

ANGLICA

An International Journal of English Studies

Special Issue: Scotland

29/3 2020

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Scottish Gaelic in Peter Simon Pallas's *Сравнительные Словари*

Abstract

In the 1780s a multilingual dictionary was issued in Saint Petersburg, edited by the German Peter Simon Pallas (1741–1811). It was a comparative dictionary, containing almost 300 words in Russian and their equivalents in 200 languages and dialects from all over the world. Amongst those to be found within is Scottish Gaelic. This dictionary thus offers a brief snapshot of Scottish Gaelic from the 1700s seen through the prism of Cyrillic and this article aims to present some background history of the dictionary itself, and to show how Scottish Gaelic is presented in the text.

Keywords: Scottish Gaelic, Cyrillic, Pallas, linguistics, lexicography

1. The History of the Dictionary

Pallas's comparative dictionary really began several years previously when Ludwig Christian Bacmeister (1730–1806) published his *Объявление и Прошение касающіяся до Собранія Разныхъ Языковъ въ Примѣрахъ* ['An Announcement and Request Concerning the Gathering of Various Languages in Examples'] in 1773. Bacmeister was another German living in Saint Petersburg and was at this time a State Councillor and Deputy Librarian at the Imperial Academy. In this pamphlet, Bacmeister asks his acquaintances in science and learning from near and afar to provide him with translations from languages according to the model he provides in the same pamphlet. He issued his publication in four languages – Russian (the language of the Empire), Latin (the old language of science), German (the new language of science) and French (the language of the nobility at that time in Russia) – and forwarded it to cultural institutions all over Europe.

Although Bacmeister was not the first individual to show an interest in comparing vocabularies from various languages, he was one of the first who thought of the idea of compiling a dictionary in which examples of languages the world over would be collated. This was in tune with the (fairly novel) thought at the time that all the languages of the world had one single ancestor, and that common

roots between languages could be found by comparing examples of vocabulary. Some word lists had appeared in print previously in diverse publications giving translations of words in various languages, but Bacmeister's approach, as laid out in his pamphlet, was very much a new model for his time, in that he sets about acquiring his linguistic vocabulary in a scientific manner. His *Объявление и Прошение* can be divided into three parts. In the first, Bacmeister lays down the best method for recording the phonetics of the linguistic samples obtained, for example that they should be transcribed in French if possible, if not, then in German or another European language known to the collector, but that Latin should be avoided. Furthermore, the sources and the translators and their names should also be recorded, along with their social status and where that particular language is spoken. In the second part of his pamphlet, he gives the list of words and sentences which he wishes to be translated. Amongst these are the numbers 1–22, the tens from 30–100 (including, for some reason, 71, 72 and 99), 200 and 1,000. He then gives 22 sentences, some short, some long, that are also to be translated. These included:

- 10. Носъ по среди лица [‘The nose is in the middle of the face’]
- 11. У насъ двѣ ноги, и на каждой рукѣ по пяти пальцевъ [‘We have two legs and five fingers on each hand’]
- 12. Волосы растутъ на головѣ [‘Hair grows on the head’]
- 13. Языкъ и зубы во рту [‘The tongue and teeth are in the mouth’]

As can be seen from the brief examples above, and has been discussed in more detail by Klubkova, some of the sentences are linked by a certain theme (such as parts of the body as in the examples above) whilst others contain several related words (such as ‘tongue,’ ‘teeth’ and ‘mouth’ as in no. 13 above) and thus are not necessarily as quirky as they might appear at first sight.

In the third section of his pamphlet Bacmeister gives the example of one phrase taken from the Bible: “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God” (Romans 13:1), and shows how it was translated from Russian into Arabic, French into Finnish, German into Swedish and Latin into Finnish in an effort to illustrate how translation between disparate languages is possible, even if they do not contain the same turns of phrase or even concepts.

