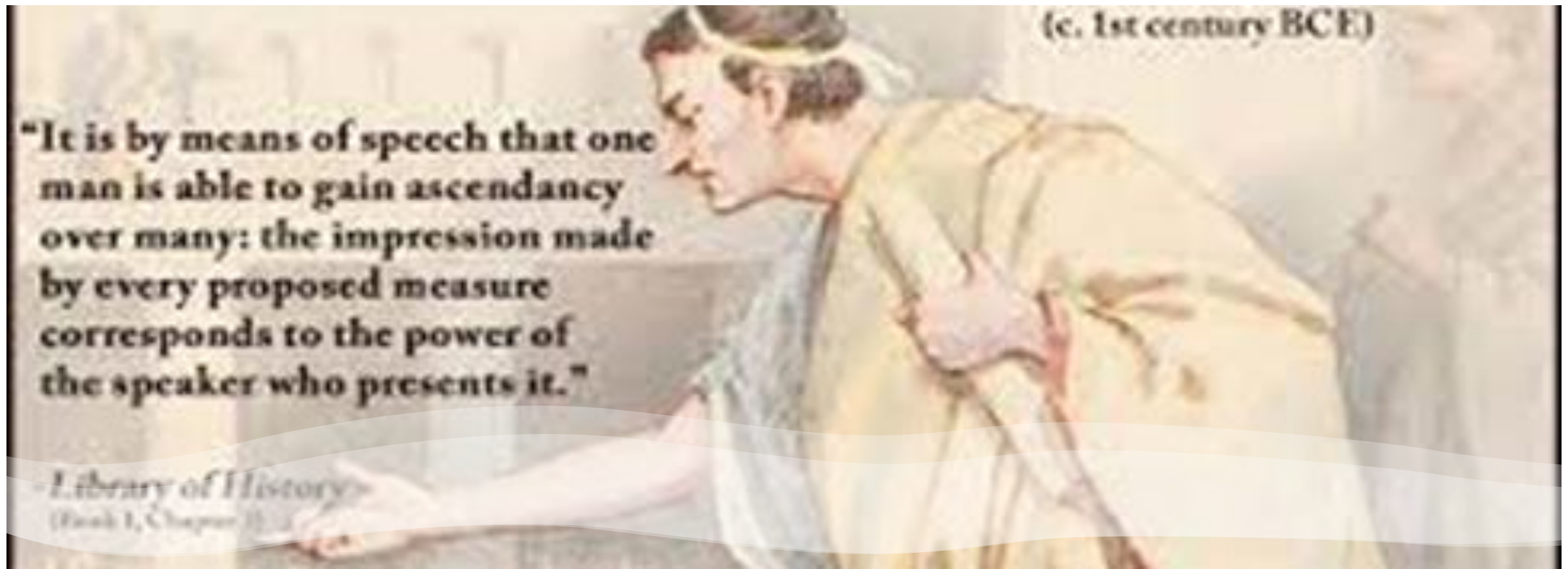




Subject:- Diodorus Siculus' comments on the Gaulish Bards in the 'Bibliothèque Historique' [BH] and the presenter's observations on their British Counterparts. . .

Opening question : What does Diodorus tell us ?

BH V , 31. 2

‘ poietai melon ous Bardous onomazousin Outoi de
met organon tais llyrais

[the Gauls have] ‘ *Verse-makers of Bards so-called . . . with lyre-
like instruments*’

V.31.1 ‘ The Gauls are terrifying in aspect . . . and they like to talk in
superlatives, to the end that they may extol themselves and deprecate all
other men. . . fond of pompous language,

. . . Among them are also to be found lyric poets whom they call Bards.
These men sing to the accompaniment of instruments which are like lyres,
and their songs may be either of praise or of obloquy.

Question . . .

At the opposite end of the so-called Celtic world, the Gododin tribe, north of Hadrian's Wall, and in the territory of Rheged to the south-west of them, did the same hold true with the 'beird o vrython' [the bards/poets of Britain]? The following discussion is a brief appraisal. We shall consider two post-Roman bards amongst other matters

Firstly, the evidence for the Gaulish bardic functionality, limited though it is



... excavated In Brittany (Paule) in the latter half of the 20th century, a statuette suggesting a high status member of society or possibly even personification of a Celtic muse? Points to note:

- ☐ Wears a torc around the neck
- ☐ Holds a compact lyre in front of around 7 strings
- ☐ Seems to have a second lower crossbar which might have had some function in altering the pitch of the string ? Experimenting with recreations of such instruments might clarify this



5/

Status of the instrument ?

The lyre can be considered as the principal instrument of the ancient world and emblematic of the Mediterranean, found in a variety of forms ranging from the size of the example above up to very large 'Kithara' types, typical of public performance at the Pythian and Isthmian Games.



In 1st century AD Britain what evidence is there for knowledge of this cultural medium ?

The Roman hierarchy as seen from the British perspective

Cassius Dio (Lucius Cassius Dio)

Cassius Dio's Roman History and historical account of first century Roman occupation of Britain : What does he tell us in part **LXII: 1 -5**

The Icenian **Queen Boudouika** and her denunciation of Nero Claudius Germanicus (Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus) as poor lyre player, kitharist and chanter with the kithara

‘Neron . . .
adei kai kitharizei kai kallopizetai .
. kitharodo, kai touto kako douleuontas .
. . .

