

The Scottish Medieval Lute

©Rob MacKillop, 2002

[This essay is an outcome of my researches into the medieval lute within Scotland, for which I was granted study leave by the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and the ancient and contemporary oud practices in Morocco and Turkey made possible by a Churchill Travelling Fellowship. Thanks go to both institutions. Other related outcomes include: three commissions (financed by the SAC and the Hope Scott Trust) of new compositions, one for oud (Edward McGuire ~ The Oud Player of Rosslyn), the others for 12 course lute (John Maxwell Geddes ~ The Rosslyn Oud, and John Purser ~ The Old Composer Remembers); my own composition, 'The Healing'; and arrangements for medieval lute of some of the music mentioned in this text, first performed at Boarhills in Fife, 1st February, 2002.]

Introduction

In October 1996, I recorded a CD called **Graysteil**, for Dorian Recordings (DIS-80141). The musicians were William Taylor (clarsach and harp), Paul Rendall (tenor voice), Andy Hunter (traditional ballad singer) and Rob MacKillop (medieval and renaissance lutes). My experience of performing medieval music had been minimal and largely based on intuition, but the recording proved seminal and propitious in its choice of venue: Rosslyn Chapel. Lying some ten miles south of Edinburgh at the village of Roslin, is the ancestral home of the St Clair (Sinclair) family, Rosslyn Castle, which is connected via the interestingly named 'Minstrals Walkway' to the famous Rosslyn Chapel. The name of Rosslyn is Gaelic: Ross – a rocky promontory, Lynn – a waterfall. The Chapel is decorated in a profusion of engravings which are on the receiving end of much revelatory academic attention. In this essay I shall concern myself only with the engravings of three lutars (the Scots word for 'lutenist'), with which I made acquaintance during the aforementioned recording. It was these images which fired my imagination, and led me seven years later on a six-week tour of Morocco and Turkey in search of the roots of the lute in Scotland, and to explore the musical connections between Scotland and the Middle East, echoes of which can still be traced today. The essay is in part academic – the objective gathering a facts and folklore – and also partly subjective and intuitive, in the belief that at some point the facts must leave off and the musician must take over. There are two journeys involved here. One, the physical journey in the present to Morocco and Turkey, where the journey was of significantly less importance and interest than the destination, and Two, the less defined journey back in time in which the destination became less significant than the journey itself.

The Scottish Medieval Lute

The lute is of Asian origin, and in general outline has experienced little constructional change in c.3,000 years. The most important and lasting change – the exact date is unknown, but happened before the 9th century – was the use of bent strips of wood for the back, in place of the gourd or animal shell in use from biblical times. The name also changed at this time

(there are various theories) from *barbat* to *al oud*, meaning 'aloe wood', which became distorted in the West to variations on 'a lute'. There is much debate at present as to how the lute entered Europe, but this essay is restricted in its focus on the lute's early presence in Scotland. It assumes (for much of the evidence is circumstantial) that the lute arrived in Scotland via the Crusades to the Holy Land (and therefore through encounters with France and Muslim and Christian Spain, as well as through Constantinople), through Pilgrimage (a two-way activity, with many Christians travelling from Spain and France to Scotland) and through the influx of 'gypsies' or 'Egyptians' as they were called in Medieval Scotland.

Importantly, the lute's arrival would have coincided with the demise of the Celtic form of Christianity, itself founded upon the North African eremitic tradition (musical traces of which can be found in the 12th century *Inchcolm Antiphoner*),^[i] the beginning of the change from the dominance of the Gaelic language to the use of Scots in Lowland Scotland, and the establishment of a unified nation of Scotland.

