Four Boat Songs from Northern British Insular Tradition

GEORGE BRODERICK
Universität Mannheim

ABSTRACT:

This article discusses four examples of iorraim, or rowing-songs, from Northern British insular tradition revealing a commonality in the rhythm of the tunes used, set mainly in 3-4 time (probably also the Manx version originally?) and spanning an area from Man, to Arran, to the Hebrides, and to Shetland, an area once under Scandinavian influence.

1. A MANX BOAT SONG *Manannan Beg mac y Leirr*

The song-fragment *Manannan Beg Mac y Leirr* was collected by Manx folklorist and revivalist Mona Douglas (1898-1987)[1] from Caesar Cashen (1856/57-1943), Peel (of Dalby, Patrick), seemingly during the 1920s,[2] though the precise date is at present unknown. The song in its present form is reminiscent of the rowing-songs attested in both Scottish Gaelic[3] and Shetland traditions[4] As can be seen here, the text, taken from JERRY (1978: 32), comprises three single-line stanzas (originally probably many more) accompanied by a single-line refrain, sung twice at the start, then after each stanza and at the conclusion. The text is accompanied here by an English translation.

1.1. *The Song Text*

Refrain: *Manannan Beg mac y Leirr, Manannan Beg mac y Leirr.*
Stanzas:

1. *Bannee orrin as [er] nyn maateyn*.	[Bless us and our boats.
2. *Mie goll magh as ny share cheet stiagh*.	Good going out but better coming in (back)
3. *Lesh ny bioee as ny merriu aynjee*.	With the living[5] and the dead[6] in her].[7]

1.2. *The singer Caesar Cashen*

Caesar Cashen belonged to a Manx-speaking family originally from Dalby in the parish of Patrick, just south of Peel, and was the younger brother of William Cashen (1840-1912), assistant harbour master at Peel and latterly curator of Peel Castle. As both were native Manx Gaelic speakers, William was interviewed by Prof. John Rhŷs (1840-1915) during his visits to Man (1886-1893),[8] while Caesar was interviewed by Prof. Carl Marstrander (1883-1965) when he visited Man (1929, 1930, 1933) on 24 September 1930. In commenting on Caesar Cashen and his Manx Marstrander noted:

1 For details about Mona Douglas and her life and times see BAZIN (1998).
2 According to JFSS/28: 99-106, Mona Douglas was collecting material at any rate between 1912 and 1921. For details of her song-collecting activites see BRODERICK (1908: 193-247).
3 For details of *iorraim* or rowing songs from Scottish Gaelic tradition see TOLMIE (1911: 236-239) and BLANKENHORN (2019: 113-115).
4 e.g. the *Unst Boat Song*. For details see BRODERICK (Forthcoming).
5 i.e. the fishermen.Sophia_Morrison>
6 i.e. the fish.
7 The tune to this as well as those accompanying the Arran, Hebridean and Shetland examples appear in the Appendix.
8 For details see BRODERICK (2018: 116, 2022a: 4).

> Togeether with [William] Quane I walked down to the Market Place [in Peel] and here met Caesar Cashen (ca. 70 yrs.). He remembered Rhys quite well whom he had often spoken to when he came to consult his [Cashen's] older brother. Cashen seems to speak quite good Manx. The sentence 'I would like to go to Douglas' he repeated immediately like Woodworth […]. Both Quane and Cashen were extremely pleasant. It is very likely that with help from them it should be possible to outline the main features of the Peel dialect – phonetical and grammatical (CM *Dagbok* 32) 'Cashen spoke Manx from the cradle' (CM MNHL MS 05357 B / IV: 2564 (24 September 1930).

That is to say, that Marstrander regarded Caesar Cashen as a competent Manx Gaelic speaker and therefore competent in the material he was passing on.[9]

However, the song seemingly has a history. It was originally known as 'Fisherman's Prayer'.

1.3. *Fisherman's Prayer*

1.3.1. Version 1 (Manannan / St. Patrick)

The text to this 'prayer' was evidently provided by Mona Douglas for the *Journal of the Folk Song Society* VII, no. 28 (1924): 100 (editor Anne G. Gilchrist) as an adjunct to the 'Sea Invocation' (qv) as part of a series of Manx songs / tunes to do with 'Gods, Sprites, and Fairies. Songs and Cante-Fables collected by Miss Mona Douglas, Miss Sophia Morrison,[10] and others' (ibid. 99-116). With regard to the 'fishing invocation', Douglas provides the following text and translation (JFSS VII/28: 100):

Pherick beg jeh'n cheayn	(Little Patrick of the sea
Bannee orrin as nyn baatyn !	Bless us and our boats
Mie goll magh agh ny share chetstiagh	Good going out but better coming in
Lesh vie [?] as marroo aynjee	With living and dead in them).

