

Humanism's priorities and empire's prerogatives: Polydore Vergil's description of Ireland

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Abstract

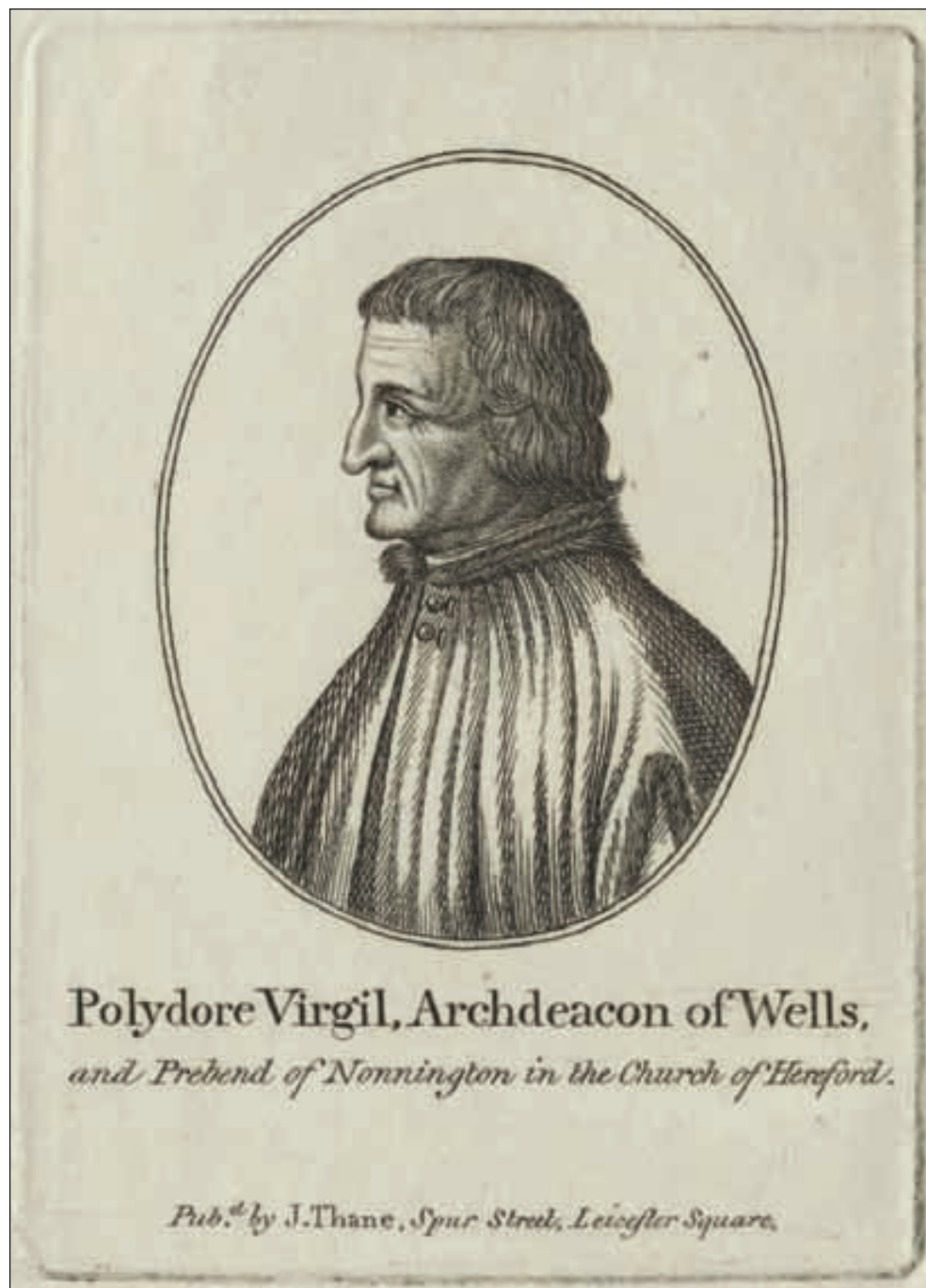
The description of Ireland in the *Anglica historia* by Polydore Vergil (c. 1470–1555), is possibly one of its most original passages, yet nowadays it is little known or studied. This article seeks to remedy that deficiency by (a) providing an edition of the original Latin text, together with a modern English translation, and (b) explaining how the description came to be constructed. It argues that Vergil, writing as an Italian, aimed on the one hand to abide by humanist precedent and respect the (nascent) rules regarding historiography and chorography, and on the other to satisfy the imperialising demands of his patrons, the Tudors. As a result, the work is anything but 'modern', as some critics have suggested. On the contrary it is very much of its time, recording deeds done (in war) for the sake of deeds-to-be-done, and thus portraying the Irish as inevitable losers.

Introduction: Polydore Vergil's best sellers

Polydore Vergil [Polidoro Virgili] (c. 1470–1555) was a cleric from Urbino, Italy, who in 1502 was sent as assistant papal tax collector (Deputy Collector of Peter's Pence) to England, where he remained almost to the very end of his life, becoming fully integrated in church and court circles (Pl. I). While there he wrote an *Anglica historia* (*History of England*) that soon became famous throughout Europe, thereby vindicating those who had secured his appointment because of his ability to write, in the style of humanists, what the reading public wished to read. In 1498 he had published a collection of proverbs (*Adagia*) which rivalled the popularity of that by the great Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus, and in 1499 an encyclopaedia of human inventors and inventions (*De inventoribus rerum*) which also became a text-book of the time. Neither work, however, brought Vergil quite the fame (or notoriety) that the *Anglica historia* would do (Pl. II). Apparently commissioned by Henry VII, in order to 'justify the Tudors to the scholars of Europe', it quickly established itself as the standard history of England, and long remained 'virtually indispensable' to anyone seeking information on that country.¹

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¹ The standard work on Polydore Vergil is still Denys Hay, *Polydore Vergil: Renaissance historian and man of letters* (Oxford, 1952). See also: Marc Magnien, 'Virgile (Polidore)', in Colette Nativel (ed.), *Centuriae latinae offertes à Jacques Chomorat* (Genève, 1997), 783–7; Rolando Bacchielli (ed.), *Polidoro Virgili e la cultura umanistica europea* (Urbino, 2003). A modern edition of *Adagia* does not exist, but there are two of *De inventoribus*: Polydore Vergil, *Beginnings and discoveries*, eds and trans Beno Weiss and L.C. Pérez (Nieuwkoop, 1997);



PL. I—Polydore Vergil after Unknown artist; published by John Thane. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Pl. II—First page from the 1534 edition of Vergil's *Anglica historia*. Courtesy of the Board, Trinity College Dublin.

The *Anglica historia*: redaction and publication

Vergil, it is believed, began writing the work in about 1506. An early draft, now in the Vatican Library, was completed by 1513, a second draft, of which no trace remains, by 1520, and the first edition was published in 1534, in Basel. At that stage the *History* consisted of 26 books and ended with the death of Henry VII, in 1509. In 1546 a second edition was published, also in Basel, for which the text was revised, though England continued not to have a history after 1509, specifically no history of royal divorces and dissolutions. It was only with the third edition, published in Basel in 1555, that Vergil dared, up to a point, to be more forthcoming. Having managed to remain loyal to the old order without offending the new, he was at the time on his way back to Italy for good, and so added a twenty-seventh book, covering the reign of Henry VIII, but only up to 1537. Henry had died in 1547, and Vergil himself was to die a few months later. Therefore no further books were added. Yet still the work continued to be published. There were to be seven more editions over the following century, three of which were published in Basel (1556, 1557, 1570), one in Ghent (1556), one in Douai (1603), and two in Lyon (1649, 1651), some containing 26 books, others 27, depending on which version the publisher was copying.²

The description of Ireland in the *Anglica historia*

In Book 13 of the work (which is dedicated to Henry II), with a postscript in Book 26 (dedicated to Henry VII), there is a description of Ireland and the Irish. According to Denys Hay, Vergil's modern-day biographer, writing more than 50 years ago, this is 'one of the most original passages in the work' and therefore merits closer scrutiny.³ But so far it has received scant attention, and it is the primary purpose of this article to remedy that oversight, making the description available to a modern audience. The Appendix to this paper thus contains the original Latin text, together with an English translation, edited in such a way as to allow the modern reader to understand how the description evolved from the manuscript to the printed version. At the same time, by recording all the variants from all the printed editions, it aims to give an idea of what 'precise' information about Ireland was available at the time. In other words, what is provided is not a critical edition of the text, and what is intended by precision is less the nature of the original text, or the accuracy of its contents, or the exact configuration of its different versions, or the identity of the sources used by the author, than it is the possibility of answering this one question: what *did* people of the time actually know, think and say about Ireland?

Polydore Vergil, *On discovery*, ed. and trans. B.P. Copenhaver (Cambridge, MA, 2002). There is a (partial) modern edition of the *Anglica historia* in Denys Hay (ed.), *The 'Anglica historia' by Polydore Vergil*, Royal Historical Society: Camden Series 74 (London, 1950). 'Justify': Hay, *Polydore Vergil*, 9. 'Indispensable': P.I. Kaufman, 'Polydore Vergil and the strange disappearance of Christopher Urswick', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 17 (1986), 69–85: 70.

² On the textual history of the work, see Hay, *Polydore Vergil*, 79–85, and Denys Hay, 'The manuscript of Polydore Vergil's *Anglica historia*', *English Historical Review* 54 (1939), 240–51. For details of the early editions see the Appendix.

³ Hay, *Polydore Vergil*, 100.

The popularity of the description of Ireland

The question is all the more intriguing if one bears in mind that, for a great many people of the time, Vergil's description of Ireland may have been the only available source of information on the matter. What is certain is that the description was widely known. In Vergil's native Italy, during the early days of humanism, the 'standard' reference work on Ireland, with the blessing of the humanists' great master, Francesco Petrarca [Petrarch] (1304–74), who thought highly of it, was the work known as *De mirabilibus hybernie* (*On the miracles of Ireland*), which is more commonly known today as *Topographia hibernica* (*The topography of Ireland*), by Gerald of Wales [Giraldus Cambrensis] (1146?–1223).⁴ Among the more famous readers of the *Topographia* were Giovanni Boccaccio (1313?–75), the St Paul of humanism to Petrarch's Christ; Pope Pius II (1405–58–64), perhaps the first of Europe's modern geographers; Giovanni Pontano (1429–1503), the highly influential writer and prime minister of the Kingdom of Naples; and possibly Alexander VI (1431?–92–1503), the simonist Borgia pope.⁵ Eventually, however, the *Anglica historia* was to knock the *Topographia* off its pedestal, and it was Vergil's views on Ireland which circulated most. For instance, they are amply quoted, not to say plagiarised, by Italian cosmographers, such as Tommaso Porcacchi (1530–85), in *L'isole più famose del mondo* (*The most famous islands in the world*) first published in 1572; Giovanni Lorenzo d'Anania (c. 1545–c. 1608), in *L'universale fabrica del mondo* (*The whole edifice of the world*) first published in 1576; and Giovanni Botero (1544–1617), in his *Relationi universali* (*World reports*) first published in 1591.⁶ France's royal cosmographer, François Thevet (1516–92), also pressed them into service, but more importantly, they came to form the substance, together with the description of

⁴ On Petrarch and Gerald, see Eric Haywood, 'Il Petrarca lettore della *Topographia hibernica* di Giraldus Cambrensis', in Luisa Secchi Tarugi (ed.), *Francesco Petrarca. L'opera latina: tradizione e fortuna* (Firenze, 2006), 647–67. For the text of the *Topographia*, see J.J. O'Meara, 'Giraldus Cambrensis *In topographia hibernie*. Text of the first recension', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 52C (1949), 113–78. For a fuller (later) version of the text, see J.F. Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia hibernica et Expugnatio hibernica* (Wiesbaden, 1964 [1867]). For a translation (of the first recension), see Gerald of Wales, *The history and topography of Ireland*, trans. J.J. O'Meara (London, 1982 [1951]).

⁵ On Pius, see Eric Haywood, 'L'Europa senza isole di Enea Silvio Piccolomini', in Luisa Secchi Tarugi (ed.), *Pio II umanista europeo* (Firenze, 2007), 237–60; on Pontano, Eric Haywood, 'Iter asinarium: per una nuova interpretazione dell'*Asinus pontaniano*', in Mario de Nichilo (ed.), *Confini dell'umanesimo letterario* (Roma, 2003), 733–46; on Alexander VI, Eric Haywood, 'Disdegno umanista? Alessandro VI di fronte all'Irlanda', in Davide Canfora (ed.), *Principato ecclesiastico e riuso dei classici* (Roma, 2002), 255–74. And in general see Eric Haywood, 'Is Ireland worth bothering about? Classical perceptions of Ireland revisited in Renaissance Italy', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 2 (1996), 467–86, and Eric Haywood, 'La divisa dal mondo ultima Irlanda, ossia la riscoperta umanistica dell'Irlanda', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana* 176 (1999), 363–87.

⁶ Over the next century Porcacchi's work was to be reprinted at least another six times, d'Anania's at least another three, and Botero's saw no fewer than 40 re-éditions or adaptations, in at least five languages (Italian, English, Spanish, German, Latin).

Ireland by another Italian humanist—*Descriptio hyberniae*, published in 1548, by Paolo Giovio (1483–1552)—of the chapter on Ireland in what has been called the ‘lay bible’ of sixteenth-century Europe, namely the *Cosmographia* of the Basel professor, printer and polymath Sebastian Münster (1489–1552). Between 1537 and 1628, this work was published no fewer than 30 times in at least 4 different languages.⁷ If for no other reason, that is why Polydore Vergil’s account deserves to be better known.

The originality (or otherwise) of the description of Ireland

The originality of the description, in truth, is not really of the order that Hay seems to suggest. Indeed, a good deal of Vergil’s information about Ireland, as even a cursory reading of the Appendix and the *Topographia hibernica* will reveal, is taken straight from Gerald of Wales, as well as from the ‘digest’ of the *Topographia* which is to be found in the *Polychronicon* of the English Benedictine monk Ranulf Higden (d. 1363), a work which was probably even better known during the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance than the *Topographia*. What is more, many of the views expressed by Vergil do no more than rehearse what were then common assumptions about the Irish and other ‘primitive’ or ‘border’ peoples. Vergil was certainly not the first to highlight moustaches and saddles, for instance, or marriages and languages, as ‘ethnic identifiers’ and markers of Irish difference. The predilection of the Irish for a life of *otium* led in woods rather than in cities, and their misguided understanding of true Christianity were also, and had long been, ‘commonplaces of observation’ among those who marvelled or grew indignant at their stubborn-minded otherness—not all of whom were English: the bile displayed by St Bernard (1090–1153), in his life of St Malachy, as he castigates the Irish for being ‘beasts’ rather than ‘men’, is a case in point. Neither is Vergil exceptional in applying to the task of defining Irishness modes of perception that were fashioned through a familiarity with the ancient world of Greece and Rome, and above all through a love affair with Rome’s *imperium*.⁸ What is certainly of greater significance is not

⁷ See André Thevet, *La cosmographie universelle* (2 vols, Paris, 1575), vol. 2, 16, 10 (‘De l’isle d’Irlande, ou Hibernie: façon & manière de vivre de ce peuple’). On Ireland in Münster, see Haywood, ‘Is Ireland worth bothering?’, 476; on Münster, Matthew McLean, *The Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster: describing the world in the Reformation* (Aldershot, 2007); on Giovio, Eric Haywood, ‘Paolo Giovio’s *Descriptio Hyberniae*: humanist chorography or political manifesto?’, in J.F. Alcina (ed.), *Acta conventus neo-latini bariensis* (Tempe, AZ, 1998), 315–22, and Jason Harris, ‘Ireland in Europe: Paolo Giovio’s *Descriptio* (1548)’, *Irish Historical Studies* 35 (2007), 265–88. ‘Lay bible’: Numa Broc, *La geografia del Rinascimento* (Modena, 1996 [1980]), 72. On the popularity of Polydore Vergil’s description, see Eric Haywood, ‘Brutti irlandesi? La prima descrizione umanistica dell’Irlanda’, in Luisa Secchi Tarugi (ed.), *Disarmonia, bruttezza e bizzarria nel Rinascimento* (Firenze, 1998), 173–87, and Eric Haywood, ‘La storia dell’Irlanda dell’*Anglica historia*’, in Bacchielli, *Polidoro Virgilio e la cultura*, 143–63.

