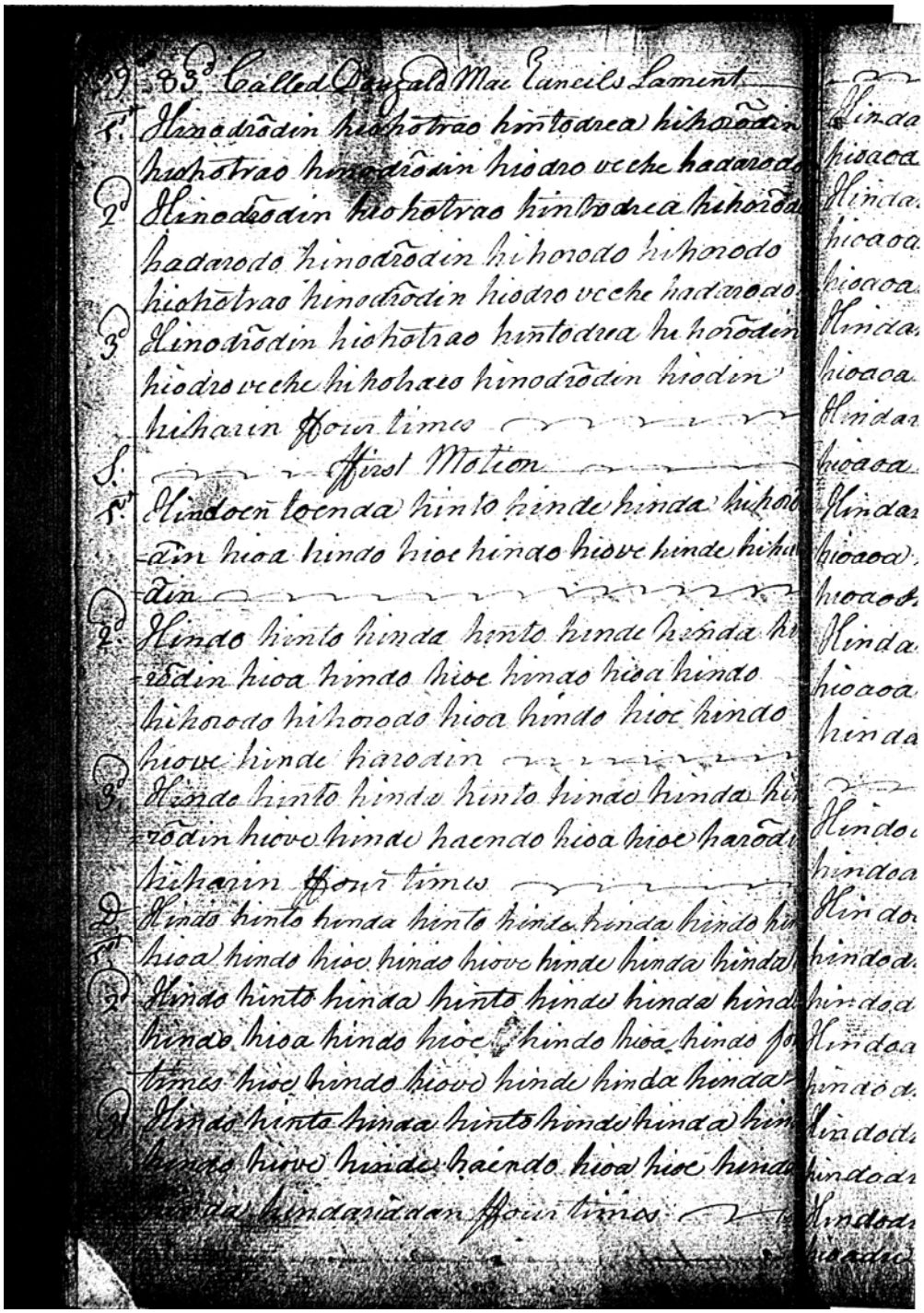
MacNeil of Barra's March

There are settings of this tune in the following manuscript sources:
– **Nether Lorn Canntaireachd**, i 189-90 (with the title "Dougald MacRaneils Lament");
– The **MacArthur/MacGregor**, ff.21-3 (with the title "Spaidsearachd Bhairoch, or the pride of Barroch");
– **David Glen**, ff.348-349;
– **Robert Meldrum**, ff.190-192;

