

CASE STUDY 8

ISEABAIL NICAOIDH

(ISABEL MACKAY)

SOURCES

PIPE

Campbell Canntaireachd. [CC] c1815. Vol. 2 no. 31

'Clann donail Raoich'

Donald MacDonald Ms. [DMcD] c1806-26 no.37
p254.

'Battle of Maolroy'.¹

¹ There is another tune in A.MacArthur's Ms. (no.8) which was later called the Battle of Mulroy. The title 'The Battle of Red Hill' has been written in ink above the music score and this handwriting looks like Dr. Bannatyne's. The tune also appears in A.McKay's Ms. Vol 1. without a title, as his source is MacArthur. However, MacKay has the following words underneath the music:

'Fhir a bhreacain duibh, chaidh an diugh oirnne,
Chaidh an diugh 's an dé le clann Dòmhnail.'

(Men of the black plaids, the day went against us/ today and yesterday went with clan Donald.) which links them to a battle theme. The words are difficult to match with the notation, though, without taking a great amount of freedom in singing them.

Thomason's Ceòl Mór (1900) has a title which similarly suggests an older song text relating it to battle called 'A mhuinntir a chail chaoil thugadh am bruthach oirbh.' (Those of the meagre kale/cabbage that took to the hills) The associations made in poetry and song with kale or cabbage were derogatory in the Gaelic Scotland of the sixteenth century at least.

Another title is 'Thug Clann Dòmhnail am bruthach orr'. PT. (May 1968) has an article which states that by tradition, it was composed by Dòmhnall Mór Mac a Ghlasraich on the battlefield to celebrate the victory of the Keppoch MacDonalds over the MacIntoshes in 1688. This was the last clan battle fought in the Highlands. It took place in Keppoch between the MacDonalds and the MacIntoshes immediately before the revolution of 1688 and the MacIntoshes were 'vanquished.' (Gregory 1881: 415) The 'muinntir a chail chaoil' was an epithet on the MacIntoshes. It seems from the titles that both sides claimed some honour.

Another source (CMg. vol VI: 89) associates some of the above Gaelic poetry with another battle, Blàrleine in 1544. It states that a pibroch was composed to it with the lines:-

Variant Tune

Piobaireachd Society Series. [PS.] 1925 Book 1.

'Prince's Salute'

SONG

Urquhart Ms. 1820

Audio Recording

JCM Campbell, Kintail. [JCM] Scottish Tradition Series 8

'Iseabail NicAoidh'

OTHER MUSIC SOURCES.

Daniel Dow 1776 p. 40

Isobail Ni Caoidh - The Stewart's March

'Fhriselich a chàil chaoil (Three times),
Thugaibh am bruthach oirbh.
plus two more stanzas:-
'Chloinn Dòmhnail an fhraoich (three times)
Cuiribh na' siubhal iad.

Luaidhe chruinn ghorm (three times)
'S fùdar 'air siubhal ri.'

Fhriselich

Although Blàr Léine was between the Clanranald MacDonalds and the Frasers with the latter suffering heavy losses (Gregory 1881: 162) the association of the additional lines with the same event is flawed. This date is too early for the existence of firearms on the Highland battlefield, which did not appear till the Battle of Killiecrankie over a hundred years later. It is just as likely then that the words are mixed up with different occasions. The poetry does however go some way to explaining the CC title 'Clan Donail Raoich' for Iseabail NicAoidh and 'muinntir a chàil chaoil', although one cannot be sure that Frasers were meant - it says so!
See also Carmichael Watson Ms. for a version of Battle of Mulroy beginning : 'Thàinig sgeul o'n armailt (8 lines per verse and three stresses/line)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

The song Iseabail NicAoidh is recognised as of the best known of all the songs which are associated with pibroch. However, the melody to which the song is sung is historically associated with a pibroch called The Prince's Salute. Robert, or Rob Donn, MacKay was the author of the song words which, as the titles above suggest, ^{were probably} based on a much older tune than the period in which the poetry was written - in the mid 1700's but ^{probably} pre-1747² - ^{than the melody to which it is now sung}

