The Battle of Bealach nam Brog

This tune is to be found in the following published source:
–**C. S. Thomason**'s *Ceol Mor*, pp. 328-9;

and amongst manuscript sources:

–**Angus MacKay**'s Manuscript, ii, 81.
–**Colin Cameron**'s Manuscript, ff.68-69, (with the title "The Battle of Prague").
–**D. S. MacDonald**, ii, 73.
–**Ronald MacKenzie** [MS 22125].
–**David Glen**, ff.1-3

C. S. Thomason cites a single source, Angus MacKay's MS, for this tune. There is no 'Ed.' in the Index to indicate editorial responsibility for the final score (the Index was compiled, apparently, by Thomason's grand-daughter, Lucy) and this was later to draw criticism from Archibald Campbell (*PS 9*, p.247)—rather ironical in view of Campbell's own practice in this area and his very considerable inferiority to Thomason as an editor. The problem is that MacKay is short of at least a bar in the ground, and different people make it up in different ways. Thomason practically re-composes the tune, but the results are not in his best manner.

Angus MacKay sets the tune like this:

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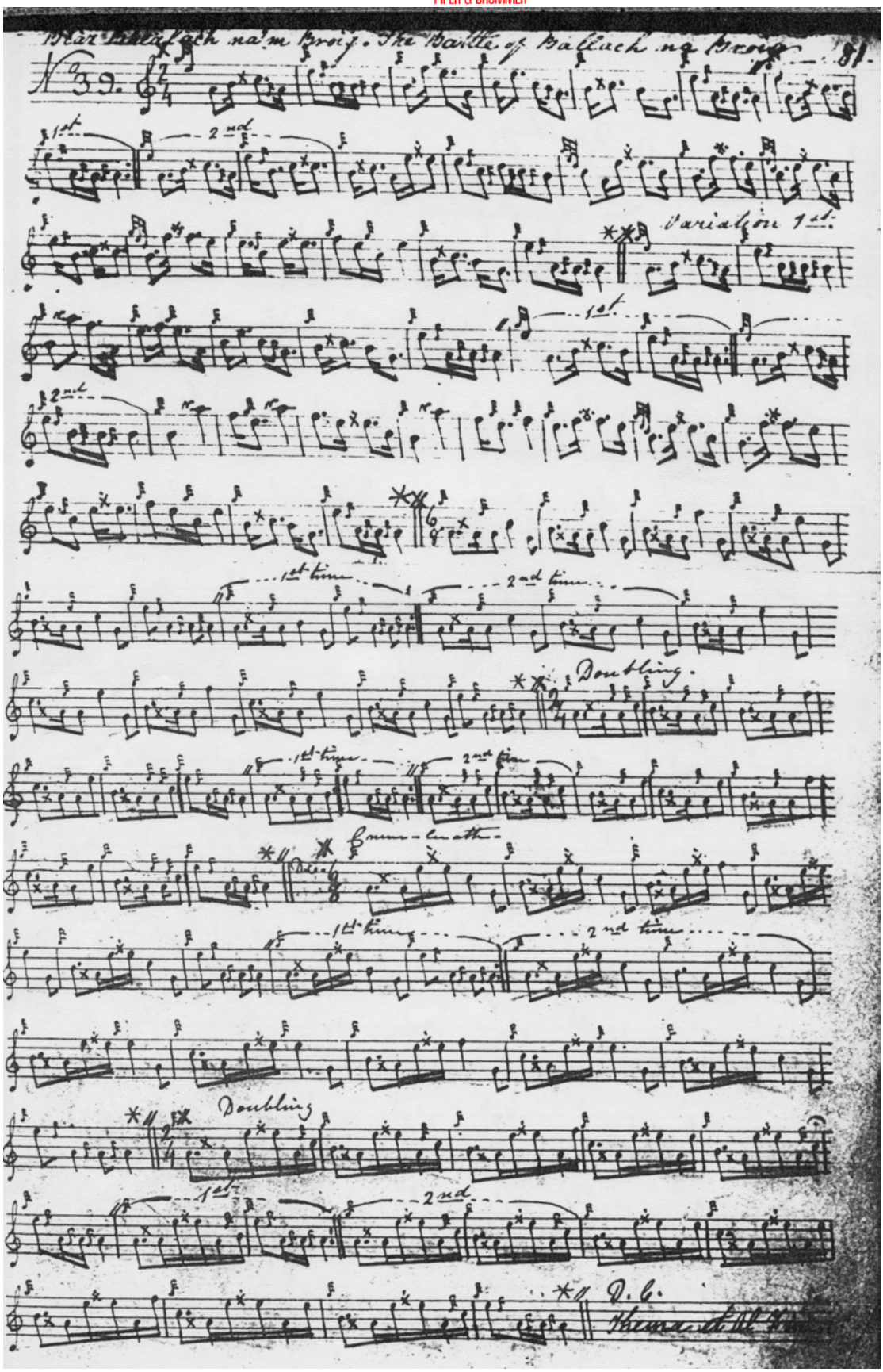