⁸ On all of this, see in particular: Robert Bartlett, *The making of Europe. Conquest, colonization and cultural change 950–1350* (London, 1993), esp. 197–242 (chapters 8 and 9: ‘Race relations on the frontiers of Latin Europe’); R.R. Davies, *The first English empire. Power and identities in the British Isles 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000), esp. 120–9

what Vergil says, but *how* he says it, as well as the mere fact of his having said it at all—‘as an Italian’, we might add, remembering that he liked to boast of the fact that he ‘wrote as an Italian’.⁹

Writing about
Ireland as an
Italian and a
humanist

Had Vergil, ‘as an Italian’, followed (humanist) precedent, he might well have decided simply not to bother with Ireland. In 1458, shortly before ascending the throne of St Peter, Pius II (Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini), who in so many ways was a trail-blazer for his fellow humanists, completed a history of contemporary Europe (*De Europa*). The work innovatively intertwined the writing of history and of geography, and its aim was to introduce Pius’s readers to parts of Europe which hitherto had been considered to be *extra orbem* (‘out of this world’).¹⁰ Ireland at the time, especially in Italy, was not unknown: its ‘saints and scholars’ may have been a distant memory, but thanks to the *Topographia*, its ‘marvels’ were an object of some curiosity, and thanks to the pilgrimage to St Patrick’s Purgatory¹¹ it was famed for being the

(‘ethnic identifier’: 128); Sean Duffy, ‘The problem of degeneracy’, in James Lydon (ed.), *Law and disorder in thirteenth-century Ireland. The Dublin parliament of 1297* (Dublin, 1997), 87–106, esp. 88; S.G. Ellis, ‘Civilizing the natives: state formation and the Tudor monarchy, c. 1400–1603’, in S.G. Ellis and Lud’á Klusáková (eds), *Imagining frontiers, contesting identities* (Pisa, 2007), 77–92, esp. 82–5 (‘commonplaces of observation’: 83); S.G. Ellis, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors 1447–1603. English expansion and the end of Gaelic rule* (London and NY, 1998), esp. 48; John Gillingham, ‘Foundations of a disunited kingdom’, in Alexander Grant and K.J. Stringer (eds), *Uniting the kingdom? The making of British history* (London and NY, 1995), 48–64, esp. 51, 59–60; James Muldoon, ‘Wild Irishmen and half-breeds’, in his *Identity on the medieval Irish frontier. Degenerate Englishmen, wild Irishmen, middle nations* (Gainesville, FL, 2003), 63–102, esp. 72, 81. St Bernard’s *Life of St Malachy* can be found in Jean Leclercq and H.M. Rochois (eds), *S. Bernardi opera*, vol. III: *Tractatus et opuscula* (Rome, 1963), 295–378 (‘tunc intellexit homo Dei, non ad homines se, sed ad bestias destinatum’: 325). And see chapters 32–6 of Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon*, ed. Churchill Babington, *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores* 41 (London, 1865), 328–82.

⁹ What Vergil is actually reported to have said is: ‘I write as an Italian, and relate everything with truthfulness’ (quoted in F.V. Cespedes, ‘The final book of Polydore Vergil’s *Anglica historia*’, *Viator* 10 (1979), 375–96: 380).

¹⁰ Apologising for having devoted more time than may have seemed warranted to the description of Germany, Pius wrote: ‘We have done this because the ancient writers spoke sparingly of Germany, referring to German matters as though they themselves were *dreaming* and as though that country lay *out of this world*’ (‘id fecimus, quia ueteres scriptores parcissime de Germania locuti sunt et, tamquam *extra orbem* ea natio iaceret, *somniantes* quodammodo res germanicas attingunt’): E.S. Piccolomini, *De Europa*, ed. Adrian Van Heck (Città del Vaticano, 2001), 133 (emphasis added). For more on this see Haywood, ‘L’Europa senza isole’.

¹¹ St Patrick’s Purgatory, Lough Derg, Co. Donegal, was to leave a lasting mark on the Italian language: the expression *pozzo di san Patrizio* (‘St Patrick’s Well’) is still in current use, to signify a bottomless pit, both literally and figuratively.

antechamber to the other world.¹² On the whole, however, it too, for most, remained ‘out of this world’. Pius, though, chose to let it be. ‘We ought now,’ he wrote in *De Europa*, after having dealt with Britain:

to acquit ourselves of Hibernia, which is separated from Britain by a short stretch of sea, and is partly free, benefiting from the friendship and the alliance of the Scots, and partly subject to English rule [*imperium*], but since nothing worth remembering has taken place there, we understand, during the period we write about, we hurry on to matters Spanish.¹³

Given that Pius had warned, in the very first sentence of the work, that he would only be recording what was ‘worth remembering’, his eagerness to ‘hurry on’ from Ireland, however much it might offend modern sensitivities, need not surprise us. We cannot fail to notice, however, that he too harboured doubts about the propriety, or the wisdom of doing so: ‘we *ought* now to acquit ourselves of Hibernia’, had been his first reaction. Clearly he had reflected on the matter, in the knowledge, possibly, that his readers may have expected otherwise, but on balance, it would seem, he had decided that it was safer to omit Ireland. He had good reasons, in truth, for suspecting that it did not really belong to ‘our’ world. For a start it was an island, and he seems to have been unsure as to whether islands should be considered a part of Europe: hardly any islands at all are discussed in *De Europa*, and when they are, it is mostly in negative terms. What is more, Ireland was an island which, if St Bernard, Gerald, and others were to be believed, was only imperfectly Christian, and for such islands there was definitely no room in Europe. The opening sentence of the work makes that quite clear: the work, it warns, would only deal with ‘what was done under Frederick, third emperor of that name, by Europeans and island-dwellers considered to be Christian’.¹⁴ Above all, however, there was the question of Ireland’s ‘marvels’ and ‘fables’.

¹² On the popularity in Italy of the pilgrimage to St Patrick’s Purgatory, see Ludovico Frati, ‘Tradizioni storiche del Purgatorio di san Patrizio’, *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana* 17 (1891), 46–78, and Jean-Michel Picard, ‘The Irish pilgrims’, in Michael Haren and Yolande de Pontfarcy (eds), *The medieval pilgrimage to St Patrick’s Purgatory. Lough Derg and the European tradition* (Enniskillen, 1988), 169–89. On Ireland’s ‘saints and scholars’, see: Vincenzo Berardis, *Italy and Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1950); Ludwig Bieler, *Ireland, harbinger of the Middle Ages* (London, 1963); A.M. Tommasini, *Irish saints in Italy* (London, 1937).

¹³ ‘Hibernia nunc nobis absoluenda esset, que paruo a Britania disiuncta freto, partim libera Scotorum amicitia societateque gaudet, partim anglicano paret imperio. sed quoniam nihil dignum memoria per hoc tempus, de quo scriptio est, gestum accepimus, ad res hispanicas festinamus’: Piccolomini, *De Europa*, 16.

¹⁴ ‘QVE SVB FRIDERICO, tertio eius nominis imperatore, apud Europeos et, qui nomine christiano censentur, insulares homines gesta feruntur memoratu digna mihique cognita, tradere posteris quam breuissime libet; commiscebimus et aliqua interdum altius repetita, quemadmodum locorum rerumque ratio expostulare uidebitur’ (‘What was done under Frederick, third emperor of that name, by Europeans and island-dwellers considered to be Christian, I will here record, for the sake of future generations, as briefly as possible and insofar as it is worth remembering and known to me, intermingling it now and then with earlier events, for as much as the nature of places and of things will require it’): Piccolomini, *De Europa*, 27.

The marvels and fables of Ireland

In Pius's time, owing largely to the legacy of Gerald of Wales and Ranulf Higden, Ireland had come to stand for marvels by antonomasia. Almost at the very moment Pius was signing off on *De Europa*, in Venice the then famous cartographer Fra Mauro (d. 1459) was putting the finishing touches to two remarkable world maps. These maps were drafted to help the merchants of Venice and their Portuguese counterparts to find their way across the globe, not least by means of some 3,000 or so captions which provided them with very practical information, such as, 'Here you pay a toll' (with reference to Yemen). Yet for Ireland Fra Mauro thought of nothing else to mention but its marvels, while issuing a warning, included in the very same cartouche, that marvels, wherever they occurred in the world, might well be true, as though he meant to say: if Ireland is 'marvellous', so too can the rest of the world be! Accordingly, any sailor using one of the maps to attempt the circumnavigation of Africa, as the Portuguese are said to have done, could be sure, had he sailed in the opposite direction, that, in Ireland, he would most probably have come across 'a water in which, if you immerse wood, after a while that part of the wood which is in the earth becomes iron, whilst that in the water becomes stone, and that above the water remains wood'.¹⁵ Is it any surprise, therefore, that little over half a century later, even as Vergil was working on his history of England, the poet Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533) was to make sure that Ruggiero, the mythical ancestor of the Este¹⁶ and one of the heroes of his exceptionally popular chivalric romance *Orlando furioso*, would not miss the opportunity to visit the sights of 'Ibernia fabulosa' ('Ireland of the fables')?¹⁷ Yet though it may have been acceptable for a knight in shining armour to 'waste' his time in such a way (Ruggiero should, in truth, have been saving the world, not behaving like a tourist), was it admissible for serious writers to be doing so? There were those who definitely had their doubts.

In the latter part of the fourteenth century the mass of new information that was emerging following the 'rediscovery' of ancient works, could be the cause of some confusion and make it difficult for readers and writers to tell, say, their *Araraths* (a mountain in Armenia) from their *Arars* (a river in Germany). To address

¹⁵ 'Qui se paga el datio': Piero Falchetta, *Fra Mauro's world map* (Turnhout, 2006), 269 (no. 411); 'una aqua ne la qual chi li mete legno quela parte che è ne la terra cum tempo diventa ferro e quela è circumdada da l'aqua diventa piera e quela è sopra aqua riman legno': Falchetta, *Fra Mauro's*, 579 (no. 2212: trans Jeremy Scott). On Fra Mauro, see the introduction in Falchetta, and also Angelo Cattaneo, *Fra Mauro's mappamundi and fifteenth-century Venetian culture* (Turnhout, 2007). This particular miracle does not figure in Gerald's *Topographia*, but in Higden, *Polychronicon*, 368.

¹⁶ Ariosto wrote for the Este dukes of Ferrara and their courtiers, who were among the day's most committed patrons of humanists and most avid collectors of geographical lore.

¹⁷ Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* 10, 92, 1. It was a member of the Este family, Isabella, marchioness of Mantua, who was responsible for the visit to Ireland (in 1517) of one of the more famous Italian pilgrims to St Patrick's Purgatory, Francesco Chiericati, the papal nuncio to the court of Henry VIII. One of Chiericati's first tasks, upon arriving in England, had been to secure the release from the Tower of London of Vergil, who had been locked up there for having dared to cross swords with Thomas Wolsey. See Mary Purcell, 'St Patrick's Purgatory: Francesco Chiericati's letter to Isabella d'Este', *Seanchas Ardmhacha* 12 (1987), 1–20, and Bernardo Morsolin, *Francesco Chiericati, vescovo di Vicenza* (Vicenza, 1873).

this problem, Giovanni Boccaccio decided to compile what today would be termed a database, *De montibus, silvis, fontibus, lacubus, fluminibus, stagnis seu paludibus et de diversis nominibus maris* ('On mountains, woods, springs, lakes, rivers, pools or ponds, and on the various names of the sea'). He did so with the blessing of his friend Petrarch, who had even lent him his copy of the *Topographia hibernica* to make the task easier, should he choose (as in fact he did) to include information on the mountains, lakes and rivers of Hibernia.¹⁸ What Boccaccio did not include, however, was information about islands, yet is it not the case—mused Domenico Silvestri (1335?–1411?), one of his disciples—that there is 'more to read about that is worth relating and likely to move one's mind to admiration and to be a serious read, more sights that are a joy to behold on islands than there are in ponds, pools, lakes or woods?' Thus Silvestri decided to complete Boccaccio's work (which enjoyed enormous success during the Renaissance) with a database on islands, *De insulis*.¹⁹

Ireland is one of the islands which most fascinated, and confused, Silvestri. It is afforded no fewer than five entries in *De insulis*, for a total of seven pages (of a modern edition), and is superseded only by Sicily (three entries and twenty-five pages), England (two entries and ten pages) and France's Isle de la Cité in Paris (eight pages). There are five entries because Silvestri, it would appear, was not too sure what constituted Ireland and what did not, but whatever it was (whether *Iberia*, *Ibernia*, *Irlanda*, *Midia* or *Scotia*), he was in no doubt whatsoever as to what was to be found there. Carried away by what he had probably read in the *Topographia* and the *Polychronicon*, as well as by the testimony, so he tells us, of a native eye-witness, Bishop Milo (believed to be Milo Sweetman, archbishop of Armagh, from 1361 to 1380), all he describes, and all he appears to have (relentlessly) questioned Milo about, are Ireland's marvels, to the point where Ireland, as was to be the case for Fra Mauro, becomes his testing ground for the 'marvellous'. On the whole Silvestri too believes in marvels, but at times he does appear to worry that his fascination with them could be getting the better of him. For instance, writing about Meath (*Midia*), Ireland's 'noblest and most fertile part', he confesses: 'from the miracles, which are reported to us in the works we read, I cannot hold back my pen'. And at one point he even seems to want to admit that he should not really be writing about such things at all. This—he declares, again referring to an Irish miracle—is 'amazing to say, even more amazing to believe but worth remembering'.²⁰ The 'but' says it all: the

¹⁸ For more on this see Eric Haywood, 'Il Petrarca lettore'.

¹⁹ 'Plura enim et relatu digna mentemque admiratione motura et lectu seria scituque iocunda gesta ac visa leguntur in insulis quam paludibus, stagnis, lacubus vel in silvis': Domenico Silvestri, *De insulis et earum proprietatibus*, ed. Carmela Pecoraro (Palermo, 1955), 29. On the *De montibus*, see Manlio Pastore Stocchi, *Tradizione medievale e gusto umanistico nel De montibus del Boccaccio* (Padova, 1963).

