oderick Cannon’s *The Highland Bagpipe*, is an excellent starting point for a general study of the Scottish Highland bagpipe. Its recent republication in paperback is welcome and compliments Cannon’s earlier invaluable work, *A Bibliography of Bagpipe Music* (most of which deals with the music of the same instrument).

In such a short book as *The Highland Bagpipe* the author, himself a good piper, has condensed a large amount of information from an admirably wide collection of sources. Cannon’s sights range over the instrument’s antecedents in Antiquity, its history and function, musicological questions concerning scales and tonality, classical and light-music piping, and modern piping, including piping for dancing and pipe bands. With such a wide scope, inevitably there are imbalances which may leave a new reader in the subject wondering where the proper emphasis should be. Many topics worthy of post-graduate study, perhaps even books, are touched in the most cursory way. The author was aware of many and justly acknowledges them.
This is a good book; it is scholarly as much as writing on piping and the bagpipes has stubbornly not been. If too tight and abbreviated, its advantage is that anyone wishing to probe more deeply some of the major aspects of the Scottish two or three-drone bagpipe with a conical-bore chanter (known to the world as the Highland Bagpipe), has a good starting point.

David Waterhouse’s review of the earlier hard-cover version of Cannon’s book finds occasional errors in that text and discusses Cannon’s musicological points in a way which will interest the more technical reader. There is no indication in the paperback edition that the text has been altered since 1980. Waterhouse also remarked, not unkindly, on Cannon’s ignorance of certain aspects of North American modern piping which, as one would expect, must appear obscure, once upon a time even inferior, to many British students of the Highland bagpipe. While I know nothing of Mieczyslaw Kolinski’s theory of consonance and dissonance, which Waterhouse drew upon impressively in his assessment of The Highland Bagpipe, I will draw your attention to a point concerning the instrument and Cannon’s understanding of it which should be said, particularly at a time when “Celtic” music is being wooed by the commercially minded.

While the so-called “Highland bagpipe” is undoubtedly Scotland’s national instrument, advertising that bilingual country world-wide (almost having commandeered the death rite and the parade), the foundation for the instrument’s later development lies in eighteenth
century Gaelic Scotland. Its function and development as a military and civilian social phenomenon in the English-speaking world springs from the radically altered scientific or improver concepts introduced systematically to Gaelic and English Scottish life from the eighteenth century (in a large expanse of Gaelic Scotland from after 1750).

Competition in bagpiping was begun in 1781 and probably did not fundamentally alter a rich, sophisticated and diversely functional Gaelic “tradition” until after the Napoleonic Wars. Literate learning of piping, like military and civilian pipe bands, and non-ceilidh dance music bagpiping are all nineteenth century phenomena and at a radical remove from the older Gaelic Scotch tradition. Cannon’s book about the Highland bagpipe tends to overlook, or de-emphasise, the Gaelic aspect of that Highland instrument. There is no doubt that the bagpipe is much more technically brilliantly played today by a much larger number of people than ever played the instrument in old Gaelic Scotland, but to overlook the remarkable Gaelic piping tradition and foundation on which the inventive, literate and scholarly English-speaker has so fruitfully built is to irritate the crankier purist.

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