In this the first line, Douglas says (*ibid.*), was originally

Mannanan [Manan(n)an] beg mac y Leirr	('Little Manan(n)an, son of Leirr'.), as next:

1.3.2. Version 2 (Manannan Beg mac y Leirr)

Versions of this prayer were evidently already in circulation. In his archaeological report of 1911 to the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society (IOMNHAS), archaeologist P. M. C. Kermode (*Proceedings of Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society* I [1910-11]: 267) noted the following text:

> [...] I am particularly indebted to Miss Sophia Morrison, of Peel, for furnishing me in August last, with

9 In Book 3/3 in Vol. IV of his Manx notes (MNHL MS 05357 B) Marstrander notes the contents of the nine phonograph cylinder recordings he made of Caesar Cashen (pp. 2600-01, 2610-11, 2613). None of Marstrander's recordings of Cashen has survived, either among the recordings now housed in the Archive of Manx National Heritage or copies of them donated by Marstrander to the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, in March 1935 (cf. BRODERICK 2024: 172-180). Of the 54 cylinders originally made only 22 known examples have survived (21 of Harry Kelly and one of Manx *Heimatforscher* J. J. Kneen, (not a native Manx speaker) both in original and copy format (BRODERICK ibid.: 172).

10 Sophia Morrison (1859-1917), Manx folklorist and folklore / folksong collector. Editor of the short-lived Manx folklore journal *Mannin* 1913-1917), owing to her untimely death in January 1917. For details see MADDRELL (2002). See also Stowell Kenyon, Maddrell & Quilliam:'Morrison, Sophia, Manx Cultural Fieldworker, Campaigner and Writer'. In: Dollin KELLY (ed.) (2006): 331-333. Also <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophia_Morrison>.

the Fisherman's Prayer, when putting out to sea. The invocation in these days is to the Trinity, but less than a hundred years ago was to St. Patrick, and, most remarkable of all, an old woman of nearly 90 gave Miss Morrison the following version, which she said had been used by her grandfather, in which Mannanan [Manannan] beg Mac Lir was invoked! Her father used the same words, substituting the name of St. Patrick for that of Mannanan:

Mannan beg Mac-y-Lir, fer vannee yn Ellan	[Mannan beg Mac y Lir, one who blessed the island
Dy bannee shin as nyn moatey [maatey]	may [he] bless us and our boats
Mie goll magh as ny share cheet stiagh	Good going out and / but better coming in
As bio as marroo sy vaatey	and living and dead in the boat.] (GB)

1.3.3. Version 3 (St. Patrick)

Then we have:

Dy bannee Pharick Noo shin as nyn maatyn	(May St. Patrick bless us and our boats)
Parick Noo bannee yn Ellan ain	('May St. Patrick bless our island
Dy bannee eh shin as yn baatey	may he bless us and the boat
Goll magh dy mie, cheet stiagh ny share	Going out well, coming in better
Lesh bio as marroo sy vaatey	with living and dead in the boat.)

And again:

Dy bannee yn Noo Parick shin as nyn moatey [maatey]	(May St. Patrick bless us and our boats
Goll magh dy mie as cheet stiagh ny share	going out well and coming in better
Ooilley bio as ny merriu marin	all alive and the dead ones with us.) (KERMODE 1910-11: 267).

The exchange of the name "Patrick" (and later the Trinity) for "Manannan"[11] would indicate a "christianising" of the prayer of some antiquity?

1.4. *The Text*: *linguistic comment* (Mona Douglas version):

1.4.1. *The Refrain*:

As can be seen in the Mona Douglas version of the text, the form of the refrain comprises an appeal to Manannan to bless the undertaking, and as such the name would traditionally be in the vocative case, which as in other branches of Gaelic would involve lenition, viz. *Vanannan Veg Vac y Leirr* 'O Wee Manannan, son of Leirr (G *Mhanannáin Bheig Mhaic [a] Lir*' here with palatalisation of the final consonant). Though lenition was commonly applied in Early Manx (17th cent.) (LDIM/92) and Classical Manx (18th part 19th cent.) (LDIM/93), this was not necessarily the case in Late Manx (Late 19th and 20th cent.) (LDIM/94-102). The form we have here, with non-lenition, would suggest a 19th century development. The omission of orthographical palatalisation in final syllables of vocatives in mansculine singular nouns in Manx probably mirrors actuality.[12] Otherwise a non-vocative form without any linguistic modifications is also a possibility.

11 For details of the position of Manannan in Celtic tradition see BRODERICK (2022b).

12 For examples in Scottish Gaelic cf. GILLIES (2010: 261), for Irish cf. Ó BAOILL (2010: 177-178). Though palatalisation of final syllables in the vocative case of masculine singular forms, as in the case of Scottish Gaelic above, may likely have been the case earlier, as registered in plural forms of dentals, nasals and laterals (cf. BRODERICK (1991: 86; 1999: 105).

1.4.2. *The Stanzas*

1. The imperative *bannee* ‘bless’ takes a direct object, as can be seen in *bannee shin* ‘bless us’ in the variants. Douglas’s *bannee orrin* shows confusion with the idiom *bannaght ort* ‘a blessing on you, bless you’. This suggests that her version of the song has not been adequately taken down or wholly understood, even though the song is genuine enough.

