

LANDLINE

FIVE WALKS IN SKYE

Aig Tobar Loch Shianta

Dha Keiko Mukaide, neach-ealain à Iapan a tha a' fuireach ann an Alba agus a thadhail air Tobar Loch Shianta. 'iana' – 's ann mar seo a muinntir an àite ga fhuaimneachadh. A rèir choltais, 's ann bho sianta/seunta a tha an t-ainm a' tighinn. Bha an tobar seo, ann an Tròndairnis, ainmeil mar thobar slànachaidh sna seann làithean.

Latha fuar frasach,
an loch fhèin luasganach
le gaoth tuath rapach

ach tha an tobar sìochail
fo fhasgadh chraobh fuchsia
agus caochan a' sruthadh

bhon loch sheunta –
's sinne nar triùir aig an tobar
a' gabhail stiùir a brìgh

's i a' sruthadh gu ciùin,
a' samhlachadh sìth –
diva mhàlda, leth-fhalaichte.

Togaidh sinn uisge gu ar bilean
gun mhir-mhineachadh an fhacail
a' cur casg air a shlàinte:

chan eil facal ga ràdh,
a' cuimhneachadh a' hado
eadar aigne is uisge.

Thig an t-uisge bhon ghrund
a-nìos, fada shìos fon choille,
bhon talamh choibhneil:

an t-uisge diombuan is buan,
an-diugh ann am Flòdaigearraidh
's a-màireach os cionn cuan.

Ear is iar a' tighinn còmhla
aig an tobar san tiotan seo:
's e am facal simpatico.

At Sacred Loch Well

Dedicated to Keiko Mukaide, a Japanese artist living in Scotland and who visited the well at Loch Shianta in 2006. She has an interest in sacred wells. The locals pronounce the name as 'iana'. It appears to come from the word sianta/seunta, meaning enchanted, defended by enchantments, sacred. This well in Trotternish was renowned in the old days as a healing well and people came to it from near and far.

A cold showery day,
the loch itself restless,
with a brisk northerly wind

but the well is calm
under shelter of fuchsias
and a streamlet runs

from the sacred loch –
we a threesome at the well
guided by its virtue

as it flows quietly,
communicating peace –
a shy, half-hidden diva.

We raise water to our lips
without the analytic word
stopping its wholeness:

if there is a word it is prayer,
remembering the hado
between mind and water.

The water comes from the table
upwards from far beneath the wood,
from the kind earth we see:

the transient, lasting water,
today in Flodigarry
and tomorrow above some ocean.

East and west come together
at the well in this moment:
the word is simpatico.

Eilean Dòrais

About a mile to the North, lies the Isle Altvig, it has a high rock facing the East, is near two miles in circumference, and is reputed fruitful in corn and grass, there is a little chapel in it, dedicated to St Tueros.

*Bho A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland
le Màrtainn Màrtainn, 1703*

1. An t-Eilean

Eilean nan trì ainmean,
Altavaig, Eilean a' Chinn Mhòir
agus Eilean Fhlòdaigearraidh

far an robh Dòras a' còmhnaidh
na bliadhnaichean mòra ud air ais
mus tàinig na Lochlannaich bho thuath

le targaidean is obair fala,
ach 's e ainm-san fhathast a tha air chuimhne,
Cill Dòrais air Cladach Fhlòdaigearraidh,

Poll Dòrais eadar an cladach is an t-eilean,
eilean aosmhor bàn, gun ri fhaicinn
ach strìochan fheannag is chlachan;

ach bha Dòras ann uair air choreigin
's dh'fhàg e a bheannachd againn na ainm
's dh'fhàg e ainm mar ùrnaigh air muir is fearann

mar cheathach cùbhraidh a' cur beannachd
air an t-seann fhonn
mar a ghabhas an oiteag thairis.

2. An Naomh Dòras

Uaireigin dhen robh an saoghal
Air an eilean seo tha aonarachd umam
mar èideadh, nam chill nì mi ùrnaigh,
ag aslachadh an Tì as àirde,
a' ghaoth a' cur crith nam chleòca
agus crith fèin-àicheadh nam fheòil
sic transit gloria mundi.

Sleuchdaidh mi air mo ghlùinean
aig àm èirigh na grèine,
èiridh an uiseag chun nan nèamhan,
molaidh sinn le chèile an Tighearna
fuaim na fairge nar cluasan,
sic transit gloria mundi.

