

**Reviews**

**Enrique García Hernán and Óscar Recio Morales (eds.),  
*Extranjeros en el Ejército: militares irlandeses  
en la sociedad española, 1580-1818***

By David Barnwell



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This volume has its origin in a seminar held in Madrid in June 2006, though it is unclear whether the collection of essays may be considered as proceedings of the conference. The book is composed of eighteen essays, divided into five sections, together with an Introduction and a closing bibliographical review.

The first section places the study of Irish involvement in Spanish military affairs within the context of the widespread use of foreign soldiers in the armies of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In one of the essays, Óscar Recio Morales draws attention to the wealth of research on Irish emigration to English-speaking countries, as contrasted with a much smaller number of studies of Irish migration to continental Europe. Recio Morales points out that Irish historians, perhaps because of their monolingualism and inability to work with non-English language sources, have in many cases been unable to exploit the *riquísimo* store of archival material in other languages. He does however cite a number of historians, beginning with Micheline Kerney Walsh, who did have the research tools to work with the original

documentation. In the subsequent essay, Jane Ohlmeyer stresses the fact that the Irish were not the only nationality from these islands to serve abroad. English and Scottish forces of volunteers or mercenaries fought in a number of campaigns on the continent. Ohlmeyer also offers the rather startling statistic that at one period in the seventeenth century the annual migration of Irish males to serve in Europe exceeded 10% of the entire population.

The second section consists of five articles which in one way or another study the presence of Irish in the armies of Habsburg Spain, essentially Spain of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra shows how vast and shifting the borders were, mental borders it might be said, of the Hispanic world's sphere of interest. They ranged in a sweep from Cuzco and Havana in the far west to the Balkans and the Maghreb, from the shores of North Africa up to the chilly Scottish and Irish coasts. It poses the question of how the Spanish regarded Ireland, in relation to their countless interests elsewhere. What view did they take of Irish society and of Gaelic culture? It seems that the Irish in their homeland were often seen as *salvajes y bárbaros*,

yet, once in Spain and adopted by the Spanish Court, those same people were recognised and respected to a greater degree than refugees from other lands. The key factor, according to the author, was the Catholicism of the Irish. Editorially, this first article might have been better followed by the third in the section, Porfirio Sanz Camañes' consideration of a similar theme, "Irlanda en el archipiélago atlántico". Here the author gives us a useful reminder that in the great game of seventeenth century *Realpolitik*, Spain was not always in direct confrontation with England. There were periods, such as the Gondomar (Spanish Ambassador to England) era in the early decades of the century, when the two countries gingerly sought to establish a *modus vivendi*, and when non-belligerence represented a mutually beneficial policy.

The second contribution in this section, by Enrique García Hernán, deals with the events at Smerwick in County Kerry in 1580 and their consequences. The article stresses how the Spanish landing and subsequent slaughter by English forces was still fresh in people's memory at the time of the Battle of Kinsale. Indeed, perhaps the thought of the massacre at Smerwick made many in Southwest Munster hesitate before flocking to Don Juan de Águila's standard two decades later. It was an atrocity even by the standards of the day - hundreds of foreign soldiers and Irish civilians were slain in cold blood by the English. It is perhaps odd that an account of what happened at Smerwick, as opposed to discussion of its wider context and consequences, merits so little detail in the article.

The last two articles in this section can be taken together. Declan Downey offers an examination of the Milesian myth that underpinned the Spanish-Irish alliance for centuries, and gave the exiled Gaelic nobility the confidence to view themselves as equals of the courtiers of Spain. In the famous phrase of the Conde de Caracena, the Irish were *nuestros hermanos, los españoles del norte*. It is striking that Spain, a country which perhaps more than any other in Europe was obsessed with *limpieza de sangre*, recognised and upheld the class system,

titles and genealogy of Gaelic Ireland. This was in contrast to English-dominated Ireland, where succession rights of Catholics were suppressed for long periods. Downey's treatment of Milesianism is adequate, but it should be considered that surely this pervasive and influential foundation myth merits a full book-length study. Well into the nineteenth century Maturin's "Milesian Chief" and Clarence Mangan's evocation of the "high Milesian race" give testimony to its resonance in Irish culture. The final essay in this section analyses the role of Franciscan priests in Irish military units in Spain. The paper dwells on the great and abiding service to the Irish language and culture rendered in Spanish Flanders by priests such as Aodh Mac Aingil [Hugh McCaghwell] and Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire [Florence Conry], or by soldiers such as Somhairle Mac Dómhnaill [Sorley MacDonnell], who ordered the gathering of ancient Fenian literature into the compendium known as the *Duanaire Finn*.