. . . according to Lucius, she doesn't rate Nero as great artist. He is a kind of foolish exhibitionist, parading as a would-be Greek professional pantomime performer. So, did the British bards who survived the occupation of Britain have a strong lyre tradition? Some initial thoughts to consider follow . . .



Gildas (6th century Romano-British chronicler and commentator) or a later author writing in his name . . .

‘Epistoli de Novissimis Diebus’ (chapter 31 De Excidio Brittonum)

In condemnation of the great British King, Maglocunas and possibly referring to the king’s parasitic inner circle, including bardic elements

‘Et tu Maglocunas . . .

Arrecto aurium auscultantur captu non dei laudes canora Christi
tironum voce sauviter modulante neumaque ecclesiasticae
melodiae sed propriae quae nihil sunt furciferorum referto
mendaciis simulque spumanti flegmate proximos quosque
roscidaturo praeconum ore ritu bacchantium concrepante. . . etc.

An attempt at translation by the presenter (not yet finalised and open to collaboration and restructuring)

'Erect of ears you hear with captive attention not the songs in praise of Christ given by sweet voices of the modulated notes of the ecclesiastical melodies, but yet strictly for yourself in which place nothing exists, slaves for one's interest or advantage prone to lying at the same time foaming, a clammy humor of the body, very lately draw near, to praise, to rattle, clash, resound in this manner' etc. [suggesting musical instrumentation]

9/ Points to note at this stage (mid 6th century):

- * No mention of 'Bards' in Britain by Gildas. But he does emphasize the parasitic group of sycophants in a condemnatory way who accompany the great king**
- * No specific mention of a musical instrument, but suggested as an opposing entertainment to the sweet sound of the ecclesiastical chant**
- * No mention of 'harp' or 'lyre' in any of its literary forms directly connected with the king, but generally paraphrases the Old Testament Book of Isaiah and the banqueting scenarios of wine and plucked sounds at various points in the Epistle**

10/

What do 6th century (Welsh) poets Aneirin and Taliesin say about praise of the patron? Are they 'singing' his praises? Are they plucking stringed instruments?

Difficult to say. No mention of lyre or 'Crwth' as presently seen. But they are adamant about their role, celebrating the deeds and generosity of historical British leaders such as Urien Rheged. Certainly do reflect the comments made by Diodorus on the manner of speech of the Gauls. They, too, speak. . . 'in superlatives, to the end that they may extol themselves and deprecate all other men'.



11/
Another
possibility - the
Chief or King in
the role of
the Bard?

Some limited evidence
(to be further
investigated) of the
possibility that the
Head of State
/territory also took on
the role. . . for
example

'Uthyr Pen', of the
Marwnat Vthyr Pen, in
the 'The book of
Taliesin' (p. 71.7 -
72.8)

. . . describes himself
as a 'talented bard'
and performer on the
harp, lyre and pipes
(telyn, crwth, pibiau) in
his imagined
deathsong, 'marwnat',
from beyond the grave





12/ So what had become of the ‘lyre-like’ instruments presumably played in pre-Britannic America where the lyrist statuette was found?

Surprisingly, we find something like it turning up among the Angles, in the 7th century, in East Anglia. We find that they have a ‘softer’ side to their psyche, in that they apparently like the sound of a well-plucked lyre. And here for the first time in secular texts we see evidence for the term ‘harp’ [meaning Germanic lyre]. For example, in the poem **Beowulf**, we find the fiend from Hell, Grendel, lurking in the shadows. . . he suffers, every day, “noise of revelry loud in the hall; there was harp harmony, sweetly sang scop’s” . . .

*þæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde
hludne in healle; þær wæs hearpan sweg,
swutol sang scopes*

The Beowulf poet lines 86 - 90 *Beowulf* (image: remnants of excavated lyre from the Sutton Hoo ship burial, East Anglia, 7th century AD)



Apart from the crumbling remains discovered in Anglian ship and other burial sites, we eventually see the lyre transformed into an instrument not exclusively for secular use, but more in keeping with support for the Psalms of David, as interpreted in the *Vespasian Psalter* from the British Library (BL 25668-2). The accompanying image depicts King David dressed in what appears to be ecclesiastical vestments (circa 750 AD) in the act of composition. The instrument shown would have been referred to in at least one of two different languages at this time. For example: 'rotta', 'cithara', 'hearpe', 'psalterio'.

Quo vadis ? A possible way forward . . . a ‘roadmap’ ?

Some immediate thoughts . . . open to comment from the meeting contributors.

Diodorus’ comments can be corroborated to some extent by compiling material and data from existing British resources. But, the foregoing is very much a work in progress. Any comments /reactions/ advice would be welcomed over the summer, when some further research will be attempted and some tightening-up of the methodology involved in the project. Or even splitting the project into a review of bardic history in Britain on one hand, and a more extensive examination of very early plucked instrumentation on the other. It is potentially a very extensive, complex research environment, involving, as far as I can see, Iron Age British sites, burial sites, musical instrument fragments, sometimes cryptic comments, a review of pictorial sources, amongst others.

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