Connections between the Scots and the Holy Land are commented on occasionally during the first millennium AD, with Adomnan's *De Locis Sanctis* (c.690) of particular importance^[ii]. The traffic increases exponentially during the Crusades, although the authors of the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320 complain that more Scots would make the journey if only the aggressive English would allow them to do so: 'But how gladly would our lord the king and we ourselves go tither if the king of the English would leave us in peace'. One king who apparently did make the journey was Alexander I (1107-1124) who is said to have been in possession of an Arab horse and Turkish armour, thereby no doubt igniting a passion amongst his nobles for the collection of all kinds of exotic artefacts.

Folk-lore has also preserved remnants of the Crusades, with the artefacts taking on a magical and healing charm. Thus the *bratach shithe*, the fairy banner, of Dunvegan Castle on the Isle of Skye: 'The legend of its origin is that a McLeod who had gone on a Crusade to the Holy Land when returning in the garb of a pilgrim was benighted on the borders of Palestine in a wild and dangerous mountain pass, where by chance he met a hermit who gave him food and shelter. The hermit told him that an evil spirit guarded the pass and never failed to destroy the true believer; but by the aid of a piece of the true cross and certain other directions given by the hermit, this McLeod vanquished and slew the "she-devil"... around whose loins this banner had been tied; and in reward for conveying certain secrets which she wished some earthly friends to know, she revealed to her conqueror the future destinies of his clan...and desired that her girdle be converted into this banner, which was to be attached to her spear, which became the staff which is now lost.' [F.T. McLeod, 'Notes on the Relics preserved in Dunvegan Castle', *PSAS*, xviii (1913), 99-129, at 111].

In 1883 James Mitchell visited the MacPhersons of Cluny: 'In the hall there were various relics of the olden time...There is... a very curious belt of thick morocco leather, with clasps and devices in silver of a religious and oriental character. This had been in the family since the time of the Crusades, one of the Cluny race having gone to Palestine to fight against the Turks. The country people believe there is a charm in the belt, particularly for the safe delivery of women in childbirth.' [J. Mitchell, *Reminiscences of my Life in the Highlands* (1883, reprinted London, 1971), i, 192].

The Stewarts of Ardvorlich owned a *clach dearg*, a sweet red charm-stone which, it is said, had the properties to cure sick cattle when they drank

water in which it had been dipped. This stone was originally owned by the Stewarts of Balquhiddy, and family tradition asserts that it was brought back from the Crusades. [I. Moncrieffe, *The Highland Clans* (London, 1967), 21].

Such imagery could not be expected to go unnoticed by Sir Walter Scott, who, in his novel *The Talisman*, related and embroidered upon the legend of the Lee Penny: a talisman brought from the Holy Land by Sir Simon Lockhart of Lee (14th century), described as 'a medical amulet, for the arrestment of haemorrhage, fever, etc'. [F.M. McNeill, *The Silver Bough* (Glasgow, 1957), i, 94].

And Sir Colin Campbell of Glenorchy (d.1480) had an amulet which he 'woir when he fought in battell at the Rhodes agaynst the Turks', which was held at Taymouth Castle for many years. It is thought that such amulets could heal not just sickness of the body but of the heart also. There is a folk ballad which may have a connection here, and could easily be adapted for performance on medieval instruments. 'Sir Cawline'[iii] was recorded in the 19th-century, yet clearly contains medieval elements. Sir Colin is lying on his death-bed, and calls for Janet, the king's daughter. She kisses him the magical three times, restoring his health, but says that he cannot be her husband...

Verse 8: 'Unless you watch the Orlange hill An at that hill there grows a thorn; There neer cam a liven man frae it, Sin the first nicht I was born' ...to which Sir Colin replies:

9.'Oh I will watch the Orlange hill, Though I waur thinkin to be slain; But I will gie you some love tokens, In case we never meet again'

10.He gae her rings to her fingers, Sae did he ribbons to her hair; He gae her a broach to her briest-bane, For fear that they sud neer meet mair.

