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## Historical Geography of the Irish Revolution: A Multilayered Perspective

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### Abstract:

*The Atlas of the Irish Revolution*, edited by John Crowley, Donal Ó Drisceoil, and Mike Murphy examines the revolutionary period in Ireland from 1912 to 1923, including the 19th century as the prelude to the revolution as well as its impacts, legacy, and memory. Comprised of over 100 contributions by numerous scholars and different perspectives, including maps and a striking visual dimension, the atlas represents one of the most comprehensive books about the revolutionary period in Ireland so far.

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Crowley, John; Ó Drisceoil, Donal and Mike Murphy (eds.): *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2017. 984 pages, 59 EUR. ISBN: 9781782051176.

### Abstract:

*The Atlas of the Irish Revolution*, edited by John Crowley, Donal Ó Drisceoil, and Mike Murphy examines the revolutionary period in Ireland from 1912 to 1923, including the 19th century as the prelude to the revolution as well as its impacts, legacy, and memory. Comprised of over 100 contributions by numerous scholars and different perspectives, including maps and a striking visual dimension, the atlas represents one of the most comprehensive books about the revolutionary period in Ireland so far.

Peter Hart rightfully argues that “Ireland’s may be the best-documented modern revolution in the world.” (Peter Hart: *The I.R.A. at War 1916-1923*. Oxford 2003, p. 5). Only halfway through the Irish decade of centenaries, the revolutionary period of 1912-1923 has already generated an enormous amount of publications and it does not cease to be the most prominent theme in Irish history writing. Appearing in the middle of the commemorative decade with the *Atlas of the Irish Famine* as its predecessor, the *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*, edited by John Crowley, Donal Ó Drisceoil, and Mike Murphy covers the momentous times from the 1912 Home Rule crisis to the end of the Civil War in 1923. The atlas is dedicated to Michael Hopkinson and Ronan Fanning, two prominent historians who contributed to the atlas but did not live to see it finished. The book is introduced by the president of Ireland Michael D. Higgins, who calls the atlas “a scholarly masterpiece” (p. xii).

Almost one thousand pages and five kilograms, the atlas encompasses over one hundred textual contributions by an impressive list of authors – academics, including both early career researchers and renowned scholars, as well as authors from outside of academia. Beginning with the painting

*Men of the South* by Sean Keating on the book's cover, the atlas provides an equally important visual dimension through the hundreds of maps, images, and printed and hand-written documents.

*The Atlas of the Irish Revolution* comprises ten sections, organized chronologically from the nineteenth century to the revolutionary period in memory and culture. Starting with the 1801 Act of Union, the first section examines the tumultuous 19th century in Ireland as the path to the revolution, which was deeply rooted in this momentous period. The next section continues until the beginning of the First World War. The third section opens with John Horne arguing for larger frameworks of interpretation and combines the events of the First World War and the parallel republican struggle gaining momentum within Ireland and culminating in the 1916 Easter Rising. The fourth section is entitled "The Rising Tide" and looks at the aftermath of the Rising, including important political moments, such as the 1918 conscription threat and protests against it, the general elections in the same year, and the 1919 proclamation of the first Dáil Éireann parliament.

Three sections are dedicated to the War of Independence, amounting to almost one third of the book and divided into three themes: military dimensions; political, social, and international perspectives; and regional perspectives. The regional dimension is of particular significance and represents the geography of the War of Independence. The 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, the division among the Irish republicans it caused, the Civil War which ensued and its aftermath are subject of sections eight and nine. Finally, the last section focuses on memory and culture, encompassing the representations of the revolutionary period in popular culture, media, literature, and sports. Here the authors also provide a valuable review of historiography and a reflection on archives – such as the witness statements of the Bureau of Military History and the Military Service Pensions Collection.

