Beinn a' Ghriain

This is one of the tunes for which there seems to be a single ultimate source, namely the MacArthur/MacGregor MS. Angus MacKay acknowledges this as the source of the setting in his MS and all the later settings are close to MacKay. This suggests that the tune was not widely distributed in tradition, and, as a result, shows relatively little variety in style and approach. Since it occupies broadly similar tonal territory to one of the great leviathans, "I got a Kiss of the King's Hand" (see below), this is perhaps not very surprising.

There are settings of this tune in the following manuscript sources:

---**MacArthur/MacGregor**, ff.11-14
---**Angus MacKay**, i, ff.7-10
---**Duncan Campbell of Foss**, ff.124-127
---**D. S. MacDonald**, ii, 81
---**David Glen**, ff.75-78
---**Robert Meldrum**, ff.225-227

and in the following published sources:
--***The MacArthur-MacGregor Manuscript of Piobaireachd (1820)***, p. 132
--**C. S. Thomason**'s *Ceol Mor,* p.288

The **MacArthur/MacGregor** treats the tune as follows:

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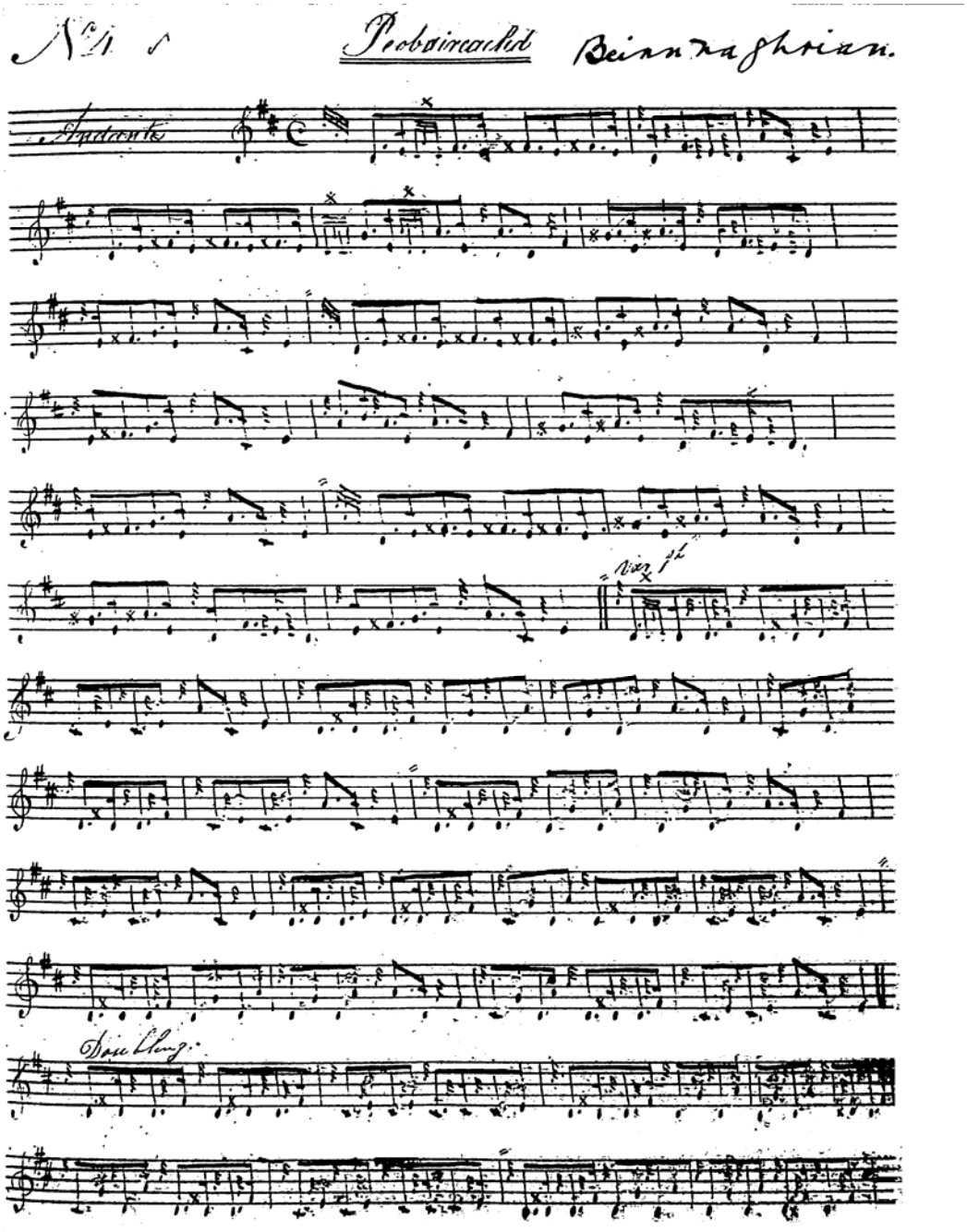
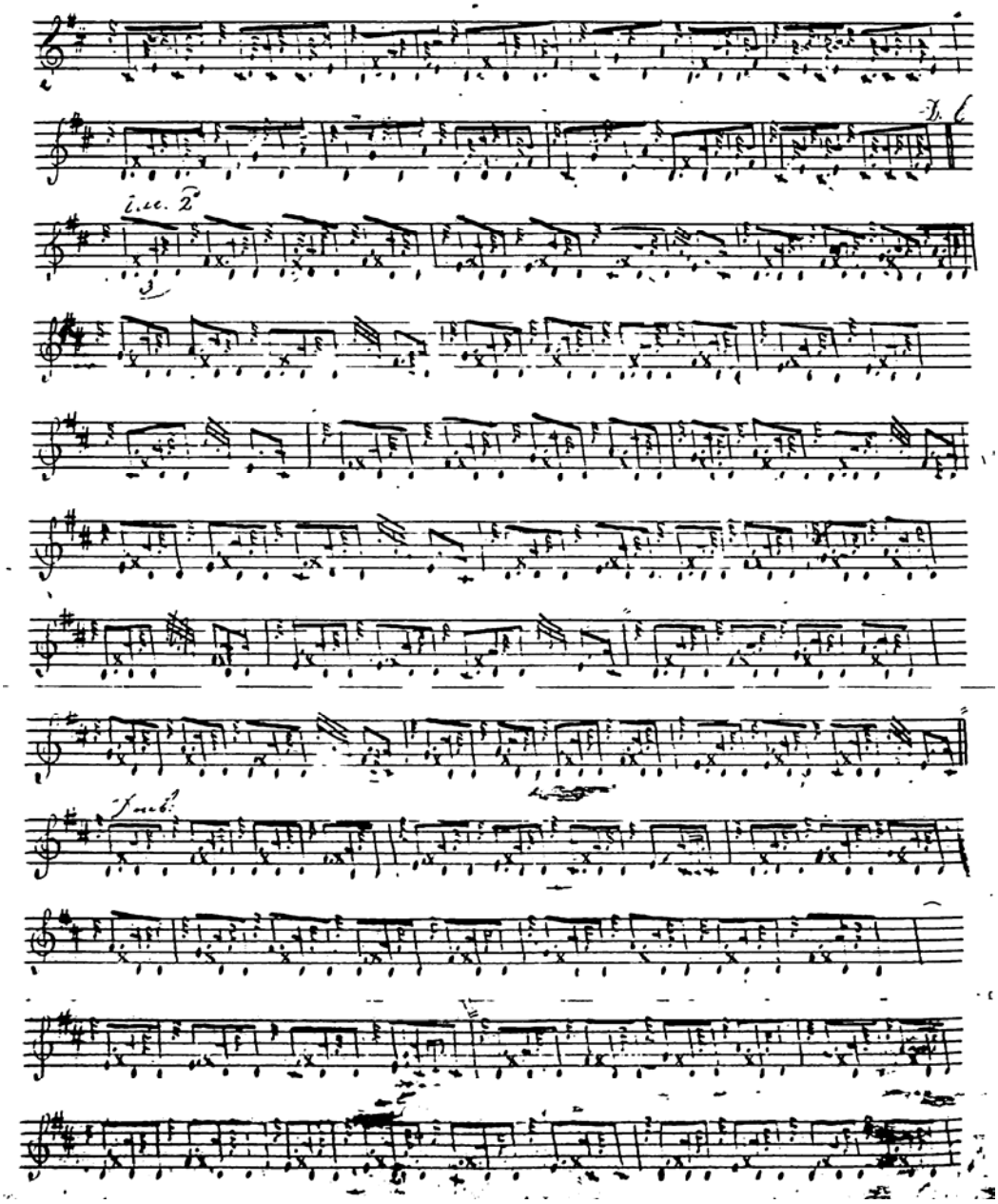
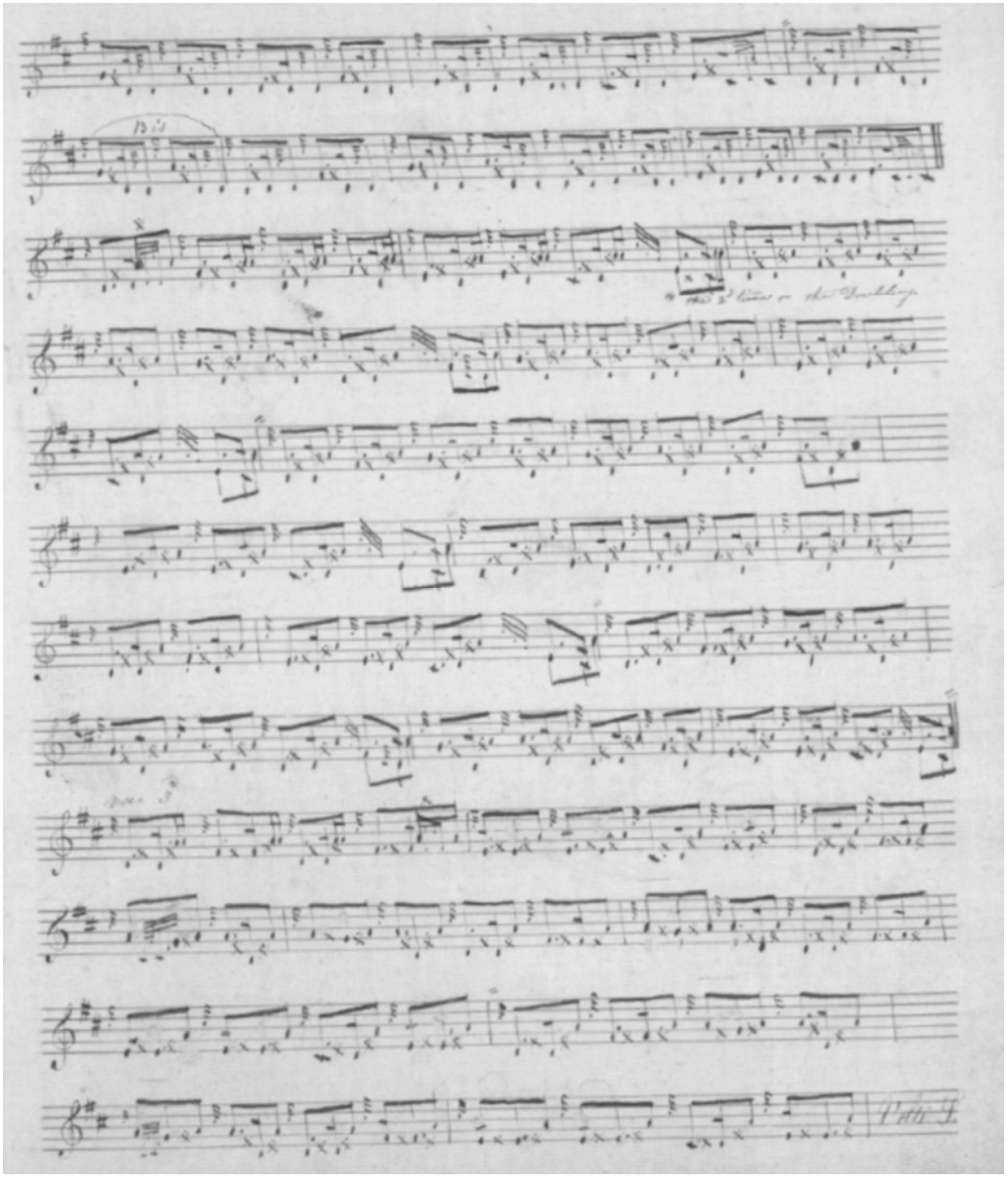