²⁰ 'Midia [...] pars Ibernice nobilior fertiliorque [...] A mirabilibus que in scriptis nobis relata legimus, calamum astinere non possum'; 'mirabile dictu, creditu mirabilius sed memoratu dignum': Silvestri, *De insulis*, 164–5 and 126. Though it is Milo Sweetman who best fits the bill as Silvestri's star witness, it seems somewhat implausible that an encounter between the two should have taken place. On Milo, see Brendan Smyth (ed.), *The register of Milo Sweetman, archbishop of Armagh 1361–1380* (Dublin, 1996).

'amazing to say' (*mirabile dictu*) and the 'worth remembering' (*memoratu dignum*) do not belong together.

Pius could not have agreed more. When he was still a young man, in 1435, he was sent on a diplomatic mission to Scotland. While there he went in search of a peculiar type of bird, and later in *De Europa* he wrote:

We had heard that there used to be a tree in Scotland, which, growing on the bank of a river, produced fruits that had the shape of ducks and that these, when they were almost ripe, fell of their own accord, some onto the ground and some into the water; and that those that landed on the ground would rot, but those that fell into the water would quickly come to life, swim underwater and then all at once fly off into the air with the help of feathers and of wings; but when we investigated the matter with greater care [*cum auidius inuestigaremus*], we learnt that miracles always flee to remoter parts [*semper remotius fugere*] and that the famous tree was to be found not in Scotland but in the Orkneys.

What Pius is referring to here is the miracle of the barnacle geese, one of Gerald's more famous Irish marvels.²¹ Quite why he went to look for it in Scotland is not entirely clear. He did not believe, as many others did, that *Scotia* and *Hibernia* were the same place, of that we may be sure. Perhaps he had read the *Topographia hibernica* too hastily. Or perhaps, by uprooting these birds from their natural habitat, so to speak, he simply intended to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the 'amazing to say' cannot but 'always flee to remoter parts', and that there could indeed be no room for it beside the 'worth remembering'. What is for sure is that Pius's Europe is a Europe almost totally devoid of *mirabile dictu*. And that too explains why Ireland, since it was *mirabile dictu* by antonomasia, was a place that had to be 'rushed on' from.

Ireland (not) seen
from Rome's
perspective

Another reason for Ireland's exclusion from the *De Europa* may have been that, in Pius's eyes, it suffered from the handicap of never having known the benefits of Roman civilisation: Pius after all was a humanist, that is, an admirer of Rome, to the core. His trip to Scotland, 'out of this world', had been an unpleasant experience. 'Scotland, and that part of England which is close to the Scots,' he wrote in his autobiography, the *Commentaries*, 'has nothing in common with where we live: it is wild, uncivilised and untouched by the winter sun'. The sigh of relief he must

²¹ 'Audiueramus nos olim arborem esse in Scotia, que supra ripam fluminis enata fructus produceret anetarum formam habentes et eos quidem, cum maturitati proximi essent, sponte sua decidere, alios in terram, alios in aquam; et in terra deiectos putrescere, in aquam uero demersos mox animatos enare sub aquis et in aera plumis pennisque euestigio euolare. de qua re cum auidius inuestigaremus, didicimus miracula semper remotius fugere famosamque arborem non in Scotia, sed apud Orchades insulas inueniri': Piccolomini, *De Europa*, 187. For the barnacle geese see Gerald of Wales, *History and topography*, 41–2, and O'Meara, 'Giraldus Cambrensis', 125.

have heaved when he returned to what for him was civilisation therefore rises almost audibly from the pages of the *Commentaries*. As he approaches Newcastle, which ‘they say is the work of Caesar’, he proclaims with undisguised delight: ‘there, for the first time Aeneas felt he could see the shape of the world again and the habitable face of the earth’.²² The world, in other words, only seemed to have a recognisable face for him if it was Roman, and only if one looked through the eyes of a Roman could one really fathom it. Ireland, clearly, was at a serious disadvantage, and all the more so as Pius’s gaze was strongly marked by the writings of the Graeco-Roman geographer Strabo.

The *Geography* of Strabo (65? B.C.–A.D. 24?) was one of the greatest and most influential discoveries made by Renaissance humanists. No sooner had it been rediscovered, in the 1420s, and translated into Latin, in the 1450s, than it came to be regarded, alongside the *Geography* of Ptolemy (which had also been recently rediscovered), as the ultimate authority on how to ‘see the shape of the world’. It was Strabo who insisted that all that mattered was to see the ‘habitable face of the earth’ (or in other words the *oikoumene*), and it was he too who made a clear distinction between what was ‘out of this world’ and what was in. His *Geography*, which is constructed as a ‘periegesis’ (i.e. a journey) through the *oikoumene*, is based on the notion that the world gravitates, metaphorically speaking, around ‘our’ sea (*mare nostrum*), the Mediterranean, whose heart beats in Rome. In addition, it predicates a clear distinction between lands and peoples that matter most (to ‘us’ Romans) and therefore *have* to be described, and lands and peoples that matter least and therefore need *not* be described. What is more, it is the very case of Ireland (*Ierne*) that serves as Strabo’s yardstick to make this point explicit:

the distance that should be set down for the stretch from Britain to Ierne is no longer a known quantity, nor is it known whether there are still inhabitable regions farther on [...] And for governmental purposes there would be no advantage in knowing such countries and their inhabitants, and particularly if the people live in islands which are of such a nature that they can neither injure nor benefit us in any ways because of their isolation.²³

²² ‘Ibi primum figuram orbis et habitabilem terrae faciem visus est revisere. Nam terra Scotia, et Angliae pars vicina Scotis, nihil simile nostrae habitationis habet: horrida, inculta atque hyemali sole inaccessa’, ‘quod Caesaris opus dicunt’: E.S. Piccolomini, *Commentarii*, ed. Luigi Totaro (Milano, 1984), 28. (Note that Pius, who refers to himself as ‘Aeneas’, preferred, like Julius Caesar, to talk about himself in the third person singular.)

²³ Strabo, *The Geography*, ed. and trans. H.L. Jones, Loeb Classical Library (8 vols, London, 1960–7), vol. 1, 444–5 (2, 5, 8). On Strabo in the Renaissance, see Germaine Aujac, ‘La géographie grecque durant le Quattrocento: l’exemple de Strabon’, *Geographia Antiqua* 2 (1993), 147–69; Manlio Pastore Stocchi, ‘La cultura geografica dell’Umanesimo’, in *Optima hereditas. Sapienza giuridica romana e conoscenza dell’ecumene* (Milano, 1992), 563–86; Giovanni Salmeri, ‘Tra politica e antiquaria: lettura di Strabone nel XV e XVI secolo’, in Gianfranco Maddoli (ed.), *Strabone e l’Italia antica* (Naples, 1988), 289–312; Christian Van Paassen, ‘L’eredità della geografia greca classica: Tolomeo e Strabone’, in Francesco Prontera (ed.), *Geografia e geografi nel mondo antico. Guida storica e critica* (Bari, 1983), 227–73.

Pius, who owned a copy of the *Geography*, which he carefully read and annotated, was one of Strabo's earliest, and greatest admirers. His own *Geography* is also written from the point of view of Rome (Christian Rome, in his case); it too has *mare nostrum* as its focal point; it too is set out as a periegesis, and more importantly, it too presupposes lands, and especially islands, that may or may not be of benefit to 'us'. His 'worth remembering' is undoubtedly a reprise of Strabo's 'advantage in knowing', and it is clear that a writer of his kind was bound to 'rush on' from Hibernia. What possible advantage, from his point of view, could there be in knowing about it?

When it is 'not out of order' to discuss Ireland

Of course, had he been looking at the habitable face of the earth from the vantage point of London, instead of Rome, he might well have been of a different opinion. In London, whatever about Ireland's perceived deficiencies in matters of religion, its insularity could most certainly not be held against it, and since there was a very good chance that it could be the cause of 'benefit' or 'injury' (to England), 'governmental purposes' positively demanded that one should not 'rush on' from it. That, at least, is how Vergil must have viewed the matter. Like Pius, he too saw himself as a 'born-again' Roman, whose duty it was to nurture Rome's (translated) *imperium*, and he too was a reader of Strabo's *Geography*, which he quotes quite frequently in the *Anglica historia*. So he too must have begun from the premise, or at least felt his readers might do so, that, strictly speaking, there was little to be gained from knowledge of Ireland. Yet he must also have realised that a history which purported to be English (*Anglica historia*, it is clear, means not only 'history of England', but also a 'history that is English') could not, at that particular time, ignore the question of the Irish. Undoubtedly that is why in the printed version of the description of Ireland, he insisted that 'it does not seem to be out of order to discuss the layout of Ireland and the customs of its people' [6].²⁴ He is, it is true, aware of the risk which doing so might involve, namely that one might (following Gerald of Wales and Silvestri) be tempted 'once again' to talk of Ireland's marvels. But with the help of Pius, whom he quotes word for word on the matter (though without acknowledgement), he manages to exorcise the risk. It would have been 'futile', he informs us at the end of the description, to discuss such things, because the more marvels are 'enquired into' (the manuscript had said 'investigated'), 'the further [*remotius*] they tend to flee [*fugere*]'. His, in other words, was a strictly 'worth remembering' type of description, and he for one—he wanted his readers to know—had not been diverted from his task by taking us pointlessly to ever 'remoter parts' in pursuit of the 'amazing to say'. He had not pandered to the 'vulgar' tastes of the 'common' man [25].

Nevertheless it does appear at first sight as though he did believe, or wished his readers to believe, that his description of Ireland was not overly 'worth remembering'. He concludes it with what sounds like an apology, or even an admission of guilt [25]. This, he seems to want to signal, is a mere 'digression', that has little to do

²⁴ Numbers in square brackets refer to the numbered sections of the text and translation in the Appendix.

with the body of the *History* and so could easily be left aside—unlike the description of England, we then remember, which is pointedly foregrounded at the beginning of the work. But that too—we cannot fail to notice—is laced with an apology, and an even more explicit one. Vergil is aware that this is not an acceptable start to a history. His aim, however, is to be of assistance to his readers:

I wanted these things to be set out in the first part of my work, before I wrote about wars, so that my readers would know right from the beginning of what people and how great a people the deeds were and of what country the customs were which they were then to be presented in the rest of the work.²⁵

Put simply Vergil is apologising for *not* having digressed: the subject of history being war, it is in fact with war one should begin, and only later, by way of digression, should one venture to describe the actors in the war. But why make such an issue of the matter? Undoubtedly, the question of whether to digress or not depended on one's estimation of the 'greatness' (or otherwise) of the 'people' which were to be described, but what was primarily at stake, it would seem, was Vergil's reputation as a historiographer.

Descriptions of places in works of history

In *De inventoribus rerum*, echoing words of Cicero, Vergil made it clear that descriptions of places (chorography) were to be an integral part of any history: 'The edifice of history is built on events and words. An account of events demands chronology as much as chorography'.²⁶ But he was not alone in saying so. At the very same time, Giovanni Pontano, in his dialogue *Actius*, which, with its extensive exposition of historiographical rules was fast becoming an authoritative guide for humanist historians, also stressed that histories should contain 'descriptions of places, peoples, nations and races'. One of the main reasons for this, Pontano explained, was that descriptions provided the 'variety' (*varietas*) which was necessary to prevent a reader's mind from wandering, and without which, presumably, it would have been impossible to adhere to the ideal of the poet Horace (65–8 B.C.), considered so important by humanists, namely that literature was not only to be 'useful' (*utile*), but also 'sweet' (*dulce*). Such variety, Pontano further insisted, was best achieved by

²⁵ 'Haec in prima operis mei parte proposita volui, priusquam bella scriberem, quo legentes statim a principio scirent, cuius ac quanti populi res gestas cuiusve patriae mores in reliqua parte essent deinde accepturi': Vergil, *Anglica historia*, 15.

²⁶ 'Ipsa autem historiae aedificatio posita est in rebus et verbis. Rerum enim ratio tam temporis ordinem quam locorum descriptionem poscit': Vergil, *On discovery*, 110–13 (where 'locorum descriptio' ['description of places'] is translated as 'geography'; but 'chorography', I believe, is a more accurate translation). 'Rerum ratio ordinem temporum desiderat, regionum descriptionem': Cicero, *De oratore*, eds and trans E.W. Sutton and H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (2 vols, London and Cambridge, MA, 1967), vol. 1, 244–5 (2, 15, 63–4).

means of 'digressions'.²⁷ Descriptions, in other words, were seen to be most effective when they were digressions, and that must surely be one of the reasons why, upon reflection, Vergil insisted in the printed version of the *Anglica historia* that it was 'appropriate' to have included the description of Ireland where he did [26], and why he felt uncomfortable at having allowed himself to break the rule in connection with the description of the English.

The effectiveness of descriptions was not, however, simply a matter of holding the readers' attention. They also had a far more important function. Since the world was the 'field' (to quote an expression used by Pius) where history unfolded, it was necessary to set that field 'before the eyes' of the readers (*ante oculos*), so as to make it easier for them to understand what had taken place. Descriptions, that is, were conceived as a visual aid. Readers, though, were not presumed to be neutral onlookers, and so the historio-geographer, as he described the field, was expected to do it in such a way as to be seen to adhere to the standards set by Sallust [Gaius Sallustius Crispus] (86–35 B.C.) in his *Bellum jugurthinum* ('*War of Jugurtha*'). 'Crispus,' says Pontano, 'describes the lay of Africa, so that, for sure, both the land itself be known, and who one's friends and who one's enemies in every province.' Put bluntly, the subject of history being war, chorography had to be seen to be partial, by allowing one to picture who was *for* 'us' (*qui amici*) and who *against* 'us' (*qui inimici*).²⁸ And as it did so, it was never to lose sight of who its beneficiary was meant to be, because history, and by extension chorography (and indeed geography), was always written *for* somebody. It presupposed a reader, who acted at once as its arbiter and its perpetuator, triumphantly transforming the 'done' into the 'to-be-done', as he strove to 'out-Rome' Rome. In the case of the *Anglica historia* that ideal reader was the king of England, a king who, crucially, had 'empire' (*imperium*) and 'justice' (*iustitia*) on his side. Nowhere does Vergil makes this clearer than in his dedication of the work to Henry VIII:

You above all know perfectly how to pass correct judgement both on deeds done and on deeds to be done, you who, born to empire and justice, are gifted with great prudence and, exceptionally learned in divine as well as human letters, excel in all good arts. And so by your singular virtue you

²⁷ Giovanni Pontano, *Actius*, in G. Pontano, *Dialoghi*, ed. Carmelo Previtiera (Firenze, 1943), 121–239: 192 ('locorum, populorum, nationum, gentium descriptiones'), 193 ('digressiones ac varietas'). Horace, *Ars poetica*, in Horace, *Satires, epistles and Ars poetica*, ed. and trans. H.R. Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, MA, 1999 [1926]), 478–9 (ll. 343–4): 'omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci/lectorem delectando pariterque monendo' ('He has won every vote who has blended profit and pleasure, at once delighting and instructing the reader'). On the importance of *Actius*, see Anthony Grafton, *What was history? The art of history in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2007), 21, 23, 37.