and in the following published sources:
– **Angus MacKay**'s *Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.72-3 (with the title "Spaidseaireachd MhicNeile a'Bhara. MacNeill of Barra's March);
– **C. S. Thomason**'s *Ceol Mor* p.119 (with the title "MacNiel of Barra's Lament"; Thomason has a tune entitled "MacNiell of Barra's March," but this is a different tune nowadays called "The Pride of Barra," not, in turn, to be confused with the MacArthur/MacGregor "Pride of Barra");
– **G. F. Ross**, *Some Piobaireachd Studies*, p.35 (with the title "MacNeill of Barra's Lament."
– **Frans Buisman and Andrew Wright**, eds., *The MacArthur—MacGregor Manuscript of Piobaireachd (1820)*, pp.76-7, 135.

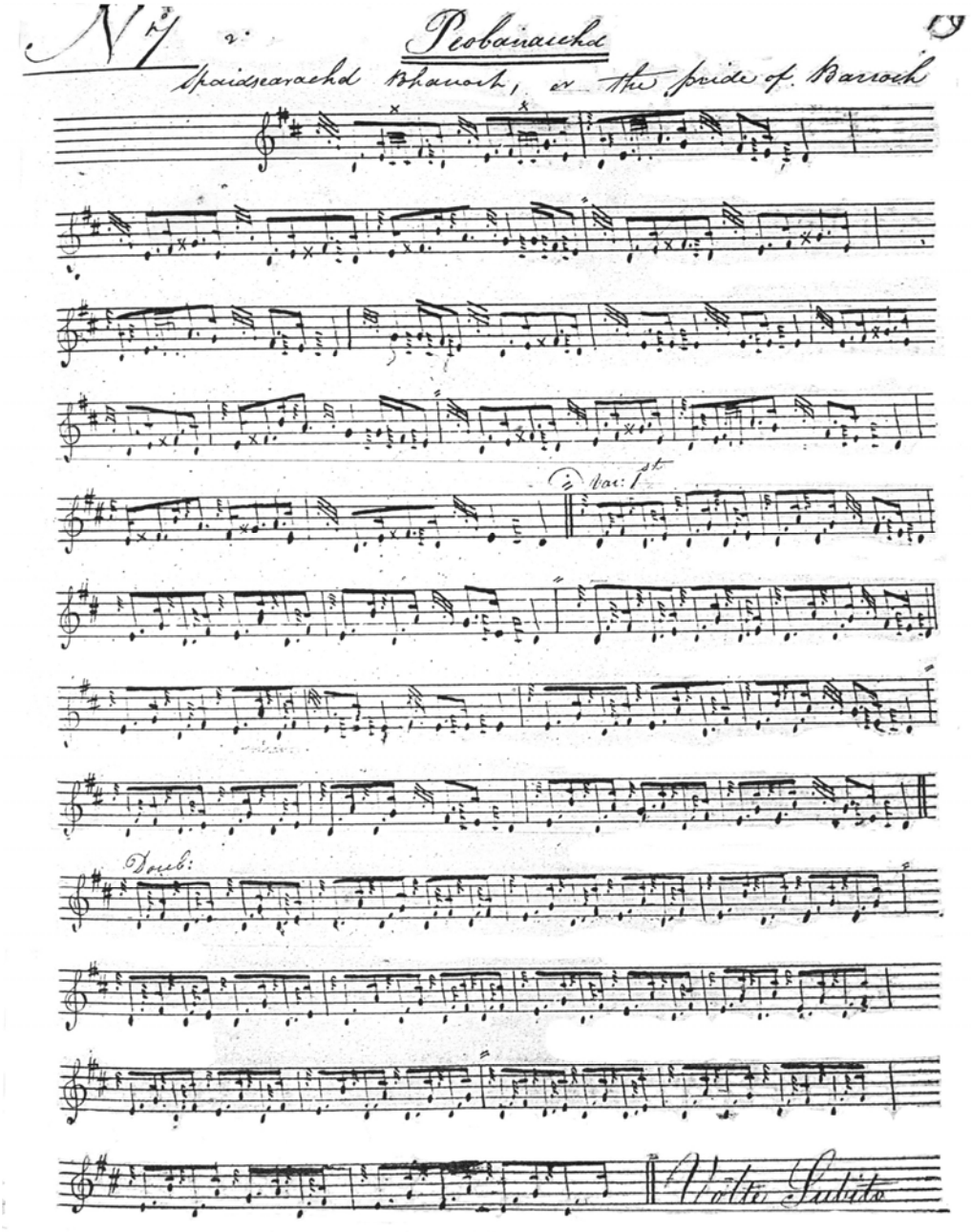
Colin Mór Campbell treats the tune like this:



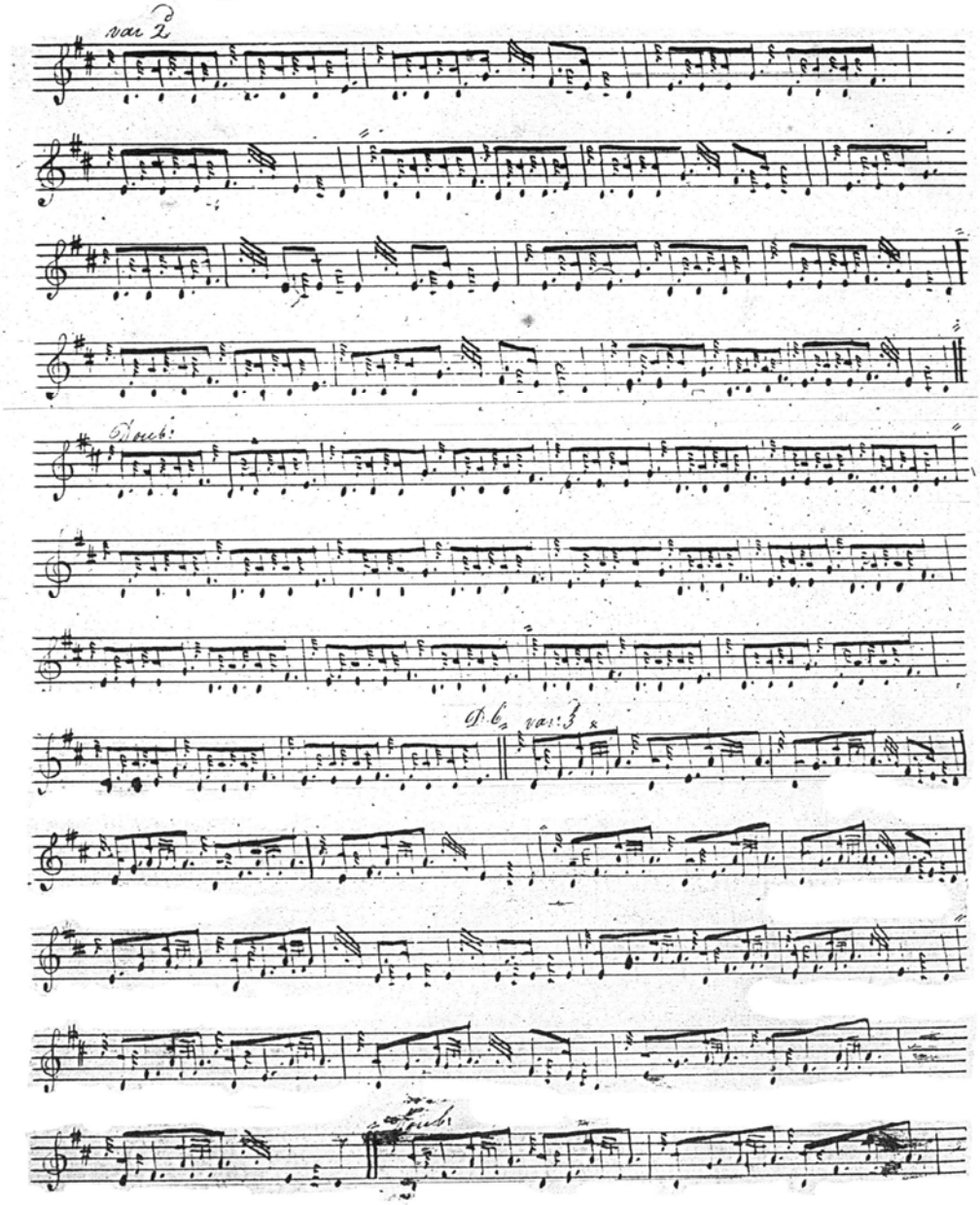
and so on. The tune is developed perfectly symmetrically:
ground;
siubhal singling and doubling;
taorluath fosgailte singling and doubling;

crunluath fosgailte singling and doubling.