Was this broach the same amulet worn by Sir Colin from his time in the Crusades? It clearly held magical powers which could protect the wearer from harm. But whether the two Sir Colins are one and the same is of secondary interest, as the tune and text suffice to provide for a plausible medieval reconstruction of a distinctly medieval subject matter. [I will deal with the practicalities of a lute arrangement later].

Robert Wedderburn of Dundee supplies us with a list of songs, tunes and dances which had become commonplace in Scotland by the mid-16th century and which have roots running deep into the medieval period. In *The Complaynt of Scotland* (c.1550)[iv], Wedderburn recounts his meeting with a group of shepherds and their wives who seem to be in possession of a large repertoire of ballads:

'...robene hude and litil ihone, the meruellis (marvels) of mandiueil (mandeville), the taylor of the young tamlene and of the bald braband, the ryng of the roy Robert, syr eigeir and syr gryme, beuis of southamtonn, the goldin targe...bille vil thou cum by a lute...o lusty maye vitht flora quene...the battle of hayrlau...Greuit is my sorrou...allace that samyn sueit face...'

Most of these references are known to us. There are many versions of Robin Hood, and we shall meet it again later in this essay. 'Tamlene' is probably Tamburlane (Tam Lin appears later in the book). 'Syr eigeir and syr gryme' is better known as the ballad of Graysteil, for which the tune survives in the lute book of Sir William Mure of Rowallan and was recorded by the writer as mentioned in the Prelude to this essay.[v] The 'goldin targe' might possibly be the poem of a mythological arcadia with peculiarly Scottish overtones written in virtuosic aureate style by the great William Dunbar (?1460-?1513), which helpfully contains the lines: 'And eviry one of thir in grene arayit On harp or lute full merily thai playit, And sang balletis with michty notis clere.' Sadly no music survives for any of the poetry of the two great early makars, Dunbar and Henryson, although an improvised accompaniment would not be too difficult, and stylistically not inappropriate. 'O lusty may' has become popular in Scottish early music programmes of late, justifiably so, as the galliard rhythm is utterly infectious. The 'battle of hayrlau' is still very much alive in folk circles, the recorded performance by Andy Hunter being particularly riveting (Lismor LIFC 7002).

Wedderburn goes on to mention the common dances of the day, again some of which emerge happily from the medieval period and can be carried back there with a suitable performance:

'it vas ane celest recreatio to behald ther lycht
 lopene, galmouding stendling, bakuart & forduart,
 dansand base dansis, pauuans, galzardis turdionis,
 braulis, and branglis, buffons vitht mony vthir lycht
 dancis the quhilk ar ouer prolix to be rehersit yit
 nochtheles i sal rehers sa mony as my ingyne can put
 in memorie in the fyrst thai dancit al cristyn mennis
 dance, the northt od scotland, huntis up, the comount
 entray, lang plat fut of gariau, Robene hude, thom of
 lyn, freris al, ennyrnes, the loch of slene, the gosseps
 dance, leuis grene, makky, the speyde, the flail, the
 lammes vynde, soutra, cum kittle me naykyt
 vantounly, schayke leg, fut befor gossep Rank at the
 rute, baglap and al, ihonne ermistrangis dance, the
 alman haye, the bace of voragon, dangeir, the beye,
 the dede dance, the dance of kylryne, the vod and
 the val, schaik a trot'

Tunes survive for 'thom of lyn', 'ihonne ermistrangis dance', but unfortunately no tune or text survives for 'cum kittle me naykyt vantounly'! The improvisers standard fare, the 'base dansis, pauuans, galzardis turdionis, braulis, and branglis, buffons' quite properly belong to the Renaissance period, although early examples show trace elements of the Medieval style.

