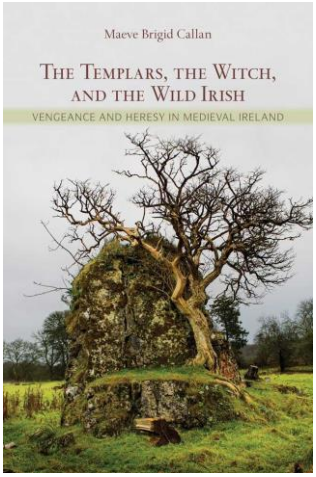

Maeve Brigid Callan, *The Templars, the Witch, and the Wild Irish: Vengeance and Heresy in Medieval Ireland*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 2015. xxii + 280 pp.

As Maeve Brigid Callan notes in her new book, modern scholars of heresy distinguish between 'real' heresies, involving genuine differences of doctrine; and 'artificial' heresies, fabricated charges against adversaries. Callan argues that the heresies that arose in Ireland in the high and late Middle Ages are of the artificial variety, and reflect 'the conflicting interests and shifting identities' on the island. She states that in modern scholarship, 'claims of heresy need to be rigorously examined' – who made them, why, when, with what authority, who benefited, and what were the political, ethnic, economic, and cultural contexts for the claims (p. 26). Callan defines heresy as 'a Christian's persistent belief in something contrary to officially defined doctrine after authoritative attempts at correction' (p. 29, see also pp. 19–20). In her 'Note on Time and Terms', she explains that in her study, witchcraft is understood – simply – as a subset of heresy (p. 29).

In her 'Introduction', Callan gives an overview of the historical background for heresy in Ireland, or how the 'sanctuary of saints and scholars' turned into 'a haven of heathens and heretics' (p. 1). Even if, according to Callan, the Irish did not practice the same form of Christianity as the Roman Church, and suspicion towards these practices (such as the calculation concerning the date of Easter) started to rise in the early medieval period, all of Ireland's reliably recorded heresy trials occur within a fifty-year period in the fourteenth century, starting from the trials of the Templars and Philip de Braybook in 1310 and ending with the MacConmaras' execution in 1353.[1] Of all these trials, one has gotten

[1] It should be acknowledged that Callan admits to have simplified complex issues (footnote 3, p. 3). This does indeed seem to be the case, for many scholars have cogently argued that one cannot meaningfully say that the medieval Irish had a 'form of Christianity' different from that in Rome. See, for example, Donald E. Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, Handsel Press: Haddington, 2000.

significantly more scholarly attention than the others, that being the case of Alice Kyteler and her associates, prosecuted in 1324 by Richard de Ledrede, bishop of Ossory. As Callan points out, the Kyteler case is recalled today for its bold accusations of devil-worshipping witches: it was notably isolated both in time and place, occurring well before the witch hunts began in Europe during the fifteenth century.[2] Callan argues that the case has not been studied in relation to the other heresy trials in Ireland (which, according to her, have been treated only as a footnote to the Kyteler case, p. 242), a matter which she sets out to correct by returning the Kyteler case to its original context and examining it together with the other heresy trials that took place in Ireland (p. 2).

Callan argues that by studying Ireland's heresy trials as a group it is possible to explore important issues such as the relations between the 'three nations' –the English, the Irish, and the Anglo-Irish– and the role of the church within these relations. She also sets out to examine 'tensions within the ecclesiastical hierarchy and between secular and spiritual authority; Ireland's position within its European context; and the political and cultural aspects of the heresies'. Callan further points out the role that gender played in the heresy trials (mainly in the Kyteler case), an aspect that does not, perhaps, get as much attention as the other main themes of the book (p. 2).

After considering the context for the heresy trials in Ireland – the distinctive Christianity and cultural codes; issues of ethnic identity between the Irish, the English, and the Anglo-Irish; and heresy prosecution in Europe as compared with that in Ireland, Callan separates the heresy trials in Ireland into three categories. Her book, which is divided into five main chapters, follows this categorisation. The first category is examined in the chapter 'Heresy Hunting Begins in Ireland: The Trial of the Templars and the Case against Philip de Braybook'. Callan argues that the trial against the Templars grew primarily out of the trial that began in France and was conducted throughout Western Christendom on the orders of the pope. Interestingly, she points out that it was also 'purely a colonial affair', since all the Templars examined, the witnesses as well as other participants in the trial (with the exception of one inquisitor who was Italian), were English or Anglo-Irish (pp. 17–18).