Although the Irish revolution or revolutionary period is now generally accepted as terms for the events in Ireland between 1912 and 1923, the editors nevertheless explain their understanding of revolution as an umbrella term for what happened in "these years of political change, social upheaval, cultural ferment and military conflict"; therefore they are trying not to signify a specific ideological approach to it (p. xvii). Certainly, a social revolution did not take place in Ireland in this period, as the editors rightfully argue, too. However, the republicans at the time not only strived for independence but also for radical changes and Irish society did go through drastic changes in this period. Summarizing this issue in one sentence, the editors argue that "the process of change in the years 1916-1923 was often revolutionary in its nature and potential, even if the revolutionary outcomes led to disappointment and disillusionment amongst many of those who hoped for cultural, social, and economic transformation and a unified independent Ireland" (p. xvii).

The name “Atlas” is suitable for this book that focuses on the spatial dimensions of the Irish revolution. The main argument is that geography – location, physical landscape, and environment – represents an important historical factor rather than just a backdrop to historical events. Geography is deemed significant also because „Irish-nationalist demands were always underpinned by the notion of the national integrity of the island“ (p. xvii). The atlas as a project of ‚historical geography of the revolution‘ is based on a multilayered approach that ranges from the widest international context – looking at the networks and transfers of ideas, the international echoes of the events in Ireland and their transnational character – to the micro-level. It is a great example of multilayered history writing from a multidisciplinary perspective. According to the editors, the combination of local, regional, national, and international layers “reflects the many levels on which the Irish revolution took place” (p. xviii). One of the main distinctive features of the Atlas is the visualization of historical processes and events, made with the help of mapping software and resulting in more than 300 original cartographic and quantitative representations of the textual contributions, as well as previously published historiography. An entirely separate review could be written about the maps, because the Atlas makes use of newly released and digitized data and reproduces several historical maps.

The maps represent the widest range of topics, including emigration from Ireland to Britain in the 19th century (p. 143), the distribution of agrarian protests of 1879-1880 or of proprietary or co-operative creameries in 1909 (p. 109-110), election results, and the scope of armed forces. Moreover, there are truly fascinating moments such as the map of the collection of sphagnum moss that was used to treat battle wounds and that involved the employment of thousands of women (p. 211); or a map of Dublin home addresses of those who looted during the Easter Rising (p. 246). Almost each of the 140 contributions is illustrated by one or several maps, cartographically visualizing different aspects and structures of social, economic, and political life in Ireland and enabling deeper understanding of Irish history.

Besides the maps and textual contributions, the *Atlas* includes an incredible collection of photographs, paintings, drawings, and original documents and posters, many published for the first time. In particular, the reprinted hand-written documents are amazing pieces that bring a reader closer to the events in Irish history, such as the hasty note written by Jim Larkin in 1913 to inform the Union that James Connolly would replace him in case of his arrest, Eoin MacNeill’s order canceling the maneuvers planned for Easter Sunday 1916, or the manuscript copy of *The Rose Tree* poem by W. B. Yeats.

Although published after the book hype on the revolutionary period prior and during the 1916 centenary year in Ireland, the *Atlas of the Irish Revolution* still stands out. Bringing together a plurality of authors and approaches, some almost in juxtaposition to one another, the atlas not only provides

a review of history writing about the revolutionary period but it is also an example of the different perspectives on it. This does not make the Atlas incoherent, but is, on the contrary, one of its most valuable features. The editorial efforts invested in putting such diverse textual, cartographic, and visual content together proved successful and are worth admiring. The written as well as visual aspects and the grand picture combined with the eye for details make the *Atlas of the Irish Revolution* a brilliant book and probably the most comprehensive publication on the revolutionary period in Ireland.

**German Abstract:**

**Historische Geographie der irischen Revolution: Eine vielschichtige Perspektive**

Der *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*, herausgegeben von John Crowley, Donal Ó Drisceoil und Mike Murphy untersucht die revolutionäre Phase Irlands von 1912 bis 1923. Ausdrücklich wird dabei das 19. Jahrhundert als Auftakt der Revolution bzw. ihres Einflusses, ihres Vermächtnisses und der Erinnerung daran miteinbezogen. Bestehend aus über 100 Beiträgen von unzähligen Wissenschaftler\_innen und aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven (inklusive Kartenmaterial und beeindruckender Visualisierungen), stellt der Atlas eines der umfassendsten Werke bislang über die revolutionäre Phase in Irland dar.

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