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All-Utterly Barbarous? Gille-Chaluim Garbh, Laird of Raasay, and a Sixteenth-Century Gaelic Poem from the Fernaig Manuscript

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Introduction

GILLE-CHALUIM GARBH, chief of the MacLeods of Raasay (ca. 1570x1616) is a somewhat shadowy figure in historical sources. He was known in Gaelic as Gille-Chaluim Garbh mac (Alasdair 'ic) Ghille-Chaluim and in English is referred to as Malcolm Macleod, third chief of the Macleods of Raasay. The Gaelic form, Gille-Chaluim Garbh, will be preferred here. He was part of Siol Torcaill, or the MacLeods of Lewis, one of those Hebridean kin-groups identified by King James VI in 1598 as 'allutterly barbares', in need of 'rooting out' as they lacked any 'shew of civility.'² Siol Torcaill in Lewis were duly expropriated, the Lordship of Lewis was granted by the King to a consortium of nobles and merchants from Fife, and the area was subject to Lowland plantation or colonization from 1598.³

1 The author would like to thank Professor Clare Downham for an invitation to give a lecture on this topic to the Scottish Society for Northern Studies and the editor of this journal. I also owe thanks to the editors of *Aiste*, the journal to which I had originally considered submitting this article, and to anonymous peer reviewers for their comments.

2 *James I, The Workes of the most High and Mightie King James*, 15.

3 The MacLeods of Lewis (Siol Torcaill) are not mentioned by name in 'Basilikon Doron' but it is fairly clear this was who James VI had in mind. Basilikon Doron is thought to have been written in the summer of 1598 and the Plantation of Lewis commenced in late October that year. Siol Torcaill were one of three Highland kindreds expropriated in his reign, together with the MacDonalds of Islay and Kintyre (ca. 1605x1615) and the MacLans of Ardnamurchan (1625) and the MacGregors in the southern and central Highlands from around 1606. *James I, The Workes of the most High and Mightie King James*, 15; Macinnes 1993, 34-38; MacDonald 2000, 177-178. MacCoinnich 2015, 105.

King James's agents in Lewis demonstrated that civility for many Lewis people meant, in effect, whatever the rhetoric, that they were deprived of their lands—with those who refused to quit their lands, or resisted, being killed or captured. Captives faced 'civilised', royally sanctioned 'justice', leading in many cases to execution—with the heads of some executed Lewis rebels being sent southwards as grisly evidence of their death.⁴ Despite this, native resistance to Lowland plantation continued, eventually causing the scheme to falter. After the failure of the Lowland plantation by 1609, Gille-Chaluim's surviving kinsmen on Lewis were then conquered and absorbed into the burgeoning empire of the MacKenzies of Kintail. Yet Gille-Chaluim himself managed to survive, and the MacLeods of Raasay continued as a landholding entity after the Jacobean pacification of the Hebrides, which was achieved in the northern Hebrides with the Statutes of Iona, 1609, followed by the complementary MacKenzie conquest of Lewis in 1610. The fate of the MacLeods of Lewis (the main line of Sìol Torcaill) has been considered at length elsewhere, but the Raasay branch of the clan has received far less attention.⁵

Sìol Torcaill were much maligned by Lowland contemporaries, whose voices (in Scots or English), levelling charges of barbarity and savagery at Hebrideans, dominate surviving primary source material—most of which was generated by and for King James and his Privy Council. This, in turn, influences subsequent historical discourse. Indeed, the perceived barbarity of Gaels was promulgated by no less a figure than the monarch. The impulse of the state to curb the Gàidhealtachd and inculcate 'civility' is hardwired into the historiography of the Early Modern Highlands, and much scholarly writing that considers the Gàidhealtachd proceeds along these lines.⁶ Only one roughly contemporary source survives (in English) from Sìol Torcaill, giving an internal, clan perspective on their downfall, 'the Ewill trowbles of the Lewes' (ca. 1626x30).⁷ There are no extant sources in Gaelic from the MacLeods of Lewis that can be dated to this period. Yet, the MacLeod of Raasay chief composed a brief poem in Gaelic towards the end of the sixteenth century, which gives us the sole Gaelic voice from this kindred in this period. This paper will firstly consider the

4 MacKenzie 1903, 190-191; MacCoinnich 2015, 69 (and n128), 84-85, 162-163, 173-174.

5 For the Lewis branch see MacCoinnich 2015, 11, 74-112. For previous work on the Raasay MacLeods see note 49, below.

6 See, for example, Macinnes 1993; Williamson 1996, 56, 59-65; Goodare 1998, 36, 55-56; MacGregor 2006, 132, 162; Cathcart 2010, 5-7; Brochard 2015, 10; MacCoinnich 2015, 11-20, 23; Kennedy 2018, 52-60, 68.

7 *Highland Papers*, vol. ii, 265-279; MacCoinnich 2006, 214-231.

poem and its context and then consider the career of the poet, Gille-Chaluim Garbh of Raasay.

Gille-Chaluim Garbh's poem was preserved in the later *Làmh-Sgrìobhainn MhicRath*, or the *Fernaig Manuscript*, compiled ca. 1688-93.⁸ This manuscript source—a collection of fifty-nine poems in Gaelic running to some 4200 lines—was written by Donnchadh MacRath, Kintail. MacRath had connections, through his wife Seònaid nic Alasdair ('ic Alasdair) mhic 'Ille-Chaluim Gairbh, to the Raasay family, explaining, no doubt, the poem's presence in this collection of verse.⁹ Seònaid's two brothers, Iain Garbh (d. 1671) and Alasdair (d. 1688), were lairds of Raasay in turn, but both died prematurely without issue. This left Seònaid and her sister, Sileas, as joint heiresses of the Raasay estate in December 1688. The two sisters sold their right as heirs of line to a cousin, Iain MacLeod of Rigg, who became the next laird of Raasay. The timing of Seònaid's co-inheritance of her brothers' estate, contemporaneous with the composition of the *Fernaig Manuscript*, make it reasonable to suggest that this piqued Donnchadh MacRath's interest in his wife's family's heritage and in this poem by her great-grandfather.¹⁰ Indeed, Donnchadh recycled the first line of the Gille-Chaluim Garbh of Raasay poem considered here, using it as a first line in one of his own compositions.¹¹

Many of these poems in MacRath's manuscript have never been fully edited, translated, or considered by scholars other than by Calum MacPhàrlain (1923). The reason for this scholarly oversight is the idiosyncratic Scots-English orthographic system employed by the scribe, Donnchadh MacRath (d. ca. 1693), for the writing of his Gaelic. It can sometimes be difficult to decode the Gaelic words represented by MacRath's writing. MacRath seems to have been typical of, rather than different from, most Gaels of his class and period in the northern Highlands, whose education focused on English

8 GUL, MS Gen 85/1/34.

9 Seònaid MacLeod is said to have been a poet in her own right and four poems survive which are thought to have been composed to her (although some of these are variously attributed to another contemporary poet, Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, or to Seònaid's sister, Sileas). These include a lament for her brother, Iain Garbh of Raasay, who was lost at sea in 1671. Ó Baoill and MacAulay 2001, nos 290-293. McGuire 2001, 3, 153, 375. Cheape 2019, 26-27. Nicolson 1994, 298. Ó Baoill 2014, 275-276; Mathis 2019, 95, note 80. My thanks to Dr Mathis, University of Edinburgh, for discussing Seònaid with me.

10 Morrison and MacKinnon 1990, 42-44. *Retours*, i, 'Inverness', no. 109. NRS, RS 38/5/583.

11 Ó Baoill and MacAulay 2001, no. 270, 325. This was 'A shaoghal is diomhan mo mhùirn', the first line in Gille-Chaluim Garbh's poem, which MacRath then used as the first line in his own 'Laoidh do rinneadh leis an sgrìobhair an àm mualaid' (song made by the writer at a time of great sadness), in *Dòrlach Laoighean*, 46-49.

