s *Memoir* is a most valuable addition to the Irish Narratives Series published by the Cork University Press, and is accompanied by a substantial introduction that does an excellent job of providing the reader with the necessary historical context. The introduction also provides a useful map to help the reader locate all of the numerous lordships which preceded the division of Ireland into counties. Unfortunately, the map is not well reproduced, and a number of the names of the lordships and the dominant families are indecipherable. The *Memoir* appears to be available only in a paperback edition which makes the book affordable, but is an editorial decision that will not please many librarians.

#### Note

[1]. Roger B. Manning, *Swordsmen: The Martial Ethos in the Three Kingdoms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 74.

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