‘A NOXIOUS PACK’: HISTORICAL, LITERARY AND FOLKLORE TRADITIONS OF THE WOLF (*CANIS LUPUS*) IN THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

> … there were Wolves in this Country about 300 years ago; but now there are none. (Shaw 1882, iii: 16)

Recurrent and controversial plans to reintroduce – or as this process is now termed ‘rewilding’ – the wolf (*canis lupus*) to the Scottish Highlands has occasionally attracted a great deal of media as well as public attention over the years, some of which may be described as either misinformed at best, or merely prejudiced at worst. Recently published studies, on the other hand, have given the wolf a fairer treatment and have reached balanced arguments and observations based upon scientific analysis of successful pilot projects to rewild wolves in many parts of the world (Dennis 1998: 2; Holt 2001: 38−40; Taylor 1996: 12–15; Wilson 2004: 211–32). Nevertheless, the wolf has earned itself an unenviable reputation throughout most of Europe since medieval times and such entrenched attitudes are reflected in the cultural history of the Scottish Highlands. It is the purpose of this article to examine such attitudes to the wolf from the earliest iconographical material through to a unique poem from the *Book of the Dean of Lismore* (compiled in the early sixteenth century) as well as taking into account various references regarding wolves from historical, literary and folkloric sources.

Wolf Iconography

One of the earliest, if not the earliest depiction of a wolf in a Scottish context, is the famous Ardross Wolf (see fig. 1).[1] It is a Class I Pictish stone, originally recovered from a wall at Stitteham, Ardross, in the county of Ross and Cromarty.[2] It is an ornate carving of a wolf, striding along with a leisurely gait, tongue lolling, as if panting. The muscles are elaborated curvilinear lines, similar to the animate carvings of the Burghead bulls, and the Knocknagael boar. It represents a later, more artistic form, then flourishing in the early

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Pictish period, before the more sophisticated Class II and III forms of sculptures took over. Despite the various theories that have been propounded with regard to the symbolic meaning of Pictish animals on their stone carvings, it would seem that the most that can be said with any degree of certainty is that the wolf, as well as other animal forms, was important enough for both resources and time to be spent on such artistic endeavours. It is a fine sculpture through the economy of line that complements and animates the wolf to a level that can be seen on not a few Pictish carvings. Boece interpreted the use of such stones as memorials when he wrote that these sculpted stones 'wer engravit ymagerijs of dragonis, wolffis and vther bestis, because na inuencioun of l*ette*rez was in thais dayis, to put the dedis of Nobill men in memory' (Boece 1938–41, i: bk. 2, c. 6).

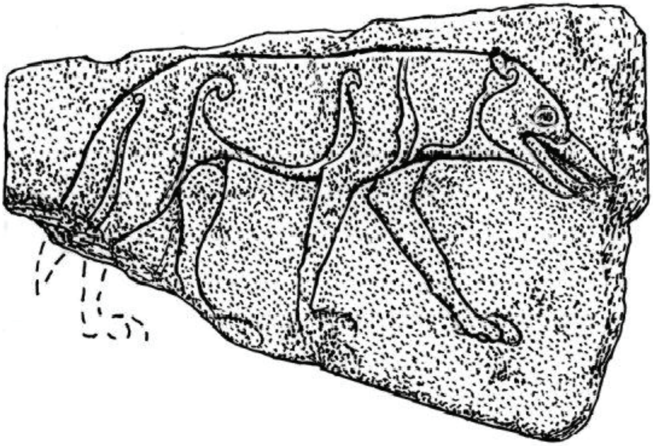

Fig 1: The Ardross Wolf,
courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient Historical Monuments of Scotland

Regarding a stone commemorating a certain Martin and his nine beautiful daughters, a tradition is recounted by the antiquarian John Pinkerton (1758–1826):

> … when this country was a forest, and […] was the habitation of wolves […] there lived a man whose name was Martin. He was

> blessed with a beautiful family of nine daughters, who were employed by their father in bringing water to slake his thirst […] Martin sent one of his daughters to the well for water, and she failing to return in the ordinary time, he sent another […] until all the nine were gone; and the unhappy father was then informed that they had been devoured by a dragon (alias, a wolf). Immediately Martin mounted his steed and proceeded to the fatal spot, where he encountered the murderer of his children. The animal fled, and Martin pursued, followed by some of his neighbours, who called out to him, “Strike, Martin:” hence the name of the district and parish *Strik-Martin*. At the distance of about two miles west from the well the victory was completed; and Martin transfixed the animal with his spear. On this spot is erected the stone […] bearing the representation of the last scene of the conflict; Martin on horseback, piercing a dragon with his spear … (Pinkerton 1830, ii: 425–26).

Despite the obvious folk etymology and the motifs present in this legend of how Martin is said to have lost his nine daughters, there remains a clear and present understanding of the dangerous menace that wolves were reputed to have, even though this has been metamorphosed into a dragon. It may well be that the wolf was identified with a dragon in order to raise its fearsome nature to such a degree in order to reinforce its demonic character (Pluskowski 2006: 152).

There is also a crude medieval carving that may be described as a wolf-slayer (using a bow) at Darnaway Castle in Moray (see fig. 2). Presumably what the archer is attacking is a wolf rather than a dog but such is the crudity of the carving’s zoomorphic detail that it makes it difficult to ascertain with certitude that the dog-like figure is an actual wolf.

Another notable sculpture of the wolf appears upon the St Andrews Sarcophagus,[3] dating from around the middle of the eighth century, representing at least one of the types of methods used to hunt down wolves during (and after) this period (see fig. 3). This topic will be revisited and discussed in more detail later in this paper.

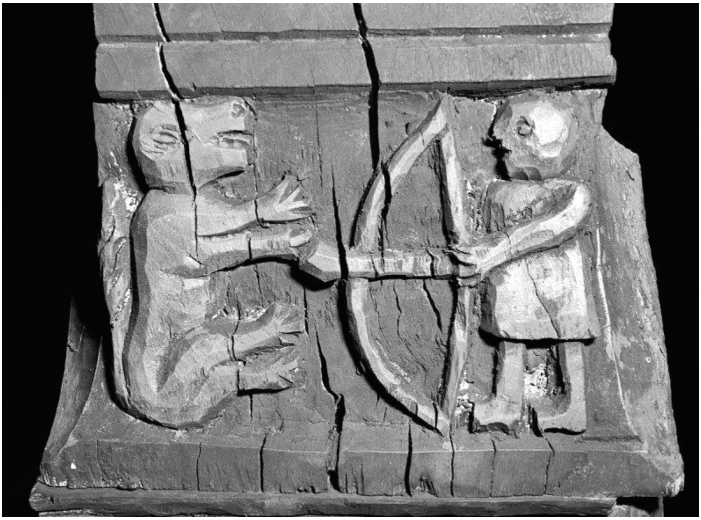

Fig 2: Wolf-slayer in Darnaway Castle,
courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient Historical Monuments of Scotland

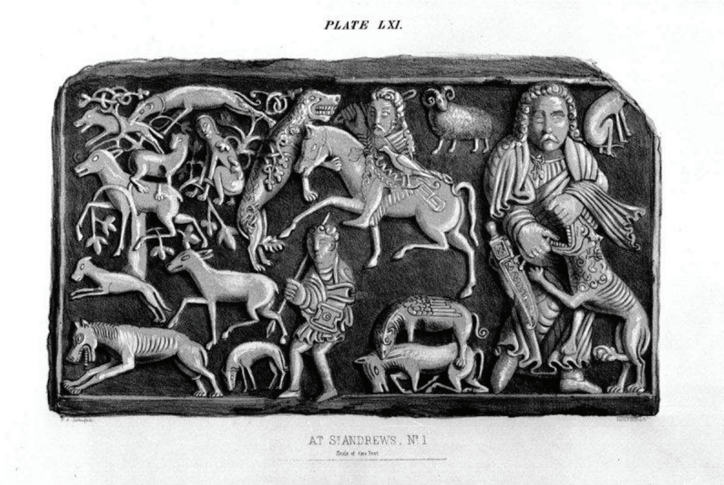

Fig 3: St Andrews Sarcophagus (from Stuart 1856-67, i: pl. LXI),
courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient Historical Monuments of Scotland

Lupine Etymologies and Personal Names

One of the most common Scottish Gaelic names for a wolf is, of course, *madadh allaidh* [wild dog] but there are other less commonly used words such as *cù-choille/coille-chù* [forest dog], *cù-fàsa(i)ch* [wilderness dog], or the more obscure *gladaman/ gladamair/ glaoidheaman*, as well as the more poetical *mac tìre* [son of the land/earth] (Forbes 1905: 227–30; Carmichael 1928–1971, ii: 255–56). As with the Anglo-Saxons, who named January *Wolf monat*, ‘wolf-time’ (Harting 1880: 123), the Gaels used a lupine association for the last fortnight of winter and the first fortnight of spring, corresponding to January, known as am Faoilteach or am Faoilleach, also meaning the wolf-time, or the month of wolf ravaging (Black 1985: 4–5). It seems likely that this concept ultimately derives from *fáel* (later *faol*), that is ‘wolf’ (*DIL*, s.vv. *faíleach*, *fuidlech*). Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912), that great collector of oral traditions and folklore, stated that ‘here we see myths in the making’ when he commented upon a proverb that he had taken down:

> Tri la luchar ’s an Fhaoilleach,
> Tri la Faoilleach ’s an luchar.
>
> Three days of Dog-days in Wolf-month,
> Three days of Wolf-month in Dog-days.
> (Carmichael 1928–1971, ii: 275)

Carmichael was well aware that Faoilleach/Faoilteach/Faoiltheachd could mean ‘the Carnival Season’, but also that it was a folk etymology stemming from *faol*, ‘the wolf-month’ as ‘during this proverbially hard period the wolf, driven from wood and mountain, approached dwellings.’ (*ibid.*: 275).

