

Book Reviews

In Dialogue with the Agallamh: Essays in Honour of Seán Ó Coileáin. Aidan Doyle and Kevin Murray, eds. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014. 261+xiii pp. ISBN 978-1-84682-385-5

Most of the essays in this *Festschrift* originated at a 2012 conference organised by colleagues of Seán Ó Coileáin, longtime professor of Modern Irish at University College Cork, in honour of his significant contribution to Irish scholarship and to the life of that university. The theme reflects Professor Ó Coileáin's longstanding interest in *Acallam na Senórach*, 'The Colloquy of the Ancients', a late medieval text from which much of our knowledge of Fionn Mac Cumhail and his warrior-band derives, and which provides essential background to the study of those fenian tales and ballads that survived into the twentieth century. Indeed, two of Professor Ó Coileáin's own articles, long regarded as seminal contributions to the study of *fianaigheacht*, are reprinted in this volume.

An important point of reference for subsequent writers is Professor Ó Coileáin's 1993 article, 'Place and placename in *fianaigheacht*', reproduced here as the first essay in the collection.¹ In it he persuasively argues that the names of places mentioned in the *Acallam* be regarded as integral to the narrative – that is, that the words they contain be considered as part of the narrative setting, rather than as indicators of actual places. As he puts it, 'in the dissolving world of *fianaigheacht*, names of places and persons are reabsorbed by the poetics that created them and from which they had never really escaped to begin with' (13). Place-names in these stories are 'not so much referential as evocative' and their locations are 'everywhere and nowhere' (15-16). Further, he suggests that the evocations go beyond their manifest descriptive content to remind listeners of the wider universe of other stories and lore – 'an implied narrative that remains to some degree beyond the text compelling one to draw from other sources for its completion' (17). He concludes:

[T]he result is a random series of what we may call "out-tales" in whose creation we imaginatively participate, following out, as we must, the textual allusion which can sometimes amount to what reads as a brief summary supplied by way of etiological explanation. These "out-tales" function as loosely attached satellites of the larger narrative, itself the aggregate of a fixed series of self-sufficient in-tales' (17).

In the second essay, historian Anne Connon takes a more literal approach to the *Acallam*'s place- and personal-name evidence, using a number of such references to cast light upon the composition and authorship of the text itself. Building upon the work of Ann Dooley,² Connon suggests that references to various journeys in Connacht contained in the *Acallam* may indicate that the text originated at the Augustinian monastery of Roscommon. She supports her argument with onomastic and genealogical evidence, citing the oft-recurring references to known Connacht place-names and to personal names associated with certain families mentioned in the *Acallam* narrative, and tracing their likely derivation from personal names found in actual families known to have dominated the Roscommon area at the time of the *Acallam*'s composition. Challenging the commonly-held view that the work dates from around the turn of the twelfth century, Connon suggests that the *Acallam* was composed in Roscommon around the year 1224, and that its author was either Máel Petair Úa Cormaccáin, head of the monastic school at Roscommon who died in 1234, or (more likely, in

¹ Originally published in *Studia Hibernica* 27 (1993): 45-60.

² 'The date and purpose of *Acallam na senórach*'. *Éigse* 34 (2004): 97-126..

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In her own essay, Ann Dooley contributes to the ongoing discussion of how the *Acallam* should be seen in relation to medieval European literary romance. Her argument focuses upon what she calls ‘the area of commonly-shared imagination...the complex interaction between...personally-experienced reality...and cultural memory’ (61). She points out that, while much of the vitality inherent in medieval romance derives from the ‘matter of Celtia’, works like those of Chrétien de Troyes have been ‘shaped and rendered decorous’ by their ultimate dependence upon pre-existing literary sources designed for a specific courtly audience (62). By contrast, the author of the *Acallam* – surely more familiar than most with ‘Celtia’ itself – acknowledges no such reliance on literary sources, but has steered his own path, integrating elements of the ‘real’ (*i.e.* the Patrician ‘present’ of the frame-story, with its dialogue between the Christian incomer and his fenian interlocutors) and the imaginary, of ‘this world’ and ‘the Otherworld’, into a multivalent narrative, the audience for which was not limited to those of high social status. He has accomplished this, she argues, by exploiting not just the ‘fluidity’ of the stories themselves, the fact that the indeterminacy of their geographic and temporal *loci* renders them eminently ‘portable’, but also the mediating power of memory enhanced by musical performance: ‘[T]he deeds of the *fíán* are recessed in a background of oral performance, with Caílte as the figure of memory, Cas Corach as the contemporary figure of oral performance, and the clerics as the scribal textual recorders’ (72). This web of referents has, she says, combined to shape the power of the *Acallam* as a narrative with both presence and resonance, a lively entertainment for a winter’s night, as well as a powerful record of Ireland’s heroic vision of itself.

In describing the *Acallam* as ‘a conversation between worlds’, John Carey begins by reminding us how the author confounds expectations not only by playing with anachronism, but by distorting accepted historical accounts, by inventing genealogical records, and even by reworking the accepted narratives of *fianaigecht* attested elsewhere (77). These oddities are, however, insufficient to explain what he calls ‘the “strangeness,” to use Ann Dooley’s term, of a story about the weight and pathos and consequences of time in which time’s realities are so flamboyantly made light of’ (79). Carey shows how the story’s exploration of time-travel contrasts not just the prelapsarian world of the *fénnidi* with the historical world of Patrick and his followers, but also the mortal world of the *fénnidi* – the descendants of Míl – with the immortal, ever-youthful world of the Tuatha Dé Danann, whom the sons of Míl had supposedly (but not quite) displaced: thus, three worlds in all. Having been introduced to certain Otherworld characters, Patrick seemingly takes a benign and (in the case of Cas Corach) even admiring attitude towards individual members of the Tuatha Dé, but ultimately banishes their tribe ‘into the slopes of hills and crags’ where popular tradition had located them by the time of the *Acallam*’s composition, and where, according to the same belief-system, they continue to reside. Presumably Patrick, whose Christian teaching likewise assumed the existence of a world beyond the mortal realm, could have taken no other view. Was the contrast between the eternal Otherworld of the Tuatha Dé and the promise of eternal life contained in Patrick’s Christianity (a potential fourth ‘world’) meant to be part of the conversation? Carey does not say so, but the question comes to mind.

