

Thesis of a dissertation

Mira Farkas

Eliash Parish Alvars' influential role
in the history of the harp

Supervisor: András Batta (PhD)

The Liszt Academy of Music

28th Doctoral School of Arts and Cultural History

Budapest

2023

I. A prelude to research

There have been some summative writings about the history of harp, or about the significant harpists of the 19th century accessible in Hungarian language as well, for instance Andrea Vigh's DLA Dissertation (2008), or Mercz Nóra's book called *A mágikus hárfa*. During research, there has been considerably little data accessible concerning the life and work of Eliash Parish Alvars, for this reason foreign language resources were also used. Most of the topic related literature is primarily available in English, such as Roslyn Rensch's book called *Harps and Harpists*. Any other study besides the presentation of Alvars' life and relations that would examine his impact on harp techniques and composing has not been conducted in Hungarian language yet.

II. Sources

The main sources of my research are the book by Floraleda Sacchi titled *Eliash Parish Alvars Life, Music, Document* that has been indispensable to provide a detailed biography, in addition the unpublished sketches of Alvars' harp lessons, titled *New Method for the Harp*, indicating a new form of methodology.

Further important sources of the study regarding the appearance and the reception of the double- action pedal harp and the contemporary harpists of Alvars' age are Wenonah Milton Govea's book *Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Harpists*, Roslyn Rensch's work *Harps and Harpist* and some studies from *American Harp Journal*.

III. Methodology

Beyond giving a detailed summary of Alvars' biography, the major objective of the first part of the dissertation is to give an overall view of the era based on the accessible literature. Furthermore, I find it relevant to address the preliminaries, including the appearance and reception of the double-action pedal harp following the single-action pedal harp, or to present the contemporary harpists to demonstrate and emphasize Alvars' importance.

Whereas the second part of the dissertation examines Alvars' work in the light of his technical innovations, attached samples of sheet music serve to support and demonstrate my observations. Subsequently, I aim to present the work *New Method for the Harp*, which caused some difficulty during the analysis due to its illegible and damaged pages at some points. I find it important to approach Alvars as a composer as well, therefore, I analyzed his work called *Serenade op. 83*, based on his technical innovations.

Finally in the last chapter, besides the demonstration of Alvars' relations, my main objective was to prove his impact on other composers and on harp literature, supporting my observations with samples of sheet music.

IV. Results

Regarding the choice of dissertation topic, it was crucial to find a harpist, who contributed to the success of harp being treated as a soloist instrument, moreover whose impact on the development of harp technique and literature is indisputable.

This paper attempts to introduce Alvars as a virtuosic artist, who was also mentioned as „the Liszt of the harp” by his contemporaries. Besides his strong relevance as a performer, I also studied his innovations and the impact of his work on current state of harp techniques. Taken together, these studies suggest that Alvars is underappreciated both nationally and internationally, although there has been an increasing interest towards him recently and his works are being performed more often.

V. Documentation of the dissertation's subject related activities

While conducting the study, I played several solo and chamber works by Parish Alvars. Recently, I have had the opportunity to perform as a solo artist within the confines of the Gödöllő International Harp Festival recorded by Radio Bartók. Furthermore, I aim to transfer the harp technique specific knowledge obtained from my research as a high school and university teacher.