EGYPT, EMPIRE, AND THE GAELIC LITERARY IMAGINATION

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On 8 March 1801, a British expeditionary force – including the 42nd Black Watch, the 79th Cameron Highlanders, the 90th Perthshire Volunteers, and the 92nd Gordon Highlanders – stepped from their boats and onto the beaches of Abukir Bay in northern Egypt. Since Napoleon Bonaparte’s invasion of Egypt in July 1798, William Pitt’s government had been determined to remove the French threat to Britain’s trade routes in the Middle East and in the Indian Ocean.¹ While fears of an Alexander the Great-inspired French decent into northern India were dismissed as implausible, the threat to British global power was sufficient to ensure the dispatch of a large expeditionary force to Egypt.² Horatio Nelson’s decisive victory at the battle of the Nile in August 1798 ended the threat of French hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean but left the

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¹ For an excellent analysis of Napoleon’s expedition, see J. Cole, *Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007).
² Senior British figures such as Henry Dundas were more concerned that a French invasion of the Middle East would provoke Mysore and other Indian states into an attack on East India Company possessions in South Asia, see E. Ingram (ed.), *Two Views of India: The Private Correspondence of Mr. Dundas and Lord Wellesley, 1798-1801* (Bath: Adams & Dart, 1970), 2-16; A. Aspinall and E. Anthony Smith (eds.), *English Historical Documents*, 10 vols. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1959), viii, 78.
French army, minus its illustrious commander (who fled to Europe after the failed siege of Acre in May 1799), in control of northern Egypt.

Sir Ralph Abercrombie’s army did not land unopposed. French artillery on the sand dunes above the beach caused havoc among the lines of redcoats coming ashore. After clearing the dunes at the point of the bayonet, the British army began its fourteen-mile march to Alexandria along a narrow isthmus of sand that separated Lake Abukir from the Mediterranean Sea. A successful assault on French positions at Mandora on 13 March brought Abercrombie’s force close to Alexandria where, at dawn on 21 March, it was counter-attacked by the Armée d’Orient under Jacques-François Menou. As the advancing French columns drove in the British outposts, a confused melee ensued in the darkness around the ruins of the Nicopolis, a large Roman ruin on the British right flank. For five hours, repeated French assaults on the ruins were beaten back and, when the ammunition ran out, both sides pelted each other with rocks. Finally, having failed to break through the British lines, the French withdrew to Alexandria, which was laid under siege and surrendered in September 1801.

The British victory in Egypt, while later overshadowed by subsequent victories in the Iberian Peninsula and at Waterloo, was a major turning point in the wars against revolutionary France. When news broke of the victory at Alexandria, leaders in both the House of Lords and the House of Commons – including the future William IV and the Prime Minister Henry Addington – gave speeches in the army’s honour. William Pitt read a letter before the Commons that “paid a just tribute to the brave men who shewed themselves a

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4 *Bell’s Weekly Messenger*, no. 266 (24 May 1801), 163.
match for the flower of the French army – for the conquerors of Italy … never was there a moment when the steadiness and bravery of the British army was more fully evinced.”

This article presents an edition, translation, and analysis of a Scottish Gaelic song by the Reverend Seumas MacLagain [James McLagan] (1728-1805) about the battle of Alexandria. This text, which has not received any previous scholarly attention, is a rare illustration of an attempt of a member of the Gaelic intelligentsia to reframe Gaelic identity and history so as to reconcile them with the agenda of British imperialism. The spectacular contribution of Highland soldiers to the victory in Egypt was a crucial moment in re-examining the relationship between the Gàidhealtachd and the British state. Gaels, particularly those from the middling and upper sections of society, had been quick to recognize the political and economic benefits of an alignment with the Hanoverian regime and had turned to soldiering as an “imperial specialization” within the post-1746 British state. It fell to writers such as McLagan who, as the chaplain of the Black Watch from 1764 to 1788, was himself part of this imperial specialization, to give meaning to these new alignments and to explain them as entirely consistent with Gaelic imperatives, despite the on-going effects of internal colonization within the Gàidhealtachd. While there are many examples of Gaelic

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5 *The Times*, no. 5112 (19 May 1801), 1.
songs that seek to explain the triumphs of Gaelic soldiers within the context of British expansion, none are as sophisticated or as intellectually rigorous as McLagan’s Òran d’ an Chath-bhuidhinn Rioghaí Ghàidhealaich.

Gaelic engagements with the British Empire – and the largely uncritical celebration of the imperial enterprise that accompanied it – have received some attention. Wilson McLeod notes that military writings from the mid eighteenth to the mid twentieth centuries do form a distinctive literary chapter in the Gaelic corpus. He notes, however, that while it is “certainly not impossible to excavate … dissonant notes within the literary corpus, there is a risk that doing so may distort or misrepresent what is actually a very largely unvariegated body of work.”

Peter Mackay describes – with some justification – the Gaelic military songs of the period as broadly simplistic in their assumptions and literary styles. The uncritical celebration of British victories also lends these songs a crude and uninspiring triumphalism that sits uneasily with modern sensibilities. The most that can often be said of these songs is that the celebration of the Highland regiments helped create a hybrid and often contradictory Gaelic identity. Figures such as Coinneach MacCoinnich and Iain Mac Fhearchair, for example, deployed a fetishized image of the

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martial Highlander in order to unsettle the very forces that imperial integration was instrumental in creating.\textsuperscript{10}

This article stresses the importance of variations within these songs in negotiating and expressing sophisticated Gaelic identities. As a major contributor to Gaelic military song, it is essential to investigate McLagan’s work on its own terms. McLagan’s crucial role as a collector of Gaelic songs and manuscripts – referred to by Derick Thomson as “McLagan’s great achievement” – tends to overshadow his contributions as an original writer.\textsuperscript{11} As a distinctive contribution to the Gaelic military corpus, however, his song deserves greater attention. How did McLagan deploy this important event to make sense of a Gaelic role in British imperialism? What do its specificities say about the colonized adoption of imperial narratives and cultural morays – Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridization and colonial mimicry?

This analysis of McLagan’s text furthers such investigation. It reveals the devices that were used to celebrate Gaelic contributions to British military endeavours. Beyond this, however, McLagan’s song reveals that Gaelic engagement with British imperialism was far from superficial. While largely unexamined in modern historiography, the victory in


Egypt was used to draw the Gaelic literary imagination into a pan-British centred celebration of the imperial world. Egypt was the link between eighteenth-century Gaelic Scotland and the troubling embrace of British imperialism by Gaels that was rarely challenged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

There are two sources for this text. It first appeared anonymously in the Stewart Collection of 1804. It appeared again seven decades later in An Gàidheal and it is clear that the two primary texts both derive from the same original source because they contain all of the same verses in the same order. Differences between them are slight and reflect differing interpretations of handwriting, or emendations of it (e.g., line 102: miosgain / mioscam) or minor emendations to improve the text (e.g., line 43 ghleusda / bheumnach). The song was reprinted by Alexander MacLean Sinclair in 1892 but his text differs, sometimes considerably, from the other two and should be considered to be derivative of them. Sinclair is known to have emended texts for aesthetic, political or moral reasons and expresses explicitly his dissatisfaction with the poet’s skills: “We suspect however that his command of words was somewhat limited. His composition is somewhat stiff; it contains too many contractions. It lacks the regular flow that one would like to find in poetry.” This was no doubt Sinclair’s

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12 A. and D. Stewart, Cochruinneacha taoghta de shaotair nam Bard Gaelach, 2 vols. (Duneidin, 1804), ii, 470-78.
13 An Gàidheal, vol. 5, issue 52 (April 1876), 113-5. The text printed in An Gàidheal includes a number of glosses and neologisms in Gaelic. It is not clear whether these glosses were taken from McLagan’s manuscript or are the product of the contributor’s analysis. We have included these glosses at the end of the song.
rationale for rewriting the text, as he would have approved of its militaristic vision of Gaels in the imperial order.  