   The use of nasalisation is found in Classical Manx in a number of environments, including here in the genitive plural of the article or possessive adjective, as here with *nyn* ‘our’ and in Late Manx in fossilised phrases: *bee shiu nyn dost* ‘be ye silent (in your silence)’ (cf. HLSM/II: 455-456). Otherwise not, as can be seen in other versions below. It is generally lost altogether in Late Manx and found only in place-names, e.g. *Close ny Moght* (G *clós na mbocht*) ‘enclosure of the poor’, *Ellan ny maghyl* (G *Eilean na mbachall* ’island of the staffs, croziersʻ) (cf. BRODERICK (2010): 25-27). The fact that it has survived here may indicate that is has been fossilised within a song-text (see also Version 2).
2. *As* ‘but’, usually written *agh*[13] but often pronounced /as/ (HLSM/II: 5-6 s.v. *Agh* [ax, aʃ, a:s]).
3. No comment.

1.5. *The Tune*[14]

In a letter from Anne G. Gilchrist to Mona Douglas dated 15.10.1922 Gilchrist comments on the tunes sent to her by Douglas for JFSS, including that to the above Manannan song, noting their similarity in her view to tunes collected by Frances Tolmie (TOLMIE 1911) from Skye. With regard to the tune to the Manannan song, Gilchrist oberves:

> The tune of the Mananan [*sic*] song strikes me as having been modernised from an early pentatonic form. If you will substitute B for C in the second bar and A for G in [2] the fourth bar, you will get what I guess to be the original form of the tune which would then be purely pentatonic (i.e. minus the 4th or 7th degrees) (Letter: Gilchrist – Douglas 15.10.1922; MILLER 2015).

Returning to the Manannan song-tune in a later letter to Douglas dated 25.10.1922 Gilchrist notes:

> The Mananan song opens – the tune I mean – like the Highland air “Gun chrodh gun aighean”, but there is not much further resemblance (Letter: Gilchrist-Douglas 25.10.1922; in MILLER 2015).[15]

The implication here is that in the course of time the tune has been modernised (see above).

2. A BOAT SONG FROM ARRAN

So far as we are aware, there is no known extant text to this tune, though any text would likely have been in Arran Gaelic.[16] The form as we have it is set in 3-4 time commonly found in rowing-songs. It is modal in character (“E Dorian”) which betrays its antiquity. The slow and solemn character of the tune would be suitable when a boat was well-laden and heavy, or that the seas were heavy which would require a regular and slow rhythm.[17]

13 As in the first rendering.
14 For examples of the tunes in all cases see Appendix.
15 See also Gilchrist in JFSS VII/28 (1924): 102, but adding ‘though the likeness has not been carried throughout’.
16 For details of Arran Gaelic see HOLMER (1957). The last known native speaker of Arran Gaelic was Donald Craig, Pirnmill (originally of Auchencar, Machrie), Arran, who died in 1977 (GB).
17 The tune is seemingly first noticed in James Kerr’s *First Collection of Merry Melodies*. Glasgow, 1975.

3. A BOAT SONG FROM SKYE

In this context Virginia Blankenhorn (2019: 113) notes the presence of rowing songs in Scottish Gaelic tradition where they are known as *iorraim* /iRim′/ and has this to say:

> Rowing songs constitute the one genre for which we do not possess context-specific recorded evidence. There can be no doubt, however, that songs were sung as accompaniment to rowing, and that they would have facilitated the labour, especially when it required the co-ordination of two or more rowers (BLANKENHORN 2019: 113).

Blankenhorn (ibid.) then quotes from novelist Alexander Smith (SMITH 1912: 84, 124, 134) concerning the use of rowing-songs by men from Skye:

> The wind came only in intermitting puffs, and the boatmen took to the oars. The transparent autumn night fell upon us; the mainland was gathering in gloom behind, and before us rocky islands glimmered on the level deep. To the chorus of a Gaelic song of remarkable length and monotony the crew plied their oars (SMITH 1912: 84, 114, 134).

Such songs, because of their regular rhythm as rowing-songs, also find use in waulking-song repertoires in Scotland, which, as noted by Tolmie (1911: 236-239), would not necessarily confine themselves to issues of waulking. Virginia Blankenhorn (2019: 114-115) lists the following four rowing-songs, identified as such by their singers, and their Track ID from *Tobar an Dualchais*, University of Edinburgh (here with additional personal information, ibid.). Here we have an example each from Skye and Lewis, with two from Tiree.

3.1. *Rowing-songs from the Hebrides (Blankenhorn)*

Iomairibh eutrom hò hò James MacDonald [Sèamus Iain Shèumais], Kilmuir, Skye 21645
An t-iorram Niseach Joan MacKenzie [Seònag nic Mhurchaidh],[18] Shulishader, Lewis 22290

Iomairam ò théid i dh'aindeoin Donald Sinclair [Domhnall Chaluim Bàin], Tiree 58816
Alla bharra bò choisinn cò bheag Alasdair MacNeill [Alasdair Iain], Balevulin, Tiree 103479

3.2. *Rowing songs from Skye and North Uist (Tolmie)*

The following rowing-songs, also sung as waulking songs, were collected by Frances Tolmie in the Isle of Skye and North Uist (TOLMIE 1911: 236-239):

Iúraibh o-hì, Iùraibh o-hù	Oighrig Beaton, Bracadale (Cottar), Skye, 1863.
Eile na Hùraibh o-ho	Mary Ross, Killmaluag, Skye, 1898.
O Hi Ibh O	Mary Ross, Killmaluag, Skye, 1898.
Òran do Dhomhnull Gorm	Harriet M'Vicar (spinner), North Uist, 1870.[19]

3.2.1. Rowing-song / iorram *Eile na hùraibh, o-ho.*

18 Though she goes by SEONAG NICCOINICH on her CD of Scottish Gaelic traditional songs, School of Scottish Studies CD recording SCOTTISH TRADITION 19 (1991). Greentrax Recording Ltd, East Lothian.

