Some Light on the Chalumeau

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In our student days we learned that the clarinet was invented by a certain Denner of Nürnberg in 1690, when he added a speaker key to an earlier instrument called the chalumeau, in order that it should overblow at the twelfth and thereby extend its compass. Later, this Denner became two Denners, J. C. the father, and J. the son, each of whom had a hand in the clarinet's development. By subtracting from the clarinet the modifications which the Denners made, one is left with a single-reed instrument with seven fingerholes, a thumb hole and one key - this then was the chalumeau.

Such a straightforward image has since then become so blurred in a fog of discussion and doubts, that one turns to the authority of Canon Galpin himself to have one's faith restored. What he writes in *A Textbook of European Musical Instruments* (p. 186) is perfectly clear: 'Throughout the Middle Ages the single-beating reed appears to have been chiefly confined to peasant folk. It is still commonly found on the hornpipes and bagpipe "chanters" of the Greek islands. ... In Italy it appears in the popular "trumpets" made at Florentine fairs, and in France it was known as the *Chalumeau*, a word derived from the Latin *calamellus*, "a little reed", or from the Greek *calamaulos*, "a pipe of reed". As a folk instrument it has been confused with the *Chalemie*, a conical pipe with a double-beating reed. …'

This takes care of the folk element in the ancestry of the chalumeau. The 'popular "trumpets"' correspond to Thurston Dart's 'Mock Trumpet' (GSJ VI, p. 35) - a novelty instrument from the eighteenth-century toy shop. It is obvious that there was bound to be confusion about the name *Chalumeau*: anything so similar to *Schalmei* and *Shawm* was asking for trouble. But the name of a thing is what people call it; not something decided by a committee. My interest in the chalumeau was focused some ten years ago on a Suite for three chalumeaux by Christoph Graupner (1683-1760). This had been published in Germany in an arrangement for three recorders, and Dr. Walter Bergmann had managed to get hold of a copy which he lent to me. I tried to see how it might be reconstructed as a trio for three clarinets. It looked as if the whole work would fit perfectly if transposed down a fourth as the parts would then range from *g* (lowest note in the third clarinet part) to *c''* (highest note for clarinet I). This experiment led me to think that the Suite might have been transposed for recorders, and that the original might have been for three clarinets (chalumeaux in Gluck's sense). At this stage I was eager to see what in fact Graupner had done, and eventually obtained microfilms of the original MS (MUS 464/43 & 73, Darmstadt) through the good offices of Herr Heinz Kaestner of B. Schott's Söhne, Mainz.

When these arrived it was obvious that the parts were for three true chalumeaux of different sizes, not three equal clarinets. Also there were not one, but two Suites - the one I already knew from the recorder arrangement and another for the same instrumentation.

The fact that these Suites were for chalumeaux of different sizes led me to the paragraph on the instruments in Majer's *Museum Musicum* (1732) which mentions the discant, alto or quart chalumeau, tenor and bass:

*Man hat sonst Discant, Alt- oder Quart-Chalumeaux, wie auch Tenor- und Bass-Chalumeaux, theils mit dem Französischen / theils mit Teutschem Ton / und sind absonderlich ratione des schwehren Ansatzes / sehr hart zu blasen / die Application darauf correspondiret meistens mit denen Flöthen; Allein deren Ambitus erstrecket sich nicht viel über eine Octav. Wird derhalben vor unnöthig erachtet / weitläufiger hievon zu melden / zumalen / wann man eine Flöthen blasen kan / wird man auch hier praestanda praestiren Können.*
The compass of Graupner's parts and the incipit of the last movement of the second Suite are as follows (Ex. 1):

From this it will be seen that each part has a range of an eleventh. Scoring out a few bars like this gave the appearance of a trio for one soprano and two growlers until I remembered the convention by which composers sometimes wrote their clarinet parts with the chalumeau register in the bass clef and octave lower than the actual pitch (e.g. Mozart's Adagio for two clarinets and three basset-horns, K. 411, where the third basset-horn is written in this way). Putting the bass-clef parts up an octave brings the music to a more satisfactory proportion which probably represents the actual pitch of the parts: 1st, c' to f''; 2nd, f to b flat"; 3rd, c to f'.

About five years ago a friend, knowing my interest in the chalumeau, brought back for me a little instrument from one of the Leipzig Trade Fairs. This (Plate III) was about 13 1/2 in. long, with a small clarinet mouthpiece, seven fingerholes and one key - obviously a modern version of the chalumeau. At the time I did not pay very much attention to it, as I thought the upper notes were too out-of-tune for it to be of any use; but when I tried out the first chalumeau part of Graupner's Suites on it I soon found that a simple cross-fingering provided me with the necessary eleventh, and that the instrument was reasonably well tuned if the right fingerings were used.

Galpin writes of the instrument having a range from f to a': Majer's paragraph is as follows:

§5. Chalumeau, pl. Chalumeaux, gall. Fistula partoritia lat. eine Schallmey / Schäfer-Pfeiffe; weil sie mehrentheils aus Rohr (so Calamus heisset) gemacht ist. Nebst dieser Bedeutung wird auch die an einem Dudelsack befindliche Pfeiffe: Ferner ein kleines Blas-instrument, so 7. Löcher hat / und vom f² bis ins zwey gestrichene a gehet / also genennet. Weiter ein kleines aus Buchs-Baum verfertigtes Blas-instrument / so 7. Löcher oben beym Ansatz / zwo meszinge Klappen / auch bey der untern noch ein à partes Loch hat / und vom ein gestrichenen f bis ins zwey gestrichene a und b, auch wohl bis ins zwey gestrichene h und drey gestrichene c gehet.

I am quoting Majer again as I think he generally knew what he was writing about. The paragraph quoted earlier, about the different members of the family, follows the above as §6. On another page he gives the fingerings for the recorder right up to the very high notes. He slips up, however, over the clarinet, which, according to his fingerings, overblows at the eleventh! (I think he has become confused, trying to fit in both b and h on an instrument without the low E key.)

My modern chalumeau has the following range and fingerings: (Ex. 2):
This suffices for the first part in the Graupner Suites; and I am at the moment constructing similar instrument in appropriate sizes for the two other parts. The next question is: Are the second and third parts to be regarded as for alto and tenor chalumeaux, or for tenor and bass? I am inclined to think the latter would be correct, and that the members of Majer's family were discant in C (like my modern one), quart or alto in G, tenor in F (like the chalumeau register of a clarinet in C - Majer describes his clarinet as going 'von dem Tenor f. bis zum gestrichenen a. auch zuweilen ins 3. gestrichene c.') and bass in C, an octave below the discant. In this case Graupner does not use the quart or alto member of the family. The tenor of the family corresponds to the one referred to by Galpin as the prototype of the clarinet.

Graupner's two Suites will shortly be published in my transposed arrangement for three equal clarinets (by Schott & Co., London). It would have been putting the clock back to confine players to the chalumeau registers of, say, basset horn and bass clarinet, but anyone who has followed my argument will easily be able to reconstitute Graupner's original from this edition.

Notes

1. This was in the Rieter Biedermann edition which appeared before the same work came out in Peters Edition. (For an earlier discussion of Graupner's works for chalumeaux, see Oskar Kroll, 'Das Chalumeau', Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft, 15 (1934), p. 374 ff. -ED)

2. Is this a misprint for ein gestrichenen f, or are all the other notes described an octave too high?