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11. 'A mind restless seeking': Sorley MacLean's Historical Research and the Poet as Historian¹

HUGH CHEAPE

The success and universal acclaim of Sorley MacLean's literary career and its continuing reverberations have tended to elide his output of historical research and contributions to wider fields of Celtic Studies and Scottish History. In Sorley's case as a natural tradition-bearer, the distinction between poet and historian must be an artificial one, and intellectual trends in historical studies serve to enhance the importance of his historical work. This essay looks at some of these trends and some topics which Sorley researched and published, at his intense interest in the literature, personalities and events of the more culturally secure seventeenth century, and the fruitful blend of archival research and oral tradition – for example, in his Raasay home.

History, like any academic discipline, is not necessarily a straightforward business. Of course, there are those who will argue that subjects and disciplines within the sciences are 'easier' or in some way more straightforward than those categorised within the humanities, and alternatively there are arguments for the greater difficulties of the sciences over the humanities. At the same time, all academic disciplines are subject to advance, decline, variation and change in their make-up and subject-matter and in their conceptual framework. The charting of change has become an academic discipline in itself and, in the sciences, has been closely studied. Changes in the sciences have been characterised as 'scientific revolutions' and as demonstrating convulsive change. The process is predicated on a tendency for outmoded paradigms for a discipline's theory or model to persist for some time after their obsolescence has set in. When the paradigm does eventually shift, this may occur rapidly, and the speed of change is then maintained by the subsequent concentration of resources on research into what are thought to be important questions.²

Historical paradigms, such as those confronting Sorley MacLean, seem to change in a more haphazard way; there are periodic shifts forward but more characteristically a sluggish revisionism in which pupils are mainly concerned to qualify the interpretations of the previous generation and, only rarely and at a risk to their own careers, challenging its assumptions. A more dubious influence may arise from the appropriation of a historical paradigm to a political agenda. History is coloured by the institutional configurations of higher education, academic labels and conventional terminology such as periodisation, and the national boundaries of academic disciplines. Bridging the divide between disciplines is a further challenge. Lip service at least is ritually paid to cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary studies, so that historians have recourse to economics, sociology, anthropology, archaeology and even literary theory, though less to physics, mathematics and, it must be said, to language, linguistics or socio-linguistics.

The centenary celebration of Sorley MacLean as ‘renowned over hundreds’ – *Ainmeil thar Cheudan* – prompts consideration of the poet as historian and assessment of his cultural and political legacy, particularly with regard to a ‘national history’. The recognition and success of Sorley MacLean as poet has perhaps obscured his historical writing or distracted recent generations from it. Taken in isolation, this is still an important and lasting part of his output, with a lifetime of historical research and significant contributions to wider fields of Scottish History and Celtic Studies. In Sorley’s case as a natural tradition-bearer, the distinction between poet and historian must be an artificial one, though recognisable in other contexts where misconceptions may arise from too ready assumptions that poetry depicts real-life people and events. Gaelic poetry still needs further scrutiny for its depictions of people and events, and to be accepted or discarded, as Sorley suggests in his published output. We can claim to be in a more liberal-minded academic atmosphere which will admit consideration of this genre of literary evidence. At the same time, intellectual trends in historical studies such as the shift in focus from parliamentary institutions and political elites to social structures and *mores* have opened the historian’s mind to poetry and song, and these trends serve to highlight the importance of his historical work. This study argues for the emplacement of Sorley MacLean’s research in the historical discourse in

Scottish Historical Studies and an *a priori* acceptance that Gaelic song and poetry may indeed supply a record, straightforward or otherwise, of something that actually happened.

