

David Dickson. Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster, 1630-1830. (History of Ireland and the Irish Diaspora.) Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 2005. Pp. xvii, 726. \$65.00.

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David Dickson's monumental work analyzes society in the southern Irish counties of Cork, Kerry, and west Waterford in the two centuries before the Great Famine, addressing the evolution of a key region and exploring plantation, cultural assimilation, and socioeconomic change. It not only reconstructs contemporary society but illuminates developments in the region and beyond in the following century when the twin forces of reforming state and emergent nationalism undermined the "old colony."

The study's core is an exploration of the combined variation and cohesion in the South Munster economy. Close analysis of eleven different economic zones in the region also emphasizes the development of a region-wide economy with a cash and credit network, and an evolving transport infrastructure opening up even the most inaccessible parts to commerce and law. Documentary and visual sources (maps, landscapes, and character drawings) combine to excellent effect in linking such changes to the "improvement" phenomenon. Encouraging estate manicuring and "big house" building, land reclamation, linen manufacture, and the introduction of Protestant tenants, improvers sought to boost rentals while establishing islands of English civility in the midst of perceived backwardness. The planners of improvement were those second-rank landed proprietors benefiting from the mid-sixteenth-century fragmentation of the great New English estates, although the shock troops were those farther down the socioeconomic ladder (i.e. the marginal tenants whose

cultivation of the pioneering potato sped the progress of reclamation during the later eighteenth century).

Rural economy and landscape development were intimately related to the emerging hegemony of Cork city. Briefly challenged by other centers like Kinsale, Youghal, and Dungarvan, the city's rise to economic pre-eminence depended on several interlinked factors: physical location, water power, access to a splendid harbor, and direct colonial and continental contacts. Thus developed meat processing, a successfully regulated butter trade, a drink industry boosted by the presence of army and navy, and, in the outlying river valleys, a proto-industrialized textile trade. The port's inward flow of grain, timber, wine, and cotton, and the outward passage of beef, butter, emigrants, and (periodically) recruits for continental armies, met increasing consumer demands, built the fortunes (and expectations) of urban merchants, and further opened city and hinterland to the wider world.

This study's particular richness lies in matching broader economic change with oscillating social fortunes: marginal holders digging their way into uplands and uncultivated areas; substantial gneevers or farmers; urban artisans and bread rioters; middlemen and landed proprietors; and emerging merchants, bankers, and professionals. The fading optimism of New English beneficiaries of the seventeenth-century settlement is stressed as, weakened by financial burdens, fearful of French attackers and Irish swordsmen, and disillusioned by England's apparent lack of concern, some turned absentee. Others set the tone for future anti-Catholic politics by supporting penal legislation, monopolizing borough politics, or operating Protestant parliamentary lobbying groups. Embryonic political Catholicism is also scrutinized, as Catholic merchants and professionals wedged their way into economic prominence and reached for and netted political power. This advancement ladder (inaccessible to laborers increasingly entrapped in poverty) was potentially within reach of many groups. Some dairymen became gneevers; city butchers rose to merchant status; merchants pushed their

sons into the professions; lesser gentry passed via Grand Jury service into the higher gentry; mid-eighteenth century smaller landholders became leaseholders on the middlemen's demise (an indication, incidentally, that descent, too, was possible); and larger landed proprietors conforming to Protestantism insured undivided land inheritance.

The religious polarization of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Irish society is closely reassessed. Although New Englishness was characterized by theologically based self-belief while the "dispossessed" increasingly equated their own emergent "Irishness" with Catholicism, political divisions between Catholic and Protestant were not clear cut, nor was there denominational political cohesion. Some (though few) Protestants were Jacobites and United Irishmen; Whig-Tory divisions separated Protestant gentry and clergy; parliamentary union met cross-denominational support and opposition; and city merchants united in a non-sectarian Hibernian patriotism from the 1770s onward. Moreover, a common male sociability provided bridges, whether through gentry fosterage of foxhound pups or shared membership in urban cultural and intellectual associations.

Dickson's lucid writing style and sure command of primary sources and comparative scholarship open up the complexities of an evolving colonial region over the longue duree. Reconstructing the framework and socio-economic, political, and religious dynamics of that region in a manner untried until now, this study casts its light forward into the equally complex developments of the following century. It is a must for anyone seeking to understand the evolution both of one key Irish region and of modern Ireland generally, as well as the nature of power and identity in their broadest senses. It is a book that I, for one, would love to have written.