Regarding personal names, some but not all instances of the surname Shaw (in Gaelic Seathach), derive from *sitheach*, an old Gaelic word for wolf (Black 1962: 721). This name is old for the *Book of Deer*, dating from the tenth century, mentions Donnachac mac Síthig toesech clenni Morghainn (‘Duncan mac Síthech, toísech of Clann Morgan’) (*ibid.*: 721). Other variants of the name are MacGhittich and perhaps also an Argyllshire one, MacGhilleSheathanaich (*ibid.* 496). Another surname, connected with St Fillan, is MacGilleFhaolain, or MacLellan and Gilfinnan (as well as other variants) which all stem from *faolan* (*ibid.*: 470). There is also a further double diminutive represented by MacGilleFhaolagain or MacKilligan (MacBain: 1897–98: 155), meaning 'son of the servant of Faolagan' (Black 1962: 529).

Sliochd a' Mhadaidh Allaidh ('The Race of the Wolf')

The Wolf McDonalds or *Sliochd a' Mhadaidh Allaidh*, of whom the writer can claim descent, is one of two McDonald families from Braemar in the Aberdeenshire Highlands, the other sept were called the Fir McDonalds, or the *Giuthasaich*. A feral legend informs the story of how a child of widow McDonald was snatched away by a wolf and was suckled by it. The boy was later reintroduced into civilisation and, as the local Braemar historian, John Grant (1830–1884), puts it:

> He took no offence at his re-establishment among the human race, to which, it was proved, he belonged; but he had decided objection to return to his mother, choosing rather the society of a young damsel of his captor's family, in a bothy put up on their behoof. He reproached that mother in after-time thus: –
>
> A bhean ud anns a' bhail' thall,
> Chuir coin a' bhaile air mo lorg
> Ged do dh' òl mi bainne do chìche,
> Is laigh mi naoi mìos nad bholg.
>
> (Wife of the farm yonder,
> You put the dogs of the town on my track,
> Though I drank the milk of your breast,
> And lay nine months in your womb.)

At the time of writing he relates that there were three families in Braemar – one at Altchlar, one at Ardearg, Corriemulzie, and the third in Glen Cluny itself – all of whom were descendants of this hero.

This legend is a clearly a localised version of the classical myth of the founders of Rome, the twins Remus and Romulus and probably brought to the British Isles by the Romans (Pluskowski 2006: 145–49). An early example from Irish mythology concerns Cormac mac Airt, one of the most famous of the high kings, who, after his birth, was stolen away by a she-wolf and suckled along with her other cubs in its lair (MacKillop 1998: 93–94). This legend is the pre-eminent example of feral children in mythology. Feral children (that is, a child who has been bereft of all human contact) are often depicted in mythology and fiction as having strength, intelligence and morals superior to ‘normal’ humans, the implication being that because of their upbringing they represent humanity in a pure and uncorrupted state. The abandoned twin brothers Romulus and Remus, raised by a wolf, eventually become the founders of Rome. Also there appears to be a far deeper substratum of the theme of twins in mythology, and this might involve the duality of twin gods that appear as a structuring principle in the Aegean and in northern Europe that is apparent by as early as the middle of the second millennium BC and this in turn may have had a possible manifestation in Indo-European religion. Parallel evidence from texts of a dual, divine leadership in Rome, Scandinavia and India was demonstrated as early as 1940 by George Dumézil in his study *Mitra-Varuna*. In the case of the Wolf McDonalds the lupine association would have provided not only a heroic status but also a powerful factor with regard to personal identity.

Charms and Spells Against Wolves

It is entirely understandable, given the predatory nature of the wolf, and especially given the reliance of a rural population upon livestock, that saints’ names should be invoked with reference to divine supplications that plead for protection against such a deadly foe as the wolf:

O Mhanuis mo ruin,
Is tu dheanadh dhuinn iul,
A chuirp chubhraidh nan dul,
Cuimhnuich oirnn.

Cuimhnuich a naoimh nam buadh,
A chomraig ’s a chomhn an sluagh,
Cobhair oirnne n’ ar truaigh,
’S na treig sinn.

Tog ar seilbh mach ri leirg,
Casg coin ghioirr us coin dheirg,
Cum uainn fuath, fath, feirg,
Agus foirne.

O Magnus of my love,
Thou it is who would’st us guide,
Thou fragrant body of grace.
Remember us.

Remember us, thou Saint of power,
Who didst encompass and protect the people.
Succour thou us in our distress.
Nor forsake us.

Lift our flocks to the hills.
Quell the wolf and the fox,
Ward from us spectre, giant, fury,
And oppression. (Carmichael 1928–1971, i: 178–79)[4]

The reference to St Magnus is noteworthy for, according to a story told in *Magnúss Saga Iengri*, dating to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, the saint is said to have brought back to life ‘a man who had been consumed and regurgitated by wolves in Norway’ (Pluskowski 2006: 168).

In a version of Sian Bride (St Bride’s Charm), also collected by Carmichael, the wolf, among other predators, is mentioned:

Bho mhada-ruadh nan cuireid,
Bho mhada-ulai a Mhaim,
Bho thaghan tocaidh na tuide,
’S bho mhaghan udail a mhais.

> From the fox of the wiles,
> From the wolf of the Mam,
> From the foul-smelling fumart,
> And from the bear of uneasy hip.
> (Carmichael 1928–1971, ii: 34–5)[5]

Other examples of wolf references were also collected by Carmichael such as Uibe ri Shul (‘Spell of the Evil Eye’) where Mary is implored to protect the supplicant from any loss: Air ficiall coin-ghiorr / Air siadhadh coin-ghiorr (‘Against the teeth of wolf / Against the testicles of wolf’) (*ibid*., ii: 52–53).[6] This is replicated almost word for word in Ob ri Shul (‘Spell of the Eye’):

> Ob a chuir Moire mhor-gheal
> Gu Bride mhin-gheal,
> Air muir, air tir, air li, ’s rachd fharmaid,
> Air fiacail coin-ghiorr, ’s air siadha coin-ghearr.
>
> The spell the great white Mary sent
> To Bride the lovely fair,
> For sea, for land, for water, and for withering glance.
> For teeth of wolf, for testicle of wolf
> (*ibid*., ii: 68–9)[7]

Another example, Am Beannachd Lombaidh (‘The Clipping Blessing), may be given where a shepherd implores higher powers to protect his newly-shorn flock from dangerous predators, including the wolf: Bho ’n mhi-chu us bho ’n an-chu, / Bho ’n mhac-tir ’s bho ’n mhadhan stig (‘From the evil dog and from the fox, / From the wolf and the sly bear’) (*ibid*., i: 292–93).[8] So, too, a very similar supplication is made in Gleidheadh Treuid (‘Guarding the Flocks’), imploring Mary, Bride, Columba, Maolrithe and Carmac to protect flocks of sheep from both fox and wolf (*ibid*., i: 280–81).[9] Carmichael adds some detail, relating that on such special occasions when quarter bannocks (made on the first day of the season) were consumed and they would then throw a piece over each shoulder imploring protection from wolf predation specifically with relation to sheep (*ibid*., i: 208–9).

A medical compendium, dating to between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, compiled by the Mull Beatons, contains a 'thread charm' against wolves beginning 'Artha in tsnaiti dheirg …' (NLS Adv. MS.72.1.2: fol. 102^{v}) and was effectual if placed under the door or threshold.

These various blessing and charms strongly suggest that from an early period – and given that the large-scale introduction of sheep to the Highlands only took place during the later half of the eighteenth century, and more intensely during the first half of the nineteenth century – that Highlanders perceived the wolf, and not without good reason, as a very real and serious threat not only to themselves but, more importantly, to their livestock and their livelihoods. The wolf came in for special treatment due to their tendency to indulge in surplus killing of livestock – that is far from concentrating on one animal, they would kill and mutilate many and leave them injured or dying as well as dispersing herds (Pluskowksi 2006: 29).

