Among the lies that Geoffrey Keating (FF I, 10) ascribes to Solinus is the claim that Ireland lacks bees. To refute it, Keating cites Camden. He does not mention that the first actively to counter Solinus’s claim was Giraldus Cambrensis, Gerald of Wales; Bede in the opening chapter of his Ecclesiastical history says simply that Ireland abounds in milk and honey. This is not surprising, given the fact that for Keating, Gerald was, if not the actual Lord of the Flies and the Father of Lies, at any rate the father of the liars about Ireland, or, as he put it famously (FF I, 52), the tarbh t/ ana > le scribhadh saoibh/-she anchusa ar Éirinn.

Among the things Keating accused Gerald of lying about in Topographia Hiberniae (here abbreviated TH) are certain wondrous wells or fountains (FF I, 19), the source(s) of the rivers Barrow, Nore and Suir (FF I, 21), the identity of an ante-/diluvian survivor (FF I, 152–4). He likewise accused him of untruth about various aspects of Irish life and society, most notably marriage norms (FF I, 18), the rule of blood-brotherhood (FF I, 18–20), and the royal inauguration rite among some of the Cenél Conaill (FF I, 20–22). By implication he imputed mendacity to him (FF III, 20–22, 300, 312–14) about the date of the first archbishops in Ireland, and faulted him (FF I, 74) for omitting all mention of the Tuatha Dé Danann. He charges him (FF I, 21) with inaccuracy in his second book about Ireland, the Expugnatio Hibernica about the titles and territorial claims of the husband of the fateful Devorgilla. Some of these – the lesser ones – such as O’Rourke’s fluctuating territorial claims, and the river-sources, involve subtleties which an outsider with only superficial insight into Irish conditions, could not be expected to


2See Robert Bartlett’s biographical study, Gerald of Wales 1146–1198 (Oxford 1982), with an extensive bibliography.

3John O’Meara’s translation of Gerald of Wales, The history and topography of Ireland rev. ed. (Penguin Classics 1982), is the only text readily available to the general public of the first version or recension of this work. I refer to it throughout as TH. It is based on the same scholar’s edition of the first recension, ‘Giraldus Cambrensis in Topographia Hiberniae: text of the first recension’, RIA Proc. 52 C (1948–50) 113–78. This also explains my choice of title, Topographia Hiberniae (with modification of the editor’s genitive) rather than the alternative, Topographia Hibernalica. While based on a study of the original work, my characterisation holds good, I believe, for the expanded form(s) (edited by James F. Dimock in the Rolls Series under the title Topographia Hibernica (Giraldi Cambrensis Opera V, London 1861, repr. 1964) – most of the additions being moralisations or confirmatory quotations. For something on the history of the term topographia see E. R. Curtius (transl. W. R. Trask), European literature and the Latin Middle Ages (New York 1953) 200; and Bartlett, Gerald of Wales, 181.


5Scott and Martin, Expugnatio Hibernica, 288 n. 4.
grasp. In none of the instances adduced (and others — involving Irish geography — that might be) was Gerald demonstrably lying, his case gaining nothing by his inaccuracy except with regard to Ireland’s first archbishops (TH, 105), a matter which also involves some subtleties. 7

With regard to all the important cases (the inauguration rite excepted) such as the blood-brotherhood (TH, 108–9) 8 and the esoteric state of Irish marriage 9 (TH, 106–7), as also in the case of less important matters such as the wells 10 (TH, 62–3), Gerald was demonstrably right (and Keating wrong). As to the inauguration rite of the gens quaedam of the Cenél Conaill (TH, 109–110): while it will continue to be debated, the consensus now seems to be that comparative material lends credibility to the essentials of Gerald’s account of what looks like a (memory of a) survival in a relic area. 11


7 Gerald was right in stating (TH, 105) that ‘John Papire (i.e. Paparo) legate of the Roman see ... established 4 pallas in Ireland’ but not (quite) right in claiming there were no archbishops in Ireland until then. (John Lynch’s Cambrensis romanus I–III (ed. M. Kelly, Dublin 1848–52), which is cited in TH, 134 n. 63 on this point, is not available to me.) See (and in some respects, contrast) J. F. Kenney, Sources for the early history of Ireland I (New York 1929, repr. 1968) 761; A. Gwynn, The twelfth century reform (Dublin 1968) 38. For Gerald the formalist, an archbishop without the pallium was doubtless no (real) archbishop. Aráepsco, which became the technical term for a canonical archbishop, was used earlier as a mere honorific for ‘a bishop whose prestige or influence marked him out as a leader’ (Gwynn, 24). Kenney (Sources, 765) is therefore not correct in speaking of Cellach as archbishop of Armagh and Malchus as archbishop of Cæshel in the early twelfth century. See too D. Ó Corráin, ‘Mad Muiré Úa Dúnáin (1040–1117), reformer’, in Fola Gaedheil (ed. P. de Brún et al., Cork 1983) 47–53.


10 As indicated, for instance, by F. X. Martin, Espagnoto Hibernica, 271.

Impressive as that list of acquittals might seem at first sight, it involves a mere fraction of the statements made in TH. What of the rest of the work? How does it stand up to the lie detector? These are questions that have remained unanswered because nobody seemed willing to undertake the preliminary task, essential to an adequate appreciation of TH, of investigating the sources of that work and Gerald's handling of them, until the present writer, having undertaken a pilot study of some of Gerald's sources (presented as a thesis, unpublished, in Sweden in the 1960s), decided to attempt a full investigation of the sources of TH. That, in the intervening two decades, I have never considered abandoning the project suggests that I share one quality with Gerald—perseverance. That the work remains unfinished suggests, on the other hand, that I lack another of his abilities—that of writing several books simultaneously. My investigations of Gerald's sources have, however, reached a stage where it is possible to present some results in what is likely to be their final form. To do so seemed fitting in a work (mooted, as it happens, about the time of the eight-hundredth anniversary of the completion, in its initial form, of TH) in honour of the teacher from whom I probably first heard the name Giraldus Cambrensis.