²⁸ A.S. Piccolomini, *De Asia*, in A.S. Piccolomini, *Opera quae extant omnia* (Henricpetrinus, Basel, [1574]), 282: 'Et quoniam rerum quas scribimus [...] campus est ipse terrarum orbis [...]' ('And since of the things we write about [...] the world itself is the field [...]'). Pontano, *Actius*, 219: 'ante oculos', 'Describit Africae situm Crispus, quo scilicet et situs ipse notus esset et qui amici quive inimici ex omni provincia'. Note that Pontano (*Actius*, 218) makes it clear that 'deeds are mostly deeds of war' ('res gestae plerumque sunt bellicae').

easily surpass not only the glory of those princes who are alive today but also the memory of all of antiquity.²⁹

In short, without the help of chorography, chronology on its own might have produced a history which made no sense: not the sense, at least, that was expected of it. Together, on the other hand, chronology and chorography allowed history to progress as it was meant to do, promoting ‘our’ friends and restraining ‘our’ enemies.

Vergil’s timeless ‘lies’ about Ireland

Only if we bear the joint purpose of chorography and chronology in mind will we be able to understand what seems to be the most inexplicable feature of Vergil’s description of Ireland. In the chapter on Henry II [15], Vergil describes an Ireland that already enjoys the benefits of English rule, even though the conquest had only just begun; and in the chapter on Henry VII [26], he invites us to look up the ‘appropriate’ place (i.e. the chapter in Henry II), to discover what the Irish *are* like, because—is his implication—that is what they *were* like, and so forever *will be* like. To some, most notably Denys Hay, this ‘essentially timeless view of history’ has seemed like no more than an unfortunate oversight, barring which Vergil could be said to be a ‘modern’ historian in every sense of the word.³⁰ Such a view, however—which effectively ignores any sense, not just of historiographical objectivity, but also of historical progression and development—was no accident. It formed the very core of what Vergil, and other humanists, unlike modern-day historians, understood history to be about. Once on the losing side, always on the losing side (once an Irishman, always an Irishman) was indeed its essential premise, as it aligned itself with *imperium* and kept its foes in their proper place, while tempting history’s losers with the hope of a better future (where Irishness, for example, would give way to Englishness), but at the same time endeavouring to ensure that such a future would always remain out of reach. Its civilising mission, indeed, would not allow it to be otherwise, for a history that marches to the tune of civilisation and progress can never quite permit that the to-be-done be fully done. If the Irish became English, what, then, would be the point of being English?³¹

²⁹ ‘Cum praesertim tu rectum omnino gestarum rerum aequae ut gerendarum scias iudicium facere, quippe qui, ad imperium & iustitiam natus, magna praeditus es prudentia literisque pariter divinis atque humanis apprime eruditus cunctas bonas calles artes. Ac ita tua singulari virtute non modo eorum Principum qui hodie sunt gloriam, verumetiam omnis antiquitatis memoriam facile superas’: Vergil, *Anglica historia*, 2.

³⁰ Hay, *Polydore Vergil*, 137; Hay, ‘The manuscript’, 241.

³¹ I too am of the opinion that so far ‘scholars have paid little attention to the imperialist aspects’ of humanism, and I would also argue that ‘liberty’ and ‘empire’, as understood by humanists of every hue (even ‘civic’, ‘republican’ humanists), are not ‘two opposing, incompatible or theoretically unrelated ideals, or principles’: Mikael Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and empire* (Cambridge, 2004), 41, 74. And see Alison Brown, ‘The language of empire’, in W.J. Connell and Andrea Zorzi (eds), *Florentine Tuscany. Structures and practices of power* (Cambridge, 2000), 32–47. On ‘the inherent imperialism of Europe’s geographical knowledge’, see J.M. Headley, ‘Geography and empire in the late Renaissance: Botero’s

Similarly, to accuse Vergil of being a liar, or to pretend that he was not so is to miss the point. The legend of Polydore the Liar has been in existence for a very long time. No sooner had the *Anglica historia* been published, than Vergil was charged with 'polluting our English chronicles most shamefully with his Romish lies and other Itlish beggarys', and still quite recently he was taken to task for being economical with the truth.³² On the other hand, there are those who would argue that he is a modern historian, who writes history as it ought to be written and therefore just says things as they are (or were). His, it has indeed been claimed, is 'the first modern history of England', and what distinguished him, as a humanist, from the historians or annalists who preceded him was his 'exercise of logic' and his ability, which has been that of historians ever since, 'to test a story by its inherent plausibility rather than by searching for new material'.³³ That may well be so; yet upon closer inspection we will find that the logic which Vergil actually exercised and the plausibility which he really looked for aimed to produce not the type of history that is the *nec plus ultra* ('latest fashion') nowadays, but the type of history, and so chorography, that was considered to be so at *that* time. To convince ourselves of that, we need only take a closer look at the changes which his description of Ireland underwent, as it passed from manuscript to print, and then to reprint.

Vergil's revisions to the text: the unstopability of *imperium*

Most of the changes, it would appear, were carried out precisely to underpin the prerogatives of *imperium*. What serves as the 'appropriate' pretext for the 'not out of order' description of Ireland and the Irish is the very question of how to make that *imperium* 'permanent' for the king of England and 'his heirs' [1]. The threat posed to that permanency by the ability of the Irish to fight back having, for the present, been defused, following Henry II's defeat of them in 1171, it was the more serious threat posed to England's *imperium* by the everlasting allegiance of the Irish to their 'master' the pope which Henry had to address next [2]. That too is expeditiously dealt with, thanks to the pope's 'little hesitation' [3], yet we cannot fail to notice that Vergil chose to highlight that these were nevertheless real threats and that they had the potential to nullify history's timeless repeatability, by giving chronology the

assignment, western universalism, and the civilizing process', *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000), 1119–55: 1119. The French royal cosmographer François Thevet, it should be noted, called geographers the 'custodians of the imperial imagination': quoted in Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the world. Ideologies of empire in Spain, Britain and France, c.1500—c.1800* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1995), 12.

³² The accusation was levelled by John Bale (1495–1563), the polemicist and dramatist, and later bishop of Ossory (quoted in Hay, *Polydore Vergil*, 158). On the 'legend', see F.J. Levy, *Tudor historical thought* (San Marino, CA, 1967), 63–4, and D.R. Woolf, *Reading history in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), 23–4. On how Polydore Vergil could be 'economical with the truth', see Cespedes, 'The final book', and Kaufman, 'Polydore Vergil and the strange disappearance'.

³³ Levy, *Tudor*, 58–9, 293. See also Hay, 'The manuscript', 241, and Peter Burke, *The Renaissance sense of the past* (London, 1969), 76.

ascendancy over chorography. He did this through the use, and addition of the word ‘now’: the Irish claim ‘even now’, he says from the manuscript onwards, that the pope is their master [3]; they are beginning ‘just now’ to bear arms, he adds in the first edition, and they have ‘now’ learnt to use pillions, he then adds in the second edition [21]. But it was, of course, inconceivable that ‘now’ should be allowed to stand in the way of *imperium*’s everlasting forward march, and Vergil chose to make that clear by turning Perkin Warbeck (one of the pretenders to the English throne during the reign of Henry VII) into the herald of its unstoppable. Since the Irish do not ‘cover their bodies with any armour when fighting’—the manuscript had said—Perkin had realised that they were ‘worth little in battle outside their native land’. That, though, could presumably have been construed as a warning to the invaders, who might well have concluded from it that *inside* that land defeat for them was a distinct possibility. The printed version therefore notes instead that the Irish ‘were worth little in battle against the English’ [30].

Vergil’s revisions to the text: the rival claims of God and Caesar

Putting a stop to the prerogatives of religion, however, was not to be so easy, not least because doing so risked undermining the legitimacy of the *imperium* that the *Anglica historia* sought to uphold; after all, it had been Ireland’s loyalty to the pope, according to Vergil’s narrative, which had provided the catalyst for the recognition of Henry II’s claims to the island ‘he had just subdued’. Yet the narrative also required that the religion of the Irish be deficient, for it had been on that basis that the pope had acceded to Henry’s request [3]. To solve the conundrum, Vergil firstly changed the Irish from delinquent Christians into delinquent taxpayers [3]. By doing so, he no doubt also sought to gratify his own sense of importance as a papal tax collector, but the move, it would seem, was designed above all to boost the plenitude of papal power, and consequently the fullness of the English king’s. Indeed, since Christians who are not christened cannot really be said to be members of the church, what right had the pope, one might wonder, to call himself their ‘master’? And more to the point, by what ‘authority’ could he then claim to alienate a ‘power’ which in fact he did not hold? To leave no room for doubt, Vergil also decided to strike out a reference to the Irish being ‘good Christians’ [27], and chose to demur regarding the intensity and nature of their faith. In the manuscript, he had declared that the Irish ‘practice the Christian faith (*fides*) most religiously (*religiosissime*)’,³⁴ in the printed version he simply stated that they ‘practice the Christian religion (*religio*) chastely (*caste*)’ [16]. Nevertheless what we are left with in the end is still an oxymoron: where previously the Irish had been ‘uncivilised good Christians’ [27], now they were ‘beastly Christians’ [16]. On closer inspection, however, this half-hearted shift of focus would appear to be deliberate. Only an oxymoron, all things told, could properly accommodate the rival claims of pope and king, of God and Caesar.

³⁴ This omission of *fides* conveniently conformed to the demands both of Ciceronian Latin (according to which it does not mean the faith, as we understand the word) and the logic of Vergil’s own narrative (how could a people who were ‘faithless’ [22] be said to have ‘faith’?).

Still, it was the claims of Caesar which were given greater recognition. Nowhere does this come across more clearly than in the section of the description that deals with the division of Ireland into parts [15].³⁵ Struggling to find the right formula (were there two parts or four?), Vergil had initially proposed to take as his measure Ireland's ecclesiastical provinces (Armagh, Dublin, Cashel, Tuam), but when it came to the printed version, he set aside all references to sees and archbishops, and instead opted for the island's 'lay' provinces (Munster, Ulster, Leinster, Connacht). Presumably he did this with a view, once again, to minimising the 'good Christianity' of the Irish. More importantly, though, he may have wished to avoid giving the impression that the Irish were more 'polished' than they were, which might have led the English to believe that there was little to improve upon. To state that Ireland was 'presided over' by four archbishops could suggest that civilisation had already achieved its mission, and what is more that it had done so thanks to the 'wrong' people, God's people, that is, and not by Caesar's. The narrative, after all, required that the Irish be mostly 'backwoodish' (*sylvestres*), and that the civilising mission be vested in the bringers of *imperium*. A telling, though seemingly insignificant change proves the point. To highlight the natural seditiousness of the Irish, Vergil originally used the expression *imperium obire* which means 'to seize power/empire', but later he substituted it with *imperium accipere* which means at once 'to seize' and 'to receive power/empire' [20]. In other words, *imperium* is not for seizing; it is to be gifted. And who it is who has it within his gift is made quite clear through a careful choice of words. The pope, 'master' (*dominus*) of Ireland though he may be, simply has 'power' (*ditio*) and 'authority' (*autoritas*); only the 'mighty Christian king' of England (*rex Christianus potentissimus*) has *imperium* on his side. The Irish, for their part, are left with nothing. Their leaders are 'kinglets' (*reguli*), and the one such kinglet, it will then emerge, who was recognised by all the others as their 'prince' (*princeps*) and could have therefore claimed a higher status, is, upon reflection, stripped of the right to do so. That prince, the manuscript notes, 'is' the king of Connacht, but in the printed version it is noted instead that he can do no more than 'call himself' king of Connacht [1, 15]. The Irish, that is, can no more fashion kingship as they will than they can seize *imperium*.

The choice of the word *regulus* is itself a telling one. There was a sound, ancient precedent for calling Irish chieftains thus: it is the word used by one of Vergil's most admired and most quoted models—Tacitus (c. 56–c. 118), in his *Life of Agricola*—to describe the Irish ruler who sued Agricola for peace, as the latter debated whether or not to follow up his victories in England and in Wales with victories in Ireland. But the choice of word was not dictated, contrary to what has been suggested, by mere philological concerns. As used by ancient historians—Tacitus, precisely, or Sallust—the term *regulus* indicated someone who was opposed to the legitimate aspirations of imperial authority. And that is also how it continued to be used during the Middle Ages. When, for instance, the chancellor of the Hohenstaufen Empire, Rainald von Dassel (c. 1120–c. 1159), had called the kings of Europe *reguli*, he had done so, it has been argued, to 'actively deny them the attributes of empire'. So too had Gerald of Wales, by terming *reguli* those Irish leaders who were subdued

³⁵ On the significance of this, see Ellis, *Ireland*, 31.

by the king he called ‘our western Alexander’: ‘when Jove thundered in the western reaches of the ocean and Henry II, king of the English, lead an expedition there, the occidental kinglets, stupefied by his thunderbolts, took shelter from the blows of his lightning by suing for peace’.³⁶ Vergil clearly aimed to do the same, namely to impress on his readers that this ‘Alexander’, and his later namesakes are in the right, with *imperium* on their side, for their potential opponents are merely *reguli*.

Vergil’s revisions to the text: in the name of civility

Vergil had to face a similar problem when dealing with Ireland’s cities. According to the manuscript, there were eight or nine centres of habitation in Ireland, no fewer than six or seven of which were said to be ‘cities’ (*civitates*); instead, of the remaining two, one was termed a ‘borough’ (*oppidum*) and the other a port (*portum*). In the first edition, on the other hand, the centres of habitation increased to twenty, but the scales were tipped in the opposite direction: a full fourteen of them were called ‘boroughs’ and one a ‘market town’ (*emporium*), while the number of cities remained unchanged at six, or had in fact decreased, since two of them (Cashel and Meath) were also said to be ‘towns’ (*urbes*). By the time of the third edition, though, any remaining city had been downgraded to a town, and Ireland therefore had no cities left. Nevertheless the text continued to proclaim: ‘it is the cities which are least uncivilised, for they obey the English king, wherefore they absorb more honourable manners’ [15]. It was not an oversight however to leave Ireland with only virtual cities: cities, that is, which existed not in practice but in theory, and which were at best the negative of what cities were really meant to be, since they were not actually civilised, but simply ‘least uncivilised’. Ever since antiquity, cities had been held to be ‘the only place where virtue could be practised’, and only citizens to have the sense of order and of civic pride that could allow for the growth of civilisation, which was itself by definition coterminous with city living. What is more, to the Romans and to those who hoped to be like them, *civitas* also was and always had been synonymous with the notion of *imperium*.³⁷

Thus it would presumably have been an oxymoron too far to concede that the Irish ‘backwoodsmen’ (*sylvestres*) lived in cities. All the more so as it was the woods in which they liked to dwell and hide (from the English) which served as the objective correlative, so to speak, of their unredeemable otherness: an otherness that was

³⁶ ‘In occiduis enim oceani finibus Jove tonante, et Henrico rege Anglorum secundo ibidem expeditionem agente, occidentales reguli, tonitruis ejus attoniti, pacis adeptae beneficio fulminis ictum praevenierunt’: Dimock, *Giraldi Cambrensis*, 149. ‘Western Alexander’: Gerald of Wales, *History and topography*, 124. On Dassel, see Pagden, *Lords*, 15. On Polydore Vergil’s philological concerns, see Hay, *Polydore Vergil*, 124. Gaius Cornelius Tacitus, *De vita Ivlii Agricolae liber*, in Tacitus, *Opera minora*, eds M. Winterbottom and R.M. Ogilvie (Oxford, 1975), 18 (24, 3): ‘Agricola expulsus seditione domestica unum ex regulis gentis exceperat ac specie amicitiae in occasionem retinebat’ (‘Agricola had taken in one of the kinglets of that people [= the Irish] driven out by a family discord and was holding on to him for the right opportunity, under the pretence of friendship’). On Tacitus and Ireland, also see Philip Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world* (Austin, 2000).

