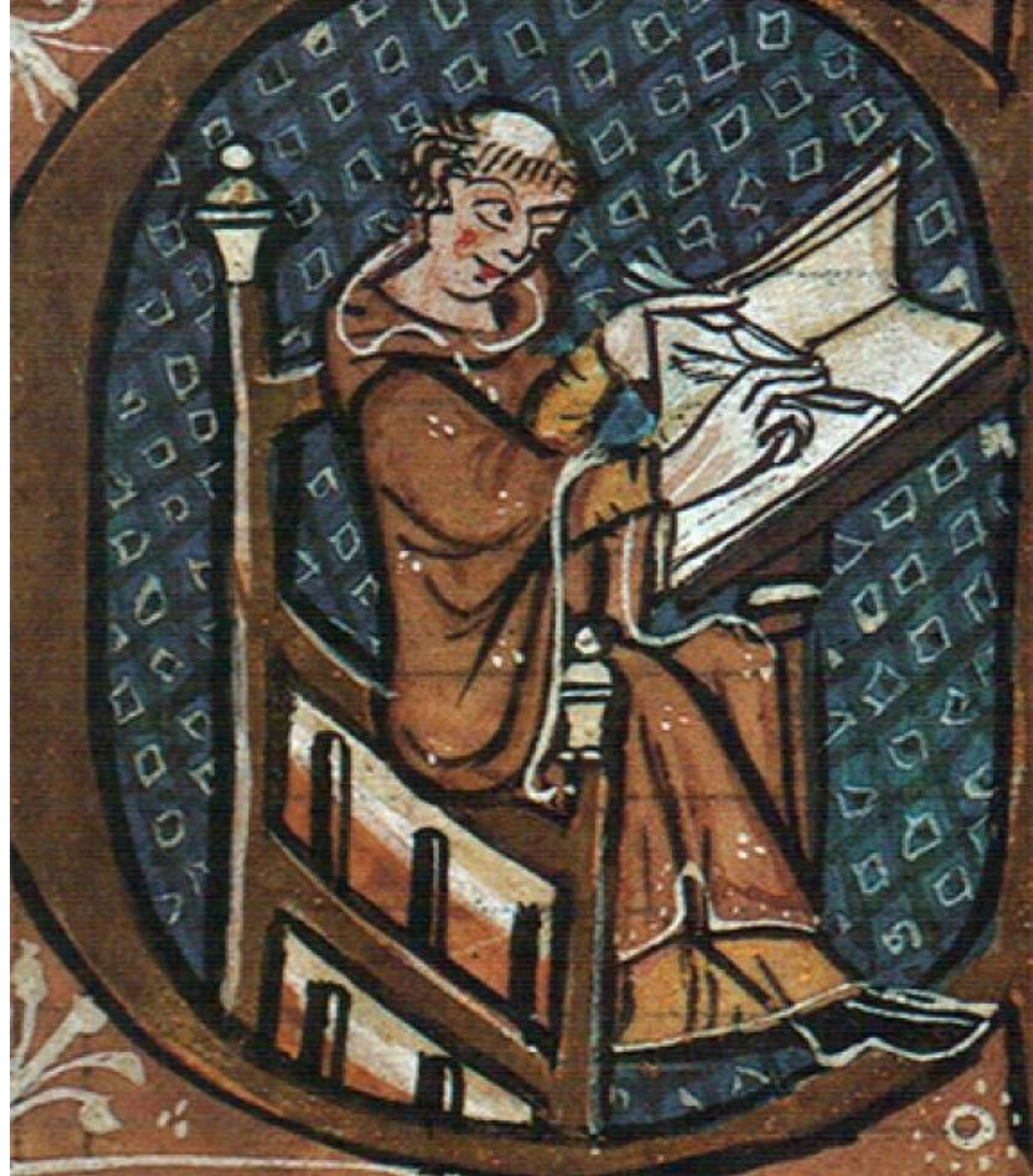


The Description of Wales by Gerald of Wales



Gerald of Wales

- Born c.1146 at Manorbier Castle
- Of mixed Norman and Welsh ancestry
- Archdeacon of Brecknock 1175
- Wished to be Bishop of St. David's
- Entered King Henry II's service in 1184
- Went on journeys to Ireland and Wales
- Died c.1223



The Description of Wales

- Chapters X & XI

CHAPTER X

OF THEIR HOSPITALITY AND LIBERALITY

No one of this nation ever begs, for the houses of all are common to all; and they consider liberality and hospitality amongst the first virtues. So much does hospitality here rejoice in communication, that it is neither offered nor requested by travellers, who, on entering any house, only deliver up their arms. When water is offered to them, if they suffer their feet to be washed, they are received as guests; for the offer of water to wash the feet is with this nation an hospitable invitation. But if they refuse the proffered service, they only wish for morning refreshment, not lodging. The young men move about in troops and families under the direction of a chosen leader. Attached only to arms and ease, and ever ready to stand forth in defence of their country, they have free admittance into every house as if it were their own.

Those who arrive in the morning are entertained till evening with the conversation of young women, and the music of the harp; for each house has its young women and harps allotted to this purpose. Two circumstances here deserve notice: that as no nation labours more under the vice of jealousy than the Irish, so none is more free from it than the Welsh: and in each family the art of playing on the harp is held preferable to any other learning. In the evening, when no more guests are expected, the meal is prepared according to the number and dignity of the persons assembled, and according to the wealth of the family who entertains. The kitchen does not supply many dishes, nor high-seasoned incitements to eating. The house is not furnished with tables, cloths, or napkins. They study nature more than splendour, for which reason, the guests being seated in threes, instead of couples as elsewhere, ^[169a] they place the dishes before them all at once upon rushes and fresh grass, in large platters or trenchers. They also make use of a thin and broad cake of bread, baked every day, such as in old writings was called *lagana*; ^[169b] and they sometimes add chopped meat, with broth. Such a repast was formerly used by the noble youth, from whom this nation boasts its descent, and whose manners it still partly imitates, according to the word of the poet:

“Heu! mensas consumimus, inquit Iulus.”