The song does not appear in John MacKechnie’s index of the McLagan Collection, but it is reasonable to lend credence to the attribution to McLagan given in An Gàidheal. The anonymous contributor tells us that he or she has worked from an original manuscript:

Rinneadh an t-òran seo leis an Urramach Seumas MacLagain an dèidh Cath na h-Éipheite ’s a’ bhliadhna 1801. Bha an t-ùghdar fhéin ’na mhinishear-feachd do’n Fhreiceadan Dhugh agus air a chunntadh ’na dheagh sgoilear Gàidhlig. Tha an t-òran air a chur sios an-seo mar a sgriobh e fhéin e agus gheibh sinn ann samhladh air a’ mhodh air an robh e am beachd gum bu chòir ar seann chànain a litreachadh.

This song was composed by the Rev. James McLagan after the Battle of Egypt in the year 1801. The author himself was a chaplain for the Black Watch and considered to be an excellent Gaelic scholar. The song is given here as he himself wrote it down and we can get an example of the way in which he believed our ancient language should be spelled.

Besides the attribution in An Gàidheal, a number of other features of this song strengthen the claim that McLagan is the author: dialectical features of the text are consistent with a

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Perthshire Gaelic speaker, such as the loss or shortening of second syllables (e.g., line 8 Gàidh’l); the literary and historical allusions suggest an author with high level of education in both English and Gaelic; and the style and metre are similar to those of a song written by McLagan to the same regiment when they departed for the Seven Years’ War. An analysis of the text is given below followed by the original text and a translation of the song (noting variants in the two source texts).

**Egypt and Gaelic Scotland**

The contributions of Highland soldiers to the victory in Egypt were widely recognized in the aftermath of the campaign. The 90th and 92nd Foot had led the advance at Mandora on 13 March and were awarded a battle honour in recognition of their services. The 42nd Foot bore the brunt of the French assault on 21 March. Initially held in reserve, the regiment took position beside the Nicopolis, where they were exposed to repeated infantry assaults and incessant fire from French skirmishers and artillery. Near the end of the battle, the regiment was also subjected to a desperate cavalry charge that broke through the exhausted soldiers and almost broke their resolve. The Black Watch alone sustained a quarter of all British casualties. It was little surprise that when commissioned to do a statue of the fallen Abercrombie for St Paul’s Cathedral in London, Richard Westmacott placed him in the arms of a soldier of the Black Watch.

When the regiment returned to Britain in 1802, they were awarded numerous honours. They paraded in Edinburgh and received new colours bearing their battle honours along

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with permission to emblazon an Egyptian Sphinx on their crests and badges.\textsuperscript{19} For those who sought to promote the Gaelic contribution to the British military, a conspicuous Highland role in the victory in Egypt was useful. The Highland Society of London struck a medal to commemorate the campaign that they intended to award to all ranks of the \textit{Black Watch}. Designed by Benjamin West, the medal bore the bust of Abercrombie on one side and an image of a Highland soldier on the other with the date of the battle and the inscription: “Na Fir a choisin Buaidh ’san Ephait [These are the Men who gained Victory in Egypt].”\textsuperscript{20} Controversy arose when the \textit{Black Watch} refused to accept the medal, “considering it to be solely the prerogative of [His] Majesty to confer such a mark of distinction on Military Men,” though the regiment later accepted a silver vase from the Society that was presented to them in 1817.\textsuperscript{21}

A number of Gaels turned their attentions to the victory and McLagan’s song was only one among a number of texts that expounded on Gaelic martial triumphs. Perhaps the most famous of these was a song written by Alasdair MacFhionghain who, as an enlisted man in the 92\textsuperscript{nd} Foot, fought in Egypt and was severely wounded at the battle of Alexandria.\textsuperscript{22} MacFhionghain’s “Oran air don Bhàrd a dhol air

\textsuperscript{19} P. Groves, \textit{The History of the 42\textsuperscript{nd} Royal Highlanders} (Edinburgh: W. and A.K. Johnston, 1893), 12.
\textsuperscript{21} J. Sinclair, \textit{An Account of the Highland Society of London} (London, 1813), 27.
\textsuperscript{22} MacFhionghain was so severely wounded that he was almost interred in a mass grave before a friend realized he was still breathing, see R. Black (ed.), \textit{An Lasair: An Anthology of Eighteenth-Century Scottish Gaelic Verse} (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 522.
Tir san Eiphit” described coming ashore at Abukir Bay on 8 March 1801 and is, in terms of linguistic skill and accomplishment, a superior piece of work to McLagan’s. MacFhionghain freely acknowledged his skills as a Gaelic poet but his work is told from the perspective of an infantryman, complete with vivid descriptions of the noise, the smoke, and the piercing wounds of musket ball and bayonet. Fashioned from the same cloth as clan panegyrics of old, it is an impression of a battle experienced personally and lacks the historic and political motifs deployed so freely by McLagan.23

A similar argument can be made about MacFhionghain’s other military song, “Blàr na h-Àlaind,” describing the Anglo-Russian victory at Alkmaar over the forces of the Batavian Republic in 1799. This song is aligned with an older panegyric model that praises the martial valour of clan leaders. Six of the opening seven stanzas praise generals Ralph Abercrombie and John Moore and the colonels of the Gordon and Cameron Highlanders, George Gordon, Marquis of Huntley, and Alan Cameron of Erracht, who are variously described as “an leòghann colgarra gun ghealtachd [the fierce lion without cowardice]” or “An darag dhìleas dharaich ud, Nach d’fhàg san linn seo samhail da [That faithful tree of oaken wood, who has left no likeness in this age].”24

There is some overlap in the use of words and phrases between MacFhionghain’s and McLagan’s work – the descriptions of


“bhrataichean (banners)” and emphasis on savage hand-to-hand combat – but these are very different pieces of work.

Ailein Dall Dùghallach also turned his attention to the battle. As the hired poet of Alasdair Randalson MacDonnell of Glengarry, Dùghallach was no stranger to military praise poetry and composed songs celebrating his patron’s role as colonel of the Glengarry Fencibles. Like McLagan, Dùghallach composed a song in celebration of the Black Watch and its role in the battle of Alexandria. Dùghallach lacks the intimate connection with the Black Watch possessed by McLagan but his “Òran do ’n Reisimeid Duibh” borrows heavily from clan histories by outlining the great historic successes of the regiment. Dùghallach recounts their elevation as a numbered regiment in the armies of the British state and their acclaimed role at the battle of Fontenoy in 1745. He also places some emphasis on their presentation to a young George III.

