

## *The MacLerans*

In *N&Q* ser. 1, no. 28, March 1986, 15–16, Alastair Campbell of Airds told a story about how some MacLeans at Southend in Kintyre added an ‘r’ to their name to conceal their identity. This produced a magisterial response on the MacLerans by the late Rev. William Matheson (ser. 1, no. 29, August 1986, 21–26). Mr Matheson modestly omitted reference to one his own books, in which he had spoken of *Fionnlagh Mac Gille Eadharain*, ‘chieftain of the clan of that name’, in North Galson, Ness, Lewis, c. 1600.<sup>1</sup> In his article he judiciously turned his words ‘chieftain of the clan of that name’ into ‘the head of the tribe’ and ‘tacksman of Galson’, and went out of his way to portray the MacLerans as belonging to a large sub-aristocratic social class which does not figure on clan maps and which is ‘dispersed all over the land from north to south and east to west, bearing their own ancient surnames’. For present purposes, however, Mr Matheson’s principal conclusion is this: “The phonetics are satisfactorily represented by writing *Mac Gille Eadharain* (with elision of the final vowel in *Gille*); but there are other possibilities – *Mac a’ Leadharain* for one. The former alternative looks like a well known type of Gaelic surname: *Mac* plus *Gille* plus the name of one of the saints, whether Celtic or Biblical. But, if that is what it is in the present instance, he or she has not been identified.”<sup>2</sup>

Mr Matheson pointedly avoided referring to a source which must be used with caution, Dr Donald Macdonald of Gisla’s *Tales and Traditions of the Lews*, in which genuine tradition is mixed with concocted material. Dr Macdonald makes much of an Uig hero called the *Cochull Glas* (‘Grey Hood’), whose name was ‘really John Macdonald’ and who was a contemporary of Dòmhnall Cam MacAulay.

The Cochull belonged to a sept of the Macdonalds called Clann ’ic Gilleadharain, whom the Macleods of the Lews had settled in various colonies along the west coast as far down as Galson, to be a buffer between the Macaulays and the Morrisons. In the neighbourhood of Galson the name Gille Leadharain was rendered in English as Maclaren and it was one of these Macdonald women that Donald Cam married in 1610, when he went north with his brother Malcolm as best man, to fetch back his bride.

The Uig people tell you that the Cochull Glas was one of the MacIans of Glencoe, who escaped from the massacre in 1692, but if that is so, he could not have wrestled with Donald Cam, who died at Valtos before 1640. He may have come from Glen Quoich, others say.<sup>3</sup>

Under the heading ‘An Cochull Glas ’s Clann Gilleadhraim’ (‘The Grey Hood and the MacLerans’), Dr Macdonald appended twenty lines of Gaelic verse which are clearly of modern origin and were probably composed by himself. They summarise the life story of the Cochull Glas and his tribe, ending:

Gu ruigeas Uig, no ceò ’s nam beann  
Cun stad iad ann is phòs iad,  
’S an diugh th ’an àl gu lionmhor dàn  
’S gach òb is allt ’sa’ chòrsa:  
’N uair dhùisgeas pàirt a réir an dàin,  
Is fir na h-Iùbhraich còmhla  
Théid iad ’nan deann gu treun neo-ghann  
Le Fir Chinn-tìr ’sa chòmhdhail!<sup>4</sup>

(“As far as Uig of the mist and mountains,  
That’s where they stopped and married,  
And now their race is substantial and bold  
By each creek and burn on the coastline:  
When some awake, the prophecy says,  
Along with the men of the Iùbhraich,  
They will run swiftly, brave and numerous,  
With the Men of Kintyre into battle!”)

Dr Macdonald footnoted *fir na h-Iùbhraich*: “Those sleeping in Tom na h-Iùbhraich (the fairies).” Thus does concoction go wild, and give the game away – he seeks to connect the Lewis MacLerans not only with Kintyre, but also with the messianic prophecy that Thomas Rhymer (or Fionn mac Cumhail) lies sleeping with his army in Tomnahurich, ready to fight the last battle against the foreign invader.<sup>5</sup> However, ‘each creek and burn on the coastline’ evokes something more genuine: in Carloway there is, for example, *Allt Mhic Gill’ Leadhraim* (‘MacLeran’s Burn’), whose pronunciation is carefully rendered by Cox in alternative versions which may be represented orthographically as *Allt Mhic Gill’ Leadhran* and *Allt Mhic Gill’ Leadhlan* – not, it will be noticed, *Allt Mhic an Leadhraim*.<sup>6</sup>

Further detail on the Knapdale MacLerans was provided by A. G.

Morrison in *N&Q*, series 2, no. 11, June 1993, pp. 16–17, and note should also be taken of a reference in Frank Bigwood’s *The Sheriff Court of Argyll: Services of Heirs* (N. Berwick, 2001), p. 44, to Archibald MacIlerrand in Kilmelford and his father John McInlerand in Kilmun. These seem to back up Mr Matheson’s conclusion. What we are looking for is a saint’s name resembling *Eadharan*, giving ‘the Son of the Devotee of X’, or a word resembling *leadharan*, associated in some way with a trade or profession and giving ‘the Son of the X’.