As a result of his request, Bacmeister received a lot of information from various sources – Friedrich von Adelung, in his book on the history of linguistics in Russia in the time of Catherine the Great, states that Bacmeister had in his possession 72 *Ganze Uebersetzungen* [‘whole translations’] (including Scottish Gaelic, although it is here listed by Adelung as ‘Galisch’ whilst in Pallas’s *Dictionary* itself it goes under the heading of *Эрзо-Шотландский* [‘Scottish

Erse’]), 5 *Uebersetzungen einzelner Stücke* [‘translations of individual pieces’] and 24 *Wörterverzeichnisse und Sprachbemerkungen* [‘indices of words and language notes’] (Adelung 26–31) – but for unknown reasons nothing came of it.

Regarding the source for Scottish Gaelic, Adelung notes that Bacmeister got it “von Pennant, durch Pallas” [‘by Pennant, *via* Pallas’]. Presumably this ‘Pennant’ is Thomas Pennant (1726–1798), the famous Welsh traveller and naturalist who travelled the British Isles and Europe and who wrote about his journeys in Scotland in the late 1700s, namely *A Tour in Scotland* and *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides 1772*. Both books contain some original verses in, and translations to and from, Scottish Gaelic, as well as a selection of Gaelic proverbs. As there is no separate Gaelic vocabulary list in these publications, Pennant must thus have provided an independent list of words which Bacmeister received via Pallas and with whom he was already acquainted. It so happens that Pallas and Pennant had also both known each other for some time: as Pennant had travelled all over Europe as well as the British Isles he had encountered Pallas on his voyages. They had even agreed to co-write a book together but Pallas was called away, leaving behind an outline sketch of the proposed work and leaving Pennant to complete the book proper. The result – *Synopsis of Quadrupeds* – eventually came out in the year 1771 (Pennant 7–8).

It is also worth noting at this juncture that there is no Scots given in the Dictionary: the list of the Germanic languages given in the dictionary is as follows: [по] Готїйски [‘[in] Gothic’], Англо-Саксонски [‘Anglo-Saxon’], Аглинкси [‘English’], Тевтонски [‘Teutonic’], Нижне-Германски [‘Lower German’], Германски [‘German’], Цимбрски [‘Tsimbrski’] (= Cimbrian, the German dialects spoken in Italy), Датски [‘Danish’], Исландски [‘Icelandic’], Шведски [‘Swedish’], Голландкси [‘Dutch’] and Фризски [‘Frisian’]. It might thus appear that Scots would not seem to have qualified as either a language in its own right or as a dialect of English proper, at least in the opinion of Pallas. However, Adelung, in his list of the linguistic material that Bacmeister had in his possession, states that there are whole translations of Bacmeister’s list in both ‘Galisch’ and ‘Schottisch’, and that ‘Schottisch’ was also provided by Pennant *via* Pallas. It would thus seem that if ‘Galisch’ means (Scottish) Gaelic, then ‘Schottisch’ must be taken to mean Scots and that, therefore, material in Scots was at least received and made available for the dictionary but, for some unknown reason, it was not deemed worthy enough to be included in the enterprise.

Although nothing concrete ever arose from his research, Bacmeister’s material did not go to waste. Catherine the Great (1729–1796), who was Empress of the Russian Empire at this time, had earlier also expressed an interest in a comparative dictionary of all languages, initially of those of her Empire, and thus appointed Peter Simon Pallas to the task of compiling one, based, to a certain degree, on Bacmeister’s initial work. Pallas was already well known to Catherine the Great when she appointed him. He was a doctor and naturalist, he had published

extensively on his journeys throughout the Russian Empire, he had explored Siberia and had spent seven years exploring the north and east of Asia (and which was the reason he never got around to writing the book with Pennant). He was an expert on Siberian and Mongolian flora and fauna and, even though he had no linguistic experience, it was he who was chosen to take charge of the planned dictionary.

Pallas's completed dictionary came out under the Latin title of *Linguarum Totius Orbis Vocabularia Comparativa* or, in Russian, *Сравнительные Словари Всѣхъ Языков и Нарѣчій* ['Comparative Vocabularies of Every Language and Dialect']. The first part was issued in 1787 and the second two years later. Only 500 copies were printed and they were mainly distributed amongst foreign ambassadors and diplomats. This first volume of two parts, despite its ambitious title, only contained languages from Europe, Asia and the "southern Islands"; those of Africa and America were intended to appear in a second volume which never appeared, although preliminary work was set in motion. A second edition of the dictionary was issued in 1790, however, but in this case the words in all of the languages were listed in (Russian) alphabetical order which, whilst making it easier to see whether there existed any patterns between languages and their vocabulary, was of no use if one wished to look up a particular word in a given language.