(or Scots) rather than on their native Gaelic.¹² There was an important Gaelic manuscript tradition, of course, employing Gaelic orthography, in Argyll and the isles, which has given us a thread of continuity from the medieval period through into modern Gaelic.¹³ Yet, English education predominated in most of the Gàidhealtachd, especially in the north. Many Gaelic speakers such as MacRath were unused to writing their native tongue. Whenever they did so, they employed an alien Scots-English orthography ill-suited to the accurate writing of Gaelic.¹⁴

Although an accurate and reliable transcription of MacRath's text was published by Calum MacPhàrlain (1923), the scribe's eccentric and irregular application of Scots-English orthography for the writing of his Gaelic creates a barrier to our understanding of MacRath's manuscript as a Gaelic text. MacPhàrlain attempted a transliteration or interpretation of MacRath's text into regular Gaelic orthography which, while very helpful, can sometimes raise as many questions as it does answers. MacPhàrlain's book, nevertheless, remains a valuable starting point. Although the manuscript as a whole has not been edited, there has been some more focused scholarly study of, or reference to, some of the poems.¹⁵ Despite this, the manuscript as a whole remains comparatively neglected. The short poem composed by the chief of the MacLeods of Raasay, forming the focus of this current paper, has also tended to be overlooked by scholars.¹⁶

12 MacCoinnich 2008, 2022.

13 Black 1989, 146-174; Hogg 2021, 257, 268-71, 282-284.

14 For more examples of such approaches by Scots/English-literate Gaels—unused to writing (or reading) their native language—attempting to write Gaelic verse see Meek 1989, 131-145; MacCoinnich 2008, 325-328.

15 W J Watson, for example, published a small number of these poems in the journal of An Comunn Gàidhealach, *An Deò-Grèine* (1917-18), and then in his subsequent verse anthology, *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig* (1918, 220, 230, 233, 234, 236-7). Ó Baoill and Bateman's anthology (1994) contains some additional poems from MacRath's collection and other items have appeared in MacCoinnich 2013, 121-160; and MacCoinich 2015, 415-419. A number of scholars have also mined MacRath's collection for its political content: MacLean 1939, 32-33, 106-110, 161, 165, 261, 276-81, 329-337; Macinnes 1982, 83, 86-87. Ní Suaird 1999, 93-140; Findlay 2002, 250-251.

16 Professor Watson, Alexander Nicolson's *History of Skye* (1996), and Derick Thomson's *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* (1989), all referenced below, mention this poem, but apart from that it tends to get overlooked. Recent, wide-ranging, comprehensive discussions of Gaelic poetry relating to this era make no mention of this (admittedly very short) poem by the Raasay chief, although some of these works do reference other Clan MacLeod poetry. McLeod 2006, 73-74, 79; McLeod and Bateman 2007, 466-470; Coira 2012, 155-182, 370-371.

The poem

The poem as it appears in the manuscript has a title ‘Còig rainn do rinneadh le Gille-Chaluim Gairbh mac Ghillechaluim’ (‘five verses made by Gille-Chaluim Gairbh’).¹⁷ The poem was given the title ‘Na trì làmh bu phailte’ (the three most plenteous hands) by the Gaelic scholar, Professor William J Watson (1918). The reading that follows is taken directly from the manuscript source but acknowledges a debt to Professor Watson’s treatment of the poem, first trailed in *An Deo-Gréine* and then published in his *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig* (1918), and also Calum MacPhàrlain’s transcription and transliteration, *Làmh-sgrìobhainn MhicRath* (1923).¹⁸

The reading offered here returns to the manuscript source, Donnchadh MacRath, aiming to follow this as closely as possible, and favours the text as we have it in the manuscript from MacRath.

The aim here, in other words, is to try in the second column to understand what MacRath wrote using conventional Gaelic orthography and then to translate this into English—a working transcription and translation rather than a scholarly ‘reconstruction’ or edition.

The transcription, transliteration, and translation which follows is thus a provisional interpretation rather than a definitive edition of the text.¹⁹ Despite the different approach taken here, this reading differs from Watson and MacPhàrlain only very slightly on a number of points, most notably only in the final verse. Professor Watson’s reading of each verse is included in the footnotes for ease of reference.

17 In the 16th century ‘Gille-Chaluim’ was known in English as ‘Malcolm’. In modern Gaelic the ‘Gille’ prefix has been lost and ‘Calum’ remains. I follow, broadly, Alexander Nicolson’s usage of the name form ‘Gille-Chaluim’ and ‘MacGhille-Chaluim’ (Nicolson 1994, 298).

18 Watson 1917-18, 119-120; Watson 1918, 305; Watson 1959, 236-7, 331; MacPhàrlain 1923, 166-67, 315.

19 My thanks to anonymous reviewers for their suggestions.

<i>Reading from the manuscript</i>	<i>Gaelic transliteration</i>	<i>A provisional English translation</i>
5 Rijn d̄i reigin lea Gillicallūm Gariph mc illichallūm	‘Còig rainn do rinneadh le Gille- Chaluim Gairbh mac Ghillechaluim.’	<i>Five verses by Gille-Chaluim Gairbh mac Ghille-Chaluim</i>
<i>Hivill iss dijmboin d̄i vūirn Smairg ī ghūhir lea droigh qūirmb i Trūire b̄i phailt ra mī reah Nī er vairrin dhuh ach ī nah skeil</i>	A shaoghail, is diomhain do mhùirn ‘S maig a ghuidhear le droch chuirn An trìuir bu phailt ri mo ré Nī air mhaireann dhiubh ach an ath sgeul ²⁰	<i>O world, useless is your mirth Woe unto you with your poor feasts The three most generous in my day No trace of them save a tale</i>
<i>Ta Ingiss ī Kroighk nī naingle Laūh nach d̄i cheinin ī sivill Va shid er nī laūhu b̄i phailt Da faighjiss i chlan na Ghaihall</i>	Ta Aonghas an Cnoc nan Aingeal Làmh nach do chaomhnain an t-saoghail Bha shiod air na làmhaibh bu phailt D’a[m] faiceas ‘a chlannaibh nan Gàidheal ²¹	<i>Aonghas now in Cnoc nan Aingeal He would give all he had to share That was one of the most generous hands That was seen among the clans of the Gael</i>
<i>Laūh eill ver Gillespig Maighk Chellen Earle ghtūinigh Shea shin dairle laūh b̄i phailt Da faigekiss d̄i chlannū ghaihall</i>	Làmh fhèil bh’ air Gilleasbuig MacChaillein, Iarla Dhuibhneach ‘S e sin an dàrla làmh bu phailt Da[m] faiceas de chlannaibh Ghàidheal ²²	<i>A free hand had Gilleasbaig, MacCaillein, the Campbell Earl The next of the most generous hands That was seen among the clans of the Gael</i>
<i>Lauph Eachin oig vijck Eachin Mī chraighs b̄i er ī kljig Bea shin oin lauh b̄i phailt Da faighkiss ī chlannū gaihall</i>	Làmh Eachainn Òig mhic Eachainn Mo chraidh-sa, bi air a claidheadh B’ i sin an aona làmh bu phailt Da[m] faiceas ‘a chlannaibh nan Gàidheal ²³	<i>The hand of Eachann Òg mac Eachainn - My torment has worn me out: That was the most open hand That was seen among the clans of the Gael</i>
<i>Nish vo chait trūir shin saighid Skin vi aind naigh ga tivig Ach ead mir Shimbigh ī faiihe Is ro vèg mart ort ī hivill.</i>	Nis bho chaidh an trìuir sin seachad ‘S gun bhith ann neach g’an taobhadh Ach iad mar dhiombuaidh a’ faoighe Is ro-bheag m’ fheart ort, a shaoghail. ²⁴	<i>Now since these threefolk have passed There is no one [for people] to turn to They are like luckless thiggers Little I trust in you, o world</i>
<i>Hivill iss doimhein etc and.</i>	Shaoghail is diomhain etc.	<i>O world, useless, etc.,</i>

- 20 Watson (1959, 236-7, verse 1) has the first verse: ‘Shaoghail is diombuan do mhuirn / Maig a dhubhar le drochuirn: / an trìuir bu phailt ri m o rè / Nī air mhaireann diùbh ach an athsgeul.’ See also Nicolson 1994, 295.
- 21 Watson (1959, 236-7, verse 2): ‘Tà Aonghas an Cnoc nan Aingeal / làmh nach do chaomhnain ‘na saoghail / Bha sud air na làmhaibh bu phailte / D’ am facas de chlannaibh Ghaidheal.’
- 22 Watson (1959, 236-7, verse 3): ‘Làmh eile bha air Giolla-easbuig / MacChaillein an Iarla Dhuibhnich / ‘S i sin an dara làmh bu phailte / D’ am facas de chlannaibh Ghaidheal.’
- 23 Watson (1959, 236-7, verse 4): ‘Làmh Eachainn Oig mhic Eachainn / mo chreach-sa i bhith air a claidheadh / B’ i sin an aon làmh bu phailte / D’ am facas de chlannaibh Ghaidheal.’
- 24 According to Watson (1959, 236-7, verse 5): this was ‘Nis, bho chaidh an trìuir sin seachad / is gun bhith ann neach gun taobhadh / Ach iad mar ghiomaich am faiche / is ro bheag m’ fheart ort a shaoghail.’ Watson translated the third line here as they are like lobsters in burrows. I read the third line from this verse from the MS as ‘ach ead mir Shimbigh ī faiihe’ which seems to me to be to be either <Ach iad mar dhiombuaidh na faoighe> (but they are like luckless thiggers) or else <Ach iad mar dhiombuadhaich faiche> (but they are like unfortunates in the fields).