For Joseph Falaky Nagy, the *Agallam*’s dialogue between the *fénnidi* and Patrick’s entourage – a conversation in which strangers explore each other’s temporal and cultural realities – suggests an analogue with the challenging relationship between the Phoenicians and the Greeks. According to Herodotus, the Phoenicians were ‘the classical world’s exponents *par excellence* of enterprise, restless exploration, exploitation and invention’, people who were ‘never far from resorting to trickery and piracy’ in their quest for commercial and economic advantage (92). Observing that the sort of ‘commercial’ talents attributed to the Phoenicians are also to be found among the members of the *fíán*, Nagy cites a number of instances where both Caílte and Fionn are able to discern and exploit opportunity for gain, albeit with the larger purpose of building or restoring social relationships, rather than of undoing them. In describing the *fénnid* not just as a warrior but also as an entrepreneur – a ‘commercial hero’ – Nagy identifies him as someone ‘characterised by resilience, the ability to negotiate...with his enemies and rivals, even to the extent of merging with them, or merging his interests with theirs’ (94). The possibility of such merging would have surely resonated with the

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immediate audience of the *Acallam*, whose relatively recent experience of Viking and subsequently Anglo-Norman incomers (what Nagy terms their ‘evolving present’) would have had them nodding their heads as the story – however bewildering in its temporal details – unfolded before them.

In her exploration of the narrative voice in the *Acallam*, Geraldine Parsons examines the role played by the narrator in presenting and elucidating the points-of-view required for comprehension of the *Acallam*’s complex of temporal realities and its mixture of storytelling, onomastic lore, and historically-sanctioned nostalgia. Reflecting the work of earlier scholars – Poppe, Tristram, Ó Cathasaigh and others – Parsons describes the narrator as, on the one hand, a person whose comprehensive command of *dindsenchas* and other oral tradition renders him deeply authoritative, and, on the other, as one who understands that the oral medium is no longer sufficient to preserve the knowledge consigned within it. This dual awareness is reflected in the narrator’s presentation of the story. As Parsons puts it, ‘in his handling of a complex frame-tale – his demarcation of episodes, including using terms which are used to categorise tales elsewhere, and other explicit acknowledgements of the narrative’s structure – the narrator functions in a manner which is reminiscent of contemporary scholarly engagement with written textual culture’ (124).

Stiofán Ó Cadhla approaches the *Acallam* from the perspective of ethnology, citing as justification the work’s presentation as a ‘dialogue, conversation or survey’ (129). As he is careful to observe, such an approach to the study of the past is hardly a novel one: the profusion of medieval annals, chronicles of, and histories in manuscripts dating back to the sixth century (and no doubt reflecting earlier practice in the oral realm) provide ample testimony that a question-and-answer methodology was considered essential to the understanding of earlier times, and that the result of such an approach was often recorded as a list: ‘The *Acallam* and many of the *laoithe*, although later, have a penchant for lists of things. *Aides mémoire*, fragments of evidence, relics, souvenirs, monuments, symbols and stories are central. Many of the two hundred or so stories appropriate and consecrate the artefacts and monuments, mounds and cairns of the ancestors. *Fian*-warriors are like “Tomb Raider” archaeologists, searching for the monuments or graves of the heroes’ (130). In an appendix, Ó Cadhla reconstructs the ethnological methodology as it might have applied to the *Acallam* by listing the questions asked in the course of the narrative, and identifying the questioners. In so doing he not only reminds readers of Patrick’s professional expertise as a catechist, but elicits comparison with the methodology advocated by such works as Seán Ó Súilleabháin’s *Handbook of Irish Folklore*. In its timing, its method and its content, Ó Cadhla argues, the *Acallam* is ‘an archaic survey, a vernacular exegesis of Christian and non-Christian in which valuable knowledge is abstracted, generalised, streamlined, recontextualised and integrated into the personal memories of Caílte and Oisín’ (138).

Drawing upon paleographic as well as stylistic evidence, Pádraig Ó Macháin accounts for the peculiar two-fold occurrence of the *Agallamh Bheag* (*AB*) in the fifteenth-century Cork manuscript, the Book of Lismore (*LLM*). In a quire largely devoted to kings, kingship, pre-history, and the early history of the Gael in Ireland, the beginning of *AB* is included, only to be broken off after fifty-two lines. Ó Macháin explores why the principal scribes of *LLM* – the unnamed principal scribe of the manuscript as a whole, and the scribe of *AB*, Aonghus Ó Callanáin – at first appear to have decided that *AB* should be grouped with the king stories, before changing their minds and repositioning the tale – including the section already given – later in the manuscript as a *réamhscéal* to the *Acallam* itself, which follows immediately after and fills the remainder of the manuscript. Written in Irish, Ó Macháin’s article is a fascinating detective study, revealing the scribes’ understanding not just of the tales that they were committing to vellum and their significance for the readers they had in mind, but also of the evolving notion of an Irish literary catalogue, and of the part played by various historical, thematic and stylistic considerations in its development.

The *Agallamh Bheag* also functions, among older elements, as a crucial source for the much longer Reeves *Agallamh* (RIA 24 P 5), a late 17th-century manuscript surveyed here by Joseph J. Flahive. Modern scholarship agrees that the Reeves text was probably composed in the 14th or 15th century, while earlier attestation and/or linguistic criteria confirm the prior history of much of the

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verse embedded within it (169). In addition, the manuscript features ‘long narrative lays of a sort not found in the earlier *Acallam*. Many of these contain lore, lists, and learning, which form a narrative that reduplicates in both prose and verse with linguistic concord of many phrases found in both’ (168). Flahive concludes that Reeves is ‘a prosimetrum *Agallamh* of a wholly different type from the earlier *Acallam*: a prose romance, punctuated by the texts whence the material was mined. The new text is a polished and fashionably ornamented tale with source-poems included as a scholarly apparatus, rather than the original programme of introduction and recitation in which the verse speaks for itself. ... [T]he prose has become a full rewrite in the literary form of a later age’ (183). Containing a wealth of detail, this article provides a welcome guide to the complexities of the text, especially so in light of the recent reissue of Nessa Ní Shéaghdha’s semi-diplomatic edition of the Reeves *Agallamh*, long out of print, by the Irish Texts Society.

Writing in Irish, Síle Ní Mhurchú assesses the manuscript tradition of *An tAgallamh Nua*, the late version of the *Acallam*, attested in manuscripts from the late seventeenth to the late nineteenth centuries. The four earliest of these are for the most part the source of the later versions:

- Trinity College H.5.4, compiled by Eoghan Ó Caoimh (1699-1702).
- National Library of Ireland G114, compiled by Uilliam Mac Cairteáin (1700-03).
- RIA 23 C 30, compiled by Aindrias Mac Cruitin (c. 1733).
- University College Cork 107, compiled by Seán Cúndún (1738-39).

The author traces the genealogical relationships between these manuscripts and earlier versions of the *Acallam*, as well as the descent from them of later ones in the *Agallamh Nua* tradition. She observes that the popularity of this text may well reflect its thematic emphasis upon the importance of heritage, continuity and the preservation of culture at a time in Ireland when widespread political and social upheaval threatened the destruction of those very values (217). The article provides a useful guide to understanding the evolution of this important text.

