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## James Macpherson & Ossian

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Department of Rare Books  
& Special Collections

# James Macpherson & Ossian

*an exhibit from the*  
G. Ross Roy Collection



Thomas Cooper Library  
University of South  
Carolina

*July-September 1998*

## **James Macpherson & Ossian**

The present exhibit of writings by and about the Scottish poet James Macpherson (1736-1796) welcomes to Thomas Cooper Library the eighth W. Ormiston Roy Memorial Visiting Research Fellow, Dr. Valentina Bold from the University of Aberdeen. Macpherson was himself a student, first at King's College, Aberdeen, and then at the rival Marischal College, before his versions of traditional Gaelic poetry made the name Ossian famous throughout Europe and America.

In addition to its outstanding holdings of Robert Burns and Burnsiana, the Roy Collection also encompasses extensive holdings of many other Scottish poets, from the early 18th century to the present. Dr. Bold's research interest in Macpherson provides a good opportunity to showcase the Roy Collection's extraordinary depth of material on a once widely-influential writer who deserves renewed critical attention.

What is shown here is only a sampling of the Macpherson material available in Thomas Cooper Library; the Roy Collection has not only many more British editions and reprints, but also many American printings, many examples of contemporary efforts at versifying Ossian, much material on other poets' response to Ossian, and additional items on the debates over authenticity.

The exhibit also gives opportunity to include other recent acquisitions: a first edition of James Boswell's *Journal of a*

**Tour to the Hebrides**, donated by Dr. Donald Kay, and Hill Burton's **Life and Correspondence of David Hume**, from the James Willard Oliver David Hume Collection. Macpherson's late pamphlet on American independence is from the Yates Snowden Collection in the South Caroliniana Library. Unless otherwise indicated, all items in the exhibit are by Macpherson.

### **Case 1: Early Writings and *Fragments***

\* Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1723-1792.

**James Macpherson.**

Reynolds's portrait of Macpherson, painted in 1772 at the height of his fame, is shown from the engraved frontispiece to **Poems of Ossian**, ed. Laing (1805).

\* "The Highlander," shown from **The poems of Ossian**, Dublin: D. Graisberry for P. Wogan, 1802.

Macpherson's early poems were written in the immediate shadow of the last Jacobite Rising and the defeat of the Highland clans at Culloden in February 1746.

\* "Ode on the Death of Marshall Keith," in Thomas Blacklock, 1721-1791, ed., **A collection of original poems.**

Edinburgh: A. Donaldson, 1760.

\* "The Cave," in **The poems of Ossian** ed. Laing, Edinburgh: Constable, 1805.

\* Thomas Maclauchlan, 1816-1886, ed. and tr., **The Dean of Lismore's book; a selection of ancient Gaelic poetry.**

Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1862.

\* "Two fragments of antient poetry



collected in the Highlands of Scotland,"  
**Gentleman's Magazine**, June 1760.

**\* Fragments of ancient poetry,**  
collected in the highlands of Scotland  
and translated from the Galic or Erse  
language. Edinburgh: Hamilton and  
Balfour, 1760.

**\* Fragments of ancient poetry . . .**  
Dublin: Sarah Cotter, 1760.

**\* Fragments of ancient poetry . . .**  
The 2d ed. Edinburgh: Hamilton and  
Balfour, 1760.

## **Case 2: *Fingal*, *Temora* and the *Works***

**\* Fingal**, an ancient epic poem, in six  
books: together with several other  
poems, composed by Ossian the son of  
Fingal. Translated from the Galic  
language. London: Becket and De  
Hondt, 1762.

**\* "A Dissertation on the Antiquity &c.**  
of the Poems of Ossian the Son of  
Fingal," shown in **Fingal . . .** 2nd ed.  
London: Becket and De Hondt, 1762.

**\* Temora**, an ancient epic poem, in  
eight books: together with several  
other poems composed by Ossian, the  
son of Fingal. Translated from the  
Galic language. London: Beckett and  
De Hondt, 1763.

**\* The works of Ossian : the son of  
Fingal translated from the Galic  
language . . .** 3d ed. London: Becket  
and De Hondt at Tully's Head, 1765.  
2 vols. Despite the title page, this was  
actually the first collected edition of  
Macpherson's Ossian.

**\* The poems of Ossian, Translated by**

**James Macpherson, Esq. . .** A new ed., carefully corrected, and greatly improved. London: Strahan and Becket, 1773. 2 vols. Macpherson's final rearrangement of the Ossian poems.

\* Ossian in Scotland: editions from Berwick-on-Tweed in the Borders (1795), the illustrated edition published by Morrison of Perth, on the edge of the Highlands (also 1795), an edition from the Highland city of Inverness (1804), and a nicely-preserved 1830 Edinburgh edition in original printed boards.

### **Case 3: the Ossianic Controversy**

\* David Hume: letter on Ossian, 1760, from John Hill Burton, ed., **Life and Correspondence of David Hume**. 2 vols. Edinburgh: Tait, 1846. *James Willard Oliver Collection*.