The world is your lobster: ... or thigging and chiefly generosity?

Some of the reading of these lines is uncertain due to the ambiguous nature of Donnchadh MacRath's idiosyncratic orthography. Nevertheless, the themes discussed in this poem or song, with the exception of the final verse, seem reasonably straightforward. The generosity and open-handedness of three of Gille-Chaluim Garbh's older, late contemporaries are upheld as an example to the living. Generosity is a fairly common motif in Gaelic poetry and was seen as a praiseworthy attribute for chiefs in Gaelic society.²⁵ Professor Watson read the final line of this poem: 'mir 3himbigh i faiihe' as 'mar ghiomaich am faiche', which he called a 'striking and original simile'—translating this as 'like lobsters in burrows.' Watson was followed in this by MacPhàrlain.²⁶ The phrase in the poem that Watson and MacPhàrlain read as 'faiche giomaich,' with the meaning of 'lobsters in burrows'. This phrase is indeed attested in fieldwork collected from several locations in the Hebrides from Harris to Islay in the twentieth century. The phrase may once have been prevalent in Raasay, too, meaning that this interpretation does indeed seem possible.²⁷ Yet, not only are the burrowing lobsters a startlingly unusual image, but this does not seem (to this reader) to be either a wholly convincing interpretation of MacRath's orthography or a comfortable fit with the context of the poem. If not burrowing lobsters then, or lobsters lurking in their dens, what are the alternatives? If 'mar 3himbigh i faiihe' was read instead as something like 'mar dhiombuaidh a' faoighe' (like the misfortunate thiggers) or 'mar dhiombuaidhich faiche' (like the unfortunates in the fields), or possibly 'diombuadhaich', displeased, dissatisfied, discontented (people) in the fields (or displeased thiggers).²⁸ If we consider one of these permutations,

25 Newton 2006, 289, 282-3, 312.

26 MacPhàrlain, following Watson, renders this 'Ach iad mar ghiomaich am faiche' which he glosses as meaning 'they are like lobsters in lobster-burrows' (GUL, MS Gen 85/1/34. Watson 1917-18, 119-120; MacPhàrlain 1923, 167, 315; Nicolson 1994, 295).

27 'Faiche' in connection with 'giomach' ('lobsters' and 'burrows') appear in fieldwork collected for the Historical Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic, University of Glasgow, c. 1996-97, from Harris, Islay, South Uist, Tiree and Mull. This information is now searchable at the 'Faclan bhon t-sluagh' [=Fieldwork] section of DASG.

28 Diombuaidh is likely to be a cognate of the modern word diùmbach (displeased, unhappy, indignant or angry).

this gives the verse a different meaning, much more in context with the rest of the poem, which focusses on chiefly generosity and open-handedness.²⁹

If this interpretation of the final verse is correct, then the last verse contributes to the general theme of the poem, praising the chiefly role in supplying materials to luchd-faoighe or thiggers.³⁰ Thigging was a practice where more disadvantaged members of society—either thiggers or, perhaps, unfortunates in the fields—solicited aid in the form of seed-corn, livestock, or provisions from the better off.³¹ This was anathema to market orientated Lowland reformers, hostile to such cashless transactions, who, from 1609 onwards, derided the practice of thigging, regarding it as ‘begging’. Nevertheless, thigging or faoighe was such a central feature of Gaelic society that it lingered, to some extent, until the nineteenth century.³² In this poem, if one accepts the alternative reading offered here, it would seem that Gille-Chaluim Garbh was praising the dead

29 ‘Diombuaidh,’ appears in a number of seventeenth century poems by people such as An Clarsair Dall and Iain Lom (*DASG*). ‘Faiche’, as suggested by Watson, might work better for rhyme, but ‘faoighe’ (thigging), supplied here as an alternative, is arguably suggested by MacRath’s orthography and more in keeping with the theme of generosity and open-handedness running through the poem. In terms of rhyme, faoighe, if such it is might be deliberately breaking with the rhyme scheme to give the poem a more emphatic ending. For vocabulary see the ‘Corpas na Gàidhlig’ section of *DASG*. ‘Diombuaidh’ and ‘faighe’ are attested (separately) in the Highland Society’s *DSC* (1828). Dineen’s *Dictionary* also carries the words ‘Diombuaidh’ and ‘faighde.’ If this reading of ‘mar dhìomhbuaidh faoighe’ from our poem is correct it may also parallel an older usage in the Old Irish Laws. The *RIA, Dictionary of the Irish Language* lists ‘Dimbua(i)d’ and also (separately) has ‘faoighde’, citing an illustrative example from Old Irish Laws, meaning ‘a barren hope, i.e., one from whom it is vain to solicit alms or entertainment,’ a meaning similar to the use of faoighe in Gille-Chaluim Garbh’s poem (*RIA*, F.244. 75-77. *RIA*, F. 43.9-13. *RIA*, D. 117-118). I am grateful to Professor Colm Ó Baoill, Aberdeen, for this reference and for discussing this with me and to Dr Michel Byrne, Glasgow, for discussing the rhyme scheme. Neither scholar is liable, of course, for any mistakes on my part.

30 Dwelly’s dictionary (1988) has a detailed definition under the headword ‘faoighe,’ claiming the practice persisted until the 1830s. The word ‘thig’ and its variants is also well attested in the *DSL*. Roy Wentworth (2003, 110, 660) also collected ‘faoighe’ in from Wester Ross speech in the late twentieth century, pairing it with various English translations such as cadge, beg, scrounge, thig. See also *A Collection of Gaelic Proverbs and familiar phrases*, 118-9.

31 See Watson 1937: 1978, 272-75; Martin 2000-6, 93-94. My thanks to Dr Martin MacGregor for these references. For a comprehensive discussion of thigging see also Black 2001, xxix-xxxiv.

32 MacGregor 2006, 130-31, 138-142, 175, 179; MacCoinnich 2015, 111, 199-200; Black 2001, xxix-xxxi, 226-229; Newton 2000, 124, 163-165. Annexed estate managers, 1755 x 68, complained about the extent of ‘begging’ or thigging on Highland estates even referring to practitioners of this as ‘vermin’ (Wills 1973, 63, 85, 90, 96).

chiefs for their hospitality, which had extended to thiggers: the latter falling on hard times due to the decease of their generous patrons.³³

The poem was described by Alexander Nicolson as an elegy 'recounting the transience of worldly things.'³⁴ The melancholy tone of the poem, looking back regretfully at the passing of great men, is echoed in a small number of other poems from Ross-shire from the early seventeenth century, also preserved in *Làmh-sgrìobhainn MhicRath*, which have a similar theme—mourning the passing of clan worthies with an older, surviving, poet remembering and rehearsing the virtues of the departed.³⁵ Our poem begins and ends, as Watson pointed out, with the opening word of the poem being repeated in the final line to close the poem.³⁶ Professor Derick Thomson categorised this as 'semi-bardic' verse, placing Gille-Chaluim Garbh and his poem in the same company as some of his contemporaries: 'amateur' practitioners of verse, all drawn from the higher strata of the clan social structure.³⁷ We might imagine this poet had composed a greater number of lost songs. Cheape and Grant's suggestion that poets from the laird class, such as Gille-Chaluim Garbh and his contemporaries, were probably literate, if not widely read, in Scots, Latin, and possibly Gaelic, and that they were adept in Gaelic verse seems plausible. The multi-lingual milieu in which these chiefs operated is highlighted by the fact that the only extant copy of James I's Scots-language work, 'The Kingis Quhair' (1423), was in the possession of Gille-Chaluim Garbh's neighbour, Dòmhnall Gorm, chief of the Macdonalds of Sleat, in 1592. Dòmhnall Gorm, we know, was literate in Classical Gaelic, Scots, English, and probably Latin too, and other clan chiefs may have had the same cultural profile.³⁸ Other neighbouring clan chiefs, such as Dòmhnall mac Ailean mhic Iain Mùideirteich, Captain of Clanranald (d. ca. 1618) and Ruairidh Mòr Macleod of Dunvegan (d. 1626), were patrons of poets and Gaelic scribes. Their

33 Another poem praising a chief's support for thiggers by Giolla Coluim mac an Ollaimh, a fifteenth-century bard attached to the Macdonald Lords of the Isles, is preserved in the sixteenth-century Book of the Dean of Lismore (Watson 1937: 1978, 62-81, 275. cf. Thomson 1989, 49-50).