The third section moves forward to the eighteenth century, to the presence of the Irish in Bourbon Spain. It begins with another essay by Recio Morales, on the *modelo irlandés* in the army. The author sees no huge breach for the Irish between the armies of Habsburg Spain and those of the later Bourbons. Irish soldiers were more integrated into the Spanish Army than mercenaries from other European countries. Evidence of this is provided by the fact that many among their ranks were conferred with membership of one or other of the prestigious military orders associated with the Spanish Crown. There were of course differences as the centuries progressed. For example, the authorities in Ireland connived in the migration of Irish soldiers for a large part of the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century we see a change, with ever more stringent efforts to bring an end to the tradition. This operated in parallel with the opening up of the British Army to Catholics. Interestingly, Recio Morales finds an increasing sense of Irish nationality, rather than loyalty to clan or identification with region, as the eighteenth century wore on.

The author also draws attention to the rise in French recruitment in the later period. Of course many of those who originally had gone to France later proceeded to Spain, Ricardo Wall providing a prominent example, albeit at a generation's remove. Recruitment for Spain met with varied success. Perhaps the greatest failure described by Recio Morales is the effort by Peter Sherlock to export a battalion of soldiers from Southeast Ireland around 1720. Hundreds of would-be émigrés were apprehended by the authorities in places such as Dungarvan, and were lucky not to be hanged. Another of the many interesting insights offered in this article comes in the form of sample details of information about Irish soldiers. We read, for example, that in the mid-eighteenth century Francisco Lacey was a captain in the Ultonia regiment. He was twelve years old. Francisco was something of a veteran when compared to his namesake, Francisco Comerford, who joined the "Irlanda" regiment as a cadet at the age of eight.

Aside from the human interest of such stories, they serve to remind us how the Irish, stripped of their lands and titles in their homeland, were left in Spain with nothing to pass on to their heirs save a place in the military. Casualty rates among the Irish were extraordinarily high, and few of those lucky enough to survive into old age remained in one piece. We read of a captain in the Limerick regiment who had had his right arm blown off but was still recommended as fit for promotion, or a 56-year-old officer in the Irlanda regiment who soldiered on, even though he was quite blind. There were also many cases of what today would be termed psychological disabilities. This excellent account of the Irish in the eighteenth-century army ends with a brief examination of the role of Irish women. Many of these were widowed, and forced to write endless memorials asking for support for themselves or lobbying for advancement for their sons.

In the second article in this section Colm Ó Conaill sets Irish emigration to Spain against that to France. He notes how the two countries' armies can be thought of as having an inverse relationship. The Spanish Army was

larger early on, but then decreased in numbers. The French Army was much smaller in the early seventeenth century, but grew to some 400,000 a hundred years later. Of course, since the Bourbons were monarchs of both countries, by then movement from the French army to that of Spain was fairly easy for Irish veterans of disbanded regiments in France. The third article, by Diego Téllez Alarcia, questions whether an "Irish party" can be said to have existed in the eighteenth-century Spanish Court. He finds that it is not until the mid-century, during the tenure of Ricardo Wall, that an effective *partido irlandés* can be detected. Finally in this section, Francisco Andújar Castillo offers a more exhaustive treatment of a topic that has been aired earlier, namely the social and family ties that developed among the Irish in Spain and Spanish America. Not all the Irish stayed within these networks, however; the author traces the offspring of Dionisio O'Brien, governor of Málaga, as the family rather quickly moved into mainstream Spanish society.

The three articles in the fourth section move across the Atlantic to study aspects of the Irish presence in colonial Spanish America. First we have "La llegada de irlandeses a la frontera caribeña hispana" by Igor Pérez Tostado, in which the author opens up an area which has remained somewhat unknown, namely Irish emigration to the Caribbean in the seventeenth century. Rather than pushing on to far-off Lima or Mexico, the author shows that the Irish concentrated on the island of Hispaniola, whether they had arrived via Spain or directly from Ireland. An Irish community existed on the island from as early as the 1630s, while several fruitless projects were undertaken for large-scale colonisation by Irish people. Often the Irish compared their situation to that of the enslaved Africans, both peoples stripped of their patrimony and forcibly exiled from their native land, though the author nowhere suggests that the plight of the Irish truly approached that of the slaves. Indeed, in what might evince a wry smile from many Irish readers, Pérez Tostado mentions that the authorities on the island complained that other nationalities were masquerading as Irish in

order to enjoy the benefits reserved for that nation.

In the next article Juan Marchena Fernández moves the focus forward to the eighteenth century. He observes that the Irish in colonial Spain were not always popular with other Spanish forces. Happily for Irish self-regard, Marchena assigns this poor opinion to jealousy on the part of the badly-drilled provincial units. More importantly, the author finds among the Irish military the same names that would subsequently rise to prominence as traders and merchants in Latin America. The last essay, titled “El grupo irlandés entre el siglo XVIII y el XIX”, by Jorge Chauca García, offers a biographical sketch of Ambrosio O’Higgins, a figure who has received less attention than his son, but whose achievements the author shows to be no less impressive.