Variation 1st
1st time
2nd time
Doubling
Doubling
D. C.

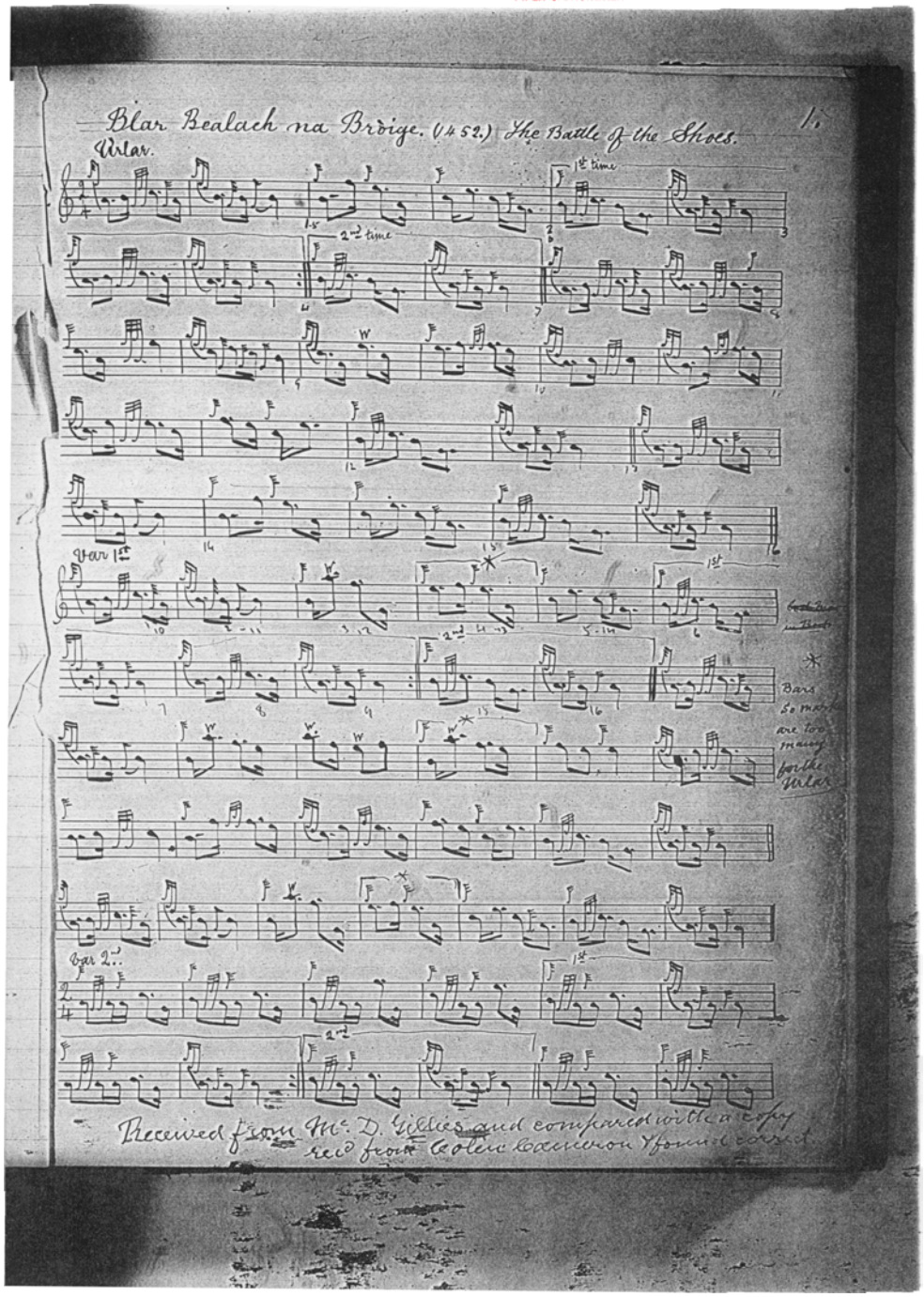
The stars and crosses above the stave are typical of MacKay's space-saving abbreviations. The star means "go back to the cross and play from there to the end of the line." Where what to play next is blindingly obvious, MacKay sometimes omits the cross. The reader will note the use of two different timings of the *eallach* in the same tune. Obviously, then, this kind of thing can legitimately be done, and it opens up interesting stylistic possibilities in a number of pieces, "The Blue Ribbon" and "The Old Men of the Shells" springing at once to mind.

