

BRITISH MUSEUM, ADDITIONAL MS 14905;
AN INTERPRETATION AND RE-EXAMINATION
OF THE MUSIC AND TEXT

M.A. Thesis submitted by
P.D. Whittaker, M.A. (Oxon.)
to the University College of North Wales, Bangor, 1974

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own independent work, and that I have given clear indication of any material taken from other sources.

I also declare that this thesis has not been accepted in whole or in part for any other degree, and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to

Professor William Mathias, for his enthusiasm, his active support and his encouragement;

Mr Thomas Messenger, my supervisor, for his boundless patience and constructive criticism;

Dr Gwyn Thomas, for his invaluable assistance in the translation of some remarkably obscure Welsh texts;

Miss Gudrun Felling, who typed, re-typed, and re-re-typed, and still retained her sanity;

The National Library of Wales, the Library of the University College of North Wales, and the British Museum Reading Room, for making their facilities available.

Part 1

Discussion

CONTENTS

Summary	1
Introduction	3
I The Musical Notation or B.M. Add8 MS 14905	10
II The Traditional Tunings of Welsh Harp Music	34
III The Ornaments	79
IV Metre, Rhythm and Harmony	132
1. Introductory	132
2. The harmonic implications of the system of measures	137
3. Analysis of the <i>cyweirdant</i> and <i>tyniad</i> harmonic forms	145
4. Metre	173
5. Expansion of the measures	178
6. The rhythm signs	220
Appendix 1	233
Appendix 2	252
Appendix 3	259
Glossary of Welsh Words	262

Summary

The thesis deals with the early seventeenth century tablature of Welsh harp music in B.M. Add. MS 14905. Reference is made to the passages from 16th century Welsh theoretical works and related material copied into the same MS in the early 18th century, and to the early sources themselves.

The main purpose of the thesis is analysis of the notation used in the MS, as a preparation for the complete transcription of the musical text which forms the accompanying volume. This analysis proceeds in the following stages:

- 1) The Welsh notation is found to combine characteristics of several different harp, lute, and keyboard tablatures of the 15th and 16th centuries, but is identical with none of them.
- 2) Neither key-signatures nor accidentals exist in the tablature. It is therefore assumed that any chromatic inflections implicit in the letter-notation depend on the tuning of the diatonic harp appropriate to each piece. The 16th and 17th century theoretical accounts of the traditional tunings are examined, but with inconclusive results. It is decided on musical grounds, with the support of two analytical appendices, to apply, in general, the major mode on the tonal centre of each piece.
- 3) The ornament signs which govern the articulation and fingering of the melodic writing are examined in the light of a diagram included in the MS, with particular reference to the work of Thurston Dart. [2]
- 4) Specific indications of rhythmic values occur very rarely in the tablature. The interpretation of rhythm in the transcription is therefore dependent on a system of metrical analysis evolved in chapter 4. This system is the product of a discussion of the strict control of harmonic and metrical structure by the 'twenty-four measures'. Its application to those sections of the MS governed by rhythm signs reveals a highly flexible usage of rhythm within the strict metrical framework.

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explain the processes of analysis and deduction which have made possible the complete transcription of the Welsh harp music of B.M. Add. MS 14905, which forms the second volume of this work.

The section of the MS with which we are chiefly concerned runs from p. 15 to p. 112, and was written by a certain Robert ap Huw around the year 1613. It consists of eighty-six pages of intabulated music for the harp together with diagrams of the ornaments, tunings and measures used in this musical tradition, together with some additional information of lesser importance.

As Henry Lewis points out¹ almost nothing is definitely known about the scribe, Robert ap Huw. A close examination of his intabulations reveals such a high standard of accuracy, and evident understanding of the music, that it is very likely that he was at any rate an extremely accomplished harpist, and a fine musician. One indication that he was not a mere scribe copying from a pre-existent written source appears on p. 97 of the MS, in the second *cainc* of *Caniad Llywelyn Delynior*. Here, a short section of tablature has been encircled, and the following note added: "leave out this section ... fault.. fault .. wrong measure" ("gad allan pwnk ...bai .. bai .. tor mesur"). From an analysis of the piece as a whole, it is clear that the deleted passage had strayed from the predetermined harmonic pattern of the piece. The tablature then continues with the correct passage, which changes the original melodic line to suit the new harmonic pattern. This mistake could not result from faulty copying, since the two passages are completely different, and, moreover, the faulty passage follows on naturally from the preceding material, and would be completely satisfactory in its context, but for the departure from the harmonic pattern prescribed by the measure upon which the piece is based.