19 Sound-recordings of these and other Scottish Gaelic songs are available via *Tobar an Dualchais*, University of Edinburgh.

In order to give an example of the varied content and delivery of an *iorram* (here with chorus), the rowing-song *Eile na hùraibh, o-ho* (TOLMIE 1911: 237), as sung in 3-4 time by Mary Ross, Killmaluag, Skye, 1898, is provided here with translation:

Solo:	Chorus:	Translation
Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho
1. 'S fliuch an oidhche, o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	The night is rainy
Nochd's gur fuar-i! o-háraibh o-ho	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	and it is also cold
2. Thug an iùbhrach, o-hù, a-ho	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	The new ship
Ùr an cuan oirr', o-hùraibh, o-ho	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	has turned towards the ocean
3. Dùrachd slàn da'an, o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	My blessing be with
T-saor a dh'fhuaigh i, o-hùraibh, a-ho	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	him who built her
4. Dh'ghàg è dionach, o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	left her secure
Làidit, luath i	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	strong and swift
5. Acfhuinneach gu, o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	well equipped for
Siubhal chuanta	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	traversing the seas
6. Cha'n eil bòrd fliuch innt', o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	There is not a wet nor
No bòrd fuaraidh	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	damp board in her
7. 'S ioma sgeir dhubh, o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	I have no fear that she
Ris 'na shuath i;	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	be driven off course
8. Agus faochag, o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	and moving the
Chròm a ghluais i	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	lowly whelk
9. Cha'n 'eil cùram, o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	I have no fear that she
Orm m'a fuadach	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	be driven off her course
10. Tha mo rùn air, o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	My beloved is on
Bòrd a fuaraidh	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	board the windward side
11. Làmh cheangail nam, o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	His hand fastens the ropes
Ball's 'gam fuagladh	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	and loosens them
12. Cha b'è fear cearraig, o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	Not a left-handed man is he
Bheireadh bhuar e	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	to take the helm
13. No fear laimhe-, o-hù, a-hó	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	nor his right hand of a
-Deis' is fuachad air	Eile na hùraibh, o-ho	man benumbed with cold.

This was a rowing as well as a waulking song, as Gilchrist tells us,[20]

20 See in TOLMIE (1911: 236).

> The slow and solemn character of several of these rowing-measures appears in some instances to be due to the fact they were also of the nature of laments […] (GILCHRIST 1911: 236).

4. A BOAT SONG FROM SHETLAND

This concerns the only known rowing-song in Shetland tradition, albeit in fragmented Norn, the former Scandinavian language of Orkney, Shetland and parts of Northern Scotland.[21] The *Unst Boat Song*, a form of weather-prayer sung by Shetland fishermen, enjoys a certain amount of kudos among the people of Shetland as a traditional song of some apparent antiquity. The song has achieved much fame as the only known traditional Shetland song in Norn.

The song was seemingly first recorded from two unnamed informants (the third apparently being Jessie Saxby)[22] by the Faroese specialist for Norn Dr. Jakob Jakobsen (1864-1918: CXIII, CXIV) during his visit to Shetland 1893-95[23] as part of his research work into Norn for his *Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland* (1928-32) in two volumes.[24]

In 1943 William Ratter of North Roe, Shetland, collected a version of the song from the singing of it by John James Stickle (1876-1957) of Watquoy, Burrafirth, later of Baltasound, Unst. Stickle's text and tune were transcribed by Thomas M. Ratter, also of Shetland, and first appeared in the *Shetland Folk Book*, Vol. 2, published by the Shetland Times, Lerwick, in 1951. In 1947 a sound-recording of this song was made of John Stickle, by musician, composer and collector of traditional material Patrick Shuldham-Shaw (1917-1977) and is accessible on the CD *Fiona J. Mackenzie. Songs of the Scottish Islands in Scots & Gaelic*. Archipelago. Greentrax Recordings Ltd, 2012 (Track 05). In September 1955 a sound-recording of part of the song was made of Kitty Anderson, Lerwick,[25] Shetland, by Francis Collinson (1898-1984) of the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh and is accessible in *Tobar an Dualchais*.

Although it is believed that this song was more extensive than its remnants suggest, nonetheless, the contents clearly repeat and emphasise the general theme of surviving the onslaught of a westerly wind while at the fishing. This seems to be the main message of the song. Three versions of the song have so far been recorded, the latter two sound-recordings (cf. BRODERICK (Forthcoming)). The first of the two sound-recordings, that of John James Stickle, 1943,[26] is chosen here as being the more complete, although fragmentary in form.

4.1. The Unst Boat Song *Second version*

Informant: John James Stickle (1876-1957), Watquoy, Burrafirth (later Baltasound), Unst, Shetland.
Occupation: joiner & fiddle-player.
Date 1943.
Collector: William Ratter, North Roe.