I can point to various sources which use the latter formation. One is George Moss, a native of Strathglass, writing about the MacLerans in 1965.

Is e fuaim “MacLèran” a bha againn an Siorrachd Inbhir-Nis, an coitchinne, aig dùthchasaich a labhair gu nàdurra . . . Faodar bith . . . gu robh am fuaim sin “MacLèran” againne, a’ riochdachadh an ainme “Mac Leadhrain” . . . Bha Clann Leadhair (Leadhra, Leadhrain) mu na gleannain bheaga uaigneach eadar Loch Airceig agus ceann siar Glinne Garadh. Meirlich chruidh a bu deach an Albainn; cliù àrd e sin agus Clann Mhaoilein is Clann a Phì a bhith ann. B’i fo-fhine bha annta gun fearann aca féin a bu leò féin. Le bha iad ’nan còmhnaidh mu na crìochan a bha fo dheasbud eadar Mac Dhomhnaill Duibh, triath nan Camaronach, agus Mac Mhic Alasdair, triath nan Domhnallach á Gleann Garadh, theirte gu robh iad ’nan Camaronaich nuair a ruigeadh maor Mhic Mhic Alasdair orra, is e ag iarraidh na càna bu dìr do uachdaran; ach gu robh iad ’nan Domhnallaich dar a chaidh maor Mhic Dhomhnaill Duibh ’gan ruigsinn. B’e “Domhnallach” a bha air gach gin aca a shìob gu cearnan eile – Raineach, Bràigh na h-Aird, Leódhus, e.c.<sup>7</sup>

(“Our usual pronunciation in Inverness-shire, that of natives speaking naturally, was ‘MacLèran’, that is, ‘MacLeran’ with long ‘e’ . . . It may be . . . that it reflected the name *Mac Leadhrain* . . . *Clann Leadhair* (*Leadhra, Leadhrain*) were scattered around the remote little glens between Loch Arkaig and the western end of Glen Garry. The worst cattle thieves in Scotland; quite a reputation, given the presence of MacMillans and MacPhees. They were a sept with no land of their own. Living as they did in the disputed frontier lands between Lochiel’s and Glengarry’s, they claimed to be Camerons when Glengarry’s ground-officer reached them in pursuit of the tribute due to a landlord, but to be MacDonalds when Lochiel’s ground-officer arrived. ‘MacDonald’ was the name used by all of them who drifted off to other districts – Rannoch, the braes of the Aird, Lewis, etc.”)

Another source is a recently-published Gaelic novel by Norman Campbell from Ness in Lewis.

An tug e na mìltean bhon chladach an oidhch' ud? A' dìreadh bho Dhìbeadal no bho Chladach Nic an Leadharain? Brag na mara a' gealltainn gairbhseach. An fhaoileag ga sguabadh air a' ghaoith, an trilleachan san t-sruth. Chaidh a bàthadh, an nighean ud, Nic a' Leadharain. G' ar bith an robh i anns an long a chaidh ri Cladach an Eathair, Cladach na Luinge, cò 's urrainn innse? Bha i na laighe air a' mhol agus thog iad suas i 's bha iad ag ràdh gun deach a tiodhlaiceadh an siud fhèin. Aonranach, uaigneach, ri fuaim a' Chuain Mhòir . . . Bhiodh na h-uaignean a' fosgladh ann an Clachan a' Chrò-Naoimh agus gach anam truagh, gach spiorad fo bhuaireas, a' falbh a-rithist fuar aonranach air uachdar na talmhainn, uachdar na mara. 'S bhiodh nighean Mhic an Leadharain sa chladach agus Dòmhnall Dubh sa gheàrraidh a' cuallach na sprèidh. Agus an Turcaid nach buineadh, bhiodh ise a' tadhal Cnoc nan Cruach 's a' coimhead le mòr-iargain chun Taobh Thall far am bris an t-suaile na steall ris an Rubha, far an cluinnear gul nan eun sna creagan sgorrach dorch.<sup>8</sup>

(“Did he take miles off the shore that night? Climbing from Dibidale or from the Shore of *Nic an Leadharain*? The thud of the sea presaging storm. The gull being swept on the wind, the sand-piper in the current. She was drowned, that girl, *Nic a' Leadharain*. Whether she was in the ship that grounded on the Shore of the Boat, the Shore of the Ship, who can tell? She was lying on the pebbles and they lifted her up and they used to say she was buried right there. Lonely, solitary, by the sound of the Great Sea . . . The graves would open in the ruins of the Church of the Holy Blood and every wretched soul, every tormented spirit, would move again cold and lonely on the face of the earth, the face of the sea. And the daughter of *Mac an Leadharain* would be in the shore and Dòmhnall Dubh in the enclosure gathering the cows. And the Turcaid who didn't belong, she would visit Cnoc nan Cruach and anxiously gaze over to the Other Side where the swell breaks in spume against the Rubha, where the cry of the birds is heard in the jagged black cliffs.”)