This song does contain some references to wider political and historic contexts and to the regiment’s place “A rinn an onoir a sheasamh / Do Rìgh Bhreatann a’s Éirinn [Who defended their honour / For the King of Britain and Ireland]” while also suggesting a desire “A bhi ’n deagh rùn do Rìgh Shasunn [To be in the good graces of the King of England].”

Many of these references, however, are incorporated within a traditional model of Gaelic praise poetry focusing on

25 Dùghallach also made passing reference to Egypt in several other songs about military officers, see “Oran do ’n Choirneal Mac-Ic-Alasdair Ghlinne-Garradh air dha bhi gu tinn” and “Oran do ’n Mhaidseir Seumas Domhnnullach, ann an Reisemeid Mhic Coinnich, Tainisteir Glinne-garradh” in A. Dughalach, Oraín, Marbhhrannan, agus Duanagan, Ghaidhealach (Inverness, 1829), 84, 89-96, 117.
26 Ibid., 91-2.
27 Ibid., 89, 93.
the personal attributes of powerful men.28 The Duke of York, the commander of allied forces in Holland in 1799, is portrayed as a paternal clan leader: “’S beag an t-ìongadh bho thoiseach, / An Diùchd O’ York a ’thoirt spéis doibh; / ’S tha ’mhòr chairéadas a’ nochdadh, / Gu bheil toirt aige fein doibh [It is little wonder / From the beginning the Duke of York was fond of them / His overwhelming kindness being shown / That he gives his own import to them].”29 According to Ruairidh Maciver, Dughalach’s song “shows a tendency toward traditional forms of address” and there is an emphasis on Gaelic mythologies.30 Dughalach, for example, implies that the Gaels are returning home to Egypt (an origin myth that is discussed below): “Mòr-euchdan nan Gàidheal / ’Dhol a dh’ àiteach gu fhearainn / A’ bheil pairt do shliochd a dhaimh [Great achievements of the Gael / Going to occupy that land / In which are part of their kin]” while also comparing the Black Watch to the Fenians of old.31 When placed alongside other songs that reference the French and British invasions of Egypt – Sergeant Alexander Forbes’ lament for Donald Macleod of Geanies or James Shaw’s “Oran do Bhonipart” or Donald Macdonald’s song of the same name – it is clear that the campaign had a far greater impact on the Gaelic literary imagination than has previously been acknowledged.32

29 Dughalach, Oraín, Marghrannan, agus Duanagan, Ghaidhealach, 92.
31 Dughalach, Oraín, Marghrannan, agus Duanagan, Ghaidhealach, 89-91
Nevertheless, many of these songs were constructed within traditional forms of praise poetry, which allowed them to celebrate Gaelic martial valour without seeing Highland service in the British military as inconsistent or contradictory. They were less driven by contemporary and imperial politics than McLagan’s song outlined below.

McLagan’s Gaelic context

Óran d’an Chath-bhuidhinn Rioghalf Ghàidhealaich is not immune from the influence of the panegyric code. It is a product of McLagan’s deep engagement with Gaelic tradition. Writers like McLagan could – and did – draw on traditional motifs of the warrior hero to sustain a narrative of Gaelic martial triumph and smooth the transition to the celebration of imperial campaigns. McLagan emphasized the moral imperative of Gaelic violence, both in terms of the loyalty of the Gael toward their leaders (dìleas) and the righteousness of the cause in checking the barbarities of Britain’s enemies (Lines 140-1). The personal and collective costs of this moral imperative only served to strengthen the righteousness of Gaelic actions in Egypt (Line 8). This violence, as well as being morally justified, could be explained through precedent and tradition as the Black Watch took their rightful place alongside the Gaels of old, though McLagan’s selection of historical narratives in the song do require further explanation (see below).

The importance of strength (neart) and winning renown (cliù), both crucial motifs of the panegyric code, are also explained, mostly explicitly in the first stanza where McLagan notes that death was no barrier to the renown won by the

“laochraidh gharg [fierce battalion].”\textsuperscript{33} McLagan’s imposition of himself into the song in the final stanza completes the cycle by reminding the Gael of the renown bestowed on young warriors by the community’s poets, decrepit and frail as they are (Line 166). Other aspects of the code – divine kingship (Line 163); the kind hand of fate (Lines 105-8); and the denunciation of Gaelic enemies (Lines 17-24) – are all embedded within the text.

Nevertheless, McLagan also deployed rhetorical strategies that must be understood as more specific to the challenges of integrating the Gael into imperial triumphs. Conspicuous loyalty to the monarchy is a recurring theme of the song but it is deployed specifically on Line 55 to make sense of previous Jacobitism, noted as prior “gòraich [foolishness/folly].” For those trying to make sense of shifting loyalties, Jacobitism became a usable past that proved Gaelic allegiance to monarchy at a time when the American and French revolutions were calling such loyalties into question.\textsuperscript{34} The very loyalties that had alienated Gaels from the Hanoverians in the early eighteenth century could, by the late eighteenth century, be used to demonstrate the inherent reliability of the Highland warrior. During the American Revolution more than two decades earlier, McLagan himself had written from New York to a scholar in Glasgow contrasting Jacobitism with the aims of the American revolutionaries: “We sometimes, at least some of us, mistook the right king, but we were always friends to Kings and monarchy in general, the American rebellion, on the other hand is entirely selfish and void of every spark of generosity that ever graced the human

\textsuperscript{33} See also Lines 45-7 and 114.
Conspicuous loyalty to the crown served to clear the record of Jacobite improprieties and added lustre to an emerging narrative of Gaelic loyalism.

The nature of this loyalty, however, was also changing. If earlier songs in the panegyric tradition had emphasized what was gòr [proper], ceart [just], or dligheach [obligatory] about loyalty to the rightful king, McLagan displayed no reticence in outlining the benefits of loyalty to both the crown and the Gael. McLagan’s song emphasized that the heroic traits of the Gael were a useful asset to the state (Lines 140-1). In return, the Gael could find security under a benevolent monarch. In Line 144, McLagan speaks of the importance of a good king as the guarantor of the law and constitution in a manner that echoes the earlier pro-Hanoverian songs of Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir. The loyal Gael also gained the respect of George III, unabashedly proclaimed as “Is a’ithne d’ ur deagh rìgh sibh / Is d’a theaghlaich riomhach suaire’ [your excellent king and his illustrious, civilised family]” (Lines 109-10). Such respect could be converted into material reward, as suggested in the following line where McLagan explains that those who pursue victory will never lack “inbhe [rank].” The acquisition of

37 The taking of material rewards from a state that was responsible for the ill-treatment of its Gaelic subjects is the theme of another military song from the McLagan Collection dated to 1784, the year after the mutiny of the 77th Foot (Atholl Highlanders) in Portsmouth, see McLagan Collection, MS Gen 1042, f. 174, University of Glasgow.
status through military service is an important theme of McLagan’s work but this specific phrase might have had a double meaning to Highland officers who held their military rank from the crown on the basis of being able to entice enlistments from among their tenancy.

