

Gerald of Wales and musical artistry: a
compilation and analysis of his
comments in the extant writings: to
what extent does Gerald inform us of
medieval musical practice and theory?

Presenter: David C. Roberts

The Project's challenge. . .

- Seek out relevant details from the extant works
- Extract for sorting into national format, e.g. Ireland, Wales etc.
- Analyse / interpret into modern English syntax
- Add personal commentary, opinion, and any corroborative data
- Also, supply a detailed summary and commentary of the 'universal' information in relation to the beneficial effects of music in the *Topographia Hibernica* (part of the works selected) which Gerald appends in an effort to display his breadth of knowledge on the subject, including historical, philosophical, metaphysical aspects.

Born 1146 in south Pembrokeshire at Manorbier castle: highly ambitious, received superior education in Paris, returned to serve Prince John, future king, on his tour of Ireland



Gerald in Ireland . . . Collected a significant amount of information on the lifestyle of the Irish people, clergy etc., and became enamoured of the musical styles of the local harpists; all of these observations eventually collected in the *Topographia Hibernica*, one of Gerald's earliest magnum opus (image: Waterford, Saint Declan's Church)



The Project's fieldwork activity: corroborating Gerald's text as far as possible by site visits, manuscript sources, etc. Archaeological aspects can contribute, e.g. old carvings in relief. . . Saint Declan's ruins (previous slide) has an Arcade with imagery illustrative of the instrument Gerald would have heard.

The 'Arcade Harpist', Saint Declan's Church, Ardmore, Waterford. Photograph by presenter. Illustration of the smaller early Irish instrument, very much 'abraded', but giving an idea of dimension relative to torso.



sonorant dulcedine compleant
Tam subtiliter modulor intant
ereunt. Sicq; sub obtuso grossiori
corde sonitu gradum tinnitui hie
ti ludunt. Latencius delectant. lac
uicq; demulcent. ut pars artu max



Marginalia image from the *Topographia Hibernica*,
Trinity College, Dublin MS

Gerald's manuscripts:
reverting to the original
(primary) sources has
been vital during the
project. Here, we see
one of his illustrations
in the *Topographia
Hibernica*, emphasising
his interest in the Irish
harp (the performer is
tuning it).

Gerald's Travels in Wales... a subsequent employment

- Is invited to accompany Archbishop Baldwin on a tour of Wales in an effort to encourage recruitment and support for the Crusade.
- Again, he uses this opportunity to collect details of Welsh life and to write extensively on the people, customs, places, and an account of the journey, all included in two major books: *Itinerarium Kambriae*, 1191 and *Descriptio Cambriae*, 1194 .

Gerald informs us that the Welsh harpers are also skilled in the techniques which he associates with the Irish. During a visit to Saint David's Cathedral (West Wales) this image was noted, an early carving in relief, crumbling away in a corner of the South Porch, dating from the 12th – 13th century. . . a useful comparison to Gerald's effort. (sketch by the presenter 2024)



On the Beneficial Effects of Music

Immediately following the details of the Irish harpers in the *Topographia*, Gerald expands his discourse to include universal considerations of the art: ‘music checks moroseness,’ lifts the mood theoretically reversing pessimism to optimism; but it can also induce hedonism and have a soporific effect.

But not only this, music can soothe disease and pain. . . ‘there are no sufferings which it will not mitigate, and there are some which it cures. David’s lyre restrained the unclean spirit from vexing Saul, and while he played his trouble ceased; but as soon as the strains ceased, he was vexed again.’