Callan states that there was little concrete evidence against the Templars and that the understanding of heresy was quite meager in general. Similarly, in the case of Philip de Braybook, the evidence was limited, and

[2] It is well to keep in mind that the Kyteler case may have been anomalously early as a *witchcraft* trial, but certainly not as a heresy trial. In her chronology, at the beginning of the book, Callan notes the year 1022 marking the first medieval execution of heretics (Orlèans), but it omits the earlier evidence – for example, Priscillian was already burned for heresy (and alleged magic) in 386.

the whole trial probably resulted from a personal feud between the accused and the inquisitor, Thomas de Chaddesworth, as well as the rivalry between their cathedral chapters (p. 18). In Chapter One (complemented by Appendix A, 'The Articles against the Templars in Ireland' on pp. 243–246), Callan examines her evidence in a thoroughgoing manner, and concludes that the trial against the Templars 'resulted from international proceedings in which the colonists were compelled to participate, but also reveals considerable enmity between Anglo-Irish religious, or at least of various religious against the Templars' (p. 239). To put these 'international proceedings' in context, elsewhere in Europe the suppression of the Templars was rather massive (in France alone, on May 12 in 1310 fifty-four Templars were burned at stake); whereas in Ireland only fourteen of the twenty-three arrested Templars were examined (p. 51). None were executed.

The second of Callan's categories consists of the cases that were prosecuted by Richard de Ledrede. Both Chapters Two and Three in Callan's book ('The Dawn of the Devil-Worshipping Witch' and 'The Churlish Tramp from England: Richard de Ledrede Tries the Alice Kyteler Case' respectively) deal with the Kyteler case. Callan argues that, as in the first category, these cases rose from personal hostility: the Kyteler case starting off as a family feud, while the others – in which Ledrede prosecuted some of the most powerful men of the colony, Arnold le Poer, Roger Outlaw, Robert de Caunton, and Alexander de Bicknor – 'were the religious face of the infighting that greatly weakened the colony' (p. 18). As already noted, Dame Alice Kyteler features in almost all publications on the topic of witchcraft, both academic and popular.[3] She was accused by her stepchildren, from a number of different marriages, of using sorcery to kill her husbands. Ledrede was the one prosecuting her and her alleged accomplices, and finally one of them, Petronilla de Midia, gave evidence against her. Alice flew to England, and thus avoided being arrested, whereas Petronilla was burned alive.

Callan gives a close reading of *The Narrative of the Proceeding against Dame Alice Kyteler*, a document possibly written by Ledrede himself. According to Callan, the Kyteler case 'offers a classic representation of the witch craze', for example by including 'an older woman who deviates from

[3] E.g. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Penguin Books: London, 1991 (1971), p. 528; Richard Kieckhefer, "Witch Trials in Medieval Europe", in *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. by Darren Oldridge, Routlege: London and New York, 2008 (2nd ed.; originally published in 1976); Susan Greenwood, *The Encyclopedia of Magic and Witchcraft*, Hermes House: London, 2001, pp. 108–109, 113; Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present*, Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, 2007, pp. 123, 125; Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchcraft: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2010, pp. 40, 70; Andrew Sneddon, *Witchcraft and Magic in Ireland*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke and New York, 2015, pp. 16–17, 71, 112, 157 and 170; to name but a few.

the norm [and] is charged with outrageous crimes against God and decency in a deliberate subversion of Christian ritual and patriarchal order'. The case included demonic magic, the witches' sabbath, animal sacrifice, a pact between a woman and a devil in which sex and money were exchanged, etc. (p. 80; the charges against Alice Kyteler and her associates are also provided in Appendix B, pp. 247–248). As Callan points out, the *Narrative* often reads 'more like a novel than reliable history' (p. 82). At times, Callan gives quite lengthy quotations from the document (and from others written by Ledrede): this is understandable, since these passages do help in providing evidence that the trials prosecuted by Ledrede arose from his tendency to take personal insults against himself as heresy against the church (p. 240). He emerges as an almost tragicomic figure, whose sole purpose in life seemed to be making other peoples' lives difficult in the quest for personal vengeance. Callan suggests that there is a possibility that the reason behind Ledrede's vehement pursuit of the Kyteler case could have been his own gender insecurities. This is an intriguing possibility; however, as Callan points out, '[g]ender is deeply intertwined with power, but power struggles are not inevitably gendered'. She also, rightly, notes that Ledrede's contemporaries did not seem to have despised him because of his issues with gender, but rather because of 'problems in his personality and agenda' (p. 100).

