



## In Praise of Morag

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This tune was always called "Marion's Wailing" by the writer's teacher R. B. Nicol and his colleague R. U. Brown. It can be found in the following published sources:

- **Niel MacLeod of Gesto's** *Pibereach or pipe tunes, as taught verbally by the McCrimmen pipers in Skye to their apprentices*, pp.4-6 (with the title "Royal Oak that Saved King Charles"). The Gesto score is highly inconsistent from a notational point of view: the failure to distinguish between low G and low A and between B and C and sometimes between E and F can create acute problems, and it is not reproduced here.
- **Uilleam Ross**, *Ross's Collection Pipe Music*, pp.72-4.
- **C. S. Thomason's** *Ceol Mor*, pp.78-9. Thomason cites Angus Mackay and Uilleam Ross as sources, and follows MacKay in the pointing of the first variation; he directs that the ground be restated at the end of the taorluath and crunluath doublings. This setting is not reproduced here.
- **David Glen's** *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.228-30 (with the title "In Praise of Marion Moladh Mòraig The MacDougalls' Pibroch Piobaireachd Chloinn Dùghaill").
- **G. F. Ross's** *Some Piobaireachd Studies*, pp. 36-7. Ross is drawn towards 4/4 time in the ground, and plays his Var 1 down on to A's rather than having the run down through A to low G. This setting is not reproduced here.

The tune also appears in the following manuscript sources:

- **Colin Campbell's** "Nether Lorn" canntaireachd, i, 186-8 (with the title "Moraig");
- **Donald MacDonald's** MS., ff.59-63;
- **Angus MacKay's** MS., ii, 8-10;
- **Colin Cameron's** MS., ff.90-91;
- **Robert Meldrum's** MS., ff.27-30.



In structure it is extremely stable, as the following table may indicate:

<b>Colin Campbell</b>	<b>Donald MacDonald</b>	<b>Niel MacLeod</b>	<b>Angus MacKay</b>	<b>Colin Cameron</b>	<b>Uilleam Ross</b>	<b>Ceol Mor</b>	<b>David Glen</b>	<b>G. F. Ross</b>	<b>Robert Meldrum</b>
Ground	Ground	Ground	Ground	Ground	Ground	Ground	Ground	Ground	Ground
Var.1 singling	Var.1 singling	Var.1 singling	Var.1 singling	Var.1 singling	Var.1 singling	Var.1 singling	Var.1 singling	Var.1 singling	Var.1 singling
Var. 1 doubling	Var.1 doubling	Var.1 doubling	Var. 1 doubling	Var. 1 doubling	Var. 1 doubling	Var.1 doubling	Var. 1 doubling	Var. 1 doubling	Var. 1 doubling
Taorluath singling	Taorluath singling	Taorluath singling	Taorluath singling	Taorluath singling	Taorluath singling	Taorluath singling	Taorluath singling	Taorluath singling	Taorluath singling
Taorluath doubling	Taorluath doubling	Taorluath doubling	Taorluath doubling	Taorluath doubling	Taorluath doubling	Taorluath doubling	Taorluath doubling	Taorluath doubling	Taorluath doubling
			Ground			Ground	Ground		
Crunluath singling	Crunluath singling	Crunluath singling	Crunluath singling	[presumably] Crunluath singling	Crunluath singling	Crunluath singling	Crunluath singling	Crunluath singling	Crunluath singling
Crunluath doubling	Crunluath doubling	Crunluath doubling	Crunluath doubling	[presumably] Crunluath doubling	Crunluath doubling	Crunluath doubling	Crunluath doubling	Crunluath doubling	Crunluath doubling
									"Generally a crunluath a mach is played"
			Ground		Ground	Ground	Ground		

