

DAVIES, JAMES (Iaco ap Dewi; 1648 - 1722), translator, copyist and collector of manuscripts

Name: James Davies
Pseudonym: Iaco ap Dewi
Date of birth: 1648
Date of death: 1722
Gender: Male
Occupation: translator, copyist and collector of manuscripts
Area of activity: History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Garfield Hopkin Hughes

There are two contemporary accounts of his life, one by **Moses Williams** (1685 - 1742) in his *Repertorium Poeticum* and the other by **Christmas Samuel** in the history of Panteg church (NLW MS 12362D). He was born at Llandysul, Cardiganshire, came under the influence of **Stephen Hughes**, and was a member of the Independent church at Pencader. Some time before 1700 he lost all his property in a fire - he refers to this event in his poems - and there is evidence that he lived in Penllyn, Meirionnydd, for a time before returning to Llanllawddog, Carmarthenshire, where he died 24 September 1722. It is recorded that he was buried there 27 September 1722. There are indications that his later years were made wearisome by poverty and ill health. The tradition that **Siôn Rhydderch** (John Roderick), the almanac-maker, was his nephew, should probably be rejected.

His chief claim to fame is as a copyist and collector of old manuscripts, and the influence of **Edward Lhuyd** on his career is marked. Nor should we forget the importance of the sources, such as the library of **William Lewes** of Llwynderw, which existed in his neighbourhood. Later, there arose a band of copyists in Carmarthenshire, all influenced by Iaco ap Dewi: William Bona of Llanpumpsaint; David Richards, curate of Llanegwad; and **Ben Simon** of Abergwili. Some of his manuscripts were acquired by **Siôn Rhydderch** and, later, by **Lewis Morris**. It should be emphasized that he displayed a critical judgement in preparing the texts and that there is evidence that he was a professional copyist, preparing the manuscripts for others, and travelling widely, e.g. to the well-known library at Pen-y-benglog, Pembrokeshire, to collect his material. The best proof of the importance of his work lies in the fact that he and **Samuel Williams** have transcribed in **Llanstephan MS 133** a large number of poems of which no other copy exists. **Iolo Morganwg** had learned from his friend **Tomos Glyn Cothi** something about Iaco ab Dewi's manuscripts, but the claims he makes on his behalf are untrustworthy.

Moses Williams testifies that Iaco ap Dewi assisted **Stephen Hughes** to collect the poetic works of **Vicar Prichard**, and it is certain also that he collected traditional songs, etc., from the actual singers. It seems likely that he was the editor of *Flores Poetarum Britannicorum*, 1710. The few poems which he himself wrote are not important except for the sidelights they throw on his own poverty and the melancholy conditions in which he lived; except, too, that they show him attempting to imitate some of the poets whose works he was transcribing as in his *cywydd* 'Molawd i'r Iesu.' Among his manuscripts was a copy of the bards' grammar. It is quite clear that he was not interested in the ballads and popular songs of his district; and any connection between him and the eisteddfodau of the period was purely fortuitous.

Moses Williams asserts that Iaco was forced by poverty to turn to translation as a means of eking out his livelihood and that he was patronized in this respect by the gentry and Nonconformists of Carmarthen. His eight translations were published between 1714 and 1730. The most remarkable of these is his translation of *Daily Communion with God*, 1714, and the best known that of *Particular Thoughts on Religion*, 1717. It is possible that Iaco ap Dewi was one of the four who, according to **Stephen Hughes**, were employed in translating the *Pilgrim's Progress*, but there is no evidence to support this in the book itself.

Author

Garfield Hopkin Hughes, (1912 - 1969)

Sources

G. H. Hughes, *Iaco ab Dewi. 1648-1722* (Cardiff 1953)

J. Davies, *Bywyd a Gwaith Moses Williams, (1685-1742)* (1937)

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Works

George Webbe, James Davies (translator), *Yr ymarfer o lonyddwch: i gyfarwyddo Cristion pa fodd i fyw yn llonydd yn y Byd trafferthus hwr*(Caerfyrddin 1730)

Matthew Henry, James Davies (translator), *Catechism o'r scrythur, yn nhrefn Gwyr y Gymmanfa*(Mwythig 1717)

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