As for instrumentation, Wedderburn mentions mainly outdoor instruments:

'Thir scheiphirdis ande there vyuis [wives] sang mony
 vthir molodi sangis the quhilkis i hef nocht in
 memorie, than eftir this sueit celest armonye tha
 began to dance in ane ring...Ther vas viij scheiphirdis
 and ilk ane of them hed ane syndry instrament to play
 to the laif, the fyrst hed ane drone bag pipe, the nyxt
 hed ane pipe maid of ane bleddir and of ane reid, the
 thrid playit on ane trump, the feyrd on ane corn pipe,
 the fyft playit on ane pipe maid of ane gait horne, the

sex play on ane recordar the seuint plait on ane fiddil, and the last play on ane quhissil...'

The recorder, fiddle and whistle could also entertain indoors alongside the clarsach, harp and lute.

The lute

The earliest mention of the lute (and gittern) in Scotland comes from Thomas of Ercyldoune (1219-99), the erstwhile Thomas the Rhymer, 13th-century poet and mystic of the Scottish Borders:

**Harpe and fethill both they fandē,
Getterne and als so the sawtrye;
Lutte, and rybybe, both gangande,
And all manner of mynstralsye**

This is one of the earliest mentions of the lute in all of Europe. There are a number of other mentions of the lute in medieval Scotland, most quoted in Phillips,[vi] and chiefly taken from poetry and court accounts. It is clear from the number of payments to lutars as compared to other instrumentalists, that the lute held pride of place within the Scottish court and was used in a Scottish context with Scottish subject matters.

The lute of the mid-13th century generally had four courses of double strings and was plucked with a quill or plectrum of sorts with the emphasis on single notes played against adjacent open strings which could act as transitory drones. Soon a fifth course was added to increase the bass register.

It is not known what tuning or tunings were used by Scottish lutars, nor exactly what techniques were employed. My reconstruction of the Scottish medieval lute playing style and repertoire is drawn from the following three sources:

**Stone engravings
Poetic references, both to the lute specifically and to music performance in general
My own experience of playing a copy of a medieval lute, and observations of modern oud players in Istanbul and Morocco.**

Stone Engravings



There are three lutars engraved in the Lady Chapel in Rosslyn Chapel, where they are to be found alongside other musicians with their instruments, such as bagpipe, fiddle (or viel), harp – a veritable Scottish Consort. The lutars all seem to be playing a similar instrument, possibly a small four-course lute, and close examination in situ reveals them all to be plucking the strings with a plectrum of sorts. The plectra and the rose engravings for the soundholes are clearly visible.

The Chapel was built adjacent to Rosslyn Castle, with a 'Minstrals Walkway' joining the two buildings. Clearly music was of great importance to the founder of the chapel, William St Clair. 'The St Clair family are descendants of Rognvald 'the mighty', Jarl or Chief of the Orkneys and Earl of Moere and Romsdahal in Norway, who was born in 835 AD. His son Rollo first fought and then in 912 made peace with King Charles 'the simple' of France. At the treaty they signed at St Clair-sur-Epte, whence our family takes its name.'[vii] There are number of generations of 'William' St Clair or Sinclair. The first is known to have escorted King Malcolm Canmore's bride, Princess Margaret of Saxony, to Scotland. He was given the responsibility of defending Scotland's border with England, and died carrying out his duties. The North wall of the Chapel holds the burial stone of a later William St Clair who died in 1330, while attempting to escort the heart of Robert the Bruce to the Holy Land. He was succeeded by his grandson, William (1330-58), who married Isabella de Strathearn, daughter of Malise, Earl of Caithness, Strathearn, and Orkney. Their son became the 42nd Earl of Orkney in 1369 and also became the first St Clair Prince of Orkney, as well as holding the titles of Lord Shetland, Lord Sinclair, Lord Chief Justice of Scotland, Admiral of the Seas, Great Protector, and Keeper and Defender of the Prince of Scotland. The Chapel was founded in 1446 by Sir William St Clair, third and last St Clair Prince of Orkney. Sir William died in 1484, but his image survives, engraved onto the walls of the Chapel. To the left of him are 'three cockle shells and an emblem associated with St James. Together with the stars in the roof above they may symbolise the pilgrim's route to Santiago de Compostella (literally 'Saint James of the field of stars') in Spain.'[viii] William is described as 'a very fair man of great