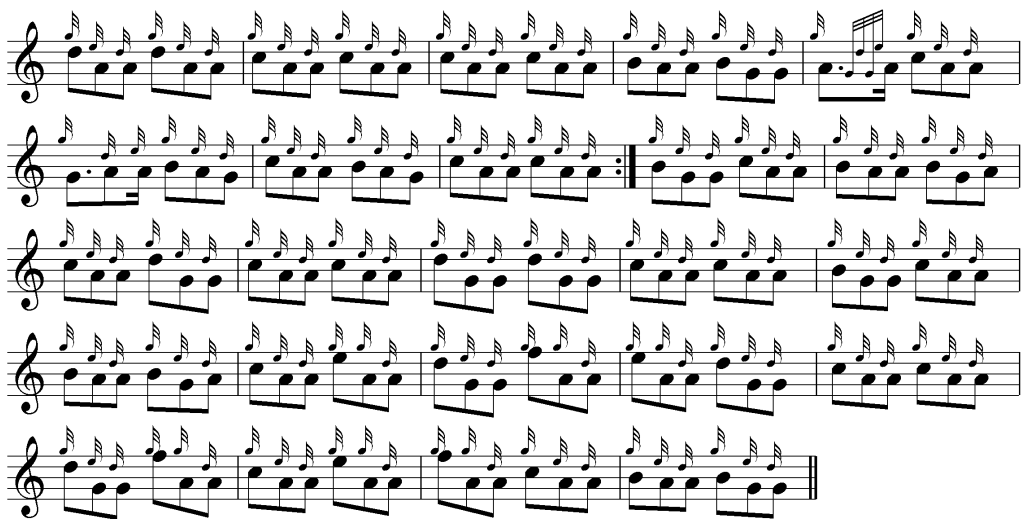
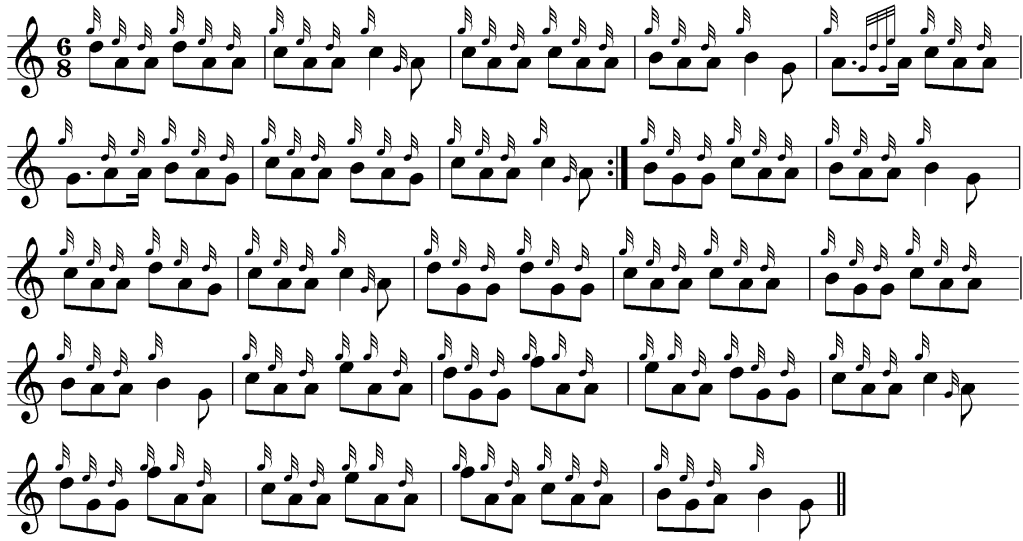
The most interesting feature of **Colin Campbell's** score in the "Nether Lorn" canntaireachd is his treatment of the first variation, which he times like this:

#### ffirst Motion

1st Haendan haendan, hoendan hodin, hoendan hoendan, hioendan hioem, hindarid hoendan, himdarid hioendam, hoendan hioendam, hoendan hodin Two times  
 2d Hioemdam hoendan, hioendan hioem, hoendan haendam, hoendan hodin haemdam haemdam hoendan hoendan hioembam hoendan hioendan hioem--  
 3d Hoendan cheendan, haemdam heendan cheendan haemdam, hoendan hodin haemdam heendan hoendan cheendan heendan hoendan hioemdan [sic] hioem--

D. 1st Haendan haendan hoendan hoendan hoendan hoendan hioendan hioemdam, hindarid hoendan himdarid hioendam hoendan hioendam hoendan hoendan Two times--  
 2d Hioemdam hoendan hioendan hioemdan [sic] hoendan haemdam hoendan hoendan haemdam haemdam hoendan hoendan hioemdam hoendan hioendan hioemdan [sic]--  
 3d Hoendan cheendan haemdam heendan cheendan haemdam hoendan hoendan haemdam heendan hoendan cheendan heendan hoendan hioendan hioemdam--

As it stands, the variation could be 'pointed' either way:



OR



These triplet movements form a kind of extended siubhal, and although unusual, are not unique to "Marion's Wailing": for a similar use of the device see "Grain in Hides and Corn in Sacks"; interestingly, too, there is a piece in Angus MacKay's MS (published by C. S. Thomason as "Nameless, No.14," p.394, and which— although strongly cognate with "Marion's Wailing"— does not show this feature at all, but proceeds from the ground to a standard siubhal variation).



