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The first rigorous academic overview of witchcraft in Ireland, this publication is a very welcome addition to a growing corpus of scholarship on this relatively neglected aspect of Irish social and cultural history. For decades, St John D. Seymour's *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology* (1) was the only academic text on the subject available to researchers. Since the early 1970s the handful of scholars who have delved into research in this field have been mainly concerned with ascertaining why there was so little witch-hunting in Ireland, though significant case studies of Irish witchcraft trials, such as that of Florence Newton in Cork (1661) and the Islandmagee witches in Antrim (1711) have appeared since the early 2000s, lending greater depth to the analysis. From the late 1990s, Raymond Gillespie's work in mapping the magical, moral world of early modern Irish people has deepened our understanding of how witchcraft, ghosts, divination, prophesies and astrology and other forms of supernatural intervention in earthly affairs constituted an essential part of both Catholic and Protestant popular religion in Ireland. Similarly, it has only been in recent decades that the non-Christian supernatural as part of popular religion alongside official Catholic doctrine in late 18th and 19th-century Ireland has been explored, with current historiography remaining largely silent on Protestant witchcraft belief during that period. In the context of this emerging scholarship, Ronald Hutton and Andrew Sneddon have led the way in exploring the nature of early modern Irish witchcraft belief and the ways in which this differed from beliefs in the British Isles and continental Europe. This is Sneddon's third book on the subject. While the central focus is on the period between the passing of the 1586 Witchcraft Act and its repeal in 1821, witchcraft and magic during the late medieval era and the 19th and early 20th centuries are also covered. By examining these phenomena over such a lengthy period, he has made a very significant contribution towards advancing scholarship which traverses the usual chronological and conceptual boundaries imposed on Ireland's past by historians, charting change and continuity over the centuries. The author's deep understanding of his subject, his keen awareness of the nature of witchcraft and magic throughout the British Isles, his mastery of historiography, his familiarity with relevant source material and record compensation, and his adeptness in developing a methodology suited to the Irish context have resulted in an original, systematic study which goes a long way in addressing a significant lacuna in Irish historiography.

Sneddon is to be commended on producing a work of such substance notwithstanding the serious limitations imposed by a dearth of source material. In his introduction, he explains to those not familiar with the sorry history of archival collections in Ireland that combined with the destruction of records during the 17th and early 18th centuries, almost all Irish administrative and criminal manuscripts relating to the main criminal courts of Quarter Sessions, Assizes and court of King's Bench) down to the mid-18th century are now lost, together with probate material and Church of Ireland parish and institutional records. Consequently, as another Irish historian Neal Garnham has observed, Irish historians have no choice but to reply on 'aggregations of examples drawn from the contemporary press, or the wealth of anecdotal evidence contained in the private papers of prominent individuals' (quoted p. 1). To his credit, Sneddon has mined an extensive range of new, under used and under analysed primary sources ranging from church record, private correspondence, depositions, newspapers, periodical, printed pamphlets and books to ballads and almanacs, and woven highly fragmented material into a coherent, original narrative that is solidly grounded in archival evidence. His extensive endnotes and select bibliography serve as excellent starting points for further reading and research in this field.

The book also makes an original contribution in a number of other important respects. Because Sneddon's approach is informed by recent developments in the study of European witchcraft and popular magic, this study veers away from representing the Irish experience as particularly exceptional. As befits a volume in this series edited by Jonathan Barry, Willem de Blécourt and Owen Davies which aims to illuminate lesser known or little studied aspects of the history of witchcraft and magic and to explore their relevance and influence from the

medieval to the modern period, the interpretative framework for this study of witchcraft and magic in Ireland is the British Isles in particular, with Sneddon constantly comparing beliefs and practices in Ireland with those in England, Scotland and Wales. This is an especially strong feature of the study. His analysis of belief in witchcraft and popular magic within the three main religious denominations (Catholic, Church of Ireland, and Presbyterian) is another innovative feature of this work. Sneddon also breaks new ground by examining, for the first time, both harmful magic and its beneficial counterpart together, highlighting how cunning-folk or commercial, magical practitioners were recognised as part of both Catholic and Protestant popular culture in early modern and modern Ireland, just as they were in the British Isles and elsewhere in Europe.

