

Beirdd yr Uchelwyr

The manuscript sources

Beirdd yr Uchelwyr: the manuscript sources

Mainly copies made by 16th- and 17th-century antiquaries

Notable examples: William Salesbury, Thomas Wiliems of Trefriw, John Jones of Gellilyfdy, John Davies of Mallwyd, William Bodwrda

Many copyists were active poets, or at least competent in the rules of *cynganedd*.
Problem?

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Preservation of autograph copies becomes more common by late 15C

In the case of Dafydd ap Gwilym, Iolo Goch and Guto'r Glyn, apart from a few speculative examples, no autograph poetry has survived

Were they literate?

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Y Traddodiad Llafar (oral
transmission)

Oral transmission of some kind
is beyond dispute, but for how
long (years? decades?
centuries?) is matter for debate



Cynghanedd (lit. ‘harmony’)

- A complex system of alliteration, consonance and internal rhyme whose roots are found in the work of Beirdd y Tywysogion but which appears to have been formally codified in the 14th century
 - Four main types: llusg, sain, traws, croes
 - Designed to appeal to the ear and perhaps aid the memory
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Cywydd

- Probably derived from an earlier, simpler, less respected metre, the *traethodl*
 - An unlimited series of rhymed couplets, one rhyme stressed and the other unstressed, seven syllables in each line, on *cynganedd*
 - Perhaps invented, almost certainly pioneered and popularised by Dafydd ap Gwilym and his contemporaries in the early decades of the 14th century
 - Dislodged the *awdl* as the main metre for singing praise poetry
 - But to what extent?
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‘My first love was a plover’ (Twm Morys)

My first love | was a **plover**; Llusg
Beautiful things | her wings | **were**. sain
Tiny | eyes shining at **night** – traws
Though mainly | in **the moonlight**. Croes (*f, r, m, n*)
We ate leeks | at a lakeside,
I caressed | her crest, | and cried $dh = t$ (hardening)
All night. Then the kite called,
Unshaven and dishevelled.
He saw from the bristling sedge
My playmate’s handsome plumage.
She made a tryst, kissed the kite
So dearly in the starlight.
I thought of only one thing:
My plover lover leaving.