

MacIntosh's Lament

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

- **Donald MacDonald**'s MS, ff.76-82;
- **Donald MacDonald jnr.**'s MS, f.34;
- **Peter Reid**'s MS, ff.1-2;
- **C. S. Thomason**'s MS, f.46;
- **D. S. MacDonald**'s MS, ii, 24-5 (pagination confused in original source);

and in the following published sources:

- **Angus MacKay**'s *Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.162-8 (with a note 'About the year 1526');
- **Donald MacPhee**'s *Collection of Piobaireachd*, i, 37-9;
- **David Glen**'s *Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.31-4;
- **C. S. Thomason**'s *Ceol Mor*, p.48;

Donald MacDonald calls the tune "MacIntosh's Lament" but in the short printed notes which prefix his manuscript gives the titles as "*Cumhadh Mhic a'h Arasaig*, Or MacIntosh's Lament." He sets the tune as follows:

pipes | drums



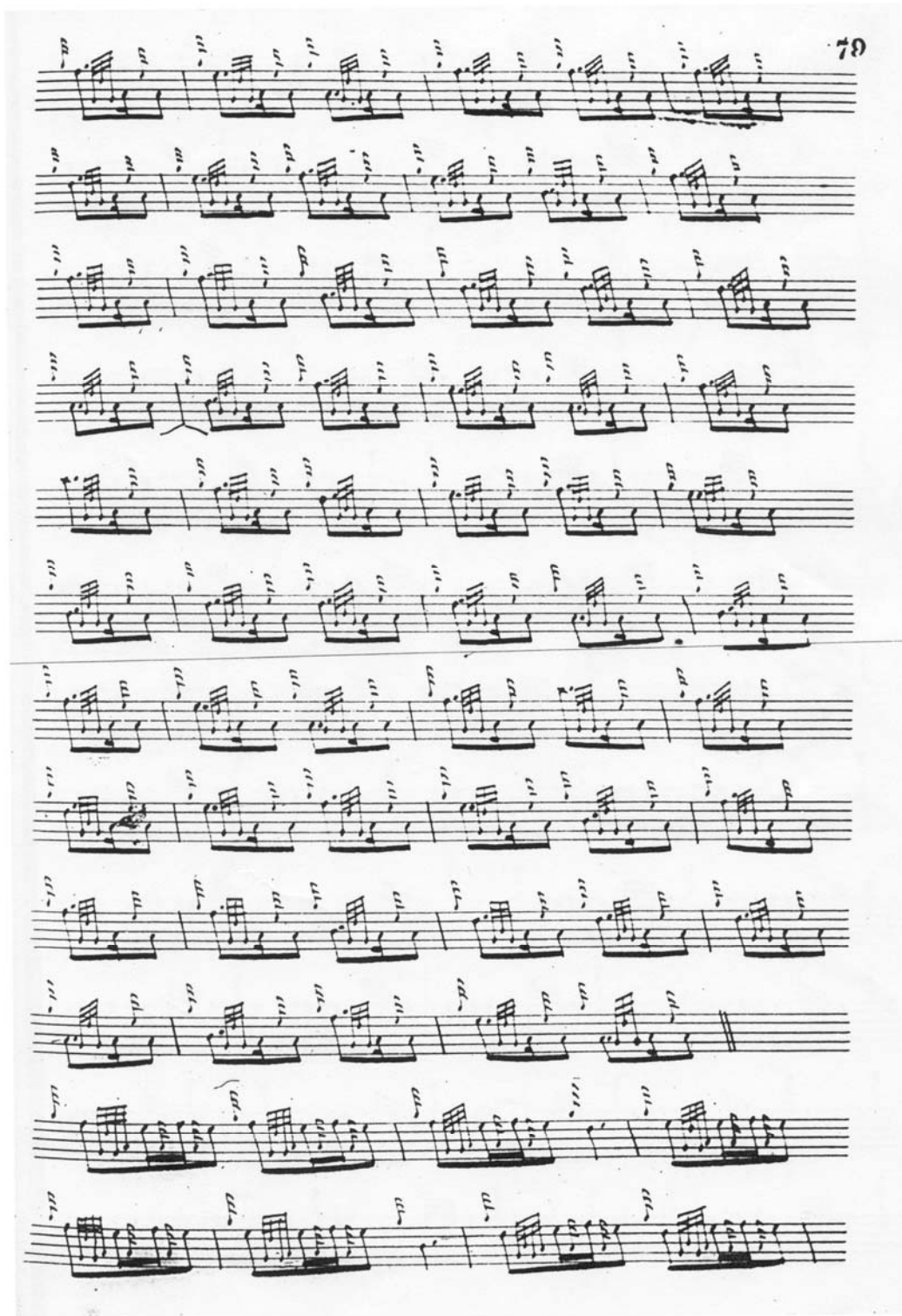
pipes | drums



pipes | drums



pipes | drums



pipes | drums



81

This image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for a pibroch. The page is numbered '81' in the top right corner. It contains ten staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation is dense, featuring many beamed eighth and sixteenth notes, characteristic of pibroch. There are various musical symbols such as slurs, ties, and repeat signs throughout the score. The handwriting is in black ink on aged, slightly yellowed paper.



MacDonald differs in having the third phrase of the ground begin with a D crotchet. All the settings seem to develop the tune in the same way: ground; thumb variation; siubhal singling/doubling, taorluath singling/doubling; crunluath singling/doubling, and to express the tune in two uneven lines, one of eight, followed by one of ten bars.

Donald MacDonald jnr.'s score is a partially graced sketch going no further than an outline of the siubhal, and seeming to conform to his father's style in this tune. It is not reproduced here.

Peter Reid sets the tune as follows:

Cumha Mhic a'h Oraisia
W. Intosh's Samment

Slow = First Variation