No 4
Beinn na ghrian.
Andante





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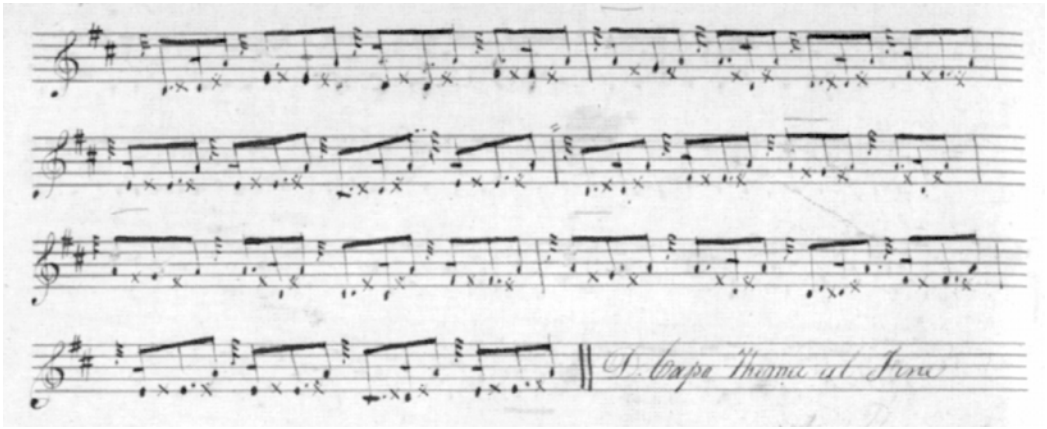


The reader will note the repeat of the ground at the end of the first variation doubling and again at the end of the tune (but not, interestingly, at the end of the taorluath doubling), and the characteristic MacArthur crunluath a mach movements on D which are played off an initial E rather than B.

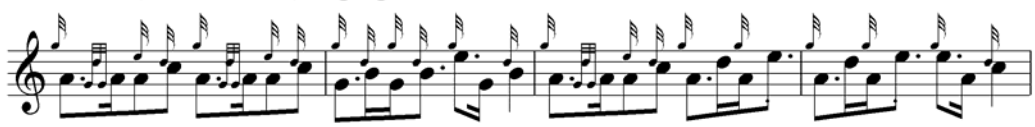
Angus MacKay identifies the MacArthur-MacGregor manuscript as his source, and he follows it fairly closely but he repeats his ground after the taorluath doubling rather than after the first variation doubling as MacArthur does. MacKay also repeats the ground at the end of the tune. MacKay's score is not reproduced here.

Duncan Campbell of Foss adds little to Angus MacKay, except that he drops the instruction to repeat the ground at the end of the taorluath doubling; his score is not reproduced here.

D. S. MacDonald's score is written in outline only, i.e. there are no gracenotes indicated; he follows MacKay's time values throughout and is not reproduced here.