**Donald MacDonald** develops the tune in a similar way to Colin Campbell's but his tone row is different after line one. Whatever one's conclusions about structure, MacDonald's setting is interesting in showing his preferred timings which many might agree offered a more flowing and idiomatic approach to the ground than the square 3/4 timing adopted by Angus MacKay and others:

PRAISE OF MARION.

59

A musical score for the piece 'Praise of Marion'. The score is written on 11 staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notation is complex, featuring many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes, suggesting a fast tempo. The score is arranged in a system where the first five staves are grouped together, and the remaining six staves are grouped together. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, and dynamic markings.













**Angus MacKay** plays consistently down on to the Gs in Var.1 which he 'points' rather than showing as even quavers, and his setting is pleasingly regular and symmetrical. Note, though, the missed *Bis* sign under bar 22 of the doubling of the taorluath variation and the *dal segno* signs at the beginning and end of line one of the crunluath doubling, which should, obviously, be repeated notwithstanding. MacKay's setting of the ground in 3/4 may be a consequence of giving time value to his cadence notes within the bar obscuring the underlying duple timing:

*Cuilagag Mòrag*

*The Praise for Marion. \* 2nd time*

The musical score is handwritten on ten staves. The first five staves correspond to the piece 'Cuilagag Mòrag', and the last five staves correspond to 'The Praise for Marion. \* 2nd time'. The notation is in a single system, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a time signature of 4/4. The first piece features a variety of note values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The second piece is characterized by a more rhythmic, repetitive pattern of eighth notes. Dynamic markings such as 'f' (forte) and 'p' (piano) are used throughout the score. The piece 'The Praise for Marion' concludes with a double bar line and the word 'Fine'.

*Doubling -*

*Var. 2nd.*

*Doubling*

V.S.

*Thema.*

*Crown-math.*

*Doubting.*

*Thema at the time.*

In **Colin Cameron**'s manuscript the tune is untitled. It is taken through only to the taorluath doubling, but presumably a crunluath singling and doubling are to be inferred. The setting is on broadly familiar lines, but one notes the lovely, typically Cameron, cut down from E to G in bar 3 of the ground:



and so on.

The setting by **Uilleam Ross** is the earliest version published in staff notation. Ross follows MacKay, with the exception that he plays even quavers like Donald MacDonald and Colin Cameron in Var 1 singling and doubling. Like MacDonald, Ross sets the ground in quadruple time, changing to 6/8 in his variations:

**"CEILEARACH MHORAG".**

PRAISE FOR MARION.

W.D.



"Ceilearadh" musical, melodious.

"Mhorag" the name adapted by Prince Charlie when in female attire in the Highlands.



1<sup>st</sup> var: 73

Doubling 1<sup>st</sup> var:

Taorluadh.

Doubling of Taorluadh.

and so on. The reader will see the note-error at the beginning of bar 25 of the taorluath singling which I have marked with an asterisk: it should, of course, be a C rather than a D quaver here.



**David Glen** contributes relatively little that is fresh and insightful to the tune on this occasion. The following brief example gives his style of handling the ground. The choice of time signature might be queried as tending to encourage a playing of the ground in semi-detached three-pulse chunks; 6/8 might have been a better choice. The *eallachs* are played 'down,' and the first variation 'pointed':

# IN PRAISE OF MARION.\*

MOLADH MÓRAIG.

(THE MACDOUGALLS' PIBROCH.) (Piobaireachd Chloinn Dùghail.)

Ùrlar.

95.

Var. 1<sup>st</sup>

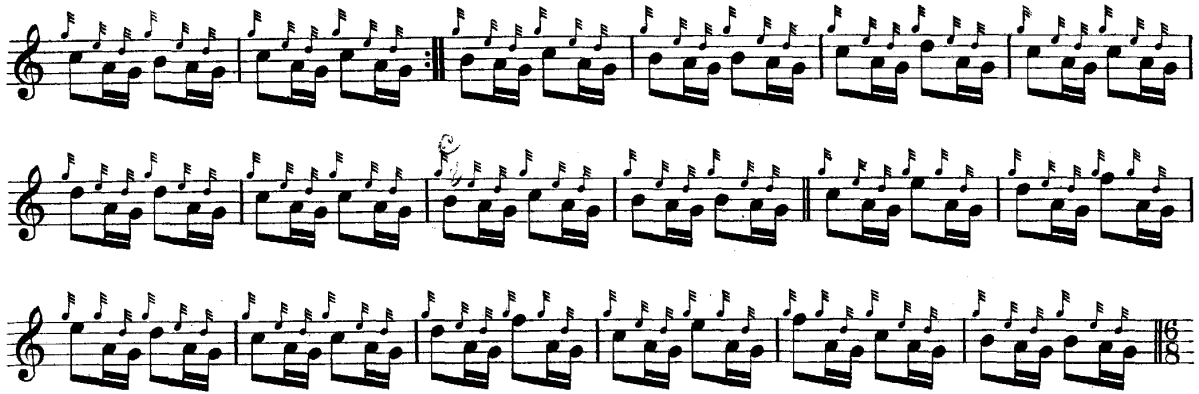
Doubling of Var. 1<sup>st</sup>

Written

Played

† A second setting of this bar

\*Also known as "The Royal Oak that saved King Charles!"  
revised by the piper & drummer magazine, 2005-04



and so on.