[4] This is a strong indication that ap Huw could to some extent be regarded as the composer of the music in the form in which he intabulated it. In order to clarify this statement we give the following brief review of the probable historical background to the MS.

Only two sources of this early Welsh music are extant: ap Huw's tablature, and a small, incomplete collection of *clymau* in B.M. Add. MS 14970. The latter is a somewhat inaccurate early 19th century copy by Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg) of a MS which

¹ Professor Henry Lewis: Preface to the University of Wales Press Board facsimile edition of B.M. Add. MS 14905 (1936), pp. vi-vii.

has since been lost. The form of the tablature and the style of the music are so similar to the MS of ap Huw that it seems likely that the lost MS was also written around the turn of the 17th century.

The complete lack of any earlier intabulations is puzzling in view of the sophistication of the notation which, as we point out in chapter 1, is a unique combination of elements found in harp and keyboard tablaturs from as far afield as Germany, Italy and Spain. One possible explanation could be that the notation was developed in a comparatively short time at the end of the 16th century in response to a sudden need to preserve the repertoire in written form.

The Statute of Gruffydd ap Cynan² sets out the repertoire which harpists and *crwth*-players were required to memorise for the various bardic degrees. The insistence of this document on the role of memory and improvisation in the craft of the musician, no mention being made of the ability to intabulate or read music, suggests that until a comparatively late date the repertoire was aurally transmitted.

The 'Statute' describes a strictly organised hierarchical system of professional musicians. The proclamation of the second Caerwys Eisteddfod (1567/8), copied by Lewis Morris on ff. 3b-4a of the ap Huw MS makes it clear that as an essential part of this system, *eisteddfodau*, or competitive examinations were organised, at which degrees were awarded. As a result, professional musicians could operate only under licence from the authorities, issued subject to the [5] attainment of recognised standards of competence, and according to strict rules of personal conduct.

In such circumstances, it is understandable that the musicians working within this competitive system would safeguard their own livelihoods by jealously guarding the technical secrets of their craft from the eyes and ears of "Vagrant and Idle persons naming themselves Minstrells Rithmers and Barths."³ This may well provide us with one good reason why no attempt should have been made to intabulate the musical repertoire until the hierarchical system was on the point of breaking down as a result of social changes at the close of the 16th century.

A second, and possibly even stronger reason could be that improvisation played a crucial role in the musician's craft, and the process of intabulation would tend to crystallise the finer details of ornamentation and melodic content which probably varied from one performance to another.

² B.M. Add. MS 14905, ff. 62a-64a. See Dr Gwyn Thomas: 'The Caerwys Eisteddfodau', Cardiff, 1968, pp. 49-79.

³ B.M. Add. MS 14905, f. 4a.

We are discussing a musical tradition which grew and changed like a succession of living organisms. On the one hand a strict genetic pattern was provided by the codification of the measures, and their association with particular pieces; on the other hand, individual variations occurred through improvisation within this framework. Particularly favoured innovations in melodic figuration, for example, would be integrated into the 'genetic' pattern, and passed on to succeeding generations of performers.

Thus, in the 'Statute' we find that the *pencerdd*, or teacher, had to know an immense repertoire of pieces and "their measures and their rule [the rules which govern the use of the measures], know twenty-four *difre* [variants of the measures?] and the classification of the measures as it is shown in the *Llyfr Dosparth* and be capable of making music himself, faultlessly according to the judgement of [other] *pencerddiaid* ..." ⁴

[6] That significant variations could occur in different versions of the same piece is indicated by occasional discrepancies between the information given in the lists of pieces in N.L.W. MS Panton 56 and the form in which certain of these pieces have come down to us in tablature.

For example, the description of *Caniad y Gwyn Bibydd* on p. 55 of Panton 56 reads: "Can: Gwyn bibydd 12 K [12 *ceinciau*] Tudur bach [based on the measure *tytyr bach*]." In ap Huw's intabulation, however, the piece has thirteen *ceinciau*; this additional material would probably have made an appreciable difference to the total effect of the piece.