21 For details of Norn, see BARNES (1996, 1998).
22 The third text recorded by Jakobsen appears also in SAXBY (1932: 62)
23 In Shetland Jakobsen's informants evidently included Haldane Burgess, James Stout Angus, John Irvine, Robert Jamieson, James Inkster, John Nicolson, and Laurence Williamson <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jakob_Jakobsen> (retrieved 04.11.2023).
24 Now available in a single volume, see EVERSON (2021). For comment on Jakobsen's interviewing techniques, see BARNES (1996: 4).
25 According to Kitty, her father came from Unst and her mother from Gonfirth, West Mainland (*Tobar and Dualchais*),
26 The other is that of Kitty Anderson, Lerwick, 1955.

Recording Location: Unst, Shetland.
Language: Norn.
Genre: Song.
Source: Shetland Folk Society songbook *Da Sangs at A'll Sing ta Dee* (2013: 32-33).
Sound-Recording: 1947.
Collector: Patrick Shuldham-Shaw (1917-1977).
Recording Location: Shetland.
Source: CD *Fiona J. Mackenzie. Songs of the Scottish Islands in Scots & Gaelic*. Archipelago. Greentrax Recordings. 2012 CDTRAX368 (Track 05).

4.1.1. The following introduction and text to the song, with a suggested translation, was evidently first published under the title 'A Boat Song from Unst. Translated and edited by William W. Ratter' in *Old Lore Miscellany* 10 (1935-46): 241-244.

'Four fragments of old Norn rhymes from Unst are given by Mrs. Jessie M. E. Saxby in the 'Home of a Naturalist', the work by her and her brother, Rev. Biot Edmondston.

One of the fragments as given by her, beginning 'Saina poba wer-a' was in a fuller manner noted by Dr. Jakobsen, but both versions are too corrupt to be understood. However, the writer during the first great war [1914-1918] got some lines of this old song from an Unst man [John James Stickle] who sang the lines and his version seems to be intelligible or partly so. Here are the words as he sang them with an attempt made at translation, word by word.'

THE OLD SONG

4.1.2. 'In 1945 Mr. Tom M. Ratter noted down the following version in 6/8 time which he considers preferable to the version which he noted in 1943 in 4/4 time. His preference for the 1945 version in 6/8 time arises through the fact that the tune, if sung in that time, has a rhythm which fits the rhythmical action of rowing much more accurately than the version in 4/4 time which is too march-like in character.

'The version in 6/8 time receives some support from Mr. W. W. Ratter's version in Professor Otto Andersson's "Giga och Bröllopslåtar på Shetland (1938; Åbo, Finland; page 88 not translated) in which it was evidently sung in 6/8 time and which almost coincides with that of 1945, except for one note and the metronome speed which he thinks should be slower.'

The tune is taken from the Shetland Folk Society's *Da Sangs ar A'll Sing ta Dee* (2013:32). See Appendix.

TEXT	IPA VERSION	'Suggested Translation'
Starka virna vestalie	[sˊtɑrka vørnə vɛstali:	Strong weather from the west
Obadeea, Obadeea	oᵬa'di:ə oᵬa'di:ə	Obadeea, Obadeea
Starka virna vestilie	sˊtarka vørnə vɛstali:	Strong weather from the west
Obadeea, monye	oᵬadi:ə mø;nji	Obadeea, men!
Stala, stoita, stonga raer	sˊtɑ:lə sˊtɑ:kə sˊtɔŋə 're:ra	Put in order, brace up mast and yards
Oh, whit says du da bunshka baer	o: hwat se:s du da bunʃka 'be:r	What say you, the boat will bear her sail?
Oh, whit says du da bunshka baer	o: hwat se:s du da bunʃka 'be:r	What say you, the boat will bear her sail?

Litra mae vee, drengie	lɪtra me: vi 'dreŋgi	I am satisfied with that, (my) boys
Saina papa vara	se:na pɑpɑ vaə'ra:	Bless us, our Father
Obadeea, Obadeea	oʚa'di:ə, oʚa'di:ə	Obadeea, Obadeea
Saina papa vara	se:na pɑpɑ vaə'ra	Bless us, our Father
Obadeea, monye	oʚadi:ə mø;nji	Obadeea, men
Starka virna vestalie	s´tɑrka vørnə vɛstali:	Strong weather from the west
Obadeea, Obadeea	oʚa'di: oʚa'di:	Obadeea, Obadeea
Starka virna vestilie	s´tarka vørnə vɛstali:	Strong weather from the west
Obadeea, monye	oʚadi:ə mø;nji]	Obadeea, men!

The translation here is based on that provided by William W. Ratter (1873-1947), a native of North Roe, 'main public assistance officer in Lerwick and self-taught scholar of Scandinavian languages,'[27] is today available on page 33 of *Da Sangs at A'll Sing ta Dee.*

Obadeea (as Obadiah) is the title of a one-chapter book in the Old Testament. As can be seen in the Appendix, Obadeea is a common name among males. In the *Book of Obadiah* he is seen as a malicious character to be avoided at all costs, and in Shetland seemingly became syonymous with extreme weather conditions.