The deliberate imitation of pibroch rhythm and form as an identifiable genre in the song/poetic tradition was not new to Gaelic culture because there were songs closely associated with the pibroch tradition in existence probably one hundred years earlier such as Cholla mo Rùn (Piper's Warning) (CS 5) and Fuaim na Tuinne ri Dùntreòin (The sound of the waves against Duntroon) The composition of Gaelic song on a higher Gaelic register than these³ two just mentioned does not seem to have occurred, until Alexander MacDonald set his poetry to extant pibrochs, basing his poems on their melodies and imitating the different rhythmic schemes which are represented by the ùrlar, siubhal and crunluath. Rob Donn was probably influenced by MacDonald's seemingly innovative form which created a new poetic genre, later used by Duncan Bàn MacIntyre and others. (See CS 9) Buisman (1995) points out that although Rob Donn may have known the form by 1746, MacDonald was regarded as the person who started the literary form of 'pibroch poems'.

Isabel MacKay was not the only poem Rob Donn wrote which was based on pibroch. He is said to have composed 'at least two pibroch-poems' (MacLeod 1971: 19) One of these is probably Thogaireadh bean Aoith (The desire of the MacKay woman) (Gilles 1789) which in Urquhart (1820) is called 'Port Mearsaidh eile le Rob Donn' (Another marching tune by Rob Donn) At a later date (MacFarlane/Gunn 1900) called this 'Pibroch of

² See Grimble p.31.

³ The frequent inversions of words, which occur in the lines and the use of consonants to imitate the pipe fingering is, however, clever, and it seems to have been a test of memory to be able to reproduce the sequences in the predetermined order. For example, part of the 'siubhal sleamhuinn' runs as follows: 'Sin iad thugad, so iad agad, bidh iad agad a Dhùntròin; so iad agad, sin iad thugad, tha iad thugad a Dhùntròin. Tha iad agad sin iad thugad...'

Aodh's Wife'. MacDonald published at least four songs which were modelled on pibroch in his 1751 edition. (See CS 9)

DESCRIPTION

This is a standard eight phrase tune. The first two phrases are repeated and the rest of the *ùrlar* consists of a development of this, merely by moving up one note in the phrases. It finishes by repeating the first phrase once again which is followed by a different concluding phrase, in a reworking of the more prominent notes of earlier phrases. The song versions which will be considered can be identified in the first two phrases of the tune.

Firstly, the song version 'Iseabail NicAoidh', which is heard today and the pibroch with which it is traditionally associated will be considered.

The song version as sung by JCM is shown in Ex. 1 below which is the present day piper's notation of The Prince's Salute. Underneath this is the PS notation below which is the actual notes values that one would be most likely to hear played today.

Ex.1.

can't?

JCM Campbell.



Ise - a - bail Nic Aoidh, Aig a chrodh laogh, Ise - a - bail Nic Aoidh 's i 'na h-òn - ar;



Ise - a - bail Nic Aoidh, Aig a chrodh laogh, Ise - a - bail Nic Aoidh 's i 'na h-òn - ar;

Prince's Salute PS version:



put one above other.

One can see the common melodic features when comparing the song and pibroch score. The first two stresses show the song beginning on the low A which coincides with the pibroch version's low A rather than the E as played today. The short Es which are notated in the PS version are exaggerated in actual performance, but this seems to be a common feature of modern style which has, unfortunately, become fairly generally accepted. The JCM version has an operatic style with great accentuation on the the stressed vowels eg., the *I* of *Iseabail* and the the *o* of *Aoidh*, which are prominent especially at the beginning of phrases and at the end of subphrases. A strong rhythmic contrast is set up in the phrases and subphrases due to the greater differences between the longest and the shortest notes of the song compared to what would normally be heard in more traditional singing.

repeated
? "aoi"
There's no
o sounds, it
there?

It is probably a coincidence that it has a very similar melodic shape to Cholla mo Rùn, which is a very different type of pibroch. It demonstrates, however, how changes in function, tempo and rhythm, can well disguise a tune from another.

DMCD

The important feature to observe is that the PS version of Isabel MacKay also has a similar melodic shape ^{to} as The Prince's Salute and is shown in Ex.2. By removing the cadences a song version can be created by overlaying the words on the pibroch melody line, to produce a version which is shown transcribed underneath the pibroch version.

too many
versions?