Lastly, Seán Ó Coileáin’s second article in this volume returns to the theme touched on in his earlier essay: the function and interpretation of place-names in *fianaigheacht*.³ Here the launch-point for his argument is James Carney’s discussion of *Géisid cúan*, a much-edited and anthologised poem from the *Acallam* that, according to its traditionally-accepted prose context, represents the lament of a wife for her drowned husband.⁴ Challenging Carney’s disestablishment of the link between the poem and this prose context (especially as Carney is unable to come up with an historically-validated alternative), Ó Coileáin reiterates his argument that, in attempting to locate place-names mentioned in the *Acallam* on a physical map of Ireland, scholars and editors are on a hiding to nothing, because ‘place has become text’ (224). The ‘transparency’ of such names – the fact that they create a mental image, that they have meaning in and of themselves – strongly indicates that they are likely to have been invented by the author for the purpose of intensifying the meaning of the story he is telling. While elements given in the text as place-names must at least resemble place-names – ‘there must be the appearance of recognition to counterbalance the elusiveness of place’ (225) – there can be no doubt that ‘language takes priority over location; the catalogue of names is essentially mesmeric rather than directional’ (226). In similar vein, Ó Coileáin rejects Carney’s argument that a reference to a cross being raised at the head of Cael’s grave reduces the likelihood of the poem having originated in the context of the *Acallam*, where the prose context would locate it in the pre-Christian past. Ó Coileáin asserts that, in a time-warping text such as the *Acallam*, anachronism was inevitable. But did it matter? Ó Coileáin believes that ‘for both language and literature the rule must be that something is not a problem unless it is felt to be a problem, and for the author of the *Acallam* and his audience...this clearly was not’ (227). For Ó Coileáin, the ‘literal’ interpretation of elements in the

³ Originally published in Carey *et al.* (eds), *Cin Chille Cúile: texts, saints and places. Essays in honour of Pádraig Ó Riain* (Aberystwyth, 2004): 234-48.

⁴ ‘Two poems from *Acallam na senórach*’ in J. Carney and D. Greene (eds), *Celtic Studies* (1968): 22-32.

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Acallam must be tempered by the understanding that the text is, first and foremost, a work of literature in which authorial license is both permissible and expected.

If the inclusion of two articles by Professor Ó Coileáin himself have provided a thoroughly suitable frame for this volume, the breadth and diversity of viewpoints collected within it amount to a ‘colloquy’ that reflects the extraordinary richness of the *Acallam* itself, and of its continuing fascination for scholars. For all of their efforts, Professor Ó Coileáin, the editors, and the contributors to this volume deserve our thanks and congratulations.

V. S. BLANKENHORN

The Irish Folklore Commission 1935-1970: History, Ideology, Methodology. Mícheál Briody. Helsinki: Studia Fennica Folkloristica, 2007. 535 pp. ISBN 78-951-746-947-0. €32.

Mícheál Briody’s *The Irish Folk Commission, 1935-1970: History, Ideology, Methodology* is the first comprehensive historical assessment and contemporary critique of the thirty-five-year comet-like trajectory, both in its brevity and impact, of an organisation whose unique mandate was the gathering and, in most cases, the salvaging of Ireland’s oral traditions. Founded at a time of tremendous linguistic, cultural, social and political change, the Irish Folklore Commission (1935-1971) was the first national body dedicated solely to the collection and documentation of folklore in Europe. Its undertakings resulted in one of the largest repositories of its kind in the world (the largest in Europe), currently housed as *Cnuasach Bhéaloideas Éireann / The National Folklore Collection* at University College, Dublin. Briody’s publication heralded the first in what has proven to be a distinguished cohort of relevant works presenting, commemorating and delving deeper into the Commission’s work and legacy which appeared between 2007 and 2010. These include Director of the National Folklore Collection Ríonach uí Ógáin’s attractive annotated edition of the official IFC field dairies made by Séamus Ennis (1919-1982), *Mise an Fear Ceoil: Séamus Ennis—Dialann Taistil 1942-1946* (Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2007), and her subsequent English translation *Going to the Well for Water: The Séamus Ennis Field Diary 1942-1946* (University College Cork 2009), affording detailed contextual insights concerning one of the Commission’s most celebrated fieldworkers; Séamus Ó Cathain’s *Formation of a Folklorist* (Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann, 2008) detailing five foundational months spent by James Hamilton Delargy (*Séamus Ó Duilearga*, 1899-1980)—then *The Folklore of Ireland Society*’s Librarian and editor of its flagship journal *Béaloideas*—in Scandinavia, Estonia and Germany during 1928, during a determinative decade that preceded his role as the Commission’s first and only Director; and finally *Seoda as Cnuasach Bhéaloideas Éireann ~ Treasures of the National Folklore Collection* (Comhairle Béaloideas Éirinn, 2010) a multilingual (Modern Irish, Scottish Gaelic and English) and handsomely illustrated anthology of essays in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Commission’s establishment. Briody’s work here is also recommended as a definitive subject-specific companion to Diarmuid Ó Giolláin’s *Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity* (2000). Ó Giolláin, as Briody notes in his Preface (13), was instrumental in encouraging and inspiring him to undertake the current study.

Briody’s ambitiously thorough and extensive presentation of the Commission’s history and its various ideologies and methodologies is accomplished through contextualizing the cultural, linguistic, political and social movements that led to the Commission’s establishment, its founding and evolving mandate, its dedicated fieldworkers’ collecting and resulting collections, and its administration. He aptly concludes with a much needed contemporary critique of the Commission’s legacy and calls for its long-term protection at a time when its future seemed uncertain.⁵ Ultimately,

⁵ On the last point, it is notable to add that in the decade following the appearance of Briody’s work the Republic of Ireland officially ratified UNESCO’s 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible

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Briody provides the reader with an informative, accessible account—and, it should be added, a frequently entertaining front-row seat—concerning not only the incredible achievements of the Commission but also its inner mechanics, by delicately untangling various threads concerning competing objectives, conflicting philosophies, and the unfolding dramas, struggles and uncertainties that resulted (in particular the events detailed in chapter VI, “The Seeds of Discontent”), culminating in the infamous *Cogadh na gCarad* (The War of the Friends).