4.2. *The Song*

4.2.1. *The Tex*t

According to tradition, as noted above, this is seemingly the only known traditional Shetland song containing a Norn text. In order to establish the veracity of the Norn I contacted Norn expert Professor Michael Barnes, Professor Emeritus of Scandinavian Studies of the University of London, in early November 2023 and asked him for his assessment of the grammar of the text. He replied as follows:

> You pose a question to which there is no obvious answer. My view is that the Norn of the *Unst Boat Song* represents the very last stage in the decline and death of the language, a stage in which the morphology and syntax of Norn had been forgotten and many or most grammatical endings had been levelled to *-a* or *-na* […]. Jakobsen on p. XCII of the 1928-32 English version of his *Etymological Dictionary* makes more or less the same point (he also […] offers variants of the *Unst Boat Song* pp. CXIII-CXIV [§1.1 above]. Of course, this does not mean that the Boat Song cannot be of considerable antiquity – its wording and morphology may have changed parallel with the development of Norn. But I cannot see that one can go further than to say what I have tried to outline here: the *Song* in the [above] form shows the complete collapse of Norn morphology characteristic of most fragments collected some 100-150 years after the passing of the last native speakers [c.1800]. What shape it may have had at the time it was composed is anybody's guess (BARNES p.c. 03.11.2023).

4.2.2. *The Tune*

For comment on the melody I contacted ethnomusicologist Dr. Virginia Blankenhorn in the School of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, also in early November 2023. She wrote back supplying details of the structure and melody of the song:

27 Brian Smith, Shetland Archive (p.c. 04.12.2023).

4.2.2.1. *Its Structure*

> Structurally, this is a very simple tune in eight bars, neatly divisible into two halves. Within each four-bat line there is likewise a clear division between bars 2 and 3. The overall stanzaic structure as ABAC, each section corresponding to two bars on the tune. The rhyhm is characterised by a repetitive rocking motion, as one might expect from a song that might have accompanied some thythmic seafaring activity [...]. The eight-bar structure is an extremely widespread European song-form. By contrast […] Scottish Gaelic waulking songs [ScG *òrain luadhaidh*] and rowing songs [ScG *iorraim*] tend to be structured differently in terms of phrases and repetitive elements, without the same sense of balanced elements. There is no indication that the *Unst Boat Song* involved any sort of call-and-response element, but I suppose it is possible that the second four-bar section could have been sung by a group in response to a solo singer on the first four bars.

4.2.2.2. *Its Melody*

> Melodically, the final note suggests forward movement rather than coming to rest. This tune is not necessarily modal; as the key signature suggests, it fits handily into an Ionian (major) tonal framework (G major in this case), but because the tune lacks any version of the fourth degree of the scale (in this case C or C#) we cannot tell if it is Ionian (C natural) or Lydian (C sharp). The oddest thing about the tune is that it comes to rest on B rather than G, leaving it sounding unfinished – which may have been the point if it was meant to be repeated *ad infinitum* in order to accomplish a repetitive task (BLANKENHORN, p.c. 08.11.2923).

That is to say, to accompany the rowing rhythm of the men in order to ease the strenuousness and monotony of the task, similar to a Hebridean *iorram* ('boat-song, rowing-song; tedious rhythm, song sung during any kind of work by way of lightening its burden'). According to Blankenhorn, this would be achieved

> by a call-and-response alternation of soloist and chorus; strong regular rhythm; prominent use of refrains; […] flexible performance structure, reflecting the immediate needs of the work; and 'wrenched stress – rhythmic emphasis on what would normally be an unstressed syllable'. In many cases, textual disjuncture in the middle of the song […] reflects that fact that the texts of such songs are considered vehicles for performance, rather than performance being a vehicle for the text (BLANKENHORN 2019: 114).

5. CONCLUSION

The invocation of Manannán[28] mac Lir to bless and protect the Manx fishing boats and their crews as they went out to the fishing, often battling against both winds and seas, as exemplified in Shetland's *Unst Boat Song* as well as in the boat song from Skye (probably also Arran), would suggest a custom rooted in pre-Christian deities, such as Manannán mac Lir, who in a Celtic context features heavily in Irish tradition particularly, but also in both Manx and Scottish Gaelic, and to an extent in Welsh, tradition.[29]

Although Manannán mac Lir may embrace certain attributes and qualities for which he is known in Irish and Scottish tradition (GREEN 1992: 139, MCKILLOP 2000: 322-323, MACQUARRIE 2015: 300-301), in Manx tradition he shares some of these qualities but also embraces others: he is seen as

28 The ending *-án* in *Manannán*, borrowed into Welsh as *Manawyd-an*, is a diminutive suffix. Older forms without the suffix are attested both in Irish (*Manann*, *Monann*) and in Welsh (*Manawyt*). In Man Manannán is known as Manannán Beg 'little M.' (in Manannan Ballad), although he can be conceived as a giant who rolls his wheel over the island. The diminutive forms seems to have a tabuistic function, as Manannán at any rate, as a god of the sea, was feared by sailors (cf. WAGNER 1981: 9-10). See next.