To present conclusions without the full line of argument by which they are reached is of course unsatisfactory. To thus present mine seemed less unsatisfactory, however, than not to present them at all, especially as the viability of my conclusions will, I believe, be readily appreciated and generally controllable even on the basis of the limited documentation I have here provided.

That Gerald, in the opening section of the third and last part (distinctio) of TH (here designated III) drew on an early version of the Lebor gabála (LG) was known, being implicit, for instance, in Keating's censure of Gerald for confusion as to the identity of the antediluvian survivor, and explicitly stated in O'Meara's translation (TH, 92–3, 126, 133). What was not recognised was that Gerald's account of the legendary early invaders follows LG so closely, and, as a rule, so accurately, that it can only be based on a written resumé of the LG sequence which Gerald had acquired and kept by him as he wrote.

That Gerald knew some account(s) of Irish wonders was likewise known. The aforementioned wells, for instance, which Keating accused Gerald of inventing, are to be found in not one but all surviving main versions—Latin, Old Norse and Irish—of that series of Irish wonders

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12 As indicated in the notes to the O'Meara translation (TH, 452), the question of Gerald's handling of sources is addressed in Matthew Kelly's edition of John Lynch's Cambrensis eversus. As indicated above, note 7, this work has not been available to me. The 'single related study' which would attempt to assess Gerald's veracity, called for by Eileen A. Williams, 'A bibliography of Giraldus Cambrensis, c.1147–c.1223', National Library of Wales Jn. 12 (1961–2) 97–126, p. 126, remains unwritten. Such a study would of course involve scrutiny of his individual works and the present study might be regarded as a contribution towards that greater work.

13 I have aimed at a documentation that is adequate without being exhaustive.
which I have found it useful to label the 'official' *Mirmilika Hiberniae* (here abbreviated MH).\(^{14}\)

That Gerald in the opening section of part II (here abbreviated II) had otherwise drawn on this MH tradition was also known (TH, 130). What had not been established was the degree and quality of Gerald's debt. So familiar does he show himself with some reflexes of this set of wonders and so detailed and (on the whole) accurate is his handling of them that his account amounts to a version of the MH and one must conclude that in this case too he worked from a written text.

Other elements of TH show an acquaintance with other types of Irish sources, in addition to those two main ones – LG in III, and MH in II. Thus in II, Gerald (not surprisingly for a churchman who was soon to become a keen, though not disinterested, hagiographer)\(^{15}\) has also drawn on Vitae and/or other saintlore in telling about Patrick (and the snakes,\(^{16}\) 50; his Purgatory,\(^{17}\) 61), Kevin\(^{18}\) (77), Colman\(^{19}\) (79), Nannan  

\(^{14}\)For a convenient introduction see A. Gwynn, *The writings of Bishop Patrick*, 1074-1084 (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae I, Dublin 1955) 55, 126. The view that Gerald collected his wonders piecemeal orally does not convince.

\(^{15}\)For some information about these see Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 271, 183, 145; and M. Richter, 'Gerald of Wales: a reassessment on the 750th anniversary of his death', *Traditio* 29 (1973) 379-90, p. 385.

\(^{16}\)While sceptical about the story that Patrick banished the snakes, Gerald retells, without demur, the comparable one about Nannan and the fleas. Recent work on such traditions includes R. Wildhaber, *Bech Venerabilis and the snakes*, in the Derso festscdrift, *Folke today* (ed. L. Døgh, H. Clausa, F. J. Oinas, Blooming-ton 1976) 456-506; and P. K. Ford, 'Aspects of the Patrician legend', in the Heist memorial volume, *Celtic folklore and Christianity* (Santa Barbara 1983) 37-49. Both cite A. H. Krapp's article 'Irish earth', *Folklore* 52 (1941) 229-35; but not his posthumously-published article, 'St. Patrick and the snakes', *Traditio* 5 (1947) 323-30, which provides adequate material for placing this Patrick legend in perspective.

\(^{17}\)Of the extensive literature on St Patrick's Purgatory I cite only two of the latest works, J.-M. Picard and Y. de Pontfarcy, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory* (Dublin 1988), where earlier works are given; and M. Haren and Y. de Pontfarcy, *The medieval pilgrimage to Saint Patrick's Purgatory* (Emiskillen 1988).

\(^{18}\)Interestingly, the story of a willow-tree that bears apples, as required, through the virtues of St Kevin, is told in extenso in the Old Norse version of the MH: L. M. Larson, *Speculum regale*: *Konungs skuggsjá* (New York 1917) 112-13. Another instance of Gerald's drawing on the MH tradition.

(80), St Dominic of Os么r20 (35), and, most extensively, Brigid21 (85–91).