Yet another source, the oldest of the three and the only one that has come to us in English, is a story published by the marquis of Lorne. It seems to lie behind Airds's tale about adding an 'r' to 'MacLean', and is referred to (but not cited) by Mr Matheson. According to the marquis, who seems to have enjoyed excellent traditional sources, the first MacLerans were some MacLeans who had disobeyed their chief in 1527 by rescuing his wife

from the ‘Lady’s Rock’, where he had abandoned her to die. Being unable to return to Mull, they “took to their boat and landed at the Leagrúa – the Red Low ground – in Kintyre, and put up houses there. They were asked their name, and answered only by asking another question as to the name of the place where they had landed. When they heard it was the Leagrúa they said that they were called by that very name, Clan an Learainie, and ‘MacanLearan’ continued to be their surname thenceforth.”<sup>9</sup>

Now this does not make a lot of sense. The marquis says that Leagrúa means ‘the Red Low ground’. There is no doubt about ‘rua’ (*ruadh*, ‘red’), but what is ‘Leag’? *Léig*, ‘a marsh’? *Leac*, ‘a slab’? Or perhaps that characteristic West Kintyre term *learg*, which signifies ‘a slope’, but also the low ground at its foot? None of these would give ‘Clan an Learainie’ or ‘MacanLearan’, but on the other hand, it is entirely possible that these two were connected with each other. If there were indeed a surname *Mac an Learain*, there would presumably have to be some eponymous *learan*, a person belonging to his tribe would be a *Learanach* or a *Learaineach*, and the descendants of that person would be *Clann an Learanaich* or *Clann an Learainich* – the marquis’s ‘Clan an Learainie’.

The word *learan* is not in any dictionary. What could it mean? The answer is pretty simple: ‘shipwrecked mariner’, ‘human flotsam’. *Lear* is a common poetic word for the sea. Shakespeare picked it up as ‘King Lear’, the sea-god Manannan being *Manannan mac Lir* ‘Manannan son of *Lear*’, that is, ‘the son of the Sea’. Coincidentally, in his article on the MacLerans, Mr Matheson mentions the surname ‘*Mac Bhannain*, found in Arran, Skye, Barra, Benbecula and Lewis’, now generally anglicised into Buchanan; I have always understood it to be derived from Manannan. I look forward some day to discovering *learan* in the corpus of Gaelic literature. It goes without saying that it fits the ‘Lady’s Rock’ story like a glove.

Unfortunately it fits Norman Campbell’s *Nic an Leadharain* every bit as well – which is a pity, because *leadharan* is not *learan*! The evidence from the north points to an eponymous Leadharan or Leadhran who may or may not have been a saint. Given Moss’s information, a derivation from some word or name connected with ‘leather, hide’ would be highly appealing. Gaelic *leathar* would not supply it, but its Welsh/?Pictish and Norse cognates *lledr* and *leðr* would.<sup>10</sup> Moss said that MacLerans had migrated from an original homeland in upper Glengarry to Rannoch, the Aird (of Lovat) and Lewis; Matheson found them in Lewis, Glengarry, Tiree, Knapdale and Kintyre, and was able to establish a connection between those of Lewis and Glengarry. It seems likely, then, that those

of Tiree, Knapdale and Kintyre were MacLerans of a different kind from those of the north. There is nothing surprising about this. Few would argue nowadays, for example, that the MacIvers of Lewis are identical in origin to the MacIvers of Asknish in Argyll. They are simply thought to be descended from two (or more!) different ancestors who happened to share the same name. In fact, the main complicating factor appears to be the custom of some of the northern MacIvers of imitating the southern ones by calling themselves Campbell.

I now come to the 1467 manuscript (NLS Adv. MS 72.1.1, f. 1), which was written in or around the year 1467 by Dubhghall Albannach mac mhic Cathail, probably a Kintyre MacMhuirich. In our website ([www.1467manuscript.co.uk](http://www.1467manuscript.co.uk)) my wife Máire and I have tentatively identified a genealogy in it which may be that of the Kintyre MacLerans. It begins, or appears to begin, in the middle of f. 1r(1)e5, that is, five lines from the top of the right-hand column ('e') of the recto ('r'), following the Campbells, MacKays of Ugadale, MacDuffies and, apparently, two different tribes of MacEachrans, and preceding the earls of Lennox, the Lamonts and the MacMillans. It was published by Skene in *Collectanea* as part of a genealogy which he surmised to be that of the MacVicars. Skene was able, with some confidence, to read that part of the MacEachern genealogy which appears at the foot of the previous column, his text and translation being as follows (I add column/line numbers):

d54 Genelach clann Ectigearna.—Gillaam . . . . ic Cailin ic Icair  
d55 mc Gillacrist ic Ireit ic Marceartaig ic Cormaic ic Disiab  
d56 mc Fearchar ic Finlaeic ic Nicaileic ic Nicaileic Muirecac.