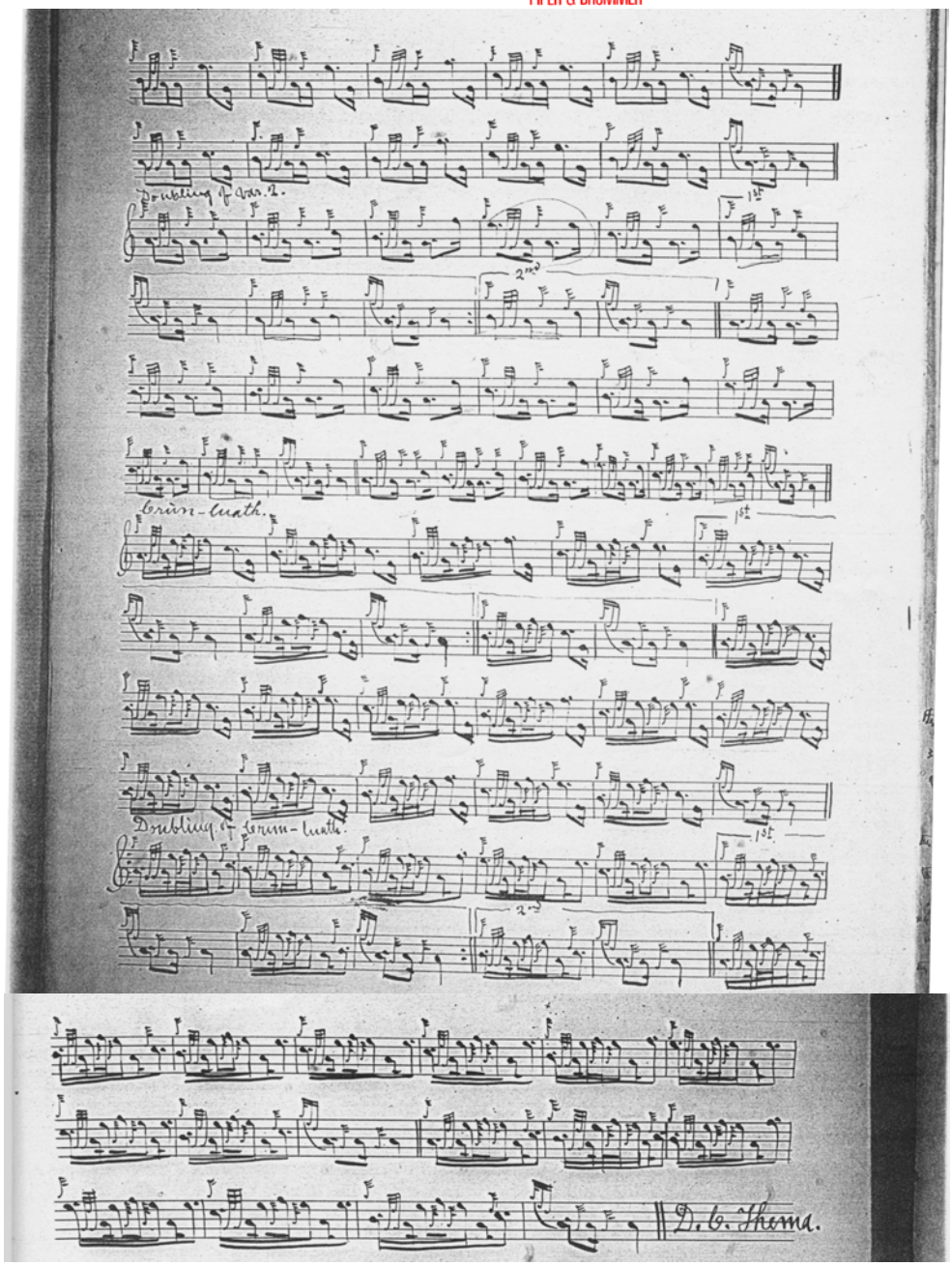
The score in **Colin Cameron**'s manuscript is also irregular, having an 8:6:12:6 pattern in the ground; 8:6:12:7 in the thumb variation; 8:6:8:6 in the taorluath singling; 9:7:10:7 in the doubling; and 8:6:8:6 again in the crunluath singling. He seems to have rethought the structure later before sending a copy of the tune to David Glen (see below).