For his account of Lough Neagh, likewise in II (64), he had used Irish placenames-lore,22 and in the case of a solitary wonder – the fish with the golden teeth (65) – he used an annalistic, or related, account. 23

Brian Ó Cuiv has suggested24 that ‘the accounts of the Viking Turgis and the stratagems by which his death was encompassed, which are found in Giraldus . . . [TH, 120] . . . and in Keating, probably derive from one of the historical tracts which came to supplement the

20 As indicated (with reference to Stokes, Martyrology of Oengus, 113) in TH, 126 n. 4. M. Ó Dhomhnaill is probably intended. Gerald here chooses to be sceptical. D. A. Binchy, ‘Irish law tracts re-edited’, Ériu 17 (1955) 52–85, p. 56 (followed by T. Charles-Edwards and F. Kelly, Bechurth (Dublin 1983) 40), suggests that the account of the introduction of bees was ‘doubtless based on the fact that apiculture on a large scale was first practised in the monasteries’. Bartlett, Gerald of Wales, 141 n. 73, states: ‘The story of how bees followed him (Modomnoc) to Ireland . . . is told in Rhys’s Life of St David (ed. J. W. James, Cardiff 1967, repr. 1985) 18–9’.

21 P. Mac Cana, Celtic mythology (London and New York 1970) 34, writes: ‘paradoxically, it is in the person of her Christian namesake St Brigid that the pagan goddess survives best. For if the historical element in the legend of St Brigid is slight, the mythological element is correspondingly extensive, and it is clear beyond question that the saint has usurped the role of the goddess and much of her mythological tradition’, in illustration of which, Gerald’s pages on this saint would serve very well. His handling of sources in this case I have yet to study and so shall merely refer to some relevant works: Kenney, Sources, 356–64; P. Ó Brian, O.F.M., ‘Sagas themes in Irish hagiography’, Péisceirbhín Torna (ed. S. Pender, Cork 1947) 33–42; Bethu Brigh (ed. D. Ó Ruaí, Dublin 1978); R. Sharpe, Vítei S Bridice: the oldest text, Peritha 1 (1982) 81–106; K. McCone, ‘Brigit in the seventh century: a saint with three lives?’, ibid., 107–45; D. A. Bray, ‘The image of St Brigit in the early Irish church’, Études Celtiques 24 (1967) 205–215.


Irish annals of the 9th and 10th centuries. For his knowledge of the North Atlantic Island, which he presumably included on grounds of analogy, Gerald evidently drew on a continental source – Adam of Bremen’s chronicle of the archbishops of Bremen–Hamburg.

In some cases, as for instance when characterising the state of religion among the Irish, layfolk and clergy, Gerald was able to augment from his own experience of Irish conditions, the written testimony of other clerical critics such as Lanfranc (late eleventh century), Anselm (c. 1100), Bernard (mid-twelfth century) and his own senior contemporary, John of Salisbury, as also, papal utterances such as Laudabiliter (c. 1155) and the letters of Alexander III, 1172. This is made clear by comparing (for instance) the opening of Gerald’s ‘charge-sheet’ against the Irish (106) – the epitome of what he strove to establish against the Irish – with Bernard’s charges against the people of Connor in his Life of Malachy.

In method, too, Gerald’s work resembles Bernard’s: to magnify Malachy’s virtues, Bernard magnified the vices of the Irish; to magnify the merits of the Norman intervention, Gerald did likewise. In the effect they had, the two works are also comparable, both enjoying an immediate and lasting success – unfortunately for Ireland’s reputation.


In a geographical appendix to the text which was completed c. 1076, Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum, ed. B. Schmeidler, revised with German translation by W. Trillmich in Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburger Kirche und des Reiches (Berlin 1961). There is an English translation by F. J. Tuchan, History of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen (New York 1959); and a Swedish translation by Emanuel Svenborg, Adam av Bremen, Historien om Hamborgs stift och dess biskoper (Stockholm 1984), with valuable commentaries.

Bartlett, Gerald of Wales, 158–77, shows how it is ‘especially useful to compare’ Adam with Gerald but without suggesting that Gerald actually drew on Adam’s appendix (Bk 4) for his description of the northern seas. My studies suggest that Gerald is actually indebted to Adam or a congener.


As Gwynn, Twelfth century reform, 52, reminds us, Bernard’s Life of Malachy had ‘an immensely wide circulation’, no less than 39 manuscript texts having survived from the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. As Bartlett, Gerald of Wales, 213–21, reminds us, uniquely among Gerald’s works, a similar story is to be told of TH – ‘Gerald’s first major work and his most popular’. There is no gainsaying the verdict of another historian, himself a cleric: ‘St. Bernard and Gerald were largely responsible for the lamentable public image of Ireland in medieval Europe’ (F. X. Martin, ‘Gerald of Wales, Norman reporter on Ireland’, Studies 38 (1959) 279–92, p. 288).

It is melancholy to consider how much the predominant attitude of TH and the reputation it was a prime force in establishing for an entire nation owe to the fortuitous
In arraigning the Irish clergy (68) [as a counter to an Irish attack on British clergy based in Ireland], Gerald was drawing on a written source of another kind – the text of a sermon he had delivered in Dublin in 1186 (TH, 135). To show the British clergy in a better light he made the Irish clergy as black as possible. And ‘he was anxious to blacken the Irish laity the better to upbraid the clergy for neglect of their duties’. The ‘modern miracles’ (those of Norman Ireland) he recounts in II (72–3, 85–91) and in III (117–18), he doubtless also heard in Ireland. The continental parallels he likes to cite (for instance, in discussing wells, 62, and hybrids, 72–3) he could have heard from his travelled friends or seen or heard about in France.

His story of the werewolves (TH, 69–72), a narrative highlight of the work, reads as if he wrote it up from a written source (it is in all the main versions of MH), drawing perhaps on his knowledge of lycanthropy elsewhere. He updates it, makes it the lead story in this section on ‘The wonderful happenings of our time’, doubtless hoping to make it interestingly ominous.