Briody’s engagement with and contextualisation of primary-source materials are sensitively achieved with level-headed fairness and reflexivity, although now that all the protagonists involved are long deceased, this challenging task is an easier one to accomplish with success. The primary sources he engages include both governmental and administrative documents held in the National Archives of Ireland (NAI) pertaining to the IFC’s official engagement with its overseers and funders within the Departments of Finance, Education and the *Taoiseach* (official departmental correspondence, sub-committee minutes, administrative reports, etc.). He successfully fleshes out a dynamic and multi-vocal narrative through his careful curation of bureaucratic paper-trails alongside relevant personal correspondence from James Delargy and other IFC staff, most notably Kevin Danaher (Caoimhín Ó Danachair, 1913-2002) and Sean O’ Suillivan (Seán Ó Súilleabháin, 1903-1996), along with several of their international colleagues, namely, Maarti Haavio, Kaarle Krohn, Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, Oskar Loorits, and Åke Campbell, Stith Thompson and Richard Dorson. Briody provides the important caveat that he did not have access to the official files of the IFC (with the exception of microfilm copies of official field diaries and notebooks of full-time collectors available elsewhere) nor Delargy’s private papers, all held by the Department of Irish Folklore, UCD. He also notes that most of the surviving members of the Commission were at too advanced an age to be interviewed when he began research towards the current work in 2000. In spite of this, Briody felt ‘justified in presenting results’ (28) due to the inherent overlap between such materials and his ability to draw upon and, indeed, bring both the achievements and struggles of the IFC to vivid life through his own expert intertextual analysis of these select official documents and personal correspondence.

The remainder of Briody’s sources include published accounts, official collectors’ diaries, personally-designed questionnaires, and most intriguingly his personal experiences as a student in the Department of Irish Folklore at UCD in the 1980s. In retrospect, his time in the Department well-served his approach through what can be considered foundational immersive and observational fieldwork towards contextualising the current work. These experiences provide a valuable reflexive underpinning towards capturing the underexplored folklife of folklorists, themselves rooted in the often-legendary aetiologies and unofficial hagiographies of founding members that emerge and circulate among multiple generations of staff, faculty and students. As Briody recalls of his single meeting with Delargy a year prior to the founding director’s death:

He who had listened to so many stories, had also a story to tell, and I was an eager listener and conscious that I was savouring a moment in time. Some of what he told us that cold wintry afternoon I recall quite vividly; much I do not, alas. Some of these personal memories I have used in this study, some I recollect too poorly to use, and some I reserve for another day. (29).

Of particular interest to readers of *Scottish Studies* are the sections detailing the work of the IFC in the Isle of Man and Gaelic Scotland in section 6 of chapter IV. Relying on the Department of Education files, specifically its IFC subcommittee minutes, Briody details the results of a meeting on the Isle of Man in July of 1947 between *Taoiseach* Éamon de Valera, Basil Megaw and Ned Maddrell. Megaw was then Director of the Manx Museum (and in a few short years was to become the founding Director of the School of Scottish Studies), and the well-known first-language Manx speaker Ned Maddrell was then serving as curator of the open-air Manx Folk Museum in Cregneash. What is not fully detailed by Briody is that their meeting was part of a

Cultural Heritage in 2016 and added the Irish Folklore Commission Collection to UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register in 2017.

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notable impromptu unofficial itinerary by de Valera to the Southern Hebrides and Man aboard a retrofitted former Royal Navy fisheries vessel renamed *Macha*, remarkably his first visit out of the Republic since the onset of World War II⁶, a consideration that advances Briody's later discussions on de Valera's Celtic Vision (307-09). As a result of de Valera's spontaneous visit and his discovery that no systematic recording was then being undertaken to document the few remaining first-language speakers of Manx, he made the ambitious assurance that the IFC would bring its mobile recording unit to Man to carry out such work. Little did de Valera know that in consulting Delargy upon his return to Ireland, he would discover that the IFC was not in possession of such a mobile recording studio and so de Valera ordered its procurement in the form of a new gramophone and retrofitted van. By the time Kevin Danaher arrived in Douglas with the mobile recording studio via cattle boat from Dublin on 22 April 1948⁷ to complete the field recordings as a collaboration between the IFC and Manx Museum, de Valera had become leader of the opposition, an anecdote emblematic of the unpredictable fits and starts that advanced so much of the IFC's work.

Such unforeseen and harried advances made by the IFC in Man are fittingly presented by Briody alongside succeeding subsections detailing Delargy's negotiations towards achieving his long-desired expansion of the Commission's collecting mandate into Scotland's *Gàidhealtachd*, installing Calum Maclean as a permanent fieldworker there, and their central roles in paving the way for the founding of the School of Scottish Studies. The crux of Delargy's argument was, quite rightly, that without such an expansion into Gaelic Scotland, the work of the IFC and the contextualisation of Irish oral tradition in Ireland would be left '*gan saothrú*' or 'uncultivated' (300) in Delargy's own words. This was a grand scheme that highlighted Delargy's skill in both delicate diplomacy and, most importantly, dogged perseverance, as evident in the considerable persuasion required in his official communications with various gate-keeping bureaucrats at the Departments of Education and Finance, who nurtured varying degrees of support and interest for the proposal stemming from differing visions of the IFC's mandate (300-04). Ultimately, Delargy was able to skilfully navigate the various hurdles, and received official consent to hire Maclean as 'a part-time cataloguer' of existing Scottish Gaelic recordings held in the IFC's collection (303), especially those compiled after a successful test run in which Maclean had been sent home by the IFC the previous year to do collecting in Raasay. Yet, in a masterful tactic of bait-and-switch that Delargy had planned all along, he presumptively sent Maclean to the Outer Hebrides to collect permanently in June of 1946 prior to receiving official sanction (304). Thanks to Maclean's own, if reluctant, willingness to undertake the work with a smaller salary and less funding than his Irish colleagues, this arrangement proved a considerable personal investment in advancing fieldwork in Scotland's *Gàidhealtachd* on Maclean's behalf and indeed, as Briody puts it, a 'gamble' (307) on Delargy's that was ultimately, if not improbably, met with success. With the founding of the School of Scottish Studies in 1951, Delargy's efforts in Scotland, as he expressed himself, 'would bear fruit, for the Gaelic population of both countries in addition to that of the cultured world' (quoted. 307).

Through Briody's skilled engagement with his chosen corpus of textual sources, we are afforded much-needed contextualisation regarding the complex web of associations fuelled, ultimately, by both the personal willpower and individual passion that led to such achievements. Similar to the cohort of publications that have appeared in the last decade concerning the work of the IFC, its role in the foundation of the School of Scottish Studies and the work of Calum Maclean have been given increased attention based on relevant letters and papers held within the School of Scottish Studies Archives, Ireland's National Folklore Collection, the National Library of Scotland, National

⁶ For further details of de Valera's trip, see the 1948 correspondence from Delargy to Megaw quoted. in *Skealyn Vannin ~ Stories of Mann: The Complete collection of Manx Language Recordings made by the Irish Folklore Commission in 1948* (Manx National Heritage 2003, p. 6).

⁷ See the entertaining excerpt of Danaher's description of the voyage quoted. in *Skealyn Vannin* (p. 6).