2. The Layout of the *Сравнительные Словари*

Regarding the dictionary itself, there are around 900 pages altogether, excluding the introduction (first in Latin, then in Russian) and the notes on the languages contained, and every page is divided into two columns. There are 273 basic headwords and, as an appendix, there are the numbers 1–10, 100 and 1,000. The Russian headword is given at the top of each column and then there follows the translations in the 200 languages and dialects, except in the case of the numbers where it increases to 222. The translations on each page are listed according to numbers, followed by the name of the language and the headword in that language.

The words, for the most part, can be divided into themes. They start with the two most important concepts at that time, namely *Богъ* ['God'] and *небо* ['heaven'], followed by:

- family members (numbers 3–15, such as 'father,' 'mother,' 'son,' 'daughter')
- parts of the body (16–47, e.g. 'face,' 'nose,' 'hand' etc.)
- the senses (48–53)
- abstract concepts to do with people's lives (54–74, for example 'love,' 'life,' 'marriage,' 'work' etc.),
- nature (75–112, e.g. 'sun,' 'wind,' 'rain' 'river' and so forth).

The second part covers:

- plants and their parts (126–143, such as ‘wood,’ ‘tree,’ ‘leaves,’ ‘fruit’ etc.)
- animals (144–164, e.g. ‘fish,’ ‘fly,’ ‘bull’ etc.)
- household and farming (165–178, e.g. ‘house,’ ‘door,’ ‘city’ etc.)
- colours and adjectives describing people (201–217, e.g. ‘black,’ ‘white,’ ‘light,’ ‘good’ etc.)
- verbs (227–246, such as ‘eat,’ ‘drink,’ ‘sleep’ etc.)
- pronouns and prepositions (247–273, for example ‘I,’ ‘you,’ ‘on,’ ‘under’ etc.)
- the numbers 1–10, 100 and 1,000

along with a good selection of other words that are not particularly easy to label or classify.

Of all the languages and dialects in the dictionary the first twelve places are taken up by the Slavic family and the second set of places by the Celtic. This list starts with ‘Celtic,’ *По Кельтски* [‘in Celtic’], although it is unclear what this ‘Celtic’ actually is and Adelung has no mention of any ‘Celtic’ amongst Bacmeister’s papers, at number 13, *По Бретански* [‘in Breton’], number 14, *По Ирландски* [‘in Irish’], number 16, *По Эрзо-Шотландски* [‘in Scottish Erse’], number 17, *По Валски* [‘in Welsh’], number 18, and *По Корнвалски* [‘in Cornish’], number 19. Manx is thus the only Celtic and Gaelic language missing. Number 15 is occupied by Basque, by which Pallas states he means that which is spoken in France, not in Spain. This would seem to be a decision taken under the influence of the thought prevalent at that time, namely that the Basques of France were somehow linked to the Celts, unlike those of Spain whose language was to be covered in the second volume which never came about. Proof of this opinion can still be seen in the 1830s in, for example, John Reid’s work where he lists Basque as one of the “dialects” of Celtic (Reid ix; and also see Igartua), although this division of Basque into two ‘separate’ languages was one of the criticisms levelled by Kraus at Pallas (Bulich 229) – although not that Basque is not Celtic. Pallas also provides a list of lexicographical sources he used for his ‘Celtic,’ ‘Gothic’ and ‘Anglo-Saxon’ vocabularies, a list which includes Lhuyd’s 1707 work *Archaeologia Britannica* and Bullet’s *Dictionaire Celtique* from 1759 amongst other works, but as he also claims in his introduction that the first 47 languages in the dictionary – and, thus, Scottish Gaelic – were based on the materials Bacmeister gathered, it is unclear what part these other dictionary sources might have played in Pallas’s vocabulary lists, especially in relation to Gaelic, for which Bacmeister had received original material.