stature, broad bodied, yellow haired, well proportioned, humble, courteous and given to policy as building of castles, palaces and churches'. The St Clair family had been associated with the Knights Templar since the 12th century when Templar leader, Hugues de Payen, Grand Master 1118-36, married Katherine St Clair. Two St Clairs were Grand Masters of the 'Prieuré de Sion', the covert military arm of the Templars. 'Scotland and Portugal were the only two countries of western Europe where the order was not proscribed'.^[ix] And in 1441 – James II made hereditary the position of Grand Master Mason of Scotland to the St Clair family.

I mention all of this to demonstrate that the St Clairs could clearly afford the expense of paying for the best musicians to entertain them, and it is easy to imagine the musicians of the Lady Chapel, in the flesh, entertaining some of Scotland's most powerful guests in the nearby castle chambers.

It is tempting to observe that the third lute pictured above is sporting some kind of turban, and recall that the St Clair family were known to be sympathetic to 'Egyptians'. There are over 100 images of the Green Man – a symbol of fertility – in the Chapel. The Robin Hood legend has roots in this myth, and may well have been performed by gypsies at Rosslyn (the Robene hude mentioned by Wedderburn, above). 'The St Clair family in general, and in particular Sir William St Clair, great grandson of the founder of the Chapel, were known to be sympathetic to the plight of the gypsies in an age when the laws of the country persecuted them severely. In 1599, while Lord Justice General, this Sir William "delivered an Egyptian from the gibbet in the Burrow Moore, ready to be strangled; upon which account the whole body of the gypsies were, of old, accustomed to gather in the Stanks of Rosslyn every year, where they acted severall plays, during the month of May and June. There are two towers which were allowed of their residence, the one called Robin Hood and the other Little John"^[x]

The story of Robin Hood is thought by some to have developed out of the myths surrounding the guerrilla tactics of William Wallace, and an improvised accompaniment to a recitation from Blind Harry's Wallace would be of interest. Nor should we overlook Henryson's Robene and Makyne, whose tune might well be lurking amongst the variants collected in the 19th century by Child/Bronson.^[xi]

Rosslyn Chapel also attracted pilgrims, and it has been argued by the authors of *Rosslyn ~ Guardian of the Secrets of the Holy Grail*^[xii] that the chapel marked the culmination of a seven-fold path to enlightenment, journeying from the Cathedral of St James at Compostella, through France to Scotland. Pilgrims are famed, thanks to Chaucer and others, for providing their own or attracting entertainment, which very often included portable musical instruments, and it is not unlikely that the lute and other instruments played in Spain of the 13th to 16th centuries would have found their way to Scotland by such a route.

Poetic References

Thomas the Rhymer's early mention of the lute (quoted above) predates any European use of the word in a Romantic poetic sense. He is simply describing what he saw: Scottish musicians playing harp, fiddle, gittern, psaltery, lute and the North African 'rybybe' or rabab (a kind of bowed rectangular guitar), and 'all manner of mynstralsye' – doubtless referring to singing, dancing, performing plays, recitations, comedy, tragedy (Cf. Polonius).

The mixture of gut and wire plucked sounds with drones provided by the bowed instruments would have created a very engaging sound capable of great subtlety and nuance in quieter music, and quite a rhythmical racket in dance music. Later Scots poets such as Richard Holland (c.1450), Gawain Douglass (d.1522) and Alexander Hume (1556-1609) would similarly describe the lute as being but one part of a heavenly clanjamfrie of sound. Douglass, in *The Palice of Honour*, even attempts to describe to us the sort of music performed at the Scottish court:

In modulation hard I sing
 Faburdoun, pricksong, discant, countering,
 Cant organe, figuratioun, and gemmel,
 On croud, lute, harp...

