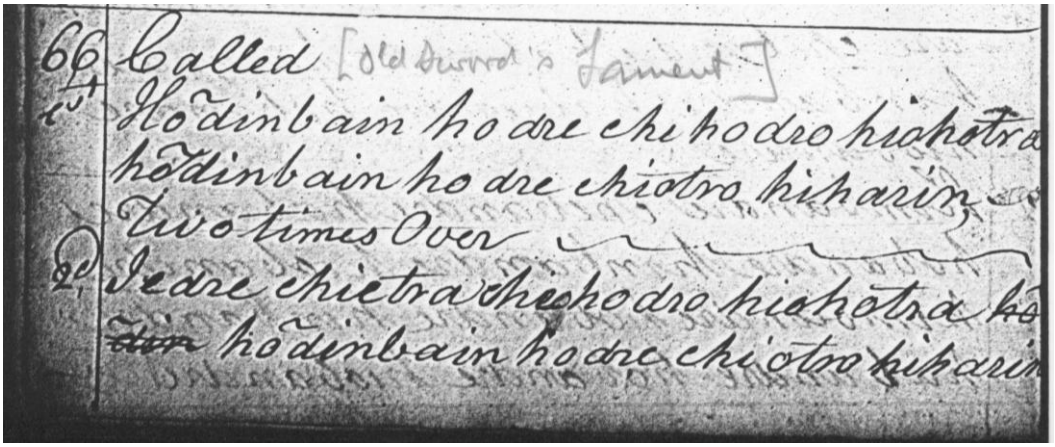
pipes | drums

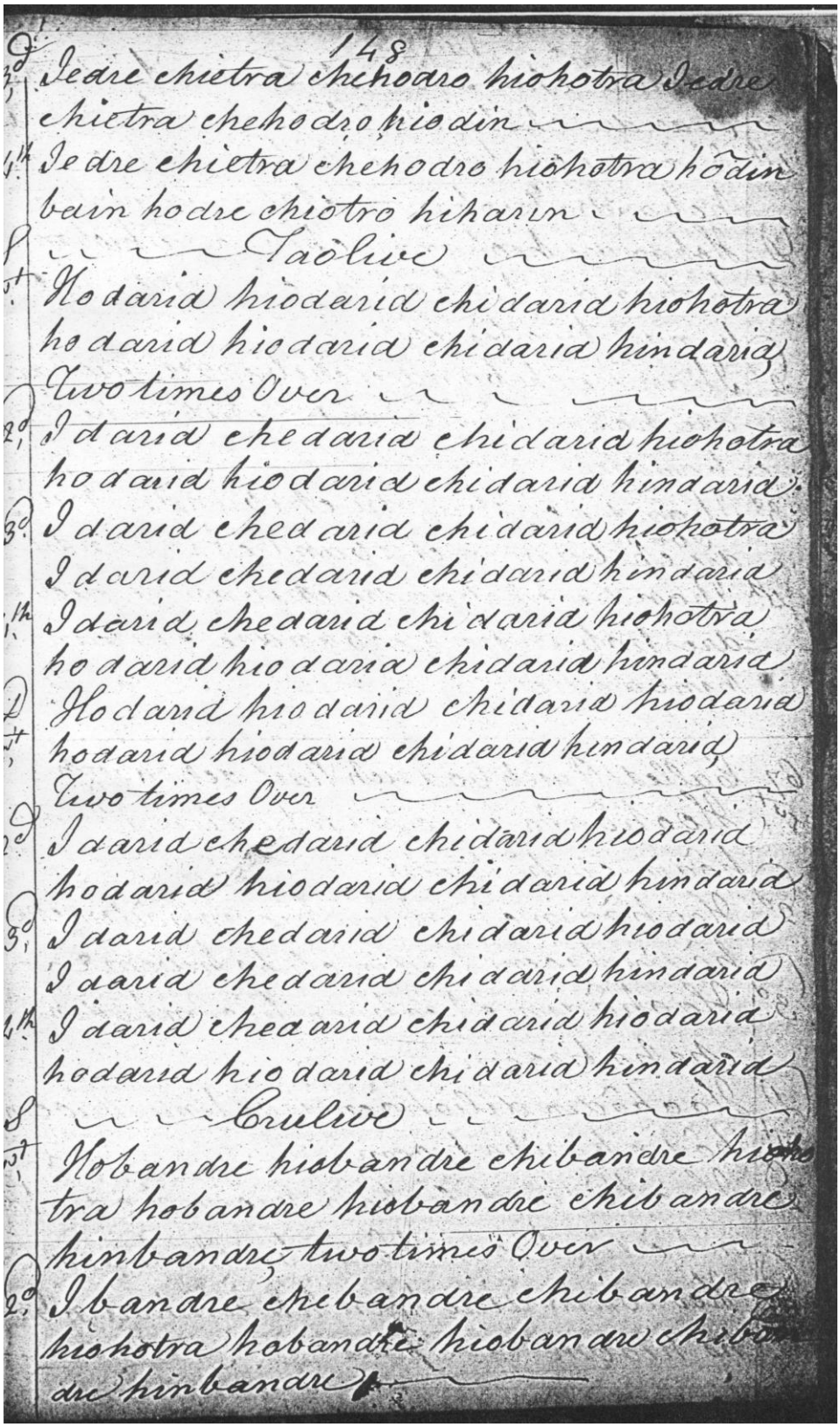
Lament for the Old Sword

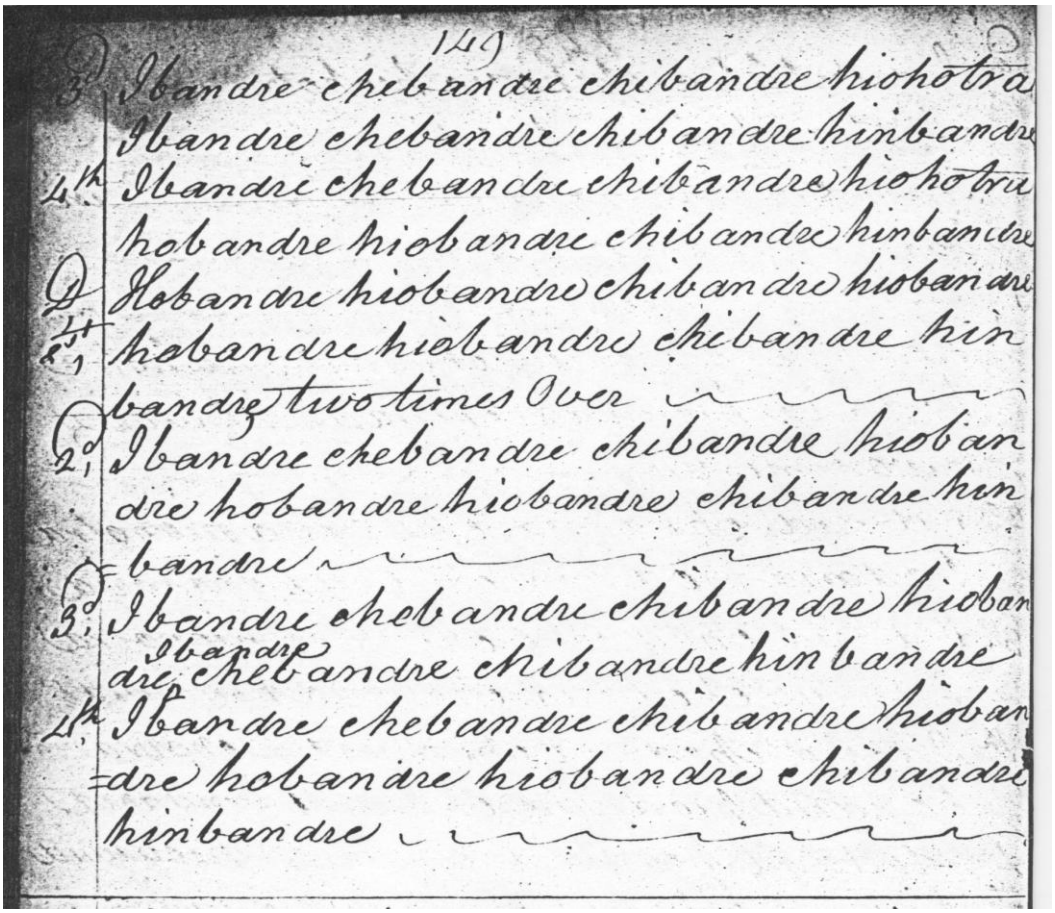
There are settings of this tune in the following manuscript sources:
– **Colin Mór Campbell**'s Nether Lorn Canntaireachd, ii, 147-9 (nameless in this source);
– **Donald MacDonald**'s MS, f.41;
– **Angus MacKay**'s MS, ff.139-40; (and in the so-called "Kintarbert MS," ff.77-8);
– **Peter Reid**'s MS, f.16;
– **D. S. MacDonald's MS,** ii, 71;

and in the following published sources:
– **C. S. Thomason**, *Ceol Mor,* p.28;
– **David Glen**, *Ancient Piobaireachd,* pp.12-13.