The potential audience may help make sense of the other appeal to monarchy in the song. According to McLagan, the king stood in opposition to greed, miserliness, and the forcible removal of the Gael from their lands. The military advantages that the Clearances gave to Napoleon – by depleting Britain’s reserves of manpower – are also outlined (Lines 145-52). Placed in the context of mass Highland emigration, however, McLagan’s audience may have been able to interpret this in a number of ways. At the time of composition, Highland leaders were engaged in an effort to convince parliament to halt the flow of Gaelic migrants across the Atlantic. The resulting Passenger Vessels Act (1803) – which used humanitarian arguments about conditions aboard transports to raise the price of passage – was a tool of the landlords designed to ensure that estates retained their human capital despite deteriorating socio-economic conditions. The idea that George III supported these efforts in order to retain Gaelic manpower for the fight against Napoleon may well have pleased pro-military landlords and recruiters in the same way that it appealed to poorer Gaels who were bearing the brunt of socio-economic change.

We must also consider audience when assessing the broader purpose of the song. As chaplain of the regiment, McLagan was a critical link between the military and the Gaelic community. His songs were not simply the work of an individual poet but were intended to offer a medium through which the community could interpret broader events.

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McLagan’s focus on the rewards of service can be seen as an effort to ensure the continuing supply of Highland manpower to the king’s armies at a time when the Highland population seemed incapable of sustaining the regiments already formed.\footnote{By the Napoleonic Wars, many “Highland” regiments were majority non-Scottish, to say nothing of Gaelic-speakers who had become a decreasing (if occasionally sizable) minority, see T.M. Devine, \textit{To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland’s Global Diaspora, 1750–2010} (London: Penguin, 2012), 219.}

Correspondence between McLagan and Lord John Murray, colonel of the 42nd Foot until 1787, reveals that Murray wanted to publish McLagan’s earlier songs in both Gaelic and English as a recruiting tool.\footnote{Dziennik, \textit{The Fatal Land}, 208.} McLagan’s 1756 song for the regiment when it departed for America was published in the \textit{Gillies Collection} in 1786 though this did not prove to be the immediate fate of the Egypt song.\footnote{J. Gillies (ed.), \textit{Sean Dain, agus orain Ghaidhealach} (Perth, 1786), 113-7.}

Both songs feature allusions to sexual rewards for Highland soldiers upon their return and can be read as an enticement to young Gaels. Lines 157-60 are clear that the soldiers can expect sexual rewards from the “òigh[ean] [maidens]” when they return. There is a strong parallel here with the earlier song where McLagan describes the tender maidens and the promises of sexual attention on their return. In that earlier iteration, he tells the soldiers: “Mas fios do mhaighdinnibh rùn maighdinn / Leibh gun aom gun aindeoin [As maidens know another’s wish / You will make them yield willingly]” and that the lasses would not refuse a “fhìor-laoch [true warrior].”\footnote{Newton, \textit{We’re Indians Sure Enough}, 123-4, 26.} In fact, McLagan’s song shares a number of motifs and themes with his earlier song. The style and metre are very similar and there are some similarities of language.
Allusions to the natural world and the correlation between the power of nature and the power of the weapons used by the Highlanders (Lines 33-40) are also clear in both cases. 

But some important differences can be identified. McLagan’s use of the term “Coillteach [forest people]” to refer to the Gael (Line 83) stands in contrast to his use of the same term to describe Native Americans allied to France during the Seven Years’ War. The use of the term Coillteach demonstrates a remarkable change of attitudes regarding civility and savagery. Maclagan himself probably coined the ethnonym as a calque on “savage” – despite a long tradition of celebratory tree symbolism in Gaelic – in order to have a term to describe the Indigenous enemies of the British Empire. In 1756, this no doubt helped distance the Gael from Anglophone insinuations that they were Britain’s equivalent of France’s “savages.” By 1803, however, it is reclaimed as a term to describe the Gaels themselves. Rather than engaging in racial distancing so as to align Gaels with their fellow Britons as evident in earlier texts, McLagan seems to be highlighting the Gaels’ presumed rustic characteristics, which were claimed to give them special advantages as warriors. This shift reflects an early form of Highlandism as Scottish elites began to distance themselves from the cultural hegemony of England safe in the

43 Gillies (ed.), Sean Dain, 114.
knowledge that their inclusion in the “civilized” imperial order was secure. It adds further weight to the notion that Highlandism was not simply the grotesque manipulation of Highland symbols by Lowland elites but something that was also – probably first – generated within the Gàidhealtacht.

McLagan’s navigation of tradition themes and pan-British considerations is nowhere more interesting than in his foregrounding of political and historical themes. Stanzas Ten to Fourteen place the actions of the Black Watch along a continuum of resistance of foreign oppression. The Black Watch are the heirs of the Gauls who resisted first Julius Caesar and the Franks (Line 79). There is little here that is unusual. McLagan echoes the contemporary antiquarian understanding of the Gaels as a branch of the continental Celts whose territory had been slowly encroached upon by Germanic invaders, a view he expressed in letters to other collectors of Gaelic manuscripts.\footnote{McLagan to Stewart, 1 Sept. 1800, GD/We/5/15, Dundee City Archives [DCA]. This idea can clearly be seen in Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s introduction to Ais-Eiridh na Sean Chánoín Albannaich (Edinburgh, 1752), vi-vii.}

What is more unusual is McLagan’s endorsement of a Japhetic and Gomeric lineage for the Celts in the following stanza. As a member of the Gaelic literati, McLagan would have been well aware of the long tradition of a Milesian line of descent for the Gaels. This origin myth centred on the ancestral figure of Míl Espáine (Soldier of Hispania) from whom the Milesians derived their name. According to the legends compiled in the Lebor Gabála Érenn (The Book of the Taking of Ireland), the Milesians had come to Ireland from the Iberian Peninsula and had divided the realm between themselves and the previous inhabitants, the Tuatha Dé Danann, who were driven to the Otherworld. This story held the advantage of being mutually intelligible to both Scottish and Irish elites and
centred language as a primary identifier of race. It posited that the Gaelic language could be traced to the Milesians via Fénius Farsaid, one of the creators of the Tower of Babel and a prince of Scythia, from whom the Milesians and their language were ultimately descended. The Milesian story, while sometimes manipulated by Tudor propagandists to justify genocidal English expansion, retained a central place in Gaelic scholarship well into the eighteenth century.47

The Japhet and Gomer origin stories were, by contrast, common throughout the English-speaking world and beyond. According to many medieval and early modern national histories, Europeans had descended from Noah through his son Japhet and his grandson Gomer. The exact details changed across time and place but it was common to associate the Welsh with the Gomeric line, the Gaels of Scotland and Ireland with Gomer’s brother, Magog, and the Germanic or Teutonic peoples with Ashkenaz, a son of Gomer. Writers in the late eighteenth century, such as Edward Gibbon, were challenging this formulation, decrying the “antiquarians of profound learning and easy faith” who had embraced the myth in the name of patriotism and religious fervor in the seventeenth century, but it still had its defenders even among the elites of the Scottish Enlightenment.48