Wolf Legends

One of the earliest legendary mentions of the wolf in a hagiographical context is in the story told about St Fillan (Fáelán) when he was working in some fields in Glen Dochart in Perthshire – known by at least the fourteenth century as Strathfillan due to its association with the saint (Taylor 2001: 192–3). The text is taken from the *Leganda* in the *Aberdeen Breviary*, the first book to have been printed in Scotland (1509 and 1510). The book was compiled under the supervision of William Elphinstone (1431–1514), Bishop of Aberdeen and founding father of the University of Aberdeen:

> While he was building the church in the place shown him by heavenly inspiration, when his oxen were unyoked from their wagons, a fierce and greedy wolf [*lupus uorax et ferus*] one night killed one of the oxen and ate it; and in the morning when he did not have an ox which could take the place of the one which had been killed, he poured out a prayer to God, and that very wolf came back as if tame and submitted itself to the yoke of the

> plough along with the other oxen. And it remained until the said church had been completed, pulling with the rest of them, after which it returned to its usual nature … (Taylor 2001: 201)

This perhaps can best be described as a parable rather than a legendary account but it also seems that such a story is informed by way of a folk etymology of the saint’s name, Féalán (‘little wolf’) (Anon. 1919: 15). It may be added that Robert the Bruce’s special devotion to St Fillan inspired the king to (re-)establish a priory at Kirkton of Strathfillan in 1318 (Stuart 1876–78: 134–82). A similar type of legend is also told of at least three other saints. St Kentigern, alias St Mungo, is also said to have tamed wolves in a similar manner to St Fillan (Hardy 1856–62: 272). It is said that St Fechin, an Irish hermetic saint, tamed a wolf that had killed a calf belonging to his mother. He then bound it to a stone and greyhoundes, to chase and pursue wild beastes, and namely the Woolfe the herdsmans foes, by means whereof his advancement was muche the more acceptable amongst the Nobles, who in those dayes were whollye gyven to that kynde of pleasure and pastyme …' (Boece 1938–41, i: bk. 5: 27). Further, Bellenden, in his translation of Boece, also notes that 'wild hors' along with the 'Wolffis' inhabit the Caledonian forests; and says of the wolves that they are 'rycht noysum to the tame bestiall in all partis of Scotland …' (Harting 1880: 160)

Legend has it that in 1010, when King Malcolm II, or Máel Coluim mac Cináeda (*r.* 1005–1034), returning from Mortlach after gaining victory over Danish invaders, was attacked by an immense wolf in Stochet forest, on the bounds of Aberdeen. The monarch was saved from the ferocious wolf only by the presence of mind of a younger son of Donald of the Isles, who wrapped his plaid around his left arm and hand, and who then thrust his muffled hand in the 'gaunt grey' brute's gaping mouth, while at the same time stabbing it to death with his dirk for which he was rewarded a grant of the neighbouring lands of Skene (Ritchie 1920: 116).[10] The founder of the Robertsons (Clann Donnchaidh), Donnchadh Reamhair (*b. c.* 1275), was also, it is said, 'largely instrumental in clearing the Atholl Highlands of wolves, for which public service he received a grant of lands in the district, and also an augmentation to his armorial bearings' (Robertson 1929: 11).[11]

'A Noxious Pack': a poem from the Book of the Dean of Lismore

There is a unique Gaelic poem entitled *Beannuigh do Theaghlach, a Thríonóid* ('O Trinity, Bless Your People') on the destruction of wolves that survives in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*, composed by Giolla Críost Táilliúr (*fl.* 1450). Opening with a plea to higher powers to bring down destruction upon such a war-like band of savages, the poet brings to the fore the reasons why such a supplication should be heard and acted upon:

> Malluigh na sealga is an mhortlaidh
>   itheas eich, caoirigh is cruidh,
> do chuir druim ré fód na faithche:
>   sgaoiltear cinn an ghasraidh dhuibh.

Atá gasradh mhadadh mhaslach
    ar láthair Inse Alt Airt:
lán trudair iad, tréig, a Thríonóid,
    curstar iad dod mhíondóid bhailc.

Giodh iomdha craiceann chon allta
    againn um chláirsigh ’s um chruit,
cha teirce claigeann fuar falamh
    againn ón chuain alla uilc.

Curse the hunts and slaughter,
which devour horses and cattle and sheep,
which strewed backs on the sod of the meadow,
    let the heads of the black legion be cleft.

An abusive wolf-pack is on location
    about the meadow of Arthur’s Burn;
O God, abandon them, utter abominations,
    let them be cursed by your mighty gentle hand.

Though we have many a wolfskin
    covering up harp or lyre,
not fewer the skulls, cold and empty,
    we possess from that wild evil pack.
(McLeod & Bateman 2007: 236–7)

The poet continues by evoking the elements (snow drifts from Lochaber to Renfrew) upon the roaming wolf packs and where he fervently wishes to see ashes from their burning carcasses. He then praises mac Roibeirt (Eòin Stiùbhart, son of Sir Robert of Rannoch) for successfully hunting this vermin from the north-western borders of Perthshire to the wilds of Rannoch Moor. The poet then proceeds to depict graphically a massacre that he would like to see Eòin Stiùbhart execute (presumably with extreme prejudice):

A bhfuil ó Bheinn Ghuilbinn ghreanta
    do mhadradh suas gu sruth Toilbh,

bhíos ar sealgaibh síos ag suidhe,
deargár ó Chríost uile oirbh.

Go gcluininn ’s mé i nInbhir Nise
míolchoin *ag* sgaoileadh na sgonn;
mairg mán iadh baladh na mbuicneach:
go n-iadh galar tuitmeach trom.

Sgamhach conach aillse is acais
ar lucht marbhtha na ngreagh nglas;
Mac Dé le croidhe nau [ ]
snoidheadh an chuain ainmheach as.

Loisg gach saobhaidh tha i Sídh Chailleann,
a Eóin Stiúbhairt na stéad mbras,
más fior uaim gur sreathach srannmhor
an chuain ghreannach ghreannmhor ghlas.

Ar ghardha Eóin stéidghil Stiúbhairt
cha léir dhomh cabar gan cheann,
is iad ar chollaibh cas corrach,
an chonairt ghlas mhongach bheann.

Every wolf from fair Beinn Ghuilbinn,
up to the river Tolve,
who hunt by waiting on their haunches,
may Christ send destruction on you all.

Deerhounds tearing the brutes asunder,
would that I’d hear it in Inverness;
woe to him wrapped in the stink of goatskins,
soon he’ll be wrapped in epileptic fits.

May murrain, rabies, cancer, poison
strike the slaughterers of the grey herds;
may God’s son with new purpose
lop away that misshapen brood.

Burn out every lair that is in Schiehallion,
O Eòin Stiùbhart of the swift steeds;
so that snarling ugly grey brood, If I'm truthful,
will lie snoring in serried rows.

On Eòin-of-bright-steeds Stiùbhart's ramparts
I see no stake without head;
the grey hairy pack from the mountains
on sharp-pointed hazel staves.
(McLeod & Bateman 2007: 236–9)

A similar sentiment appears in *The Dunkeld Litany* where some pre-Reformation Latin lines implore the protection of the Almighty from lupine predation: 'A cateranis et latronibus […] Libera nos Domine / A lupis et omni mala bestia […] Libera nos Domine' (Forbes 1872: lxii) – 'From caterans and robbers […] Lord deliver us / from wolves and all wild beasts […] Lord deliver us.'

William J. Watson offers a tentative identification and suggests that the John Stewart cited here is the same as the Eòin Stiùbhart, son of Sir Robeirt Stiùbhart, 'from the bounds of Rannoch', addressed in *Cóir Feitheamh ar Uaislibh Alban* ('It is Right to Serve the Nobles of Scotland') (McLeod & Bateman 2007: 108–13). Watson then proceeds by stating that he may be identified with John Stewart of Garth and Fortingall in Perthshire, recorded in a charter of Fortingall in 1455, and who died at Garth in 1475. It had been argued by Duncan Campbell, a local historian, that the poem can be interpreted as a political allegory of the capture of King James I's murderers, who was assassinated in Perth in 1437, by Robert Reoch (*Riabhach*) Duncanson (*mac Dhonnchaidh*) of Struan and John Gorm Stewart, ancestor of the Stewarts of Garth, and who was a son of the Wolf of Badenoch and Janet Menzies. In respect of their endeavours to see justice being done, the former received a grant of the Barony of Struan in 1451, while the latter received a substantial money payment (Campbell 1888: 154–7). Whether or not the poet is literally referring to wolves is not the case in point for the perception of this 'noxious pack' of wolves, as translated by Watson, is one of both fear and loathing. The phenomenon of the wolf as an outlaw has a long tradition in European literature.