d54 The Genealogy of the Maceacherns.—Gille . . . . son of Colin son of  
Vicar  
d55 son of Gilchrist son of Vicar son of Murdoch son of Cormac son of Shaw  
d56 son of Ferchar son of Finlay son of Nicol son of Nicol son of Murdoch.<sup>11</sup>

He footnoted this: "Here it has been found necessary to omit an entire column of MS., of which only a few detached words can at present be read." In a subsequent issue of the *Collectanea*, however, he returned to the fray, stating:

Since the Extracts from this MS. were printed in the first number of the *Collectanea*, (page 50,) the Editor has been enabled, by means of a chemical process, to restore the writing which was so much decayed as to be in many parts illegible. He has again gone carefully over the

whole MS. and has thus been enabled to correct a few names which had been erroneously read, to fill up many blanks, and to add a whole column which had been from the above cause entirely omitted. To the Genealogies in the First Part the Editor now makes the following corrections and additions.<sup>12</sup>

In the spirit of the age, he was probably exaggerating the doubtful benefits bestowed by chemicals; at any rate, he corrects ‘Gillaam . . .’ to ‘Gillaamardrias’ and ‘Nicaíl ic Nicaíl’ to ‘Nicaíl ic Maine’, then proceeds with the top of the fifth column. Here is his text and translation (again I add column/line numbers):

e1 Mc                    renabarta in gamor  
e2 McEodgar ic Gillandres ic Eatgar  
e3 mc Ath. Clann on igerne Betain ic Ubusan  
e4 ic Conor ic . . . . ic . . . . ic Becir  
e5 .i. Mougailain mc  
e6 Gillpadruig ic Cormaig ic Gillepadruig ic  
e7 Barru ic Eogan ic Arailt ic . . . . .  
e8 mc . . . . . ic Murechach ic . . . . .  
e9 Mc Eogan ic Lanisai mc Tremoit  
e10 mc . . . . . ic . . . . . ic Maine ic Ile.

e1 Son of . . . . called . . . .  
e2 son of Eadgar, son of Andrew, son of Eadgar,  
e3 son of Ath. Clan . . . . . Beaton, son of Ubusan,  
e4 son of Conor, son of . . . . . son of . . . . son of the Vicar  
e5 or Votary, son of  
e6 Patrick, son of Cormac, son of Patrick, son of  
e7 Barru, son of Ewen, son of Harold, son of . . . . .  
e8 son of . . . . son of Murdoch, son of . . . . .  
e9 son of Ewen, son of Lanisai, son of Tremoit,  
e10 son of . . . . . son of . . . . son of Maine, son of Ile.<sup>13</sup>

Skene footnoted ‘Mougailain’ (e5) as follows: “Mougailan, the Editor takes to be derived from the old Gaelic word Moidgeallad, a vow. This clan, it is to be presumed, are the MacVicars of Argyllshire.” He clearly perceived that a new genealogy had begun in the interior of e3; it did not strike him that another one appears to begin in the interior of e5.

Skene did not reproduce any part of his ‘Maceachern/MacVicar’ text in *Celtic Scotland*.<sup>14</sup> We may take this as a tacit admission that his readings

were uncertain and that he had no alternative sources with which to back them up. At any rate, Máire and I having undertaken to try and read the whole of the manuscript, the following is what currently (November 2011) appears for it on our website. Italics = uncertain text, square brackets = interpolations.

- d54 genelach cloinni echthigerna gilla ainndrias mac cailin mhic *Imair*  
d55 mhic gilla crist mhic mhicraith mhic muirchertaigh mhic cormaic mhic  
oisiab  
d56 mhic ferchair mhic finnlæith mhic nicail mhic maine mhic --?-- *mhic*  
*ethach*  
e1 mhic *gillacrist* mhic osiab mhic sainngandrias  
e2 mhic ectig[*erna*] mhic mhic gillandrias *moir* mhic [or mac] eittigerna  
e3 mhic ath cloinni [or *clann*] echtigerne bet[h]ain mhic ab[a]ran  
e4 mhic conaill mhic cairbri mhic eatach [or *eaictigerna*] mhic bethair *moir*  
e5 mhic dubgaill mhic *fergusa* genelach cloinne earrainn  
e6 gillapadraig mac corraig mhic gillapadraig  
e7 barra mhic eogainn mhic aranilg mhic *mainne*  
e8 mhic *tormoid* mhic conbethad mhic murchaidh mhic t--?---  
e9 mhic eoghain mhic lamrainn .g. [ = guirm? glais?] mhic tocmoit  
[=tormoid?]  
e10 mhic *balta*[i][r] [*mhi*]c mainne mhic ale[*lla*?]

