

Cholla mo Rùn: the Piper’s Warning to his Master

This is a fairly widely diffused tune and comes down in two main versions, one through Donald MacDonald and Peter Reid, the other through Angus MacKay. It is contained in the following

Manuscripts:

–Donald MacDonald’s MS, ff.98-102, with the title “Macdonald’s Warning. (Cholle mo Run.)”

–Peter Reid’s MS, ff.5-6, with the title “Colla mo Run The pipers warning to his Master”

Published settings:

–Angus MacKay’s, *Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.125-7

–Donald MacPhee’s, *Collection of Piobaireachd*, i, 1-3

–David Glen, *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.86-7, 111-2

–C. S. Thomason, *Ceol Mor*, p.88

–G. F. Ross, *Some Piobaireachd Studies*, p.30

The sources develop the tune as follows:

MacDonald Ground	Reid Ground	MacKay Ground	MacPhee Ground	Glen Ground	Thomason Ground	G. F. Ross Ground (remainder of tune to follow MacKay in the light of its emendations)
	Siubhal singling	Siubhal singling doubling	Siubhal singling doubling	Siubhal singling doubling	Siubhal singling doubling	
Taorluath singling doubling	Taorluath singling doubling	Taorluath singling doubling	Taorluath singling doubling	Taorluath singling doubling	Taorluath singling doubling	
		Ground		Ground	Ground	
Crunluath singling doubling	Crunluath singling doubling	Crunluath singling doubling	Crunluath singling doubling	Crunluath singling doubling	Crunluath singling doubling	
		Ground		Ground	Ground	

This is one of the classic examples of an 'irregular' tune. Some have reasoned that as a 'warning' tune (assuming that the title is correct), some kind of oddity might reasonably be expected and ought, therefore, to be preserved. Others, conspicuous amongst them G. F. Ross (see below), have laid this 'irregularity' at the door of faulty transmission and have sought to bring the tune into conformity with received ideas of 'correctness'.

It seems sensible at the outset to establish what MacKay and MacDonald actually say here, since their scores are not accurately represented by Archibald Kenneth, editor of the Piobaireachd Society's vol. 12, one of the main modern sources likely to be used by players (Kenneth's main score closely follows that of Archibald Campbell in the *Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor*). Archibald Kenneth made extensive silent changes to his sources presumably to remain faithful to the house style established by his predecessor Archibald Campbell, so that while the player using these collections might believe that he or she is playing MacKay or MacDonald, this is not the case.

Donald MacDonald treats the tune as follows:

Macdonald's Warning, Donald MacDonald, ground

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef, 2/4 time. It consists of nine staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. The music is characterized by a complex, repetitive rhythmic pattern of sixteenth notes, often grouped in pairs or fours. There are several slurs and accents throughout the piece. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end of the ninth staff.

Macdonald's Warning, Donald MacDonald, taorluath singling

Macdonald's Warning, Donald MacDonald, taorluath doubling

Macdonald's Warning, Donald MacDonald, crunluath breabach singling

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Macdonald's Warning" by Donald MacDonald, categorized as a "crunluath breabach singling". The score is presented on ten staves of music, all in treble clef. The notation is highly technical, featuring a dense and rapid sequence of notes, primarily sixteenth and thirty-second notes, which is characteristic of crunluath (fast) piping. The melody is written in a single system across the ten staves, with a double bar line at the end of the final staff. The overall appearance is that of a traditional manuscript or a printed score for a specific performance style.

Macdonald's Warning, Donald MacDonald, crunluath breabach doubling

There are a number of points of interest in MacDonald's setting. The Ground is 38 bars long, and the variations follow its tonal contour exactly. It is notable, too, the way the accent is reversed between the singling and doubling in both the Taorluath and Crunluath movements, the scurrying Taorluath doubling and Crunluath singling figures being sandwiched between two more orthodoxly timed sections. This unusual feature may have constituted the 'Warning'. As is generally the case with MacDonald's manuscript, there is no direction that the Ground be repeated within, or at the end, of the tune.

Angus MacKay treats the tune as follows:

CAISMEACHD A PHIOBAIRE DA MHAIGHSTEIR

125

na

PIOBAIREACHD DHUNNAOMHAIG.

The Piper's Warning to his Master

OR

Piobaireachd of Dunyveg.

About the year 1647.

XLIX.

Cholle mo runn tionn-daigh am bàt, na'm Fhios dhut mar tha chad thigeadh dùm chòir;
Cholle mo runn seach-ainn an dùn, tha mi-se'n laimh, tha mi-se'n laimh.
Cholle mo runn tionn-daigh a'm bàt, na'm Fhios dhut mar tha chad thigeadh dùm chòir; Cholle mo runn
seach-ainn an dùn .. tha mi-se'n laimh, tha mi-se'n laimh Cholle mo ghaol
seach-ainn a'n caol s'na creag-an-an caol, 'thoir orst a mhaol, tha mi-se'n laimh,
tha mi-se'n laimh

Variation 1.