34 Nicolson 1994, 294-8.

35 See, for example, 'Coig rainn air bàs MhicChoinnich' and 'Roinn na sheann aois- is fada ata mise an dèidh chàich', both by Donnchadh MacRiridh (1629x33) and 'Roinn na Sheann Aois - Is tursach dhuinn ri port' by Alasdair (mac Mhurchaidh) Mackenzie of Achilty, (ca. 1643) (MacPhàrlain 1923, 137, 141. *Gàir nan Clàrsach. An anthology of 17th century Gaelic verse* (1994), 80-82, 84; MacCoinnich 2013, 121-159. These poems have been described as melancholic in tone, 'tinged with religious overtones, shading over into elegiac reminiscence...' (Gillies 2010, 100).

36 Watson 1918, 305.

37 Thomson 1989, 107.

38 Grant and Cheape 1997, 135; Bannerman 1983, 230-231. Pons Sans and MacCoinnich 2018, 37 and 283.

courts facilitated the production and performance of poetry.³⁹ We know less about Gille-Chaluim Garbh, and his poem appears to be in standard vernacular Scottish Gaelic rather than the Gaelic literary dialect favoured by the professional Gaelic literati.⁴⁰

Dating the poem and identifying the poet

Who was the poet? Although this seems obvious at first, the similarity and frequent recurrence of the name and style ‘Gille-Chaluim’ and ‘MacGhille-Chaluim’ means that this is more challenging than one might think. A Gille-Chalum ‘Garbh’, first of Raasay, flourished in the early sixteenth-century.⁴¹ However, the individuals seemingly named in this poem, Gilleasbuig ‘Donn’ Campbell, fifth Earl of Argyll (1538-73), Eachann Òg MacLean of Duart (ca.1525-75), and Aonghas Macdonnell of Glengarry (d. 1574), lived one or two generations later.⁴² Given this internal evidence, the poet is likely to have been Gille-Chaluim (mac Alasdair ‘ic Ghille-Chaluim), Macleod, third chief of Raasay. He was known, according to

39 The Macdonalds of Clanranald were patrons of the MacMhuirich bardic family. Ruairidh Mòr Macleod of Dunvegan (d. 1626) habitually signed his name in Gaelic, retained a number of Gaelic scribes, and, no doubt, had Gaelic poets in his household, too. He could write an accomplished letter in Scots when he had to and was, no doubt, also Latin-literate (Clancy 2010, 109-125; Bannerman 1979/80, 18-33. For a general overview see Bannerman 1983, 214-235). Ruairidh Mòr MacLeod of Dunvegan often signed his name in Gaelic, yet at least three holograph letters in Scots survive from him addressed to the King and Council (one in 1596 and two in 1615): NLS, Adv MS 29.2.6, no 71; Adv MS 33.1.1, vol. 6, no. 1; Adv MS, 33.1.2, vol. 14, no. 33. *The Book of Dunvegan*, ii, 54-55.

40 Professor Wilson McLeod (2006, 74), however, draws attention to Irish grammatical tracts produced in Irish bardic schools embedding fragments of lost poems which seem to reference MacLeod chiefs. These are likely to have been the work of professional poets in Ireland (who may well have come to Scotland on occasion) rather than the more vernacular type of Scottish Gaelic poem we see here from Gille-Chaluim Garbh.

41 The first Gille-Chaluim of Raasay, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, was called ‘Garbh’ by Mackenzie (1889, 340, 444-5), Morrison and Mackinnon (1990, iv, 39), Nicolson (1994, 291), and Richard Sharpe (1982, 39). It is not clear, however, where they get this information on the appellation ‘Garbh’ from for the first, early sixteenth century, laird—possibly from tradition? There is no doubt that our poet, the third laird, is called ‘Garbh,’ in both a contemporary deed, 1572, and in *Làmh-sgrìobhainn MhicRath / Dòrlach Laoighean* as shown elsewhere in this paper. A successor, Iain Garbh, was chief from 1648-71.

42 This identification was first made by Professor Watson who claimed initially that this was an Aonghas MacDonald of the Islay family but in subsequent editions of his work, *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig*, changed this to Aonghas Macdonnell of Glengarry (Watson 1959, 331). Aonghas in Cnoc nan Aingeal, mentioned in verse two, was likely to have been Aonghas, chief of the Macdonnells of Glengarry and buried at the old cemetery of Cnoc nan Aingeal by An Clachan Aillseach (Kirkton of Lochalsh). The date of Aonghas of Glengarry’s death has been dated to 1574. He was succeeded by Donald ‘macAngus’ MacDonell of Glengarry (Macdonald and Macdonald 1896-1904, iii, 309; *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, vol. iv, 232-3). The chiefs of Clan Campbell (Iarlan Duibhneach) mentioned in the third verse of the song are known as MacCailein Mor. ‘MacCailein, Iarla Duibhneach’, in verse three is likely to have been Gilleasbuig (Archibald), the name of the fourth and fifth Earl of Argyll successively. Watson suggested this was the fourth Earl of Argyll. Given the dates of the others mentioned here, the fifth Earl of Argyll (d. 1573) seems the more likely candidate. Eachann Òg, son of Eachann, is likely to have been the chief of the Macleans of Duart who died in 1574. This being so, the poem, presumably a backward glance at bygone worthies, would seem to date to 1574, 1575 or soon after (Watson 1917-18, 119-120; 1918, 305; Maclean-Bristol 1999, 54-58; Dawson 2002, 191).

Làmh-sgrìobhainn MhicRath in which the poem is preserved, by the by-name of 'Garbh' (perhaps meaning fierce, rawboned, or brawny), as his grandfather seems to have been by-named (and as a later descendant would also be). So well-known was he as Gille-Chaluim Garbh in his own day, that this name-form, 'Gillecallum Garwe McCloid de Raisay,' was included in a Great Seal charter of 1572 where his kinsman, Ruairidh Macleod of Lewis, chief of Sìol Torcaill, designated him as his heir.⁴³ 'Garbh' may have been a favourite transgenerational nickname, with several members of the family (including our poet) known by this term; a parallel may be seen with the Sleat family's frequent use of 'Gorm' and both the seventh Earl of Argyll and his son being known as 'gruamach'.