Sneddon states explicitly that this book is 'by no means comprehensive but breaks the hard ground of the academic study of Irish witchcraft, lays a foundation upon which future studies can be built, and dispels the myth that witchcraft and popular magic were not an important part of Protestant and Catholic culture well into the modern era' (pp. 3–4). The book is very well structured, comprising seven thematic chapters which follow a logical sequence. Chapter one explores the nature of witchcraft beliefs across denominational and socio-cultural groups in early modern Ireland, offering a nuanced, contextualised overview of the very specific nature of Irish beliefs in magic and witchcraft. Presenting a different approach to interpretation of Irish witchcraft beliefs from those offered by Raymond Gillespie, Elewyn C. Lapoint and Ronald Hutton, and drawing heavily on scholarship on beliefs in contemporary England and Scotland, Sneddon argues that belief in potentially harmful magic, especially love magic, had a longer lineage in Ireland, ante-dating the 12th-century Anglo-Norman colonisation. He also claims that the female butter-stealing witch was not, as existing historiography contends, a corrupt version of the malefic/demonic figure found in continental Europe but a distinct part of Gaelic Irish culture that dated from at least the early medieval era. Chapter two provides a brief overview of witchcraft legislation and legal administration in early modern Ireland, set within the comparative framework of the British Isles, with specific emphasis on the Irish witchcraft statute of 1586 which, as Sneddon points out, has hitherto tended to be cited rather than studied. He concludes that although almost identical to the 1563 English statute, the 1586 Irish Witchcraft Act was part of a grander programme for conquest and consolidation of Elizabethan power in Ireland. The following two chapters examine how civil and ecclesiastical authorities interpreted the 1586 Act and the degree to which they punished practitioners of magic, be they harmful witches or benign cunning-folk. Chapter three concentrates on cunning-folk whom Sneddon identifies as 'a recognised, cross-denominational cultural phenomenon in early modern Ireland' (p. 36). He concludes that such men and women specialised in three activities (finding lost goods or treasure, diagnosis and curing of witchcraft, and, in Gaelic Irish and Catholic regions, protection against attacks on livestock and humans) and that notwithstanding the illegality of popular magic, there is no evidence of any concerted drive by the civil authorities to suppress it. Furthermore, he argues, opposition to cunning-folk was expressed in Ireland in the same way as it was by demonologists in Europe and England. Chapter four tackles the question of why prosecution and execution rates for witchcraft in Ireland were so low compared with England, Scotland and continental Europe. Sneddon is especially thoughtful in his engagement with explanations advanced by historians, notably Raymond Gillespie and Elwyn Lapoint, and while he is at pains to emphasise the limitations imposed by the dearth of sources, he makes excellent use of archival examples, particularly the 1641 Rising Depositions (Trinity College Dublin) and Presbyterian session minutes to offer some fresh insights into this complex phenomenon. Sneddon contends that although by the mid-17th century accusations of malefic, demonic witchcraft were being made by and against Presbyterian and Church of Ireland settlers, during the disturbances of the 1640s prosecutions rates were low owing to 'serendipity, informal arbitration, execution, and imprisonment without trial' (p. 61). Furthermore, he asserts, the Catholic majority did not make formal accusations of malefic

witchcraft while the Protestant only did so late in the 17th century. Chapter five focuses on witchcraft trials and demonic possession in Ireland. It begins by setting the record straight on what ought to be regarded as witchcraft trials, revising downwards the numbers identified by earlier scholars to a total of four recorded trials and one execution. After an overview of demonic possession in Britain and Ireland, Sneddon presents detailed analyses of two well-documented trials, the first in Youghal (1661) and the second in Islandmagee, County Antrim (1711) and affords cursory attention to the prosecution of Irish women for witchcraft abroad – in Scotland during wide scale witch-hunts (1590s, 1670s) and in America during the 1680s. The focus then shifts to witchcraft in modern Ireland, with an exploration of popular belief in witchcraft in Protestant and Catholic communities after the witch trials, from the early 18th century onwards. Using public discourse, parliamentary and court records, as well as folklore sources, Sneddon traced the decline in educated belief in magic and witchcraft, and examines the attitude of the judicial authorities to cases involving witchcraft before and after repeal of the Irish Witchcraft Act in 1821. This is done within the context of a wide ranging sketch of the decline, decriminalisation and legislative repeal in other countries in the British Isles and continental Europe. Sneddon argues that while the ‘Catholic clerical elite, in the eighteenth century at least, condemned many popular folk beliefs considered superstitious, traditional malefic, demonic witchcraft was still regarded as orthodox, along with various forms of the miraculous’ (p. 122). He stresses how in contrast to Catholic Ireland, little research has been undertaken on magic or witchcraft in Irish Protestant communities during the 18th and 19th centuries. In this context, his finding that witchcraft scepticism in public discourse was voiced by growing numbers of Irish Protestants post-1750 breaks new ground in deepening our understanding of denominational differences about witchcraft. Sneddon argues plausibly that this trend towards scepticism, combined with the legal authorities brushing aside allegations of witchcraft, marginalised belief in magic and witchcraft within educated culture to the point that the Irish Witchcraft Act ‘slipped quietly from the statute book in 1821’ (p. 123). In the concluding chapter he contends that cunning-folk, who are widely recognised as having been part of popular culture in early modern society, continued to serve both Catholic and Protestant communities in Ireland as late as the 20th century. Having highlighted how other magical practitioners (namely fortune-tellers and magical healers) differed from cunning-folk, Sneddon combines case studies of individual practitioners, contemporary clerical reactions and newspaper reports to construct a picture of what cunning-folk did, who sought their assistance, and how they were dealt with by the authorities once complaints were made against them. Sneddon contends that from the mid-19th century, popular recourse to cunning-folk declined as legal action was taken against them by clients, usually for theft or obtaining money under false pretences, and at this trend was facilitated by changes in policing and legal administration. In addition, Sneddon highlights the contribution of both the Catholic and Presbyterian hierarchies who, on spiritual and religious grounds, warned their faithful against having any dealings with cunning-folk. On reaching the end of this original, scholarly book, the reader will have gained an excellent, fresh insight into the nature of beliefs about magic and witchcraft in Ireland, and the various ways in which these both conformed to and differed from beliefs in the British Isles and continental Europe throughout this period. It is, therefore, extremely suitable as a textbook for university students and is likely to be the main scholarly work on this subject for several years to come.

Notes

1. St John D. Seymour, *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology* (Dublin, 1913, repr. London, 1989).