Two points of great significance are apparent. First, the Japhet myth lacked the firm ethnic and racial barriers of later nineteenth century. In asserting that all occupiers of the Atlantic Archipelago were descended from Japhet, early modern theorists imagined Teutons and Celts as kindred peoples in a way that became impossible in a post-Biblical era of scientific racism. Defenders of this idea, figures such as James Parsons (the Dublin-educated English physician) and Francis Hutchinson (the English-born Bishop of Down and Connor), often straddled the ethnic divisions of the Atlantic Archipelago and found common cause in a widely shared orthodox belief that the peoples of the islands descended from the same line.\(^49\) In foregrounding the Japhet myth – rather than that of the Milesians – McLagan was situating himself within a frame of reference that emphasized ancestral unity among the Germans and Celts over linguistic disunity. That McLagan chose to neglect the Milesian myth in favor of a Gomeric one is especially significant given the role of Scota in the Milesian version. Scota, from whom the Scots reputedly derived their name, was said to have been the daughter of an Egyptian pharaoh who had married the son of Fénius Farsaid and whose grandson, Goídel Glas was the creator of the Gaelic language.\(^50\)

\(^{49}\) There had been efforts to link the Milesians to the Japhet myth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries though the results were often “rather messy” since it was also necessary for the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland to claim the high antiquity of the peoples whom the Tuatha Dé Danaan and Milesians had displaced, see Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism*, 65.

\(^{50}\) For versions that were used for Scottish origin myths, most famously (but not first or exclusively) by John de Fordun, see D. Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain: From the Picts to Alexander III* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 215-68.
That McLagan rejected such an obvious link to Egypt is fascinating.

Second, by embracing a specifically Gomeric line, McLagan was consciously placing himself within a paradigm that emphasized an affinity with other Britons. The Gomeric line allowed an unambiguous rejection of Jacobite origin myths promoted by figures such as Thomas Innes that focused on the Scottish royal line.\(^51\) It also distanced him from a Milesian myth that was beginning to lose credibility under the weight of intellectual investigation.\(^52\) Ultimately, it gave him an origin myth that had much greater credibility in the Anglophone world and offered him a secure base from which to celebrate the triumphs of the Gael within a unified British context.

There is, of course, some ambiguity in McLagan’s treatment of the Gael within the British Isles. He aligns himself firmly (at times) with a pan-Gaelic context through frequent references to the Fian.\(^53\) The term “cothrom [na] Féinne” is used on Line 17 to mean a “fair fight” while there are further allusions to the Fian on Line 67. McLagan’s comparison with Oisean on Line 167 is particularly apt given McLagan’s long involvement with the transcription of Ossian oral literature and his engagement with the Ossianic debate. McLagan had corresponded with James Macpherson in the early 1760s and provided the Badenoch man with around thirteen poems from

\(^51\) T. Innes, *A Critical Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of the Northern Parts of Britain or Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1885 [1729]).


\(^53\) Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir’s “Oran do Réisimeid Bhràghaid-Albann,” which was nearly contemporary to McLagan’s song, portrayed the volunteers of the Breadalbane Fencibles as “A shliochd nam Fianntan [Fian descendants],” see Maciver, “A’ Moladh na Réiseamaid,” 62.
his own collections.\textsuperscript{54} Frequent references to the Fian may have also been an acknowledgement of the Irishmen who often constituted large percentages of infantry regiments.\textsuperscript{55} Three regiments from the Irish establishment – the 18\textsuperscript{th} Royal Irish, the 89\textsuperscript{th} Princess Victorian’s, and the 2/27\textsuperscript{th} Inniskilling regiments – also served alongside the Highlanders during the battle.

McLagan also displays a venomous hostility to the Teutons and the Goths, despite his endorsement of the Gomeric line. In his editorial comments on the song, Sinclair is no doubt correct when he states that, “The Goths referred to are Dr. Johnson and Pinkerton, especially the latter.”\textsuperscript{56} McLagan’s rancor runs deep in Lines 97 to 104. In the late 1780s, John Pinkerton had published two texts in which he had outlined the case that the Picts were a branch of the Teutonic Goths and that the Gaels, like all Celtic races, were an inferior species of mankind.\textsuperscript{57} Here, McLagan blames Johnson’s high-handed Anglophilia and Pinkerton’s racialized Celtophobia for turning many Britons against the Gael without any justifiable reason. McLagan also portrays the Black Watch as a bulwark against “Teutonaich thàin’ ’nur coir, A chuid a chiud le seòltachd [Teutons who impinged on you with cunning, bit by bit].” The

\textsuperscript{56} Sinclair, \textit{Gaelic Bards}, 242.
\textsuperscript{57} J. Pinkerton, \textit{Dissertation on the Origins and Progress of the Scythians or Goths} (Edinburgh, 1787); J. Pinkerton, \textit{Enquiry into the History of Scotland preceding the reign of Malcolm III} (Edinburgh, 1789).
image of Gaels being driven to the margins by the advances of the Teutons places the Highland soldier within a “Celtic Fringe” construct of the British Isles.

Nevertheless, the ambiguities of the song are precisely what gave McLagan the ability to play with certain narrative aspects of the historical record, particularly with regard to Celtic resistance to the Teutons and imperial Rome. The argument that the Highland regiments constituted a bulwark against the latest in a long line of foreign oppressors of the Gael is something that McLagan had thought about in other contexts. Six months before the battle of Alexandria, he had penned a letter to his brother-in-law, John Stuart of Luss, in which he had compared the threat of Napoleon to the invasions of Scotland under Edward I and Oliver Cromwell. McLagan was careful to resolve any inconsistency that might arise in a comparison of an English invasion of Scotland to a French invasion of Britain. Both risked the destruction of Scotland’s history and culture, argued McLagan, suggesting that Gaelic cultural identity could be made to work within shifting political alignments.

The motif of freedom-loving Caledonians fighting off the Romans (Line 85) was a common one in Anglophone literature but it could also carry connotations of Protestant resistance to Catholic hegemony. The virulent anti-Catholicism of British national identity in this era would have made sense to a minister of the Church of Scotland – especially in the aftermath of French support for the Irish rebellion of 1798 – while also smoothing Gaelic inclusion into a united Protestant history.

McLagan’s British context
What are we to make of McLagan’s varied deployment of historical examples that were laced with contemporary

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58 McLagan to Stewart, 1 Sept. 1800, GD/We/5/15, DCA.
59 Newton, Seanchaidh na Coille, 108.
meanings? Certainly, for McLagan, political histories could be written and re-written without ever obscuring the importance of the Gael from the history of Britain and Europe. He is not so much inconsistent as adaptive and develops a historical argument that could engage without alienating a variety of Gaelic perspectives. But there is also a strong element of mimicry in play, whereby a colonized people adopts the attitudes of the colonizer. They do so to assert a presence in colonial society that would otherwise leave them bereft of the ability to challenge the Anglophone narrative. In so doing, they often normalize and underpin the dominant narrative by offering proof of the merits of the “civilizing mission” among so-called savage peoples. McLagan is part of this process as he simultaneously incorporates and disassociates the Gael from a narrative that celebrates Britain’s resistance to revolutionary France.