\* Hugh Blair, 1718-1800. **A critical dissertation on the poems of Ossian : the son of Fingal**. London: Printed for Becket and De Hondt, 1763.

\* Samuel Johnson, 1709-1784, **Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland**. 1775. Shown from **Works of Samuel Johnson**. Dublin: White, 1793, vol. IV. [*First edition at conservator's.*]

\* James Boswell, 1740-1795, **Journal of a tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, Ll.D.** First edition. London: Henry Baldwin, 1785. *Recently donated by Dr. Donald A. Kay.*

\* Dr. Johnson's final riposte to Macpherson, from Sir John Hawkins, **Life of Samuel Johnson, Ll.D.** 2nd ed London: Buckland et al, 1787.

\* Mackenzie, Henry, 1745-1831, **Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland appointed to inquire into the nature and authenticity of the poems of Ossian . . . with . . . some of the principal documents on which the report is founded.** Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1805. Original boards.

\* Patrick Graham, 1754?-1835. **Essay on the authenticity of the poems of Ossian; in which the objections of Malcolm Laing, Esq.. are particularly considered and refuted.** Edinburgh: Hill, 1807.

\* John Smith, 1747-1807.

**Sean dana; le Oisian, Orran, Ulann, &c. Ancient poems of Ossian, Orran, Ullin, &c. Collected in the western Highlands and isles; being the originals of the translations some time ago published in the Gaelic antiquities.** Edinburg: Elliot, 1787.

\* MacNeill, Archibald. **Notes on the authenticity of Ossian's poems** [Edinburgh]: for the author, 1868.

#### **Case 4: Ossian in Europe and America**

\* Merck, Johann Heinrich, 1741-1791, ed., **Works of Ossian.** Francfort : I. G. Fleischer, 1783. 4 vols.

\* Melchiorre Cesarotti, 1730-1808, tr. **Le poesie di Ossian tradotte.** 4 vols. Venezia: Orlandelli, 1819.

\* Pierre LeTourneur, 1736-1788, tr. **Ossian, Fils de Fingal, Bardes du 3e Siecle; poesies galliques.** Nouvelle ed. 2 vols. Paris: Dentu, 1810. LeTourneur's translation was first published in 1776.

\* Pierre Marie Francois Louis



Baour-Lormian, 1770-1854, tr. **Ossian, barde du IIIe siecle: poesies galliques en vers francaise**. 2d ed. Paris: Didot, 1804.

\* Alexander Macdonald, d. 1837.

**Phingaleis, sive Hibernia liberata, epicum Ossianis poema, e celtico sermone conversum.**

Edinburgi: J. Moir, 1820.

\* **The poems of Ossian, the son of Fingal. Translated by James Macpherson, Esq.** Philadelphia: Thomas Lang, 1790.

First American edition.

\* John Wodrow, **Fingal: an ancient epic poem in six books . . . translated into English heroic rhyme**. Edinburgh: for the author, 1771. 2 vols.

### **Case 5: Macpherson after Ossian**

\* Dedication to Lord Bute, shown from Macpherson, **Temora**. Dublin: Leathley and Wilson, 1763.

\* **An introduction to the history of Great Britain and Ireland**. London: Becket and De Hondt, 1771.

\* **The Iliad of Homer**. London: Becket and De Hondt, 1773. 2 vols.

\* **The history of Great Britain, from the Restoration, to the accession of the House of Hanover**. 2nd ed. London: Strahan and Cadell, 1776. 2 vols.

\* **Original papers; containing the secret history of Great Britain, from the restoration to the accession of the House of Hanover. To which are prefixed extracts from the life of James II. as written by himself**. 2nd ed. 2 vols. London: Strahan and Cadell, 1776.

\* **The rights of Great Britain asserted**



against the claims of America: being an answer to the Declaration of the general Congress. London: Cadell, 1776. *Yates Snowden Collection, South Caroliniana Library.*

### **The G. Ross Roy Collection and the Scottish collections**

The G. Ross Roy Collection of Robert Burns, Burnsiana and Scottish Poetry includes both a core collection of over 4000 Burns items, from the Kilmarnock edition onwards, and extensive holdings of many Scottish poets (Ramsay, Fergusson, MacDiarmid, but many others), particularly from the early 18th century to the present. Related Scottish collections include Scott, Carlyle, Galt and Stevenson, as well as extensive stack holdings of related scholarship and of Scottish fiction.

Holdings are detailed in the library's on-line catalogue (USCAN). On-line exhibits drawn from the Burns and Stevenson collections are available through the Department's home-page ([www.sc.edu/library/spcoll/rarebooks](http://www.sc.edu/library/spcoll/rarebooks)).

### **The W. Ormiston Roy Memorial Visiting Research Fellowship**

Each summer, this fellowship brings a scholar to Thomas Cooper Library for research on a topic covered in the Roy Collection. Inquiries to: Roy Fellowship, Rare Books & Special Collections, Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208, or by e-mail to [spcoll@tcl.sc.edu](mailto:spcoll@tcl.sc.edu).

*This exhibit has been curated by Patrick Scott ([scottp@tcl.sc.edu](mailto:scottp@tcl.sc.edu)).*