Ex. 2

why PS version? DMCD?

Isabel MacKay. PS version:



Sung version:



Ise - a - bail Nic Aoidh, aig a chroth laoigh,

PS version:



Sung version:



Ise - a - bail Nic Aoidh 'si na h - ò - n - ar.

When one compares JCM's version with the Prince's Salute and then the song version which has been 'recreated' as it were, and identified with its pibroch Isabel MacKay, this version is no less close, melodically or rhythmically, to its pibroch ^{as} than the same words are to the more commonly associated tune The Prince's Salute. The pibroch Isabel MacKay could therefore be regarded as a variant of Prince's Salute. ^{This is very difficult to comprehend. just as close variant} ~~It is~~ ^{probably predates} Prince's Salute because it appears under a range of different titles related to events which pre-date the eighteenth century one commemorated by the Prince's Salute.

The rhythm of the song words are fairly constant if sung in a traditional style which places importance on speech rhythm. One does not get long accented notes followed by much shorter ones. Both pibrochs accommodate this rhythm with a little editing. When the same principles of editing are applied to each pibroch, Isabel MacKay seems more adaptable to the words than Prince's Salute.

Could it be the case that the song Isabel MacKay was once sung to a melody which formed the basis of the pibroch Isabel MacKay? Because the Prince's Salute was so melodically and rhythmically similar, the song may have been adapted to the new melody which was associated with Prince Charles. At a later date, the Urquhart Ms. (1820) has the somewhat romantic story that Isabel MacKay represented Prince Charles when under hiding after the Battle of Culloden, as his own name dare not be mentioned. This seems to be an extension of the theme of Alexander MacDonald's waulking song Agus Ho Mhòraig in which Mòrag represented Charles. (MacKenzie 1840: 121, Tolmie 1911: 143)⁴. } Sike!

|| No i in vocative feminine.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the melody of Prince's Salute was used as a vehicle for the words of Isabel MacKay quite soon after it was written. Daniel Dow's (1776) version which is as follows

Ex.3 (overleaf)

⁴ Willam Gray in PT Aug 1973 mistakenly identifies MacDonald's Moladh Mòraig as the one which represents the Prince rather than MacDonald's waulking song.

Ex. 3

Ex. 3



This example provides us with information on the style of playing which the fiddlers were picking up from contemporary pipers. (See Johnson 1984 Ch.V) As one can see from the score, the ornamentation is short. In the second line (phrase four) the cadence appears to be represented by a G gracenote and a slightly longer E. This longer E was recorded by Elizabeth Ross representing the pibroch style of John MacKay of Raasay, and it also appears in one tune in DMcD's book. The most important point, however, is that it is never anywhere as long as one finds in the style played by pibroch players today.

Other notable features are the identification of phrases in the form of rests over the penultimate note and a wider range of rhythms even when the same melodic figure appears more than once. Each can be played in a different rhythmic manner for contrast. This is the style of performance which one would also hear from a good traditional singer, who could vary the word stresses with the music to give a range of rhythmic subtleties within the song.

There is another song by Rob Donn, Thogaireadh Bean Aoidh (Gillies 1786), which has a similar rhythm to Isabel MacKay and which has been associated with the pibroch idiom. This association first appears in the 1829 edition of Rob Donn's songs as Piobaireachd Bean Aoidh. Buisman (1985) however, suggests that this is a corruption of *Thogaireadh*. This is supported by the observation that Gillies has the title 'Thogaireachd Bean Aoidh' in his index.

just existence of Gillies' title -
ref. C ?

CONCLUSIONS.

The pibroch named Isabel MacKay which has hitherto been considered a melody different from and unrelated to the pibroch melody The Prince's Salute to which the song Ise^abail NicAoidh is sung, was shown to be melodically closely related. This observation was made possible by removing the E cadences and changing the rhythm of the echo beats to what the writer considers them to have been in the eighteenth century. The closely related melody was then shown to have similar rhythmic characteristics. This close relationship may partly explain the possible transfer of a poem from one melody in the form of the pibroch Ishbel MacKay to a similar melody, called The Prince's Salute with which it subsequently became associated.