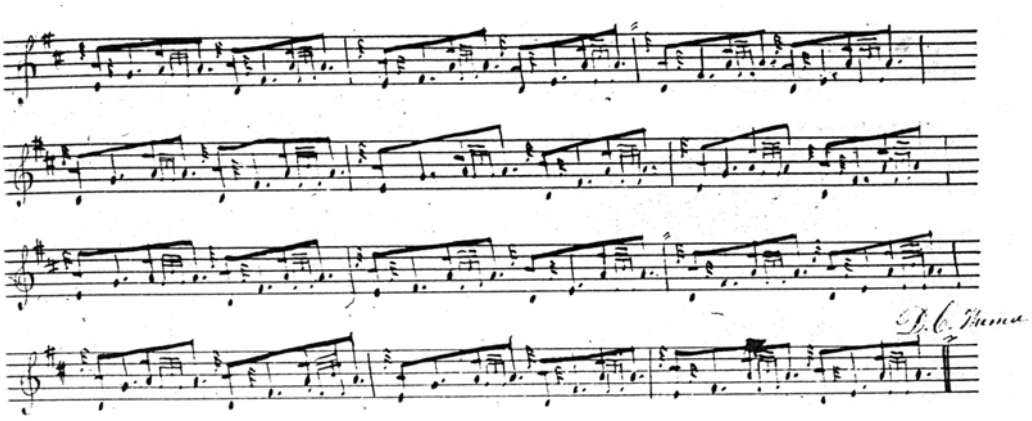
The MacArthur/MacGregor times the tune as follows:



© Dr. William Donaldson



© Dr. William Donaldson



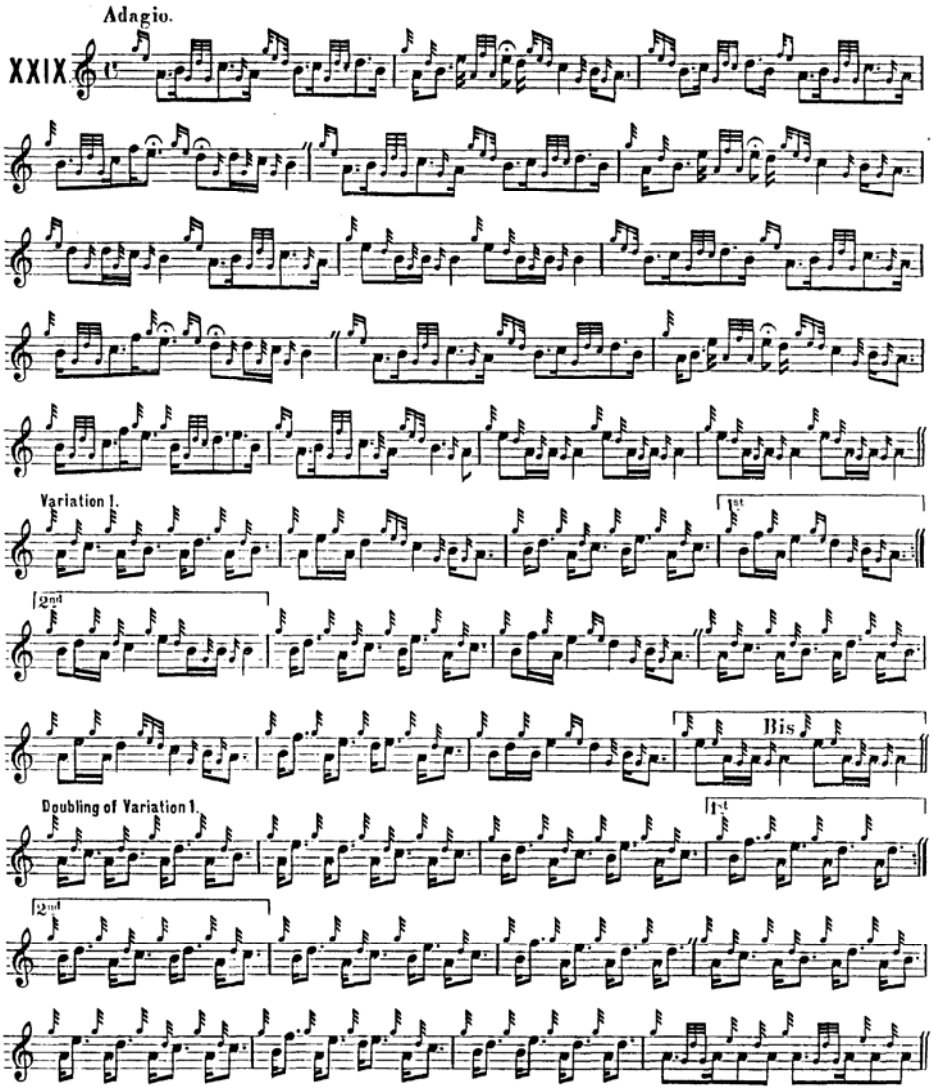
There are a number of features worthy of note here including the "down" pointing of the siubhal, the square 4/4 timing of the taorluath fosgailte, and the "up" cut crunluath fosgailte typical of the MacArthur style. One notices, too, the absence of the "flourish bars" which are present at the ends of the various movements in the other settings.