The Bishop of Ossary and his endeavors in the matter of heresy are also the topic of Callan's fourth chapter, 'Moments of Lucidity Dedicated to Malice: Ledrede's Continuing Conflicts in the Colony'. Here, Callan studies the other heresy proceedings in which Ledrede was involved, as well as his conspiracy against the king, a bitter dispute that he had with his metropolitan, the conflict that the king and the pope had about Ledrede's claims of heresy in Ireland and finally, his absence from the see from 1329 until 1347. Callan writes: "More so than the others, this chapter is fully entrenched within the colony, revealing to a greater extent its diverse factions, the infighting among colonists, and the ways in which heresy was wielded as a weapon within personal feuds". Ledrede was involved in five heresy proceedings after the Kyteler case: agaist Arnold le Poer, Roger Outlaw, Robert de Caunton, and Alexander de Bicknor, and against him by Bicknor. As Callan states, none of the allegations 'demonstrates legitimate concern about orthodoxy of the defendant's religious beliefs' – instead, they were a means to attack one's opponent(s) (p. 150). As a final verdict on Ledrede, Callan concludes: '[…] Ledrede's own words and deeds demonstrate that he was not the church's defender and glorifier, however much he may have tried to convince himself otherwise' (p. 187).

The third category of the heresy trials in Ireland is studied in the final chapter of the book, 'The Heresy of Being Irish: Adducc Dubh O'Toole and Two MacConmaras'. These three men, Callan maintains, were the victims of anti-Irish propaganda. Had they been described in the twelfth century, according to Callan, they would have been called pagans, whereas in the fourteenth century they were denounced as heretical. She states that Adducc Dubh's heresy was in reality more accurately apostasy, while the real transgression of the MacConmaras was apparently blasphemy (p. 18). According to Callan, the case of Adducc Dubh is full of questions, the most important being: Why did the colonists accuse him of heresy, when they could have just killed him, 'as they did "many of the Irish" in their war against the O'Tooles?' (p. 189).

Adducc Dubh was accused of denying the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Trinity and the resurrection of the dead; of claiming that the Virgin Mary was a whore and the Holy Scriptures nothing but fables; and, finally, of rejecting the authority of the Apostolic See (p. 204). It is uncertain what was the exact reason that brought Adducc to the authorities' notice in the first place, or whether he was imprisoned simultaneously with his other kinsmen. That the colonists and the O'Tooles had had a long lasting and at times very unpleasant relationship becomes evident from O'Callan's summary on pp. 200-203. In any case, Adducc was burned at the stake in 1328, and in the same year his kinsman David was executed in an equally brutal manner. David was, however, tried on secular grounds, whereas Adducc was convicted of a religious crime. Callan suggests that this could have been because Adducc was himself either a monk or a priest. It is equally likely that he outraged the colonial authorities in some way, or was just picked up at random among the O'Toole prisoners. On the other hand, it is also possible that he actually did deny the Catholic faith; but Callan sees the reason behind his unfortunate end as 'being Irish at the wrong place and at a wrong time' (p. 205-207), rendering him an 'ethnic sacrifice on a trumped-up charge of heresy within the heart of the colony' (p. 189).

The case of the two MacConmaras, according to Callan, is yet another event in which the issues of Irish identity, colonial insecurity, and heretical depravity were all combined. Very little is known about the campaign that triggered their execution: as Callan informs the reader, their fate is only recorded in a late entry in Chronicle A of the 'Kilkenny Chronicle'. This states that 'in the same year [1353] two heretics were burned who committed contumacy against the Blessed Virgin'. It is not clear whether the insult meant, as Callan states, the claim that Mary committed human intercourse,

or that she was begotten by human intercourse.[4] According to Callan, the case is mysterious, for the two accused were tried by a man who had no jurisdiction in the matter, and were executed in Bunratty Castle, a focal point of tensions between the native Irish and the Anglo-Irish for generations (p. 229). After yet again going carefully through the historical context of the event, Callan's final conclusion is that, like Adducc Dubh O'Toole, the two MacConmaras were most likely killed for their ethnicity and not their religious beliefs (p. 234).