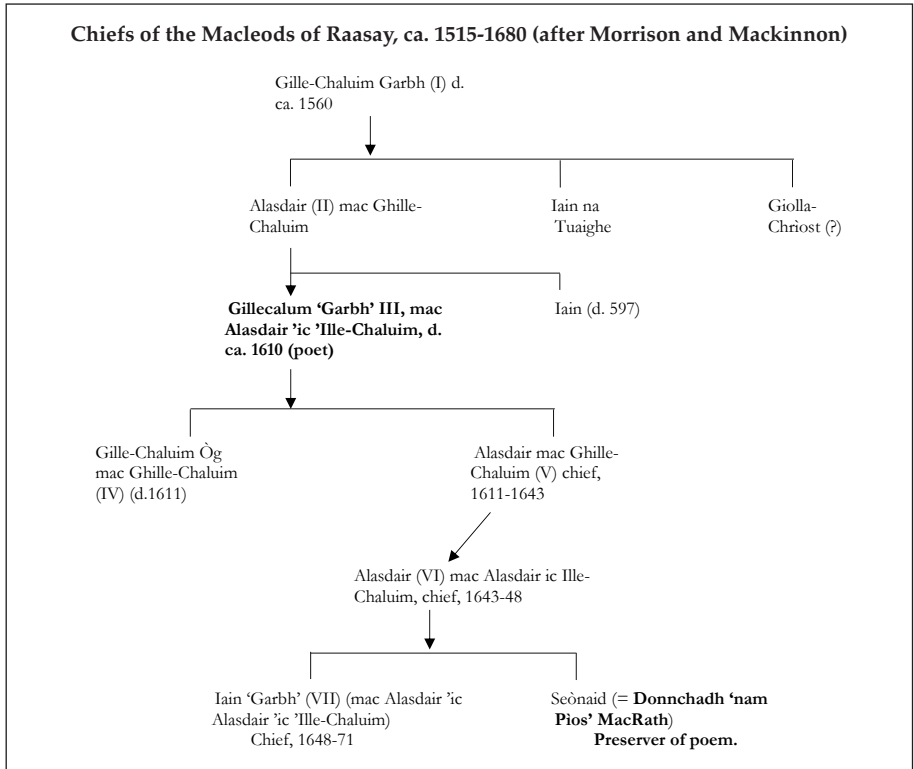
Praise in this poem for the Earl of Argyll is unsurprising, given the significance of the Campbells' presence in Hebridean power politics. The Earl of Argyll in question was probably Gilleasbuig Donn, the fifth Earl of Argyll. Gilleasbuig Donn's sister, Seònaid, was married to Eachann Òg Maclean of Duart. The Macleans in this period were closely aligned politically to the Campbells.⁴⁴ Two Macleans, Ruairidh and Pàdraig, close kinsmen of Duart, were Bishops of the Isles, holding title to the kirklands of Raasay in the mid-sixteenth century, hinting at a network of influence that would place Gille-Chaluim Garbh in the orbit of a Clan Maclean and a Clan Campbell chief.⁴⁵ Dòmhnall Monro, Dean of the Isles, and closely related to Clan Maclean—both the Maclean chief and senior Maclean episcopal clergy—noted in 1549 that Raasay pertained 'to McGillichallum of Raarsay by the sword', but that title to this lay with the Bishop of the Isles. The powerful Clan Maclean also claimed the Bishop's lands (and this included Raasay) before and after the Reformation.⁴⁶ The reasons for Clan Maclean's involvement on the north-east coast of Skye area are unclear, but Dean Monro noted that the island of Scalpay, just to the south of Raasay, pertained to 'McGillane of Doward in heritage'. Eachann Òg Maclean's father, Eachann Mòr, had been granted a royal charter to Scalpay (and other lands) in

43 *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scottorum. The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland, 1546-1580*, no. 2019, 186.

44 Dawson 2002, 15-16, 109-110, 207-208.

45 MacLean-Bristol 1995, 110-120. Norma Macleod discusses the Maclean connections with Raasay (Macleod 2002, 22-23, 25-26, 28, 30, 41, 42).

46 'A Description of the Occidental, i.e. Western Islands of Scotland by Mr Donald Munro who travelled through them anno 1549', 292, 296, 322; *The Munro Tree: a Genealogy and Chronology of the Munros of Foulis and Other Families of the Clan: a manuscript compiled in 1734*, 10-11; Maclean-Bristol 1995, 127. Successive Bishops continued to hold their title to Raasay well into the seventeenth century, at least as late as 1663. MacGillechaluim of Raasay (and the Mackenzies of Kintail and Seaforth, feudal superiors of MacGillechaluim of Raasay from 1610) continued to hold their lands of Raasay of the Bishops of the Isles (MacCoinnich 2015, 37-38, 194-5 (and n65-66), 239-242; NRS, GD 274/19/3). Copies of late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century documents relating to Raasay survive in a nineteenth-century inventory (NRS, GD 128/23/2).



1539. This was a northerly outpost in the discontinuous Maclean landholding portfolio that reached south past Mull to Islay and Kintyre.⁴⁷

The nature of the relationship Gille-Chaluim Garbh had with Aonghas MacDonnell of Glengarry is more obscure, but Glengarry lands in Wester Ross and Lochalsh were a short boat ride from Raasay, and Aonghas's first wife is said to have been Seònaid Maclean, daughter of Duart (and possibly a daughter of Eachann Òg).⁴⁸ In any event, Gille-Chaluim Garbh must have known all these men quite well, and their deaths all coming within a short, two-year period (1574-75) clearly affected the poet.

47 'Description of the Occidental', 321. The Macleans of Duart, or their kinsmen, held lands in Mull, Tiree, Coll, Morvern, Ardgour, Kingerloch, Lochaber, Kintyre, Gigha, and Knapdale (Maclean-Bristol 1995, 10, 100-101, and 1999, 139-141).

48 MacDonald and MacDonald, 1896-1904, iii, 309; Mackenzie 1881, 18-19. Aonghas of Glengarry also seems to have had a good relationship with Clan Grant (Cathcart 2006, 123, 139, 141, 154).

The identity of our poet, Gille-Chaluim Garbh, may seem relatively straight-forward, yet reconstructing the succession of Macleod of Raasay chiefs for the century prior to 1617 is surprisingly difficult due to the dearth of evidence. A number of interpretations (sometimes contradictory) of the MacGhille-Chaluim family and genealogy are in print. None of these, with the exception of that of Alexander Nicolson, discuss this poem or Gille-Chaluim Garbh as a poet.⁴⁹ The reconstruction, above, of a family tree showing the relationship between the chiefs is based on Morrison and Mackinnon's genealogy of the Raasay family.⁵⁰

Linn nan Creach – Gille-Chaluim Garbh's life and times

Having identified the poet as Gille-Chaluim Garbh III of Raasay (according to Morrison and Mackinnon's and Sharpe's numbering of the chiefs), we can now briefly rehearse his career. He came of age amid internecine feuding within the wider Macleod of Raasay (and related Macleod of Gairloch kindred), compounded by trouble from the predatory Mackenzies of Gairloch. He narrowly survived being massacred along with several kinsmen at Eilean Isay at a black supper in 1568-1569 organised by feuding kinsman, Ruairidh 'Nimhneach' ('the poisonous'), who hoped to eliminate rivals and advance his own son's claim to succeed to the Raasay inheritance. Gille-Chaluim Garbh survived, seemingly due to the actions of his foster parents who kept him out of harm's way.⁵¹ He assumed control of his clan soon after this and was recognised as chief of Raasay by 1572, when his kinsman and chief of the wider Siol Torcaill (or Macleod of Lewis) kindred, Ruairidh Macleod of Lewis, designated him his heir.⁵² Documents survive showing unsuccessful attempts by the Church authorities in 1574 and 1580 to extract rent from a number of chiefs including Gille-Chaluim Garbh. A register of the kirklands dating from this period shows that the Church expected £17 10s 4d for the '8 Merk land of Raasay and lands in Trouternes extending to a 3 merkland w(i)t(h) the patronage of the kirk and chaplainrie of Kilmaluak in

49 Mackenzie 1889, 346-352, 357-359, 365-369; Grant 1959, 149-50, 254-256; Sharpe 1978, 15-19, 66-77; Sharpe 1982, 37-42; Morrison and Mackinnon 1990, iv, 39-43; Macleod 2002, 191-211, 267-271, 277-278.

50 Morrison and Mackinnon 1990, iv, 39-43.

51 Gregory 1881, 211-212. For more details see Morrison and Mackinnon 1990, iv, 39; Sharpe 1978, 65-66; Sharpe 1982, 39; Mackenzie 1889, 347-349.

52 Sharpe 1978, 65-66; Sharpe 1982, 38.

Rasay and Sniusort [Snizort] in Troternes'.⁵³ Although the Bishops of the Isles were the nominal landowners in Raasay, they seemed unable to raise rent from the island.⁵⁴ Yet, despite Gille-Chaluim Garbh's reluctance to part with cash, he had (unlike some of his neighbours) paid his arrears of rent to Iain Campbell, Bishop of the Isles, by October 1585.⁵⁵ An English intelligence assessment of the military strength of Hebridean clans in 1593 noted that the Macleods of Lewis could raise 700 men and observed that, 'Raarsay, possesst be McGilliCallum of Raarsaye of the Cl[a]nLewyd of the Lewes, will rayse LXXX men.'⁵⁶ These eighty men will probably have been drawn from Gille-Chaluim's lands on Rona, his adjacent lands on Skye, as well as from Raasay itself.