Angus MacKay times the tune like this:

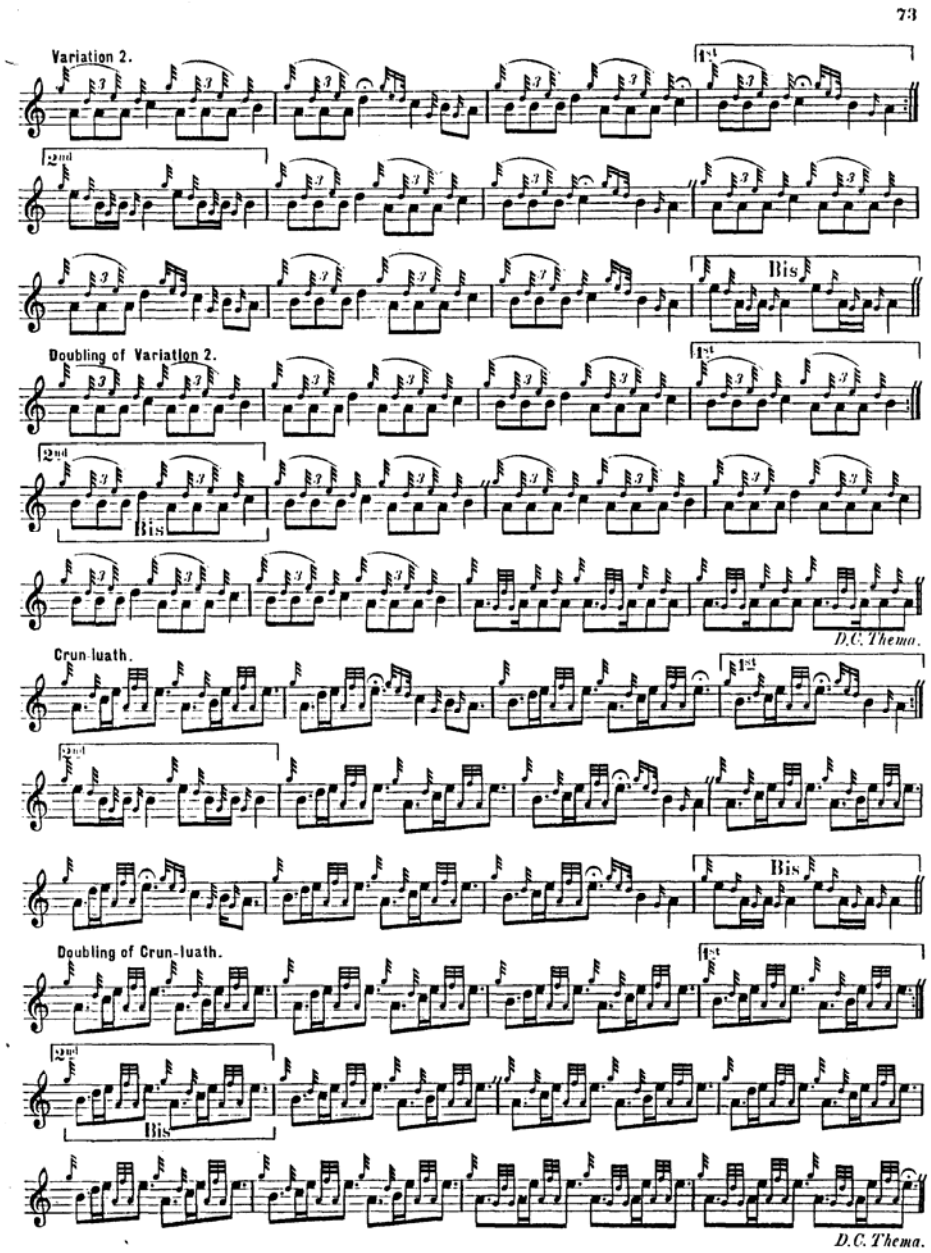
SPAIDSEAIREACHD MHIC NEILE A'BHARA.