Colin Mór Campbell sets the tune like this:

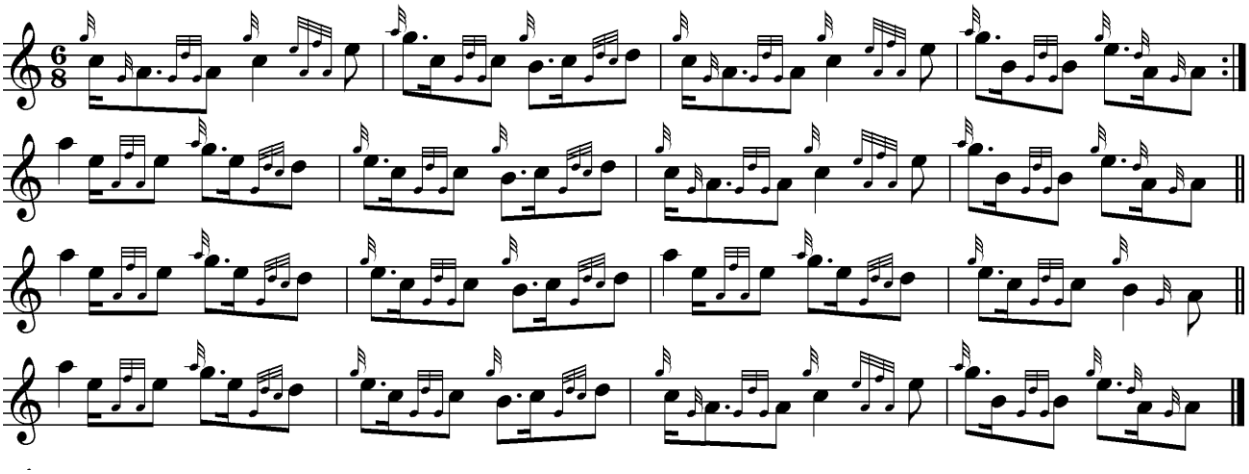



148
Dedre chietra chehodro hiohotra dedre
chietra chehodro hiodin
Dedre chietra chehodro hiohotra hodin
bain hodre chiotro hibarin
Taolive
Hodarid hiodarid chidarid hiohotra
hodarid hiodarid chidarid hindarid
Two times Over
Idarid chedarid chidarid hiohotra
hodarid hiodarid chidarid hindarid
Idarid chedarid chidarid hiohotra
Idarid chedarid chidarid hindarid
Idarid chedarid chidarid hiohotra
hodarid hiodarid chidarid hindarid
Hodarid hiodarid chidarid hiodarid
hodarid hiodarid chidarid hindarid
Two times Over
Idarid chedarid chidarid hiodarid
hodarid hiodarid chidarid hindarid
Idarid chedarid chidarid hiodarid
Idarid chedarid chidarid hindarid
Idarid chedarid chidarid hiodarid
hodarid hiodarid chidarid hindarid
Crulive
Hobandre hisbandre chibandre hiohe
tra hobandre hisbandre chibandre
hinbandre two times Over
Ibandre chebandre chibandre
hiohotra hobandre hisbandre chiban
dre hinbandre



There seem two distinct possibilities here with regard to how this might be realized in performance. One could do it in 6/8 time throughout:

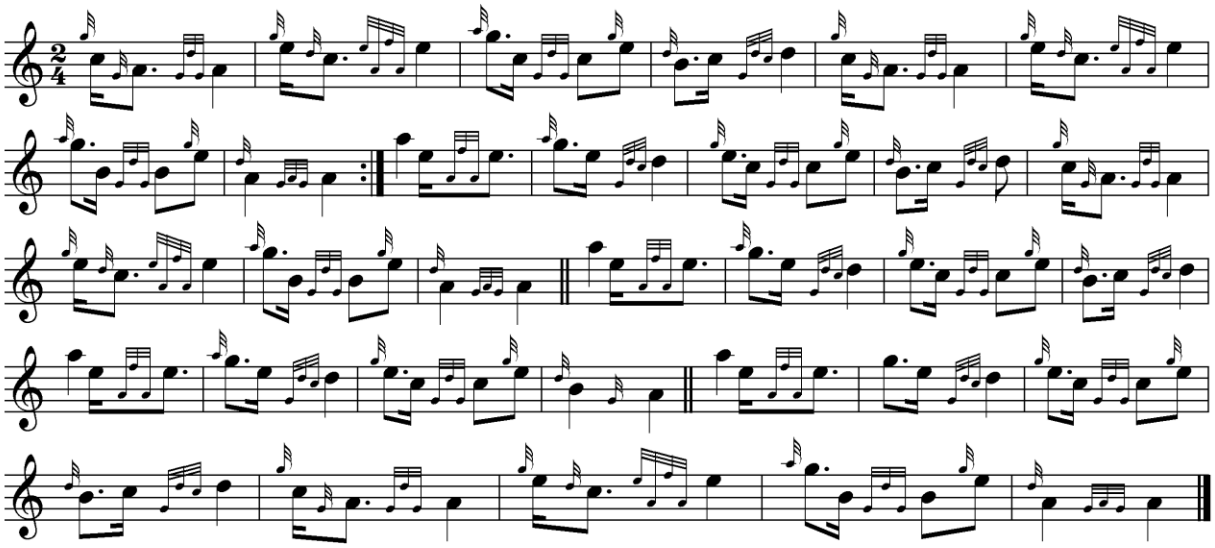
Lament for the Old Sword 6/8 time Nether Lorn



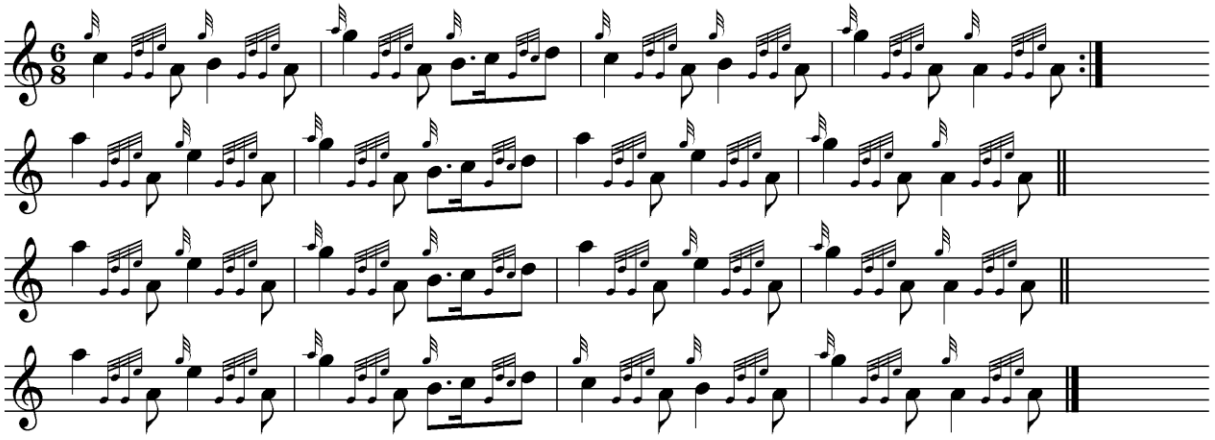
However, another approach is possible, namely to set the ground in 2/4 or 4/4 and the variations in 6/8. To achieve the former, it would be necessary to insert cadences in the manner familiar from later editorial approaches to Colin Mór's manuscript. These were based on the assumption that he customarily omitted such expressions, since when he wrote the placing of such gestures remained at the disposal of the performer. Proceeding thus, would give us something along the following lines:

pipes | drums

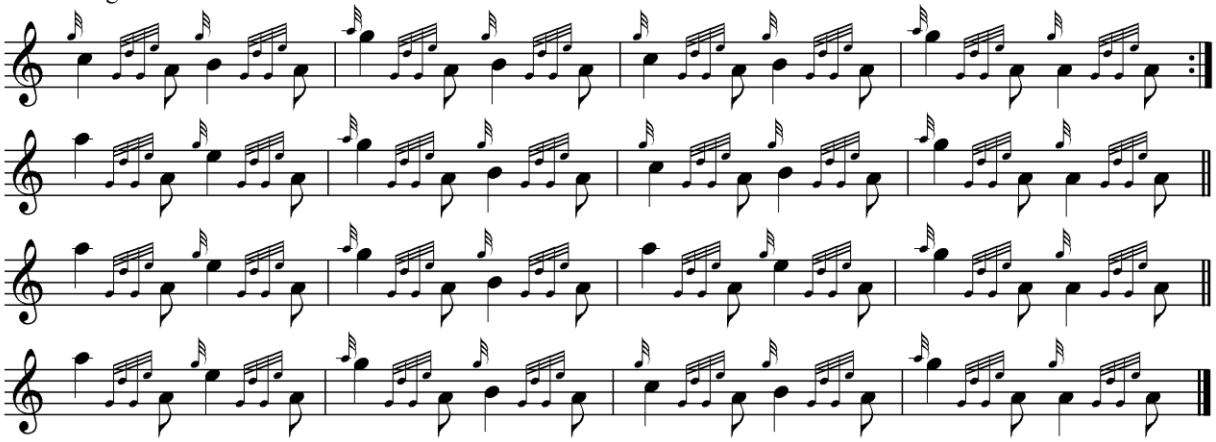
Lament for the Old Sword



Taolive

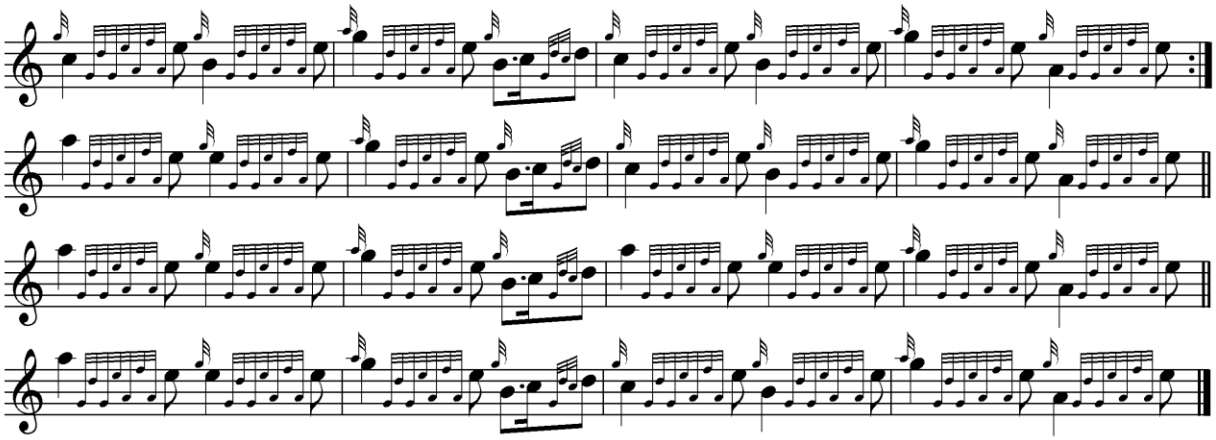


Doubling

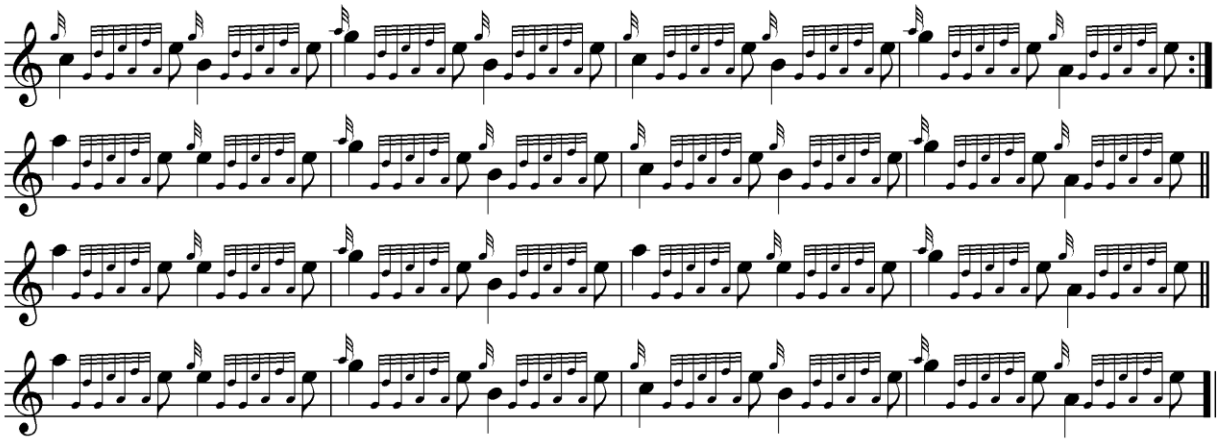


pipes | drums

Crulive



Doubling



One notes the surging song-like phrase pattern of the melody, and the scale: hexatonic, gapped at F. The result could sound very attractive.

Competing pipers, drawn to either of these interpretations could simply hand the judges the Nether Lorn score (which is, after all, the oldest authority) and say "I'm playing that." And it would be difficult for the bench to claim that they had departed from it.

Donald MacDonald sets the tune like this:

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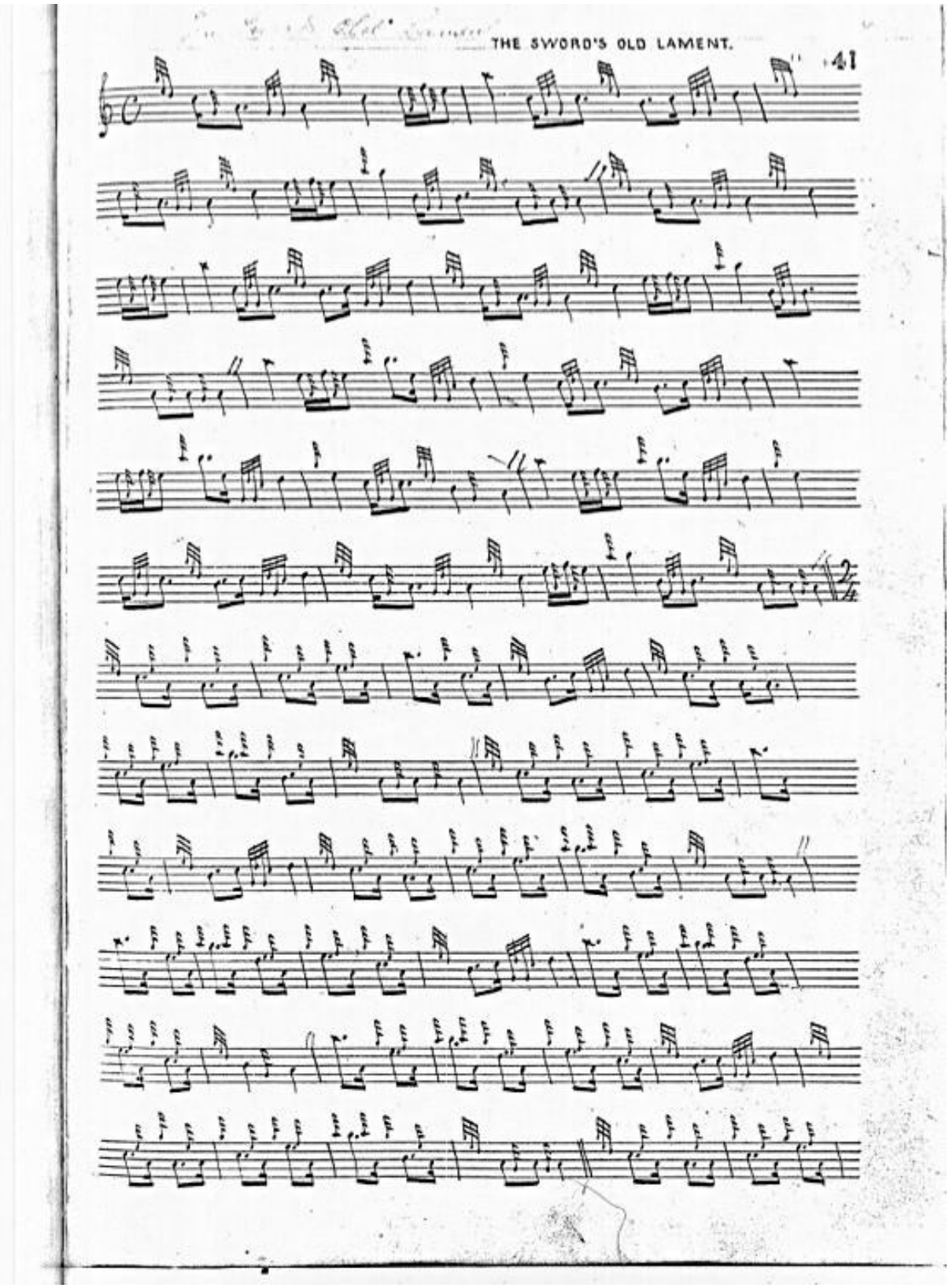
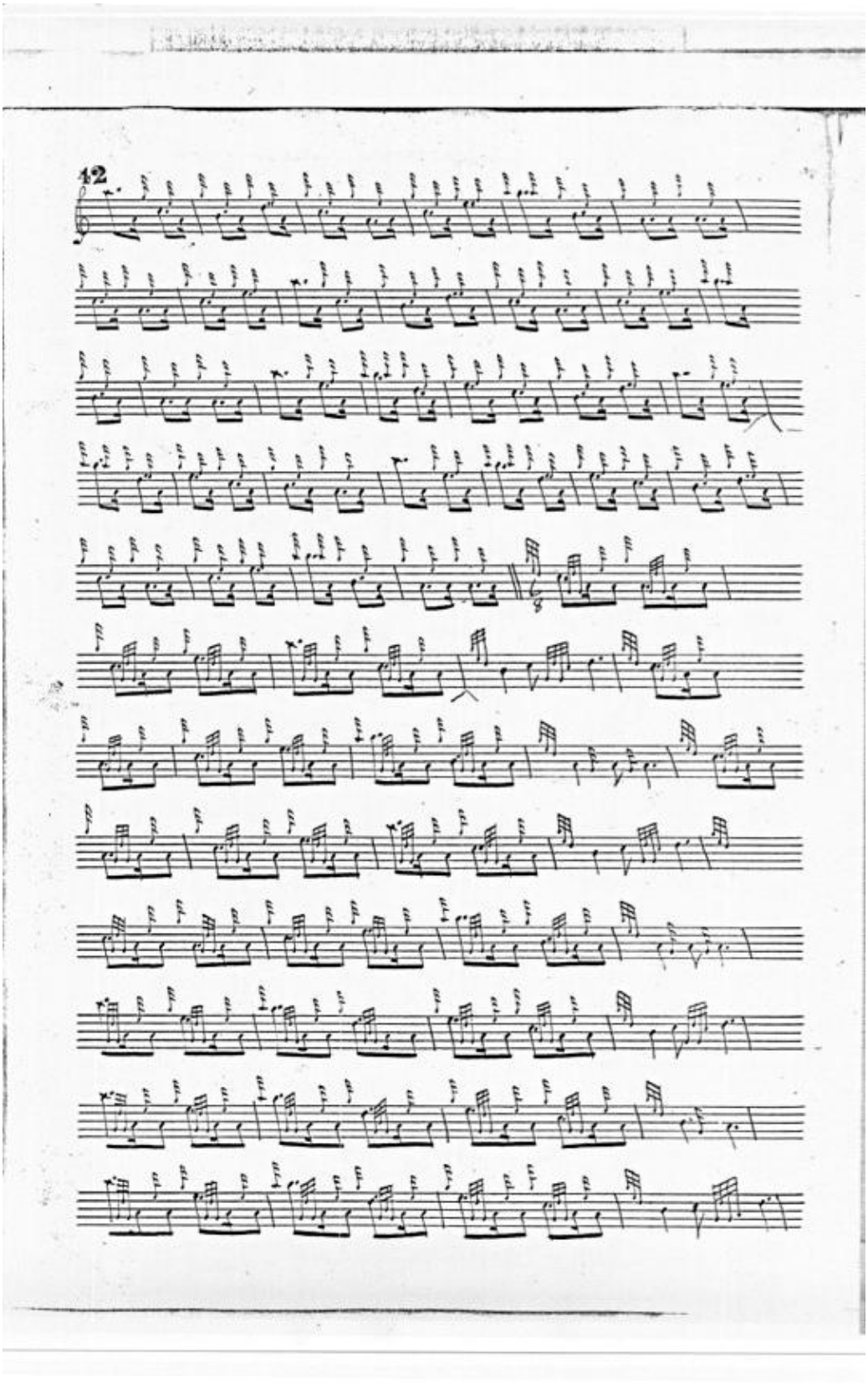