Despite the sustained treatment of wolves in the above poem, other references to the wolf in the surviving canon of Scottish Gaelic literature are scarce. A further extract taken from *Cumha ceathair do mheasg mé* ('The grief for four has bewildered me') may be given, written in 1636 in classical Gaelic by Cathal MacMhuirich (*c*.1618–*c*.1661), who was a rather sophisticated intellectual of the bardic school and a hereditary Clanranald bard. This elegy concerns four chiefs of Clanranald, namely two Ronalds, Iain, and Donald, who all died in the year in which it was composed:

Doimen*ma* abfuighlibh le fíoch
ní clui*nn*ter ceileabhr*adh* cúach
nert ga*n* cheill do ghabh a*n* gháoth
sreabh os fhraoch ag béin a bruach

The wolves are truly ill-disposed,
the notes of the cuckoo are not heard,
The wind has assumed a maddened force
The rivers run over the heath carrying away the banks.
(Cameron 1892–94, ii: 240–41)

Historical Sources and Royal Acts of Parliament

The Gaelic poem from the *Book of the Dean of Lismore* and Latin litany must be taken into the context of an Act of the Scots Parliament, passed in 1427/8, during the reign of King James I (*r*. 1406–1437):

> … it is statute and ordanit be the king […] that ilk barone within his baronry in gaynande tym of the yere gar serss and seik the quhelppis of the wolfis and ger sla thaim […] thee baron sal gif to the man at slais thaim in his baronry and bringis the baron the hede ii ss. Ande quhen the baron ordanis to hunt and chase the wolfis the tenandry sal riss with the barone under the payn of ane weddir to ilk man […] Ande at thee baronis hunt in thare baronryis and chase the wolfis four tymis in the here ande also oft

> as ony wolfe beis sene within the barony. Ande at na man sek the wolfis with schote bot allanerly in the tymis of hunting of thaim. (*APS*, ii: 15–16, c. 5)

It is interesting to note the latter clause for, although it is clear that the king and nobility wished to get rid of such a lupine nuisance, they were also unwilling to completely abandon hunting them by legally proscribing the times of year in which the wolf was deemed fair game. It remains unclear, however, whether any resources were actually put in place to enforce such legal restrictions on wolf-hunting. This statute was later re-enacted in 1457, again in 1525, and finally in 1577. The act of 1525 was merely a revised statement of the statute of 1425, which the 1457 styles as ‘the auld act made tharon’ (Hardy 1856–62: 277). It was during King James II’s reign (*r*. 1437–1460), when the revised act was passed in 1457/8, probably due to the dilatoriness of the barons in obeying the previous edict, ordaining that, in those districts where wolves were known to be, the sheriff or the bailies should gather the populace three times in the cub season, between St Mark’s day and Lammas (from 25 April to 1 August), upon pain of a wedder for each non-appearance. The reward to the killer of each wolf was six shillings and sixpence, from the baron or sheriff to whom the head was presented, and one penny from each householder of the parish where the wolf was killed (*APS*, ii: 51–52, c. 35).[12] In 1497/8, during the reign of King James IV (*r*. 1488–1513), the Lords of Council at Inverness enacted that if anyone brought a wolf’s head to the sheriff, either the bailie or the sheriff was to see that the person received 1d from every fifth household of the parish:

> … be proclaymt that quhat ever he be that bring [is a theif] or a sornare or a man at the Kingis horne to the schiref of the [?]schyre or slais ane ald wolf and bringis his hede to the schiref, he sal haf of ilk fywe house of the parischin that the theif, sornare or man at the Kingis horne is takin in or that the ald wolf is slane, as sade is, a penny; and that the schiref or bailze of that parischin sall ger this dewite be payit to the doare. (*APS*, ii: 101)

It was further enacted that when a wolf was located, the hue and cry was to be raised and penalties – to be collected by the lord or bailie – for not joining the chase were heavier on the second and third offences than for all other such offences in the above Acts of Parliament. If the lord or bailie failed in this then a fine of £20 would be imposed by the justice ayre (*ibid.*: 102).

The necessity of raising a general hue and cry after marauding wolves led to the general establishment of kennels of wolf-hounds and even to the definition in leases of the duties of tenants on that very score. So the monks of Coupar Angus Abbey in a lease of part of the lands of Innerarity, dated 14 April 1483, bound the occupier to 'obey the officers rising in the defences of the country to wolf, thief, and sorners', and many leases enforced the maintenance of 'ane leash of good hounds, with ane couple of rachis for tod and wolf' (Ritchie 1920: 118; Miller 1860: 65). That wolves were meted out the same treatment as thieves and common outlaws illustrates the danger which wolves posed in fifteenth-century Scotland, especially in the Highlands where they are said to have predominated.

In a rather strange document, *A Proposal for Uniting Scotland with England, Addressed to King Henry VIII* (1543), by a Caithness priest, John Elder, who, on the death of King James V journeyed to the English court to present a project for the union of the two kingdoms, the author entreats the English monarch to understand the Gaels as hardy hunters:

> … that we of all people can tollerat, suffir, and away best with colde, for boithe somer and wyntir […] goynge alwaies bair leggide and bair footide, our delite and pleasure is not onely in hwntynge of redd deir, wolfes, foxes, and graies […] but also in rynninge, leapinge, swymmynge, shottyne, and thrawinge of dartis: therfor, in so moche as we vse and delite so to go alwaies, the tendir delicatt gentillmen of Scotland call ws Reddshankes. (Gregory & Skene 1847: 28)

A later description of wolves, from William Camden's *Britannia* (1588), emphasises the danger that they were to both livestock and men in Strathnaver, in the Reay country:

> The country itselfe […] by reason of the sharpe and cold aire lesse inhabited: and thereupon sore haunted and annoied by most cruell wolues. Which in such violent rage not only set upon cattaile to the exceeding great dammage of the inhabitants, but also assaile men with great danger, and not in this tract onely, but in many other parts likewise of Scotland, in so much, as by vertue of an act of Parliament, the Sheriffes and inhabitants in every Country are commanded to goe forth thrice a yeere a hunting, for to destroy the wolues and their whelpes (Camden 1610: 54).

As late as 1577, King James VI ordained an Act that there should be a wolf-hunt in each barony three times a year, following severe losses of cattle from marauding wolves not only in Sutherland but doubtless elsewhere (Mackay & Boyd 1911–14, i: 192). It is recorded that an ox was slain by a predatory wolf pack between ‘Esse and Cullodyn’ in 1570 and that a subsequent act was raised (*ibid.* i: 197). Years later, as related by Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun (1580–1656), the wolf was included amongst the wild animals of Sutherland. He describes the forests and ‘schases’ in that country as ‘verie profitable for feiding of bestiall, and delectable for hunting, being full of reid deer and roes, woulffs, foxes, wyld catts, brocks …’ (Gordon 1813: 3). Another account supports this view of Strathnaver:

> This contrey is exceedinglie weel stored with fishes both from the sea and its own rivers. as also of deer, roe and dyvers kinds of wild beasts, specially heir never lack wolves, more then ar expedient. (Macfarlane 1906–08, ii: 559)

A further entry describes the threat of these beasts and emphasises, probably with some exaggeration, how densely the area was populated by them:

> The violence and number of most rapacious wolves which here, prowling about wooded and pathless tracts, cause great loss of beasts and sometimes of men, are such that, driven from almost all the rest of the island, they seem to have fixed their lairs and their homes here. Assuredly they are nowhere so plentiful (*ibid.*, ii: 454).

By 1621, lupine predation in Sutherland was still to the fore, and thus a reward for the destruction of any surviving wolves had risen to 'six poundis threttein shillings four pennies gieven […] to Thomas Gordoune for the killing of ane wolff …' (HMC 1874: 179). This was an enormous sum for that time, showing that money was no object in ridding the land of this particular vermin. In 1661 'woolf skins' make an appearance in the Customs Roll of King Charles II, when two ounces of silver were paid 'for ilk two dacker', i.e. ten or twelve skins (Murray 1681: 39).[13]

Unlike other types of hunting which were limited to a select few, the destruction of roaming wolf packs enjoined the whole populace to extinguish them both root and branch. There are a few references in *The Black Book of Taymouth* where a rental of 1594 tells of a wolf killing a two-year-old cow. A discharge of the same year records that a wolf killed four mares and a one-year-old horse. A decade later an entry for the 'household garderob' records four wolf skins (Innes 1855: 289, 298, 339). As late as 1621, such was the menace of wolves that a monetary fine was imposed upon the tenants of Breadalbane if they proved unwilling to provide assistance, as recounted in the Barony Court Book of Glenorchy, where 'euirie tennent within the saidis boundis respectiue mak four croscattis of irone for slaying of the wolff yeirly in tyme cuming, under the paine of four pundis of money toties quoties incais of failyie.' (Innes 1895: 356) A crocatt was specifically designed as a stabbing spear with a short cross-piece set back from the point in order to prevent it passing through a wolf's body, thereby decreasing the risk of injury to the hunter through close contact (Blackmore 1971: 88–93). Despite such measures, the loss of cattle through wolf predation continued, for, on 20 February 1622, John Dow McInstalker in Cloichran sued Patrick McNab of Suie for taking his own hired herd, and for the loss of three cows slain by a wolf (Gillies 1938: 259). The widespread practice of transhumance – taking cattle to higher pasturing grounds (shielings) during the summer – meant that livestock became more vulnerable to wolf predation and also the likelihood of contact with humans was increased.