- d54 The genealogy of the MacEacherns: Gille Ainndrias son of Colin son of  
Ivor(?)  
d55 son of Gille Críost son of Mac Raith son of Muircheartach son of Cormac  
son of Oisiab  
d56 son of Fearchar son of Finlay son of Neacal son of Maine son of --?-- son  
of Eochaidh(?)  
e1 son of Gille Críost son of Oisiab son of old Gille Ainndrias (?)  
e2 son of Eichthighearna son of the son of big/great Gille Ainndrias son of  
Eichthighearna  
e3 son of Aodh [or Eochaidh] of Clann Eichthighearna Beathán son of Ab(a)  
ran  
e4 son of Conall son of Cairbre son of Eochaidh [or Eichthighearna] son of  
big/great(?) Beathán  
e5 son of Dugald son of (?)Fergus. The genealogy of the (?)MacLerans  
e6 Gille Pádraig son of Cormac son of Gille Pádraig  
e7 of Barr son of Eoghan son of Aranilg(?) son of Maine  
e8 son of Tormod son of Cú (?) Beathadh son of Murchadh son of Tormod(?)



- e9 son of Eoghan son of black-haired(?) or pale-faced(?) Laurence son of Tormod  
 e10 son of Walter(?) son of Maine son of (?)Ailill.

It can be seen straight away that our text is wildly at variance with Skene's. One reason for this is that in 1839–47 Skene could only read the original, with daylight or gaslight to see it by, whereas we can now choose between the original and a variety of photographs, viewed in a variety of lighting conditions and settings. Another reason is that Skene's notes were carelessly made. His occasional use of spacing and ellipsis disguises the fact that most of the illegible words and names were treated as if they were not there. However, the very difference between Skene's text and ours provides us with a useful test: where there is agreement, the reading must surely be correct.

From this point on I will restrict my comments to the '(?)MacLeran' genealogy. (In future issues of *N&Q* I hope to subject other 1467 Manuscript kindreds, including the MacEachrans, to similar analysis.) I will use the numbers (1–35) allotted to the 1467 MS pedigrees in our website, as these show the order in which they occur; the '(?)MacLerans' are no. 19. Incidentally there is nothing unique about a pedigree beginning in the interior of a line: it also applies to no. 17 (MacDuffies).

**genelach:** I am fairly confident about this reading. The word *genelach* ('genealogy') occurs legibly in twenty-three other pedigrees. It is written **senet** in nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 35, **senet** in no. 21, **set** in nos. 9, 22 and 26, **set** in nos. 10 and 25, **sent** in no. 12, **set** in nos. 11, 15, 17, 18, 23, 27, 29 and 31, and **sh** in no. 14. All that is visible here is **sh**, but I would argue that this represents **seth** with some strokes missing. There are various possible reasons for missing strokes: ink running out; pen needing trimmed; poor light or eyesight during writing; deliberate erasure. The word seems to be preceded by the symbol **\*** which is how the scribe writes an asterisk – in this case, I think, simply signifying the beginning of a new text.

**cloinne:** the definite part of this is **le**. With the addition of two very faint strokes, it becomes **cle**. It is far from being a

certain reading, for two reasons: (1) the character **Œ** is unique; (2) analysis of the manuscript shows that the genitive case of *clann*, now *cloinne*, is consistently written **cl̃h**, i.e. *cloinni* (nos. 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31). The closest approximation to **Œ** that I can find in the manuscript is **ƿ** i.e. ‘x’ in the name **al̃x̃** i.e. ‘Alexanndair’, ‘Alasdair’ – eight occurrences in no. 30 (MacDonalds). The resemblance is only slight and if we adopted it we would be forced, I think, to assume that the character before ‘l’ is not ‘c’ but ‘a’, giving us *genelach alexanndair* . . . I believe that Dubhghall here committed a common error of anticipation – he began to write ‘e’ (the letter that follows), realised his ‘mistake’, and gave it a little tail to turn it into a sideways ‘i’. So the reading *cloinne* or *cloinni* may stand.

**earrainn**: this appears as **eyrñ**. There is room for doubt as to whether the final ‘n’ stroke is single or double, but that is unimportant. The compendium **ƿ** is normal for ‘arr’. At first sight the third character looks like **r** (‘s’) rather than **r̃** (‘r’), but the key to its identity seems to lie four lines down in **lañr̃ã** ‘Laurence’, where the left-hand downstroke of the second ‘a’ is allowed to stand for the right-hand downstroke of ‘r’. In effect our ‘r’, if ‘r’ it is, is ligatured at both ends, as its left-hand downstroke combines with the lower cross-stroke of ‘arr’. The name is thus *earrrain(n)*, *earrsain(n)*, *earrain(n)* or *earsain(n)*. If the central character is ‘s’, the only name that springs to mind is *Mac a’Phearsain*, medieval Gaelic *Mac an Phearsúin*, ‘MacPherson’, in which case one would have to argue that the mysterious **Œ** is in fact a ‘p’, which it patently is not – see next line! All in all, then, it seems tolerably clear that what Dubhghall first wrote was **cl̃e eyrñ** (‘of the *Clann Earrain*’), and that this was altered by erasure to **le eyrñ** (‘of *Leearrain*’), thus appearing to confirm our hypothesis that the kindred in question is *Clann an Learain*, the MacLerans.