³⁷ Pagden, *Lords*, 18 and 23. Also see Davies, *First English empire*, 122, 126, 137, and Ellis, ‘Civilizing’, 78.

manifest in their love of 'plunder', 'banditry', 'insurrection', and 'kinglets' [26–9].³⁸ That, however, was to reckon without the master of all humanists, Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch). Petrarch, who took pride in being nicknamed 'Woody' (*Silvanus*), had pronounced that woods were the only proper place for civilisation to flourish: 'the woods [he had written in one of his Latin poems] are a joy to the muses; the city is the enemy of poets'.³⁹ What is more, when Petrarch had read in the *Topographia hibernica* that Ireland not only was so fortunate as to be free of thunder and lightning (of which he had a phobia), but could actually offer, in its woods, the possibility of a life of *otium* and of *libertas*, in his excitement he had written in the margin of the manuscript: 'Go there, Woody, what are you waiting for?' For Gerald, *otium* had meant laziness, and *libertas* licence, but for Petrarch they represented that perfect state of non-busyness which was the only guarantee that man could meet his proper destiny: wisdom, peace and beatitude. Unlike Gerald, who had stated that it was that very quest for *libertas* and *otium* which made of the Irish a 'barbarian people', Petrarch had therefore concluded that the Irish must surely be a 'happy people' (*felix gens*), and had said as much in his work *On the life of solitude* (*De vita solitaria*), with far-reaching, positive consequences for the image of Ireland in Renaissance Italy. It is undoubtedly for that reason that Vergil decided to omit from his description the words, borrowed from Gerald (*ocio dediti*), which had so enthused Petrarch, stressing instead the 'pleasure' which the Irish took in 'holding back from work' [23].⁴⁰ Vergil too felt that Ireland was a place to go to, but he, like Gerald, wished people to journey there in pursuit of *imperium*, not of *otium*.

³⁸ When the (treacherous) Irish take to their heels, with the English in pursuit, it is 'in the nearby woods' ('in proximas sylvas') that they like to hide: Vergil, *Anglica historia*, 16.

³⁹ 'Silva placet musis, urbs est inimica poetis': Petrarch, *Epystolae metricae*, II, 3, 43. For more on this and what follows, see Haywood, 'Il Petrarca lettore'.

⁴⁰ 'Solum enim otio dediti, solum desidiai dati, summas reputant delicias labore carere, summas divitias libertate gaudere. Gens igitur haec gens barbara, et vere barbara': Dimock, *Giraldi Cambrensis*, 152 (emphasis added). 'For given only to leisure, and devoted only to laziness, they think that the greatest pleasure is not to work, and the greatest wealth is to enjoy liberty. This people is, then a barbarous people, literally barbarous': Gerald of Wales, *The history*, 102 (emphasis added). Francesco Petrarca, *De vita solitaria*, in F. Petrarca, *Prose*, ed. Guido Martellotti (Milano, 1955), 522 (emphasis added): 'Transeo Thilem et Hibernem, quarum altera scribentium varietate famosissima sed ignota est, altera vero notissima. Cuius gentem, opum rerumque civilium contemptricem, insuper et agriculture negligentem, pascua et silvas incolere compertum habeo, cui pro delitiis otium, pro summis opibus sit libertas. Felicem gentem dicerem, nisi alia, si modo vera est, infamia et morum malignitate retraheret' ('I leave aside Thule and Ireland, of which one, on account of the many who have written about it, is very famous but unknown, while the other, in truth, is very well known. The inhabitants of the latter, who despise riches and politics, and moreover have no time for agriculture, live—I know for a fact—in pastures and in woods; they take delight in leisure and their greatest wealth is liberty. I would call them a happy people, if I were not prevented from doing so by some other shameful habit of theirs (assuming of course it is true) and the wickedness of their customs'). On the Renaissance debate on *otium*, see Brian Vickers, 'Leisure and idleness in the Renaissance: the ambivalence of *otium*', *Renaissance Studies* 4 (1990), 1–37 and 107–54.

Vergil's revisions to the text: speaking and eating properly

In Vergil's estimation, however, *imperium* was to be pursued in a fitting manner. Having paid the English the compliment of saying, at the beginning of the *Anglica historia*, that 'they are very similar to Italians in the sound of their language', he later goes on to praise them for 'correctly imitating the Latins' when they speak. The Welsh too have their language gauged, and praised, in terms of the imperial measure (and we should not forget, of course, that Vergil's patrons, the Tudors, hailed from Wales): they speak a language, we are told, which 'has an ancient flavour, partly Trojan and partly Greek'. As for the Cornish, though their speech is mostly incomprehensible, they nevertheless speak a language which gives them an identity of which they need not be ashamed: 'those who inhabit Cornwall have the same language, and use it even now, as do those in France among the Britons who are called Bretonising Bretons'. The Scots however—with the exception, that is, of those who have been Englished—are not viewed in such a favourable light:

the Scots who inhabit the southern and much better part are well mannered and, being more humane, they use the English language [...]. The other, northern and mountainous part, is held by a much more cruel and much harsher type of men, who are called backwoodsmen: these [...] all speak Irish.

The plight of the Scots is all the more unfortunate in that Irish is shown not to be a proper language, so that those who speak it are not to be trusted. Having, in his manuscript, overtly linked the speech of the Irish with their 'savage' and untrustworthy character, in the printed version Vergil was even more explicit, stating that they speak 'as though they were babbling and groaning' [22].⁴¹ Never mind that the Irish had studied 'Latin from childhood, as well as canon and civil law'. The *translatio linguae* ('the transfer of language'), it is clear, was as partial as the *translatio imperii* ('the transfer of empire').

Yet though the fate of the Irish was written in the way they spoke, more than anything, perhaps, it was the way they ate which made them what they were, and would continue to be. Between the manuscript and the printed version, the Irish are remarkably transformed from vegetarians into carnivores [15]. One might reasonably presume that this transformation was the outcome of a conversation with a 'man of age who was pointed out to [him] as having been formerly occupied in important and public affairs', and thus could, presumably, have been relied upon to give an accurate account of Irish life; Vergil liked to boast of engaging in such

⁴¹ 'Sunt Angli [...] sono linguae Italis persimiles'; 'Latinos recte imitantes'; 'Vualli linguam habent [...] quam ipsi [...] partim Troianam, partim & Graecam sapere vetustatem aiunt'; 'qui Cornubiam incolunt, eandem habent linguam atque utuntur etiam nunc in Galliis illi, inter Britannos, quos Britones Britonantes vocitant'; 'Scoti qui australem meridionalem incolunt partem multo meliorem bene morati sunt & ut humaniores lingua utuntur Anglica [...]. Alteram septentrionalem ac montosam tenet genus hominum longe durissimum ac asperum, qui sylvestres dicuntur: hi [...] omnes Hybernice loquuntur': Vergil, *Anglica historia*, 7, 9, 14. On the inability of 'barbarians' to speak 'properly', see Tzvetan Todorov, *La conquête de l'Amérique. La question de l'autre* (Paris, 1982), 36–7.

conversations frequently, but in this particular case nothing could be further from the truth.⁴² As it so happens, the description of the way the Irish eat in the printed version corresponds, word for word, to how the Swabians are described as eating in Julius Caesar's *Gallic war* (*De bello gallico*): 'neither do they live off grain much, but for the most part off meat and milk' ('*Neque multum frumento, sed maximam partem lacte atque pecore vivunt*').⁴³ Obviously, what was good enough for the antagonists of Caesar, had also to be good enough for all the other antagonists of 'empire' and 'justice', at whatever time and place. It could not be otherwise, indeed, for it was the purpose of chorography, as we have seen, to help distinguish friend from foe, and what is more, to do so in such a way that was 'not out of order', or in other words, that was sanctioned by precedent. And what better precedent could there be than the one set by Rome's most famous imperialiser, that is, by an *imperator* ('emperor/general') who not only could make history, but who could write it too, 'appropriately' blending chronology and chorography? So it is hardly surprising that it should be the latter's own sense of 'order' which Vergil chose, upon reflection, to impress upon the mind of his 'exceptionally learned' readers.

Vergil's revisions to the text: on Julius Caesar's order

When beginning his description of the Germans and the Gauls in the *Gallic war* Caesar writes: 'Since we have now reached this point it does not seem to be out of order to discuss the customs of Gaul and Germany, and how these nations differ from one another' ('*Quoniam ad hunc locum perventum est, non alienum esse videtur de Galliae Germaniaeque moribus et quo differant hae nationes inter sese proponere*'). When Vergil begins his description of the Irish in the *Anglia historia*, the wording is strikingly similar: 'Since we have now reached this point it does not seem to be out of order to discuss the layout of Ireland and the customs of its people' ('*Quoniam autem ad hunc locum perventum est, non alienum esse videtur, de Hyberniae situ moribusque gentis exponere*' [6]). Caesar continues: 'The whole of Gaul is divided into three parts, of which one [...]' ('*Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres, quarum unam [...]*'). Vergil for his part, adapting the arithmetic to suit Ireland, continues: 'The whole of Ireland is divided into four parts, of which one [...]' ('*Hybernia est omnis divisa in partes quatuor, quarum unam [...]*' [15]).⁴⁴ Yet this was not simply a matter of mathematics, nor of style. It was dividing so as better to rule, rendering unto Caesar what was his, while at the same time announcing to the world, in the very fashion of Caesar: we will now describe the people that we *shall* defeat! *Imperium's* prerogatives were safe.

Vergil, however, as he bowed to the demands of Caesar, cannot have approached matters exclusively from a humanist perspective. He was widely read, especially on the history of England, and his knowledge was garnered from far and wide. More importantly, it is impossible to imagine that he did not make a point of seeking out those 'men of age who were pointed out to [him] as having been

⁴² See Kingsford, *English*, 257; Cespedes, 'The final book', 380.

⁴³ Julius Caesar, *The Gallic war*, ed. and trans. H.J. Edwards, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA and London, 1970), 180 (4, 1).

⁴⁴ Caesar, *Gallic war*, 332 (6, 11), 2 (1, 1).

formerly occupied in important and public affairs'; he would therefore have been well informed on 'public affairs', not least on Anglo-Irish affairs. But that will be a matter for specialists of Irish and of English history to pronounce upon, when they have had a chance to study the Appendix of this article. It is more than likely, however, that they too will conclude that his writings, like those of many of his contemporaries and predecessors, could be faulted for 'failing to consider historical realities' when describing Ireland and the Irish.⁴⁵ This is inevitable, as what was considered as a 'historical reality' then is very different from what is considered so now.

Conclusion:
Vergil's sense of
reality

The kind of historical reality, or better perhaps, of historiographical reality, and by extension of chorographical reality, which Vergil took for granted was, as we have seen, a reality which, in its essentials, was defined by war, and thus by the inevitable contraposition of friend and foe. It was built on the assumption of a common humanity, which was common, however, only insofar as it was (Holy) Roman and civilised. It was held to be repeatable and improvable, but only if it conformed to the requisites of the hegemonic culture. It was goal-driven, but its mission was never fully to be realised, for to survive *imperium* always needed to be on the advance, with each new Henry acting as a reincarnation of all the previous 'Alexanders' and a herald for all those still to come. It was a reality for kings not for kinglets, for winners not for losers, for denizens of cities not of woods, for people who mattered more not less, people who shunned *otium* but paid their taxes, and those who spoke and ate properly, but were not faithless. It was a reality which, all told, posited and was sustained by a 'rhetoric of difference' that sought, paradoxically, to bolster the demands of chronology, even as it strove to undermine them—the rhetoric of *plus ça change et plus c'est la même chose* ('the more things change the more they stay the same'), in the imperative mood: the more things changes, the more *let them be* the same!⁴⁶

In this, its typically humanist manifestation, the rhetoric, I would suggest, was different from earlier and from later pronouncements of the sort. Where Gerald of Wales confidently proclaimed that all would be well in Ireland, as soon as the English had visited their civilising mission upon it, Spenser asked what had gone wrong with this mission, and Cromwell decided that there was no point in pursuing it, since the Irish were hopelessly unreceptive to it. Polydore Vergil on the other hand suggested that for the mission to be successful it was best not to try to right the wrongs altogether, lest right and wrong cancel each other out.⁴⁷ Time marches on, but it would be quite 'out of order' and not at all 'appropriate' for the Irish of Henry VII to be any different from the Irish of Henry II. 'The things the Irish *have* in common *are* [...]' [22].

⁴⁵ It is Muldoon, in particular, who starts from the premise that Gerald of Wales, and others, 'failed to consider historical realities' when describing Ireland and the Irish ('Wild Irishmen', 76).

⁴⁶ 'Rhetoric of difference': Ellis, 'Civilizing', 84, 86.

⁴⁷ On Gerald, see Gillingham, 'Foundations', 61. On Spenser, see Davies, *First English empire*, 141; Muldoon, 'Wild Irishmen', 89–90; Ellis, 'Civilizing', 87. On Cromwell, see Muldoon, 'Wild Irishmen', 101.

Appendix

Polydore Vergil's description of Ireland (from *Anglica historia*, books 13 and 26)

Latin original

For the sake of clarity, the text is divided into numbered sections, with a section from the 1534 *editio princeps* (EP), in bold Roman type, immediately followed by the corresponding section from the autograph manuscript (MS), in plain Roman type. Words in italics are interlinear and/or marginal additions/corrections to the manuscript, and bold italics indicate what are probably later additions. All the additions are, seemingly, in the same hand as the body of the text. The footnotes give all the variants from the later editions. Spellings are as per the original texts, and the use of *sic* has thus been dispensed with; only in one instance was a word not fully legible in the manuscript: see 25 (MS). The punctuation has been modernised. The editions are referred to by their date of publication, as follows:

1534 *Polydori Vergilii urbinatis anglicae historiae libri XXVI* (Bebelius, Basel), 217–19, 587, 589

1546 *Polydori Vergilii urbinatis anglicae historiae libri vigintisex* (Isingrinus, Basel), 220–3, 594, 596

1555 *Polydori Vergilii urbinatis anglicae historiae libri vigintiseptem* (Isingrinus, Basel), 220–3, 594, 596

1556B *Polydori Vergilii urbinatis anglicae historiae libri vigintiseptem* (Isingrinus, Basel), 220–3, 594, 596

1556G *Polydori Vergilii urbinatis anglicae historiae libri vigintisex* (2 vols, Manilius, Ghent), vol. 1, 559–66, vol. 2, 1506–07, 1511

1557 *Polydori Vergilii urbinatis anglicae historiae libri vigintiseptem* (Isingrinus, Basel), 220–3, 594, 596

1570 *Polydori Vergilii urbinatis anglicae historiae libri vigintiseptem* (Guarinus, Basel), 220–3, 594, 596

1603 *Historia anglica Polydori Vergilii libris vigintisex comprehensa* (2 vols, Bellerius, Douai), vol. 1, 559–66, vol. 2, 1506–07, 1511

1649 *Historiae anglicae libri XXVI, autore Polydoro Virgilio urbinatate* (Maire, Lyon), 287–91, 753, 755

1651 *Historiae anglicae libri XXVII, autore Polydoro Virgilio urbinatate* (Maire, Lyon), 287–91, 753, 755.