The themes of incorporation and disassociation – exemplified by the use of the term Coillteach – make it critically important to place McLagan’s work within a wider British paradigm. It must be considered as the work of an author whose writings were intended to support the counter-revolutionary ethos of the British state and its loyalists. McLagan was familiar with the specifics of the battle. The reference to Alexander Stewart as the leader of the energetic

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61 For discussions of Gaelic Scotland and postcolonial theory, see S. Stroh, Uneasy Subjects: Postcolonialism and Scottish Gaelic Poetry (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011); C. Krause, “Gaelic Scotland – A Postcolonial Site?” eSharp 6 (Autumn 2005) [http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_41178_en.pdf].
Gaels (Line 129) is remarkably specific, given that Stewart had only taken command of the regiment two weeks previously when James Stewart was wounded during the landing at Abukir Bay. At the same time, McLagan adjusted his account to remain fixated on the triumph of British arms. The French commander Menou did order his cavalry into the melee around the Necropolis but, while McLagan states that this set the Gaels in motion among other valorous Britons (Lines 31-2), eyewitnesses noted that the “shock” of the French charge was “irresistible” and that those Highlanders who were able to resist the charge found themselves “fighting on his own ground, regardless of how he was supported … while strength or life remained.” The French cavalry were eventually driven back but with a high cost.

Most interesting is McLagan’s choice of words to describe the attacking French and their battle flag. Lines 9-32 describe the 42nd Foot’s bitter fight with the 21st légère demi-brigade, whose nickname “The Invincibles” is used by McLagan and was widely used in accounts of the battle and by the British press. The term gained widespread popularity when it became attached to a rancorous dispute over who had captured the standard of the 21st légère demi-brigade – Sergeant Sinclair of the 42nd foot or Private Lütz of the Minorca or Queen’s Own German Regiment. The press quickly took the side of the 42nd Foot and a large panorama of the battle by the stage-artist Robert Ker Porter displayed the 42nd Foot’s triumph to adoring crowns in London and Dublin. Some writers, however, were not entirely willing to engage in another celebration of Scottish valour. William Cobbett stoked the flames of controversy by suggesting that Lütz, a “friendless … foreigner,” had been neglected in a fit of British patriotism.

62 Mackesy, British Victory in Egypt, 127.
and Highlandism. In response, the Highland Society of London conducted an investigation and declared that Lütz had taken the standard from the wounded Sinclair rather than from the French. Ironically, the dispute greatly upset the officers of 42nd Foot who found the Society’s quibbling over the regiment’s honour to be distasteful and a disservice to the professional reputation of the army as a whole, including the foreign and émigré regiments.

What is most revealing about this dispute, however, is that it puts McLagan firmly within a pan-British narrative of the battle. There was, in fact, no French regiment nicknamed “The Invincibles” in Egypt. Napoleon had described the troops that had crossed the bridge at Lodi in 1796 as “cette colonne invincible [this invincible column]” but there is no evidence of the title in French sources. In the 7 February 1802 edition of

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63 Cobbett’s Annual Register … from July to December 1802 (London, 1810), 546-71.
64 [Anon.], Invincible Standard: Falsehood and Malignity Exposed in a Vindication of the 42nd Royal Highland Regiment Against the Pretentions of Mr. William Cobbett (London, 1803); D. Stewart, Sketches of the Character, Manners and Present State of the Highlanders of Scotland, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1822), i, 454n, 479-81.
65 The captured standard was of the 3rd battalion of the 21st légère demi-brigade, which had fought in Italy but most of the formation had fought in the Rhine campaign of 1796, perhaps offering some rationale for McLagan’s brief mention of the Rhine on Line 40. If McLagan was making reference to the French regiment’s history, it displays a remarkable understanding of the 42nd Foot’s opponents at Alexandria. It may equally be the case that McLagan was attempting to remove the stain of defeat suffered by British forces in the invasion of Holland in 1799 though the army had not crossed the Rhine or the Waal during that campaign.
the French government’s official newspaper, *Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel*, it was reported that the British press had invented the term to add luster to the victory. McLagan’s use of the term “Invincibles” and his description of the standard as the “infamous banner” shows his awareness of pan-British debates over the battle and puts the song firmly within a Continental dispute between Germans, Frenchmen, Britons, and Gaels.66

**Conclusion**

McLagan’s Òran d’an Chath-bhuidhinn Rìoghail Ghàidhealaich is a highly valuable illustration of an early attempt by a member of the Gaelic intelligentsia to reconcile Gaelic identity with support for British imperialism and the war against revolutionary France. The song not only evidences Gaelic efforts – in a Gaelic medium – to acculturate to an Anglophone narrative, it reveals the complicated and often ambiguous devices that were used to celebrate Gaelic contributions to British military endeavors. While many songs in the Gaelic military corpus made use of generic stock motifs and formulaic narratives, there was space for intellectuals like McLagan to ruminate on the meaning of Britain and the place of the Gael within a British military and imperial system. McLagan’s song is a cultural and historical narrative aimed at making sense of a problematic situation in a way that other military texts are not. It deserves closer attention for this reason.

There is no doubt that Gaelic heroism was central to McLagan’s process. If Britain’s overseas expansion promoted Gaelic heroism, it could be embraced without damaging the

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66 For British uses of the term, see A. Anderson, *A Journal of the Forces ... in the Mediterranean and Egypt* (London, 1802), 355; *The Royal Standard and Loyal Political Register*, no. 7 (18 Feb. 1804), 111.
cultural identity of Gaelic Scotland. There was little inconsistency here and, it might be argued, that McLagan is prefiguring the unionist nationalism of the mid nineteenth century. Despite historiographical focus on Anglo-Scottish elites, the people most affected by the advance of a domineering Anglophone narrative were, unsurprisingly, first to respond to its challenges. And as McLagan’s song makes clear, they did this long before the appropriation of Highlandism by Scotland’s urban and literary elites. McLagan’s deep engagement with pan-British arguments and motifs was not, therefore, inconsequential. His Egypt song not only prefigures the politicization of Gaelic and Anglo-Scottish literature that was to follow, it points to a positive acknowledgement of imperial Britain that was rarely challenged – despite vigorous protests against the effects of internal colonialism in the region itself – late into the twentieth century.67

While largely unmentioned in analysis of Gaelic Scotland, the victory in Egypt was a crucial moment that was used by McLagan and others to draw the Gaelic literary imagination into a British sphere more completely than any previous event. Egypt was the missing link between the subjugation of the Gàidhealtachd in the eighteenth century and the troubling embrace of Britain’s “imperial mission” by Gaels in the nineteenth century. McLagan was not alone in this endeavor. Ailein Dall Dùghallach, Alastair MacFhionghain, and the Highland Society of London all celebrated the Gaelic role in the success in Égypt. But none were as politically profound and none had greater meaning than James McLagan.

The Song

67 McLeod, “Gaelic Poetry and the British Military Enterprise,” 61-76; Meek, Caran an t-Saoghlail, 304-17.
'S an ochd ceud deug is bliadhna
'S am beuc na siantan àrd'
Tha gaoth an ear, air sgiathaibh,
Toirt sgeòil an làr gun chàird;

Far aon tha cliûteach is cianail
Gun thuit mór-thriath 's an àr
D' ar slòigh gun thuit na ciadan
Fa leth, laioch fhial nan Gàidh’l.