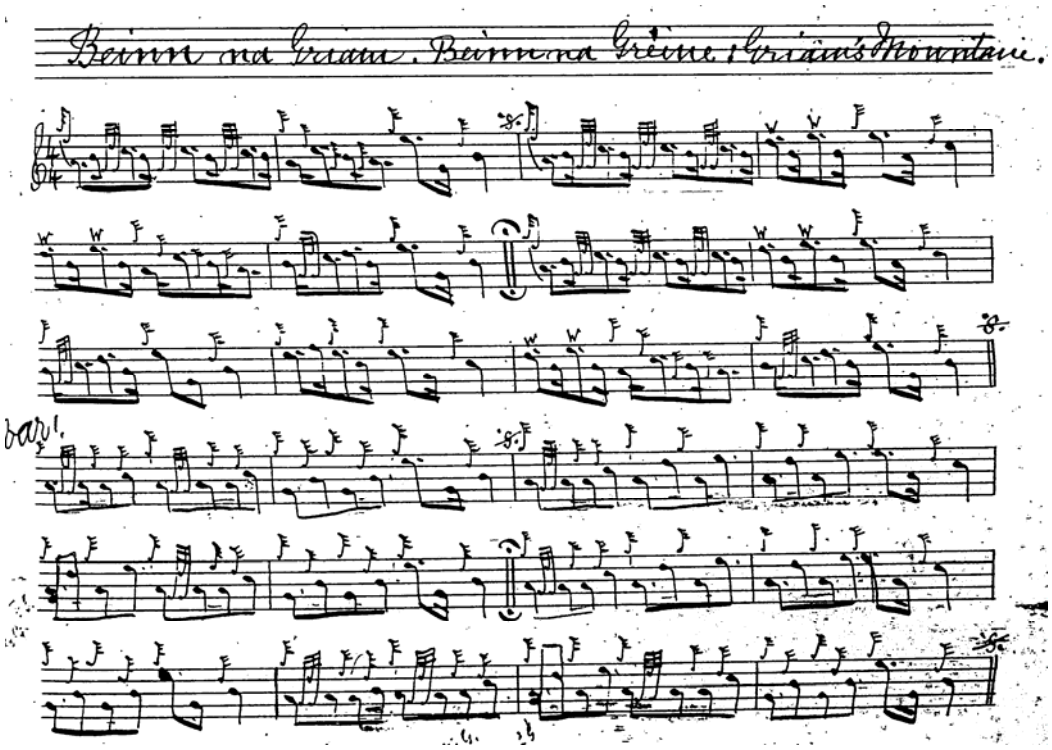
David Glen's stylish setting has some interesting features: although he sets the First Variation singling and doubling as even quavers---as many of the scores do—there are various very lightly inserted dots and cuts, suggesting that he may have contemplated pushing the accent around a bit here to avoid the awkward see-saw effect (which Lt. John McLennan called "*Raoichden an Asail*—The braying of the ass") produced if these quavers are actually played as written. The intention seems to be somewhat thus:

