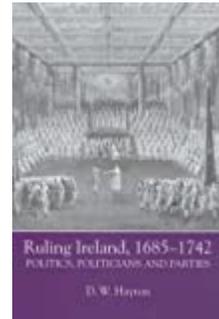




D. W. Hayton. *Ruling Ireland, 1685-1742: Politics, Politicians and Parties.* Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004. xiv + 304 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84383-058-0.



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A Masterly Account of Early-Eighteenth-Century Irish Politics

Twenty-five years ago, when, after many decades of neglect, eighteenth-century Irish political history attracted a new generation of able research students, David Hayton co-edited (with Thomas Bartlett) a seminal volume of essays that represented a digest of the most exciting research currently taking place. Entitled *Penal Era and Golden Age: Essays in Irish History, 1690-1800* (1979), it has survived the test of time so well that most of the essays in the volume are still essential reading for students of eighteenth-century Irish history, though much additional new information and new perspectives have been brought to bear on the subjects addressed in that volume in the mean time. Credit for this new work rests with many scholars, but some of the best work has been completed by the contributors to the 1979 volume, among whom Hayton deserves especial mention. Building on the foundations he laid with his definitive doctoral examination of the policies and attitudes of English ministers to Ireland between 1707 and 1716, he has in the interval produced a sequence of papers on a wide range of aspects of domestic Irish politics and Anglo-Irish relations that have refashioned our understanding of the operation of the Anglo-Irish nexus and the dynamic of domestic Irish

politics in the period spanning the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.

The current volume, which comprises eight inter-linked chapters, brings together seven of those papers which have the "government of Ireland" between the reign of James II and the fall of Robert Walpole as their focus; all have been revised and updated, though in one case the reconstruction has been so extensive that it is in effect a new work. They have been supplemented by one new chapter—the longest in this collection—which serves both to link the earlier chapters and to engage with one of the major unresolved questions in the field of political history. In the preface, Hayton modestly states his hope that the essays in the collection will provide the reader with "something approaching a coherent account of political developments in Ireland" (p. vii). This certainly has been achieved. Indeed, the collection as a whole constitutes a historical *tour de force*, which combines exhaustive primary research with a sophisticated ability to place local events in their Anglo-Irish context. The result is the most persuasive account produced to date of the changing character of the government of Ireland be-

tween the accession of James II to the throne and the eclipse of Walpole. This was, as Hayton observes, long an unfashionable period in Irish history, but it has been analyzed from such a variety of vantage points over the past decade that it can now legitimately be described as one of the most exciting. At first glance, Hayton's focus "on political thought and practice, and the development of English policy" (p. 1) may not seem to possess quite the same appeal as Toby Barnard's encyclopedic studies of Protestant *mentalit * or Sean Connolly's dissection of social relations, but this volume is no less stimulating in its analysis of the less fashionable, but undeniably important, realm of high politics.[1]

One of the main achievements of Hayton's work over many years, and one that this collection highlights, has been his exceptional capacity to locate Irish events in their wider British context. Born, in the first instance, out of his mastery of British high politics, this quality is amply manifest throughout, beginning with the opening analysis of the "Glorious Revolution" where as well as teasing out the particular trajectory of events and their long term implications for the political and economic influence of the main interests in Ireland, he places them securely on the larger stage that was the focus of James II and William III. This is an important consideration, and one that transcends the so-called "New British History," which seems in any case to have lost its momentum, because the pattern of protestant politics in Ireland in this era is more comprehensible if it is placed in its wider British and European context. This is true particularly of the unresolved issues of the impact of the rise of party in Britain upon the same process in Ireland and of the implications of the interaction of British and Irish party personnel. These matters have long withstood definitive explication, and rather than embrace the traditional explanations that party arrived "suddenly" and fully formed with the whig Earl of Rochester in 1701 or the tory Duke of Ormond in 1703, Hayton locates its origins in the "tortuous course of Irish politics" in the 1690s (p. 94). Moreover, though it can be detected in embryo in the crucial 1695 parliament, it was not inevitable that it should come into being; rather it was the impact of personality (of the Brodrick brothers, most notably), the formation of Anglo-Irish political alliances arising out of differences over forfeitures, the ratification in 1698-1699 of the Woollen Act, as well as the early phase of Ormond's viceroyalty that was cumulatively crucial. This is traced in detail in the book's longest and only previously unpublished chapter. It is a difficult and demanding subject, as the author acknowledges, but it is essential read-

ing because it not only provides a convincing answer to a question that has not previously been addressed in a satisfactory manner, it also sets the context for what follows.

What follows is more familiar terrain, as the reader is invited in successive chapters to follow Hayton through slightly revised versions of his account of the "beginnings" of the undertaker system, his analysis of the party crisis in Ireland during the final years of Queen Anne's reign, and his reconstruction of the efforts of high churchmen to advance their tory vision in the Irish convocation. Most scholars will be familiar with these essays, but what is striking reading Hayton's seminal account of the beginnings of the undertaker system is that it is more persuasive now than it was when originally published arising out of the elucidation of the origins of party provided in the earlier chapter. By comparison, the exploration of the impact of the sacramental test on dissenting politics sits less comfortably in the volume. This is not a reservation that can be expressed with respect of succeeding chapters, which have as their subject the approach of successive whig ministers between 1714 and 1742 to the government of Ireland. Guided in their decision making by pragmatism rather than by principle, ministers felt no need either to devise or to initiate bold policies. Their priority as far as Ireland was concerned was to maintain order, to secure the country from foreign invasion, and to ensure political stability. These seemed most at risk during the late 1710s when, consistent with the shift in Ireland from the politics of party attributable to the disintegration of the tory party following the Hanoverian succession to a "court" versus "country" dynamic (which hastened the emergence of a strong patriot voice), it seemed for a moment that the executive might be unable to control the legislature. This did not come to pass largely because of developments in the political management of the House of Commons that led ultimately to emergence of "undertakers." This was less straightforward than it might have been because of the regressive impact of domestic British politics on the selection of lords lieutenant by successive governments, not least that of Robert Walpole. However, the implications of the realization that lords lieutenant required the assistance of powerful Irish figures to ensure the smooth administration of the kingdom, could not be evaded, and the decision of Lord Cartaret to opt for William Conolly paved the way not only for the era of the undertakers but also allowed the British government to adopt the crisis management approach to Ireland that was the norm after 1730.

Hayton relates this, and the changes in personnel and style that give early eighteenth-century Irish politics its unique character, with insight and incisiveness. In keeping with their origins as separate papers, there is some repetition between chapters in respect of a number of matters, though this rarely has a distracting effect. Indeed, the skill with which the many individuals that populate the pages of this book are drawn equals the acuity of the perspectives offered on political and administrative developments. This is a superbly researched and important work by a master of his craft that amply justifies the author's and the publisher's investment in its generation.

With its publication, it is possible at last to address and to offer convincing answers to many of the outstanding questions regarding the government and administration of Ireland in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Toby Barnard, *Irish Protestants: Ascents and Descents, 1641-1779* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2004); and Sean Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland, 1660-1760* (Oxford, 1992).

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