

Irish Rome: Roma Irlandese, Vittorio and Roswitha Di Martino (Rome: Arbor Sapientiae Editore, 2015). 195 pages.

This elegant, dual-language volume provides an engaging exploration of the rich historic relationship of diverse Irish men and women with the Eternal City. The scope of the work is broad in terms of timespan, themes and personalities. It takes us from the fifth-century Rome of St Patrick, through to that of Luke Wadding in the seventeenth century, and down to the Rome of Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, Elizabeth Bowen and Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty in the twentieth.

Having taken a large canvas, the authors have illustrated it with colourful portraits of the great, the good and the eccentric Irish who came to know, love or even (rarely) hate the city through the centuries. The nineteen chapters can stand alone, each with their own intrinsic interest and distinctive theme, but generally they take a broadly, though not slavishly, chronological path.

Thus – and who could carp at this? – pride of place as first chapter, goes to Luke Wadding, the great scholar-diplomat, founder of the Irish College, and his Franciscan confrères. At the same time, the authors’ portrayal of St Isidore’s leads them on to a consideration of a number of secular notabilities who are connected therewith. Amelia Curran, the artist daughter of John

Philpot Curran, and herself the portraitist of Shelley, is remembered by a memorial sculpted by the great John Hogan in the course of his own twenty-year sojourn in Rome, a memorial paid for by that ever-generous lover of Ireland and Italy, Lord Cloncurry.

There follow two chapters in the early history of the connection. One deals with Brian Boru's son, Donnchad, a repentant pilgrim who died in 1063, was buried – and is commemorated – in the monastery of San Stefano Rotondo; the other concerns St Patrick, possibly a three-time visitor to Rome, between 432 and 444 – a relic of his is said to be in the Basilica of San Marco al Campidoglio. A brief, but fascinating account is provided of the Villa Spada, purchased by the Irish Government in 1946 for its mission to the Holy See, and now home to its mission to the Italian state. Ninety-eight years prior to that purchase, it was the headquarters of Garibaldi's troops during the short-lived Roman Republic of February to June 1849, before the Villa and the Republic, alike, were demolished by French artillery.

Subsequent chapters concern the lives and memorial tombstones of a diverse body of Irish notables, from Charles Mac Raghnaill, envoy of Silken Thomas to Pope Paul III, who died in 1535 and is buried and commemorated in St John Lateran, to the Earls or sons of Tyrone and Tyrconnell in San Pietro in Montorio. Here, where St Peter was crucified according to legend, Hugh O'Neill and his son, Hugh, Baron of Dungannon, and Rory O'Donnell, brother of Red Hugh, and their brother, Cathbharr, were laid to rest. There is an engaging treatment of the non-Catholic cemetery in the city, resting place of Keats and Shelley, and of some sixty Irish men and women among the four thousand whose remains are there interred. It is particularly striking here how the authors draw attention, as they do elsewhere in the volume, to the sadly young age at death of so many – victims to Rome's notorious malaria, if not to other more general maladies such as tuberculosis.

The role of Catholic religious orders, in addition to the Franciscans, features in the book. The authors remind us of the Jesuits' custody of the Irish College over the 140 years from 1635; of the Dominicans at San Clemente, and the heroic archaeological work of their Fr Joseph Mullooly in rediscovering and presenting the ancient basilica beneath the existing church. And while they cite the important work of Leonard Boyle, Eileen Kane and Federico Guidobaldi on San Clemente, published in 1977, it is not certain that they have used Eileen Kane's later important contribution on San Clemente (*Studies: an Irish Quarterly Review*, LXXIII, 290, Summer 1984).

This is a minor point, perhaps, as their fairly comprehensive inclusion of the major Irish male religious orders (the Carmelites excepted) continues with the Pallotines, whose San Silvestro in Capite was given to their Irish Province in 1909, and the Irish Augustinians, a presence from the 1650s. Their various locations in the city included Santa Maria in Posterula until it was demolished to make way for a new Tiber embankment in 1888, after which they finally settled in the present-day St Patrick's in Via Piemonte, of happy memory to so many Irish couples married in Rome. Such wanderings were also the fate of the Irish College itself, and the Di Martinos give a very useful, succinct account of its five different historic locations in the course of its almost four centuries.

There is so much that is captivatingly varied in this fine work, not least their account of the Irish horses in the Presidential Guard and, indeed, the story of the 1,400 Irishmen who enlisted to fight in the St Patrick's Brigade of the Papal Army to help Pope Pius IX to recover his Papal States. One suspects that the authors, in their affection for their subject, are rather too generous or uncritical in their treatment of this episode, compared with the "warts and all" study by Monsignor Ciaran O'Carroll in the 2008 volume of essays edited by Daire Keogh and Albert McDonnell, *The Irish College, Rome and its World*. (In fairness to the Di Martinos, however, they do cite this work in their comprehensive bibliography). As against this, their treatment of the last days of Daniel O'Connell in Italy and their account of the varied possible journeys of his heart and of the mystery of its final resting place are utterly engrossing.

The book lacks an index, and could have benefited from closer proofreading: Donal McCarthy, in the Acknowledgements, should surely be Donal McCartney, and Henry John Newman in the text is surely John Henry Newman. Such are very minor blemishes in this beautifully illustrated volume. It complements too, in a very full and rich way, Vittorio Di Martino's volume of a decade ago, *Roman Ireland*. For the Irish who know and love Rome and for those who have yet to do so, this is a companion not to be neglected on future visits and to be consulted even at home.

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