The closing contributions in this volume consist of a rather technical report on “Archives and new technologies” by Patrick Maher and Thomas O’Conner, which describes steps in the creation of a computerised data base of eighteenth-century military data from France. It appears to have much in common with the Recio Morales CD cited below. (1) The section closes with another article by Pérez Tostado, in which he sums up the papers and offers some thoughts on where the field of study may now be going. Among other suggestions, he calls for greater study of the earlier period, stressing the need to look outside of Spain, to France, Portugal and the New World. Finally, Recio Morales returns once more, with a very useful review of the bibliography on Irish contacts with the Hispanic world.

A review such as this present one perforce does less than justice to its subject, since it offers room for only a few sentences on each of what in this case are lengthy and comprehensive treatments of their subjects. Indeed, the content in this case is rich enough that another reviewer might well pick a whole set of other topics to comment upon. Outside of the content, the volume is useful for its bibliography alone, both the references cited in

each article, and the Recio Morales bibliography.

I will close with a few thoughts that occurred to me as I read the papers. Some of these arise from matters mentioned in this volume, but which to my non-specialist mind appear to merit fuller study. Several articles agree that Catholicism was the principal identifier for the Irish in Spain. But did the Irish in Spain seek to preserve their cultural and linguistic traditions? Most of the soldiers were Irish-speaking - how long did the Irish language survive? Did it manage to pass from one generation to the next? Was there anything else that might have preserved Irish identity? What about education? We can assume that the children of the lower ranks received little or none, but were Irish schoolmasters employed for the higher orders? The situation of Irish women also calls for a lot more investigation. How many Irish women emigrated with their men, and what did they do in Spain? Also, what about the Irish who stayed at home? What relationship did they maintain with their cousins in Spain, and how long did the link persist before distance dimmed it? There was onward migration from Spain, though that too needs further study, but was there much reverse migration in the form of Irish people coming back to Ireland for whatever reason? We know, for example, that Art Ó Laoghaire, whose murder in County Cork provoked his wife to compose perhaps the finest love poem in Gaelic literature, had served as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army.

It would also be worthwhile to try to establish something of an idea of Spanish attitudes to the large Irish presence in their country, especially in the army. Resentment of the Irish for their *espíritu de partido, mui común entre los yrlandeses* certainly did exist (Recio Morales alludes to this, but it deserves a concentrated study). It would be interesting to see this research linked in with study of the figure of the Irishman in *Siglo de Oro* and later Spanish literature.

One last suggestion; this book concentrates on the military tradition, and covers it very well. But there were lots of Irish people in Spain who were not soldiers. There were figures such

as Guillermo Bowles, the Corkman who became one of the principal scientists of eighteenth-century Spain, Pedro Alonso O’Crowley, author of the *Idea compendiosa del reyno de Nueva España*, or the Irish priests Higgins and Connelly who compiled the massive *Diccionario Nuevo y Completo de las Lenguas Española e Inglesa* towards the end of that same century. Undoubtedly there were dozens of other non-military Irish contributors to their adopted homeland. These should now be chronicled.

A number of minor criticisms of the text may be offered. The inclusion of maps would have been desirable - there are just one or two small sketched ones, both of Ireland and Spain. If available, portraits of some of the people mentioned, perhaps with illustrations of some of the places, would have added to the book’s interest. Regrettably, the volume is marred by quite a high number of typographical errors. Irish language words are misspelled, but then so are English words and Spanish words. Even the name of one contributor (O’Conell) is misspelled. In no way do the errors detract from our understanding of the work, but there are enough of them to suggest that stricter proof-reading was needed, admittedly a difficult task in this case.

There is a further, more substantive linguistic defect in the book. Many citations are given in translation, with no citing of the fundamental original. This is not good practice. While translations should certainly be supplied as a courtesy, the original text should be given as it is supreme. On the other hand, some texts are not translated at all, a case in point being a letter in French to Louis XV, in which Georges de la Roche appeals for the Irish in France to be accorded the same status as they enjoyed in Spain. This is quite a long document, and

merited an accompanying translation from the French for the purposes of the present work. Of course, that translation would have had to be to English and Spanish. The book’s index is entirely in Spanish, even though five of the pieces are in English.

These are small caveats, perhaps, but they are exemplary of a persistent issue in the case of this research field. There are Spanish historians writing in their language, and Irish historians writing in English. I do not know how competent each group is in the other’s language. As the research literature in this area continues to grow, a useful task would be to set up a clearing-house where the work in one language could be translated to the other. In fact, it can be argued that to truly understand the Irish in Spain, the seventeenth-century in particular, the historian should know English, Spanish and Irish (and maybe also Latin!). There is surely no doubt that the majority of the Irish who went to Spain were Irish-speaking; should not historians know something of the language and culture of the people they are studying?