D. S. MacDonald, ii, 73, is a simple transcript of MacKay , although MacDonald overlooks MacKay's repeat marks and therefore his third line is missing throughout.

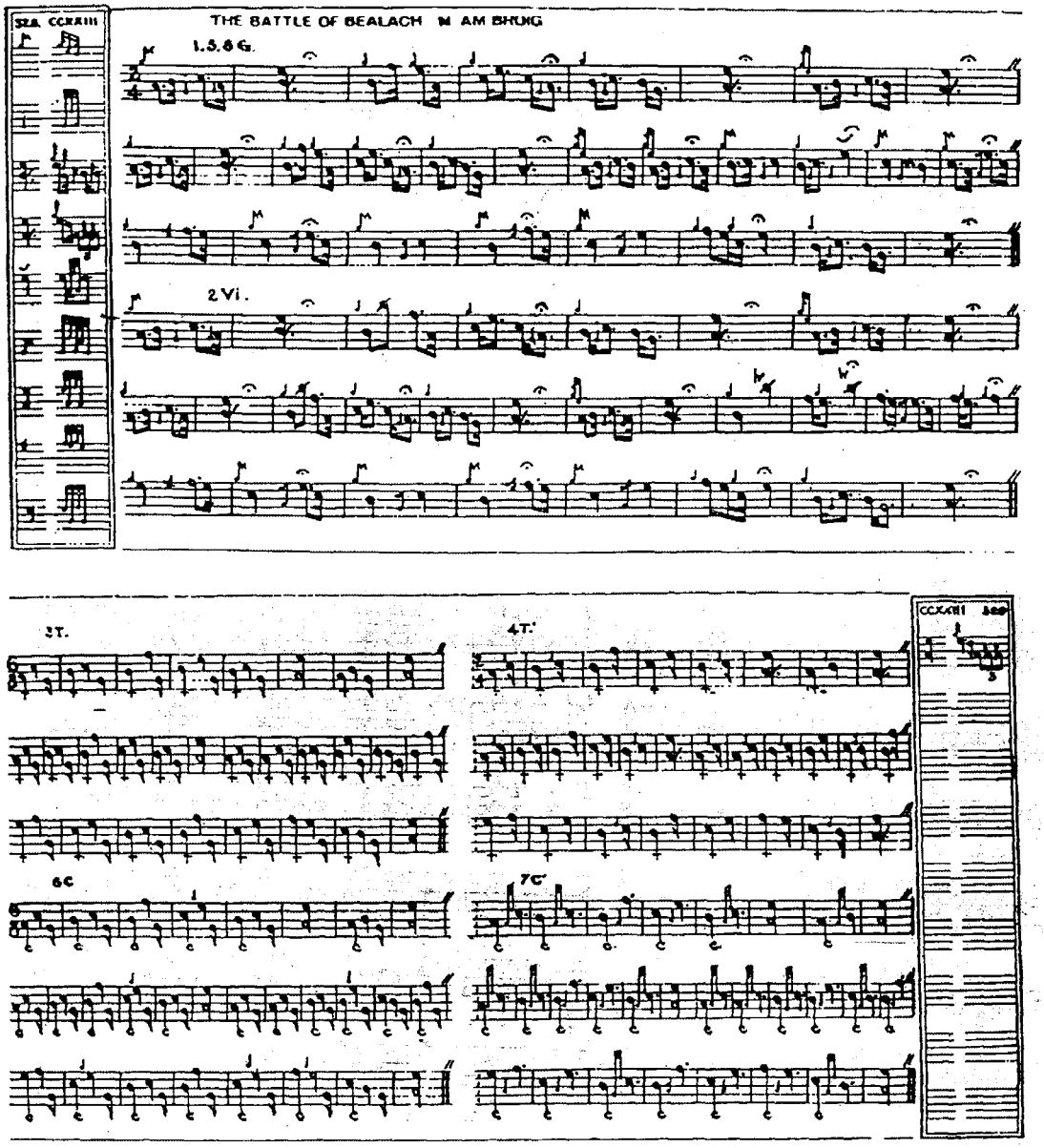
Ronald MacKenzie's score seems to have been derived from Angus MacKay's and is also irregular.