29 For this see BRODERICK (2022b: 82-90).

the first King of Man, as non-Christian, who envelopes the island in a mist to protect it from enemeies, who can make one man look like a hundred / a thousand, who demands tribute in the form of rushes each year, who is a master of skills, who possesses Peel Castle as his stronghold (perhaps a reference to St. Patrick's Isle (on which Peel Castle stands) and its early Christian traditions). Manannán mac Lir in Manx tradition functions primarily as a deity of the crops and of the rushes and swamps, then later on of the sea and its great depths, and by implication of wisdom and knowledge. In this regard he would be possibly of the same deity as the Welsh Manawydan, all of which may go back to early Eastern traditions. All of this represents traditions of long-standing and great antiquity, many of which may indeed be pre-Celtic (WAGNER 1981, RENFREW 1987, 1990, MAIER 1998, DAVEY 2013, ALLENTOFT 2015, HAAK 2015, KOCH 2020).

The foregoing would seem to tally with that in the *iorram* from Skye and the Unst Boat Song from Shetland (probably also from the Arran Boat Song, had a text survived). All the boat songs would seem to refer to beliefs of quite some antiquity connecting all four areas.

5.1. Comment: *An appropriate time signature?*

As can be seen from the staff-notation of the tune collected for the Manx text (Appendix 1), the tune is set in 4/4 time, whereas the tunes for the Arran and Hebridean rowing-songs (Appendix 2 & 3) is in 3/4 time, and 6/8 time for the Unst Boat Song (Appendix 4). The tunes to the four rowing songs in TOLMIE (1911: 236-239) are given the following time-signatures:

p. 236 *Iùraibh o-hì, Iùraibh o-hù*	3/4 time. Mode 5 ([hexatonic:] 6-note scale)
p. 237 *Eile na hùraibh, o-ho*	3/4 time. Mode 3 ([hexatonic:] 6-note scale)
p. 238 *O hi ibh o*	3/4 time. Mode 4 ([septitonic:] 7-note scale)
p. 238 *Óran do Dhomhnull Gorm*	2/2 time. Mode 2 (pentatonic [5 note scale]).

But mostly in 3/4 time.

In considering the appropriate time-signature for the Shetland rowing-song *Unst Boat Song* (cf. BRODERICK Forthcoming), William Ratter[30] (1935-36: 241-244) suggests the following:

> In 1945 Mr. Tom M. Ratter noted down the following version in 6/8 time which he considers preferable to the version which he noted in 1943 in 4/4 time. His preference for the 1945 version in 6/8 time arises through the fact that the tune, if sung in that time, has a rhythm which fits the rhythmical action of rowing much more accurately than the version in 4/4 time which is too march-like in character (RATTER: 1935-36: 241-244).

This may well be the appropriate rhythm for the Manx rowing-song, i.e. 6-8 (or 3-4) rather than 4-4 time, since the pace would need to be in time with the act of rowing, as in the case of the *Unst Boat Song* (Appendix 4). The tonal incidence of all four tunes may suggest a Scandinavian origin?

ABBREVIATIONS:

Ch – Chorus.
CM – Carl Marstander.
G – Gaelic.
HLSM – A Handbook of Late Spoken Manx (Broderick 1984-86).
IPA – International Phonetics Association.
JSNS – Journal of Scottish Name Studies.
MNHL – Manx National Heritage Library.