Such technical devises were later described in some detail in the anonymous *Art of Music* (Edinburgh c.1570), a very revealing document of the Scottish compositional mind at work, retaining many medievalisms amongst a somewhat confused but highly creative contemporary Renaissance music theory and practice. The medieval lute, sounding single notes with a quill, would have played an important part in such ensemble playing, providing, in Douglass's words, 'soft releschingis in dulce deliverning'.

Medieval Lute Technique

We must be careful not to assume that the tunings and techniques used for the lute in medieval Scotland were the same as for the Middle-East or the European Continent, nor should we readily assume otherwise. Scotland may be geographically distant from the Mediterranean or the heart of Europe, but in politics and trade, and cultural exchange also, Scotland seems to have been very involved.

Crawford Young[xiii] cites a number of early sources – all from the 1480s and 90s – which seem to indicate early version of Renaissance lute tuning. The earliest, from Ramos de Pareja's *Musica Practica*, is accompanied by a note stating that the tuning given is the most common but that others are used according to the taste of the individual. This is good advice, and an analogy can be found in modern so-called 'Celtic' guitar styles where the standard guitar tuning has given way to a plethora of alternative tunings such as DADGAD, CGCGCD, 'Open G' and many others.

The tuning I have found most useful for the Scottish repertoire I have concerned myself with, is DGdga. The use of the major second between the top two courses is an echo of the 'New Persian tuning' referred to by Henry George Farmer: cdga.[xiv] This tuning could be adapted for a modern six-string guitar, as (from the bass upwards) DGDGAD.

Various types of plectra were used in the Medieval period, such as feathers, wood, bone and horn, and many paintings show fairly clearly the technique used. The plectrum would be held either between thumb and index finger, or between index and middle finger. The degree of bend (which could be varied by the player from one note to the next), of the, for example, quill, allows a wide degree of tonal variation, from soft stroking to hard striking. Possibly a player would use a different kind of plectrum for different musical scenarios – solo or ensemble, for instance.

Young[xv] argues convincingly that the use of a plectrum should not automatically indicate a monophonic performance, and posits a style of 'plectrum polyphony' as a reasonable assumption for a possible alternative

performance practice. I entirely agree. It is possible to perform Bach's cello suites, as written, on an electric guitar with a small plectrum. Bach's use of implied polyphony, although much removed in style from the medieval aesthetic, is technically close to Young's plectrum polyphony.

Almost all the European lutes depicted before c.1400 show a fretless lute, and therefore, by implication, any temperament could be used without problem. Once the instrument became fretted, however, we have to decide where to place the frets. There seem to have been two distinct temperament systems in use in Medieval Scotland. Throughout Europe, the interval of a third seems to have been regarded as quite dissonant, with perfect fourths and fifths being used as the favoured intervals for parallel organum. The Hymn To Saint Magnus of the 13th century St Andrews Music Book, on the other hand, is almost entirely in parallel thirds. This might imply a unique appreciation by the Scots for the interval of a third, or (more likely) that they were using a different temperament. Put simply, whilst the Pythagorean system of pure fifths and 'out of tune' thirds, dominated Europe before the late 15th century, the Scots seem to have favoured a temperament such as quarter comma mean-tone which provided sweet thirds (with some 'wild' fifths and fourths). But we must also allow for the bagpipe, which is tuned to the Pythagorean system. In Scotland, the modern bagpipe is the sole survivor of this Medieval tuning system which might itself have roots in India and the Middle-East.

In practice, as opposed to in theory, lutars would have played 'by ear' and adjusted the positioning of the frets for different modes. I have found myself using more fret positions on the Medieval lute than on any other period lute, to the point where I can no longer describe accurately the temperament I am using. Such a non-scientific stance is entirely defensible and not without historical precedence.