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Trust for Scotland's Canna House and other repositories.⁸ Briody's work is seminal in that it provides what can be considered the first word in what has already sparked further worthwhile conversations on the role of these individuals and their networks in advancing the study of folklore and ethnology in Ireland and beyond in the twentieth century. As Stiofan Ó Cadhla notes in an earlier appraisal of Briody's work in *The Irish Review*: 'We have had the *Handbook of Irish Folklore* since 1942, but now we have the handbook of the Irish Folklore Commission' (No. 40/41, Winter 2009, p. 201). Perhaps, most importantly, just as Ó Suilleabháin's *Handbook* has aided over four generations of ethnographic fieldworkers, Briody's *Irish Folklore Commission* provides those of us working in the fields of folklore and ethnology with a tried-and-true playbook that will better inform us of how to best navigate our disciplines' uncertain future and advance their careful cultivation in the face of our own twenty-first-century challenges.

TIBER F.M. FALZETT

Reading the Gaelic Landscape – Leughadh Aghaidh na Tìre. John Stewart-Murray. Whittles Publishing, 2014. 240 pp. ISBN 978-18495-100-5.

The author of this work, Dr. John Murray (or John Stewart-Murray or Iain Moireach as he is also known), is a Gaelic speaker and Director of Landscape Architecture at the University of Edinburgh. Murray has previously published relevant work as *Differentiating the Gaelic Landscape of the Perthshire Highlands*,¹ some of which material is included in this book.

The work claims to be 'a comprehensive field guide to the Gaelic landscape'. It is also stated that the 'book is intended to appeal to serious enthusiasts who seek a deeper understanding of what they study and enjoy in the Highlands of Scotland' (p. 3). The names come from a variety of sources: maps, personal research and Gaelic poetry.

Visually the book is stimulating enough, with numerous colour and monochrome photos taken by John Murray on his many trips round the Highlands. Accompanying this are many illustrations and sketches, of which more below. That said, in various places (such as p. 125), the spacing justification is wrong. More seriously – and though not the fault of the author – the binding itself was found wanting, as a number of pages fell out in the course of reading the book.

The introduction sets out the questions (p. 2) which the book explores. These chiefly involve the relationship between a Gaelic place-name and the environment in which it exists. The second to fourth chapters after the introduction ground the reader in the context of the Gaelic Highlands, should he or she need it. The second chapter offers a 'Brief History of Gaelic in Scotland'. The third chapter comprises a background to the history of mapping of the Highlands, and the issues surrounding the Ordnance Survey's (OS) (mis)treatment of Gaelic names.

Chapter four is a brief guide to Gaelic grammar and pronunciation. I understand the author's reluctance to use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) 'which many find obscure' (p.28), but that of course raises its own problems. For instance, is the pronunciation 'vake' on p. 30 for Gaelic *bheag*, meant to represent a word rhyming with 'bake' or is the -e on the end of the word supposed

⁸ See for example Wiseman's 'The people never seem to lose their charm': Calum Iain Maclean in Clonmel,' *Tipperary Historical Journal* (2012): 112–32 and 'Fear Beag a' Chridhe Mhòir: The Life and Legacy of Calum Iain Maclean (1915–1960),' in Kenneth E. Nilsen (ed.), *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 5: Fifth Scottish Gaelic Research Conference* (Sydney, N.S.: Cape Breton University Press, 2010): 280–98; as well as Ríonach uí Ógáin's 'Irish Links and Perspectives' in Bob Chambers (ed.) *The Carrying Stream Flows On: Celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of the School of Scottish Studies* (Kershader, Lewis: Island Books Trust 2013): 177-98.

¹ Stewart-Murray 2006.

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to be pronounced? Of course, anyone with a passing knowledge of Gaelic will know the first pronunciation is intended, but one wonders whether the usage of a simple IPA would not be preferable in the longer term.

The fifth chapter – ‘Place-name Classifications – Revealing Layers in the Landscape’, is where the book really offers an original contribution to the field of toponymy. It utilises a system based on the practice of Meto Vroom, ‘a Dutch academic’. Here, landscape is divided into three layers: the abiotic or non-living bottom (i.e. geological features); the biotic or living layer (i.e. flora and fauna); and the occupation or cultural layer at the top (i.e. human activity). The field of toponymy has long had a problem agreeing on a unified system of semantic categories, so it might be tempting to encourage adoption of this system across the field.

Part two, starting with chapter six, comprises a number of chapters which each cover a different aspect of the environment: Landform and Hydrology; Landcover and Ecology; Land Use; Climate, Season, Sound and Time and The Cultural Landscape. Throughout, evidence is taken from a variety of sources to discuss elements from the Gaelic language and how they fit into the landscape.

Throughout are a series of excellent monochrome diagrammatic illustrations. For example, on p. 43 there is a sketch graph of the different sizes and forms of the main Gaelic elements for hills and mountains. This portrays the differences between elements in a way that only a great number of photos could do. Likewise, the ‘Generic diagram summarising coastal toponymic terms’ on p. 79 constructively shows a ‘platonic form’ of the coastal landscape providing a solid ‘best example’ of each element, as portrayed from above.

At the end of each chapter are tables of linguistic elements discussed, giving nominative, genitive and plural forms, gender, pronunciation, meaning and an example or two. These tables flesh out the topics included in the discussion, containing mainly various semantic categories such as flora, fauna, anatomy, land use and so on. These lists give the elements as they apply to place-names rather than just the general lexicon, which is useful since general Gaelic dictionaries often ignore so-called ‘obsolete’ meanings which are preserved only in the ‘toponymicon’.

These names are partially cross-referenced by an ‘Index of Generic Nouns’ on p. 221 and an ‘Index of Adjectives and Adjectival Nouns’ on p. 231. The cross referencing is not complete however, as, for example the element *baile* on p. 160 is not in the index on p. 221. Of course, with any compilation or list, one could query the inclusion of absence of certain terms, and one wonders if map names have taken precedence. For instance, *beum*, ‘stream, torrent, gap’ (p. 92) is included as it appears five times on maps, but absent from the list is *àban*, ‘backwater’, which does not appear in Gaelic form on maps despite appearing several times in the Highlands. The element is discussed by Watson and MacLean.²

The table on p. 60 (taken from his earlier work: Murray 2006) gives the number, average elevation and average ruggedness for the main Gaelic elements for hills. This approach, using hard data, is to be applauded and quantifies place-name information better than woolly statements used by scholars previously.

Ample use of Gaelic poetry is made throughout, not just as evidence for place-names but also as a way of putting the names in the context of their environment. For instance pp. 108-111 discusses for instance how Sorley MacLean in his poem *Hallaig* employs place-names on Raasay as part of a ‘psychogeographic itinerary’, suggesting ‘a reweaving of the past with the present’.

