

An Irish History of Civilisation – volume one by Don Akenson.  
Granta 2005.

I approach this book with enormous positive bias, as the rabbi of an Irish Jewish congregation! But no bias was really necessary because the enthusiasm that underlays the book, the very Irish charm that is on every page, the quixotic and at times anarchic choice of subjects, and the mischievous alliance of individuals and events hooked me quickly and held me fast.

Akenson sets this volume in a very Semitic context which piques the reader's interest from the start. I am not aware of any legends averring that the Irish are one of the lost tribes of Israel, but Akenson clearly sees abundant Semitic influences, which are highly entertaining!

The two sections into which this volume is divided are entitled: 'Downpatrick is the butterfly capital of the universe' and 'Kings of the wild frontiers', covering an historical period between 16 and 1845 C.E. Across this vast stretch of time Akenson traces the journey that the Irish have made across the world, by the end of which one is confirmed in one's view that if you seek you shall find the Irish everywhere.

An Irish history of Civilisation is a tour de force to which every reader will return repeatedly making fresh discoveries every time and I await volume two with keen anticipation.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh