



BA Celtic Studies [distance learning] , year 3/ Level 6,

Student ref : D C Roberts # 2108135

**Course Module: Dissertation (HHP6902), Centre for Humanities and
Social Sciences**

Assignment Component : Reflective Report (1000 words)

Due date: 19th November, 2023

Draft Dissertation Title:

*Giraldus Cambrensis and musical artistry. . . a reappraisal of original
texts concerning music-making in Britain and Ireland*

Aims and objectives

This is an ambitious major project generating original research, as no apparent previous in depth study has been attempted on this scale. Smaller scale entries have been made in dictionaries, journals and biographical volumes. These have tended to be insufficient to provide a comprehensive

account of the subject-matter, as extracted from the collected works, and possibly collate a better overall summary of the subject.

The current project is therefore focused on, and concerned with

-- a review of the content of what Gerald comments on as regards to music making, skills etc in the four nations, in consideration of importance in the field of musicology, social history etc and whether any real substance can be attached to his writing in this study area

--To offer a personal contemporary critique of what Gerald maintains and what previous authors may have written in respect of this, possibly corroborate, challenge or debunk, if indeed any previous detailed textual materials have been produced

--To ascertain whether any new perspectives can be achieved in the light of increased access to iconography and other contemporary materials, e.g. British Museum digitised manuscript resources. Such material might be absent from previous commentary, on further examination.

But, why a reappraisal? For one thing, aspects of the translations might be better expressed. For example, when discussing the effects of the higher-sounding harp strings against a lower-sounding accompaniment the editing author states . . . 'They enter into a movement . . . and play the little notes so sportively under the blunter sounds of the base strings'.¹ In one major respect this is the exact opposite of the sonic effect: the 'little notes' [sounded on the shorter, highest sounding strings] will have the effect of sounding **above** the blunter sounds of what is now referred to as the 'bass' range of strings [that is, the thicker, longer material normally accompanying the melodic progression above them] . Alternatively, if the translator

¹ Richard Colt-Hoare 1806, pp 296 - 7

had said, 'under which the blunter sounds of the base strings are heard', then this would be immediately understood.

Methodology

Extract passages discussing music practice/instruments from the *Topographia Hibernica* ("Topography of Ireland", 1187) *Itinerarium Cambriae* ("Journey through Wales", 1191), *Descriptio Cambriae* ("Description of Wales", 1194)

We will review Gerald's comments on music practice, the instruments in use, any differences between the nations, some social characteristics, and so forth. We can also review the situation as to whether his information can be corroborated elsewhere, e.g. other Latin authors dealing with the subject-matter. We can cross refer to any manuscript illustrations and even artefacts extant from the period, e.g. carvings from west Wales, metal-work from Ireland and manuscripts from English sources. This would be useful for any clarification needed. We can attempt to construct a composite portrayal of the man and his artistic experiences.

It is planned that the original text will be reorganized into a separate 'national' format reflecting the four nations of Ireland, 'Wallia', Scotland, and England (what Gerald refers controversially to as 'Britannia', excluding Wales).

Biographical Review of existing scholarship or critiques of Gerald's work.

As Gerald avoids the local vernacular to a large extent in his writing, we will attempt to attach non-Latin terminology to his lists of instruments and the techniques involved, and clarify in everyday English. What instrument precisely is he referring to ? How have previous historians interpreted his descriptions of technicalities? What do any recent researchers say when compared to earlier ? Assuming of course that this data is forthcoming from previous authorship.

Intermediate view (November 2023)

Various authors have written a substantial body of literature directly concerning both the man and his life's work. An initial reflection of the opinions expressed by Gerald generally is that he could be contradictory, raising some doubt as to the genuine objectivity and validity of what is maintained occasionally in his authorship. However, initial impressions would suggest that any deviation of objectivity does not seem to enter into the commentary on musical arts. Crucially, one particular reason for this is that music in the mediaeval system of education (e.g. the 'Seven Liberal Arts') had been included in the 'Quadrivium', essentially a group of sciences based upon measurement, and inclusive of arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. This 'matter of fact' approach, and bearing in mind, also, his superior education in Paris, where knowledge of developments in musical artistry might be expected, as Paris and Notre Dame are associated with early developments in the field of non single melodic styles, i.e. 'polyphony' 'homophony' as opposed to 'monophony', means that Gerald seems to have a firm understanding of these distinctions in music and attempts to apply them to societies outside the Parisian sphere of influence.

Draft dissertation structure

A framework has already been developed. This takes the following format:

1 General introduction outlining the scope of a study of Gerald's observations and opinions

2

Summary and analysis of this information by nation (e.g., as per United Kingdom structure and Ireland): Ireland. Wales, Scotland, England

3

The additional texts: precis / commentary and analysis in relation to 'Of the Beneficial Effects of Music' contained within the *Topographia Hibernica*

4

The instruments: full examination of the possible instrumentation outlined in the various texts; e.g, what exactly is Gerald referring to, how did they function and do we have extant examples, or at least reliable diagrams or illustrations

5

Matrix illustration of instrumentation and vocal styles as per nation.

6

Comprehensive review of criticism as noted throughout the 20th century, reviewed and counter-critiqued where appropriate on the evidence of the assignment

7

Dissertation conclusions and summary:

Envisaged would be questions as to whether Gerald's observations are comprehensive, relevant and of sufficient detail. For example, what may have been overlooked.

Appendices:

8

Contemporary illustrations of the period surveyed

9

Glossary of terms, principally music-related

10

The additional chapters concerning the theories, psychological effects of music, included with full copyright clearance (as with the translated extracts from the three major works listed above)

Project management plan and update on progress

Stages 1 - 4 inclusive (of the Structure) are completed in handwritten draft#1, to be reviewed January 2024

Stage 6 some relevant observations drafted but not completed

Stages 7 and 9 not yet in first draft form. Completion anticipated around February - March 2024

Stage 10 complete

Bibliography is being compiled as relevant sources only after consideration of a wider selection of volumes including some listed below, which might not be totally relevant to the completed texts

The major task will be the transfer of manuscript to electronic form and further incorporation of illustrative material for successful print.

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