The bibliography and ‘Further Reading’ section will be useful for those wishing to take their studies further. In the general text, however, with the exception of longer sections of text – usually poetry – (such as W. J. Watson on p. 89 or Ó Murchú on p. 182) explicit references are absent, so that the sources for any given name cannot be not known. Given that the majority of the names given in the book derive from secondary sources, this is a fairly major drawback if the book is to be treated

² Watson 2002: 155, 230; MacLean 2004:56, 62

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as a launch board to further studies. Nonetheless grid coordinates are given throughout for the majority of names; this is extremely useful and is a feature lacking in many place-name publications.

Though perhaps a matter of interpretation, some of the Gaelic forms of names might have borne closer scrutiny. For example, “*Baile Chùirn*, ‘Township of a Cairn’” (p. 110), (although this is the form Sorley MacLean uses), would better be interpreted as reflecting *Baile a’ Chùirn*, ‘township of the cairn’. Likewise, *Cioch na Maighdean* (p. 191) is better rendered *Cioch na Maighdinn* or *nam Maighdeann*.

As with name forms, so with translations. On p. 134 is *Loch na h-Innis Fraoich*, although it is also given as *Loch na h-Innse Fraoich* in the title of plate 26 on the same page. This is translated as ‘Loch of the Heather Meadow’. This is true, but a better translation would be ‘loch of (the place-name known as) Innis Fraoich’. *Innis Fraoich* (as per OS maps) is a place situated by the side of this loch. *Innis Fraoich* itself (better *An Innis Fraoich*) means ‘the heather meadow’.

The treatment of the nominative article in noun plus adjective name formations was also found wanting. When the OS mapped Britain, they decided, for reasons of length, to exclude the nominative article in non-simplex names. For example, *Dubh Loch* as seen on the OS map is really *An Dubh Loch* in spoken Gaelic. Throughout the book the author often refers to such names without the article, for example: *Eilean Molach* p. 39 (better *An t-Eilean Molach*); *Àirigh Bheag* and *Àirigh Mhòr* p. 9 (better *An Àirigh Bheag* and *An Àirigh Mhòr*). In other instances, the article is included correctly, such as *An Caolas Cumhang* p. 71, although on the same page is *An Cumhang Lànaigh* ‘the pass of Leny’ which should not have an article at all. A book focussing so heavily on the Gaelic forms of names should be consistent in this respect.

It should be made clear that this is not seeking to be a book about Scottish place-names in general, or even, it should be said, about Highland place-names. The vast majority of the place-names in this book are names coined in Gaelic and which still exist in Gaelic orthography. Names of Pictish, Norse or Scots origin are largely absent from this book, unless one counts the treatment of names which derive from Norse loan words such as *acarsaid* (‘anchorage’ from ON *akkar-sæti*) or *geodha* (‘rocky inlet’ from ON *gjó*) on page 80. Accordingly, names from much of the Western Isles, which are largely of Norse origin, are excluded.

On the very first page the author says of OS maps of the Gàidhealtachd that ‘on these sheets most place-names are recorded in a reasonably correct and contemporary spelling with a recognisable and fairly consistent grammar. They are easy, therefore, to translate without recourse to complex toponymic or etymological research’ (p. 1). Whilst this is indeed true of many of the names, there are indeed some names for which this does not hold, and the non-specialist speaker of Gaelic may not understand this. For instance, Glen Tarken (p. 141) has not been offered as a Gaelic form, and one wonders if this is because the form (*Gleann Tearcan*) is not transparently understandable in modern Gaelic (it likely derives from the Pictish personal name *Talorgán*).³ Indeed, one has the sense that names containing elements of non-Gaelic origin - whether as place-names or as lexemes - have been deliberately avoided.

Despite the descriptions of Scottish Gaelic pronunciation this is not a book about linguistics. Nor is it a book about history *per se*, except from the point of view of folklore. There are no early forms or discussion of names now extinct but surviving in charters. In this sense the book is largely synchronic in approach. This is primarily a book which combines the disciplines of geography and toponymy within a Scottish Gaelic context. It is this approach that is the book’s main strength, but greater use of historic and linguistic analysis would have undoubtedly strengthened its arguments.

This is an ambitious, wide-ranging book, and in places this approach works and in other places one could wish for more detail on a given topic or approach. As ever, this review has spent longer in criticism than in praise, and despite the shortcomings mentioned above, I would still recommend this

³ Cf Watson 1926: 298.

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book for those whose interest in Gaelic place-names has surpassed the level of Nicolaisen's *Scottish Place-names* or Watson's *The Celtic Place-names of Scotland* but may not be able, for whatever reason, to spend the time to familiarise themselves more fully with the more detailed literature on the subject.

(The reviewer saw an early draft of the book).

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JACOB KING

Gaelic Grace Notes. The Musical Expedition of Ole Mørk Sandvik to Ireland and Scotland. Séamas Ó Catháin. Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture. Novus Press, 2014. 280 pp. ISBN 978-82-7099-773-2.

Since the first decade of the 20th century Norwegians have made major contributions to several areas of Celtic Studies. These include the work of Sophus Bugge on Celtic-Nordic cultural relations; comprehensive and still useful works on language by Marstrander, Borgstrøm and Oftedal, and Reidar Th. Christiansen's folklore publications on Gaelic and Norse traditional narrative. Recently an important addition from Norway, this time in the field of Gaelic song, has now been made available by the Irish folklorist Séamas Ó Catháin in a thorough and readable account of the 1927 visit of the Norwegian musicologist Ole Mørk Sandvik (1875-1976) to research song traditions among the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland, and their possible affinities to the folk traditions of Norway. The book is presented as 'marking a new milestone in the ongoing chronicle of cultural relations between Norway and Ireland', and reveals again how active and fruitful these relations have been. Sandvik, when he embarked on his innovative expedition to collect field recordings and printed sources, was at the midpoint of a long life and by no means a novice as a field worker and ethnomusicologist. He had carried out extensive fieldwork in his native country, and had produced a large and varied group of publications. The results of his energetic and focused collecting during the summer of 1927, consisting of 22 surviving wax cylinder recordings (45 items), musical transcriptions, diary materials, reports, radio scripts and photos, are stored in the Sandvik Irish Collection at the Norwegian National

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Library. These primary sources for the book are supplemented by relevant correspondence held by the UCD Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore in Dublin.

As indicated in his application for funding to the Norwegian State Research Fund, Sandvik's original research proposal was comparative in nature, with the aim of embarking on 'the investigation of folk music and musical mementos of the British Isles [that] has never been undertaken from a Norwegian perspective'. He drew on evidence from his fellow Norwegian scholars of linguistic and cultural contacts between their country and Ireland, and suggested that a study of the musical and song traditions of the British Isles would lead to 'an understanding of the extent to which materials of importance for Norwegian music existed' where the field researcher would identify 'potentially related phenomena'. As a researcher, Sandvik was well versed in the Nordic side of a question still worthy of research to this day, involving the sort of search for origins by means of comparisons in folklore that has been with us since the beginning. A further approach identified in the application and destined to play a central role in his treatment of the recorded materials was the adherence to 'modern principles' in carrying out the investigation, effectively promoting detailed and accurate representations of materials over the earlier practices of altering them to gain wider popular approval.