**gillapadraig mac cormaig mhic gillapadraig:** this appears as **ḡillpadraic .f. coḡais .i. padraig**. There is no disagreement here between Skene and ourselves. For *mac* and *mhic* (or *'ic*), the nominative and genitive forms respectively of the word for 'son', Dubhghall likes to use **ḡ** at the start of a line and **.f.** in the interior of a line, as here.

**barra:** this appears as **ḡarra**. A good scribe would have written **bḡa**, but Dubhghall uses the two forms of 'r' (**ḡ** and **ḡ**) pretty indiscriminately, and having committed himself to **a**, he prefers **ḡḡ** to **ḡḡ** or **ḡḡ**. *Barra* is genitive of *Barr*, Bar(r), a place of some historical importance in West Kintyre. The Barony of Bar included extensive lands in North and South Kintyre, Knapdale, Colonsay, Islay, Jura, Rathlin and Morvern, and was granted by the Crown on 21 April 1545 to James MacDonald of Dunyvaig and the Glens in return for his services against the English.<sup>15</sup> If Barr is thus the patrimony of the MacLerans, it would be interesting to know whether it is also the location of the spot called 'the Leagrúa' where their ancestor allegedly appeared out of the ocean.

**mhic eogainn:** this appears as **.f. eoḡaḡn**. Curiously, **ḡ** is faint in monochrome photographs of the text but perfectly clear in colour.

**mhic aranilg:** this appears as **.f. araḡilḡ**. There is surely no such name as 'Aranilg'. Skene gave the reading as *ic arailt* 'son of Harold', which would have been **.f. araḡilt**. My best guess is that this was what the scribe originally wrote, but that with two mischievous strokes of the pen it was converted into **.f. araḡilḡ**. *Arailt* also occurs in pedigree no. 13 (Nicolsons).

**mhic mainne:** all that can be read for certain is  $\text{f. m} =$ . There appear to be two diagonal strokes  $\text{m} \overline{\text{v}}$  and something following them, giving  $\text{m} \overline{\text{oi}}$ , and that is enough for us to be confident that the name is *Mainne*. It appears three lines further down, where Skene read it as *Maine*, and also in nos. 1 ( $\text{ma} \overline{\text{ie}}$ ), 18 ( $\text{ma} \overline{\text{ie}}$ ), 20 ( $\text{ma} \overline{\text{ih}}$ ) and 35 ( $\text{ma} \overline{\text{ie}}$ ).

*Maine* was a common Gaelic name. It is the eponym of the *Uí Maine* of Connacht, from whom we have *Leabhar Uí Mhaine* ('The Book of Hy Many'). It is cited forty-six times in O'Brien's *Corpus*, and is summed up by Ó Corráin and Maguire as 'an extremely popular early name borne by many legendary warriors and founders of dynasties'.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps we should read *Maine* rather than *Mainne* both here and later. It is not always possible to be sure what Dubhghall means by his abbreviations; on the other hand, *Mainne* could be evidence for a distinctly Scottish development on similar lines to *gloine* > *gloinne* > *glainne* 'glass'.

**mhic tormoid:** this looks at first sight like  $\text{m} \overline{\text{oi}} \text{dia}$ . Closer examination reveals further strokes:  $\text{m} \overline{\text{oi}} \text{dia}$ . Comparison with the last name in the following line suggests the possibility that the first character is 't' and that the last three are to be read not as 'dia' but as 'oit' or 'oid'. That, at any rate, is the only way to make sense of it. The final 'a' is very faint.

**mhic conbethad:** this again is badly written and hard to read, suggesting that the scribe had placed his vellum on an unstable surface such as his knee, or that he was writing in semi-darkness or had eyesight problems. It is possible to make out  $\text{f} \overline{\text{ob}} \text{nao}$ . It looks as if 'mhic' and the following 'c' are accidentally run together. The rest is a little easier, but the 'n'

and ‘eth’ compendia are pretty faint. *Con-Bethad* is genitive of *Cú-Bethad*, a splendid forename whose literal meaning is ‘Hound of Life’. It is not common.<sup>17</sup>

**mhic murchaidh:** this is Skene’s *ic Murechach* ‘son of Murdoch’. It appears as *f. mēh*, which is Dubhghall’s normal way of writing this common name.

**mhic t--?---:** this appears, rather faintly, as *.f.τ*. It is impossible to know for sure what follows ‘t’, but there appears to be a superscript symbol, perhaps *f.τ* <sup>~</sup>, which would make *Tormoid* a pretty safe guess.