The manuscript is: Vatican Library, URB. LAT. 497, fols 235v.–238r. and URB. LAT. 498, part 2, fols 256v., 257v.

English translation

The numbered sections correspond to those of the Latin text, the passages in bold Roman type being a translation of the EP version, and the passages in plain Roman type a translation of the MS version. Sections between # # are translations of the (most significant) variants from later editions, as recorded in the footnotes to the Latin text. The translation is my own. I take full responsibility for it, but I wish to acknowledge the learned assistance generously given to me by John Richmond, Emeritus Professor of Greek, University College Dublin.

Polydori Vergilii

De Hyberniae situ moribusque gentis

Liber XIII: Henricus Secundus

1 (EP). [Henricus] Dublinum, quae est insulae princeps civitas,¹ proficiscitur, ubi convocatis regulis ac episcopis, agit de imperio insulae sibi ac suis posterioribus² perpetuando.

1 (MS). [Henricus] Dubliniam primariam civitatem totius insulae venit. Ibi convocatis regulis ac episcopis, tractat de imperio insulae sibi ac successoribus suis perpetuo vendicando.

2 (EP). Id Hyberni posse fieri nisi auctoritate Ro.³ pontificis negabant, quod iam inde ab initio, post Christianam religionem acceptam, sese ac omnia sua in eius ditionem⁴ dedidissent; atque constanter affirmabant, non alium habere se dominum praeter ipsum pontificem, id quod etiam nunc iactitant.

2 (MS). *Id Hyberni negabant* posse fieri, nisi auctoritas summi Pontificis Romani interveniret, quod incolae ab initio post fidem Christianam acceptam sese Romano Pontifici subdidissent, atque etiam hodie iactarent se non alium habere dominum praeter ipsum Pontificem.

3 (EP). His auditis, rex per legatos quamprimum Alexandrum oravit, ut Hyberniam, quam ipse nuper domuerat, ad regnum Angliae sua auctoritate adiungeret, quod haud gravate fecit pontifex: nam cum nihil inde emolumenti haberet & Hyberni rudes atque sylvestres matrimonium (singuli enim pro opibus, quisque quamplurimas uxores habebant) multaque alia, quae nostrae religionis sunt, nondum rite⁵ servarent, est arbitratus illos cultiores rerumque divinarum peritiores fore, si uni duntaxat regi Christiano potentissimo parerent.

3 (MS). *His auditis, Rex per legatos quamprimum Alexandrum Papam* oravit, ut Hiberniam, quam ipse nuper domuerat, Regno Angliae sua auctoritate adiungeret. Quod admodum libens fecit Pontifex, nam cum Hyberni rudes atque sylvestres sacrum baptisma, matrimonium (singuli enim pro opibus quisque quam plurimas uxores habebant) multaque *alia*, quae nostrae religionis sunt, *nondum rite* servarent, est arbitratus illos mitiores fideique Christianae peritiores fore, si uni dumtaxat Regi Christiano potentissimo parerent.

¹ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: *civitas* > urbs

² 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1649, 1651: *posterioribus* > posteris regibus

³ 1649, 1651: *Rō.* > Romani

⁴ 1649, 1651: *ditionem* > -

⁵ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: *rite* > recte

Polydore Vergil

On the layout of Ireland and the customs of its people

From Book 13: Henry II

1 (EP). Henry sets out for Dublin, which is the leading city of the island, and there, having summoned the kinglets and the bishops, he discusses the question of how to render dominion over the island permanent for himself and his heirs.

1 (MS). Henry comes to Dublin, the principal city of the whole island. There, having summoned the kinglets and the bishops, he deals with how to claim dominion over the island in perpetuity for himself and his successors.

2 (EP). This, the Irish said, could be done only with the authority of the Roman pontiff, since from the very beginning, after the Christian religion had been received, they had surrendered themselves and all their belongings unto his power; and they kept repeating that they had no other master except for the pope himself, which is something they claim even now.

2 (MS). This, the Irish said, could not be done unless the authority of the supreme Roman pontiff was invoked, because the inhabitants, from the beginning, after the Christian faith had been received, had subjected themselves to the Roman pontiff, and even today claimed not to have any other master except for the pope himself.

3 (EP). Having heard this, the king, through his ambassadors, at once petitioned Alexander to use his authority to join Ireland, which he had just subdued, to the Kingdom of England. The pope did so with little hesitation, for he received no income from there, and the Irish, uncouth and backwoodish as they were, did not yet observe matrimony in the proper way (each, indeed, had as many wives as his wealth would allow) nor many other things that pertain to our religion; he was thus of the opinion that they would become more civilised and gain a better understanding of divine matters, if they all at least obeyed one, Christian and most mighty king.

3 (MS). Having heard this the king, through his ambassadors, at once petitioned Pope Alexander to use his authority to join Ireland, which he had just subdued, to the Kingdom of England. The pope did so very willingly, for the Irish, uncouth and backwoodish as they were, did not yet observe holy baptism, matrimony (each, indeed, had as many wives as his wealth would allow), nor many other things that pertain to our religion; he was thus of the opinion that they would become tamer and gain a better understanding of the Christian faith, if they all at least obeyed one, Christian and most mighty king.

- 4 **(EP).** Igitur Henricus intelligens his potissime de causis a pontifice imperio Hyberniae se donatum esse, post⁶ pacatum insulae⁷ statum curavit, ut celeberrimo antistitum conventu, qui Casselli in urbe celebri⁸ habitus⁹ est, omnia emendata sint, quae antea minus rite secundum Christianum dogma fiebant.
- 4 (MS). Igitur Henricus intelligens *his* potissime de causis Pontificem imperio Hyberniae se donasse, post pacatum insulae statum curavit, ut celeberrimo antistitum conventu, qui in civitate Cassellensi habitus est, omnia *emendata* sint, quae antea minus rite secundum Christianum dogma fiebant.
- 5 **(EP).** His peractis feliciter rebus, rex ineunte iam vere in Angliam reversus, propere in Normaniam profectus est obviam legatis a pontifice missis, quos eo iam acceperat ad se venire, cum quibus quid egerit, supra abunde explicatum est.
- 5 (MS). His peractis foeliciter rebus, Rex circa initium veris in Angliam reversus, propere in Normanniam traiecit obviam legatis a Pontifice missis, quod eo iam acceperat ad se proficisci, cum quibus quid egerit, superius abunde explicatum est.
- 6 **(EP).** Quoniam autem ad hunc locum perventum est, non alienum esse videtur, de Hyberniae situ moribusque gentis exponere.
- 6 (MS). *Quoniam autem ad hunc locum perventum est, non alienum esse videtur, de Hiberniae situ moribusque gentis exponere.*
- 7 **(EP).** Hybernia insula in Oceano inter Britanniam atque Hispaniam posita, ab ortu habet ipsam Britanniam unius diei navigatione propinquam, & Galliam ab austro, Hispaniam trium dierum, ut aiunt, navali cursu affinem ab occidente, Oceanum infinitum a septentrione; non multum distat a Scotia.
- 7 (MS). Hibernia insula medio inter Britanniam atque Hispaniam sita, ab ortu habet *ipsam* Britaniam unius diei navigatione propinquam, et Galliam ab austro, Hispaniam *trium dierum (ut aiunt) navali cursu ab occidente, oceanum infinitum a Septentrione; non multum distat a Scotia.*
- 8 **(EP).** Forma eius oblonga ad similitudinem ovi, ac a meridie, uti etiam Britannia est, in septentrionem protensa, ubi latior est.
- 8 (MS). *Forma eius oblonga ad similitudinem bipennis, ac a meridie, prout etiam Britannia est, in Septentrionem protensa.*

⁶ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1603, 1649, 1651: post > postquam

⁷ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1603, 1649, 1651: pacatum] reddiderat [insulae

⁸ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1603, 1649, 1651: celebri > nobili

⁹ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1603, 1649, 1651: habitus > actus

- 4 **(EP). Therefore Henry, realising that it was for these reasons above all that the dominion over Ireland had been given to him by the pope, made sure, after the island had been pacified, that that most famous synod of bishops, which took place in the famous town of Cashel, would reform all those matters which hitherto had been least in accordance with the tenets of Christianity.**
- 4 (MS). Therefore Henry, realising that it was for these reasons above all that the pope had given him dominion over Ireland, made sure, after the island had been pacified, that that most famous synod of bishops, which took place in the city of Cashel, would reform all those matters which hitherto had been least in accordance with the tenets of Christianity.
- 5 **(EP). Having dealt with these things satisfactorily and having returned to England, with spring already on its way, the king proceeded in great haste to Normandy, to meet the ambassadors sent to him by the pope, who he had already been told were coming to meet him there. What he discussed with them has been explained at length above.**
- 5 (MS). Having dealt with these things satisfactorily and having returned to England towards the beginning of spring, the king crossed over in great haste to Normandy, to meet the ambassadors sent to him by the pope, for he had already been told they had set out to meet him there. What he discussed with them has been explained at length above.
- 6 **(EP). Since we have now reached this point, it does not seem to be out of order to discuss the layout of Ireland and the customs of its people.**
- 6 (MS). Since we have now reached this point, it does not seem to be out of order to discuss the layout of Ireland and the customs of its people.
- 7 **(EP). Ireland, which is an island lying in the ocean between Britain and Spain, has Britain itself to the east, at a distance of one day's sailing, France to the south, Spain to the west, three days' navigation away, according to what they say, and the boundless ocean to the north. It is not very far from Scotland.**
- 7 (MS). Ireland, which is an island situated half way between Britain and Spain, has Britain itself to the east, at a distance of one day's sailing, and France to the south, and Spain to the west, three days' navigation away, according to what they say, and the boundless ocean to the north. It is not very far from Scotland.
- 8 **(EP). It has an oblong shape, resembling an egg, and like Britain it extends from south to north, where it is wider.**
- 8 (MS). It has an oblong shape, resembling a bird, and like Britain it extends from south to north.

- 9 (EP). **Hyberniam ab Hybero duce homine Hispano nominatam ferunt, qui primus magna hominum congregata multitudo eam occupavit;¹⁰ sive, ut alij sentiunt, id nomen tulit ab Ibero flumine¹¹ Hispaniae celeberrimo, quod illius accolae primi insulam habitassent, aut ab hyberno tempore, quia ad Occidentem vergit.**
- 9 (MS). *Hanc* ab Hybero Duce natione hispano nominatam ferunt, qui prior magna hominum congregata multitudo eam occupavit; sive, ut alij sentiunt, id nomen tulit ab Ibero flumine Hispaniae celeberrimo, quod illius accolae primi insulam habitarunt.
- 10 (EP). **Sed illud verisimilius est, ut vel a duce Hispano, vel a flumine Ibero dicta sit, quando Hyberni cum habitu corporum tum vivendi ritu atque moribus non valde discrepant ab Hispanis vicinioribus.**
- 10 (MS). Verum in re tam antiqua ac ob id ipsum incerta nihil pro certo affirmaverim.
- 11 (EP). **¹²Scoti a Scythia ¹³profecti, ut¹⁴ in tertio huius operis volumine memoravimus, expulsis prioribus incolis, aliquandiu tenuerunt, ab¹⁵ seque Scotiam appellarunt. Sed postea quam illi longo post tempore Pictis suae nationis hominibus foedere iuncti supremam Britanniae¹⁶ partem, quae ad septentrionem vergit, occuparunt, & ipsi Hiberniae¹⁷ sensim pristinum nomen redditum, & pars illa Britanniae a Scotis occupata Scotia dicta est.**
- 11 (MS). Hanc Scoti a Scythia profecti, ut in *tertio* huius operis volumine memoravimus, expulsis prioribus incolis, aliquandiu tenuerunt, ab seque Scotiam appellarunt. Sed postea quam *ipsi* procedente tempore Pictis suae nationis hominibus foedere iuncti supremam Britanniae partem, quae ad septentrionem vergit, occuparunt, et ipsi Hyberniae *sensim* pristinum nomen redditum est. Et pars illa Britanniae a Scotis obtenta Scotia dicta est.
- 12 (EP). **Spacium¹⁸ Hyberniae dimidio minus quam Britanniae aestimatur, quod non amplius milliarijs CCC¹⁹ in longitudinem & LXXXX²⁰ in latitudinem pateat.**
- 12 (MS). Spatium Hyberniae, si Britanniae comparetur, longe angustius est.

¹⁰ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: occupavit > occupasset

¹¹ 1556B, 1557: flumine > fluminae

¹² 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: vicinioribus.] Insulam ipsam [Scoti

¹³ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: Scythia,] seu ab Aegypto, ut ipsi praedicant, [profecti

¹⁴ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: ut > &

¹⁵ 1570: ab > ad

¹⁶ 1603 Britanniae > Britanniae

¹⁷ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: Hiberniae > Hyberniae

¹⁸ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: Spacium > Spatium

¹⁹ 1603: CCC > 300

²⁰ 1603: LXXXX > 90

- 9 **(EP). Ireland [Hibernia], they say, was named after General Hyberus, a Spanish man who, having gathered a great multitude of men, was the first to occupy it. Alternatively, some say that it got its name from the very famous Spanish river Ebro [Iberus], from the banks of which came the first inhabitants of the island; or from wintry [hibernal] weather, given that it looks towards the west.**
- 9 (MS). They say that it is named after General Hyberus, of Spanish nationality, who, having gathered a great multitude of men, was the first to occupy it. Alternatively, some say that it got its name from the very famous Spanish river Ebro [Iberus], from the banks of which came the first inhabitants of the island.
- 10 **(EP). But it is more likely to be known thus either on account of the Spanish general or of the river Ebro, since in terms of appearance, lifestyle and customs, the Irish are not very different from the Spanish who are closer to them.**
- 10 (MS). In truth, in such an ancient and therefore uncertain matter, I would not claim anything for sure.
- 11 **(EP). The Scots, who, as we mentioned in the third book of this work, had come from Scythia, #or from Egypt, as they themselves maintain, # having expelled the earlier inhabitants of the island, held it for a time and called it Scotland after themselves. But when, a good while later, they formed an alliance with their cousins, the Picts, and occupied the topmost stretch of Britain, which looks towards the north, bit by bit Ireland got back its original name, and that part of Britain which was occupied by the Scots became known as Scotland.**
- 11 (MS). The Scots, who, as we mentioned in the third book of this work, had come from Scythia, having expelled the earlier inhabitants of the island, held it for a time and called it Scotland after themselves. But when, in due course, they formed an alliance with their cousins, the Picts, and occupied the topmost stretch of Britain, which looks towards the north, bit by bit Ireland got back its original name, and that part of Britain which was taken by the Scots became known as Scotland.
- 12 **(EP). Ireland's area, it is estimated, is half as big as Britain's, for it does not extend, or so it would appear, to more than 300 miles in length and 90 miles in width.**
- 12 (MS). Ireland's area, if it is compared to Britain's, is much smaller.