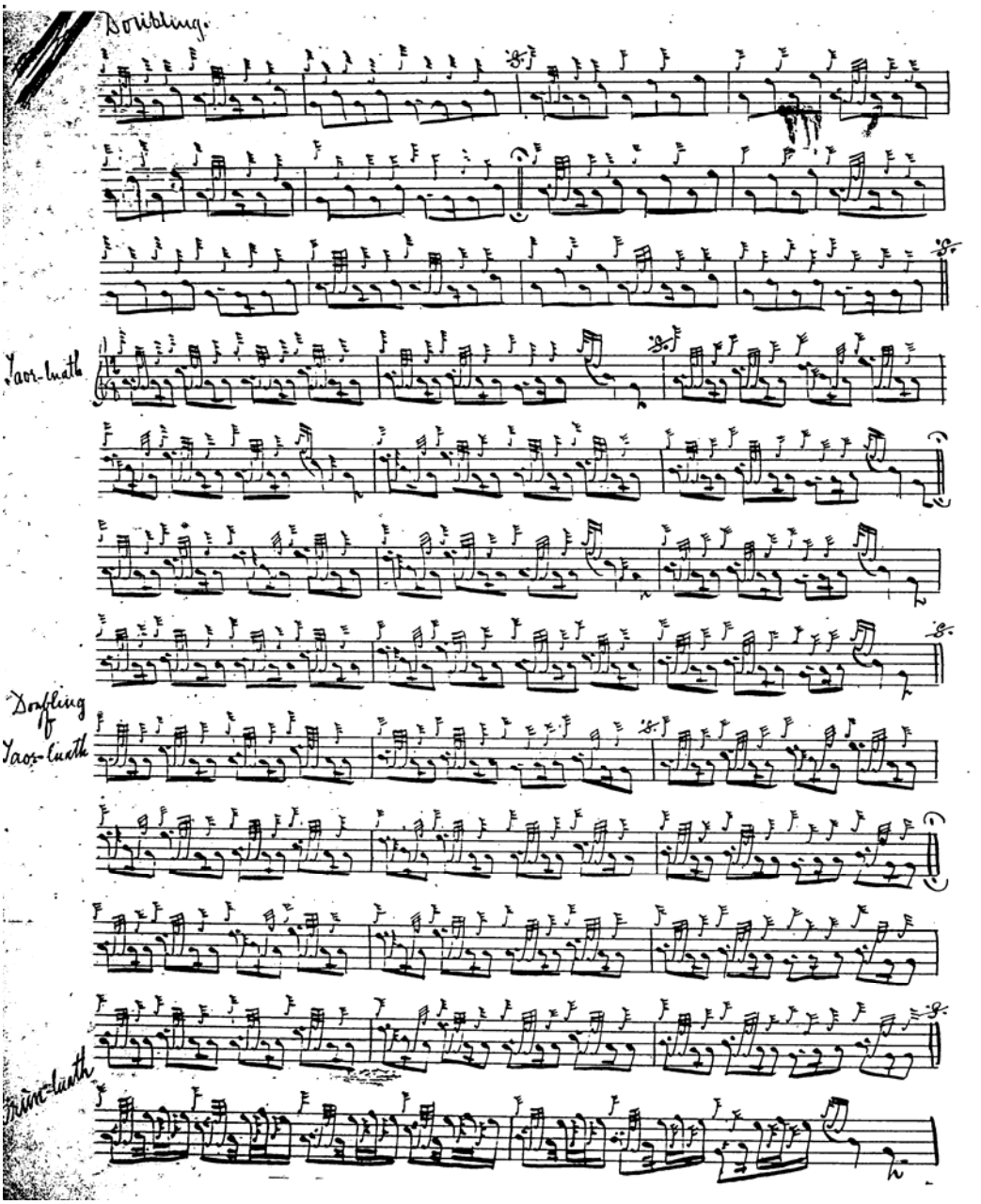
David Glen, Variation One, Singling

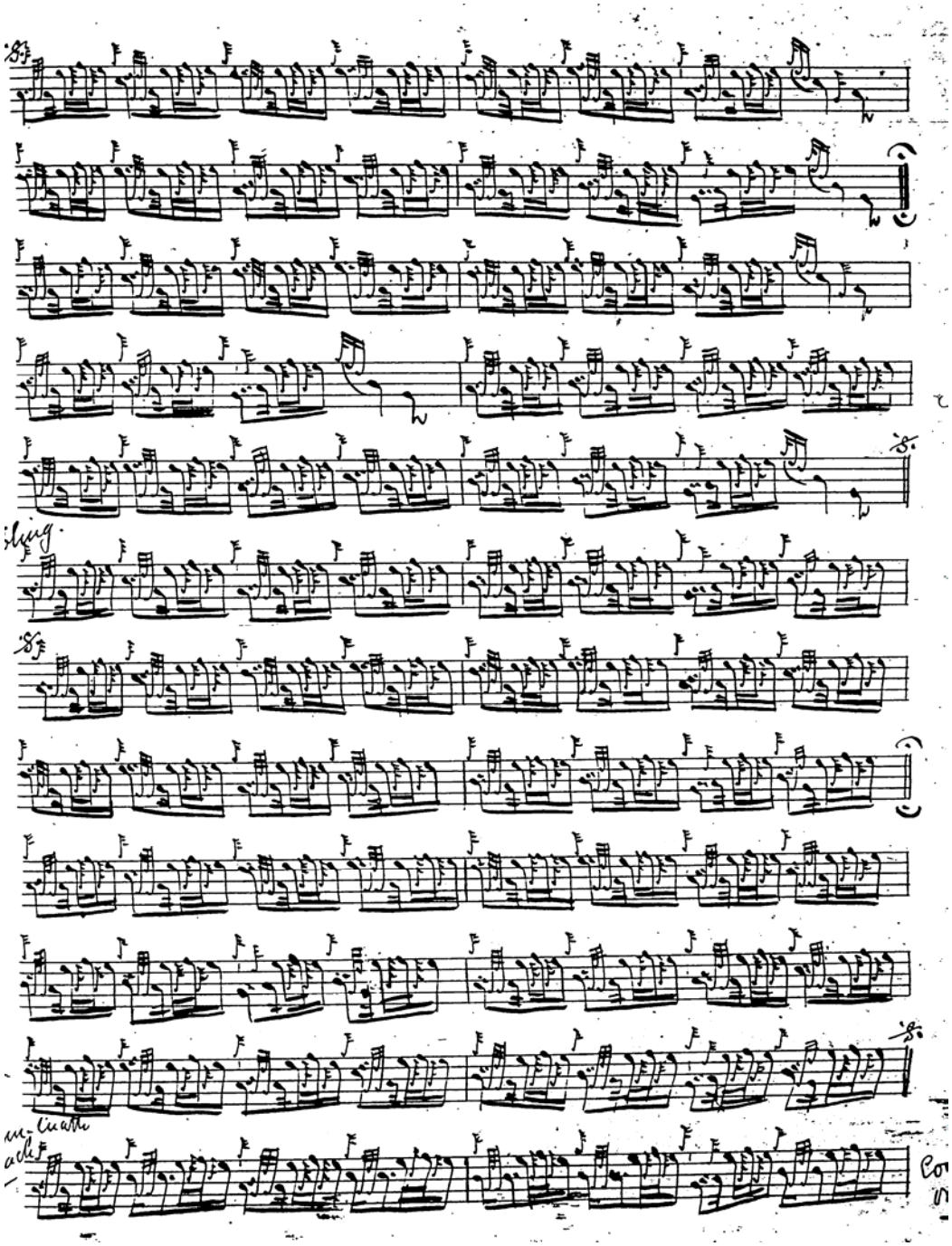


I think there is much to be said for playing these movements "up" throughout, to give a brisk feel, and avoid the squareness and heaviness that can descend like hill fog on this tune if approached over-cautiously.

David Glen sets the tune as follows:




Doubling.