A century earlier Raphael Holinshed (*c.* 1520–1580) mentions different animal species to be found in medieval Scotland and describes the kind of depredations inflicted by wolves: ‘… in the fieldes and wilde places of the countrey there is great plenty of Hares, red Dere, Fallow dere, Roes, wilde Horses, Wolfes and Foxes […] The Wolves are most fierce and noysome unto the heardes and flockes in all partes of Scotland […] where these beastes do no maner of hurt unto the domesticall cattell, but pray onely upon the wilde’ (Holinshed 1577, i, bk. 2: 10). Holinshed also notes that wolves had became so dangerous in the time of Queen Mary that it became necessary to erect overnight refuges for the safety of travellers in the Highlands, which were termed Spittals, hence the Spittal of Glenshee, on the Devil’s Elbow road from Blairgowrie to Braemar, as well as other places similarly named (Harting 1880: 125, 166–7). Such was the fear instilled by wolves that their presence was remembered in folk memory:

> There were recently alive in Loch-Aber old people who related, from their predecessors, that, when all the country from the Lochie to Loch-Erroch was covered by a continuous pine forest, the eastern tracts upon the Black-water and the wide wilderness, stretching towards Rannoch, were so dense, and infested by the rapid droves, that they were almost impassable (Stuart & Stuart 1848, ii: 232).

Tradition relates that Lord Lovat’s wife, Lady Margaret Lyon, ‘was a stout bold woman. A great hunter, she would have traveled in our hills afoot, and perhaps outwearyed good footmen. She purged Mount Capplach of the wolves; there is a seat there called *Ellig ni Baintearn* …’ (Fraser 1905: 110). Further, an etymology of *Eileag na Baintighearna* is offered: *Eileag* appears to have been specially applied to great V-shaped enclosures, open at both ends, into which deer entered by the wide opening, and were shot down as they were driven through the narrow opening. The ruins of such a contrivance is still to be seen at Eilean Bad-a’-challaidh, in the parish of Kincardine, Ross-shire. Lady Lovat’s *Eileag* was probably at or near the place now know as Carn na Baintearn (Lady’s Cairn), Caiplich (*ibid.*: 110). The period of her repression of wolves is indicated by the succession of her husband to the Lordship of Lovat, which took place in 1450, and it is therefore probable that the 'purging' of 'Mount Capplach' was begun around this time. So hunting was not the male preserve that is commonly attributed to such a sport as the local populace had to thank one of the ladies of Lovat for clearing the wolves from the mountain range of Caiplich, lying between Loch Ness and the Aird.

Such purges may have worked in the short-term. Nonetheless the great swathe of Caledonian forest gave shelter and sustenance to the general 'head' of wolves, where they seem to have flourished. During King James V's reign their number and ravages were formidable. Great parts of Ross-shire, Inverness-shire, nearly the whole of Cromarty, and large parts of Perthshire and Argyll, were covered with forests of pine, birch, and oak, the remains of which can still be seen in Braemar, Invercauld, Rothiemurchus, Arisaig, the banks of Loch Ness, Glen Strathfarrar, the glens of Lochaber and Loch Errocht, around Rannoch Moor, and the hills of Ardgour (Macfarlane 1906–08, ii: 192). However, during the reign of Mary Queen of Scots (*r.* 1542–1587), the wolf-plague, which had been gradually coming to a crisis, spread unprecedented devastation.

Wolves, it was said, when pinched by hunger, ransacked churchyards and feasted on newly buried corpses they unearthed. Along the tract of Eddrachillis, in northwest Sutherland, the inhabitants were constrained to transfer the burial of their dead to the adjacent Isle of Handa in order to put an end to such depredations (Hardy 1856–62: 283). Similar types of traditions are also related regarding other burial isles around the Highlands: Loch Awe, in Argyll (Harting 1880: 183), on Inch Maree in Loch Maree (MacCulloch 1824, ii: 301; Dixon 1886: 403) in Ross-shire and also in Loch Leven, at Eilean Munda (J. 1817: 340; Fairweather 1974: 9), lying opposite Ballachulish in Argyllshire. Neither were corpses safe in Perthshire where it was the former custom in Atholl to bury the dead in coffins made up of five flagstones in order 'to preserve the corps from the wolves' (*OSA*, 12: 107); and in Ross-shire at Cladh nan Sasannach, at the head of Loch Maree (Dixon 1886: 84–85). According to tradition, cairns were built in Assynt to 'prevent […] numerous wolves from devouring the bodies of their departed relations' (*OSA*, 18: 318) and also for a similar reason at Kiltearn in

Ross-shire (*OSA*, 17: 499). The Rev. Alexander Falconer, minister of Eddrachillis, relates, though curiously making no mention of Handa, that brochs had been used as cemeteries ‘down to the present times, which practice had its arise probably from their being a security from the ravages of wolves’ (*OSA*, 18: fn 406–7).

Records concerning wolves in the Highlands are fairly frequent during the sixteenth century, although by 1570 difficulty was reported in procuring wolfskins, as a piece of correspondence written by Alexander Clark to the Countess of Moray relates: ‘As for the Wolf skins ye wrute for I could get na knowledge of ony at the present […] Gif ony can be gottin I sall do gud weel to satisfy …’ (Anderson 1967, i: 275) Nevertheless, the wolf’s bad reputation continued long in folk memory as recounted by the Rev. Joseph MacIntyre for an entry on Glenorchy and Inishail:

> Formerly, the wolf had his haunts in our wilds and mountains, and not only proved fatal to the cattle, but, when impelled by hunger, or inflamed with rage […] made depredations on the human species. It is said, that, in the year 1680, the last wolf in Britain was killed by Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochiel (*OSA* 8: 117).

Towards the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries an effort to get rid of the wolf menace in the Highlands was made by either cutting down or burning large tracts of forest. It is recorded that: ‘the old people still retain traditions of the native clearances […] when great tracts of forest south of Loch-Treig, and upon the Black-water, were set on fire to exterminate wolves’ (Stuart & Stuart 1848, ii: 221). The mobility of roaming wolf packs is dependent upon food sources, shelter, habitat and the relative pressure of trapping and hunting in any given particular area. Resorting to such a drastic action would have been counter-productive for not only would such devastation have destroyed wood – a resource that was becoming commercially viable – but also the habitat for other wildlife such as red deer.

Hunting Wolves

The earliest indication of wolf-hunting techniques – *par force* in this case – dates from the surviving side panel of the St Andrews Sarcophagus (see fig. 3). Moving from right to left, the scene shows a figure (the biblical David) rending a lion's jaw, a mounted hunter lavishing his sword in readiness to strike down at a leaping lion, and a shield-carrying huntsman on foot, armed with a spear and assisted by a scenting hound, in the act of attacking a rather fearsome-looking wolf (Henderson 1998: 110–13). This method was the preserve of the nobility but humbler and more practical methods were resorted to by those who could afford neither expensive equipment nor manpower.

There are also tantalisingly brief mentions of wolves in medieval records. In 1263 the Sheriff of Stirling was employed in repairing and extending the Royal Park in the burgh, and in connection with a payment by the Treasurer made twenty years later, it is related that a wolf-hunter was employed by King Alexander III (*r.* 1249–1286) (Harting 1880: 161).

Despite references to wolves in the Highlands after the late-medieval period, they seldom mention the techniques used to trap or hunt them down. It is generally understood that a few well-recognised expedients were probably used to hunt down wolves such as *par force* hunting but also trapping, wolf-pits, netting and poisoned bait would have been put to use, which although far more practical and less dangerous, they probably proved to be more efficient and effective methods (Cummins 2001: 132–41).

Bishop Leslie (1527–1596) of Ross mentions the wolf, in same breath as the hart, as one of the 'gretter beistes' (Leslie 1888–95, i: 20)

> […] Throuch thir woddis the gretter parte of the nobilitie hest hair maist recreatione in hunting with the sluthe-hundes. for that, this recreatione hes our cuntrey me*n* ather in the feildes to hunte the hair and the fox, or the sandes and water brayes the Brok, or in the mountains the Wolfe, or the Wilkatt. Bot the harte, the Dae and the Rae principallie w^{t} sluthehundes ar hunted and with vthiris swofte dogs called grewhundes (*ibid.*, i: 7).

Given that wolf predation on livestock had a far greater detrimental effect on rural populations, any solution to such a problem would not only have to be a practical but also a cost-effective one. Sending out huntsmen to track down wolf packs with hounds may have been resorted to when predation was at its most intense and, by and large, such a resort would have been only a supplement to more reliable methods as using poisoned bait, trapping and netting.

Some four years after the passing of the 1525 act, in 1529 the Earl of Atholl held a tinchel that lasted a whole three days in the Forest of Atholl for the entertainment of King James V (*r.* 1513–1542), accompanied by his mother, Queen Margaret (1489–1541), and the Papal nuncio. Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie (*c.* 1500–1565) in *The Historie and Chronicles of Scotland, 1436–1565* provides a description: ‘It is said, at this tyme, in Atholl and Stratherdaill boundis, thair was slaine threttie scoir of hart and hynd, with other small beastis, sick as roe and roebuck, woulff, fox and wyld cattis …’ (Linsday 1814, ii: 346).