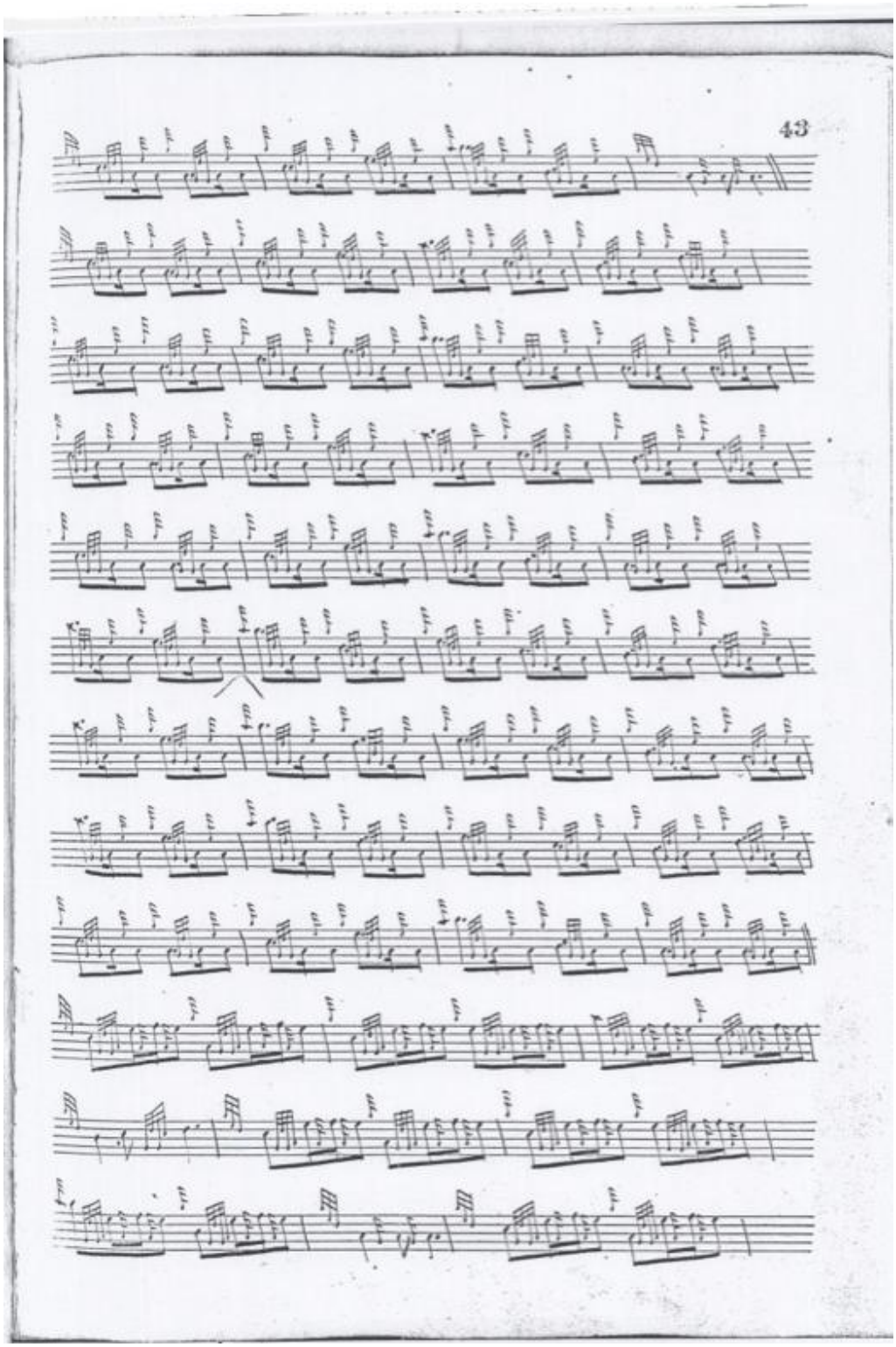
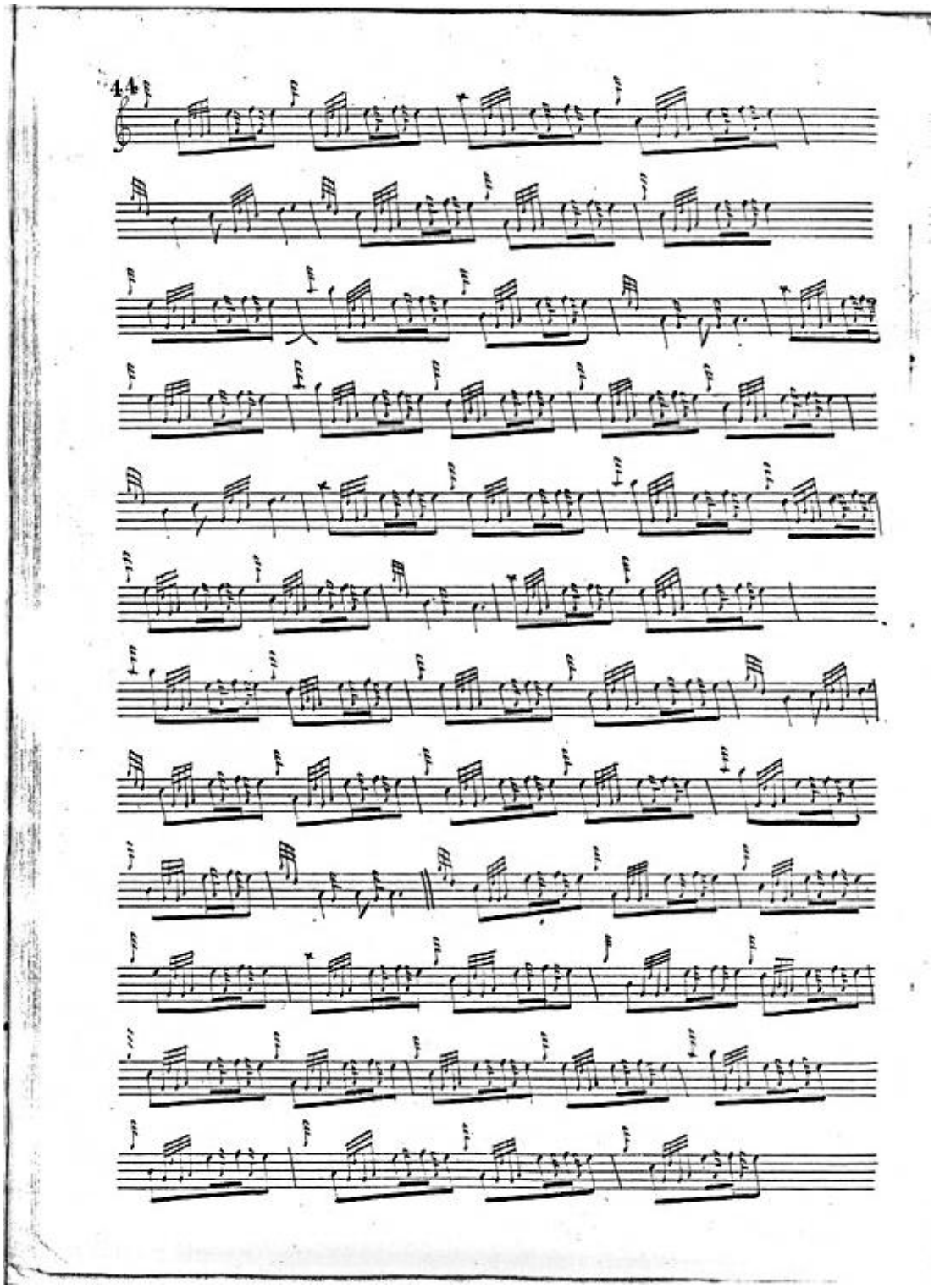
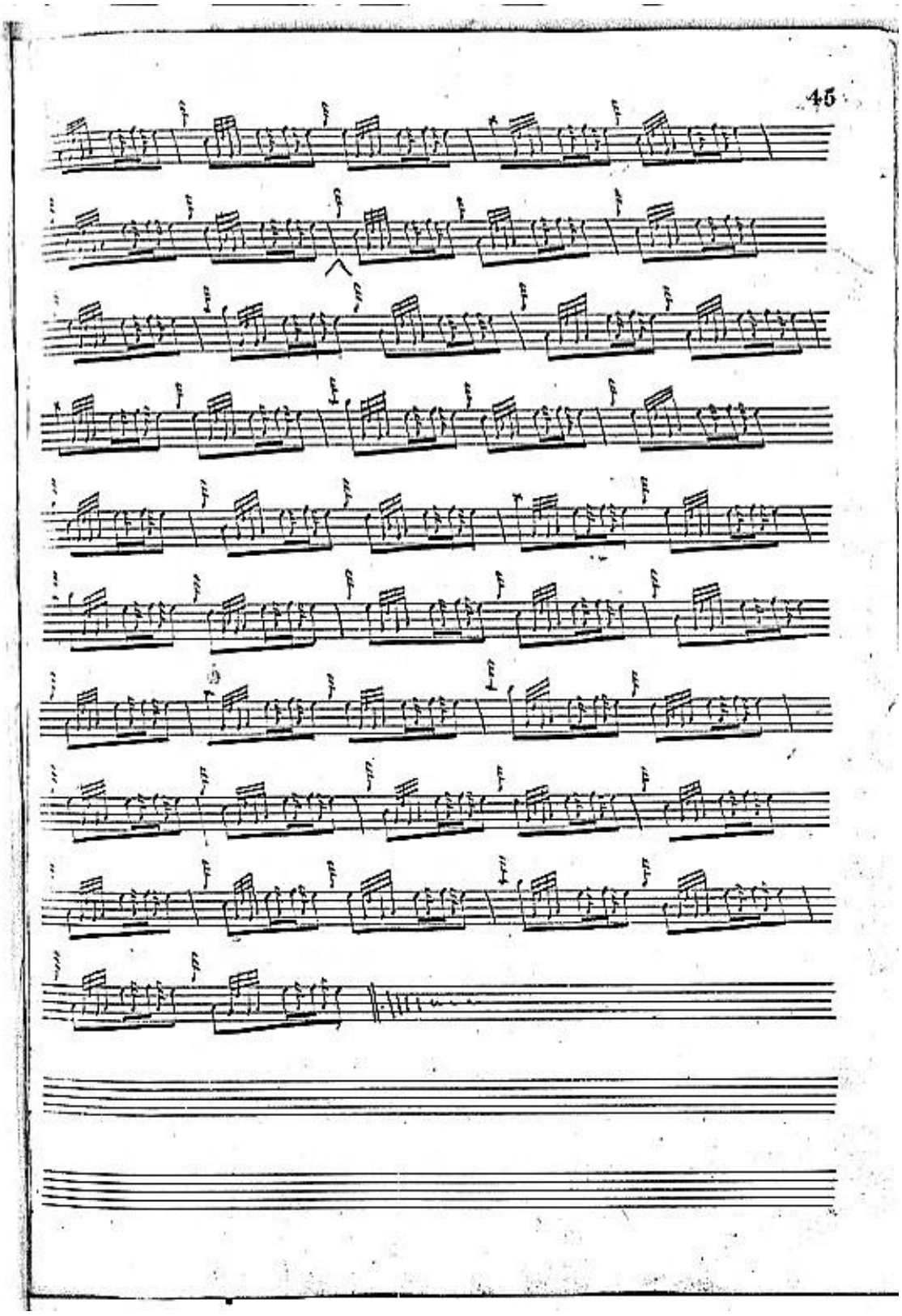