Doubling of Variation



This section contains three staves of musical notation. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The music consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with many notes beamed together in groups of four or six. The second and third staves continue this melodic line, with the third staff ending with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Variation



This section contains four staves of musical notation. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The notation is similar to the previous section, featuring beamed eighth and sixteenth notes. The fourth staff concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Doubling of Variation 2.



This section contains five staves of musical notation. It starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The notation continues the pattern of beamed eighth and sixteenth notes. The fifth staff ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

D. C. Thema

Crun-luath.

Doubling of Crun-luath

D. C. Thema

The image displays two sections of a musical score for a bagpipe tune. The first section, titled 'Crun-luath.', consists of six staves of music. The second section, titled 'Doubling of Crun-luath', consists of eight staves of music. Both sections are written in a single melodic line on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature. The notation includes numerous slurs and accents, indicating a complex, rhythmic melody. The piece concludes with the instruction 'D. C. Thema'.

MacKay's *Ancient Piobaireachd* was an edition dogged by minor errors. Here the instruction to repeat part one of the Siubhal doubling is missing, but there seem to be no other omissions. MacKay's interpretation is melodically a lot more straightforward, achieved in part by avoiding the kind of repeated figures seen in MacDonald. His relative economy of method is also quite striking, using the introductory gesture, the 'gairm' on A to balance its use as a concluding figure or 'eallach' at the end of the line, reinforcing this basic rhythmical motif with a corresponding echo beat on B, where MacDonald had used grips. Tonally, MacKay's first section (bars 1-16) is the same as MacDonald's. Thereafter we note the

dramatic throw up to high G, where MacDonald used high A, (the latter's scale actually being gapped at this point): the two main sections of the tune (bars 1-16; and 17 onwards) are built on two related gapped scales, the first section on a pentatonic or five note scale G, A, B, D, E, gapped at C, and the second on a hexatonic or six note scale:

G, A, B, D, E, F (it is usual not to count octave notes in this context, so that low A and high A, or low G and high G, are recorded simply as A or G). Like MacDonald's, MacKay's first section is of sixteen bars; MacKay's development of the tune in the second section is much shorter than MacDonald's, the whole Ground coming to thirty as opposed to MacDonald's thirty-eight bars, and the effect may be felt to be rather more shapely. MacKay does not exploit the rhythmical effects seen in MacDonald's Taorluath and Crunluath movements, but he does include an attractive Siubhal singling and doubling not present in MacDonald.

Peter Reid sets the tune as follows:

'Colla mo Run The pipers warning to his Master', Peter Reid, ground

Colla mo run, Peter Reid, siubhal singling

A musical score for a six-part setting of 'Colla mo run' by Peter Reid, titled 'siubhal singling'. The score is written for six staves, each in treble clef. The music is in a 3/4 time signature and features a complex, rhythmic melody with many eighth and sixteenth notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line on the sixth staff.

Colla mo run, Peter Reid, taorluath singling

A musical score for a six-part setting of 'Colla mo run' by Peter Reid, titled 'taorluath singling'. The score is written for six staves, each in treble clef. The music is in a 3/4 time signature and features a complex, rhythmic melody with many eighth and sixteenth notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line on the sixth staff.

Here the Doubling of Toarluidh

Colla mo run, Peter Reid, Crunluath singling; marked "Creanluidh slow"

Here the Doubling of Creanluidh

There are intriguing links here between Reid and both MacDonald and MacKay, although Reid's score may well be independent of either of these sources. Reid's Ground is similar to MacDonald's comprising thirty-eight bars in all; but there are a number of pleasantly individual touches including a different timing of the gairm and eallach, emphasising the first A in the group. Reid's variations settle into a thirty bar pattern-the same dimensions as MacKay, although Reid's tone row is different from MacKay's and perhaps more subtle.

Donald MacPhee's setting follows Angus MacKay but has one or two nice touches in the Ground, especially the way the F is sweetly caught up again in bars 19 and 25, as follows:

THE PIPER'S WARNING TO HIS MASTER.



David Glen gives two settings, one based on MacKay (the first of which is specified in the grid at the head of this article) and the other on MacDonald. He had access to MacKay's papers through his friend Dr. Charles Bannatyne who then owned them, and to MacDonald's through his friendship with General C. S. Thomason, who had inherited MacDonald's manuscript and used it extensively while compiling *Ceol Mor*. Glen's MacKay setting is a good example of how in the later 19th century a variety of timings were available for standard movements like the echo beats, as we see in his version of MacKay's Ground for "The Piper's Warning" given below (one might note particularly the one on B which follows the rhythmical pattern of the movement on A):

THE PIPER'S WARNING TO HIS MASTER.* (1647.)