Fisheries, intra-clan conflict and the growing reach of the state

Little else is known about Gille-Chaluim Garbh's life and career. In common with many of his contemporaries, he sought to exploit the herring fishing boom in the Minch in the later sixteenth century by extracting levies from visiting Lowland boat crews.⁵⁷ Hebridean chiefs, including Gille-Chaluim Garbh, thought they were within their rights to tax visiting fishermen—though the fishermen claimed they were being subjected to little short of extortion—and these fishermen, unlike most Hebrideans, had the backing of the Lowland political and mercantile community and the ear of the Privy Council.⁵⁸ James VI, newly ruling in his own right, sought in 1587 to curb what he perceived as the excesses of Gaelic chiefs and exert more control over the Gàidhealtachd. Over 100 landowners from all areas of the Highlands and Islands were named in a parliamentary roll, with the intent of making them answerable for the behaviour of their followers.⁵⁹ This list included Gille-Chaluim Garbh.

The late sixteenth century was known as Linn nan Creach (age of forays), and the Macleods of Raasay played their own role in this. The most notable of the incidents connected to our chief's 'creach' activity was his appearance in a raid at Caithness in February 1589. 'Gilcalme, Laird of Rasey' was one of the leaders, together with the chiefs of Mackay, Macintosh, Munro of Foulis, and the Laird of Assynt, who brought retinues to accompany Alexander Gordon,

53 This register of the kirklands stated that 'Malcolme McGillechallum of Rasay' held these lands as a tack. This also refers to Colin Mackenzie of Kintail (1569-1594) as chief which dates it to this period (NLS, Adv MS, 31.3.4, fol. 28r).

54 Sharpe 1978, 65-66; Sharpe 1982, 38.

55 *Book of the Thanes of Cawdor, a series of papers selected from the charter room at Cawdor*, 186-188.

56 *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547-1603*, Vol. XI, A.D. 1593-1595, 253-255.

57 Sharpe 1982, 40; *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis*, 102-104.

58 MacCoinnich 2019, 54.

59 Macinnes 1993, 32; *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis*, 35-38.

the twelfth Earl of Sutherland, to execute a Crown commission of Fire and Sword against George Sinclair, the fifth Earl of Caithness. This force pursued and wasted the lands of Caithness all the way up to the town of Wick. Although ostensibly armed with a warrant to pursue the killers of Sutherland's kinsman, a George Gordon, this raid gave Sutherland and his followers the opportunity to take from Caithness 'a great prey of cattell and goods', with many Caithness people being killed in the process. An English intelligence report probably referring to this conflict between the Earls of Sutherland and Caithness noted that up to 300 people were slain in one day. Although dismissed by one writer as a 'clan battle', it may be that this was connected with contemporary wider factional unrest within Scotland, which culminated in a rebellion led by the Earl of Huntly in the second quarter of 1589.⁶⁰

The wider political context is downplayed in the best source for the north in this period—the 'Genealogical History' of Sir Robert Gordon (1630), which focuses more on the deeds of local protagonists. Sir Robert, although not drawing a veil fully over Gordon family disloyalty, nevertheless gives a sympathetic account of Huntly's actions. Gordon also mentions how Gille-Chaluim Garbh's son, Iain, disturbed the remains of the last Earl of Caithness in the following episode from 1589. Finding a lead casket in a church in Wick, he opened it, but instead of the treasure he had hoped for, he found a human heart. Iain mac Ghille-Chaluim Gairbh, on discovering the heart and 'perceiving what it was, he threw the same away and the ashes were dispersed with the wind.' This episode in which Gille-Chaluim Garbh and his clan were involved in Caithness, 1589, was remembered as *Latha na Creiche Mòra*: 'La-ne-Craigh-Moire, that is the tyme of the great slaughter.' Sir Robert Gordon later observed (ca. 1630) that 'thus do we see alwise the poore and common people suffer for great men's follies.'⁶¹

Although a long serving chief, Gille-Chaluim Garbh III of Raasay did not receive formal title to his land until 1596.⁶² Although now with a title, this did not stop him prosecuting feuds with his neighbours, not least the Bains

60 This conflict between Sutherland and Caithness, although reported slightly later in the English account, in April 1589, was said to have prevented these northern earls from joining Huntly, who had been accused of conspiring with the Spanish against King James. We might assume that the Earl of Sutherland might support his Gordon kinsman, George Gordon, the sixth Earl of Huntly (*Calendar of State Papers Relating to Scotland*, 10, 1589-93, 46; Ashby 2022, 254-255). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer to whom I owe these references. For the wider Scottish context, see Grant (2000, 165). For Huntly's involvement with the far north, see Brochard (2010, 15-17).

61 *A Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland*, 177, 196-197.

62 Charter by James VI to 'Malcolmus Makalle[s]tar vc Gillechallum' in Rasay 'with consent of our lords of counceill and chekker all and hail the lands of Rasay to be held off the bishop of the isles.' Charter dated 20 July 1596 (NRS, PS 1 / 68, fol. 198r).

of Tulloch, with whom his people were in dispute over the lands of Torridon. Iain MacLeod, Gille-Chaluim Garbh's brother, had been fostered by the Bains and had expected to receive these lands from his foster father, Donnchadh Bain of Tulloch. Bain of Tulloch, however, had left this not to his foster son, Iain, but to a blood kinsman, his younger son, Alexander Bain, fiar of Logie (alias Alasdair Mòr mac Dhonnchaidh mhic Alasdair).⁶³ Iain MacLeod harassed and wasted the lands of Torridon as an expression of his disappointment. Then, Iain MacLeod, not knowing that Bain of Logie had obtained a warrant for his arrest, attended the Candlemas market at Dingwall in 1597, where, while seated in a merchant's shop, Alexander Bain and his followers 'most basly killed him, striking him in the head with a two-handed sword, without giving him the least advertisement'.⁶⁴

This killing of Raasay's brother immediately led to conflict in the town, with the Munros taking the side of the Bains and the Mackenzies taking the side of the Raasay men.⁶⁵ Attempts at arbitration stopped this from re-igniting a recently settled Munro and MacKenzie feud in Easter Ross, but the MacLeods of Raasay continued their quarrel with the Bains on the western seaboard.⁶⁶ Gille-Chaluim Garbh took revenge for the murder of his brother in the old fashioned way—by wasting the lands of the Bains in and around Torridon and probably elsewhere too. Alexander Bain, fiar of Logie, took legal action on 29 June 1599 against 'Gillichalume Rasey of that eilk and Gillechallum Rasay apeirand thair of' and their followers who were named in the charge as follows:

Murdo mcAne Cheill in **Torridon**, Alexr Geir mc Rore wc Ane, Ewir mc Connill wc keill thair, Donald mc Tormat wc Ane Roy in **Rasay**, Alester mc Tormod his brother thair [**Raasay**], John Mc miller skreuche (?), there, Donald mc Tormod there, Donald Bane mc Neill their, Angus mc Donald wic Pherson there, his brother Gillichallum Neill thair, Donald and John mc Neills his brothers thair, Angus Pyper there, Murche mc Ane Dowe, Androwe Le, and Alexr Ley his brother, Donald Bane mc Ane vc rore, Alexr mc Ane vc Rore, Jon Baloche and Wa[lter] Roay, Kennoch Roy in **Torridon**, Jon Keill mc Ane wic Thomas mc Angus vc

63 The Bains had received title to part of the lands of Torridon in 1571 (NRS, GD 46/20/7/10/1. Fragment of a Mackenzie MS, 194; c.f. Mackenzie 1894, 180-181).

64 *Highland Papers*, ii 35. A remarkably different version of the story is told in the Wardlaw Manuscript, clearly from the Bain point of view, which paints the Bains as 'gallant' and 'courageous' and the victim, Iain mac Gille-Chaluim MacLeod, Gille-Chaluim Garbh of Raasay's brother, as a 'vile, flagitious, profligate fellow, and ravaging robber' (*Chronicles of the Frasers. The Wardlaw Manuscript*, 230-231).

65 *Highland Papers* ii, 35-36.