THE SWORD'S OLD LAMENT.
41

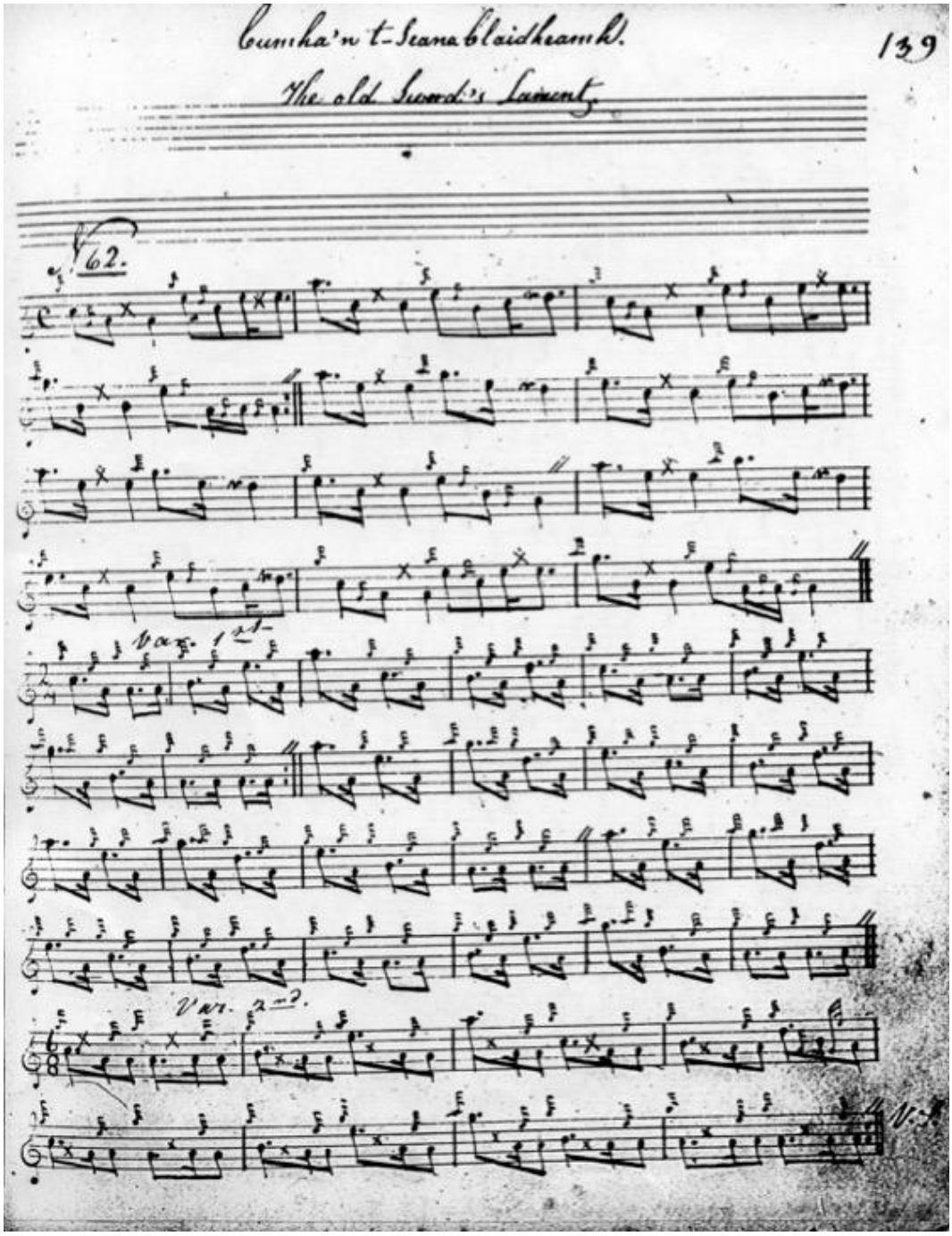

12

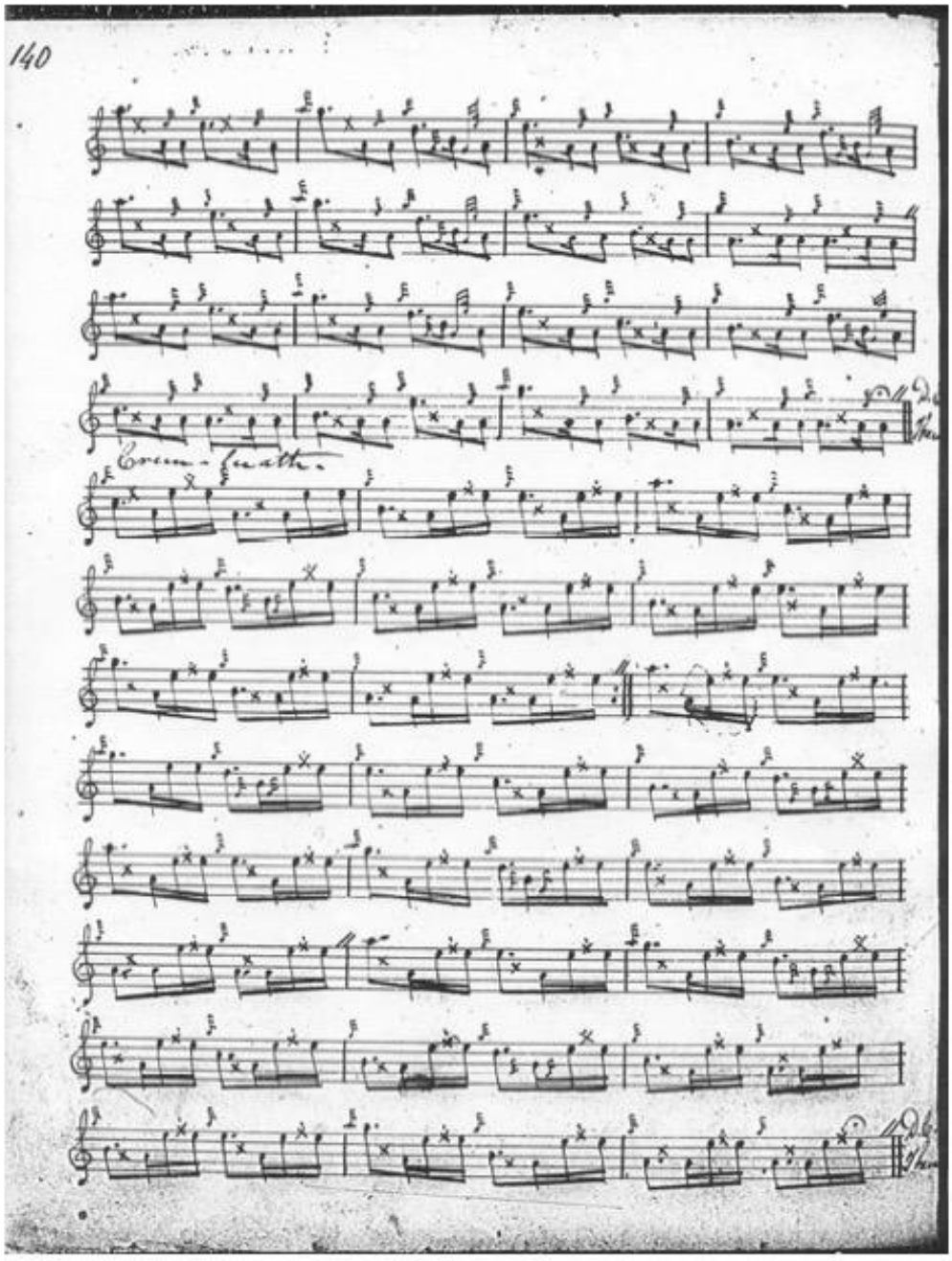

43




45

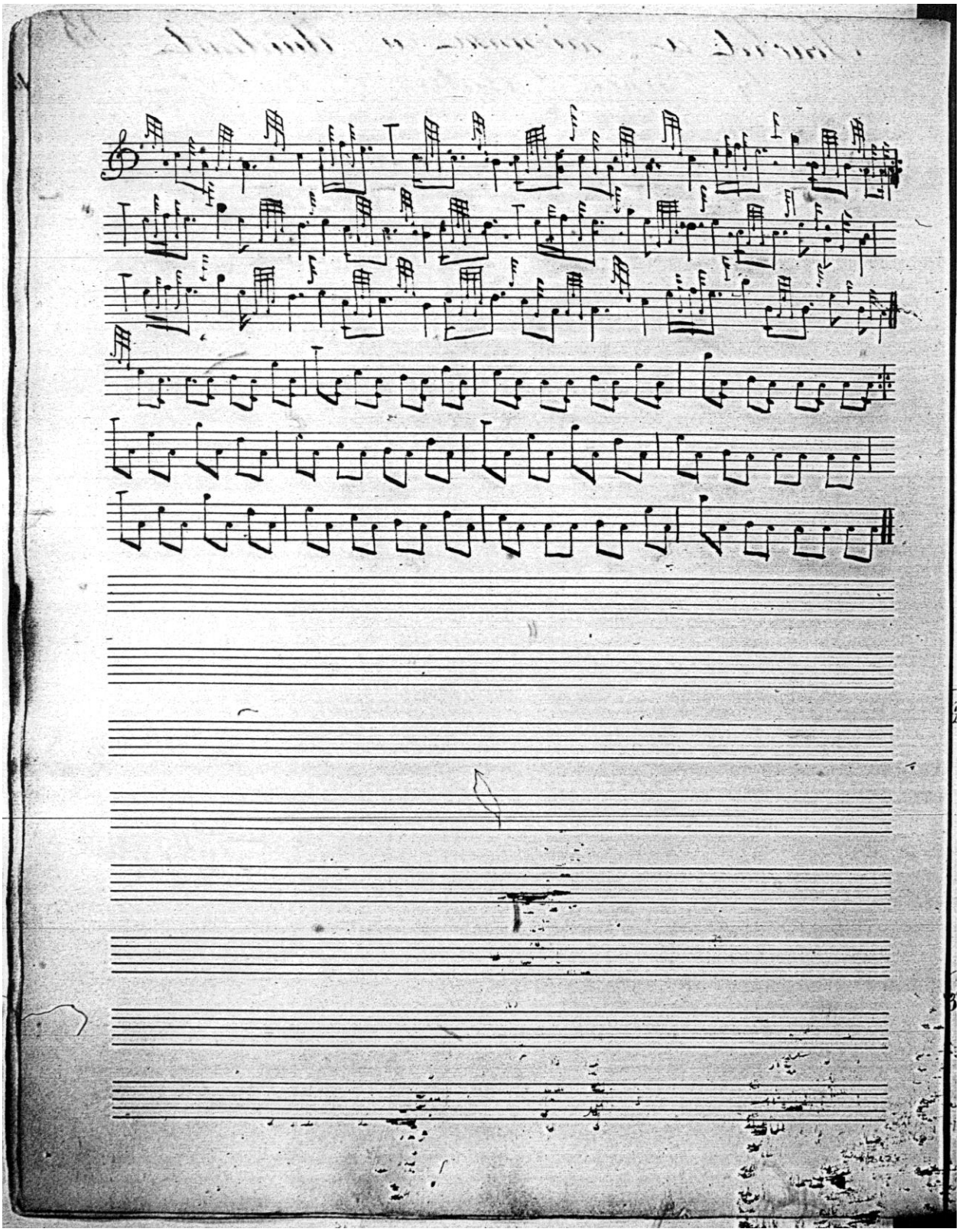
Angus MacKay sets the tune like this



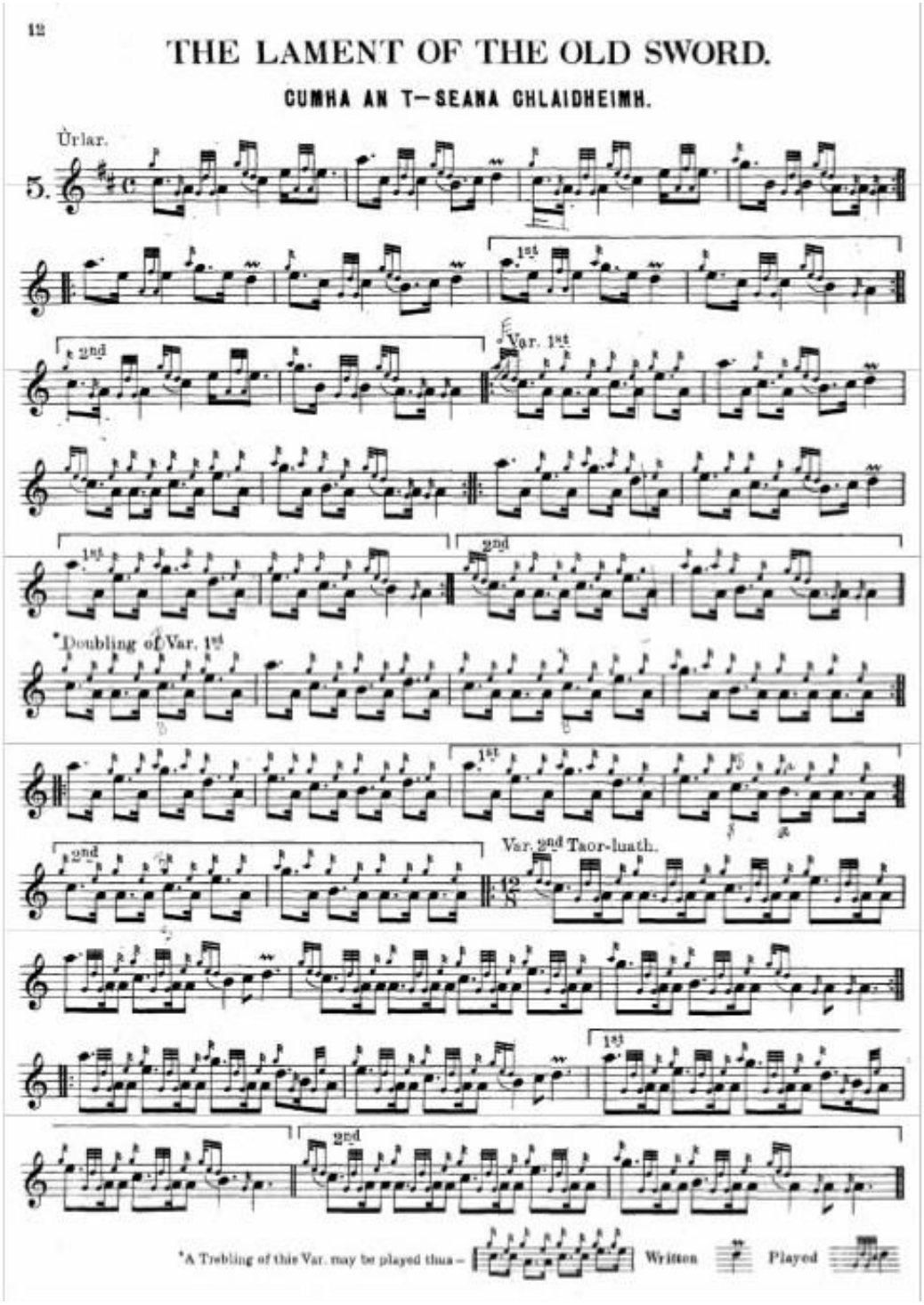

140
Crum-luath.

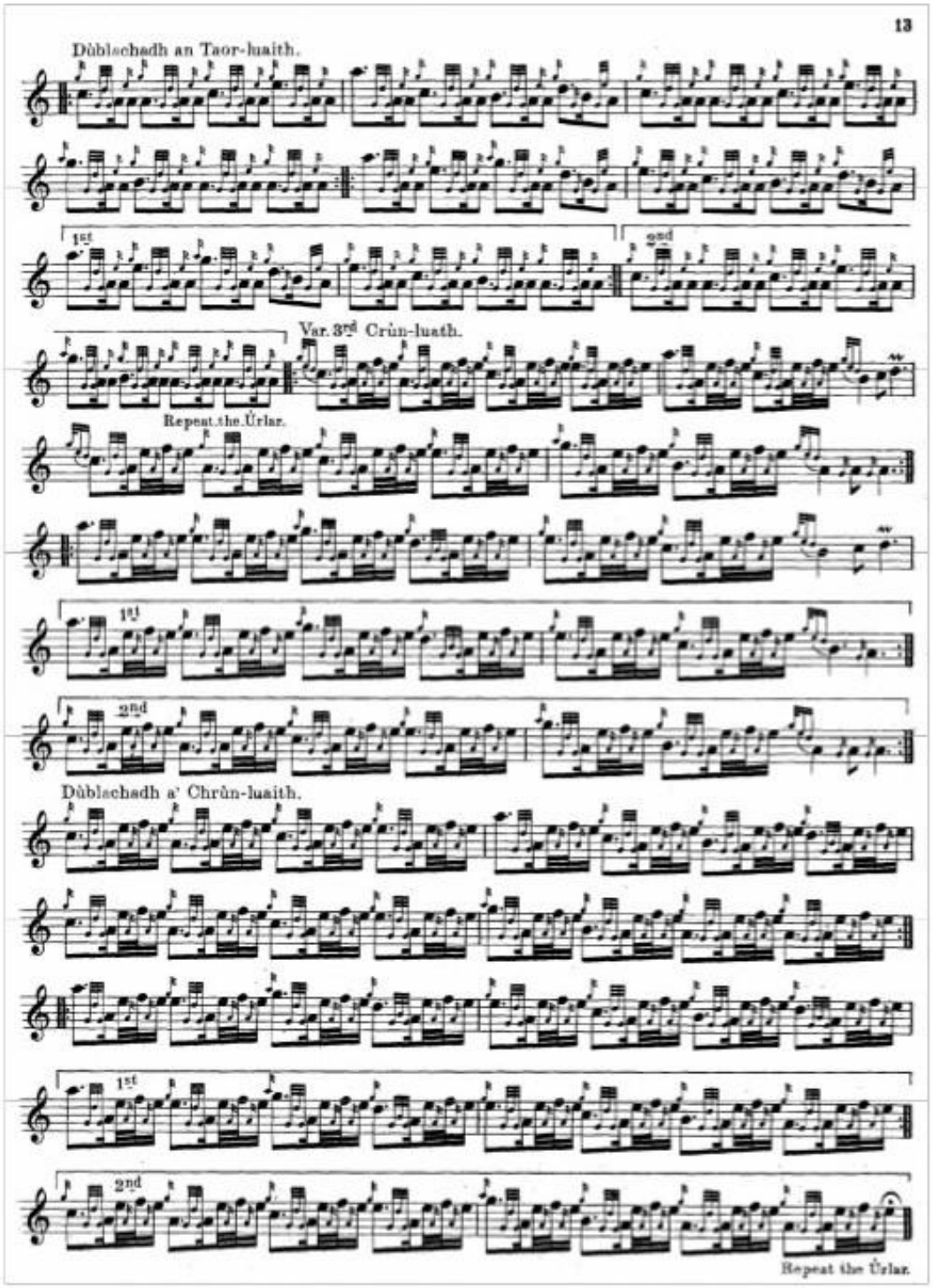
MacKay's development of the tune is similar to Donald MacDonald's, except that he uses a slightly different tone row, coming up to B rather than A in the second bar of the opening phrase in the ground and in appropriate positions throughout the tune, with some might think rather more pleasing effect. The setting in MacKay's so-called Kintarbert MS, is merely a partially-graced transcript of MacKay's main score above and is not reproduced here.

Peter Reid's setting is a partial one, giving ground and first variation only, leaving the rest to be inferred; which, of course, in the days when the master players still retained a considerable degree of interpretative control, he could perfectly safely do:



David Glen and **C S Thomason** treat the tune in a very similar fashion, unsurprisingly perhaps, since they were close colleagues at the heart of a nexus of like-minded piper-editors in the closing years of Victoria's reign. Glen times the tune like this:


12
THE LAMENT OF THE OLD SWORD.
CUMHA AN T-SEANA CHLAIDHEIMH.
Urlar.
5.
1st
2nd
Var. 1st
1st
2nd
*Doubling of Var. 1st
1st
2nd
Var. 2nd Taor-luath.
12/8
1st
2nd
*A Trebling of this Var. may be played thus –
Written
Played


13
Dùblachadh an Taor-luaith.
1st
2nd
Var. 3rd Crùn-luath.
Repeat the Ùrlar.
1st
2nd
Dùblachadh a' Chrùn-luaith.
1st
2nd
Repeat the Ùrlar.

Interestingly Glen and Thomason elect to follow MacDonald rather than Angus MacKay in his treatment of the tone row coming up to C rather than B as MacDonald does in the A phrase of the ground and later variations.

Commentary:

The Lament for the Old Sword is one of the classic tunes, and likely to be found in the repertoire of even moderately accomplished players, thanks to its flowing and attractive melody line and technically satisfying variations. In his notes to Glen's *Ancient Piobaireachd,* the historian Henry Whyte, "Fionn," offers some speculative remarks about the symbolic role of the sword in Highland society, but little is known about the historical circumstances of this tune.

> *The Lament of the Old Sword Cumha an t-seann Chlaidheimhd.* This Lament is understood to be the expressed sorrow of an old sword, which doubtless had done valiant deeds, because it was no longer of use in battle. While it may be difficult to prove that the Gael indulged in 'Sword worship,' there is no doubt he had considerable regard, nay reverence, for weapons of defence. There is a Piobaireachd belonging to the Clan Maclean called '*Claidheimh Mòr Iain Ghairbh'*—John Garve of Coll's Great Sword.'" ("Historic, Biographic and Legendary Notes to the Tunes by 'Fionn,'" p.2).

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