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Kings Behaving Badly: Images of Rulers in Gerald of Wales' Works on Ireland (c.1200)

In the decades after the English invasion of Ireland of c.1170, the scholar and archdeacon Gerald of Wales produced two texts about the newly conquered country. The first (*De Topographia Hibernica*) dealt with the country and its people, whilst the second (*De Expugnatio Hibernica*) discussed the conquest. In both texts Gerald sought to justify the invasion, and as part of this larger narrative he cited examples of different kinds of rulers and activities associated with them. By the year 1200 some copies of Gerald's works were being produced with illustrations, which served to underline particular incidents in the text. Two surviving copies from c.1200 provide sharply contrasting portrayals of a barbaric native Irish ruler and the new Christian king Henry II (and his family), through a combination of texts and images. A manuscript in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin (MS 700) is unique in containing marginal images to both the *Topography* and *Conquest* texts. This volume includes a representation of Henry II in the lower margin of folio 72, who is shown seated with a crown and sceptre, a typical iconography for a European monarch. In contrast a second image on folio 39v depicts a ritual which Gerald claimed was associated with an Irish king. The image is made up of three parts: on the left a man kills a horse, in the centre its flesh is cooked, and on the right the new king bathes in the flesh and eats it. The last scene finds parallels in scenes of baptism. Thus Henry II's invasion is presented as reintroducing Christian rule to a country previously ruled by barbarian kings.

The largely positive presentation of the English monarch in Gerald's text was due in part to his attempts to attract patronage from members of the royal family, to whom both his texts on Ireland were dedicated. However, as a representative of the church, Gerald also offered some criticisms of the English monarch's behaviour, suggesting that there remained room for improvement. These comments may explain why he seems to have met with limited success in achieving royal patronage. Moreover, whilst the treatment of the surviving illustrated copies required considerable investment of time and materials, these books do not seem to have been produced for a ruling monarch. Instead Gerald's references to his intended audiences suggest that the images may have served to engage the interest of the noble elite, conveying Gerald's ideas about the monarchy to a wider audience than the texts' dedicatees and other scholars.