If, in discussing his sources in the expanded TH, Gerald had confined himself to claiming that it was only in part III that he had drawn on ‘the chronicles of the Irish’, he might have got away with it, for only there (his river-list in I, apart) does he draw on LG, which alone of the sources discussed above, could be called a chronicle of Irish history (or ‘history’). But he specifically claims that he had used no written sources for part I or II. This, as we have seen, is not so in the case of II, for he 

course of events at the Lenten synod in Dublin in 1186 and to Gerald’s fortuitous presence at it. See TH, 135 n. 68; Scott and Martin, Expugnatio Hibernica, xxix and 324 n. 248; and H. E. Butler, The autobiography of Geraldus Cambrensis (London 1937) 90–92.

30Watt, The Church and the two nations, 155.

32In the Introitus in missationem of the expanded work, Dimock, Topographia Hibernia, 8 (and see TH, 130–31): ‘In tertia sola, de habitatoribus insulae, et gentium origine, aliquam ex eorum chronicis contractae notitiam’. While it would not be impossible for the convinced casuist so to construe these words of Gerald here and those in Speculum duorum (ed. Y. Leffvre & R. B. C. Huygens, Cardiff 1974) 172–3, that he had tried to ‘distil the histories of Ireland and Wales . . . from hitherto untouched material’ and even the claim, made in the same work (170–71, and elsewhere) that in devising his moralisations in TH he ‘had received no help’ except from God, that Gerald might be acquitted of actual lying, there seems little doubt that he was being less than candid in these cases as he certainly was when, in the ‘Introduction to the public reading’ of Expugnatio Hibernica (Scott and Martin, 2–3) he claimed to have ‘actually witnessed’ the greater part of the events he there reports on. See J. Stewart, ‘The Devil’s dealing with the Proud’, Ars 29–30 (1973–4) 25–30, for analogues to one of Gerald’s moral applications.
drew heavily on a written version of MH and on other Irish source-types. In part I because of its proclaimed preoccupation with physical facts, geographical and zoological, and Gerald’s claims, implicit (TH, 35) and explicit, one might expect to find that Gerald had repressed his bookish urges. This is not so, however. As Aubrey Gwynn pointed out (TH, 126–7) the list of ‘ancient rivers’ there found (TH, 36), Gerald took, without acknowledgement, from LG. Discussion of the relative merits of the East and West for human habitation such as we find at the end of I (54–6), by no means originated with Gerald.34

In addition to references to Solinus and Bede, whom Gerald cites to correct them, the opening pages of I contain ‘discernible echoes of Caesar’s Gallic Wars and Tacitus’ Agricola’ (TH, 130–31) and of others.35 For the moralisations that he appends, almost invariably, to his accounts of Irish (or ‘Irish’) birds, Gerald indicates a source once only: Cassiodorus on the hawk (39). The rest are obviously related to some branch of the Physiologus/bestiary tradition.36

When, on excluding this moralising, and other extraneous matter, one considers the core of hard, zoological data, one is struck by the remarkable paucity of palpable fact proffered by one given to preaching (35) the need to report from actual experience and who spent a total of some two years in Ireland – having made due allowance for the restrictions of movement and access imposed on one such as he, who had come in the wake of invading forces with pretensions to conquest.

In other respects, too, Gerald’s natural history is very limited, for, at the basic level of meaning, the identity of the creatures intended, his text (as in the case of the likewise much-praised account of Irish musicianship

33Dimock, Topographia Hiberniae, 8.
34For Gerald’s climactic and environmental determinism and its classical and medieval analogues (including Isidore of Seville), see Bartlett, Gerald of Wales, 201–5, with special reference to Clarence J. Glacken’s Times on the Rhodian Shore (Berkeley 1957). Glacken comments, ‘It all sounds like Ptolemy’s Tetrabiblos’ (280). Of Gerald’s ‘theory of the stages of economic development’ he writes, ‘it might well be the theory of Dicæclus adapted by Giraldus to Irish history’ (281). B. Robinson’s view of TH as an ‘attempt to create an all-encompassing logic, a geography of contradictions’, if valid, would increase one’s admiration of Gerald’s intellectual capacity but not of the book as a descriptive work (‘A geography of contradictions: Ireland in Giraldus Cambrensis’ Topography of Ireland’, Irish Geography 7 (1974) 81–7, p. 87).
35O’Meara, TH, 131, doubtless also has in mind the obvious similarity between Gerald’s account of the size and shape of Britain and Ireland and the opening of Bede’s history, of which B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors remark that it is ‘a mosaic of quotations: Bede’s ecclesiastical history of the English people (Oxford 1959) 14 n. 1. 36For instance, F. McCulloch, Medieval Latin and French bestiaries (revised ed., Chapel Hill 1963); E. Heron-Allen, Barnacles in nature and myth (London 1928); Bartlett, Gerald of Wales, 143. Bartlett minimises the prevalence of moralisations in the original TH (143). In fact they are the norm in Gerald’s birdlore from the outset. Bartlett also plays down Gerald’s debt to the bestiary tradition here, while acknowledging it in other respects (143).
in III (103)\textsuperscript{37} is fraught with difficulties, as a simple comparison of Holmes’s views on Gerald’s fish with those of Went,\textsuperscript{38} shows. And when, occasionally, he does more than list the creature, and indulges in actual description, as, for instance, in the case of the bird called \textit{martineta} (44), that description too is vitiated by problems of interpretation.\textsuperscript{39}

For his innate curiosity and ‘alert observational powers’, exceptional in his age, which resulted in a list (however problematic) of Irish birds and fish and mammals (and those lacking), Gerald is deserving of commendation.\textsuperscript{40} To go further and imply, on the basis of the natural history element in TH (even when taken in conjunction with the corresponding element in his Welsh works), that Gerald was some sort of harbinger of a precocious dawn of the Scientific Age, would be no more justifiable than setting him up, on the basis of certain cognates adduced in his Welsh works, as a founding father of comparative philology.\textsuperscript{41} Gerald was no pioneer of scientific zoological enquiry or experiment, no western counterpart of his near-contemporary, the emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen, as even their differing attitudes\textsuperscript{42} to the supposed origin of the barnacle goose serve to remind us. He was best on mammals, earning special praise for his characterisation (in the augmented TH)\textsuperscript{43} of the Irish hare. But again, he will tell the old tales of the beaver’s self-sacrificing ways and of the beaver thralls.\textsuperscript{44} His tidal lore (58-60)

\textsuperscript{37}L. Hibberd, ‘Giraldus Cambrensis and English “organ” music’, 
\textit{Journal of the American Musicalological Society} 8 (1958) 208-212; Ingridde Geer, \textit{Earl, saint, bishop, skald and music} (Uppsala 1985) 157-60. (The latter reference I owe to my colleague, Prof. John Bergsagel.)
\textsuperscript{38}U. T. Holmes, ‘Gerald the naturalist’, \textit{Speculum} 11 (1936) 110-21, and A. J. Went’s note on Gerald’s fish in TH, 128. Holmes’s article on Gerald’s fishlore, ‘Giraldus the naturalist, and his Welsh journey’, \textit{Modern Language Forum} 27 (1942) 101-110, has not been available to me. There would appear to be little reason to modify the following verdict on Gerald’s natural history: ‘here is some genuine observation — not enough to banish or even restrict credulity, still less to threaten the tradition’ (C. H. Raven, \textit{English naturalists from Neckam to Ray} (Cambridge 1947) 26).
\textsuperscript{39}Dimock, \textit{Topographia Hibernica}, 50 and 427, identifies the bird as the kingfisher; Holmes, \textit{Speculum} 11 (1936) 119, writes: ‘The dipper (\textit{cinclus aquaticus}), occasionally known as a kingfisher, sometimes as the water ouzel, was probably the \textit{martineta}. . .’; O’Meara, TH, 129 n. 9, writes: ‘Giraldus has plainly confused the kingfisher with the water ouzel’. ‘Obviously he was confounding the dipper with the kingfisher’, states B. Yapp, \textit{Birds in medieval manuscripts} (London 1981) 118.
\textsuperscript{40}Bartlett, \textit{Gerald of Wales}, 140, 144.
\textsuperscript{42}For which see Bartlett, \textit{Gerald of Wales}, 137.
\textsuperscript{43}Dimock, \textit{Topographia Hibernica}, 57 and p. lxxii; Holmes, \textit{Speculum} 11 (1936) 120. TH, 48, merely says ‘there are many hares but rather small’.
\textsuperscript{44}Briefly mentioned in TH, 49, the beaver’s self-sacrificing ways are described at length in both his \textit{Journey through Wales} and \textit{Description of Wales} (transl. L. Thorpe, Penguin Classics, 1978) 176, 239. There too will be found the natural slavishness of some beavers which in TH, 48, is ascribed to the badger or melot tribe (Bartlett, \textit{Gerald of Wales}, 141-4). J. Bernstein, ‘Baver’, in \textit{Kulturhistorisk leksikon
has also come in for praise. But if John Kirtland Wright can state that 'the most elaborate tidal studies of our period are in the pages of Giraldus Cambrensis', he can also write that 'Giraldus was not always so fortunate in his discussion of marine phenomena'. As in the case of Gerald's other realia, the odd unquestionably laudable observation on natural phenomena only underlines the lack of real distinction in much of the rest.

The meagre, problematic and tradition-bound natural history notwithstanding, part I of TH is no different in essence from the other two. Each of this work's three parts is dominated by one (borrowed) book which sets its tone and some of its prime concerns. In III, that book is LG, with which it opens. In II the dominant presence is MH, with which it opens. Part I (which purports to be an observed account of Irish fauna), remains, I submit, dominated by the Physiologus tradition.

In claiming his independence of written sources in all but the LG section of his book, Gerald was, then, being economical with the truth. With all three of its parts so firmly book-based, TH is in effect essentially a book-derived book, what would be called a compilation in modern terminology. In later medieval — Bonaventuran — terms, too, compilator would not be far off the mark for Gerald's role in making TH, though commentator would be the better term because of the modicum of observed data that he added in all three parts.

As to why Gerald insisted on the non-derivative nature of his TH, one may speculate. About a decade later he was willing to admit the compilatory nature of his Gemma ecclesiastica (that he was compiling 'from the disparate ideas of others something like a compendium') though without naming any of his main sources, or indicating the extent of his debt — one eighth of his book! — to the Verbum abbreviatum of Peter the Chanter. Like Layamon (and with greater truth) he could have emphasised the service he had done his readers in having 'compressed those three books into one'. Presumably his vanity would not allow him to do so thus early in his career. As we shall see, he was to persist in his taking ways.