Taor-luath
Doubling
Taor-luath
Trim-luath



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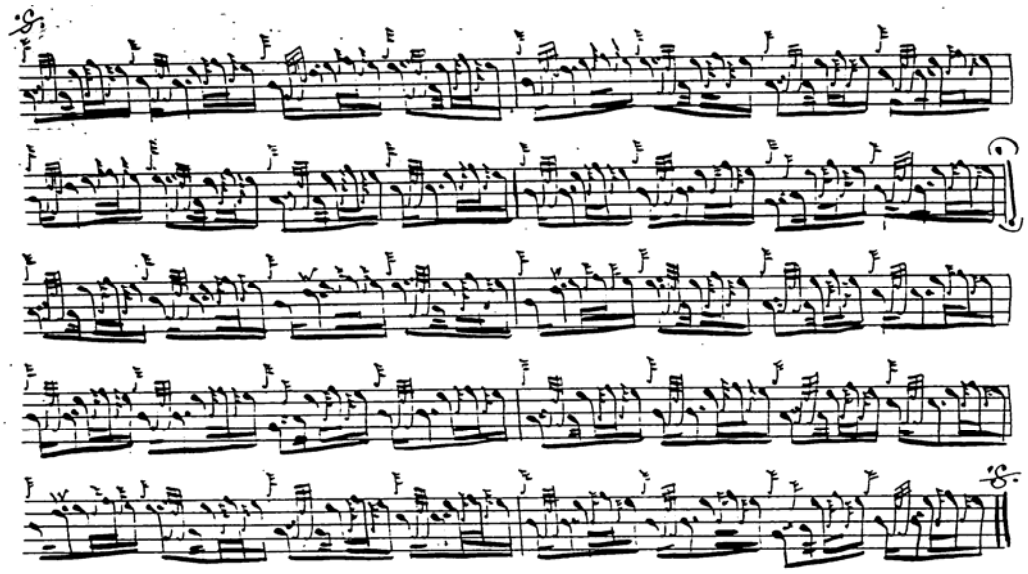


The tune is written towards the end of **Robert Meldrum**'s MS, (begun in 1929), suggesting it is a late addition, especially as Meldrum reflects the note values of the Piobaireachd Society's score which was published in 1932. It is not reproduced here.

