Thomas Tallis: Chronology, Contexts, Discoveries

A Study Day

*Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge*

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**Abstracts**

***Thomas Tallis at Dover Priory,******1530-1531***

**Roger Bowers**

Commonly the sole means for establishment of the date of birth of a composer, and thus also of his place within the chronological continuum, is consideration of the location, date, and character of his earliest known employment. In the case of Thomas Tallis this was the Benedictine priory of St Martin in Dover, within the text of a detailed financial account of which he was recorded as having served as *ioculator organorum* (organ-player) throughout the year Michaelmas 1530 to Michaelmas 1531. This document discloses also some indication of the musical resources, in terms of organ and singing-boys, placed at his disposal in this appointment, while study of the contracts of employment of other musicians holding similar posts elsewhere suggests some appreciation of the duties expected of him. This position emerges as relatively humble and far from challenging, and appears to have been best suited to discharge by some talented but still youthful musician at the very start of his adult career.

Meanwhile, the appearance of his antiphon ‘Salve intemerata dei mater’ in BL MS Harley 1709 shows that even before his appointment to Dover Tallis was already a composer of some considerable accomplishment. The association of the chapel of the household of its then patron, William Warham, archbishop of Canterbury, with Dover Priory may suggest both a locale for Tallis’s earliest training as a youth, and an identification for the source of the patronage which secured him this employment at Dover, the withdrawal of which upon Warham’s death in August 1532 may explain the stuttering nature of Tallis’s career throughout the rest of the 1530s.

***Variations on a psalm by Thomas Tallis***

**John Milsom**

We have Ralph Vaughan Williams to thank for popularising Tallis’s so-called ‘Third Tune’, a setting of Archbishop Matthew Parker’s verse paraphrase of Psalm 2, ‘Why fumeth in sight the Gentils spyght’. Under Vaughan Williams's editorship, Tallis’s ‘tune’ was included in *The English Hymnal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1906), and it then became the main theme of his own *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* for two string orchestras (composed 1910, rev. 1913, 2nd rev. 1919, first published 1921). What Vaughan Williams seems not to have appreciated, however, is that his transcription of Tallis’s ‘tune’ from its original source – Matthew Parker’s *The whole psalter translated into English metre*(London: John Day, [1567]) – is questionable on several counts.

Subsequent editions of Tallis’s ‘tune’, made variously for printed hymnals, scholarly editions, performing editions and recordings, have arrived at different solutions, some of which sound quite unlike the one created by Vaughan Williams. In this article I discuss the ambiguities that exist within the original notation, I locate the typographical reasons why they exist, I propose a new reading of the piece that diverges from all others published to date, and I explain why it may in fact never be possible to know Tallis’s intentions. During its course, the article briefly explores the broad issue of ‘appendancy’ in Tudor musical sources, addressing in particular the following three questions: (1) when a sharp symbol appears on a stave, does it have continued force along the stave? (2) if so, how can we know? – and (3) by what means can that force be cancelled? The article will be supported by images drawn from 16th- and 20th-century sources, and by music examples.

***New evidence of Tallis’s Elizabethan anthem style***

**Kerry McCarthy**

Tallis’s anthem *O Lord give thy Holy Spirit* can be firmly dated to the Elizabethan period. Its text originated as a personal prayer by John Ledley, a religious radical and “Freewiller” persecuted during the reign of Queen Mary. This text first appears in its rather eccentric original form in*Godly meditacions verye necessarie to bee sayde of all Christen men* (STC 17776), printed clandestinely at some point between 1554 and 1558 for private devotional use in Ledley’s circles. It does not appear in the more conventional form set by Tallis until its inclusion in *Certayne godly exarcises* (STC 10617), undated but published c. 1565, and in numerous dated sources beginning in 1566. Several of Tallis’s anthems (*If ye love me, Hear the voice and prayer*, etc.) survive in pre-1553 manuscripts and are thus demonstrably Edwardian. It is useful to know of one which is demonstrably Elizabethan. This discovery is a small but useful signpost for further discussion of Tallis’s English-texted music and its stylistic development.