30 Collector of a version of the 'Unst Boat Song' from John James Stickle, Unst, 1943. See BRODERICK (Forthcoming).

S – Solo.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALLENTOFT, Morten E. et al. (2015): 'Population genomics of Bronze Age Eurasia'. *Nature* 522 (2015): 167-172.
BARNES, Michael P. (1996): 'Jakob Jakobsen and the Norn language in Shetland'. In: Doreen J. Waugh (ed.) (1996): *Shetlands's Northern Links: Language and History*. Edinburgh: Scottish Society for Northern Studies, 1-15.
BARNES, Michael P. (1998): *The Norn Language of Orkney and Shetland*. Lerwick: The Shetland Times.
BAZIN, Fenella Crowe (1995): *Music in the Isle of Man up to 1896*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Liverpool.
BAZIN, Fenella (1998): *Mona Douglas. A Tribute*. Douglas: Manx Heritage Foundation.
BLANKENHORN, Virginia (2019): *Tradition, Transmission, Transformation. Essays on Scottish Gaelic Poetry and Song*. Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, New York, Wien: Peter Lang. Studies in the History and Culture of Scotland.
BRODERICK, George (1984-86): *A Handbook of Late Spoken Manx*. Tübingen: Niemeyer. 3 vols. Vol. I: Grammar & Texts, Vol. II. Dictionary, Vol. III: Phonology.
BRODERICK, George (1991): 'The decline and death of Manx Gaelic'. In: P. Sture Ureland & George Broderick (eds.) (1991: 63-125).
BRODERICK, George (1994-2005): *Place-Names of the Isle of Man*. Tübingen: Niemeyer. 7 vols.
BRODERICK, George (2008): 'Mona Douglas and her Songs'. Béaloideas 76 (2008): 193-247. Updated version 2019. Online: <www.manxmusic.com/media/History%20photos/MONA%DOUGLAS%20_AND%20HER%20SONGS.pdf>.
BRODERICK, George (2010a): 'A Grammar of Manx Place-Names'. *Journal of Scottish Name Studies* 4 (2010): 1-42.
BRODERICK, George (2010b): 'Manx'. In: Martin J. Ball & Nicole Müller (eds.) 2010): *The Celtic Languages*. London & New York: Routledge, 305-356.
BRODERICK, George (2018): 'Manx Gaelic: the end game'. *Celtica* XXX (2018): 183-205.
BRODERICK, George (2022a): 'Prof. John Rhŷs and his visits to the Isle of Man (1886-1893): Diary'. *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 69 (2018): 1-158.
BRODERICK, George (2022b): 'Early Traditions in the Isle of Man'. *Studia Celtica* LVI (2022): 77-105.
BRODERICK, George (2024): 'Professor Carl Marstrander and the Manx cylinder recordings 1933: the Irish connection' In: Dahl Hambro & Dahl (eds.) (2024): 172-180.
BRODERICK, George (Forthcoming): 'Unst Boat Song. A traditional 'weather-prayer' from Shetland'.
DAHL HAMBRO, Cathinka & Eystein DAHL (eds.) (2024): *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica.* Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet.
DAVEY, Peter J. et al. (1999). 'Bronze Age metallurgy on the Isle of Man: a symposium'. In: P. J. Davey (ed.) (1999): *Recent archaeological research on the Isle of Man.* BAR British Series 278 (1999), 39-62.
DAVEY, Peter J. (2013): *After the Vikings. Medieval archaeology of the Isle of Man AD 1100-1550*. Douglas: Manx National Heritage.
GILLIES, William (2010): 'Scottish Gaelic'. In: Martin Ball & Nicole Müller (eds.) (2010): *The Celtic Languages*. London & New York: Routledge, 230-304.
GREEN, Miranda (1992): *Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legend*. London: Thames & Hudson.
HAAK, Wolfgang et al. (2015): 'Massive migration from the steppe was a source for Indo-European languages in Europe'. *Nature* 522 (2015): 207-211.
HOLMER, Nils M. (1957): *The Gaelic of Arran*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
JAKOBSEN, Jakob (1928-32); *An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland* (2 vols. Reprinted 1985). London/Copenhagen: David Nutt/Vilhelm Priot. A colour facsimile edition prepared for publication by Michael Everson, 2021.
JERRY, Colin W. P. (1978): *Kiaull yn Theay I. Manx Music and Songs for Folk Instruments*. Douglas: Yn Çheshaght Ghailckagh.
KELLY, Dollin (ed.) (2006): *New Manx Worthies*. Douglas: Manx National Heritage.

KERMODE, P. M. C. (1911). 'Report of the Archaeological Section'. *Proceedings of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society* I (1910-11): 267-269.
KERR, James (1875): *Kerr's First Collection of Merry Melodies*. Glasgow.
KOCH, John T. (2020): *Celto-Germanic. Later Prehistory and Post-Ptoto-Indo-European vocabulary in the North and West.* Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru.
MACQUARRIE, Charles W. (2015): 'The Isle of Man in Medieval Gaelic literature'. In: Seán Duffy & Harold Mytum (eds.) (2015): *A New History of the Isle of Man. Volume III The Medieval Period 1000-1406*. Liverpool: University Press, 281-304.
MADDRELL, Breesha (2002): 'Speaking from the Shadows: Sophia Morrison and the Manx Cultural Revival'. *Folklore* 113/2 (2002): 215-236.
MAIER, Bernhard (1998): *Dictionary of Celtic religion and culture.* Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press.
MCKILLOP, James (2000): Dictionary of Celtic Mythology. Oxford: Oxford University Press. First published 1998.
MILLER, Stephen (2015): *Letters from A. G. Gilchrist to Mona Douglas (1922-25)*. MNHL MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 21. Douglas: Manx National Heritage Library.
Ó BAOILL, Dónal (2010): 'Irish'. In: Martin Ball & Nicole Müller (eds.) (2010): *The Celtic Languages*. London & New York: Routledge, 163-229.
RATTER, William W. (1935-36):'Unst Boat Song'.*Old Lore Miscellany* 10 (1935-46): 241-244.
RENFREW, Colin (1987): *Archaeology and language: The puzzle of Indo-European origins*. London, Pimlico.
RENFREW, Colin (1990): 'Models of change in language and archaeology: "Old Europe" as a PIE linguistic area'. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 87 (1990): 103-178.
ROBERTSON, T. A. (ed.): *Da Sangs at A'll Sing ta Dee. A Book of Shetland Songs*. Lerwick: Shetland Folk Society.
SAXBY, Jessie M. E. (1932): *Shetland Traditional Lore*. Edinburgh: Grant & Murray.
SMITH, Alexander (1912): *A Summer in Skye*. Edinburgh.
TOLMIE, Frances (1911): '105 Songs'. *Journal of the Folksong Society* IV/16 (1911): 143-276.
URELAND, P. Sture & George BRODERICK (eds.) (1991): *Language Contact in the British Isles. Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium on Language Contact in Europe, Douglas, Isle of Man, 1988*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
VENDRYES, Josef. (1953-54): 'Manannan mac Lir'. *Études celtiques* 6 (1953-54): 239-254.
WAGNER, Heinrich (1981): 'Origins of pagan Irish religion'. *Ériu* 38 (1981): 1-28 (Manannán:15-24).

keltisch@uni-mannheim.de

APPENDIX
[tunes to be inserted here]

1. Tune to A Boat Song from Man.

2. Tune to A Boat Song from Arran.

3. Tune to A Boat Song from Skye.

4. Tune to A Boat Song from Shetland.