Peter Reid's score has no time signature or bar lines in the ground. The third phrase in the ground (which is where the majority of scores take one of two routes) differs from both the

MacDonalds. One feature of Reid's score is the nice reflexive gracenoting on the F in the siubhal. Reid continues the score down to the end of the siubhal doubling concluding with the words "Here follow the Taorluidh with Doubling & Crunluidh with Doubling &c. & DC" At the foot of f.2 occurs the following note: "John McKenzie Piper to Davidson of Tulloch performed the above Tune at Edinr. 1823 & gained the Prize Pipe. Ranald McKenzie (a brother of Johns) & Piper to Sir [text obscure and partly removed by cropping] gained a prize with it 2 years after—he was" The remainder of the note seems to be lost. The "Account of the Competition of Pipers" in Angus MacKay's *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd* notes: "1823. July—The first prize was voted to John MacKenzie: the second, to Kenneth MacRae: the third, to John Cameron: the fourth, to Donald MacDonald: and the fifth, to William Fraser, from Breadalbane." (p.19)

D. S. MacDonald's score adds nothing to that in Angus MacKay's published book and is not reproduced here.

Angus MacKay sets the tune as follows:

CUMHA MHIC AN TÒISICH.

Macintosh's Lament.

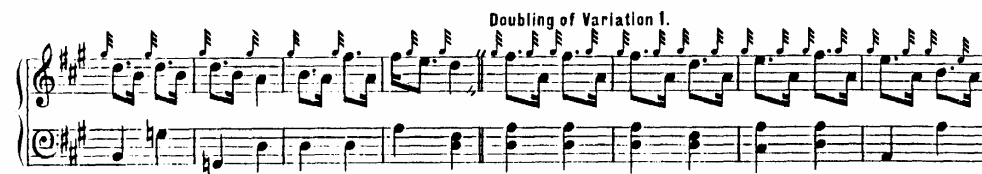
About the year 1526.

Andante.

LX.

pipes | drums

163



pipes | drums

104



Variation 2.



pipes | drums

105

Doubling of Variation 2.

pipes | drums

106

Crun - luath.

pipes | drums

167

Doubling of Crun-luath.

The musical score is for a piece titled "Lost Pibroch" by Donald MacPhee. It is written for piano in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The score consists of seven systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The right hand plays a complex, fast-paced melody with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment of eighth and sixteenth notes. The piece concludes with a "D. C. Thema" marking.

Donald MacPhee follows MacKay, but has an interesting little turn at the end of the siubhal singling, thus:

37

About the year 1526.