Likewise, in August 1564, Queen Mary and her court went on progress, and after being entertained by the Earl of Atholl for a fortnight events culminated in a great hunt. As many as three hundred and sixty deer were slaughtered, and afterwards there were gourmet banquets of ‘all kynd of delicattis that culd be gottin.’ This royal entourage is described by William Barclay (*c.* 1546–1608), a native of Aberdeenshire, in his *Contra Monarchomachos* (1600):

> I had a sight of very extraordinary sport […] the Earl of Athol […] had, with much trouble, and vast expense, provided a hunting-match for the entertainment of our illustrious and most gracious Queen. Our people call this a royal hunting […] Two thousand Highlanders were employed to drive to the hunting-ground all the deer from the woods and the hills of Atholl, Badenoch, Marr, Moray and the countries about. As these Highlanders use a light dress, and are very swift of foot, they went up and down so nimbly, that, in less than two months’ time, they brought together two thousand red deer, besides roes and follow deer. The Queen, the great men, and a number of others were in a glen […] where all these deer were brought before

> them; believe me, the whole body moved forward in something like battle order … (Stewart-Murray 1908, i: 36–37)

Barclay reported that the Queen was delighted with the sight which she beheld, and she also bore witness to the dangers involved in the tinchel, when a stag beset by a hound followed by the herd rushed headlong at the tinchel-circuit. The men forming the hunt-ring only escaped by throwing themselves to the ground. Despite several Highlanders being wounded, along with a few fatalities, they still managed to drive the deer towards the hunting party that awaited them:

> It was of those that had been separated, that the Queen's dogs, and those of the nobility, made slaughter. There was killed that day three hundred and sixty deer, with five wolves, and some roes (*ibid.*: 36–37).

According to Duff Hart-Davis, the event is said to have taken place on the western marches of what is now the forest of Fealar and, as the deer were driven up into a steep pass over shoulder of Ben-y-gloe, the Queen watched from a rocky outcrop above a loch known as Tom na ban righ, 'The Queen's Hillock' (Hart-Davis 1978: 26). That wolves were slain in the above account was probably accidental as such large-scale hunts did not discriminate with regard to the type of game that was being driven. The main type of game, and the one held in the highest regard as a noble beast, was, of course, the red deer, and any other game that was caught in the dragnet of the tinchel was probably perceived as a welcome bonus in addition to the main object of the chase.

John 'The Water Poet' Taylor (1578–1653), who, in his *The Pennyles Pilgrimage* (1618), describes the type of wildlife to be met with in his travels in the Braes o' Mar before he partook in a great tinchel in that part of the country:

> My good Lord of Marr having put me into that shape, I rode with him from his house, where I saw […] the Castle of Kindroghit. It was built by King Malcolm Canmore (for a hunting house) […] I

> speake of it because it was the last house that I saw in those parts; for I was the space of twelve days after, before I saw either house, corne field, or habitation for any creature, but deere, wilde horses, wolves […] which made mee doubt that I should never have scene a house againe … (Taylor 1999: 41–2).

It is interesting to note with regard to above description that in 1634 a charter, dating from the previous year, was confirmed by King Charles I at the behest of John, Earl of Mar, Lord Erskine and Garioch, of certain lands in Glengairn to Sir Alexander Irvine of Drum, where it is stated that in ‘or his foirsaidis the tyme of the hunting of fox, wolf or any other ravenous or distroying beast to slay any raes, they sall not be astricted thairfoir in payment of the saidis unlawis … (*RMS*, ix: 44–6). Thus legally imposed restrictions had been removed in order to encourage the hunting down of such vermin as the wolf and fox. The reason being was to protect deer stock from their deadliest natural predator.

Wolf Traditions and the Last of its Kind

The wolf is mentioned in versions of the famous legend of *Uamh an Òir* (‘The Gold Cave’), where the piper manages to render a wolf docile with his playing so that he could then continue with his journey into the underground (Drummond-Norie 1898: 239–40; Stewart 1883: 352–4).

Apart from international-type tales – that will not be dealt with in this brief survey – the wolf is mentioned not infrequently in historical-type narratives. In a traditional story of the Black Wood in Rannoch, a wolf-pack descended during mid-winter to lower grounds, attracted by unburied corpses at a place called Cladh Mhìcheil. Despite a night watch organised in order to scare them away this did not prove a deterrent to these determined and ravenous wolves. One night some Robertson brothers were there on guard duty when three wolves of gigantic stature came to raid the graveyard. One of the brothers named Donald took down MacIntosh’s bow – one that had been stolen in Perth by some Camerons that subsequently rekindled a deadly feud – and repeated the following prayer before dispatching a deadly arrow:

A Michaeil naoìmh, mo shaighead treoraich
Bho taifeid bogh’ Mhicantoisich
Steach gu cridhé mhadaidh mhor ud.

St. Michael now direct mine arrow
From string of Mackintosh’s bow
Into the heart of yon great wolf. (Sigma 1888: 124)

He then let the arrow fly and killed one of the wolves. Repeating the same prayer, he let another arrow fly which killed yet another of the wolves. The remaining wolf was his last target but he neglected to recite the above prayer before releasing his arrow and, although it pierced the intended victim, the wolf was not killed outright and the maddened beast rushed upon him. His last resort was to attempt to kill the wolf with a dagger. He is then said to have recited the following prayer:

A Michael naoimh, mo bhiodag treoraich,
Mar ri bogh’ Mhicantoisich,
Steach gu cridhe mhadaidh mhor so

St. Michael now direct my dirk,
Along with Mackintosh’s bow
Into the heart of this great wolf. (*ibid*.: 125)

The last wolf was thus dispatched and there is said to have been a great celebration that night as they ‘expressed their gratitude to heaven because there three enemies had been destroyed […] by the special intervention of Michael, the guardian Saint of their graveyard.’ (*ibid*.: 125)

A great Cameron warrior, and a natural son of a Cameron chief, of whom many tales were once told, Tàillear Dubh na Tuaighe (‘The Black-haired Tailor of the Battle-Axe’), who, once he had seen the three wolf carcasses, is said to have praised the Robertsons thus:

A chompanacha bho Lochabar,
Is mòr an t-urram so do Raineach,

> Gum bheil aig Sruan leithid de dhaoine,
> Ris na fir so bho ’n Auchtarsain;
> Is gum a fada bhios iad beo
> Fo shuaicheantais nan tri cheann madaidh;
> Is gum a fad’ a bhios *Cladh-Mhichael*
> Air a dhian le daoine cho tapaidh!
>
> O companions from Lochaber,
> Great is the honour now to Rannoch,
> That Struan has such valiant men
> As these heroes from Auchtarsin;
> And may they long be spared alive
> ’Neath coat of arms of three wolves’ heads;
> And may St. Michael’s graveyard, too,
> Be guarded long by men as brave! (Sigma 1888: 128)

This narrative may be tentatively dated to around the end of the sixteenth century as this was around the time when Tàillear Dubh na Tuaighe is said to have lived (MacMillan 1970: 115–16; Taylor 1884: 525–30, 565–71).

There are many traditions surrounding the killing of the last indigenous wolf in the Highlands. One of the most famous accounts is described by John Drummond of Balhaldie, the biographer of Sir Ewen Dubh Cameron (1629–1719), who left an account on his outdoor pursuits:

> His greatest diversion was hunting, whereof he was so keen, that he destroyed all the wolfs […] that infested the country. He killed […] the last wolf that was seen in the Highlands. He had a noble forrest that contrabuted much to his pleasure; and the continwall fatigue and hardships that he exposed himself to, in that manly and haithfull exercise, soon made him so vigorous and robust and so easy under all manner of want and inconveniecys, that he not only enjoyed continwall hailth, but acquired strength and constitution enough to surmount all the difficultys that afterwards befell him (Drummond 1872: 86).

It is claimed that the Cameron chief killed the last wolf at Killiecrankie in 1680. Apparently, an auction catalogue for a London Museum in 1818 had this stuffed wolf for sale, where an entry stated: ‘Wolf—a noble animal in a large case. The last wolf killed in Scotland by Sir Ewan Cameron’ (Dixon 1925: 176). Unfortunately, the whereabouts of this piece is now unknown.