GAISMEACHD A' PHÌOBAIRE D'A MHAIGHSTIR.

Ùrlar. Moderately slow.



G. F. Ross, was a leading exponent of the idea that the piobaireachd tradition had become corrupted, and he wrote frequently on the subject to the *Oban Times* during the 1920s and '30s. He published two small collections, *Some Piobaireachd Studies* (Glasg., privately printed, 1926), and *A Collection of MacCrimmon and other Piobaireachd* (Glasg., privately printed, 1929) in which he set forth his theories about how what had been lost could be restored by an appeal to compositional first principles. A small sample is given below to show his characteristic style:



The numbers refer to a complex argument about structure (not reproduced here) derived from detailed comparative study of other scores. The basic point was that Thomason, who had amended MacKay's version to bring it up to 32 bars was on the right lines but had erred in the details, and Ross offered his own reading of the tune in the light of this. Ross was much influenced by the thinking of Simon Fraser, and was a frequent critic of the Piobaireachd Society, commenting adversely on its timing of the 'gairm' and 'eallach', its adoption of the McLennan style of writing taorluath and crunluath movements, and its promotion of the opened fosgailte movement as an a mach. On his return from Calcutta, where he was long resident, G. F. Ross became honorary president of the London Pipers' Society. (For further particulars about Ross see *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*, pp.350-2, 439).

Commentary:

The Celtic journalist and historian Henry Whyte ("Fionn") wrote of this piece in his notes to David Glen's *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*:

This historic pibroch has been associated with several ancient castles on the west coast of Argyllshire, such as Duntroon Castle opposite Crinan, Dunyveg, Islay, and Dunaverty, Kintyre, but the preponderance of evidence seems in favour of Duntroon. The hero is Coll Citto MacDonald (*Colla Ciotach*, - i.e. left-handed Coll), father of the heroic Sir Alexander MacDonald, the Lieutenant of Montrose. When Coll Citto was ravaging Argyll he seized the Castle of Duntroon, where he left some of his men while he proceeded to Dunyveg, Islay. In Coll's absence the Campbells were able by stratagem to re-capture the castle, killing all Coll's followers except his piper, whom they made prisoner. One day the piper from the battlements espied Coll's *birlinn* returning from Dunyveg, Coll being ignorant of the fact that in his

absence the castle had been captured by the Campbells, and in order to apprise his master of the position of affairs he played the Pibroch ever since associated with the incident:

A Cholla, a rùin, a seachain an dùn,
Tha mise an laimh, tha mise an laimh;
A Cholla, a ghaoil, seachain an caol,
Tha mise an laimh, tha mise an laimh.

This may be freely rendered:-

Coll, O, my dear, dinna come near,
Dinna come near, dinna come near;
Coll, O, my dear, dinna come near,
I'm prisoner here, I'm prisoner here.

Coll understood the warning and immediately returned to Dunyveg, Islay.
"Historic, Biographical and Legendary Notes", p.12)

"Fionn" treated the subject at greater length in his "Famous Pipe -Tunes" series in the *Oban Times* (12/10/1889, p.3), quoting from Donald Campbell's interesting book, *A Treatise on Language, Poetry and Music of the Highland Clans* (Edinr., 1862), as follows:

The piper landed with a party on Islay, in advance of the expedition from Ireland with instructions to take the Castle of...(Dunyveg) by surprise, should he find the Campbells off their guard, and that this might be attempted with the prospect of success. The Campbells, however, were apprised of the expedition, and on the alert, and drew the unfortunate piper and his party into an ambush and made them prisoners...the whole party, excepting the piper, being hung up off hand. The piper asked leave to play a lament over the fate of his companions, and the chieftain, who commanded the Campbells, being himself enthusiastically fond of pipe-music, and anxious to hear so celebrated a musician, granted the boon: but in the meantime, he caused some cattle to be put in the way of the approaching birlins, while he posted a strong party in ambush to fall upon them should they land another party to take the cattle, as the piob-reac [sic] instructs. The piper, watchful of these movements adapted his piob-reac to the situation with the most consummate art. The warning notes are poured forth in separate strains, having all the appearance of unmeaning unconnected vagaries; but they breathe a melancholy spirit, and the warning and lamenting notes could not fail to be understood by those who knew the style of the musician so intimately...The chieftain understood the meaning of the sixth verse or part of the piob-reac, and on finding himself over-reached by the piper, he plunged his dirk into him; and tradition states that the devoted minstrel smiled proudly in death, on seeing by the deviating course of the birlins, that his warning was understood, and saved his friends. The warning notes "*seachain an dùn*", avoid the castle; and the lamenting notes, "*tha sinne 'an laimh*", we are prisoners, are exceedingly touching; but indeed when properly played, this noble piece of music [is] literally an epic in epitome, and perfectly unique as a piob-reac.

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