SETTLEMENT

The Munster Plantation, 1584-98

1. Background and Concepts

Colonization of Ireland, including introduction of settlers and importation of English rule of law, had begun across the country with the Anglo-Norman conquest of the late-twelfth century. It is important to emphasize, therefore, how Spenser and his fellow New English planters in Munster saw themselves as *renewing* this previous, partly completed and "degenerated" (*i.e.*, ruined) project. Unlike the English or Spanish in the New World, they would not have seen themselves so much as conquistadors in pagan, virginal *terra incognita*, but rather as virtuous citizens, soldiers, and Protestant reformers of a mostly Catholic, war-torn, dilapidated and potentially lucrative kingdom, one that had belonged by right of conquest to England for hundreds of years.

Understandably, many prior inhabitants strongly resented the intrusion of these new colonists, administrators and military men into their world. Native Irish and Old English families had long occupied the province before the arrival of the New English [see **Link: map of Gaelic and OE lordships**]. The New English were often seen as corrupt land-grabbers, political cronies and upstarts and, of course, as *English*, and so as different than (and potentially threatening to) native Irish families and culture in particular. Irish culture had its own language, system of laws and social organization that had evolved over thousands of years. The fact that the New English often resorted to violent methods to win advantage for their own faction, while also denigrating the native Irish as chronically rebellious and savage barbarians, only further exacerbated tensions in the country. Many of the Old English families had themselves been well integrated with the native Irish before the sixteenth century. Spenser and others pejoratively described this process of acculturation as a "degeneration" from English culture and lineages, and they urged sharp reform of native Irish and Old English alike.   Colonization was seen as one way to replace and reform a supposedly backward and corrupt Irish, Catholic culture. It also aimed to make the country more profitable for the English crown and to secure it against future threats from Continental powers such as Spain, who regularly threatened England.

Other colonial projects had been attempted in Tudor Ireland, such as the Laois-Offaly plantation in the Midlands, begun during the reign of Queen Mary I in the 1550s, as well as the attempted plantation of the Ards in Ulster in the early 1570s by Sir Thomas Smith and the first earl of Essex. An abortive scheme to colonize part of Munster took place in the late 1560s (Piveronius). But the Munster Plantation was the largest such project yet attempted and pointed forward to larger, more successful projects to come.

According to Ciaran Brady, the Munster Plantation had the following innovations, "which entitled it to be seen as representing an important development in the history of

English colonization":

> It was the first plantation scheme to be based on the attainder of a descendant of the original twelfth-century conquest [*i.e.*, the Old English earl of Desmond]. [It was also unique in this regard.] It was the first of such projects to see the English government in Whitehall (rather than its representative in Dublin) take direct responsibility for an enterprise that might nowadays be described as a public-private partnership. It was the first to envisage the large-scale migration of people from England to Ireland on a planned and highly structured basis. And with its novel designations of 'adventurers', 'servitors', and 'deserving natives' as recognized groups within the new social settlement, the Munster plantation became the model for future plantations in the seventeenth century, most notably the plantation of Ulster and, the most ambitious colonization scheme of them all, the 'Cromwellian settlements' of the 1650s. (Brady 87)

Contemporary propaganda promoting the plantation advertised the wealth to be found there through investment and hard work. Such tracts followed classical and humanist principles by trumpeting the value of "civilizing" and reforming the native population according to both ancient Roman and modern European (including English) models and standards (see Payne under *Links*, below).

2. Events

The plantation began after the failed rebellion (1579-83) of the powerful fifteenth earl of Desmond (see **Link: CC Desmond Rebellion**). He was declared a traitor in 1579, and in 1582 his lands, stretching across parts of Counties Limerick, Cork, Waterford, and Kerry (and some small areas in Tipperary and Clare) were "attainted" or legally forfeited to the English crown (Brady 92). Once this occurred, "the fate of his widespread possessions began to interest a number of persons." (MacCarthy-Morrogh 4)

Desmond's lands and those of his confederates were opened up for possession and exploitation by so-called "adventurers," or New English settlers, so as to be re-populated, re-ordered and made profitable for their new owners and for the crown. The scheme was devised by planners in London under the direction of William Cecil, Lord Burleigh, and other administrators on behalf of the queen. It was a large-scale enterprise concentrated in the hands of a few "undertakers" (so called because they "undertook" the task), *i.e.*, landowners who were granted "plots" of land to develop on behalf of the government and for their own profit. Spenser, as deputy clerk of the council of Munster, was one of many New English administrators in the province who could influence and/or take advantage of these dramatic events (Jenkins).

The earl of Desmond was killed in 1583, and extensive crown-sponsored surveying of his lands began in September, 1584 (see "Desmond and Peyton surveys" under *Links*, below). The purpose was to discover the area forfeited, compute its value, and name the present occupier (MacCarthy-Morrogh 5). Initial estimates placed the prize at over 577,000 acres, although only 300,000 acres were eventually granted (MacCarthy-

Morrogh 16, 287-89; Brady 92). Nearly that much in addition was "probably… allowed for mountain, rock, bog, swamps and other waste lands" but not recorded (Quinn 29; see also MacCarthy-Morrogh 288).