The business of historians and their obligation to society is to remember what others forget. Sorley MacLean's self-conscious custodianship of family history and the memory of events, as well as his self-evident reflective powers, make him a historian to trade. In terms of his own family and its cultural context of the life of a Gaelic-speaking community through two World Wars within two generations, there is almost nothing too exceptional about this, and there are striking examples to corroborate it.³ In the wider context of Britain and Europe today, where a generation seems to have grown up in a permanent present, we are served with stereotyping and banal definitions and lack an organic relation to the public past of the times we live in. Memory of event and cataclysm and the will to question and understand them is an understated though ever-present component of Sorley MacLean's poetry, but, however obliquely, he can be considered as much a remembrancer and chronicler as any twentieth-century historian. Contemplation of topics such as genocide, the rise of fascism, ecological dislocation and disruption, religious belief or death and renewal, to which Sorley's poetry holds a mirror, is outside the scope of this short paper. With this reflective and intellectual reach in his work, however, this study looks at some topics which Sorley researched and published, at his intense interest in the literature, personalities and events of the more culturally secure seventeenth century, and at his fruitful blend of archival research and oral tradition – for example, in his Raasay home.

Sorley MacLean's essays, lectures and learned papers which give voice to the strength of his ideas were scattered in a range of publications such as the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, potentially reducing the impact of any thesis without the diligence of a dedicated researcher. Here, we are indebted to Professor William Gillies, to the MacLean family and to Acair Ltd, the Stornoway publisher, for gathering 'The Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley MacLean' into the volume *Ris a' Bhruthaich*, first published in 1985.

The potential for a nudge to the paradigm of Scottish History grows from Sorley's fascination (as he describes it) with the vast body of 'folk' and 'sub-literary' song poetry of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries. However, part of the power of Sorley MacLean's literary and critical output for us lies in its contemporaneity, or at least in its take on the recent past and the influence that the recent past had had on him. In this he writes about the twentieth century and his own lifetime. A public interest in him as commentator has grown with the intense scrutiny in Scotland given to topics such as 'clearance' and 'emigration' since the 1970s. In his introduction to *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*, published by Scottish Academic Press in 1986, Seamus Heaney wrote of the 'force of revelation' on hearing Sorley MacLean reading his poetry and characterised MacLean as 'a mind that is ravenous for conviction'.⁴ The events which Sorley had experienced, such as the Spanish Civil War, or in which he had participated, such as the North Africa campaign, made him a twentieth-century writer in his search for answers or justifications. He was, as the social anthropologist would say, a 'participant observer', but also politically committed and, more significantly for considering the poet as historian, dissatisfied with the public record. A level of dissatisfaction and the intensity of questioning is part of the new historiography of the late twentieth century, growing more vigorously through the channels of the social sciences and spilling into historical studies through Marxist dialectic and the New Left politics of the 1970s.

Two early papers delivered to the Gaelic Society of Inverness in 1938 and 1939 demonstrate, as Seamus Heaney added to his characterisation of Sorley, that 'there's nothing antiquarian or archival in this drive' and that this research fired the engagement of a political mind. These papers respectively dealt with nineteenth-century subjects, 'Realism in Gaelic Poetry' and 'The Poetry of the Clearances', both remarkable treatments of their subjects for the time. In arguing for 'realism', the author achieves two main ends, with, in the first place, a vigorous counter-argument to the concept of the 'Celtic Twilight' and its votaries, and, secondly, the identification of an authentic voice. As he wrote, '... the Celtic Twilightists achieved the remarkable feat of attributing to Gaelic poetry the very opposite of every quality which it actually has'.⁵ Sorley's later comment on this as 'an immature protest against the dominance even as late as 1938 of the "Celtic Twilight"' does not diminish its importance for us today as a considered statement on a topic which continues to reverberate.⁶ The editor is to be congratulated for ensuring its reprinting in *Ris a' Bhruthaich*. Without acquaintance with the language,

there is bound to be bland acceptance in the anglophone world of Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's *Songs of the Hebrides*, but there is a vital need for an alternative perspective on them rather than, as Sorley highlighted, 'the fashionable opinion that Mrs Kennedy-Fraser's work was the authentic culmination and treasury of Gaelic poetry and an invaluable presentation of it to the world, even in the English versions of the words of the songs'⁷. An authentic voice was identified in the oldest surviving popular poetry – that is, 'the largely anonymous, orally preserved and tradition-modified poetry which is contained in the simpler songs of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and which survived, but at a much lower poetic level, well into the nineteenth century.'⁸