C. S. Thomason follows MacKay, whom he gives as his single source for this tune, including directing that the ground be repeated after the taorluath doubling; he gives crunluath singling and doubling only, omitting the crunluath a mach.

Archibald Campbell states that his setting represents a combination of Angus MacKay's MS and the MacArthur/MacGregor; the former is in 6/8 time the latter in 4/4. Campbell opts for 4/4 and lengthens--although he does in this instance record that he has done this--various passing notes in the cadences, making the tune more square and laborious, a thing for which there was no justification in his sources. He does not specify a crunluath a mach here but one is given in both MacArthur/MacGregor and MacKay, although not in all the idiomatic sources.

Commentary:

Context:
There has been an attempt to link this tune to a battle in east Sutherland in the summer of 1601 on the skirts of the twin peaks Beinn Griam Mor and Beinn Griam Beag: and there is a long and interesting note on this in A. J. Haddow, *The History and Structure of Ceol Mor* (privately printed, 1982, reprinted 2004, pp.68-71).

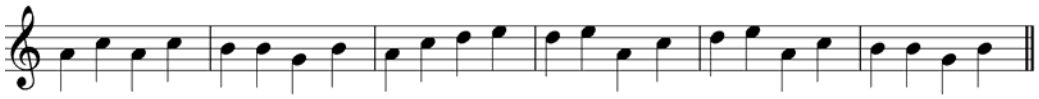
Style:

This is a heavy bottom-handed tune with a long line and covering a fairly narrow tonal range. Therefore it is important not to hang around on anything that it is not imperatively necessary to hang around on, as the idiomatic scores acknowledge with their cut bottom notes in the cadences and implied "up'" timings (which *PS4* ignores); otherwise the effect becomes terribly lumpish and heavy. The tempo must be kept going too, for the same reason; this is a brisk tune: MM , say, = 50 in the ground. Conventional wisdom in competition suggests that players might avoid including such similar tunes in their active repertoire, i.e. a piper who has "The King's Taxes," might avoid "The Groat" because of the risk of straying between them when playing under pressure. Likewise, if playing "The King's Hand" it might be better to leave "Beinn a Ghriain" alone. Also if a chanter is obtrusively flat on low G, as so many are nowadays, one might think carefully before including this tune in one's list.

Scales:

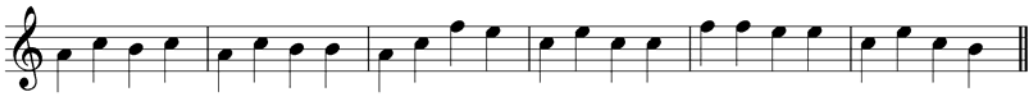
"Beinn a Ghriain" operates within a rather narrow tonal range, a hexachordal scale GABCDE, where great play is made of contrasting double tonic motifs, ACAC/GBGB; the tone row is as follows:

Beinn a Ghriain, tone row



"I got a Kiss of the King's Hand" uses a slightly more expansive scale, GABCEF, in this case hexatonic, i.e. gapped, the gap falling at D which features so strongly in "Beinn a Ghriain," and making little play of the G (also strongly emphasised in "Beinn a Ghriain"), indeed the low G is little more than a passing note in "The King's Hand," the basic scale being pentatonic ABCEF. So that while the two tunes appear to occupy a very much similar tonal space at first sight, even down to sharing an opening motif as noted above, the way their scales are handled give them a very different "feel":

I got a Kiss of the King's Hand, tone row



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