- 13 (EP). Caeterum solum & coelum haud multum differt, nisi quod Hybernia montosior est & aquarum²¹ abundantior, quippe quae in aeditissimis²² etiam montibus passim paludes & stagna habet. Mira coeli temperies, fertilitas terrae insignis, etsi Hyberni agriculturae parum student.
- 13 (MS). *Ceterum solum et caelum haud multum differt. Mira coeli temperies, fertilitas terrae insignis, et si Hyberni agriculturae parum student.*
- 14 (EP). Nullum gignit venenosum²³ animal, nec aliunde illatum nutrit. Maleficum habet lupum & vulpem; reliqua omnia animalia mansueta & corpore minora quam alibi. Apes etiam passim reperiuntur, quod falso quidam negant. Fert Hybernicus Oceanus margaritas, sed subfusas²⁴ ac liventes.
- 14 (MS). *Nullum gignit venenosum animal, nec aliunde illatum nutrit. Maleficum habet lupum et vulpem. Caetera omnia animalia mitia sunt et corpore minora quam alibi. Apes etiam passim reperiuntur, quod falso quidam negant. Fert Hybernicus Oceanus margaritas, sed subfusas ac liventes.*
- 15 (EP). Hybernia autem est omnis divisa in partes quatuor, quarum unam, quae ad austrum spectat, Momoniam appellant, alteram borealem²⁵ Hultoniam, tertiam, quae ad solem orientem vergit, Laginiam, quartam occidentalem²⁶ Connaciam, & has Hyberni pariter civiliores atque sylvestres sparsim incolunt; caeterum civitates a cultu minus absunt, quod regi Anglo parent, unde mores imbibunt honestiores. Momoniam a Laginia Suirus flumen, qui ad Vاتفordiam oppidum portum facit, quo ex Anglia brevior est transmissus, & a Connacia Sinneus dividit, cuius princeps civitas²⁷ occidentalis²⁸ orae est Limiricum, quod Sinneo omnium totius Hyberniae fluminum maximo alluitur. Oppida vero celebriora Vاتفordia, & secundum Suiri ripam Charygium, Clomellum, Charis²⁹ ac Cassellum civitas firma,³⁰ & in angulo Corcagia, contraque eam, altera³¹ in septentrionali ora, Cherrium, ubi insula in austrum versus cuneatior³² esse incipit magisque sylvestris. Altera sequitur Hultoniam, quae contra est, spectatque ad septentrionem, quam a Liginia discludit Boandus flumen, quo Druda oppidum maritimum ac Midia urbs alluitur, cuius emporium est Armachum; & in ora aquilonari³³ Stranfordia oppidum, a quo ad Scotiam, quam ex ea parte finitimam insula habet, brevior est traiectus;

²¹ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: aquarum > aquis

²² 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: aeditissimis > editissimis

²³ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: venenosum > venenatum

²⁴ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: subfusas > subfuscas

²⁵ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: borealem > aquilonalem

²⁶ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: occidentiam > quae est ad Occidentem

²⁷ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: princeps civitas > principalis urbs

²⁸ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: occidentalis > occidentis

²⁹ 1556, 1556B, 1557, 1570, 1649, 1651: Charis > Charris

³⁰ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: civitas firma > -

³¹ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: altera > -

³² 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: cuneatior > angustior

³³ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: aquilonari > aquilonali

- 13 **(EP). Otherwise its land and its air are not very different, except for the fact that Ireland is more mountainous and has a greater abundance of water, since even on the highest mountains there are marshes and pools everywhere. It has a remarkable climate and its soil is exceedingly rich, although the Irish devote little time to agriculture.**
- 13 (MS). Otherwise its land and its air are not very different. It has a remarkable climate and its soil is exceedingly rich, although the Irish devote little time to agriculture.
- 14 **(EP). It breeds no venomous animals, nor does it sustain any that are brought from elsewhere. As pests it has the wolf and the fox; all its other animals are docile and smaller than anywhere else. Bees too can be found everywhere, which some people, wrongly, deny. The Irish Ocean produces pearls, but they are brownish and bluish.**
- 14 (MS). It breeds no venomous animals, nor does it sustain any that are brought from elsewhere. As pests it has the wolf and the fox; all its other animals are docile and smaller than anywhere else. Bees too can be found everywhere, which some people, wrongly, deny. The Irish Ocean produces pearls, but they are brownish and bluish.
- 15 **(EP). The whole of Ireland, then, is divided into four parts, of which one looks towards the south and is called Munster, another in the north is called Ulster, the third, which faces the rising sun, Leinster, and the fourth which is to the west, Connaught, and these are all inhabited, in places, by the more polished Irish as well as the backwoods Irish; however it is the cities which are least uncivilised, for they obey the English king, wherefore they absorb more honourable manners. Munster is divided from Leinster by the River Suir, which forms a port near the borough of Waterford, to where the crossing from England is shorter; and the Shannon divides it from Connaught, the main city of which, on the west coast, is Limerick, which is bathed by the Shannon, the biggest of all the rivers on the whole of Ireland. Munster's more famous boroughs are Waterford and, along the River Suir, Carrick, Clonmel, Cahir and the fortified city of Cashel; and in the corner, Cork, opposite which on the northern shore is Kerry, where the island, facing south, begins to grow narrower and more wooded. There then follows Ulster, which lies opposite and looks towards the north; it is separated from Leinster by the River Boyne, which bathes the coastal borough of Drogheda and the town of Meath. Its market town is Armagh and on its northern coast there stands the borough of Strangford, from where the crossing to Scotland is shorter, since Scotland on that side is adjacent to Ireland. Along that northern coast, as far as the opposite corner towards the west, there are a number of other small boroughs and many islands. In the interior there is also a very big lake, which they call Lough Foyle; it gives rise to the meandering Shannon, which separates the inland Irish who are in the west from those who are in the east, and at Limerick forms a port with**

& quaedam alia parvula oppida atque insulae complures, per eam oram septentrionalem, usque ad alterum occidentalem³⁴ angulum.³⁵ Item interius amplissimus lacus, quem vocant Logfoylum, unde manat Sinneus, qui late fluens interiores Hybernos, qui Occidui³⁶ sunt, ab Orientalibus³⁷ discriminat, ad Limiricumque portum facit multarum navium capacem. Iam tertiam ponamus partem Liginiam; haec a Druda orientalis³⁸ orae oppido incipit, pertinetque ad Rossium oppidum eiusdem orae, quod ad austrum vergit, in longitudinem circiter millia passuum CXC. Civitates³⁹ habet Dublinum totius insulae caput, Midiam, Forneum, ac oppida munita Childariam, Childennium, Tostonum, Benettibrigium, & huius quoque bonam partem Hyberni Sylvestres tenent. Ultima pars Connacia, quae ad occidentem solem spectat, multo incultior, quam in austrum versus, ut supra diximus, Sinneus a Momonia disiungit, illincque protenditur parum ultra Slygarium oppidum orae septentrionalis, cuius principalis civitas⁴⁰ est Galvia; item portus frequentes, insulae admodum parvae, ac lacus. Haec vero crebris montibus atque paludibus plena, fere tota sylvestris, a pluribus regulis possidetur administraturque, quorum princeps unus, qui se Connaciae regem nominat, cuius incolae ut longe durissimum hominum genus non multum frumento, sed maximam partem lacte atque pecore vivunt, panem quando vescuntur, ex farina avenacea conficiunt.

- 15 (MS). *Omnis Hybernia quatuor continetur provinciis, quibus totidem praesunt archipraesules sedibus et terminis discreti, qui sunt Armachanus totius insulae primas, Dublinensis, Cassalensis et Tuamensis. Et hae quatuor provinciae, ut situs terrae et incolarum mores facilius dignoscantur, in duas dividuntur partes.* Una est spatio minor, sed cultior et Regi Anglo subiecta, quae triangularem habet formam. Incipit *enim* parum supra Drudam orientalis orae oppidum, et transversa linea per mediterraneam *porrigitur* ad alterum cornu in occidentem versus, ubi loci Corcagia civitas sita est. Atque rursus ab eodem oppido Druda protenditur per oram orientalem ad dextrum cornu, ubi Watfordia civitas iacet. Est in eadem ora civitas Dublinia totius insulae emporium, et in mediterranea Media. Haec regio ferme *tota* plana est. Incolae et si alias olim inculti, nunc autem cum Regi Anglo pareant, ita Anglorum mores paulatim imbiberunt, ut multo civiliores cultioresque evaserint. Altera *longe maior* pars a Druda per oram orientalem in septentrionem versus portum habet nobilissimum, quem Stramfordiae portum nominant. Ex quo in Scotiam est transitus *brevis*. Per oram vero occidentalem sunt imprimis nobiles civitates Limericum et Galvia. Et haec pars *crebris montibus atque paludibus plena*, fere sylvestris a pluribus Regulis administratur, quorum princeps est Rex Conacae, cuius incolae ut durissimum hominum genus carent lacte et pomis vicitant, panem siquando vescuntur, ex farina avenacea conficiunt.

³⁴ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: occidentalem > -

³⁵ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: angulum], Occidentem versus. [Item

³⁶ 1546, 1556G, 1603, 1649, 1651: Occidui > occidentales; 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: Occidui > ad Occidentem

³⁷ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: Orientalibus > eis, qui in Orientem vergunt,

³⁸ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: orientalis > orientis

³⁹ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: Civitates > Urbes

⁴⁰ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: civitas > urbs

a capacity for many ships. Next is Leinster, which we will call the third part of Ireland. It begins at the borough of Drogheda on the eastern coast and runs to the borough of Ross on the same coast, where it turns south, extending to about 190 miles. It includes the cities of Dublin, which is the capital of the whole island, Meath and Ferns, and the walled boroughs of Kildare, Kilkenny, Thomastown and Bennettsbridge. A good bit of this part too is held by the backwoods Irish. The last part, which looks towards the setting sun and is much less civilised, is Connaught. As we said above, in the south it is separated from Munster by the Shannon, and from there it reaches to just beyond the borough of Sligo on the northern coast. Its principal city is Galway, and it also has many ports, and very small islands and lakes. This part, in truth, which is covered by many mountains and marshes, is almost totally wooded and is held and ruled by several kinglets, who all have one leader, who calls himself the King of Connaught. Its inhabitants, being an exceptionally hardy breed of men, do not live off grain much, but for the most part off milk and meat; when they eat bread, they make it from oatmeal.

- 15 (MS). The whole of Ireland consists of four provinces, over which preside as many archbishops with their separate sees and boundaries, namely Armagh, the primate of the whole island, Dublin, Cashel and Tuam. And these four provinces, as can more easily be recognised from the layout of the land and the customs of the inhabitants, are divided into two parts. One, which has a triangular shape, covers a smaller area but is more civilised and subject to the English king. It begins indeed a little above Drogheda, a borough on the eastern coast, and it extends through the interior, along a diagonal line, towards another horn, pointing towards the west, in which place the city of Cork is situated. And again, from the same borough of Drogheda it extends along the eastern coast to the right horn, where the city of Waterford lies. On the same coast there is the city of Dublin, the trading centre of the whole island, and in the interior Meath. This region is almost totally flat. The inhabitants, although once in the past they were uncivilised, now however, since they obey the English king, they have gradually absorbed the customs of the English to the point where they have become much more polished and civilised. The other part, which is much bigger, extends from Drogheda along the eastern coast towards the north and has a most excellent port, which they call the port of Strangford, from where the crossing to Scotland is short. Along the western coast there stand out the noble cities of Limerick and Galway. And this part, which is covered by many mountains and marshes, and is generally wooded, is ruled by several kinglets, whose leader is the King of Connaught. Its inhabitants, as a very hardy breed of men, go without milk and feed on fruit, and when they eat bread they make it from oatmeal.

- 16 **(EP). Ii Sylvestres vocitantur, quod ferme ferarum ritu vitam degant, quanquam in ea feritate Christianam religionem caste colunt.**
- 16 (MS). Hi silvestres vocitantur, quod ferme ferarum more vitam agant, quamquam in ea feritate Christianam fidem religiosissime colunt,
- 17 **(EP). Statura sunt non indecenti, tunicam ex panno lineo confectam induunt, & eam non mutant, donec contrita sit, quam ne sordescat, croco inficiunt, cui cum in publicum exeunt, aut frigoris vitandi causa, superiectum⁴¹ pallium laneum & illud quidem villosum atque in superiore parte iubatum ferunt:⁴² & hic pariter viris ac foeminis communis vestitus.**
- 17 (MS). statura sunt non indecenti, tunicam ex panno lineo intextam induunt, et eam non mutant, donec contrita sit, *supra* quam, *praesertim* cum in publicum exeunt, aut frigoris causa, pallium laneum *et illud* villosum atque in superiori parte iubatum *ferunt*. Et hic viris ac foeminis communis habitus.
- 18 **(EP). Nobiles vero veste talari amiciuntur, tegmen a posteriore parte ad caput inducunt, & id usque ad calcanea⁴³ pendet. Calciatum⁴⁴ etiam usurpant. At reliqui aperto capite ac nudis pedibus incedunt: porro ita pedum cutis suapte natura callet, ut pueri, qui⁴⁵ pedes nondum longo usu aut labore durarint,⁴⁶ mira quadam pernecitate per loca etiam aspera currant.**
- 18 (MS). Nobiles vero veste talari amiciuntur, tegmen a posteriori parte ad caput inducunt, et id usque ad calcanea pendet. Calciatum etiam usurpant. At reliqui nudo capite nudisque pedibus incedunt, quin ita pedum cutio *suapte natura* callet, ut pueri, quorum *pedes* nondum *ex* longo usu aut labore callum fecerant, mira quidam pernecitate per loca etiam aspera currant.
- 19 **(EP). Capillum parum supra aures circuncidunt; aliqui tamen more vetusto, capillo usque ad occipitium reciso, in parte capitis anteriore⁴⁷ longos gerunt crines. Barbam frequenter radunt, labio duntaxat superiore ad terrorem, ut credere par est, intonso.**
- 19 (MS). Capillum parum supra aures circumcidunt. Aliqui tamen more vetusto, capillo usque ad occipitium reciso, in parte capitis anteriori longos gerunt crines. Barbam frequenter radunt, labio dumtaxat superiori ad terrorem, ut credere par est, intonso.