Sorley's survey and consideration of the poetry of the Clearances was the first of its kind in Scottish historical studies and lends weight to consideration of the role of the poet as historian. It is now almost forty years since the ground-breaking Highland historian, James Hunter, acknowledged Sorley MacLean's pre-eminent role as historian: '... there has been only one serious attempt to evaluate the impact of economic change on the Gaelic consciousness – and that by a Gaelic poet, Sorley MacLean – rather than by an historian.'⁹ Speaking to the Gaelic Society of Inverness in February 1939, MacLean spared nothing in his recall of the plight of a people in the face of tyranny on a national scale. Historians or chroniclers of the Clearances such as Donald MacLeod (1857) and Alexander Mackenzie (1883) had opened up the subject and courted controversy. They made some distinctions between phases of clearance and emigration, between 1780 and 1820 and between 1820 and 1880, raising issues such as free-will or enforcement taken up by historians of our own time.¹⁰ Economic determinism tended to shape views on the earlier period of emigration, but Sorley drew out an anomaly that, though there were clearances, they seemed to evoke little comment in verse. He recognised that one or two voices were raised in the eighteenth century – for example, John MacCodrum with his statement of an older view of the rights of the clan to the territory of their dwelling and Ailean Dall MacDougall in his 'Òran nan Cìobairean Gallda', with its invective and hatred focused on the Lowland shepherds who in every way were an offence to the senses, in how they looked, in how they sounded and in their offensive smell. MacLean also made a potent comment on this evidential imbalance: 'Of course, so much of the poetry of that period has been lost and much

was undoubtedly kept out of the collections dedicated to aristocratic patrons that one cannot know the reaction of poets between 1750 and 1880.¹¹ Social and economic dislocation and destruction filled the years from 1820 to 1860 but the poetry of the period was ‘flabby and anaemic.’¹² Weakness might be defined in confusing the cause and effect of the Clearances – for example, in blaming Englishmen and Lowlanders for the crimes of the Highland chiefs, or in recognition of the clergy’s acquiescence and occasional support for the landlords. Since, as Sorley emphasised, ministers of the Established Church were economically attached to the landlord, some actively supported the Clearances, or, in any process of censure, they would hide their criticism from their patrons. Highlanders’ resistance, either physical or moral, was bound to be weak and the poetry of this period reflects this impotence. In Scottish historical studies in 1939, this was an extraordinary exploration of a topic in stasis, but Sorley’s voice was a lone one.¹³

Sorley MacLean thus finds fault with nineteenth-century Gaelic poetry, describing the worthlessness of its matter and contrasting it to the oldest existing Gaelic poetry of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which had survived into the nineteenth century. But for Sorley, there were lights in the gloom of the nineteenth century – for example, William Livingston’s ‘Fios chun a’ Bhàird’, with his strong message of Gaelic nationalism, and ‘Éirinn ag Gul’, with its sympathy for Ireland and the linking of the circumstances of the Gaels of Scotland and Ireland. Livingston, ‘charged with the burden of history’, uses long views to the past in ‘Na Lochlannaich an Ìle’ and ‘Blàr Shunadail’ to throw into relief the devastation of Islay in the nineteenth century. Sorley MacLean also invokes Dr John MacLachlan of Rahoy (1804–1874), who belonged in theory to a professional class or social stratum unaffected by the devastation and lived through the Clearances in Morven, Sunart and Mull, where they were particularly severe. Though MacLachlan is not considered a master-poet, Sorley draws on vital insights offered by MacLachlan’s verse and ‘a union of anger and piercing sorrow’ evident in his songs.¹⁴