46 The geographical lore of the time of the Crusades (New York 1928) 119, 194.


49 Burrows, Medieval writers, 31. Geoffrey of Monmouth and his 'British History' Gerald was not reluctant to mention (e.g. TH, 69, 120) presumably because he despised them. Cf. Thorpe's translation of the Itinerarium Cambriae, 117.
TH, as should now be clear, is neither the ‘pack of lies’ that its Irish critics of the seventeenth century\footnote{W. R. Jones, ‘Giraldus redivius – English historians, Irish apologists, and Gerald of Wales’, Eire-Ireland 9/3 (1974) 3–20; B. Cunningham, ‘Seventeenth-century interpretations of the past: the case of Geoffrey Keating’, I. Historical Studies 25 (1986–7) 116–28.} and others since would have us believe it to be; nor, as the blurb-writer of the Penguin translation fabulously claims, ‘the prime source for what is known of Ireland during the Middle Ages’.\footnote{Change the tense, however (from ‘is’ to ‘was’), and the statement can stand. The repetition, TH, 13, of Brewer’s outmoded views is less readily dealt with. (The verdict at the end of TH, 17, is acceptable because the Espagnotic is involved.) Only to those ignorant of the native sources would TH still be a prime source.} Nor is it a uniquely valuable collection about Irish life in the twelfth century, painstakingly recorded in the field. Rather is it, as seen, essentially a compilation of lore, largely learned, carefully collected from an array of written sources, Irish and others, one major source dominating in each of its three parts. These sources having survived (that, of course, is why they can be identified), Gerald’s compilation is deprived of any unique – or even substantive – value as a source for early Irish conditions.

Admiration for the care with which the compilation was made is tempered by an awareness of the limitations of the matter involved and of the amount of precious space sacrificed to such derivative matter at the expense of observed fact. To be surprised that a medieval man should write in this way would be anachronistic. To be surprised that Gerald should write his TH in that way would also be unrealistic in view of what is known of his authorial ways otherwise. The Chanter’s Verbum abbreviatum is but one of three sources which Gerald drew on extensively in his Gemma, the others being Peter Lombard’s Sententiarum libri quattuor and the (anonymous) Glossa ordinaria.\footnote{Bartlett, Gerald of Wales, 70.} He drew on several other sources less extensively in that work.

Book I of his De principis instructione, ‘a work whose composition extended from about 1190 to about 1217’, is a conventional Mirror of Princes and ‘is largely derivative’, Gerald drawing a large number of his classical quotations from the Moralium dogma philosophorum and the historical exempla which he uses to illustrate ‘the moral platiudes he advanced’ he took in large part from the early twelfth-century Hugh of Fleury’s Historia ecclesiastica.\footnote{The Florilegium Angelicum: its origin, content, and influence, in Med. learning and literature, 55–114, pp. 89–90.} As R. H. and M. A. Rouse have shown,\footnote{ibid.} ‘the Florilegium Angelicum was extensively used by Gerald in the later years of his life’, for instance in the De principis instructione and ‘in the collection of letters included in the Symbolum electorum’. In the former, he also drew on the Florilegium Gallicum.\footnote{ibid.} The Rouses conclude that ‘Gerald was an avid user of intermediate sources’. To
regret that Gerald did not write a different book, an original type of work describing Irish life in the twelfth century — a precious, indeed a priceless pioneering work — would, on the other hand not be anachronistic: his *Descriptio Cambriae* (written soon after TH) shows him capable of doing so, as do likewise the occasional, tantalisingly few informative items of observed fact in TH and several of the malignant additions to that work. Had he written that ‘other’ TH, it would, like the Welsh books, have the feel of a lived rather than a ‘lifted’ book and Gerald would today be hailed as a great pioneer of Western ethnography, perhaps the greatest between Tacitus and Tylor, so to speak.

Had Gerald not visited Ireland he might never have written TH. As he did trouble to cross the turbulent Irish Sea and dwell among the turbulent Irish, it is frustrating (to say the least) to find him writing a book which he could have written (with a little help from his friends, i.e. from matter provided by his contacts in Ireland) almost as well had he never left the comfort of his study.

To wish he had given us that other book — a true *Descriptio Hiberniae* comparable in calibre to his justifiably admired *Descriptio Cambriae* — would not seem that unreasonable — were it not for his aim(s) in writing TH. While these motives were doubtless several and complex, I believe a prime aim to have been more specific and serious than the general urge to entertain or and to instruct hitherto proposed or to emulate such works as the Wonders of the East.

Gerald, we need not doubt, was well pleased to amuse himself and promote himself (satisfying his writerly urge, indulging his preoccupation with the bizarre), and advance his career by entertaining his initial Oxford audience, his contemporary readers — and posterity; likewise, for he was a complex and vindictive man, to wreak vengeance on the Irish who had dared decry his British colleagues and kill (albeit in defence of their birthright) his kinsmen, including a dear brother’s son. But his book was also — and perhaps primarily — aimed at a more specific For observing the obvious about Irish society — its pastoralism, multifarious divisiveness, centrifugality, fissiparousness, and endemic strife — Gerald is deserving of credit for a man of his time. Any appreciation of the subtleties of the Irish ethos or culture (its law or literature, say) it would be folly to expect from one so prejudiced and ignorant of Irish. Something more substantial on the palpable surface-patterns of Irish life — which one could otherwise reasonably hope for — he was barred from giving by the inhibiting constrictions of his purpose.


Here we leave the firm ground of source-determination for the speculative area of motivation.

audience, the real holders of power, as witness the dedication and the conclusion (31 and 124). For such, I submit, he wrote this reminder that Ireland was a place so remote and special—sui generis (see again, the Dedication and 103)—so weird and wild and wonderful that the abnormal is there virtually the norm; a place inhabited by a people so weird, wild, wonderful—and wicked—as to be as much in need of the strong hand as when Henry II (dedicatee of this book) had personally intervened in a western ‘crusade’ a decade and a half before. Here, as in the Expugnatio (though less explicitly), Gerald was urging actual conquest, the final solution, already in the 1180s, of the Irish problem. If the Expugnatio emphasises the Geraldine contribution in Ireland, deploring the lack of backing that would have enabled them expeditiously to complete the conquest, the companion volume seeks to reassert, by subtle means and unsatable, the persisting moral imperative for sustained, intensified and resolute involvement. The one is also a chronicle of an abortive conquest, the other a proleptic, oblique apologia for actual conquest. Both seek to magnify the achievement (actual or to come) of the heroes by magnifying the odds they are up against.