Over the past decade or two there has been a rapid growth in the historiography of Ireland and the Hispanic world. The research impetus was spurred on by the commemorations of the Battle of Kinsale and the Flight of the Earls, and in Spain by a renewed interest in Spanish military history. A vast amount of new source material has been uncovered, to the point where the history of the Irish in Spanish-speaking countries can now be seen as an important field within the general discipline. This book is an important addition to that literature.

David Barnwell

## Notes

1. Recio Morales, Óscar, *La presencia irlandesa en los ejércitos de la monarquía hispánica, 1580-1818. The Irish military presence in the Spanish Armies, 1580-1818*. (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, 2007). ISBN: 978-84-9781-329- 7. (CD)

## **Editors' Reply**

Translated by Claire Healy

This volume originates from the seminar that took place in Madrid (June 2006) with the title “The Irish nation in the Hispanic army and society (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries)”, the first international meeting of the I+D+I National Plan Research Project of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science “The Irish community in the Hispanic Monarchy (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries): identity and social integration” (Director: Enrique García Hernán, High Council for Academic Research, Madrid). The primary concern of the authors was to give the volume the cohesion that is not normally associated with conference proceedings, where the themes and dates selected by the authors are very diverse. This was the reason for the clear division into five major thematic sections, with an introduction and a commentated bibliographical appendix. Another important concern of the editors was to pose questions that would inspire further research and for this reason we are very satisfied with all of the questions and constructive criticisms that David Barnwell makes in finalising his comments on the collection of articles.

Moving on to these, we provide some clarifications. In the article on “Foreigners and the Irish nation in the context of new military history”, Óscar Recio provocatively calls attention to the infinite possibilities offered by the Spanish archives and their meagre exploitation by Irish colleagues. In saying this, the author of course kept in mind the excellent work done by Irish historians such as Micheline Kearney-Walsh, however until very recently, there has been no follow-up in Ireland, as also happened in the case of Spain with work pioneered by Anglo-Saxon historians such as John H. Elliott or Geoffrey Parker in the 1960s and 1970s. Among young Irish academics already the need to have recourse to the original sources is recognised, for which a long period with Spanish archives and knowledge of the Spanish language are necessary. The examples of Fiona Clark (University of Belfast) or of Benjamin Hazard (UCD, Micheál Ó Cléirigh Institute) are clear examples of overcoming English monolingualism and seeking out direct sources in the original language (in this case, mostly in Spanish). On the figure of the Irish person and the literature of the Siglo de Oro, the authors found sufficient information in the book by another member of our group, Igor Pérez Tostado, *Irish influence at the Court of Spain in the Seventeenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008) and in Óscar Recio Morales’ *Ireland and the Spanish Empire 1600-1825* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, forthcoming). This present work concentrated on the military tradition, but of course studies of the Irish presence in the territories of the Hispanic Monarchy are currently being undertaken in a comprehensive way.

Finally, I fully agree about the need to include maps and illustrations, but in relation to this the editors had to take into account the preconditions of the publisher, on the one hand, and on the other, the time for publication. This could be improved upon, as David Barnwell points out and we will keep it in mind in the next edition of the proceedings of the conference convened recently in Seville with the title “Ireland and the Iberian Atlantic: Mobility, involvement and crosscultural exchange 1580–1823”, edited by Enrique García and Igor Pérez. In relation to the translations, where the texts were in English, Spanish or French we chose not to translate them, as they are main European languages.

In relation to the necessity for Irish in order to study the seventeenth century, it is true that the majority of the soldiers spoke Irish and there is evidence of this also in the eighteenth century. However, compared with the thousands of documents that appear in the Spanish archives in Spanish, documents written in Irish are rare. Of course this does not mean that a) they do not exist (nobody has been able to see all of the documentation) or b) that Irish was not spoken; it is simply that they did not leave documentation written in that language. As the primary and fundamental evidence for the historian is written documents, the Irish language would serve to analyse return migration in Ireland, but it is of limited use in the global context of the Spanish Empire. I am sure that if part of the impressive documentation were in Irish in the European continental archives, I would have no doubt whatsoever that we as Spanish historians would attempt to take basic courses in Gaelic during our

younger years as Erasmus students at Irish universities. This does not mean that we do not have to further deepen ties with Irish specialists and particularly with those who study literature and documentation that is conserved in Gaelic.

It remains for us to express our appreciation for the fine work of David Barnwell and the excellent undertakings of SILAS.

Enrique García Hernán, Óscar Recio Morales