Other areas of the Highlands favour their own local traditions (MacGregor 1937: 133–7).[14] The ‘Wolfstone’, at Brora in Glen Loth, marks the place of the last wolf said to have been killed in Sutherland by a hunter named Polson,[15] (Scrope 1883: 284–6), a version of which subsequently entered into that region’s folklore (Campbell 1890–93, i: 281–3; Rendell 1997: 641–2). The version related by William Scrope (1772–1852) may be given in full at it is one of the most famous stories to be related about the killing of the last wolf. Scrope’s *The Art of Deerstalking* (first published in 1838 with further subsequent editions) was an instrumental publication in popularising the Scottish Highlands as a sporting playground for the Victorian gentleman where he would be able to find ample pleasure by disporting himself in pursuit of the stag:

> … Polson […] was accompanied only by two young lads, one of them his son, and the other an active herd boy. Polson was an old hunter, and had much experience in tracing and destroying wolves and other predatory animals: forming his own conjectures, he proceeded at once to the wild and rugged ground that surrounds the rocky mountain gully which forms the channel of the burn of Sledale. Here, after a minute investigation, he discovered a narrow fissure in the midst of a confused mass of large fragments of rock, which, upon examination, he had reason to think might lead to a larger opening or cavern below, which the wolf might use as his den. Stones were now thrown down, and other means resorted to, to rouse any animal that might be lurking within. Nothing formidable appearing, the two lads contrived to squeeze themselves through the fissure, that they might examine the interior, whilst Polson kept guard on the outside. The boys descended through the narrow passage into a small cavern, which was evidently a wolf’s den, for the ground

was covered with bones and horns of animals, feathers, and egg-shells, and the dark space was somewhat enlivened by five or six active wolf cubs. Not a little dubious of the event, the voice of the poor boys came up hollow and anxious from below communicating this intelligence. Polson at once desired them to do their best, and to destroy the cubs. Soon after he heard the feeble howling of the whelps, as they were attacked below, and saw almost at the same time, to his great horror, a full-grown wolf, evidently the dam, raging furiously at the cries of her young, and now close upon the mouth of the cavern, which she had approached unobserved among the rocky inequalities of the place. She attempted to leap down, at one bound, from the spot where she was first seen: in this emergency, Polson instinctively threw himself forward on the wolf, and succeeded in catching a firm hold of the animal’s long and bushy tail, just as the fore part of the body was within the narrow entrance of the cavern. He had, unluckily, placed his gun against a rock when aiding the boys in their descent, and could not now reach it. Without apprising the lads below of their imminent peril, the stout hunter kept a firm grip of the wolf’s tail, which he wound round his left arm; and although the maddened brute scrambled, and twisted, and strove with all her might, to force herself down to the rescue of her cubs, Polson was just able, with the exertion of all his strength, to keep her from going forward. In the midst of this singular struggle, which passed in silence, for the wolf was mute, and the hunter, either from the engrossing nature of his exertions or from his unwillingness to alarm the boys, spake not a word at the commencement of the conflict, his son within the cave, finding the light excluded from above for so long a space, asked in Gaelic, and in an abrupt tone, “Father, what is keeping the light from us?” “If the root of the tail breaks,” replied he, “you will soon know that.” Before long, however, the man contrived to get hold of his hunting knife and stabbed the wolf in the most vital parts he could reach. The enraged animal now attempted to turn and face her foe, but the hole was too narrow to allow of this; and when Polson saw his danger he squeezed her forward, keeping her jammed in, whilst he repeated his stabs as rapidly as he could,

> until the animal, being mortally wounded, was easily dragged back and finished (Scrope 1885: 285–6).

A similar narrative is also told of the laird of Chisholm and his brother slaying a wolf in *Gleann Con-fhiadh* ('The Wolves' Glen') (Harting 1880: 173–4). Other places that mark the wolf's extinction are: Mullinavadie, or *Muileann a' Mhadaidh* ('The Wolf's Mill'), in Rannoch Moor (Barnett 1926: 148; Sigma 1887: 497); in Torridon at *Toll a' Mhadaidh* ('The Wolf's Hole') in Ben Alligin; in Glenurquhart between Loch Leiter and Sheugly, at a place called *Slochd a' Mhadaidh* ('The Wolf's Den') (Harting 1880: 178; Stuart & Stuart 1848, ii: 244); at Shenval (*Seann Bhaile*) in Glengairn near Braemar (Grant 1910: 17); or at *Allt a' Mhadaidh Allaidh* ('The Wolf's Burn'), near Derry Lodge, in the Forest of Mar about the year 1650 (Gordon 1925: 207); at Dalcrombie, near Dores, Inverness-shire (Sinton 1904–07: 324); at *Achach a' Mhadaidh* ('The Wolf's Field') in Glenroy, Brae Lochaber said to have been killed by Iain Odhar Caimbeulach about the time of the Keppoch Murder (1663) (Caimbeul 1927: 157–9); Glassary, Argyll (*NSA* 7: 680); Kirkmichael, Banffshire (around 1644) (*OSA* 16: 286); at Bach-na-gairn, Forfarshire (Ogilvy 1846: 251); Duthil (Forsyth 1900: 7); *Coire a' Mhadaidh* ('The Wolf's Corrie') in Kincardine Slugan, Abernethy (*ibid.*: 7); at Claggans, Menteith, in Perthshire (Hutchison 1899: 46); Auchmore in Assynt (Scrope 1883: 284); and the Rev. Lachlan Shaw (*c.* 1686–1777) claims that the last known wolf was killed about the House of Kinmylies, near Inverness, in 1690 (Shaw 1882, ii: 327). Shaw also states that: 'It appears by the names of several places, and by statutes made for destroying them, that there were Wolves in this Country about 300 years ago; but now there are none' (*ibid.*, iii: 16). Presumably what he meant here, given that the wolf probably became extinct during his own lifetime, was that wolves had once been plentiful some three hundred years ago. Many of the traditions surrounding the killing of the last wolf contain certain motifs where the sole protagonists – in many cases this happens to be a woman – who encounter a wolf and in fear of their lives attack and kill the wolf with any weapon that they may have had to hand:

> The last of the wolves, which used to very numerous in this country, was killed between Dalcrombie—now called Leitir Chuilin—and Dun Chia. Tradition tells how the goodwife of Dalcrombie went to Dunchia for the loan of a girdle […] On her return journey, she came upon a wolf scenting her track, and she split its head with a girdle (Sinton 1904–07: 324).

A legend from Perthshire tells of the Wolf’s Bridge in Dalguise and it is said to have been the last wolf to have been killed in this particular district:

> At the period when wolves had been almost exterminated in Scotland, the wife of a reaper was crossing this bridge on her way to a neighbouring field with her husband’s dinner, when she was confronted by a wolf. She was too far from assistance to make her danger known, but she heroically produced a large knife from her basket, and defended herself with such good effect that the ferocious animal fell dead at her feet (Hunter 1883: 70).

As indicated above, the minister of the parish of Glassary, the Rev. Dugald Campbell, relates the legend of the wolf in that particular area:

> It is said that the wolf was, till a late period in the British history of that animal, an inhabitant of these houseless wilds, and […] It is told that the last of them which was seen in this parish followed the track of a female who was crossing the country […] and, after passing through the moor, had almost obtained the road which leads to Inverary, at the mill of Craleckan, but was found close by it, on the Glassary side of the stream, a corpse. Her right arm was protected by an apron which she had rolled around it, and her hand grasped a knife which she had lodged deep in the heart of a wolf that lay dead beside her. It was supposed that when she discovered the animal on her track, she had fled in the hope of reaching the houses that were nigh at hand; but that being unable to escape, she had assumed the defensive in despair, and died terrified and exhausted by the effort which left her nothing to fear (*NSA* 7: 680).

According to local tradition the last wolf in Strathglass, near Beauly, was killed near to St Ignatius's Well:

> … a woman of Cre-lebhan, near Strui, on the north side of Strath Glass … had gone to Strui a little before Christmas to borrow a girdle (a thick, circular plate of iron, with an iron loop handle at one side for lifting, and used for baking bread). Having procured it, and being on her way home, she sat down upon an old carn to rest and gossip with a neighbour, when suddenly a scraping of stones and rustling of dead leaves were heard, and the head of a Wolf protruded from a crevice at her side. Instead of fleeing in alarm, however, "she dealt him such a blow on the skull with the full swing of her iron discus, that it brained him on the stone which served for his emerging head" (Harting 1880: 174–5; see also Chisholm 1881: 411).

The other migratory-type legend is one where the killing of the last wolf is attributed to a local hero famed in each locality as a hunter of renown. As related by Diarmad (Donald C. MacPherson), tradition tells of Dòmhnall MacFhionnlaigh nan Dàn slaying wolves. Lochaber was famous for its woods at this time and is a habitat that favours wolves. The wolf is described as *gòsganach* [the tufted one] and was seen by the hunter near a mill on a predatory venture when he let fly a deadly arrow. The incident is said to have taken place at Dubh Lochain just behind an Fhearsaid Mhòr; another wolf is also said to have been slain by the Lochtreig hunter at Lùb a' Choire Chreagaich (Diarmad 1876: 329–30). There is, however, no mention of the wolf in the Lochtreig hunter's sole surviving work entitled *Òran na Comhchaig* ('The Song of the Owl of Strone'), composed *c.*1585, judging by references made to the Keppoch chiefs that form but one of the poem's many themes. A near-contemporary of the Lochtreig bard, and a famous wolf-slayer in his own right, was said to have been Andrew MacGillivray, Anndra Mòr nam Madadh-allaidh ('Great Andrew of the Wolves') who 'won a name and fame for himself by killing wolves'. He is said to have been the last of the great wolf-slayers in Scotland and was born around 1600 (Sinclair 1906: 197).