Close similarities between the melodic content of different pieces, such as *Caniad y Wefl* and *Caniad Llywelyn Delynior*, or *Caniad Cadwgan* and *Caniad Cynrhig Bencerdd*, together with occasional freedom in the use of measures, and the presence of measures not included in the official list of twenty-four, all suggest that the codification and standardisation of the repertoire were by no means as complete as the contemporary theoretical works imply.

Let us now return to the question of the function of ap Huw as intabulator. The nature of his mistake on p. 91 of the MS makes it clear that he was putting into written form material which he had memorised through aural transmission.

As an accomplished harpist within the tradition, he would have a thorough knowledge of the technique of the ornaments and their fingering, of the measures and their various harmonic manifestations in the pieces intabulated by him. He would have at his command a large stock of standard melodic figurations and a full

⁴ "...ei fesurau ai Rheol, gwybod pedwar ar hugain o Ddifre, a dosparth y mesur megis y mae yn y Llyfr. Dosparth yw dangos a medru gwneuthur Cerdd ei hunan yn ddifai ymarn penceirddiaid," (B.M. Add. MS 14905, f. 62b).

understanding of the variation technique which governs melodic development within individual pieces.

He would introduce details of ornamentation characteristic of his own style of performance -as we point out in chapter 4, the rhythm signs given towards the end of the tablature appear to be intended as a general stylistic guide to rhythmic articulation based on the scribe's own manner of playing, rather than absolute and immutable rhythmic values.

[7] It is regrettable that no alternative intabulations of any of these pieces are extant, since only a comparison of at least two such versions could provide concrete evidence to support these suggestions. At any rate, it is clear that any modern performance of this music should combine accuracy in the reproduction of the notes themselves with a flexible treatment of rhythm within the known metrical framework, for the spirit of indeterminacy so essential to this musical style would be lost if any two performances were identical in this respect.

The transcription given in the second volume of this work is not intended in itself to provide a 'performing version' of the music. It sets out in modern notation the metrical structure of the musical text, and the interpretation of the ornaments and fingerings which are arrived at through the analyses described in the thesis itself. The only 'performing version' which will not lay itself open to misinterpretation must ultimately be the manuscript itself, since ap Huw's tablature is a far more efficient medium for the transmission of its information than any modification of modern notation could be.

In the thesis we have concentrated our attention on the part of B.M. Add. MS 14905 written by ap Huw himself. The additional material copied into the opening and closing pages of the MS by Lewis Morris around 1727 is certainly relevant to the musical tradition, but must not be considered an integral part of the MS. All of the material copied by Morris from 16th and 17th century MSS is accessible in its original form in MSS now in the National Library of Wales, and the British Museum. Since discrepancies are found between different versions of this material, the excerpts copied by Morris cannot be regarded as definitive. Our discussion of the theoretical literature in relation to the music has therefore usually been carried out with reference to the original 16th and early 17th century sources.

In these early sources much valuable information is to be found which was not included by Lewis Morris in the MS. In particular, [8] N.L.W. MS Panton 56 and Cardiff MS Havod 3 both contain lengthy treatises on music which still await thorough investigation. Also in Panton 56 and in N.L.W. MS Gwysaney 28 are lists of pieces for the harp and *crwth* with details of the measures

associated with them and the number of sections, or *ceinciau* they contain.

These lists, like those in the closing pages of B.M. Add. MS 14905, reveal a major tragedy in the loss of by far the greater part of the repertoire of this unique musical tradition. Fortunately the pieces chosen by ap Huw for intabulation appear to be among the most important and popular of their type - we have three of the four *gostegion*, for example, and pieces such as *Caniad Pibau Morfudd* which find frequent mention in the early literature on the subject. It is to be hoped, however, that among the many hitherto uncatalogued MSS of our major libraries, at least one further example of this remarkable music still awaits discovery.

Notes

- 1 Professor Henry Lewis: Preface to the University of Wales Press Board facsimile edition of B.M. Add. MS 14905 (1936), pp. vi-vii.
- 2 B.M. Add. MS 14905, ff. 62a-64a. See Dr Gwyn Thomas: 'The Caerwys Eisteddfodau', Cardiff, 1968, pp. 49-79.
- 3 B.M. Add. MS 14905, f. 4a.
- 4 " ...ei fesurau ai Rheol, gwybod pedwar ar hugain o Ddifre, a dosparth y mesur megis y mae yn y Llyfr. Dosparth yw dangos a medru gwneuthur Cerdd ei hunan yn ddifai ymarn penceirddiaid,..." (B.M. Add. MS 14905, f. 62b).