The central thesis of her study, according to Callan, is the theme that underlies all three of her categories of heresy trials in Ireland: namely, that they 'did not involve actual alternative understandings of Christianity but were used to discredit one's opponents and to attack groups or individuals whom the accusers feared and resented' (p. 19). Here, Callan seems to follow arguments presented already by, for example, St. John D. Seymour in 1913. In his book, *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology*, Seymour stated about the Kyteler case that

> [p]ossibly Dame Alice and her associates actually tried to practice magical arts.... On the other hand, to judge from the analogy of Continental witchcraft, it is to be feared that De Ledrede was to some extent swayed by such baser motives as greed of gain and desire for revenge.... It is very probable, too, that there were many underlying local causes of which we can know little or nothing; the discontent and anger of the disinherited children..., family quarrels, private hatreds, and possibly national jealousy[5]

Later, in vol. 2 of *A New History of Ireland*, James Lydon suggests that the case may in fact have been a spin-off from the feud of the Mortimers and Despensers in England, while acknowledging that the 'root cause' was 'in Ireland, where local rivalries had long histories and were always liable to erupt into violence' (p. 299); Alan Bliss and Joseph Long are also of the view that 'it is probably fair to say that the ecclesiastical persecutions were not unrelated to secular feuds' (p. 712).[6]

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[4] The confusion lies in the Latin original:"videlicet de contumelia in beatam virginem Mariam per modum humani coytus commissa" (p. 227). It is evident that the meaning is unclear here; and apparently the rest of the text does not provide further help as the entry was very short (p. 227). It would have still been interesting for the reader to see the original, perhaps added to the appendices. As it stands, it seems to mean 'that is, an outrage committed against the Blessed Virgin Mary through the mode of human intercourse'.

[5] St. John D. Seymour, *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology*, Hodges, Figgis & Co.: Dublin, 1913, pp. 43–45.

[6] James Lydon, "The Impact of the Bruce Invasion, 1315–27", pp. 275–302; Alan Bliss and Josepf Long, "Literature in Norman French and English to 1534", pp. 708–736, both in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 2, Medieval Ireland 1169–1534*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1987.

In her 'Conclusion', Callan states that heresy became a serious issue in Ireland because of Gaelic resurgence during the time when the country was full of uncertainty, that is, the fourteenth century. She further notes that after Ledrede's death in 1360, both colonial and papal interest in heresy in Ireland declined, and while some accusations did arise, none of them are known to have reached trial, nor did they have lasting and harmful effects on the accused. Similarly, witchcraft trials did not recur in Ireland again until Anglicanism was the enforced religion in England and its domains (p. 235–237). Here, Callan tentatively offers some answers for two important questions: 1. Why were the heresy and witchcraft trials not brought by the native Irish, to either Irish or Anglo-Irish authorities? 2. Why did the fourteenth century witness all of Ireland's reliably recorded medieval heresy trials? (p. 237).

Callan suggests that the diversity of devotion and practice from earlier times may have fostered an attitude of tolerance and 'a fairly flexible and fluid approach to 'proper' Christian belief and conduct' (p. 237). She also claims that the lack of a university contributed to the relative absence of heresy in medieval Ireland, and while disputations of theological issues probably did occur in different religious houses, they never resulted in allegations of heresy (p. 238). In addition to these, Callan points out that it also might be a question of the sources: perhaps the Irish did prosecute the alleged heretics, but for an unknown reason this was never recorded. One might also add that even if recorded, this evidence might have just gotten lost, or destroyed, during the centuries that lie between us and them.

While Callan succeeds in furnishing a close reading of the documents that are involved in each of the heresy trials, at times the reader feels that she is content with giving a merely narrative account of the events, with much of the analysis being left to the end of each chapter. Similarly, though the amount of material that Callan has included in her book is impressive, the sheer multitude of names, titles and dates sometimes renders the book slow and confusing to read. Luckily, the writer has provided a much appreciated chronology on pp. xvii–xxi, which greatly helps a reader not acquainted with the topic to understand the sequence of events. The photographs taken by the author are delightful feature of the book. They illustrate the physical context of some of the key episodes and locations examined.

The back cover gives three short assessments of the book by different scholars, the first of whom states that Callan's publication is 'a brilliant and accessible case study of witchcraft and heresy, based on Celtic sources'. Callan herself does not, at any point, claim to have used 'Celtic' sources; instead, she closely examines the evidence written in Latin – letters, reports,

legal material etc. – to back up her argument. The book can be recommended both to academics and to those with a general interest in the topic, especially because it revisits the alternative understanding to the more conservative views of heresy and witchcraft in medieval Ireland.

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