Sorley’s presentation of the case against the Clearances is moderated by his views on the overall quality of the poetry of the nineteenth century, views that will be less deprecatory and more nuanced today, but nevertheless his search for the voice of the people was so successful as to persuade others to take up the cause – but not at the time.¹⁵ His robust critique picked

up contemporary voices seemingly unrecognised by historians and he described the importance of source material such as Archibald Sinclair's *An t-Òranaiche*, first published in parts between 1876 and 1879, with its records of personal experience. *Mutatis mutandis*, this is substantial historical evidence and Sorley has been an effective guide. He identified the poetry of Skye and Lewis which grew out of crofter resistance and which took courage and a lead from contemporaries such as Rev. Donald MacCallum, accused and imprisoned 'for inciting the lieges to class hatred', and Màiri Mhòr nan Òran. She was the poet of the Land League but with a respect for *uaisle* (nobility). Sorley identified the nostalgic retrospect as itself highly significant for popular views and attitudes. The 1939 paper was a tour-de-force on the poetry of social and political protest emerging from the Clearances and the Land Agitation. He considered the verse to be historical evidence on the perceptions and experiences of those caught up in the events, but in its totality and in spite of the clear incitement offered by Sorley, it has been little used by modern historians.

In the historiography of Scotland, there seems to be a less than strident side to this hunger for conviction revealed so compellingly in Sorley MacLean's late 1930s statements. With the wisdom of hindsight and the lessons offered by Sorley, any such shortcomings can be explained if not excused. In commemorating the birth of Sorley MacLean in 1911, it is worth reflecting on the state of Highland history at the time and in the years following. In short, there was little available to the ravenous mind in terms even of standard textbooks on Scottish history. The Cambridge 'history school' dominated British History, which, in effect, was English History with a nod towards Scotland and Ireland when they impinged on the onward and upward progress of English constitutional government. The writers of British History at the end of the nineteenth century included university teachers such as F. W. Maitland who belonged to a class of historians sometimes termed 'the constitutionalists' whose hold over Scottish academic historians was complete. A good example of those in thrall is Professor Peter Hume Brown (1849–1918), the first holder of the Sir William Fraser Chair of Scottish History and Paleography in the University of Edinburgh. His Cambridge University Press three-volume *History of Scotland*, published in 1902, was the standard text whose treatment of Scotland's past stopped with the Union and Rebellion of 1745, the inference being that Scotland had

no history after 1707. Hume Brown's treatment of Highland history was almost as lurid and peremptory as that of James VI.

Can such sparse and dismissive handling be exonerated by pleas of ignorance of the sources? In fact, some remarkable advances were made in the immediately preceding generation or two, placing some intriguing documentation before Scottish historians. This was largely the work of one or two people. Donald Gregory (1804–1836) was from an academic family of great distinction which included professors of science, medicine and mathematics over many generations, and was descended, it was said, from the MacGregors of Roro in Glen Lyon. He was Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries in the 1830s and joined with another Edinburgh scholar, William Forbes Skene (1809–1892), in 1833 to found the Iona Club, named 'in commemoration of the Monastery of Iona, the ancient seat of Scottish learning', and its object being 'to investigate and illustrate the history, antiquities and early literature of the Highlands of Scotland'. The Iona Club had a Gaelic Committee as part of its Council whose members included Rev. Dr Norman MacLeod, *Caraid nan Gàidheal*, and Rev. Dr Macintosh Mackay, the scholarly minister of Laggan and editor of the Highland Society's Gaelic Dictionary. The Iona Club's main achievement was the publication in 1847 of a collection of papers edited by Gregory and Skene as *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis*, including documents still under scrutiny such as the 'Genealogies of the Highland Clans extracted from ancient Gaelic MSS', now known as 'MS 1467'. In 1836 Donald Gregory published his *History of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland* from the reign of James IV until the death of James VI. When W. F. Skene published his *The Highlanders of Scotland* in 1837, he noted in the Preface 'the general neglect of Highland history', which he attributed to 'that extraordinary prejudice against the Celtic race, and against the Scottish and Irish branches of that race in particular which certainly biased the better judgement of our best historians'.