David Glen sets the ground in 3/4 time as well as giving the double echo beats in his habitual timing, giving the emphasis to the first note of the group, and he indicates that the ground

should be repeated at the end of the taorluath doubling as well as at the end of the crunluath variations, as follows:

31

THE MACKINTOSH'S LAMENT. (1526.)

GUMHA MHIC AN TÒISICH.

The Ùrlar. Slow and with feeling.

13. 

Var. 1st

Doubling of Var. 1st

Two additional renderings of Bars 5 & 6, and all similar Bars.

* 

(Angus Mackay's) (D. Mc Donald's)

and so on.

C. S. Thomason gives multiple sources, citing Donald MacDonald's MS, Angus MacKay's published book, David Glen's collection, and the teaching of Donald MacKay and Keith Cameron, son of Donald Cameron. There is little, however, that adds to the musical possibilities of the earlier scores and Thomason's settings are not reproduced here.

Commentary:

Donald MacDonald has some rather cryptic remarks on this tune in the printed notes at the beginning of his MS as follows:

A gentleman of great education, who was put to death, at the instigation of Gordon Earl of Huntly. This very plaintive air was composed by one of Mackintosh's friends.—See Buchanan's Hist. of Scotland, p.385, Vol.II.

There is a fuller account in James Logan's notes compiled for Angus MacKay's *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*:

The year 1526 was signalized by a great dissension among the clan Chattan. The chief and head of the clan was Lauchlan MacKintosh of Dunnachton, "a verie honest and wyse gentlemen (says Bishop Lesley) ane baroun of gude rent, quha keipit hes hole kin, friendes, and tennentes in honest and rewl;" and according to Sir Robert Gordon, "a man of great possessions, and of such excellencies of witt and judgement, that with great commendation he did conteyn all his followers within the limits due." The strictness with which this worthy chief the curbed lawless and turbulent dispositions of his clan, raised up many enemies, who, as Bishop Lesley says, were impatient of virtuous living. At the head of this restless party was James Malcolmeson, a near kinsman of the chief, who, instigated by his worthless companions, and the temptation of ruling the clan, murdered the good chief. Afraid to face the better part of the clan by whom the chief was beloved, Malcolmeson, along with his followers, took refuge in the island in the loch of Rothiemurchas; but the enraged clan followed them to their hiding places and dispatched them.

The Lament was composed by the Piper, we believe on this melancholy event. ("Historical and Traditional Notes, p.13)

"Fionn"'s story in David Glen's *Collection* is even more detailed:

There is a considerable amount of uncertainty regarding the origin of this well-known and touching Lament. The music is generally admitted to be as old as the middle of the sixteenth century. The Lament is first printed in Patrick MacDonald's "Collection of Highland Airs, 1781," where it has a sub-title "*Cumha Mac Fir Arasaig*," Lament for the son of the Laird of Arisaig. Tradition associates the Lament with a Chief of the Clan called Hugh or Evan, but the late Dr. Fraser-Mackintosh declares "There was no Chief of the Mackintoshes named either Hugh or Evan, and no incident such as is related (in the usual traditionary story) is known in any authentic Mackintosh tradition. A History of the Mackintoshes, written in Latin in 1676 by Lachlan Mackintosh of Kinrara uncle of the then Chief, refers to the Lament as follows: - 'It was this William (second of that name and thirteenth Laird of Mackintosh), that in his expedition to Rannoch and Appin (Perthshire), took the bard Macintyre, of whom the Macintyres of Badenoch are descended, under his protection. This Macintyre was a notable rhymmer. It was he who composed that excellent Erse epitaph called *Cumha Mhic-an-Tòisich* in joint commemoration of Farquhar vic Conchie and William vic Lachlan, Badenoch, Laird of Mackintosh. Farquhar, fourth of that name, and twelfth of Mackintosh, died at Inverness, 10th October 1514, a year after his release from his very lengthened imprisonment as a state prisoner in the castle of Dunbar. William, thirteenth Laird, was murdered at Inverness by some lawless members of the Clan on the 20th or according to the Manuscript of Croy, on the 22nd May 1515.'"