Ma thuit, cha b’ ann gun deagh chliù
A dh’eug an laochraidh gharg;
Gun d’ aithnich rogh’ nan Saor-fhear\(^{68}\)
Gur garbh an gleus ’nam fearg:
Dhio-làraich iad gu lèir-sgrios
Do-cheannsaich\(^{69}\) threun ’s an t-sealg

Is chuir am bratach bheudach
Mar chuimhn’ an euchd da ’n Alb’.

Is cha b’e cothrom Féinne
A fhuair na tréin ’s a’ bhlàr:
O’n cùl is fo dhuibhribh oidhche

Do-cheannsaich thàin’ ’nan dàil;
'S cath-bhuidhne eil’ r’an aodainn
Bu leòr r’an claoiadh ’s an àr
Ach thionndaiddh is chuir gu maoim\(^{70}\) siud
'S am fuil a’ taom’ gu làr.

\(^{68}\) *An Gàidheal* glosses saor-fhear as “Frangaich” (the French).

\(^{69}\) *An Gàidheal* glosses Do-cheannsaich as “Invincibles,” perhaps revealing the widespread acceptance of this terminology by the latter nineteenth century.

\(^{70}\) Stewart Collection: gu maoim; *An Gàidheal*: fo mhaoin.
25   Nuair\textsuperscript{71} shaoil \textit{Menou} gun d’ aom iad
Chuir [e] marc-shluagh treun ‘nan\textsuperscript{72} còir:
Eich Arabach luath leumnach
A dhèanadh euchd air thòir;
Dh’aith-bheòthaich Gàidheil ghleust’
30   Is chuir ‘nan steud siud fòs;
Bha Breat’naich uile treubhach
Ach sibhse treun thar glòir.

O’r feòdain\textsuperscript{73} ghlas a’ smùidrich
Bha frasa drùidhteach geur’;
35   Ur gunna-bhiodaga rùisgte
Mach air an druim ‘nan steud;
Ur claidhmhnean sgaiteach lùthmhor
A’ snaitheadh smùis is fhéith;
Sin dhearbh nach sibh na lùb-fhir
40   Bha faoineas riu’ mu’n \textit{Rén}.

Nò ‘m bheil e ‘n comas dhaoine
An tréine dol nas àird’
Na chaidh na Gàidheil dheumnach\textsuperscript{74}
An tir na h-Éiphit an tràth-s’:
45   An cliù a bha cho daor dhuibh
Mo dhòigh a chaidh nach caill;
Bithidh\textsuperscript{75} neart is cliù nam fraoch-bheann
Sior-chur r’ur daoin’ is r’ur càil.

Leam-s’ duilich na fir chròdha
50   A bhith fò’n fhòd gun deò

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{71} S: N’air; G: Mar.
\textsuperscript{72} S: gu’n; G: ‘nan.
\textsuperscript{73} S: feadain; G: feòdain.
\textsuperscript{74} S: ghleusa; G: dheumnach.
\textsuperscript{75} S: Bithidh; G: Braidh.
\end{flushright}
Ro fhad o’n dilsibh brònach
Nach cluinn an glòir nas mò;
Ach is aoibhinn do na beòthaibh
Gun robh iad mòr ’nan lò

Nach dèan iad tuilleadh gorach
’S nach eug an glòir no ’n sògh.

Ge duilich leinn na dh’eug dhiubh
Tha ’n luaidheachd seutach cinnt’
O thuit iad an deagh adhbhar

’S gun d’fhàg luchd eucoir sint’;
An gealtach bás, cha chaomhain
Gu dian ged shraon o rainn;
’S bithidh druim an eagail reubtadh
Ge fada leum na h-oillt.

Chan iongnadh leinn ur diobhail
O ionnsaigh dhian ur nàímh
A shaoil, tro sgrios na Fiannachd
Gum fàgta fìamhach càch;
Ach mheall sibh tür am mì-rùin

Am miosgainn thug gu’n call
Is sgath sibh catha lìonmhòr
’Nan dòigh bha cinnt’ d’ur bás.

O thug na Frangaich buaidh air
An fluigheall thrugh air bha an Gaul

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76 S: luaidh ac’; G: luaidheachd.
77 S: gealtair; G: gealtach.
78 S: bithidh druim; G: braidh druinn.
79 S: Ged fada leim na h-oilt; G: Ge fad a léim ’na h-aoil’t.
80 S: Cha b’; G: Chan.
81 S: miosgain; G: moisgain.
82 S: cinnt’; G: àithnt’.
An déis do Chaesar uaibreach
Am marbhadh, ’n ruag ’s an cràdh;
Shaoil iad gum b’ ionnan cruas do
Shaor-Ghàidheil uasal Alb’
Bha ionnsaicht’, aonaicht’, cruadhaitch’
’S d’ an duth sgor83-bhuaidh ’nan colg.

Is sibh iarmad Iapheit ’s Ghômair
A ghluais o’n Tòr d’an Eòrp’;
Sliochd Choillteach, Ghàidheal Mhóir-thîr
Is Ghàidheal-dònach84 cròdh’

Nach géilleadh do shluagh Ròimhe :-
Is Teutonaich thàin’ ’nur85 còir
A chuid a chuid le seòltachd
Is cha b’ ann le treòir cho mòr.

Na Lochlannaich thug ionnsaigh

Ar ceannsachadh gu tur
Le fomharachd86 is droch thionnsgnadh
Far aon air tràigh ’s air muir;
Ach uaidh thug Gàidheil dhoibh siud
Leo gus am b’ annsa sgur

Is bheir sibhse dearbh gach às air
Gur sinne ’n clann chruidh mhear.

Ar gaisg do dhùisg dhuinn mì-rùn

83 S: sior; G: scor.
84 The word Ghàidheal-dònach is glossed as “Gaels of the hills” in An Gàidheal.
85 S: na’r; G: n’ur.
86 For the various meanings of this term, see R. Ó Maolalaigh, “Mythnonyms in Scottish Gaelic: Fomóir, fomair, famhair, fuamhair(e), (‘giant’) and Related Forms,” Scottish Gaelic Studies 29 (2013): 172-243.
Nan Gotach fiata searbh’;
Seadh, iarmad Ghàidh’l tha líonmhór
A’ sath
Nis, nì ’m beil Got a sgriobhas
Nach eil le miosgain garg
Do nach sop-reic ar riabadh
Thoirt fiach d’ a farruig bhorb.

Ach choisinn giùlan laoch mhór
Dhuibh meas ceud dhaoin’ thug fuath
D’ ur tir gun fhios cia ’n t-adhbhar
Mur h-e bhith daonnan cruaidh;
Is aithne d’ ur deagh righ sibh
Is d’a theaghlach riomhach suaire’;
Dhuibh chaoidh chan easbuidh inbhe
Is sibh an tòir cho dian air buaidh.

Cha ghann dhuibh luchd aith-lionaigh
Is ur cliù cho cian is cho binn;
Bidh òig-fhir ghleusta dhiana
‘Gur n-àrraídh às gach beinn;
Tairngidh fuaim ur pioba
Na mìltean às na glinn;
Bidh breacan is claiddmhnean liomha
A’ dùsgadh miann gach linn.