Any analysis of the Scottish Gaelic words – or, indeed, those of any language – given in the dictionary is complicated by the fact that they are written in Cyrillic, which might seem somewhat obvious, as the dictionary was compiled for a Russian

readership. However, Pallas acknowledged that Cyrillic was not without its faults regarding the representation of other languages. He writes in his introduction that, although there is no better system of transliterating words from near and afar than Cyrillic, some modifications had to be made and, to this end, Pallas took it upon himself to modify the sounds of the Russian letters in the transcriptions of the foreign vocabulary by adding extra information as to what foreign sounds they represent and how they should be pronounced (“Explicatio litterarum Alphabeti Roffici”), for example, *Г* was to stand for /h/ “*aspiranti graecorum et H h germanorum atque latinorum anologa*,” *Э* for *Ö* or *Æ* “*germanorum et latinorum*” and *Ө* “*ut eadam graecorum littera vel uti th anglorum*.” However, this was not always successfully applied, as can be seen from several Scottish Gaelic examples. In the case of words such as *athair*, *briathar* or *fiodh*, the same Russian letter that Pallas notes is to be pronounced as the English dental /θ/, i.e. *Ө*, is used to represent the Gaelic digraph <th> which, however, is pronounced as /h/. This results in the following Cyrillic “transcription” of the three Gaelic examples given above as *аөеръ* /aθer/, *бриәөаръ* /bri:aθar/ and *фиөөъ* /fi:oθ/.¹ This thus implies to the Russian reader that the English dental /θ/ is to be heard in Gaelic words in the second half of the 18th century, even though it is generally accepted that this sound had been lost in Common Gaelic by the 13th century (McManus 351), and therefore it is most unlikely that it still existed in Scottish Gaelic five hundred years later. Regarding the unsuitability of Cyrillic for realising the phonetics of the world’s languages, Muradova (146) claims that this makes any analysis of the Celtic entries moot, as it is too difficult to draw any conclusions about the orthography at that time. Despite this, conclusions have been drawn about some of the Celtic languages, namely Breton (Gargadennec and Laurent, and on which Muradova based her own very brief article), and Irish (Ó Fionnáin), and, as such, bearing in mind the foregoing, it is worth looking at the Scottish Gaelic entries in the dictionary.

3. Scottish Gaelic in the *Сравнительные Словари*

Scottish Gaelic in the Dictionary is one of the best represented languages, in that there is a translation for almost every one of the 285 words and numbers given, unlike some of the other European languages: entry 166 *борона* [‘harrow’] is the only entry for which Scottish Gaelic is lacking. Sometimes there is also more than one option offered: e.g. *жизнь* [‘life’] is explained as all of *беаөа*, *анамъ*, *саогаль* [/beaθa/ /anam/ /saogal/ = ‘beatha,’ ‘anam,’ ‘saoghal’] or *холмъ* ‘hill’ as *тулахъ*, *кноканъ*, *томанъ* [/tulax/ /knokan/ /toman/ = ‘tulach,’ ‘cnocan,’ ‘toman’].

Amongst the Scottish Gaelic words in the dictionary there are those which are:

3.1. Phonetically Correct

These are words which were transcribed according to their sounds and which are (relatively) correct: words which, as far as possible, give a correct Gaelic pronunciation and which can thus be recognised without too much effort. These include:

- Богъ [‘god’] – дїа /di:a/ = Dia
- мужъ [‘husband’] – ферпозда /ferpozda/ = fear-pòsta
- волосъ [‘hair’] – фолтъ /folt/ = falt
- горло [‘throat’] – скорнанъ /skornan/ = sgòrnan
- зубъ [‘tooth’] – фїакуль /fi:akul/ = fiacaill
- локоть [‘elbow’] – уйланъ /ujlan/ = uileann
- сонъ [‘sleep’] – кодаль, суанъ /kodal/ /suan/ = cadal, suan

3.2. Phonetically Incorrect

These are words which were written down incorrectly for various reasons. Amongst these are:

a) A slender <s>, i.e. /ʃ/, is written as broad, i.e. /s/, giving, for example:

- время [‘time’] – аимсаиръ /aimsair/ = aimsir
- вода [‘water’] – уизге /uizge/ = uisge

b) Cases in which a Gaelic letter and an English letter (and possibly a similar-looking Russian one) were confused with each other, for example the Gaelic <c> /k/ and <ch> /x/ being confused with their English equivalents which are usually pronounced as /s/ and /ʃ/, or the letter <c> being mistaken for an <e>. Another issue is where pairs of letters, e.g. <bh> are taken as separate letters with one sound each and thus transcribed, as opposed to one digraph producing one sound between them. Amongst the many misspellings in Cyrillic are:

- дѣва [‘virgin’] – чаиллэгъ /ʃaillœg/ = c[h]aileag
- голова [‘head’] – чень /ʃen/ = c[h]eann
- овесь [‘oats’] – коирце /koirtse/ = coirce
- яйцо [‘egg’] – убгъ /ubh/ = ubh / ugh
- домъ [‘house’] – тиггъ /tigh/ = taigh
- бѣло [‘white’] – сїоннъ /si:onn/ = fionn (in this case, presumably the old long <s>, i.e. <ʃ>, was mistaken for <ʃ>)
- толсть [‘fat’] – рамгаръ /ramhar/ = reamhar

c) Words where the initial mutation was preserved. It is unclear whether this was a result of the transcription, i.e. the transcriber saw the words written down and copied them without question and accepted the mutated word as it was, or else whether there was an oral source and, again, the mutated words were accepted unquestioningly in the context they appeared in. Examples of mutated words in the dictionary include:

- сестра [‘sister’] – фiуѳаръ /fi:uθar/ = [an] p[h]iuthar
- носъ [‘nose’] – тзронъ /tзron/ = [an t-]sròn
- весна [‘spring’] – теаррахъ /tearrax/ = [an t-]earrach

d) At times the letter ⟨h⟩ was omitted. This is a frequent occurrence in the Irish language entries in the dictionary, but this is presumably due to the fact that the transcriber of the Irish words was unaware of the Irish manuscript style used for writing Irish at the time where a dot over the preceding letter represented the letter ⟨h⟩. However, as Scottish Gaelic has always been written with the Roman alphabet, and thus the letter ⟨h⟩ cannot be easily overlooked, it is not clear how some of these Gaelic words are lacking ⟨h⟩, as can be seen in the examples below:

- языкъ [‘tongue’] – тэнгадъ /tœngad/ = teangadh
- бракъ [‘marriage’] – посадъ /posad/ = pòsadh
- вѳтръ [‘wind’] – гаотъ /gaot/ = gaoth
- земля [‘land’] – таламъ /talam/ = talamh
- дерево [‘tree’] – краобъ /kraob/ = craobh
- черно [‘black’] – дубъ /dub/ = dubh
- рука [‘hand’] – лямъ /lʌm/ = lámh

3.3. Confused Words

Whereas most of the examples offered above can be guessed at and worked out with somewhat minimal effort, there are some which require more of an attempt, such as the following:

- вихрь [‘whirlwind’] – гаотжуртэнъ /gaotʒurtœn/ [gaoth chuartain?]
- виноградъ [‘vine, grape’] – бiондгэре /bi:ondhœre/ [fiondhearç?]
- быкъ [‘ox’] – дѳмъ /diœm/ [damh?]
- ровъ [‘ditch’] – блэдгэжамъ /blœdhœzɑm/ (possibly meant to be *claothui-cham* ‘to ditch’ or *cladhaigheam* ‘to dig’: see the relevant contemporary entries in Shaw)

And then there are those that, at the moment, have utterly failed to be deciphered, probably due to confusion amongst both letters and sounds, for example:

- жито [‘rye’] – эрвѣфъ /œrvhef/ (the Gaelic is *seagal*)

4. Conclusion

It is clear that there are some major problems with Pallas’s work as a source of Scottish Gaelic from the 18th century. The entries have many mistakes: mutated consonants left in where they should not have been, or omitted (as in the case of ⟨h⟩) where they should have been included; the incorrect transcription of the digraph ⟨th⟩ as /θ/, thus implying that this sound survived in Gaelic centuries after it had actually died out; the confusion of broad and slender ⟨s⟩, i.e. /s/ and /ʃ/; none of which are made any the easier to recognise due to the use of the Cyrillic alphabet. It is also not clear when such mistakes were made – in the original list sent by Pennant or when they were being transcribed into Russian. Despite all of these caveats, there is still linguistic and lexicographical worth in the Scottish Gaelic as it is presented in the work, as it does help show the words in common use at the time and, in the case of those more puzzling entries, there might be more information to come if only the code can be broken or, indeed, if Pennant’s original list were to be examined.