pipes | drums

Tradition has cast a halo of romance around this ancient Lament. Mr A. Carmichael, LL.D., Edinburgh, collected a version of the words in Barra in 1872, along with the following traditional history of the tragic incident bearing on its origin: - It seems there was a prediction that Mackintosh of that day was destined to die through the instrumentality of his beautiful black steed. Whatever he felt, the Chief determined to show his people that he treated the prediction lightly, and so he continued to ride his favourite, notwithstanding the entreaties of his friends to the contrary. On the day of his marriage the Chief rode his black charger, which became more than usually restive. He became so restive that the Chief, losing control over himself and his horse, drew his pistol and shot him dead. Another horse was at once procured for him, and he proceeded to the church. After the ceremony was over, the bridal party set out on their homeward journey. The bride and her maids, upon white palfreys, preceded, and the bridegroom and his friends followed. In passing, the Chief's roan horse shied at the dead body of the black horse, and the rider was thrown to the ground and killed on the spot. A turn on the road hid the accident from those in front, and thus the bride, unconscious of the fatal fall of her husband, continued her way home the happiest of brides. Tradition relates that she not only composed the beautiful and weird air of the Lament, but chanted it as she moved forward at the head of the bier at her husband's funeral, and marked the time by tapping with her fingers on the lid of the coffin. This, it is said, she continued to do for several miles from the family castle at Dalcross to the burying place at Petty, near Inverness, and ceased not until she was torn away from the coffin when it was about to be lowered into the grave. ("Historic, Biographic, and Legendary Notes, p.7).

In a piece devoted to this tune in the *Oban Times* in 1889, "Fionn" quoted the song associated with it, in Gaelic and with an English translation:



And so on.

"Fionn" also published a setting in sol fa with English translation:

pipes | drums

KEY B FLAT.—*Slowly, with feeling.*

m : — : r	m : — : —	m : — : r	d : — : —
Och nan och!	leag iad thu,		
Och nan och!	thou art low,		
r : — : r	m : — : —	r : — : d	l : — : —
Och nan och!	leag iad thu,		
Och nan och!	tale of woe,		
d : — : l,	d : — : r	d : — : l,	s : — : l, d
Och nan och!	leag iad thu (Am)		
Sad thy fate	laid so low,		
r : — : d, r	m : — : m	r : — : —	d : — : —
Beal-ach a' ghar-aidh,			
Laid where they slew thee.			
m : — : r, m	s : — : m	m : — : r d	d : — : —
Leag an t-each barr-shionn thu			
'Twas thy wild war-like horse,			
r : — : d, r	m : — : r d	r : — : d, l,	l : — : —
Leag an t-each barr-shionn thu,			
In his fierce fiery course			
d : — : l,	d : — : r	d : — : l,	s : — : l, d
Leag an t-each barr-shionn thu, (Am)			
'Twas thy proud charger's force,			
r : — : d, r	m : — : m	r : — : —	d : — : —
Real-ach a' ghar-aidh,			
Mad-ly that threw thee			

Wearing my widow's dress,
While these griefs round me press,
Mourning in deep distress,
Sadly I linger.
Oh, but my heart is wae!
Oh, but how unlike the day,
When first this circie lay
Fair on my finger.

Under my widow's weeds,
Oh! how my bosom bleeds,
Rider of gallant steeds.
Weeping I mourn thee:
Ne'er shall my heavy heart
Have in earth's joys a part;
Death with his fatal dart,
Sadly has torn me.

On thy black bounding steed,
Riding with eager speed,
Slain by the milk-white steed.
Where it had thrown thee.
Oh, my young darling, Hugh,
Slain ere I ever knew—
Dead! oh, my dearest Hugh,
I must bemoan thee!

("Macintosh's Lament. Cumha Mhic-an-Toisich," *Oban Times*, 14/09/1889, p.5).

This tune was one of the great competition warhorses in the later years of the 19th century, it being one of that central core of tunes that competitors could be reasonably certain that benches whose chief qualification was mere social rank, had at least heard of, typified by one contemporary judge who remarked "I always ask for 'McIntosh's Lament': it is a tune I think I understand thoroughly."

* * *

Electronic text © Dr. William Donaldson, Aberdeen, Scotland, July 2009.