66 Brochard 2010, 33-34.

rioche, Dod Dow mc Rore in **Garloche** and Johne Helmoche his brother thair...⁶⁷

This shows the support the Gille-Chaluim Garbh drew not only from his own island, but also (as will be noted below) his interconnectedness with the lands and people of Torridon and Gairloch, in his dispute with the Bains. Bain of Logie complained that Gille-Chaluim Garbh, his son, and their followers daily molested, oppressed, and troubled Bain in his possession of his lands in Torridon. While Bain managed to get Gille-Chaluim Garbh and his followers put to the horn (outlawed), it seems unlikely that they got much satisfaction through legal means—at least in the short term.⁶⁸

There is some disagreement about the date of Gille-Chaluim Garbh's death among scholars. Clan genealogists Morrison and Mackinnon noted that Gille-Chaluim does not appear in public records after 1596 and thought he had died by or before 1605, while Professor Watson thought the date of his death was around 1616.⁶⁹ He must still have been living in November 1605, however, when Gille-Chaluim Òg IV is on record in the company of Mackenzie witnessing a document and signing himself off as 'Gillical[um] younger of Raasay'.⁷⁰ Gille-Chaluim Garbh (probably, rather than his son) resigned his lands of Raasay (and Eyre in Trotternish) to the Mackenzies on New Year's Day 1608. Although

67 NRS, DI 62/1 (29 June 1599). The original document has Scots approximations of Gaelic names. Some of the Gaelic names, when we attempt to reconstruct them using conventional Gaelic orthography are fairly clear, others are harder to discern—and these are followed by a question mark.

Murchadh mac Iain Chaoil (Chathail?) in *Torridon*,

Alasdair Geur mac Ruairidh mhic Iain, Ìomhair mac Dhòmhnail mhic Chathail (?) there; Dòmhnall mac Thormoid mhic Iain Ruaidh in Raasay, Alasdair mac Thormoid his brother, Iain mac a' Mhuilleir sgìreach (?), Dòmhnall mac Thormoid, Dòmhnall Bàn mac Nèill, Aonghas mac Dhòmhnail mhic a' Phearsoin and his brother Gille-Chaluim Nèill, Dòmhnall mac Nèill and Iain mac Nèill his brothers there [Raasay], Aonghas Piobaire there [*all in Raasay*];

Murchadh mac Iain mhic Iain Duibh, Anndra [Mac]Lèigh and Alasdair [Mac]Lèigh his brother, Dòmhnall Bàn mac Iain mhic Ruairidh, Alasdair mac Iain mhic Ruairidh, Iain Balloch and Uilleam (?) Ruaidh, Coinneach Ruadh [*all?*] in *Torridon*;

Iain Caoil mac Iain mhic Thòmais mhic Aonghas Riabhaich (?), Dòmhnall Dubh mac Ruairidh in Gairloch and Iain Tholmach [*also in Gairloch*].

68 Another incident occurred in 1611, where the young laird of Raasay, Gille-Chaluim mac Ghille-Chaluim Gairbh, was killed by some Mackenzies of Gairloch. This is detailed in the near contemporary *Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland to 1630*, 236, 276-278. These incidents are related at more length in the works of Alexander Mackenzie, Richard Sharpe and Norma Macleod on the Clan Macleod and on Raasay cited elsewhere in these notes.

69 Watson 1959, 236-237; Morrison and Mackinnon 1990, iv, 40-41.

70 'Gillichall[um] younger of Raasay' witnessed a deed at the Chanonrie of Ross for Coinneach Mackenzie of Kintail, dated 10th November 1605 (NRS, RD 1/148, fol. 172v).

this was signed ‘Gillicallum Makgillicallum off Rasay’, this may have been the style ‘MacGhilleChaluim of Raasay’ rather than a patronymic.⁷¹ Gille-Chaluim Garbh, our poet, must have died by 21 August 1610 when ‘Malcolm mac Gillicallum mac Alasdair’ IV was granted title to his lands by his Mackenzie superior. This Malcolm or Gille-Chaluim IV had a short career—he was killed by the Mackenzies of Gairloch in a sea fight off the island of Raasay in 1611.⁷² Our poet, then, seems to have been eventually succeeded as titular head of the Raasay family by a second son, Alasdair V, on record as responsible for rental payments in November 1611.⁷³ Alasdair was not, however, formally given title to Raasay (and Eyre in Trotternish) until 1617.⁷⁴ Gille-Chaluim Garbh’s great grand-daughter, Seònaid (Alasdair VI’s daughter), as noted above, married Donnchadh MacRath, compiler of the late seventeenth-century Fernaig Manuscript in which his poem is preserved.

The Ewill Trowbles of the Lewis – the MacKenzie ascendancy

Siol Torcaill, or the Macleods of Lewis and Raasay (and Gairloch), had a troubled relationship with the Mackenzies of Gairloch and the Mackenzies of Kintail towards the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Much of the information regarding this comes from the viewpoint of outsiders, whether Highland or Lowland, who were hostile to Siol Torcaill. The one exception to this is the ‘Ewill Trowbles of the Lewis’, written by a surviving member of the kindred, exiled in Sutherland following the Mackenzie of Kintail takeover of Lewis in 1610. These accounts are in English and they focus on Lewis, rather than Raasay or Gairloch.⁷⁵

The MacGhille-Chaluim family of Raasay and the Macleods of Gairloch were closely related. A branch of the Mackenzie family had obtained a foothold in Gairloch from 1494, with the rest of Gairloch remaining in the hands of the

71 NRS, GD 128/23/ (Bundle) 2/1.

72 Gille-Chaluim Òg (mac Ghille-Chaluim Gairbh) was said to have been killed in a sea fight off Raasay in 1611 with some Mackenzies of Gairloch. Gille-Chaluim Òg’s brother, Murchadh escaped. This happened, according to Sir Robert Gordon, in 1611 (*History of the Earldom of Sutherland*, 369; NRS, GD 128/23/2; NRS, RH 9/4/2/35).

73 RPS 2007-2020, 1646/11/599. Date accessed: 22 January 2020.

74 Alasdair (V) was served heir to his father, Gille-Chaluim Garbh (III) referred to here as ‘Malcolmus MacGillechalum vic Alasdair’ with the name ‘MacGhille-Chaluim’ serving, perhaps, as a style for the Rassay chiefship rather than ‘MacLeod’ (‘Malcolmus mc Gillichallum vc Allester de Rasa’ = ‘Malcom MacGillechallum, son of Alasdair of Raasay’) (NRS, RS 37/1/19).

75 ‘The Ewill Trowbles of the Lewis,’ (ca.1626) in *Highland Papers*, ii, 265-79. See also MacCoinnich 2006, 214-231. For the forfeiture of Siol Torcaill and the Plantation of Lewis see also Mackenzie 1903, chapters 7-9; MacCoinnich 2015, chapters 2-3.

Macleods. Sir Robert Gordon tells us that the Mackenzies of Gairloch used the troubles of Lewis and the expropriation of the Macleods of Lewis in 1598 as a pretext for invading the 'Clan wick Gill-Cholm with fyre and sword'. Emboldened with legal backing, and with support from their MacKenzie of Kintail kinsmen, Mackenzie of Gairloch chased the MacLeods 'ryght out of Garlogh.' Mutual killings continued sporadically on both sides up to 1611, but the Mackenzies came out on top.⁷⁶

A chilling insight into the desperate nature of this struggle is offered by a blanket remission, or pardon, offered in 1614 to the Mackenzies of Gairloch for any killings or injuries they had committed against the enemies of the Crown (i.e. Siol Torcaill, the Macleods). This was, moreover, backdated to pardon Iain Mackenzie of Gairloch and his sons for all killings they had committed against 'broken men, vagabondis and lymmeris' antedating King James' departure for England in 1603. The Mackenzies of Gairloch were pardoned for their killings and 'crymes capital', presumably in Gairloch and surrounding regions as well as in Skye and Lewis. Indeed their actions were considered 'guid and acceptable service' by the Crown.⁷⁷ The full backing of the crown was weighted to the advantage of the Mackenzies. Not only were the Mackenzies of Gairloch pardoned for extra-judicial killings and for unspecified 'crymes capital,' but they were able to pursue the relatives of the defeated Macleods of Gairloch at law, 1610, for the killing of a Mackenzie by one of the Macleods. The late Dòmhnall Dubh mac Ruairidh mhic Ghille-Chaluim [Macleod] had killed a Mackenzie at Diabaig, by Loch Torridon, during the conflict—and now Alasdair Mackenzie of Gairloch sought to seize the goods of his widow and kinsmen living in Trotternish in Skye.⁷⁸

Gille-Chaluim Garbh's kinsmen were not only being pushed out of Gairloch and under pressure in Raasay and Skye, but the Lewis branch of the clan had also suffered the loss of their island to Lowland planters from 1598.⁷⁹ The Raasay family, indeed, must also have been sucked in to the troubles in Lewis although details are lacking. Some members of the MacGille-Chaluim of Raasay family had been resisting the Fife Adventurers. Coinneach Mackenzie of Kintail

76 *History of the Earldom of Sutherland*, 276-278. Fraser 1876, 489.