One of the sources of advice and support mentioned by Sandvik in his application was his countryman Reidar Th. Christiansen, and it turned out to be a fortunate choice. Christiansen, who in his correspondence revealed a surprisingly wide knowledge of Irish musical traditions for a non-specialist, contacted his long-time Irish friend and colleague James Delargy in Dublin, requesting the latter's help and advice in locating Irish language courses, since Sandvik did not know Irish. Once in Ireland, toward the end of July Sandvik enrolled in the 'summer college' language course in Ballingeary, Co. Cork, where he experienced his first direct exposure to Irish song and became aware of the country's language issues. During this time he began to note down songs, which he then checked against the wax cylinder recordings he had made at the sessions. His introduction to the 'flamboyant' father O' Flynn of Cork led to a more detailed appreciation of technique and delivery, particularly the Gaelic grace notes of the present work's title. His remarks from their various meetings over the summer are of interest: the observation that 'at certain junctures in the melody grace notes are sung around a single consonant, a peculiarity I have not met with elsewhere, not at any rate, so remotely pronounced. The charm with which the melody is thereby bestowed consists of something free and independent, as if the mood is amplified, and the note acquires an augmented inexpressible effect by this lingering on the consonant'. He observed that collectors have underrated such ornamentations' importance, and had failed to represent them accurately in their transcriptions.

Following the introductory weeks in Ballingeary, Sandvik took the opportunity in late August to explore West Cork and Kerry, eventually arriving at the home of the renowned storyteller Seán Ó Conaill, in Cill Rialaig. There he rendezvoused with Delargy, who together with local collectors initiated him into folklore fieldwork among Irish Gaels. It was an experience that made a deep impression, not only in terms of his collecting mission, but equally for the warmth with which assistance and support were extended. Ó Catháin observes that had Sandvik been successful in obtaining additional support from his funders, it would have brought major benefits to Norse-Celtic folklore collaborations. Again with the help of Delargy, Sandvik was able to make the acquaintance of some of the central folklore scholars and singers in Dublin, including Máirín Ní Ghuairim of Cárna, whose description of the *caoine* ('keening') tradition is provided along with a transcription of the words.

Of primary interest to Scottish readers will be the chapter titled 'Caledonia Calling' covering Sandvik's visit to Scotland in late September. His original intention had been to stop in Edinburgh to visit Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, famed for her collections of Hebridean songs, but once in Glasgow his plans changed, and he set out for the Isle of Barra in the Outer Hebrides, a decision that was perhaps more in keeping with his recent experiences in the west of Ireland. There, provided with an introduction from Delargy, he sought out the local schoolteacher Annie Johnstone ('Anna Aonghuis Chalúim'), a remarkable carrier of her island's traditions. Annie, who proved to be an invaluable

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source for fieldworkers over the following decades, was a second stroke of good fortune for Sandvik: over a very few days (23-26 September) of intensive recording, together they noted down over 20 songs. Her intelligence, generosity and dedication are apparent from the diary entries, earning Sandvik's enduring respect. He arrived back in Norway via London on 19 October. The account of the project at all stages is generously supplied with photographs, many taken by Sandvik himself.

Following the sections on fieldwork and contacts is a chapter 'A Final Reckoning', with a detailed listing of the results of Sandvik's three-month expedition. Given here are the titles of songs and instrumental tunes, some accompanied by notations; a catalogue of notebooks with their Irish and Scottish contents; and a list of songs, tunes, and one story 'supposedly contained in 27 wax cylinder recordings'. In so far as possible, the items are carefully described, with the Gaelic spelling normalised and the Norwegian translated.

The final chapter consists of follow-up correspondence with Delargy, or further items relating to Sandvik's work, all of which bears evidence of the goodwill generated over that summer. Also provided are excerpts from the final report to his funders, mentioning the materials collected and their importance. Of interest here is a summary of the overall results concerning the original mission to describe cultural and historical links between the traditions of Norway and Gaeldom, in which he singles out the shared musical characteristics he regards as being 'either due to Norseman coming under the influence of Gaelic music, or mean[ing] that they relate to a common musical basis older than the known contacts between the two nations' (131). Further observations were shared through popular articles and radio broadcasts. The appendices contain Norwegian texts and English translations of the original funding application and a later one from 1931; materials concerning the 1927 trip, including the final report; two radio lectures; a newspaper article; and a scholarly article with an engaging discussion of early musical contacts between the two cultural areas.

JOHN SHAW

Gaelic Cape Breton Step-dancing. An Historical and Ethnographic Perspective. John G. Gibson. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017. 464 pp. ISBN 978-0-7735-5059-9.

In traditional dance circles in Scotland, Cape Breton step-dancing, now enthusiastically received by audiences, was virtually unknown before the 1980s, giving rise to doubts as to its Scottish origins. For people in Scotland the underlying issues have not always been easy to contemplate: if Cape Breton's lively Gaelic-based dance did originate in the Highlands (or arguably more widely in Scotland), what had happened to bring about such a thorough and pervasive decline and cultural eradication of that tradition in Scotland from around the time of emigration? By 'the placing of the music and dance/step-dance that persists unselfconsciously today in Gaelic Northeast Nova Scotia, particularly in Cape Breton, into the broad (European) Scotch Gaelic cultural world perspective', John Gibson's detailed and comprehensive investigation into what is still a fraught topic sets out to provide an answer through an examination of the traditions of the *Gàidhealtachds* on both sides of the Atlantic.

A major difficulty for researchers has been the absence of surviving detailed descriptions of popular Gaelic dance in Scotland from 1745 to 1845, notably accurate notations of technique, that would correspond in their specifics to the style and steps employed by Cape Breton step-dancers. However, a very similar set of limitations could be said to apply to any investigation of the Highland origins of Cape Breton traditional singing or fiddle styles, which seem to have generated less scepticism. Thus, it is no surprise that the work has a large historical component, and one where religious divides have exercised a substantial influence on local culture. Gibson's views on this and other matters, often trenchantly expressed, are supported by an impressive amount of research from the two *Gàidhealtachds*, drawing on public records; travellers' accounts; parish and society records;

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contemporary published sources; descriptions in Gaelic songs, personal correspondence and the author's own fieldwork. Such diverse sources are carefully and perceptively evaluated with a view to bringing to light the crucial events in the history of Gaelic dance from the time of the Clearances down to the present.