While the family is engaged in waiting on the guests, the host and hostess stand up, paying unremitting attention to everything, and take no food till all the company are satisfied; that in case of any deficiency, it may fall upon them. A bed made of rushes, and covered with a coarse kind of cloth manufactured in the country, called *brychan*, ^[170] is then placed along the side of the room, and they all in common lie down to sleep; nor is their dress at night different from that by day, for at all seasons they defend themselves from the cold only by a thin cloak and tunic. The fire continues to burn by night as well as by day, at their feet, and they receive much comfort from the natural heat of the persons lying near them; but when the under side begins to be tired with the hardness of the bed, or the upper one to suffer from cold, they immediately leap up, and go to the fire, which soon relieves them from both inconveniences; and then returning to their couch, they expose alternately their sides to the cold, and to the hardness of the bed.

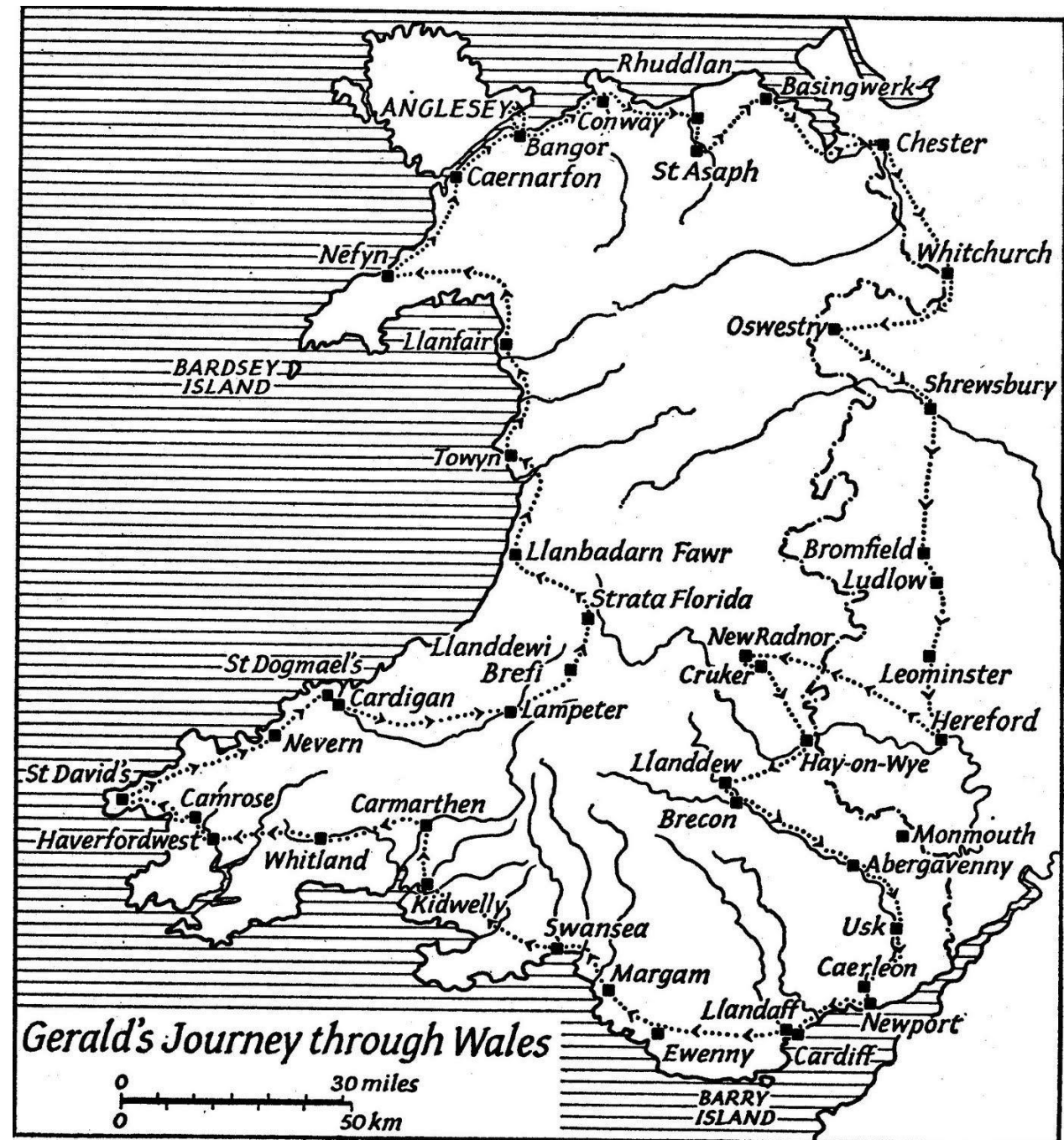
CHAPTER XI

CONCERNING THEIR CUTTING OF THEIR HAIR, THEIR CARE OF THEIR TEETH, AND SHAVING OF THEIR BEARD

THE men and women cut their hair close round to the ears and eyes. The women, after the manner of the Parthians, cover their heads with a large white veil, folded together in the form of a crown.

When and Where?

- Tour of Wales in 1188
- Raising support for a Crusade
- Normans had tried to invade Wales several times but failed
- Still a lot of Welsh-Norman hostility



Why is this significant?

- Description of many aspects of Welsh life
- Aimed at non-Welsh readers
- Interesting perspective
- Goes into minor details