O Abercromai chliüitich
Gur mór ar tùirs’ ’ad dhéidh!
Gur mór a chaill do dhùthaich
’Nad chleachd, ’nad iùil, is ’nad thréin!

87 S: A’ sath; G: A shàth.
88 S: miosgain; G: mioscam.
89 Although both sources have this, it is likely faulty; “gach” may have been intended.
Do bhantrach is t’òg-fhiùrain
Tha frosadh dìth nan deur
Ach is mór am meas is dùth dhoibh
Air sgàth an fhiùbhaidh dh’eug!

Ach Alasdair àigh Stiùbhairt

Is éibhinn leam-sa t’ euchd
A stiùr na Gàidhleal shunndach
An còmhraidh cluîteach Éipht’;
Ged thug aois is droch dhùthaich
Dhiom slàinte, lùths is gleus,

Chaoidh, leanaidh mo dheagh
’S is beath’ bhur cliù do m’chré.

Nis, saoghal fad’ is soirbheas
Do ghaisgich ghang nan Gàidh’l
A dhionadh còir na h-Alba

Is a chosgadh buibh nan nàmh;
A bhuanach sìth is sealbh dhuinn
Air chuantaibh garbh ’s air tràigh
Gum mair ar reachd is co-dealbhadh
Fo righ math, soirbh ’s gach àl.

Bu dian a ruith air aithleas e
A thionndaidheadh
Ar cinneadh dìleas làmh-làidir
Tre ghionach[d] [is] saidhbhreas chrion;
Is có a choimheadh dhoibh-sin siud

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90 S: mo cheud; G: mo dheagh.
91 *An Gàidheal* glosses Coi-dealbhadh as “Constitution.”
92 S; aithleas neach a thionndaidheadh a’n tìr; G; aithleas e a thionntaidheadh an Tir.
93 S: Ar; G: Bhur.
In [the year] 1801, in which the elements howled, the east winds quickly carried a tale of the west on its wings that is both celebratory and sad, that the great lord fell in the battle; hundreds of our own troops fell as individuals, the goodly heroes of the Gaels.

If they did [fall], the fierce battalion did not die without [achieving] great repute; the select troops recognized that their manner was rough in their aggression; they wiped out the brave Invincibles to the point of annihilation in the chase and their bellicose banner was selected as a memorial in Scotland of their exploits.
(17-24) The brave men did not get fair play in the battlefield: the Invincibles met them from behind under the dark cover of night; with another regiment before them, there was plenty for them to subdue in the battle but they turned around and routed them, with their blood gushing to the ground.

(25-32) When Menou thought that they had been defeated, he sent cavalry to them: swift, galloping, Arabic steeds that would excel in pursuit; that revived the expert Gaels and set them in motion again; all of the Britons were valorous, but you [Gaels] were courageous beyond words.

(33-40) From your grey, discharging muskets came sharp, penetrating volleys; your bared bayonets were on the ridge like a wave; your swift, biting blades were slicing marrow and sinew; that is what demonstrated that you are not pliant men, the Rhine posed no great challenge for them.

(41-48) It is not humanly possible to summon greater bravery than that of the walloping Gaels who are now in the land of Egypt: they bought their reputation dearly, I am confident it will never be lost; the strength and reputation of the heathery mountains will always enhance your people and your well-being.

(49-56) I am sad that the valiant men are under the sod, with no breath of life, too far away from their sorrowful friends who will no longer hear their clamour; but it brings joy to those who live that they were great in their day and that they will engage in no more folly, and that their glory and their grandeur will never die.

(57-64) Although we are sad about those of them who died, their reward is wonderful and certain since they fell in a good
cause and they left the evil-doers stretched out [dead]; death will not spare the coward, even if he has swiftly dodged the blade; the back of the coward will be cleft even if [his] leap of fear is long.

(65-72) We are not surprised about the harm on you from the intense attack of your enemy who thought, that through the destruction of the “Fenian” warriors that the rest would be cowered; but you outwitted the artifices of their malice, the enmity that brought them to destruction, and you have ruined many troops who were certain of your death.

(73-80) Since the Franks conquered the pitiful remnant who were left in Gaul, after proud Caesar murdered, routed and oppressed them, they assumed that they would create a similar hardship for the free and noble Gaels of Scotland who were trained, united and toughened-up, who were heir to rough-victory in their blades.

(81-88) You are the successors of Japhet and Gomer who relocated from the Tower [of Babel] to Europe; the lineage of the Gaels of the continent, and of the brave Gaels of the mountains, are a lineage of forest people who would never yield to the people of Rome: [nor to] Teutons who impinged upon you with cunning, bit by bit, rather than with overwhelming power.

(89-96) The Norse attempted to conquer us completely with naval-force and evil devices on both land and sea; but the Gaels returned it to them until they preferred to desist [from violence] and you will always demonstrate that we are the tough, high-spirited people.

(97-104) Our heroism has aroused the malice of the fierce, bitter Goths; aye, the barb is being thrust into our skin, the
numerous successors of the Gaels; now, there is not a Goth who writes [about us] without ill-intent to tear us apart for their own profit and to draw attention to their nasty rubbish.

(105-112) But [your] heroic behavior has earned you the respect of hundreds of people who had learned to hate your country without understanding the reason, if it was not just to be perpetually condemnatory; and your excellent king and his illustrious, civilised family has come to know you; you will never lack rank while you pursue victory so hotly.

(113-120) There is no shortage of people who will take your place, while your reputation is so sweet and lasting; well-trained and keen young men will seek you out from every mountain side; the sound of your bagpipes will draw thousands from the glens; the kilt and sharpened swords will inspire the ambition of every [coming] generation.

(121-128) O, renowned Abercromby, we mourn greatly after you! Your example, leadership and strength is a great loss to your country! Your widow and your young heirs are shedding tears copiously but they inherit great respect on account of the warrior who died!

(129-136) But lucky Alexander Stewart, your success in leading the energetic Gaels in the famous battle of Egypt gives me joy; although old age and [living in] a difficult country has drained me of my health, strength and ability, my good wishes will always follow you and your honour is life to my body.

(137-144) Now, [I wish] a long life and success to the rough warriors of the Gaels to defend Scotland’s honour and to check the barbarity of the enemies; they have won peace and prosperity for us on rough seas and on land; may our laws and
constitution endure under a good king, successful in every generation.

(145-152) He [the king] keenly strives against those who would drive our faithful, strong-handed people from their land through greed and miserliness; who could protect that [land] for them without kinsfolk, [who are] their shield? It gives Bonaparte joy that they [Gaels] are emigrating across the western ocean.

(153-160) After toil and tribulations, is it pleasant [to enjoy] contentment and peace, honour from goodly people and a warm welcome from kinsfolk; but where can I find the means to express the contentment of the maidens who have been in love with you since their tender youth and are now breathless with joy?

(161-168) Although you are now far from me in a foreign land, you have my eternal well-wishes; may you have the protection of High King [God] defending you from harm and injury; it gives me joy to get good news of you, even if I am decrepit and frail; but if I am a grey-haired Ossian, I am in good spirits, “May my Fenian-band live forever.”