Concluding texts: Metaphysical, Philosophical and Historical aspects

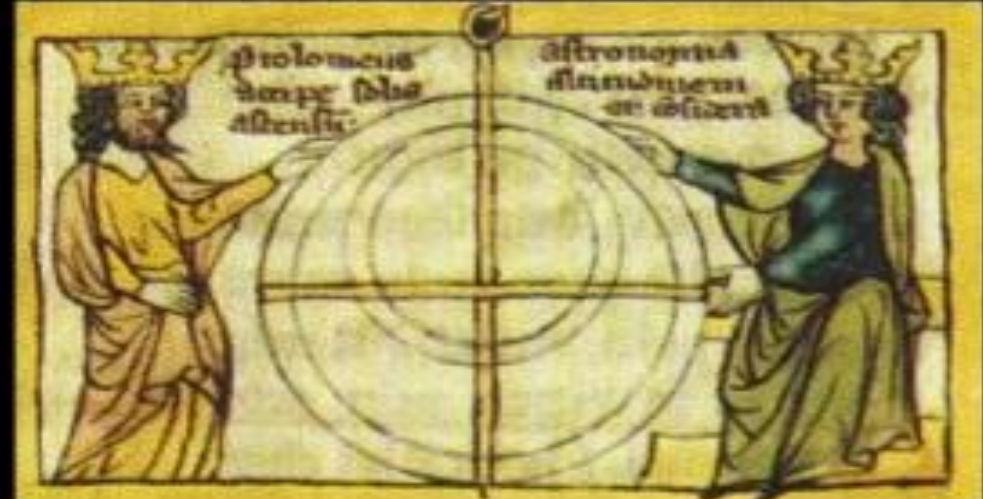
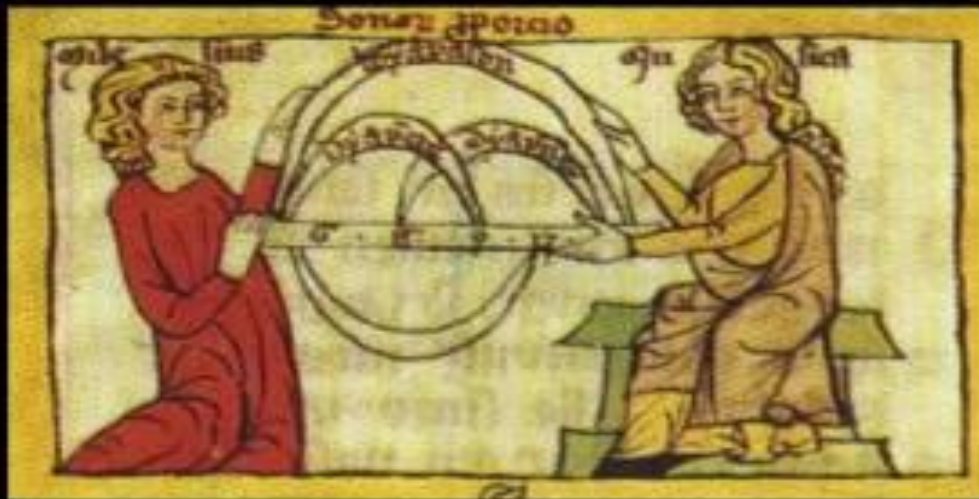
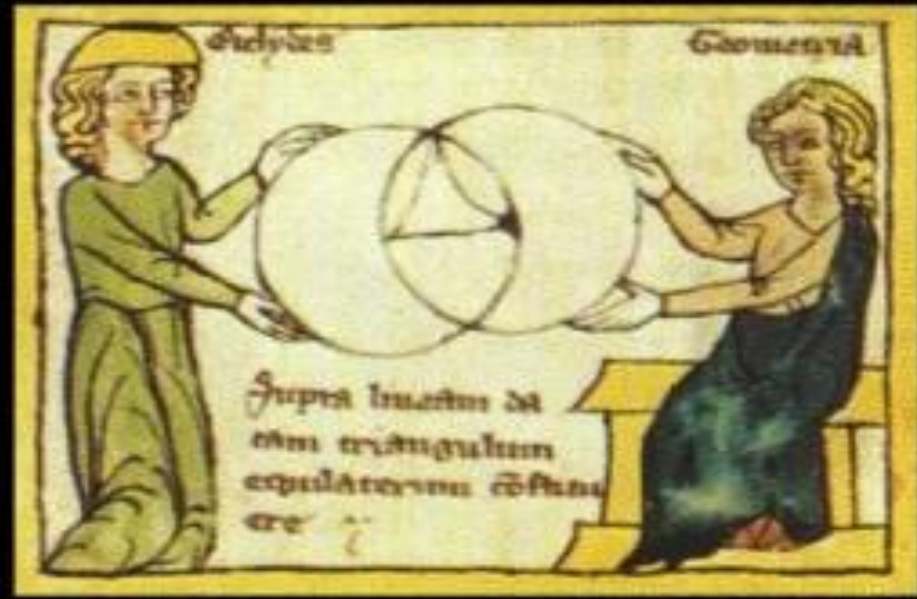
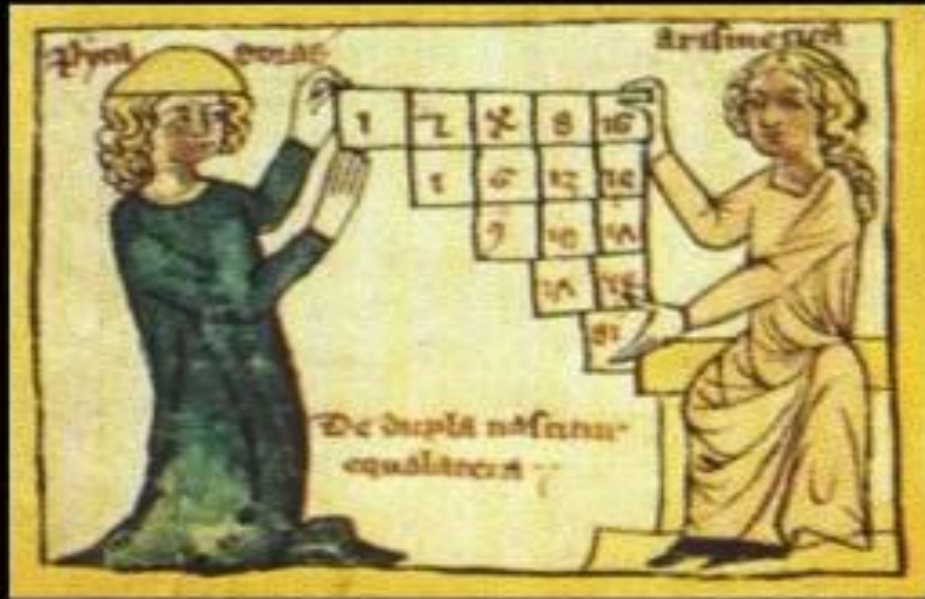
Gerald is also concerned with 'Harmony', as in the 'Harmony of the Spheres' [Musica Universalis]

Pythagoras, e.g. theories and experiments involving strings (the tighter the string becomes, so the higher the pitch will be), and

King David . . . an 'inventor' of musical instruments

. . . ending a *tour-de-force* of in-depth knowledge of what could be later used in a public 'reading' (presentation)

The personifications of the Quadrivium



Pythagoras and
experiments with
weights. . .