Mac Neil of Barra's

March.



© Dr. William Donaldson

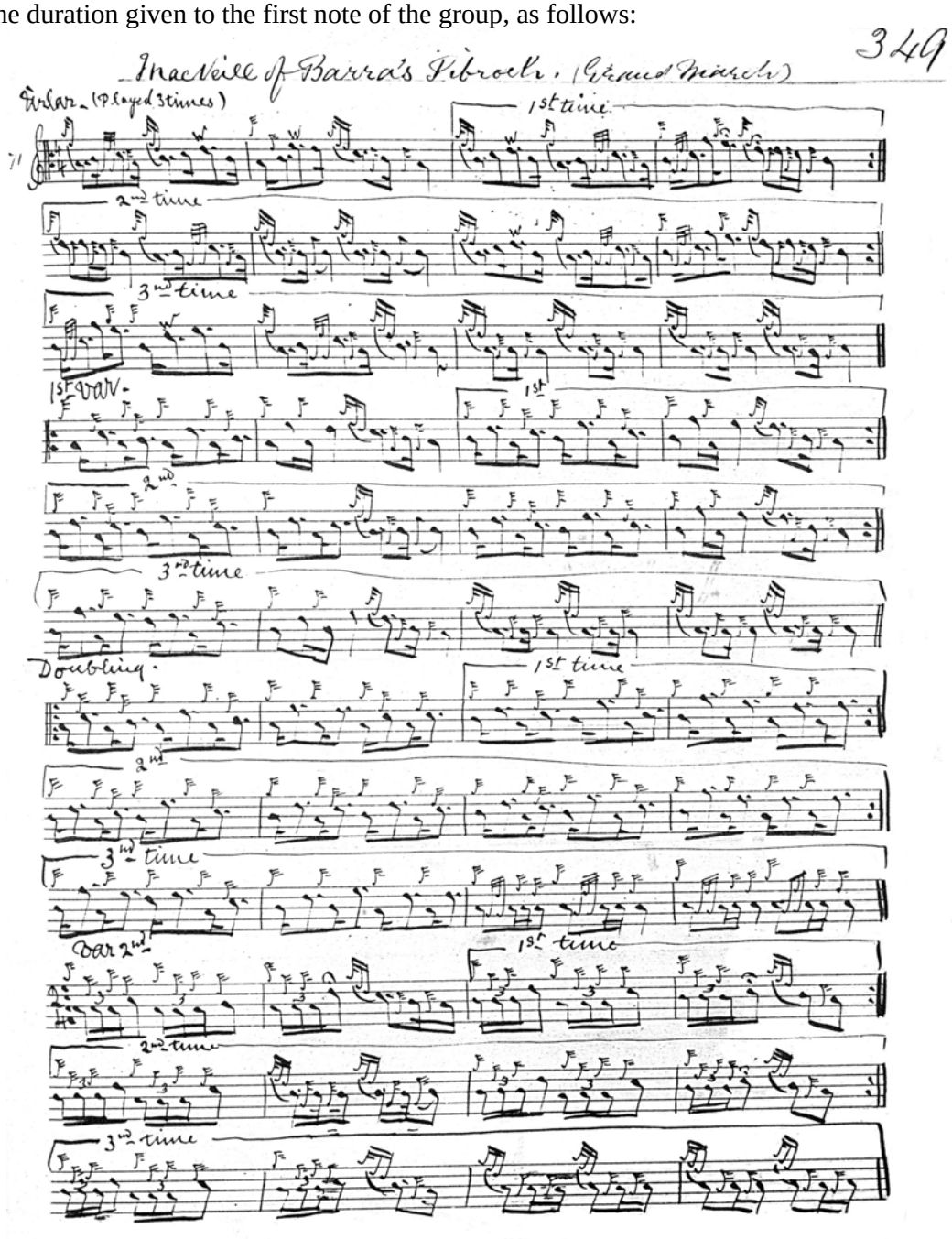


There are a number of interesting differences from the MacArthur/MacGregor setting which will certainly have been one of **Angus MacKay**'s sources. This includes the different turning of the coda of the ground, the predominantly "up" cut siubhal, and the more "orthodox" pointing of the crunluath variations.

C. S. Thomason reproduces MacKay's score, except that he re-times the crunluath fosgailte in 6/8 with semi-demi quaver triplets in the manner which had become orthodox

by the end of the 19th century. He adds little to the stylistic possibilities of the tune otherwise and his score is not reproduced here.

David Glen follows MacKay, but the echo beats are timed in Glen's normal manner with the duration given to the first note of the group, as follows:

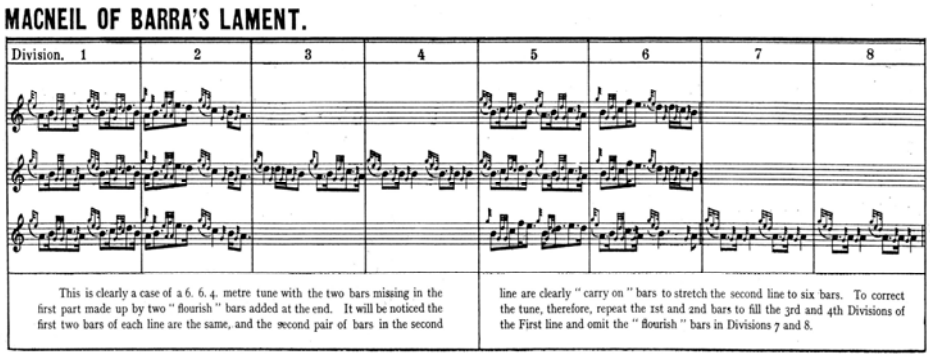


and so on.

© Dr. William Donaldson

Robert Meldrum's setting adds nothing to the expressive possibilities of the tune and is not reproduced here.

G. F. Ross makes the interesting suggestion that the tune may be in 6 6 4 metre and have suffered structural dislocation, and he proposes quite a pleasing emendation as follows:



Commentary

This piece is at the centre of a cat's cradle of overlapping names, "MacNeill of Barra's Lament," "MacNeill of Barra's March," "The Pride of Barra" and so on, as indicated in the list of manuscript and printed sources at the head of this article. This is not a very satisfactory situation. It means, for example, that we cannot be sure that it was this tune that John Campbell from Nether Lorne gained 4th Prize with at the Edinburgh competition in 1816: his tune was called "Speadsearachd Bharra– Macneill of Barra's Salute."

The editors of *The MacArthur-MacGregor Manuscript of Piobaireachd (1820)* take the view that this may be a seventeenth-century tune, and that the dedicatee may have been one of the Clanranald bailies of South Uist (p.76).

* * *

Electronic text © Dr. William Donaldson, Aberdeen, Scotland, September 2006