It would seem that there was a different version from MacKay's circulating amongst Victorian master players. **David Glen**'s score is marked "Received from Mc D. Gillies and compared with a copy recd. from Colin Cameron and found correct." But it is obvious from Glen's marginalia that he still thought the tune irregular: he stars and brackets bars in the thumb variation with the note 'Bars so marked are too many for the urlar'. Glen indicates a number of bars he thinks redundant and if these were dropped, then the tune would seem to be heading towards a basic 8:6:8:6 four-line pattern although this never quite develops. Glen points his taorluath breabach "down," producing, some might think, a rather laboured effect in a pronouncedly bottom-handed tune like this, although he does switch to an "up" timing in the crunluath. The evident structural analogy lurking in the background here would seem to be "MacLeod's Short Tune":


Blar Bealach na Broige. (1452.) The Battle of the Shoes.
Urlar.
1st time
2nd time
Var 1st
Var 2nd
Received from Mc. D. Gillies and compared with a copy
rec'd from Colin Cameron & found correct.



This tune created difficulties for everybody. **C. S. Thomason** took a hatchet to it, and little wonder: one can feel his baffled sense that there might be a really nice tune buried in here somewhere. He inserted a couple of bars in the second line, settling to an 8:12:8 bar pattern in his later variations. But although ranking with the best of the old editors musically, and often convincing in his emendations, "The Battle of Bealach nam Brog" is not amongst his better efforts:



Commentary:

In his *Martial Music of the Clans* (Glasg., 1904), "Fionn" notes: "About the year 1452 a desperate skirmish occurred at a place called *Bealach-na-Bròige*, 'betwixt the heights of Fearnan Donald and Loch-broom,' which was brought about by some of Kintail's vassals, instigated by Donald Garbh Maciver, who attempted to seize the Earl of Ross. The plot, however, was discovered, and Maciver was seized by the Lord of the Isles' followers, and imprisoned in the Castle of Dingwall. He was soon released, however, by his undaunted countrymen from Kinlochewe, consisting of Macivers, Maclennans, Macaulays and Macleays, who by way of reprisal pursued and seized the Earl's relative, Alexander Ross, of Balnagowan, and carried him along with them. The Earl at once apprised Lord Lovat, who

was then His Majesty's Lieutenant in the North, of the illegal seizure of Balnagowan, and his lordship dispatched northward two hundred men, who, joined by Ross's vassals, the Munros of Foulis, and the Dingwalls of Kildun, pursued and overtook the western tribes at *Bealach-na-Bròige*, where they were resting themselves. A sanguinary conflict ensued, aggravated and more than usually exasperated by a keen and bitter recollection of ancient feuds and animosities. The Kinlochewe men seem to have been almost extirpated. The race of Dingwall were actually extinguished, one hundred and forty of their men having been slain, while the family of Foulis lost eleven members of their house alone, with many of the leading men of the clan." (p.88).

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