The opening chapter is an instructive account of one of the major historical frameworks: the background importance of issues of religion from the mid-18th to the mid-19th century as they have related to community dance traditions in Scotland. This included campaigns by Protestant clergy to suppress and eliminate Gaelic Catholicism, often through the roles of various organizations in the Highlands such as the SSPCK and the Royal Bounty that were to lay the groundwork for much of the clergy's policies regarding dance in the Gaelic world.

Following this, the book is arranged into two main sections: the first dealing with the emigrant communities in Cape Breton, followed by chapters reviewing and interpreting the evidence of Gaelic dance in the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*.

The Gaelic settlement of Cape Breton took place primarily during the first half of the 19th century, from which time numerous rural communities, Presbyterian and Catholic, have co-existed over generations. The historical written sources receive detailed treatment, and once again we can see the effects of religion on step-dance in some districts, not least its effect on matters of 'body-contact dancing and liquor'. Never the less, we are left with the general and lasting impression that step-dance was persistent and pervasive - at least until recently - throughout nearly all of the island's Gaelic areas; as a form of cultural expression it was uniformly supported in Catholic communities, with women making an important contribution to its transmission (57).

The Cape Breton section is greatly enhanced by the author's own field research, carried out primarily in Inverness County from the 1970s. The interviews were conducted through English with no recording device used; initial sessions being noted down later; then 'when the teacher-student bond had been formed, I could put paper on the table'. Whatever questions there may be in the 21st century regarding field recording technique, to anyone directly familiar with collecting from Cape Breton oral sources, the results are undeniably accurate and valuable. Use is made of genealogies extending as far back as the first generation of settlers, some drawn from families well known in the Highlands, complemented by orally collected information from Catholic parishes where step-dance is still transmitted, such as Judique, Glendale, Mabou, and the Margarees. The geographical and cultural orientation is toward Inverness County, but accounts from Boisdale (Cape Breton County; mainly a South Uist settlement) from as early as 1907 by a visiting Scottish priest ('never expressed surprise at the sort of setting – step-dancing he saw'), are combined with local accounts of step-dance musicians.

Despite the ostensible issues among the clergy remarked on above, historical research and fieldwork reveal the much less widely appreciated evidence for the strong lines of dance transmission that have existed from the earliest settlements in many Presbyterian areas as well, particularly those settled by Gaels from the Inner Hebrides, where dancing was the norm. They include River Denys and the settlements around Lake Ainslie, where one informant assured the author that 'his family had not learned music and step dancing as some novelty in Cape Breton – instead, it was the music and dance in Presbyterian Mull in the immigration times' (125). The universality of step-dance throughout the whole Gaelic speaking area would suggest that from the time of the first arrivals it was nearly as endemic as the language itself. Observations from the field are supported by written historical sources, Presbyterian and Catholic e.g. the Gaelic newspaper *Mac-Talla*, and the records of the Scottish Catholic Society of Canada.

In contrast to Northeast Nova Scotia, in researching the history of Gaelic dance tradition in Scotland and the possible presence of step-dance, the emphasis by necessity is on written sources rather than fieldwork. Unfortunately, as Gibson points out, such sources are notoriously difficult to draw on as detailed proof, since they are sadly limited with regards to content (which is invariably vague regarding technique), and perspective. To be sure, travellers' accounts from the 1770s to the

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1830s record a marked preference for ‘reels’, travelling steps, a beating or shuffling of the feet to keep exact time, and the lack of arm movements (termed ‘graces’), all of which will be familiar to Cape Bretoners. The description of ‘Highland dancing’ by Col. Thomas Thornton from Dalmally in 1784 is particularly suggestive. Yet the perspective in which accounts are routinely set is the dominant Presbyterian one, often as not emanating from rural clergy, with little recorded of active and enthusiastic Catholic exponents. Such matters of perspective in official and scholarly portrayals of Highland cultural and political history are nothing new, as the introduction to John Lorne Campbell’s *Highland Songs of the Forty-Five* written in the 1930s makes clear. Records from the time of emigration (1798 – 1845) indeed reveal an active ‘antipathy to dancing’ on the part of Presbyterian clergy in some areas, and cover the Outer Isles; Skye; the ‘moderate Presbyterian Gaelic parishes’ on the western mainland; Strathspey; and north-western Perthshire. Although some accounts from 19th century Argyllshire and Strathspey indicate active participation, and often promotion, of traditional dance by members of the rural middle class, the infrequency of references in written records to a central form of cultural expression is compounded by a remarkable lack of interest in Gaelic dance traditions on the part of the most celebrated fieldworkers in the Highlands during the 19th and early 20th centuries. A notable exception is the 19th century Scottish collector Alexander Carmichael, who from his time in Harris describes the Kintail-born octogenarian Mary MacRae, who ‘danced at her leisure ... dancing to her own shadow when nothing better was available’.¹ Significantly for Gibson’s argument, one of the most evocative dance descriptions to survive from the Highlands is of the same Mary MacRae in a song composed by Rev. Allan MacLean, a native of Arisaig, who was later to serve in a parish in Cape Breton where he is remembered to this day in local tradition. As for dance descriptions in Gaelic song, which are examined in detail and evaluated, many if not most give as much information on the social context of dance as they do on substance and technique. The section on the development of dance in the Highlands in the second half of the 19th century reviews evidence that by the late 1870s, dance in Gaelic Scotland had undergone significant – if not fundamental – changes.

Questions of Gaelic dance in the home country were consigned to the cultural margins for over a century, to be reawakened by the visit – now over 30 years ago – of the Cape Breton step–dancer Mary Janet MacDonald. As the author foresaw at the time, claims that this tradition of dance was an inherited one, arriving from the Highlands, were met with polite incredulity from most observers. The exception was one Farquhar MacNeil, a teacher of traditional dance from Barra, who revealed in a series of informative letters to the author his memories from his youth of forms of dance that corresponded closely with what he witnessed from Cape Breton. MacNeil’s testimony and the related evidence reviewed above present a compelling and thoroughly researched case for the origins of Cape Breton dance, and the nature of Gaelic dance in the Highlands, which is difficult to challenge; in their content and range, the sources over more than two centuries lend weight and resonance to Gibson’s declared view that the proper focus (‘there is no plausible alternative’) for studying the history and technique of this popular Gaelic tradition is not the Scottish Highlands, but the island of Cape Breton. This is the most complete and authoritative study of the history of Scottish Gaelic dance known to the reviewer and is destined to take its place beside Gibson’s widely recognised earlier books on Highland and Cape Breton piping traditions: *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping: 1745-1945* (1998) and *Old and New World Highland Bagpiping* (2002).

Materials concerning the Royal Bounty, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (1725), and the Napier Commission are contained in the appendices, and maps, genealogies and photos of dancers and musicians are featured in the front matter.

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¹ *Carmina Gadelica* 1: 4-5; noted down in 1866.