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Atrocity, Codes of Conduct and the Irish in the British Civil Wars 1641–1653

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To introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war itself
would always lead to logical absurdity.

Clausewitz¹

In Ireland, Oliver Cromwell's name will for ever be associated with the storming of the towns of Drogheda and Wexford in the autumn of 1649. The massacre of troops and civilians in both cases shocked contemporary Irish opinion and left a deep legacy of bitterness towards English colonial rule. Condemned by his critics for unprecedented savagery, Cromwell's apologists excused his conduct as merely reflecting the bloody and unprincipled nature of the war in that country, and of warfare in general during the mid seventeenth century. The widely publicized horrors of the Thirty Years War in Germany confirmed contemporary perceptions of the all-destructive impact of prolonged armed conflict.² However, in a seminal article on the laws of war, Geoffrey Parker argues that...

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