**mhic eoghain:** Skene here has *Mc Eogan*, so there is no real disagreement, but the ‘i’ is perfectly clear: *ḡeōḡaī*. Perhaps Skene was right to ignore the stroke over the ‘g’, as to give ‘h’ it should be only a dot.





**mhic lamrainn .g. [= guirm? glais?]:** Skene gives *ic Lanisai*, and it is easy to see why, for the reading is *.f. lanraīḡ*. It is less easy to see why he ignored the double ‘n’ stroke and final ‘g’. There is no name *Lanisai*, but there is a name *Labhrann* (‘Laurence’), genitive *Labhrainn*, which could certainly be miswritten ‘Lamrainn’, with or without a dot on the ‘m’ to represent ‘h’. For ‘ra’ written ‘sa’ see **earrainn** above. It is of course a little unsettling to find the name *Labhrann*, the ancestor of the MacLarens (*Clann Labhrainn*), in the genealogy of the MacLerans, but that is as far as it goes: the similarity is in our minds, and was clearly not in Dubhghall’s, as *lamrainn* bears no real resemblance to *earrain* or *leearrain*. The final ‘g’ is harder to explain. It could reflect Dubhghall’s pronunciation

of *Labhrainn* (*Labhraing*),<sup>18</sup> or it could equally, as we suggest in our website, be an abbreviation of some common epithet such as *gorm*, genitive *guirm* (‘black-haired’, literally ‘blue’), or *glas*, genitive *glais* (‘pale-skinned’). If it is an abbreviation we would expect to find a dot on either side of it; there does seem to be one to the left of it, but it is hard to make out, and there is certainly one to the right of it, but perhaps it belongs exclusively to the *mhic* compendium.

**mhic tocmoit [=tormoid?]:** Skene gives this as *mc Tremoit*, which is very peculiar, as that is not the reading, and there is no such name as *Tremoit*. The reading is clearly  $\text{f.} \text{c} \text{c} \text{c} \text{c} \text{c}$ , which is only one letter away from *mhic Thormoid*. In fact, on looking closer, one can distinguish traces of an original ‘r’ underneath the ‘c’:  $\text{c} \text{c} \text{c} \text{c} \text{c}$ . For the fourth time in this genealogy, then, we have a mutilated or obscured form of a Norse name. It is too much to be coincidental. We have to conclude that the MacLerans, who were after all ‘sea-people’, ‘flotsam’, were of less than pure Gaelic blood, and that someone, not necessarily Dubhghall himself, was unhappy about this.

**mhic balta[i][r] [mhi]c mainne:** there is more evidence of mutilation in this line. The reading here is  $\text{f} \text{b} \text{v} \text{t} \text{q} \text{f} \text{m} \text{a} \text{i} \text{n}$ , of which some of the strokes in *baltair* are almost invisible. It looks as if the final  $\text{q}$  of *baltair* has been doctored to turn it into something resembling  $\text{f}$ , then the following  $\text{f}$  has been doctored to turn it into  $\text{f}$ , which is meaningless. *Baltair* (‘Walter’) is of course another Norse name, but was much used by the Norman French and also appears in pedigrees no. 9 (MacEwens), 10 (?MacLavertys) and 20 (earls of Lennox).

**mhic ale[lla?]:** this was read by Skene as *ic Ile* ‘son of Ile’, and he may very well be right. The trouble is that I am aware

of no instance of *Ile* as a personal name other than in certain onomastic origin-legends, and in these it is feminine: “Tradition says the island of Islay derives its name from Ìle, a Scandinavian princess who went to bathe in a loch there and, sticking in the soft mud, was drowned.”<sup>19</sup> The reading is , and our *ale*[*lla*?] represents a slightly desperate attempt on our part to interpret it as a name which appears (or seems to appear) in the pedigree of the earls of Lennox, with whom the MacLerans share the names Main(n)e and Walter. This reading depends on the dot following  being read as part of the following letter ()<sup>1</sup>, and on the assumption that there is obscured text following , both of which I now consider very doubtful.

All in all, I believe that the *Ile* reading has a great deal to commend it. Skene read it; it is what the manuscript says, as opposed to what we might like it to say; mythological characters have been known to change sex in the course of oral transmission (a good example is *Brianainn*, St Brendan, becoming St Ronan's sister *Brianuilt* in Lewis).<sup>20</sup> Finally, I have to be persuaded by the force of my own arguments. If the father of the first MacLeran really did crawl out of the ocean at Barr in West Kintyre, as I have suggested, there is sound logic in tracing his descent from the supposed eponym of the great island, *Ìle*, that rises so visibly from the sea twenty-five miles to the west.