***The Five-Part English Litany of 1544: Seventeenth-Century Traces of “the Notes Sung in the King’s Majesty’s Chapel”***

**Andrew Johnstone**

From the seventeenth century to the early twentieth, one of the works that chiefly sustained the name and reputation of Thomas Tallis was also one of the most widely bastardized settings of English vernacular liturgy, the celebrated Five-Part Litany (EECM 13, no. 12). Yet although modern scholars have continued to take it for granted, Tallis’s claim to this work still rests on anachronistic attributions: no sixteenth-century sources of the Litany are known, and signs of adaptation are already evident in most of the oldest surviving copies. It has for some time been suspected, however, that the Five-Part Litany is none other than the work of that description known to have been composed for Henry VIII’s Chapel Royal and printed in 1544. This paper will examine hitherto overlooked seventeenth-century evidence for identifying the extant Litany with the lost print, and the implications this has for Tallis’s authorship.

***Praying for a safe delivery: Queen Mary, Thomas Tallis and the Chronology of mid-Tudor Music***

**Magnus Williamson**

During the central decades of the sixteenth century English polyphony underwent a stylistic transformation, typified by the adoption of continental forms of imitation. Pinpointing when, how and why this took place has been complicated by the relative lack of securely datable sources, especially from the 1550s, and by the doctrinal tergiversations that characterised the English Reformation between the 1540s and the 1560s. Thomas Tallis's *O sacrum convivium* offers a case in point: originally a viol fantasia, it was subsequently reworked by Tallis as a Latin motet and eventually included in the *Cantiones*of 1575.  The surviving manuscript evidence has been taken to suggest a date in the mid-to-late 1560s for the composition and subsequent reworking to have happened. A copy of the 1545 edition of the Salisbury Processional, now at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (F-Pn Rés. B-1852), points towards a composition date of 1555 or earlier for the motet: tipped into this book is a copy of Tallis’s polyphony along with litany invocations to a pregnant Queen Mary (‘mariam reginam gravidam’).  This points decisively towards the first half of 1555, when Mary Tudor was believed to carry the male heir who would secure the Catholic succession. This provides a chronological fixed point in the evolution of this stylistically important motet (which was also contrafacted as an English anthem); it also casts light on metropolitan politics under Mary Tudor, and the role of public processions in the enforcement of traditional religion.

***‘Deliuer me from my deceytful ennemies':* *A Tallis Contrafactum in Time of War***

**David Skinner**

Thomas Tallis’s *Gaude gloriosa dei mater*is one of the finest of the large-scale Tudor votive antiphons. It has long been regarded as a celebration of the short-lived return to Catholicism under Queen Mary and as a tribute to the Henrician masterpieces of the pre-Reformation years. All of the sources are Elizabethan, but one: incomplete fragments of the contratenor part with a hitherto unidentified English text, discovered in 1978 during building renovations at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. The author of that text has been now identified as Henry VIII’s sixth and last queen, Katherine Parr. Less than a year after her marriage to Henry, Katherine produced her first publication *Psalms or Prayers* (1544). These included fifteen psalm-collages (or psalm ‘centos’) translated into English from Fisher’s *Psalmi sue precationes,* originally published in 1525. Katherine’s translations are followed by a prayer for the King, and another ‘for men to saie entryng into battaile’. England was at war with Scotland and France. The Ninth Psalm ‘Se lorde and behold’, headed ‘agaynst ennemies’ was set to an earlier version of Tallis’s *Gaude gloriosa.* This discovery sheds light the circumstances behind the production of this most extraordinary of English *contrafacta*. It is here argued that the adaptation was not only intimately bound with *Psalms or prayers* but also Cranmer’s *Exhortation unto prayer*and English Litany, and part of a crescendo of activity leading to its first use at St Paul’s Cathedral on Friday, 23 May. It would have been a unique and short-lived event quite new to the liturgical stage involving at its centrepiece an English version of the most complex of early Tudor votive antiphons with stirring themes of war. More personally, the exercise seems aptly to demonstrate Katherine’s passion for reform and Henry’s growing conservatism in the final years of his reign: a meld of a hotly topical vernacular text with an established stylistic idiom. The earlier Henrician origins of *Gaude gloriosa* are also considered.