Skene himself was an assiduous collector and deposited a collection of Gaelic manuscripts in the Advocates' Library, where by 1862, largely through Skene's own efforts, there were sixty-five Gaelic manuscripts where formerly there had been only four. Spectacularly, he himself secured the 'The Black Book of Clanranald' from a street barrow in Dublin and the Fernaig Manuscript, which had been given to him by the trustees of Rev. Macintosh Mackay. It is notable that these two manuscripts alone make up most of the second

volume of *Reliquiae Celticae*. Skene contributed an introduction to Thomas MacLauchlan's 1862 edition of the Book of the Dean of Lismore, and his majestic *Celtic Scotland: A History of Ancient Alban* (1876–1880) appeared in three bulky volumes, 'History and Ethnology', 'Church and Culture' and 'Land and People', and included many appendices of original documents.¹⁶

Sorley MacLean's fascination with the folk poetry of circa 1550–1800 was informed by his interest in the history of the period, and especially of the seventeenth century, a period which formerly had a grim reputation in British history in comparison to the sunburst of the eighteenth century and the 'Enlightenment'. If our studies (and sources) are over-compartmentalised, we may miss the bigger picture which may make more sense of Sorley's specialised insights. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for example, the Stewarts won and consolidated their power in Scotland. The emergence of the dynasty in the mid-fifteenth century was particularly owing to the shrewd judgement and ability of James II (1437–1460) and his dealings with over-mighty subjects. His marriage to Mary of Gueldres brought him guns and gunsmiths and technology from the Low Countries – and possibly Mons Meg. He overpowered the Douglasses and broke the bond that they had made with the Earl of Ross and Lord of the Isles in 1455. There was a tale that the young king went for advice to Bishop Kennedy of Saint Andrews, who took up a sheaf of arrows and showed him that they could not be broken, that they were irresistible when united – but could be broken one by one. With his queen from Denmark, James III sustained the links with Europe and the Renaissance, as did his son, James IV (1488–1513), possibly the last King of Scots to be a Gaelic-speaker.

James IV saw to the fall of the Lordship of the Isles in 1493 and the promotion of the Campbells of Argyll, the Gordons of Huntly and the Mackenzies of Kintail as the Crown's lieutenants. Our obsession with the shifting ground of politics or the destructive power of weaponry tends to push into the shadows the fabric of everyday life which the songs portray. At this time Scotland shared in the Renaissance styles of Florence and Venice, and we can glimpse touches of the Florentine palace in Dùn Bheagain and Dùn Tuilm. The European Renaissance is evident in the lavish hospitality and display, and in the drift towards domestic comfort and the distinguishing between *sala* (or hall), *scrittorio* (or study) and *camera* (or bedroom). Furniture, though sparse in the Highlands and Hebrides by

modern standards, yet followed a European formula of storage chests and fine beds, and the government passed sumptuary laws to try to limit the expenditure on finery originating in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East; and bedrooms were now not just for sleeping in but for receiving close friends and throwing intimate dinner parties. Life for men and women of the Renaissance followed a ritualistic pattern, and the Palazzo Medici was not so very far from Castle Tioram. Some of this Renaissance ‘horizon’ can be felt in the lament of Mary MacDonald for her MacDonald of Clanranald husband, who died in 1618:

Is iomadh sgall piobadh,
Mar ri faram nan disnean air clar ...¹⁷

*Many a blast of the pipe together with the noise
of the dice on boards
I listened to in your house, with the poetry
and the bragging of the bards,
To the books of history with red covers, and to poems,
Together with pleasure without thirst – why for ever
would I let you away from me?*

The richness of allusion and imagery is as Sorley taught us, though much of the surviving literature in Gaelic is an evocation of ‘big house’ culture, with its entertainment of music and song and the declamations and contentions of the poets. There are also subtle touches such as a tenderness in the moving from the *faram* of the great hall or *sala* to the *camera* or *seòmar* and intimate reflection in the subtle counterpointing of a female with a male domain and the emergence of differing social roles.