### *Commentary:*

In the reliable pre-Piobaireachd Society scores this tune is very stable: the main differences lie in the timing of Variation 1 singling and doubling, and various little turns in the ground. Only Robert Meldrum, the last to be compiled chronologically, includes a crunluath a mach.

Of the two scores published by the Piobaireachd Society (*Piobaireachd Society Collection*, i, 22-3, and *Kilberry Book*, p.63), the ground is in 3/4 time in the former, and in common time in the latter, the note values being arbitrarily prolonged (by turning crotchets into minims) to square the musical arithmetic, following, although without acknowledgement, G. F. Ross's interpretation in *Some Piobaireachd Studies*, pp.36-7.

The *Piobaireachd Society Collection* setting is attributed to Angus MacKay, although there are numerous silent departures from the score given in Angus MacKay's MS, and what is given in *PS1* is largely a simplified and coarsened version of David Glen.

The commentary on this tune in *Sidelights on the Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor* (p.34) suggests that the introductory E quavers be given the same length as the following melody note crotchets in the ground (a style unknown in the earlier written and published tradition); there are various other features characteristic of Archibald Campbell's approach. The tendency is to undermine confidence in (and responsibility for) note values as written, in favour of a set of esoteric timings lying behind them, known only to the editor himself and a handful of other adepts, which must—somehow—be divined if the music is to be played "correctly."

If we apply the notes on timing in *Sidelights on the Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor* to the *Kilberry Book* score of the tune, we would seem to end up with something like this:



In other words, the more faithfully the player attempts to follow Archibald Campbell's instructions, the more wrong he or she is likely to go.

\*

In his notes prefixed to the unpublished second volume of the *Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia*, Donald MacDonald says:

This harmonious air was composed by Alexander Macdonald, who flourished about the beginning of the last [i.e. the 18th ] century. This gentleman was a great poet, and a good scholar; the words which he composed to this air, surpass any thing of the kind that I have ever seen. This genius went one morning into an old wood; and seeing a very old stock of fearne [sic], or, what is now called Scotch mahogany, lying on the ground, he went round and round it, and began his song. The equal of it has never been seen since the time of Ossian. With his tale, he fell in love with this piece of wood, which he feigned to be a beautiful lady. When his own wife (who was a gentleman's daughter,) heard of it, she vowed she never would put a foot into his bed; nor would she be persuaded, but that the subject of the song was a young lady in reality. The poet therefore reversed the words, and made a most miserable song indeed. The above is the foundation of this excellent piece of music. (f.2)

Alexander MacDonald (?c 1695-?c.1770), better known as Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair, was a famous character of whom many stories are told, a Jacobite poet and teacher who was "out" in the '45 and perhaps also in the '15. His poem "*Moladh Mòraig* The Praise of Morag" was apparently the first Gaelic poem of substance to echo piobaireachd structure, being divided up into various sections headed "urlar," "siubhal" and so on and ending in a "Crùnluth."

"The Praise of Morag" is a love poem, apparently pure and simple, and appealing, even in translation:

"Since a glimmering of sense  
came to me in my youth,  
I never saw a creature  
so glorious;  
Molly, true, was mild,  
and her cheeks were rowan-red,  
but fickle as the breeze,  
always song-singing;  
Peggy was too mature  
for me to win her love;  
flighty Marsaili had all sorts  
of strangenesses;  
Lilly pleased me well



though her lashes were too fair;  
But they're all dish-water compared  
To the Morag-one...  
You can't get her equal  
for beauty or ballast,  
or for rare virtues  
in Mull or in Lewis:  
she's chaste, smart and welcoming,  
confident, pride-less;  
a stunner in figure  
from her top to her tip-toes[...]"

(quoted in Derick S. Thomson, *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century*, Aberd., 1993, pp.35-7).

There is a political "Morag" song, also thought to be by MacDonald, which is actually addressed to prince Charles Edward Stuart, the Young Chevalier, which is full of playful interchange between political and amatory motifs, but the tune bears no obvious relation to the piobaireachd air.

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