77 The remission, dated 2 April 1614, is in the Gairloch family's papers (NRAS, 0143, Unpainted deed box, no. 51; MacCoinnich 2015, 187).

78 Alasdair Mackenzie of Gairloch got a decret granting the escheat (confiscation) of the goods and gear of 'Catharine McCloyd, relict of umquhile Donald Dow mc Rorie vic Gillechallum in Trouternes, Allane mc Donald vc Rorie his eldest sone, Rorie, Marie, Jonet and Margaret mc Donald Dow vic Rories Gillechallumas, bairnes to the said umqll Donald Dow'. A number of other people are also named in this document, dated, 24 July 1610 (NRS, CS 7/255, fol. 154v. See also MacCoinnich 2015, 195).

79 Mackenzie 1903, chapters 7-9; MacCoinnich 2015, chapters 2-3.

was pursued by Thomas Cunningham, burgess of Crail in May 1599, accused of being behind the losses, ‘grit oppressionis, invasiones, depredationes, slaughteris and mo[r]theris at divers tymes committit be the inhabitants of the Lewis againis him’ and his colleagues⁸⁰. Cunningham’s charge centred on his allegation that Mackenzie had been orchestrating the systematic undermining of the Lowland plantation. He named a long list of perpetrators of this violence, from Lewis and the west coast—for whom, he argued, Mackenzie was ultimately responsible. Mackenzie, incarcerated in Edinburgh, mounted a robust defence, rebutting the charge that he should be responsible for those implicated in the offences against the colonists. His lawyer pointed out that:

the defender can nawayis be obleist to enter Gillechrist mc Gillecallum Rasa, Murdo mc Gillicallum and Donald mc Gillechallum his twa sonis because ther is na thing lyk to mek him obleist for thir entrie seing they duell not upoun ony of McKainzies lands, nather in Loch Brume, nor Assent, bot duells in Rasa.⁸¹

Cunningham’s pursuit of Mackenzie foundered in the face of Mackenzie’s defence, which ridiculed, among other things, the inaccurate designations of the Gaelic names of people on Mackenzie’s lands on the mainland—a response that the furious Cunningham called an ‘insolent discours.’⁸² Mackenzie, although incarcerated in Blackness castle for nearly a year (May 1599 to April 1600) managed to escaped through good luck, nerve, and good political connections in Edinburgh.⁸³

The Lowland planters’ attempts to take over Lewis can be said to have failed by early 1607 when they were forced to quit the island, with the Mackenzies gaining title to Lewis in 1609 and taking possession in 1610.⁸⁴ The new order also impacted Raasay. Gille-Chaluim Garbh (III) formally accepted the superiority of the Mackenzies over the island of Raasay (and a parcel of land at

80 NRS, JC 26/3

81 ‘Defenss for the pairt of Kenneth McKainzie of Kintail aganis the pretendit summondis persewit be Thomas Cunnyngame burges of Craill befor my lord iustice and his deputis c[on]trair him.’ This dates to 25 May 1599 (NRS, JC 26/3). Gille-Chriosd, son of Gille-Chaluim of Raasay and Gille-Chriost mac Ghille-Chaluim’s two sons, Murchadh and Dòmhnall are otherwise unattested in family histories. The fact that they were known to the planters, however, may be part of the reason why. They are likely to have been among those pursued by the planters seeking retribution for their losses. For the measures taken by the Lowland planters against those resisting them, see MacCoinnich 2015, 85, 162-163, 173-174, 378-381.

82 NRS, JC 26/3

83 MacCoinnich 2015, 24 (n70), 68, 132 (n143), 137.

84 MacCoinnich 2015, 132-135, 174-175, 185-188.

Eyre in Trotternish) with him as their vassal, on New Year's day, 1608. Under the terms of the Mackenzie superiority—reiterated when this passed to Gille-Chaluim Garbh's son, Gille-Chaluim IV, in 1610—the Raasay chief was obliged to attend to and follow his Mackenzie superior 'and his lieutenants quhen thai sall happin to repair to the Yllis with ane birling of tuelve oares and, lykewyse, ansueiring in quhatsowver the said superior [directs in] his reichte effaires within the Yllis'.⁸⁵

The Raasay family were on good terms with the Mackenzies of Kintail (and Seaforth) in the decades that followed, with a Raasay chief being praised by one of these lieutenants—a Mackenzie poet, Alasdair mac Mhurchaidh MacKenzie of Achilty—as 'slait an fhèil' (the yardstick of generosity), a compliment echoing the sentiment in Gillecalum Garbh's poem.⁸⁶

Conclusion

It seems clear from the internal evidence of the poem that it was produced by a Macleod of Raasay chief, Gille-Chaluim Garbh; that it probably dates to around 1575; and that this has been largely overlooked in discussions on Gaelic poetry. There are several sources in Scots and in English that give us a glimpse of the life and (very) troubled times of Siol Torcaill (Macleods of Lewis, Assynt, Gairloch, Còigeach and Raasay) during Gille-Chaluim Garbh's lifetime. Much of the surviving source material concerns their struggle to navigate the troubled waters of the late sixteenth century Highlands and Islands—and most of these sources generated by or for those who had a vested interest in the expropriation of Siol Torcaill are less than sympathetic. Given the volume of reportage—mostly externally generated—which shines a negative light on Siol Torcaill, it would be easy to agree with the King and his Council and most other contemporary sources and simply dismiss Gille-Chaluim Garbh and many of his neighbouring clansman as barbaric, and accept the case made by the state

85 This from a deed dated at Eilean Donan Castle, 21 August 1610, as it appears in a notarial copy, 1873, of an 'Inventory of the Writtis and evidentis delyverit be Alex[ande]r Mc Gillichallum of Rasay To ane Nobill Lord Coline earle of Seaforth upone the 27th day of April 1629 yeirs (NRS, GD 128/23/2). The Mackenzies imposed similar burdens on the Macdonalds of Clanranald. When the Earl of Seaforth was granted the feudal superiority of Arisaig and Moidart over Clanranald in 1626, the Clanranald chief, Iain Muideirteach, was obliged to provide 100 men on twenty days notice to serve the Mackenzies anywhere between the 'Stoerheid' of Assynt and the Isle of Mull whenever his superior required it (MacCoinnich 2015, 130, n139).

86 MacCoinnich 2013, 133-4, 137, 145, 148. This increasing interconnectedness with the Mackenzies was accompanied by marital alliances. Gille-Chaluim Garbh was married to Iseabail, an illegitimate daughter of Coinneach 'na Cuirc' Mackenzie of Kintail (Morrison and Mackinnon 1990, iv, 40; Highland Papers, ii, 52).

for its measures in the Highlands at face value. This poem, on the other hand, gives us a glimpse of the Gaelic face of this kindred, with a polished, generous—perhaps even ‘civilised’—tribute by Gille-Chaluim Garbh of Raasay to three of his late contemporaries with whom he had clearly been on friendly terms.⁸⁷ These chiefs had been esteemed in the Gàidhealtachd for their generosity, charity, and hospitality—qualities appreciated in Gaelic society, if not by their monarch.

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87 We have little surviving contemporary evidence in Gaelic for Siol Torcaill. Three songs composed by other kindreds in this period, ca. 1599x1609, reference Siol Torcaill in the passing. Some versions of ‘A mhic Iain ‘ic Sheumais’ by NicCoisèam, Eriskay (MacCoinnich 2015, 30, n4) mention Siol Torcaill—as does ‘Tomair thusa, Choinnich Chridhe’, probably by a member of the MacGilleMhoire, family, North Lewis (Ó Baoill and Bateman 1994, 48-50, 217); and ‘Òran Arabhaig’ composed in Skye (Tolmie 1911, 234-235).

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