The material culture of Renaissance Europe was to be seen in the coinage, dress, weaponry, sculpture and buildings, no less than in attitudes and perspectives. MacLeod of Dùn Bheagain’s household accounts tell us of silk, satin and velvet, gold and silver lace, gold and silver buttons, and ‘doublets for his Honour’s page’. A complaint by Inverness burgesses against a Glenelg man in 1618 for his theft of ‘4 dozen great blue bonnets, 20 dozen trumps, 3 dozen bow-strings, 4 dozen English garters and a barrel full of powder’

seems to suggest that Gaelic culture was entirely European.¹⁸ Chiming with the insights into material culture and human emotion, the literature reveals an easy cosmopolitanism which should reverse our perception of the Hebrides as hinterland. When John MacDonald of Aird, Benbecula, rehearsed the followers and admirers of his leader, MacDonald of Clanranald, he joined France, Italy and Uist together into one social theatre, and conspicuous consumption was not the preserve of a ruling class, if we can appreciate the lover's shopping list in 'Bothan Àirigh am Bràigh Raithneach.'¹⁹

For richness, variety and imagery without equal throughout Europe, Sorley laid before us the songs of Mary MacLeod, Iain Lom MacDonald of Keppoch, the 'Blind Harper' – An Clàrsair Dall – and Sileas na Ceapaich, with their poetry of clan and chief, of politics and place, of conviction and belief. He drew out the poetry of hitherto less well-known poets, of Mairearad nighean Lachlainn, Alexander Mackenzie of Achilty or Alasdair Mac Mhurchaidh, and the cattle-lifter and ladies' man, Dòmhnall Donn Bhoth Fhionndainn. He drew attention to the prominence of the sea in poetry and the prestige of the ship both as symbol and as stage for life, and though this imagery supplied the desired metaphor for senses of value, it only made sense in the richness and accuracy of description. Sorley added the important observation that, against modern expectation, supernatural elements were not common in sea poetry. Reading the landscape as 'environment' may seem a recent fixation, but the great late sixteenth-century song of mountains and hunting, 'Òran na Comhachaig', could be the text for a modern 'conservation management plan' for the Highlands. To these riches he added the poetry from unnamed and unknown poets surviving *air bilean an t-sluaigh*, 'on the people's lips', to be committed to paper and print in the twentieth century. The period of the seventeenth century which drew the scrutiny and admiration of Sorley MacLean seems qualitatively different when viewed from the north and west of the British Isles. Using the enlightenment offered by him, we might risk a view that if the Gael was no better than his southern neighbours, he was certainly no worse.

In an interview with Sorley MacLean in September 1982, the late Donald Archie MacDonald of the School of Scottish Studies recorded a conversation with the poet on 'some aspects of family and local background'. In describing contemporary influences on a young poet, Sorley revealed how

his views took cognisance of the environment and how part of his identity was deeply rooted in Skye and Raasay:

I grew up at that time when symbolism was such a thing in European poetry ... and my symbols almost automatically became the landscape of my physical environment. But, of course, that was always affected, blended with what I knew of the history of my people.²⁰