The process was a highly complicated one, due to the fact that some rebels who had been allied with Desmond and/or considered him their overlord had been pardoned (and their lands restored), or had not rebelled at all.   Some survivors claimed that they owned the land and that Desmond or his confederates had only rented it from them, and so it should not be forfeited to the New English. In other cases, property boundaries were poorly or never surveyed and so were unclear. The results of the initial surveys and grants were themselves contested later on, a problem that plagued Spenser (for example) in his boundary disputes with his powerful neighbor, David, Lord Roche. Spenser claimed that he inherited his lands from John of Desmond, the brother and ally of the earl of Desmond, whereas Roche claimed the properties as his own (Heffner). Spenser allegorized the worldly "error" he found all around him in Munster in his poetry, including extensive use of legal terminology (Zurcher 183-202; Coughlan; Herron, *Spenser's Irish Work* 127-34).

A manuscript map (circa 1590) by the surveyor Francis Jobson (see **Link: OD Jobson Map)** shows English plantation holdings scattered across Desmond's old territories and marked by the names of the new owners, including "Spenser" (the poet Edmund Spenser, near the middle) and Sir Walter "Rawley" (in the south-east).

Although 86 had been projected in 1586, only 35 original grantees or undertakers received parcels in 1588 **(**see **Link: planter list from MacCarthy-Morrogh)**. These parcels ranged, typically, from 4,000 to 12,000 acres each. Sir Walter Raleigh (then a favorite with the Queen) was granted the exorbitant amount of 40,000 acres. Spenser, by contrast, wound up with 1,000 acres less than the 4,000 he had initially expected (Hadfield 202). Raleigh's grant included some of the best plantation lands, located in the Blackwater River Valley in eastern County Cork and western County Waterford, and with river access to the sea near the town of Youghal [see **Link: TT Rivers**]. Raleigh's lands lay near those of another important undertaker, the Lord Chancellor of England, Sir Christopher Hatton, across the river. Raleigh's most famous tenants included the scientist and explorer Thomas Harriot, who lived at Molanna Abbey **[**see **Link: image of Molanna Abbey]** and who helped to survey Raleigh's lands, and John White, the artist and former governor of the Virginia colony.

Some of the initial grantees soon sold their lands; Spenser's Kilcolman Castle, for example, was first granted to Andrew Reade, a lawyer in England who probably never visited Kilcolman and whose motives in owning the land remain mysterious; he may have served as a place-holder for Spenser (Hadfield 200) and/or have been intimidated by Roche (Heffner 497-8). Many owners were "doomed to disappointment" given the troubles involved in inhabiting and developing the properties (MacCarthy-Morrogh 69). Still others, such as soldiers and "servitors" of the crown who had expected reward in lands for services rendered during the Desmond wars, were either excluded from the plantation or asked to rent from others. Many of them became disaffected and resentful

of the undertakers (Brady 97-99).

The new owners were contracted to introduce settlers from England to work the land and nascent industries, as part of an effort to boost the economy and to anglicize the country. Approximately 4,000 settlers arrived between 1585 and 1598 (MacCarthy-Morrogh 118). Wool, hides, and timber were major exports and iron mills were begun (Power 31-2).

The undertakers never filled their quotas for imported labor from England and so often relied on local labor to work their estates. The plantation therefore had difficulty fulfilling its long-term goal of creating an English-style commonwealth at the expense of the so-called "degenerate" Old English and "savage" native Irish populations, who were meant to emulate the example of their conquerors. The plantation plots, moreover, were scattered across the province, thus adding to the planters' anxious sense of isolation and vulnerability. Proper oversight by the government in London and Dublin and by local administrators, who might be corrupt, was difficult to achieve. Any progress was marred by frequent lawsuits between natives and newcomers and between the newcomers themselves, who sued each other over boundaries and other issues (MacCarthy-Morrogh 91-7).

The plantation was overrun and destroyed in 1598 during the Nine Years' War, by troops led by Hugh Maguire (see **Link: CC Destruction of the Munster Plantation (1598)**). Spenser died within a few months as a refugee in London. His wife and family would eventually return to Munster, and his eldest son inherited Kilcolman. The Munster Plantation was gradually revived after the war's close, in 1603, and continued to operate as a Protestant English colony in the heart of Desmond country. By 1640 the New English population had reached its peak of 22,000, with 4,000 of these people outside of the original plantation areas (MacCarthy-Morrogh 260).

The overall, long-term impact of New English colonial projects such as the Munster Plantation on Ireland's early modern transformation is debated (Canny; Gillespie). Experience learned the hard way there certainly influenced the planning of the more successful Ulster Plantation in the north, begun formally in 1609. For Spenser, at least, the plantation and his castle were a central component of his life, his adopted home and the place that further inspired his pastoral and epic imagination (Canny 1-57; Herron, "Irish Archaeology" 243-246; Myers).

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Links

http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E590001-007/index.html
[on-line edition at CELT of Richard Payne, "A Briefe description of Ireland: made in this year, 1589". Accessed 3/14/2013.]

http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E580000-001/index.html
[on-line edition at CELT of the 1584 Desmond and Peyton surveys. Accessed
3/14/2013.]

See also (on this website):

Select bibliography of works pertaining to Spenser, Raleigh, and the archaeology and settlement of the Munster Plantation

Bibliography of published works with relevance to an archaeological study of the Munster Plantation