Playing single notes on a lute with a plectrum is relatively straightforward, yet is unlikely to have been the sole technique and style. A casual observance of folk and classical oud performers in Istanbul and Morocco reveals a far more physical use of the instrument with open strings on either side of the principal note being used as passing or even permanent drones. Such a technique is fundamental to folk guitar styles as well as other fretted instruments. The wide string spacing at the bridge on many Medieval depictions of lutes, implies a somewhat vigorous stroke.

The left hand is rarely debated in lute literature, yet there must be the possibility, observed in some present day oud players, that only two fingers were used regularly, the index and middle, with slides and position shifts of one 'fret' common to the technique and therefore resultant sound. Such a technique is especially common on longer-necked lutes such as the saz, and therefore might not have been employed on the short-necked Medieval lutes.

Six reconstructions

I present here the melodic outlines of six songs of medieval origin. The arrangements are presented in lute tablature and are basic in outline. They correspond in order to the recorded tracks accompanying this essay [both the arrangements and the recordings are available on loan from the library of The Royal Scottish Academy of Music - I hope to get them online some day]. The recorded performances are not academic sound files of the written examples, but engaged performances with much elaboration in the lute part. Unfortunately I cannot sing in tune, so please excuse the highly inauthentic microtonal shifts! (Mercifully I have only included two or three

verses of each song).

My technique is based on the above discussion and has been 'internalised' over ten years or so of playing medieval lute. I have tried to show different levels of playing from the basic accompaniment style to virtuoso solo performance.

Battle o the Harlaw

Mentioned in *The Complaynt of Scotland* (c.1550).[xvi] This ballad was first brought to my attention by the singing of Andy Hunter on the cassette, 'King Fareweel' (Lismore LIFC 7002), where Andy's voice is accompanied by the bagpipes. There is a timeless, one might even say medieval, quality to Andy's performance which might have influenced my own. The lute and pipes seem to have entered Scotland at roughly the same time and in roughly the same way, and the pipes are also depicted in the Rosslyn engravings. The air seems to demand a drone-style accompaniment and could be fingered entirely in one position, although the written arrangement uses two positions.

Sir Cawline

The air follows the common bi-chordal outline found in many medieval tunes – most notably 'The Hymn To Saint Magnus' (recorded on '[Graysteil](#)' Dorian Recordings DIS-80141). Such alternating chords have been labelled by Purser, Taylor and others as 'Home' and 'Away' chords, and appear in the Ap Hew harp ms (recorded in the 17th century yet purporting to be remnants of medieval harp technique and repertoire) as combinations of binary ones and zeros. This medieval aesthetic survives in the so-called 'double-tonic' chordal alternation common to pipe and fiddle tunes.

True Thomas

Evidence for the Dorian mode in Scottish music can be traced as far back as the 13th century *Ex Te Lux Oritur* (see below) of the Saint Andrews Music Book. The versions referred to by Scott go beyond the Dorian outline and seem to be of English origin. The Blaikie version from Dundee retains more of a medieval quality in its closing phrase, and I have therefore used elements of both surviving examples.

King Orfeo

Recorded in the early 20th century in Shetland but clearly of medieval origin, this ballad contains a refrain sung in Norn, the ancient Norse language: Scowan urla grun...Whar giorten han grun orlac ~ The wood is green early where the stag goes yearly – symbolising rebirth, spiritual as well as physical: an extraordinarily subtle reference to the Celtic version of Orpheus wherein the hero does not die and is reunited with his female half. The first two notes of the melody are the same as the last two: a musical representation of the image of the snake devouring its own tail as depicted in *The Book of Kells* and many other Celtic illustrations. This has to be regarded as one of our greatest ballads, but is woefully underperformed.