With Sorley's robust delivery to hand in *Ris a' Bhruthaich*, we can more easily and confidently reconsider Highland and Hebridean history, not only in its own right but also towards a reconfiguration of Scottish historical studies. Our cultural baggage is indelibly marked with excuses about the lack of sources for Highland history, the mantra of 'no documents, no history', or 'tradition' as historically suspect. Sorley warns us that the documents and texts that we have grown used to are deferential to alien values and expectations. He encourages us to 'read the landscape' and take seriously the anonymous tradition of popular poetry and song. This is no isolated voice in a peripheral place but a civilisation at its most confident, successful and assertive, and this in the seventeenth century when all appears in confusion in British History and Scottish History. There would be nothing more liberating and empowering than to follow Sorley MacLean's lead and re-position Highland history on foundations so inspiringly laid by him. The wider meaning of this for Highland history is given a modern but no less potent voice by Aonghas MacNeacail. In his 1996 collection *Oideachadh Ceart agus dàin eile/A Proper Schooling and other poems*, he asserts the value of an oral culture as against one where written records are the sole proof of civilisation. He questions why 'tradition' should always be regarded as historically suspect and his poem 'Oideachadh Ceart' closes with the insistence that history should be redefined to accommodate memory:

... agus a-muigh
bha gaoth a' glaodhaich

eachdraidh nam chuimhne
*eachdraidh nam chuimhne*²¹

Notes

- 1 The title of this essay adopts the line 'Inntinn luasganach a' sireadh' from 'A' Chorra-Ghridheach' in *17 Poems for 6d* (1940) to symbolise the poet's stance; also in *Caoir Gheal Leumraich*, Christopher Whyte and Emma Dymock, eds, Edinburgh: Birlinn 2011, pp. 2–3
- 2 See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962 (and subsequent editions).
- 3 See, for example, Calum Ferguson, *Children of the Black House*, Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003, which draws on the memories of the author's mother and faces issues such as the psychological trauma of the First World War in an island community.
- 4 *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*, Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry, eds, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986, p. 2
- 5 *Ris a' Bhruthaich: The Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley MacLean*, William Gillies, ed., Stornoway: Acair, 1985, p. 20
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 3
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 3
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 20
- 9 James Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community*, Edinburgh: John Donald, 1976, p. 4. I am extremely grateful to Professor Norman Macdonald, Portree, for this reference and for the reminder of its significance.
- 10 See for example Eric Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances: Agrarian Transformation and the Evictions 1746–1886*, London: Croom Helm, 1982; and J. M. Bumstead, *The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America 1770–1815*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press & The University of Manitoba Press, 1982.
- 11 *Ris a' Bhruthaich*, p. 51, questioning also the 'silence' about the scandalous experiment in slave-trafficking from Skye in 1739, 'that grim foretaste of the Clearances, *Saoitheach nan Daoine*'
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 57
- 13 Following James Hunter's singling out of the work of Sorley MacLean, another twenty years passed before this subject was revisited – for example, *Tuath is Tighearna*, ed. Donald E. Meek, Edinburgh: SAP for the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1995; and Hugh Cheape, 'Song on the Lowland Shepherds: popular reactions to the Highland Clearances', in *Scottish Economic and Social History* 15 (1995), pp. 85–100.
- 14 *Ris a' Bhruthaich*, p. 58
- 15 See *Caran an t-Saoghail*, Donald E. Meek, ed., Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003
- 16 Further and more searching exploration of Highland history was not to appear until the 1920s and '30s, with I. F. Grant, *Every-day Life on an Old Highland Farm* (1924), Audrey Cunningham, *The Loyal Clans* (1932) and W. C. Mackenzie, *The Highlands and Isles of Scotland: A Historical Survey* (1937), which was strong for the sixteenth century.
- 17 Rev. A. Macdonald and Rev. A. Macdonald, *The Macdonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry*, Inverness: The Northern Counties Newspaper and Printing and Publishing Company, 1911, p. 28
- 18 F. T. MacLeod, 'Notes on the Dunvegan Charter Chest', in *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, Vol. XXVIII (1912–1914), pp. 204–205 & 207

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- 19 *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig* (second edition), William J. Watson, ed., Glasgow and Stirling: An Comunn Gàidhealach, 1932, p. 140 & pp. 192–94
- 20 *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*, p. 220
- 21 ‘... and outside / a wind was crying / *history in my memories / history in my memories*’: Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1996, pp. 12–17