Another mention of a wolf is made by Iain Lom MacDonald (*c*. 1624–*c*. 1707) in his *Iorram do Shìol Dùghaill* (‘An Oar-Song to Dugald’s Breed’), composed while he was exiled in Kintail after he fell foul of a section of his own clan due to his outspoken politics and calls for justice in the wake of the Keppoch Murder:

> ’Gam chur a m’ fhearann gun adhbhar
> ’S nach do shalaich mo shadhbhaidh
> Mar mhadadh-allaidh is caonnag ’n thòin.
>
> I am ejected from my land without reason—and it is not that I have befouled my lair—like a wolf with the hunt close up on him.
> (Mackenzie 1964: 114–15, ll. 1462–64)

Brae Lochaber may have been one of the last places where wolves were not extinct. This mention, however brief, perhaps cannot be taken too literally, but it is interesting to compare it with the date of the wolf’s extinction in Lochaber around 1680. It may well be the case that the hounds of Clan Donald were still driving the species towards extinction.

Tradition relates, however, that the last wolf to be killed was in the forest of Darnaway, Morayshire, by MacQueen of Pollochock, in 1743:

> The last of their race was killed by MacQueen of Pall-a-’chrocain, who […] was the most celebrated “carnach” […] remarkable for his strength, courage and celebrity as a deer-stalker. It will not be doubted that he has the best “long-dogs” or deer greyhounds in the country; and for their service and his own, one winter’s day […] a large “black beast,” supposed to be a wolf, had appeared in the glens, and the day before killed two children […] in consequence of which a “Tainchel,” or gathering to drive the country, was called to meet at a tryst above Fi-Giuthas, where MacQueen was invited to attend with his dogs.—Pall-a’-chrocain informed himself of the place where the children had been killed—the last tracks of the wolf, and the conjectures of his haunt, and promised his assistance.

> In the morning the Tainchel has long assembled, and MacIntosh waited with impatience, but MacQueen did not arrive; his dogs and himself were, however, auxiliaries too important to be left behind, and they continued to wait until the best of a hunter's morning was gone, when at last he appeared, and MacIntosh received him with an irritable expression of disappointment.
>
> "*Ciod e a chabhag?*"—"What was the hurry?"—said Pall-a-'chrocain. MacIntosh gave an indignant retort […] MacQueen lifted his plaid—and drew the black bloody head of the wolf from under his arm—"*Sin e dhùibh!*"—"There it is for you!" (Stuart & Stuart 1848, ii: 245–7).[16]

MacQueen is said to have died in 1797 and the tradition of his heroic act lingered for a long while afterwards among Morayshire storytellers. But how much credence can be placed with any confidence in this tradition? As Rackham observed, the relevant story is dubious: 'Apart from the suspiciously long interval since the last previous mention of wolves, there is the circumstance that the victim had just killed two children; such behaviour is a mark of the fictional rather than the zoological wolf' (Rackham 1986: 36). Contemporary evidence supports such a view, for an account of neighbouring shires of Aberdeen and Banff, probably written by Sir Robert Gordon of Straloch (1580–1661) sometime prior to 1661 suggests that the wolf, at least in the areas of which he wrote, was by that time likely to have been totally eradicated:

> Noxious animals and such as prey upon flocks are absent, except foxes, and these are rare, for wolves are believed to be now all but extinct, of if any exist, they are far away from the more cultivated localities and human civilisation (Macfarlane 1906–08, ii: 270).

However, it is not outwith the bounds of possibility that the wolf, in ever decreasing numbers, still held out and lingered in remote locations in some parts of the Highlands. Thus, the wolf, once so common in Scotland, through constant persecution, was probably extinct by the end of the seventeenth century and had all but disappeared by the middle of the next century.

Conclusion

The evidence adduced from historical documents strongly indicates that wolves definitely survived in the Scottish Highlands until 1680 when around this time they were eradicated. Oral traditions kept a record of the wolf from passing out of living memory, especially those concerning the last wolf in many areas of the Highlands. They are so consistent in many of their details that it would suggest a migratory-type legend is at play here. Such stories survived in oral tradition until reduced into print at some remove from the events they are said to describe and which would appear to be narratives of people killing wolves, and not necessarily the last wolf, of any given particular locality. From this survey there are a number of factors that may be identified for the eventual extinction of the wolf from the Highland ecosystem. Many parts of the Highland landscape were undergoing a sustained and lasting environmental change during the period when wolves were becoming less than a familiar sight. Gaels had a no-nonsense solution to a practical problem, for livestock was protected at all costs as the burden of depredations by wolves upon cattle and sheep could not be suffered, especially during the sparse months of winter-time. After all, many lived at a near-subsistence level with the spectre of famine and scarcity of foodstuffs and thus they could not brook such losses. Deforestation during the sixteenth century seems to have facilitated the destruction of wolves and, of course, the prey upon which they relied. The increasing exploitation of woodlands not only for charcoal production and for iron smelting but also for building material led to a continual decrease in the natural habitat for wolves (and their prey). Although deer were evidently still plentiful in 1528, by the middle of that century constant slaughter and, more drastically, the development of pasturing large flocks of sheep on Lowland hills, sometimes thousands in number, led to a rapid decrease in the red deer population. This not only made the Highlands a more attractive area for hunting but it probably had the effect of attracting wolf populations to the area in which they could naturally exploit their killing instinct upon deer as well as livestock such as horses, cattle and sheep. A further factor would have been that wolves were hunted down both for their pelts and fur but it is impossible to say, due to the lack of evidence, what type of impact this made on wolf populations. From medieval times, the royal statutes that were enacted perceived wolves as merely vermin – a perception that accords with representative examples from Scottish Gaelic poetry – and were ordained to see out their final destruction. In order to protect that most royal prerogative of hunting, especially deer, the wolf as a predator on deer-stock would and could not be tolerated. The various (migratory) legends of human contact with wolves, sometimes a lone encounter or a famous wolf-hunter, in the Highlands are usually connected with last wolf traditions and they have also left an onomastic resonance that the wolf once roamed over many parts of the mainland Highlands; but also that major place-names with a lupine association are evenly spread throughout Scotland as a whole (Aybes & Yalden 1995: 212–13).

In sum, then, the exploitation of native woodlands, the commercial style of farming methods and the protection of livestock from predation, the protection of game both within and without deer parks, as well as the expansion of cattle droving from the Highlands to the Lowlands (and further south) meant that the wolf's day was numbered and nearing its end until it was finally driven to extinction in the Highlands through human persecution, definitely by the end of the seventeenth century at the earliest and perhaps even by the mid-eighteenth century at the latest.

NOTES

[1] There are three other candidates that are potentially carvings of wolves but they are not unambiguous as they may represent dogs (Pluskowski 2006: 145).

[2] The stone is now under curatorial care in the Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, Castle Wynd, Inverness.

[3] Currently housed in St Andrews Cathedral Museum.

[4] Collected from Ceit MacInnes, a cottar, Creag, Arisaig (Carmichael 1928–1971, ii: 380).

[5] Collected from Mary MacVurich, a crofter's wife, South Boisdale, South Uist (*ibid.*: 378).

[6] Possibly collected from Mairead MacKintosh, a tailor’s wife, South Boisdale, South Uist (*ibid*.: 379).

[7] Collected from Catrine MacKintosh, a cottar, Staoiligearry, South Uist (*ibid*.: 374).

[8] Collected from Malcolm MacPherson, a shepherd, Bagh nam Faoilean, South Uist (*ibid*.: 378).

[9] Collected from Donald MacInnes, a crofter, Baile Gharbhath, South Uist (*ibid*.: 377).

[10] A folk etymology for Skene (*Sgian*) probably explains this story, despite the fact that the Gaelic for the name of the parish of Skene is Sgàin. For a similar tradition concerning the old family of Skene, derived from Struan (Robertson) or Duncan of Athole, see Duncan 1899: 7–8; and H. 1882: 21–4.

[11] For a description and reproduction of the Robertson armorial bearings, with three wolf heads, see Robertson 1894: frontispiece and p. 39.

[12] It is interesting to note that these Scottish Acts ‘for the distructione of wolfes’ were only repealed in 1906 (Anderson 1967: 118).

[13] The word ‘daker’ or ‘dicker’ (Greek δεκά, ten) is still in use in the leather trade, and means a roll of ten skins. It was anciently spelt ‘dyker’ or ‘dykker,’ and the market-toll was a penny each ‘dyker’ (Harting 1880: 169).

[14] Where brief summaries are also given of the most popular traditions of the killing of the last wolf.

[15] Presumably *anglice* of Mac a’ Phàil.

[16] See also Fittis 1975: 45–7; and Lauder 1830: 41–3.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADC	*Acta Dominorum Concilii*
APS	*The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*
DIL	*Dictionary of the Irish Language*
NSA	*The New Statistical Account of Scotland*
OSA	*The Old Statistical Account of Scotland*
RMS	*The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland*

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