Notes

- 1 These and all following IPA renditions are based on Pallas’s own guide on how to read the Cyrillic. The English translations of the Russian words are those given by Pallas himself.

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The first word in the *Сравнительные Словари*, i.e. 'God.'
Scottish Gaelic is at number 17.

Г. БОГЪ.

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 По Славянски - Богъ. | 34 ПоНижне-Германски Годъ. |
| 2 — Славяно-Венгерски Бугъ. | 35 — Германски - Гоштъ. |
| 3 — Иллирійски Боогъ. | 36 — Цимбрски - Гиштъ. |
| 4 — Богемски - Бу. | 37 — Датски - Гудъ. |
| 5 — Сербски - Богъ. | 38 — Исландски - Гудъ. |
| 6 — Вендски - Богъ. | 39 — Шведски - Гудъ. |
| 7 — Сорабски - Богъ. | 40 — Голландски - Годтъ. |
| 8 — Полабски - Бусацъ. | 41 — Фризски - Годъ. |
| 9 — Кашубски - Богъ. | 42 — Липовски - Дѣвасъ. |
| 10 — Польски - Богъ. | 43 — Лапышски - Дасъ. |
| 11 — Мадороссійски Бигъ. | 44 — Кривинго - Ан- вонски Дѣвасъ. |
| 12 — Суздальски - Стодъ. | 45 — Албански - Перенди. |
| 13 — Кельнски - Дѣу, Ю. | 46 — Волошки - Думнезу. |
| 14 — Брешански - Дуэ, Доэ. | 47 — Венгерски - Иштень. |
| 15 — Басконски - Дувъ, Юнъ, Янис, Яинкоа, Эинкоа. | 48 — Аварски - Бечасъ. |
| 16 — Ирландски - Ия. | 49 — Кубачински - Бечасъ. |
| 17 — Эрзо - Шотландски Дѣа. | 50 — Лезгински, рода Анцугъ Бедшѣтъ. |
| 18 — Валски - Дѣу. | 51 — —р. Джаръ - Бедшѣтъ. |
| 19 — Коривалски - Деу. | 52 — —р. Хунзагъ - Беджѣтъ. |
| 20 — Еллински - Θεοσъ. | 53 — —р. Дидо - Бедштъ. |
| 21 — Ново-Гречески Θεοσъ. | 54 — Чюхонски - Юмала. |
| 22 — Латински - Деусъ. | 55 — Эстландски - Юммалъ. |
| 23 — Италіански - Дѣо. | 56 — Корельски - Юмала. |
| 24 — Неаполитански Дѣю. | 57 — Олонецки - Юмалъ. |
| 25 — Испански - Дѣосъ. | 58 — Лопарски - Юбмелъ, Ибмелъ. |
| 26 — Португальски Дсосъ. | 59 — Зырянски - Іенъ. |
| 27 — Роменски и др.- вне-Французски Деу, Дексъ, Дѣ- сдъ, Дѣоръ. | 60 — Пермьски - Іенъ-лэнъ. |
| 28 — Ново-Французски Дѣа. | 61 — Мордовски - Паасъ. |
| 29 — Валлезански - Ди. | 62 — Мокшански - Шкай, Шкпаасъ. |
| 30 — Готтійски - Гуфъ. | 63 — Черемиски - Юму. |
| 31 — Англо-Саксонски Годъ. | 64 — Чювашки - Тора. |
| 32 — Аглински - Годъ. | 65 — Вошяцки - Пимаръ. |
| 33 — Тевтонски - Готъ, Котъ, Куотъ, Дѣштъ. | 66 — Вогульски, по р. Чюссовой Таромъ, Саиренгъ- Таромъ. (*) |

(*) То есть: свѣтлой свѣтлѣй идолъ у Вогульцъ называется Шампанъ.