This article has been experimental. The illustrations have not been reproduced photographically from the manuscript, but by freehand copying with pen and ink, done by myself. I believe that this is the clearest and most honest way to present a discussion of what seems to be going on in the text, because photographs of the original would have to be artificially enhanced in order to make them serve the same purpose. For those without access to the manuscript (National Library of Scotland Adv. MS 72.1.1, f. 1), photographs of the highest available quality may be viewed on our website, [www.1467manuscript.co.uk](http://www.1467manuscript.co.uk). For most kindreds we present both coloured and monochrome images. The

eye can go back and forth from one to the other, picking out nuances of detail which are sometimes clearer in colour, sometimes in mono. There is no ‘killer image’ which is better than all others. This was demonstrated at a late stage in the preparation of this article when Máire and I received a very welcome e-mail from Dr Ulrike Hogg of the National Library:

There was a digitisation company here a while ago who use a ‘spectral imaging’ technique. They digitise material in a sequence of shots, each time under a different light, covering all regions of the colour spectrum. This enables them to separate out palimpsests, smudges, things written on top of each other, and things that only appear under UV light. They primarily came to do some David Livingstone diaries, but then asked if anybody could bring them another challenging manuscript – so I gave them 72.1.1 to do, first folio.

She gave us a CD of the result, and it does not seem to contain images that are necessarily better than any of those already in our website. However, with respect to the MacLerans it has drawn our attention to two specific points. At the end of the genealogy there is a mark that looks vertical (1le) in our existing colour scan and in the new mono scan, but diagonal (1le) in our old mono photograph and in the new colour scan. This is peculiar, and serves only to emphasise the ‘smoke and mirrors’ nature of the exercise. (It may have to do with the reaction of the vellum to different temperatures and pressures.) Dubhghall was not in the habit of using punctuation, but may have meant it as a full stop to mark the end of the genealogy. More importantly, at the end of line e7 the new mono scan (but not the new colour one!) conveys the faint impression that what we have interpreted as *moí* (*Mainne*, ‘Maine’) could perhaps be read as *mas̄* (*Magnuis*, ‘Magnus’).

The Trustees of the National Library of Scotland have kindly granted permission for the new scans to be added to the website.

Ronald Black

## Notes

- 1 William Matheson, ed., *The Blind Harper* (Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, Edinburgh, 1970), p. 189.
- 2 Before any reader points to Killearn in Stirlingshire, it is on record as ‘Kynerine’, presumably *cinn earrainn* ‘at the head of the land-portion’,



- from *c.* 1250, and turns into ‘Killerne’ *c.* 1450. So, despite appearances, it does not contain a saint’s name at all. See David Ross, *Scottish Place-Names* (Edinburgh, 2001), p. 123.
- 3 Donald Macdonald, *Tales and Traditions of the Lews* (Stornoway, 1967), pp. 73–74.
- 4 *Tales and Traditions of the Lews*, p. 82.
- 5 Ronald Black, ed., *The Gaelic Otherworld: John Gregorson Campbell’s Superstitions of the Highlands & Islands of Scotland and Witchcraft & Second Sight in the Highlands & Islands* (Edinburgh, 2005), pp. 147–49, 402; Michael Newton, ‘Prophecy and Cultural Conflict in Gaelic Tradition’, *Scottish Studies*, vol. 35 (2010), pp. 144–73: 149, 160. The expression *Fir Chinn-tìr* is normally used only of the ’45, see for example W. M. Conley, ‘A Poem in the Stewart Collection’, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, vol. 11, part 1 (1966), pp. 26–37: 27.
- 6 Richard A. V. Cox, *The Gaelic Place-Names of Carloway, Isle of Lewis: Their Structure and Significance* (Dublin, 2002), p. 165.
- 7 Glasach, ‘Corr Bheachd air Corr Ainmean’, *An Gaidheal*, vol. 60, no. 9 (1965), p. 101. For the identification of ‘Glasach’ see my ‘*Gairm: An Aois Òir* (2)’, in *Aiste*, forthcoming.
- 8 Tormod Caimbeul, *An Druim bho Thuath* (Daviot, 2011), pp. 8, 100.
- 9 The marquis of Lorne, *Adventures in Legend* (London, 1898), p. 168.
- 10 For more on these cognates see Alexander Macbain, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language* (Inverness, 1896), p. 204.
- 11 Iona Club, *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* (Edinburgh, 1839), pp. 56, 57.
- 12 Iona Club, *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* (Edinburgh, 1847), p. 357.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 358, 359.
- 14 See William F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1876–80), vol. 3, pp. 458–90.
- 15 D. J. McNeill, ‘Barony of Barr’, *N&Q*, 1st ser. no. 16 (September 1981), p. 17; Alastair Campbell of Airds, *A History of Clan Campbell*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 2002), pp. 32, 44.
- 16 M. A. O’Brien, ed., *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1962), pp. 696–97; Donnchadh Ó Corráin and Fidelma Maguire, *Irish Names* (Dublin, 1990), p. 132.
- 17 O’Brien’s *Corpus* contains just one example (p. 573).
- 18 Compare line e1 *sainngandrias*, cited above.
- 19 R. Black, ed., *The Gaelic Otherworld* (Edinburgh, 2005), p. 267.
- 20 See Finlay MacLeod, *The Chapels in the Western Isles* (Stornoway, 1997), p. 40.