⁴¹ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *superiectum* > -

⁴² 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *ferunt* > imponunt

⁴³ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *calcanea* > calcem

⁴⁴ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1603, 1649, 1651: *calciatum* > calciamentum; 1570: *calciatum* > calceamentum

⁴⁵ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *qui* > quorum

⁴⁶ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *durarint* > obdurarint

⁴⁷ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *antereore* > quae ante est

- 16 **(EP). They are called backwoodsmen, because they mostly lead life according to the manner of wild beasts, although, in their beastliness, they practice the Christian religion chastely.**
- 16 (MS). They are called backwoodsmen, because they mostly lead life according to the fashion of wild beasts, although, in their beastliness, they practice the Christian faith most religiously.
- 17 **(EP). Their size is not unbecoming. They wear a tunic made of linen cloth, which they do not change before it is worn and which they dye with saffron, so that it will not get dirty. On top of this, when they go out in public, or so as to avoid being cold, they put on a woolen mantle, which is quite shaggy and at the top has a crest; and this is the way both men and women dress.**
- 17 (MS). Their size is not unbecoming. They wear a tunic woven from linen cloth, which they do not change before it is worn. On top of this, especially when they go out in public, or because of the cold, they put on a woolen mantle, which is quite shaggy and at the top has a crest; and this is the way both men and women dress.
- 18 **(EP). The nobles for their part wrap themselves in a full-length mantle, which they pull over their head from behind and which hangs down to their heels; they also use shoes. But the others go bare-headed and bare-footed. What is more, the skin of their feet is by its nature so tough, that children, whose feet have not yet been hardened by long use or work, can run with remarkable agility, even on rugged ground.**
- 18 (MS). The nobles for their part wrap themselves in a full-length mantle, which they pull over their head from behind and which hangs down to their heels; they also use shoes. But the others go bare-headed and bare-footed. What is more, the skin of their feet is by its nature so tough, that children, whose feet have not yet formed a callus through long use or work, can run with remarkable agility, even on rugged ground.
- 19 **(EP). They do not cut their hair above their ears, although some, in the old fashion, cut all of it off at the back of their head and wear it long in front. They frequently shave their beard, leaving only their top lip unshaven in order to look terrifying, or so we may reasonably believe.**
- 19 (MS). They do not cut their hair above their ears, although some, in the old fashion, cut all of it off at the back of their head and wear it long in front. They frequently shave their beard, leaving only their top lip unshaven in order to look terrifying, or so we may reasonably believe.

- 20 (EP). **At gens continuis seditonibus agitatur, ac ob id praeliis & rebus gerendis assueta, solers est atque⁴⁸ ad omnia momenta rerum imperiumque obeundum⁴⁹ praesto.**
- 20 (MS). Item gens continuis seditonibus agitatur, ac ob id praeliis et rebus gerendis solers, ac ad omnia momenta rerum imperiumque obeundum praesto.
- 21 (EP). **Inermes corpore pugnant, idque pro audacia⁵⁰ & robore virium aequae habent, atque ferre arma pro onere ducunt, etsi paulatim suo periculo sapientiores effecti, arma iam nunc induere incipiunt. Sine ephippiis equitant;⁵¹ equos vero magna cura nutriunt pabulo herbaceo ac sub divo. Arma habent iacula, enses,⁵² securim & lapides, quibus, cum alia arma amiserint, se defendunt.**
- 21 (MS). Inermes corpore pugnant atque sine stratis saepius equitant. Arma habent iacula, enses, sagittas.
- 22 (EP). **Indiscreta⁵³ apud eos haec sunt. Lingua omnibus eadem, quam balbutientium ac gementium more pronunciant; subita ingenia, ferocia & ad ultionem⁵⁴ prona, non item fida, sed mendacio gaudentia, literarum non expertia, nam a pueris grammaticae & iuri tam pontificio quam civili incumbunt;⁵⁵ praeterea sobrij & inediae patientissimi, comiter & perbenigne colunt hospites.**
- 22 (MS). *Indiscreta apud eos haec sunt. Lingua omnibus eadem*, subita ingenia, ferocia et in ultionem prona, item fallacia, mendacio gaudentia, litterarum non inexpertia, nam a teneris annis grammaticae et iuri tam pontificio quam civili incumbunt. Item sobrij et inediae patientissimi, comiter et perbenigne colunt hospites.
- 23 (EP). **In delicijs⁵⁶ habent a laboribus vacare; agriculturam caeterasque artes non magnopere exercent praeter musicam, cuius peritissimi sunt, canunt enim cum voce tum fidibus eleganter, sed vehementi quodam impetu sic, ut mirabile sit, in tanta vocis linguaeque atque digitorum velocitate posse artis numeros servari, id quod illi ad unguem faciunt.**
- 23 (MS). Cum a re bellica feriantur, ocio dediti delicias *aestimant* a laboribus vacare, agriculturam caeterasque artes raro exercent.

⁴⁸ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *atque* > -

⁴⁹ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *obeundum* > accipiendum

⁵⁰ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: *audacia* > fortitudine animi

⁵¹ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *equitant*:] licet nunc stratis quambrevissimis, sine ullis phaleris, utantur: [equos

⁵² 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *enses* > gladium

⁵³ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: *indiscreta* > Quae inter se nihil distent,

⁵⁴ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *ultionem* > vindictam

⁵⁵ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: *incumbunt* > operam dant

⁵⁶ 1557, 1570: *deliciejs* > delitiis

- 20 **(EP). But they are a people engaged in continuous strife and for that reason, being used to battle and action, they are ever adaptable to changing circumstances and ready to seize power.**
- 20 (MS). Moreover they are a people engaged in continuous strife and for that reason, being practised in battle and action, and in ever-changing circumstances, they are ready to seize power.
- 21 **(EP). They fight without body armour, which they deem equally conducive to audacity and physical vigour; and bearing arms they consider a burden although, gradually growing wiser by being exposed to danger, they are just now beginning to do so. They ride without saddles, #although they do now use tiny pillions, but without any tackle#. Their horses they feed with great care, on grass and in the open air. For weapons they have javelins, swords, an axe and stones, with which they defend themselves when they have cast their other arms.**
- 21 (MS). They fight without body armour, and they mostly ride without pillions. For weapons they have javelins, swords and arrows.
- 22 **(EP). The things they have in common are as follows: they all speak the same language, which they pronounce as though they were babbling and groaning; they are quick-tempered, savage and vengeful; and in addition they are not to be trusted but take pleasure in lying. They are not without learning, for they study Latin from childhood, as well as canon and civil law. Moreover they are sober and show great endurance of hunger. Their guests they treat with kindness and geniality.**
- 22 (MS). The things they have in common are as follows: they all speak the same language; they are quick-tempered, savage and vengeful, and what is more false, taking pleasure in lying. They are not without learning, for they study Latin from an early age, as well as canon and civil law. Moreover they are sober and show great endurance of hunger. Their guests they treat with kindness and geniality.
- 23 **(EP). Among their pleasures is holding back from work, and they do not practice agriculture to any great extent, nor any of the other crafts, except for music, at which they are very skilled. Indeed, they perform with style, singing and playing the harp, but also with such force and élan, that it is remarkable how, despite the speed of their voice, tongue and fingers, they manage to keep the rhythm, which they do to perfection.**
- 23 (MS). When they are not engaged in warfare, being dedicated to repose, they consider holding back from work a pleasure, and they rarely practice agriculture or any of the other crafts.

- 24 **(EP). Domos habent aut lapideas aut ligneas, muris e luto confectis. Defunctos⁵⁷ magnis clamoribus diu lugent: si summi sint viri, conducunt mulieres, quae circa demortuos⁵⁸ plangent.**
- 24 (MS). Domos habent aut lapideas aut ligneas, muris e luto confectis. Defunctos magnis clamoribus diu lugent, et si altiore fortuna sint, conducunt mulieres, quae circa demortuos plangent.
- 25 **(EP). Miracula autem Hyberniae, quae vulgo praedicantur, quoniam eo remotius fugere solent, quo diligentius inquiruntur, repetere supervacaneum duximus, arbitantes nos satis de ea insula hic apposite dixisse. Caeterum unde digressi sumus, iam revertamur.**
- 25 (MS). *Miracula vero Hyberniae, quae vulgo praedicantur, quoniam eo remotius fugere solent, quo diligentius investigentur [?], repetere supervacaneum duximus, arbitantes nos satis ac superque de ea insula hic obiter recensisse.* Caeterum unde digressi sumus, revertamur.

Liber XXVI: Henricus Septimus

- 26 **(EP). In omni Hybernia duo sunt hominum genera, quemadmodum est a nobis loco perapposito supra, decimotertio huius operis volumine demonstratum: unum mite & urbanum. Ad hos ut civiliores ac ditiores⁵⁹ navigant frequenter vicinitatum continentis mercatores negociandi⁶⁰ causa, sed Angli in primis commeant, quorum mores illi facile imbibunt, linguamque ex assiduo commercio maiore ex parte intelligunt, & omnes parent regi Anglo.**
- 26 (MS). In omni Hybernia duo sunt hominum genera, sicut est a nobis alio in loco *in vita Henrici secundi* demonstratum: unum mite ac urbanum. Ad hos ut civiliores ac ditiores eunt frequentes circumvicinarum gentium mercatores negociandi causa, sed Angli imprimis comeant, quorum mores illi facile imbiberunt, linguamque ex assiduo comertio maiori ex parte intelligunt. Hi omnes parent Regi Anglico.
- 27 **(EP). Alterum genus ferum, incultum, stultum, asperum, qui a neglectiore cultu rusticisque moribus Sylvestres appellantur,**
- 27 (MS). Alterum genus ferum, incultum, asperum. Isti a neglectiore cultu rusticisque moribus sylvestres appellantur; sunt nihilominus boni Christiani.

⁵⁷ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: ~~Defunctos~~ > Demortuos

⁵⁸ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: ~~demortuos~~ > funus

⁵⁹ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: ~~civiliores ac ditiores~~ > magis tractabiles ac divites

⁶⁰ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: ~~negociandi~~ > negotiandi

- 24 **(EP). They have houses of either stone or wood, with walls made of mud. They lament the deceased at length and with great clamour; and if they are important men, they hire women to wail by the body.**
- 24 (MS). They have houses of either stone or wood, with walls made of mud. They lament the deceased at length and with great clamour; and if they are of greater status, they hire women to wail by the body.
- 25 **(EP). As regards the miracles of Ireland, of which such a palaver is commonly made, given that, the greater the care with which they are enquired into, the further they tend to flee, we have deemed it futile to discuss them once again; and we believe that we have said all that needs to be said here about this island. So let us now return whence we digressed.**
- 25 (MS). As regards the miracles of Ireland, of which such a palaver is commonly made, given that, the greater the care with which they are investigated, the further they tend to flee, we have deemed it futile to discuss them once again; and we believe that we have recounted more than enough here about this island. So let us now return whence we digressed.

From Book 26: Henry VII

- 26 **(EP). In the whole of Ireland there are two types of men, as we illustrated in the appropriate place above, in Book 13 of this work. The one is tame and civil, and it is to these people, who are more polished and wealthier, that merchants from the neighbouring countries of the Continent frequently travel for the purpose of carrying out their trade, though it is the English who come and go more than others. They easily absorb the customs of the English and, because of the frequency of such commercial contacts, they mostly understand their language; and they all obey the English king.**
- 26 (MS). In the whole of Ireland there are two types of men, as we illustrated in another place, in the life of Henry II. The one is tame and civil, and it is to these people, who are more polished and wealthier, that the merchants of the surrounding countries frequently go, for the purpose of carrying out their trade, though it is the English who come and go more than others. They easily absorbed the customs of the English and, because of the frequency of such commercial contacts, they mostly understand their language. These all obey the English king.
- 27 **(EP). The other type are wild, uncivilised, stupid and hostile, and because of their lack of civilisation and their coarse manners, they are called backwoodsmen.**
- 27 (MS). The other type are wild, uncivilised, and hostile. These, because of their lack of civilisation and their coarse manners, are called backwoodsmen. They are nevertheless good Christians.

- 28 **(EP). habentque quamplures regulos, qui inter se continenter bellant,⁶¹ qua de causa reliquos Hybernos ferocia praecedunt, ac novarum rerum longe cupidissimi, secundum rapinas & latrocinia, nihil tumultibus magis amant.**
- 28 (MS). Diversos habent regulos, quibus subiecti sunt, qui inter se continue bellant. Qua de causa reliquos Hybernos ferocia praecedunt, ac novarum rerum cupidores ad omnes motus promptiores habentur.
- 29 **(EP). Ad istos Sylvestres Hybernos Petrus [Varbechus] se principio contulit, eisque omnia facile persuasit, quae de se falso praedicabat. [...]**
- 29 (MS). Ad hos sylvestres Hybernos Petrus [Varbechus] se principio contulit, eisque omnia facile persuasit, quae de se falso praedicabat. [...]
- 30 **(EP). Hoc capto consilio, Petrus, idoneam proficiscendi nactus tempestatem, Hyberniam petit, ubi paucos dies moratus, quod intellexisset spem victoriae minime ponendam in solis Hybernis, qui nullis armis tegentes bellando corpora, parum adversus Anglos in praelio valerent, cum ventus factus est⁶² sequundus,⁶³ in Scotiam navigat, regemque Iacobum suppliciter adit, sicque alloquitur: [...]**
- 30 (MS). Hoc capto consilio, Petrus inde, velis in altum datis, in Hyberniam pervenit. Ibi paucos dies moratus, *intellexit Hybernos, qui nullis armis tegunt bellando corpora, parum extra natale solum praelio valere. Qua de causa, desperans* se posse ab ea gente auxilia habere, quae tanto bello gerendo sufficerent, ubi ventus secundus datus est, in Scotiam navigavit, Regemque Iacobum adivit, quem in hunc fere modum allocutus est: [...]

⁶¹ 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: **bellant** > belligerant

⁶² 1546, 1555, 1556B, 1556G, 1557, 1570, 1603, 1649, 1651: **factus est** > coepit flare

⁶³ 1555, 1556B, 1557, 1570: **sequundus** > secundus

- 28 **(EP). They have a great many kinglets, who continuously fight amongst themselves, wherefore they are more ferocious than the rest of the Irish and, being extremely eager for new things, they resort to plunder and banditry, liking nothing so much as insurrection.**
- 28 (MS). They have several kinglets, to whom they are subject and who continuously fight among themselves. For this reason they are more ferocious than the rest of the Irish, and being more eager for new things, they are considered more disposed to political change.
- 29 **(EP). It is to these backwoods Irish that Peter [Perkin Warbeck] repaired at first, and he easily convinced them of all he was falsely proclaiming about himself. [...]**
- 29 (MS). It is to these backwoods Irish that Peter [Perkin Warbeck] repaired at first, and he easily convinced them of all he was falsely proclaiming about himself. [...]
- 30 **(EP). Having reached this decision, and the weather being right to set sail, Peter [Perkin] crossed over to Ireland, where he stayed only a few days, for he understood he had little chance of victory by relying on the Irish alone, since they did not cover their bodies with any armour when fighting and therefore were worth little in battle against the English, and so, when a favourable wind began to blow, he sailed to Scotland and presented himself, as a suppliant, to King James, and addressed him thus: [...]**
- 30 (MS). Having reached this decision and thereupon set sail, Peter [Perkin] came to Ireland. Having stayed there a few days, he understood that the Irish, who do not cover their bodies with any armour when fighting, are worth little in battle outside their native land. For that reason, despairing of being able to get any help from them that would allow him to fight such a war, when a favourable wind arose, he sailed to Scotland and presented himself to King James, whom he addressed in more or less this way: [...]