Aims such as those outlined preclude an ‘even-handed’ treatment such as Gerald meted out to the Welsh, balancing their virtues against their vices in a sort of thesis, anti-thesis. They would likewise virtually preclude the ascription to the Irish of almost any normal living, such as Gerald could concede to the Welsh. More colourful phenomena, however, such as werewolves, birds-from-seashells, blood-brotherhood, ‘incest’, bestiality (ritual and other), hybrid creatures, irreligion, etc., suited his purpose—and his book—very well. This view of Gerald’s aims in writing would appear to be supported by the book’s structure and strategies. The work reaches a climax (emotional, too) in the stridently negative account of the Irish in part III (100–122), just after the outline of their history in terms of invasions (92–9); the wonders of Irish nature, Irish saints, etc. in the first two parts providing a sort of protracted prelude and lead-in to the wonders of Irish life in the third. Taking his

For the Expugnatio as family epic, see Scott and Martin, Expugnatio Hibernica, xxi, 169, 272; Bartlett, Gerald of Wales, 22.

To see such a negative account as (also) a tract—a prospectus—to promote service in Ireland might seem paradoxical if not perverse. In fact, however, Gerald’s talk of the lush and unworked lands of Ireland must have worked as an incentive rather than as a deterrent on those lusty landless younger sons (from whose ranks Gerald came) who would have lost none of the inherited Norman venturesomeness.

A. B. Scott, Expugnatio Hibernica, xxxi, compares the classical suasoria and controversia. Above all the Irish merit praise for their fine physiques (‘unaided nature’, again)—those of them who are not cripples (TH, 118), that is—and their musicianship (TH, 103). The problem of how such a people could ever have produced a beautiful illuminated manuscript such as that described by Gerald (TH, 84) is neatly circumvented, as B. F. Roberts, Gerald of Wales (Cardiff 1982) 79, remarks by ascribing it to extra-terrestrial—angelic—intervention.

Bartlett, Gerald of Wales, 105, on the difference between marvel and miracle. Nannan, Lough Derg and the Oencil Conaill notwithstanding, TH shows an eastern/south-eastern bias, understandably in view of the limitations of the Norman
cue from the inherited, classically-inspired concept of the evolution of
normal people, Gerald opens his account (100–103) of the ‘nature, cus-
toms and characteristics’ of this abnormal people by telling how Irish
infants are ‘abandoned to nature’; ‘unaided nature according to her own
judgement arranges and disposes without help’ (100). And this theme
of ‘unaided nature’ permeates and informs the entire account. Thus the
Irish go into battle clad in little but their own flowing hair. They ride
their horses without saddles, leggings, or spurs. As weapons they prefer
axes and stones. Nature, too, they prefer to let produce their basic food
needs, eschewing agriculture and horticulture in favour of pastoralism.
Mining and manufacture are likewise alien to them. They do not build
castles, still less towns. In short, here is an uncouth, uncultured, uncult-
ivated people inhabiting an uncultivated land; a wild, unshorn (101)
people in a wild, unshorn (34) land, or to retain Gerald’s punning Latin
(barba-barbarus): Gens igitur hoc gens barbar, et uere barbar. Quia
non tantum exterior vestrum cultu, uerum etiam comis et barbis luxuri-
antibus, uida modernas noudales, incullissima; et omnesorum mores
barbarismi sunt.65

To emphasise which and clinch his argument, Gerald, able preacher
and born polemicist that he was, planted strategically and contiguously
a triad of exempla, his set pieces about the blood brotherhood ritual, the
inauguration ritual and the Two Men in a Boat who had never heard of
bread or cheese or Christ (another triad, however incongruous). Now,
the inauguration rite – if it survived at all to Gerald’s day – must have
been rare indeed. The number of the Irish in the twelfth century who did
not normally eat bread even in places less remote than north-west Conn-
acht, may well have been many, for the record shows that of the corn
then grown in Ireland, some went to making oat bread, but ‘probably
12 (1961) 108, that Gerald ‘seems to have been able to draw, directly or indirectly’
on the Book of Leinster (transcribed some 20 years before the coming of the Nor-
mans’; TH, 126–7) is worth considering in view of Gerald’s seeming familiarity with
the ‘oldest extant version’ of the Leabhar Gabhála etc.64

64 Of the passage corresponding to TH, 101–2, W. R. Jones, ‘The image of the Bar-
barian in medieval Europe’, Comparative Studies in Society and History 13 (1971)
376–407, p. 396, remarks that ‘all these ideas were available to Gerald in Cicero
and his other classical sources’. (For Cicero, for instance, barbarians are ‘sylvestres
h omines’. For Gerald the Irish are a ‘gens silvestris.’) U. T. Holmes, ‘The Kambríae
Descripicio of Gerald the Welshman’, Medievalia et Humanistica 1 (1970) 217–31,
p. 225, suggests ‘it is likely that Seneca’s Quaestiones had a considerable influence’
on Gerald’s scientific thought. I remain unconvinced by the case made for the ‘detac-
hment and tolerance’ of Gerald’s attitude to Irish practices by R. R. Davies, Historical
perception: Celt and Saxon (Cardiff 1979) 12.

65 O’Meara, RIA Proc. 52 C (1948–50) 153. For the influence of ‘the stylistic
qualities of the medium of expression’ – as in the blason populaire – in the original
Latin of passages such as this and that of TH, 107 (ars/Mars, paz/faz, mel/jel, etc.),
on the evolution of the national image see J. T. Leer sen, More Irish and Fler-Ghael
( Amsterdam 1988) 87.