Salve Splendor from the Inchcolm Antiphoner (c.1300)

Here I have deliberately not followed the melodic notation exactly but have used it as the basis of a free improvisation, a commentary on different aspects of the melodic outline and the textual reveration of Saint Columba,

the patron saint of the monks of Inchcolm. My source for this melody is Purser's Scotland's Music. [Here is an Mp3 file of this piece, performed by Rob MacKillop. I first play an improvised prelude, before Salve Splendor begins at around 1 minute 20 seconds.](#)

Ex Te Lux Oritur

Transcribed by Dr Warwick Edwards and published in Purser's Scotland's Music, this joyful celebration of the wedding in 1281 between King Eric of Norway and the daughter of Alexander III of Scotland, Princess Margaret, is in the Dorian mode throughout. Falling easily into a triple-time metre, the dance-like quality lends itself easily to a solo lute performance, yet it would be difficult to argue that it was ever performed this way. It does however allow us a glimpse of the virtuoso style doubtless indulged in by one of the court's many professional lutars, and highlights the rhythmical incisiveness afforded by a vigorous plectrum technique. [Here is an Mp3 file of this song as performed by Paul Rendall \(voice\), William Taylor \(clarsach\) and Rob MacKillop \(medieval lute\).](#)

Conclusion

It is clear from literary and iconographical references that the lute enjoyed a healthy position in the courts and great houses of Medieval Scotland. By adapting the surviving vocal music from monks and bards to a reconstruction of the instrument played in a manner interpolated from Medieval iconographical and literary sources as well as present-day performers in Turkey and the Middle and Near-East, we can go some way towards recreating the style, technique and repertoire used by Scottish lutars of the Medieval period. The lute was to go on to make a considerable and significant contribution to Scottish music of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, and has lately drawn the attention of modern composers, writing in a very contemporary Scottish style, yet influenced by the Middle-Eastern origins of the instrument. So great has been the contribution by the lute to Scottish music over the past millennium, that it should not be too controversial to regard the instrument alongside the clarsach, fiddle and bagpipe (the latter two instruments bearing a similar lineage to the lute) as one of Scotland's 'National instruments'.

Rob MacKillop Tayport, 6.4.02 ©MacKillop, 2002

[i] Scotland's Music John Purser (Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh 1992)

[ii] Much of the historical material included at the start of this essay was garnered from Scotland and the Crusades 1095-1560 by Alan Macquarrie (John Donald Publishers, Edinburgh 1997). In his introduction, Professor Macquarrie laments that not enough genuine historical inquiry has been undertaken of this period of Scottish history.

[iii] Child, 61, with tune: Child 5.415, from the Harris manuscript, fol.5b. Text quoted from Scottish Ballads, edited by Emily Lyle, Canongate Classics, Edinburgh, 1997 edition).

[iv] The Complaynt of Scotland by Robert Wedderburn, Dundee c.1550. Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh 1979.

[v] In modern times, John Purser was the first to put tune and text together, being recorded by Andy Hunter with harp accompaniment for Purser's BBC Radio Scotland series, 'Scotland's Music'.

- [vi] **Music for the Lute in Scotland by Robert Phillips. Kinmor Music. Temple 1995.**
- [vii] **Rosslyn Chapel by The Earl of Rosslyn (pub. by Rosslyn Chapel Trust, 1997).**
- [viii] **Op. cit.**
- [ix] **Rosslyn ~ Guardians of the Secrets of the Holy Grail, Tim Wallace-Murphy and Marilyn Hopkins (Element Books, 1999)**
- [x] **Op. cit.**
- [xi] **The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads, Bertrand Harris Bronson (Princeton University Press)** [xii] **Rosslyn ~ Guardians of the Secrets of the Holy Grail**
- [xiii] **Lute, Gittern, & Citole, Crawford Young, chapter 25 in A Performer's Guide to Medieval Music (Early Music America, Indiana University Press, 2000)**
- [xiv] **Rebab in Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, vol.11, Kassel: Barenreiter, 1960. Quoted in Young, op.cit.**
- [xv] **Young, op. cit.**
- [xvi] **The Complaynt of Scotland by Robert Wedderburn, Dundee c.1550. (Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh 1979).**