We are presently amongst an exciting series of events commemorating the 400th anniversary of the Ulster Plantation and this particular volume is published to coincide with these events. The contributions in this volume offer some startlingly fresh and innovative insights into the Ulster Plantations during the early modern period and reflect recent and current developments in the field. Throughout the volume many of the contributions highlight that at times of political instability links between Scotland and Ulster came under scrutiny by the State. The volume also assesses the impact of the Scots in Ulster and asks “What is the nature and meaning of Scottishness in Ulster?” However, the volume’s major contribution lies in its questioning of major labels, stereotypes, and perceptions which historians’ have traditionally used to describe the plantations and inhabitants of Ulster during the early modern period. Therefore, the volume goes far beyond the issue of Scots and Scottishness in Ulster and explores the complexity of relationships between Ulster and Dublin, Edinburgh, and London, between the Irish, Scots, and English in Ulster. Indeed, it shows the emergence of a complex but distinct “Ulster” identity during the seventeenth century - an identity influenced by, but not a replica of, other identities found in the Stuart kingdoms.

Robert Armstrong opens the volume with a close examination of the dispute between the Ulster Presbytery and Viscount Ards in 1649 and explains the complex
interaction between events and personal loyalties. In 1649 Ulster was amidst various and conflicting interests, Sectarian English, Royalists, and Presbyterians. Through the examination of Ards’ own personal motivations Armstrong shows the fallacy of trying to put individuals into strict categories, highlighting that Ards’ was neither strictly Royalist nor Presbyterian. Ciaran Brady tackles the complicated events in Ulster at the end of the sixteenth century and explains the complexity of Irish and Scottish links before the Stuart plantations within the context of feuding branches of the Clan Donald. The “Irish” branch of Clan Donald developed different priorities to that of the main Scottish clan based on their own political priorities in Ulster and even offered to help James VI “civilise” the Scottish Highlands, against the interests of the main branch of the clan. Alison Cathcart highlights the wider picture and shows that many issues familiar to Stuart historians can be seen at an earlier date. The Ulster Scots were a problem for the Tudor administration in Ireland. James V used the Scottish Catholic presence in Ulster as a political tool against Henry VIII and James VI had taken an interest in Ulster before his ascension to the English throne.

In a very important contribution Raymond Gillespie questions how “Scottish” Ulster Presbyterianism was in the seventeenth century, arguing that Scottish influence did not dominate until the last decades of the century. He questions the traditional Scottish “markers” by which Ulster Presbyterianism is measured. He argues that the picture is much more complex. Ulster Presbyterianism is a mixture of English, Scottish, and Irish influences. Scottish settlers adapted quickly to English Common Law, had an interest in Irish literature, and some looked to English Presbyterianism as a potential model. Padraig Lenihan explores the Irish Confederates’ unhealthy obsession with the Scots army in Ulster which diverted their attention from important areas such as Cork and Dublin and had a detrimental impact on the conflict
in Ireland. Michael Perceval-Maxwell argues that Ormond’s perception of the Ulster Scots explains why restoration policies against Scottish nonconformity worked more peacefully in Ulster than in Scotland. Although Ormond saw the Ulster-Scots as a major threat, he was lenient, realising that persecution would be ineffectual. This was nothing to do with toleration but rather he wanted to avoid exposure of his weak government. David Menary tackles the issue of the Ulster-Scots transplantation in Cromwellian Ireland and argues that the policy was devised within the context of Glencairn’s Rising in Scotland. The proposed transplantation was a security measure to prevent the spread of rebellion into Ireland and to reduce Scottish influence in Ulster.

Overall, this is a very perceptive and enlightening collection of essays which significantly contribute to our understanding of the complex identities and exchanges which took place amongst and between the people of Ulster and the three Stuart kingdoms.

*Kirsteen MacKenzie
University of Aberdeen*