66 For this ‘permutation of the raw and the cooked’, see too Bartlett, Gerald of
Wales, 162.
as much, or more was eaten in the form of porridge.\[67\] Similarly, while 'cheese of one kind or another formed a standard and substantial part of Irish diet from at least as far back as the early Christian period\[68\] it is not possible to determine the exact kinds of cheese involved; people in every part of Ireland would probably have been familiar with soft, 'fresh', curd-like cheeses, but there would be many who had not experienced hard, 'ripened' cheeses such as would have been preferred on a sea-voyage of any duration. As far as diet goes, then, Gerald's two men in a boat are credible. That large numbers of the Irish had never heard of Christ or been baptised, almost eight centuries after the time of St Patrick, even in the remotest parts, is, however, hardly credible. Irish church practice was esoteric, but not to that degree.\[69\]

Statistical tendentiousness, the presentation of the atypical as typical and the blending of the dubious with the less (than) dubious, were, however, procedures not likely to deter a determined apologist like Gerald in his immediate purpose of showing that 'a great number of these people are not baptised', itself but part of his overall plan of showing this to be an outlandish, barbarous people, gens ex bestiis solum et bestialiter vivens, faithless in every sense, as much as ever in need of normalisation, that is Normanisation.

With sure instinct, Gerald recognised the prime requirement of a travel-book – novelty, wonder. And TH is a most wonder-full book. With characteristic enterprise and remarkable authorial authority he found his basic needs in this regard ready-made in various Wonders of Ireland, 'official' and unofficial: the core of his work is a commendably conscientious crib, which he had only to 'patch together':\[70\] this traveller had no need to invent his tales, to resort to fiction. 'Faction' (in the sense '(somewhat) fictionalised fact') might, however, be a permissible term for what he added to the cribbed core, so pervasive and many-faceted is the tendentiousness\[71\] there in evidence: in the unre-

\[67\] A. T. Lucas, 'Irish food before the potato', Guerin 3 (1960) 8–43, p. 12. St Jerome evidently knew about this aspect of Irish diet. He gibed at a heretic (thought to have been Pelagius) 'heavy with Irish porridge' (Scotorum pulitis praegravatus: Kenney, Sources, 162). A. T. Lucas's posthumously-published Cattle in ancient Ireland (London 1989) appeared too late for me to use.


\[69\] Could the charge owe something to misunderstanding, or to exaggeration of the fact that some Irish infants were 'baptised without chrism'? – Gwynn, Twelfth century reform, 4. To a canonist like Gerald this would be no real baptism. On the shortage of clergy, see, for instance, Bernard's Life of Malachy, as cited by Gwynn, 42. On the other hand, Sidney could write (doubtless from observation), mid-sixteenth century: 'I doubt whether they christen their children or no?' (N. P. Ganny, 'The ideology of English colonisation: from Ireland to America', William and Mary Quarterly 3rd ser. 30 (1973) 575–98, p. 588). See too A. Cosgrave, in A new history of Ireland II (Oxford 1987) 58–9.

\[70\] Gerald's own expression (Speculum duorum, ed. Lefèvre and Huygens, 173).

\[71\] Merling Keating's comparison, FF 1, 4, with the (dung) beetle (proipioliân) which, savouring the fragrant blooms of the field, makes a bee(like)-line for the ordure. See N. J. A. Williams, 'A possible source for a passage in Keating's history', ZCP
lenting emphasis on the sensational, the virtually unrelievedly negative attitude, the frequent exaggeration, the suppressio veri (his failure to mention the Golden Age, or the twelfth-century reform), etc. Gerald of course was no mere travel-book writer but a reforming (albeit pluralist-and-absentee) Norman cleric with a mission, personal, professional and political. What was the making of the sensationalist bestseller was, however, the undoing of the prospective ethnographic masterpiece.

In criticising as he did, Gerald was, as indicated, the culmination (in the Middle Ages) of a whole line of influential churchmen who had criticised Irish ways in what Orpen called 'the intertemperate language habitual with ecclesiastics'. Like his ambitions for the status of St David’s, Gerald did not see his dream of a conquered Ireland realized. Ultimately, however, his writings were successful. While earlier critics of the Irish were the more immediately effective in that they prompted papal reaction which in turn justified a (delayed) royal intervention – religion seeking to validate conquest – Gerald’s criticism is seen to have been ultimately no less successful when one considers the disintegration of Gaelic Ireland (conquest in that sense) – in the Tudor Age and the near-pervasive role that the Gerald-generated image of Ireland played in the accompanying war of words. In time, Gerald did indeed become the bull of the herd of the (later) detractors of Ireland and helped to give Ireland a reputation and a history from which she has yet to recover. In that sense, Keating was right.

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72 Orpen, Ireland under the Normans I, 137.

73 I am, of course, aware of the view that Henry's title to Ireland rested on conquest (attempted some 17 years after Laudabiliter), not papal concession, and that he, an Angevin, liked to distance himself (like Gerald) from actual Normans, on occasion. I am also aware of the debate about the assumption that 1169 was a turning point in Irish history and about the best term (Norman, Anglo-Norman, Cambro-Norman or English) for the first invaders of this period. See M. Richter, 'The interpretation of medieval Irish history', Irish Historical Studies 24 (1985) 289–98; and TH, 100. Canny's convincing case for the influence of Spanish thinking on English colonial ideology does not preclude the probability of inherited British influence too: William and Mary Quarterly 3rd ser. 30 (1973) 575–98.