Nuair a thig an t-sàbaid chaomh
cuiridh mi an curach dha na tuinn,

thèid mi chun chill ris an tràigh
far am bi an treud cruinn;
leughaidh sinn an Leabhar naomh,
abraidh sinn aifreann,
molaidh sinn d' Ainm,
cuimhnichidh sinn na mairbh,
sic gloria transit mundi.

Thèid mi air ais dham eilean
far am faigh mi eòlas air neonitheachd
a bhios am Mac a' lionadh le a mhaise.
Saltraidh mi air an fheòil,
's ann dhutsa Dhè a bhios a' ghlòir,
sic gloria transit mundi.

Doras's Island

About a mile to the North lies the Isle Altvig, it has a high rock facing the East, is near two miles in circumference, and is reputed fruitful in corn and grass, there is a little chapel in it, dedicated to St Tueros.

From A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland by Martin Martin, 1703

1. The Island

Island of the three names,
Altavaig, Isle of the Big Headland
and Flodigarry Island

where Dòras lived
all these long years ago
before the Norsemen came from the north

with targets and bloody work,
but it's his name that's still remembered,
Cill Dòras on Flodigarry shore,

Poll Dòras between the shore and the island,
an ancient fallow island, with nothing to be seen
but streaks of lazybeds and stones;

but Dòras was there once upon a time
and left his blessing for us in his name
left it like a prayer on sea and land

like fragrant mist blessing
the old earth
as the breeze blows over.

2. Saint Tueros

Once upon a time

On this island nothingness surrounds me
like a garment, in my cell I pray,
supplicating the Almighty
as the wind shakes my cloak
and the renunciation shivers my flesh
sic transit gloria mundi.

I fall on my knees
at sunrise,
the lark rises to the heavens,
we both praise the Lord
with the sound of the sea in our ears,
sic transit gloria mundi.

When the dear Sabbath comes
I will put my coracle to the waves

and go to the church by the shore
where the flock will be gathered;
we will read from the holy Book,
we will say mass,
we will praise Your name,
we will remember the dead,
sic gloria transit mundi.

I shall return to my island
where I will imbibe nothingness
which the Son will fill with beauty.
I shall tread down the flesh,
to you O God will be the glory,
sic gloria transit mundi.

LANDLINE

FIVE WALKS IN SKYE

LOCH SHIANTA

From the Statistical Account 1791-99, by the Rev. Donald Martin, p. 556

In a low valley, there is a small hill, shaped like a house, and covered with small trees, or rather shrubs, of natural growth. At one side of it, there is a lake of soft water, from which there is no visible discharge. Its water finds many passages through the hill, and makes its appearance, on the other side, in a great number of springs, of the very purest kind. They all run into an oval bason (sic) below, which has a bottom of white sand, and is the habitation of many small fish. From that pond, the water runs, in a copious stream, to the sea. At the side of this rivulet, there is a bath, made of stone, and concealed from public view, by small trees surrounding it. Its name is Loch Shianta, or the sacred lake. There was once a great resort of people, afflicted with ailments, to this place. They bathed themselves, and drank of the water, though it has no mineral quality; and, on a shelf, made for the purpose, in the wall of a contiguous inclosure, they left offerings of small rags, pins, and coloured threads, to the divinity of the place.

STAFFIN ISLAND / FLADDA

About three Leagues to the North West of Rona, is the Isle Fladda being almost joyn'd to Skie, it is all plain arable Ground, and about a Mile in Circumference.

FLODIGARRY ISLAND / ALTVIG

A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland 1703 by Martin Martin

About a Mile to the North, lies the Isle Altvig, it has a high Rock facing the East, is near two Miles in circumference, and is reputed fruitful in Corn and Grass, there is a little old Chappel in it, dedicated to St. Turos. There is a Rock of about forty Yards in length at the North-end of the Isle distinguished for its commodiousness in Fishing. Herrings are seen about this Rock in great Numbers all Summer, insomuch that the Fisher-boats are sometimes as it were entangled among the shoals of them.

PLACE NAMES AROUND DUNANS

Flodigarry / Flòdaigearraidh – Float or Fleet garth; from Norse gardr – a garth or house and yard; diminutive gerdhi, adopted into Gaelic as gearraidh, that is the land between the machair and the moor

Loch Sheunta or Loch Shianta – the enchanted or sacred loch

Tobar Loch Sheunta – the well of Loch Sheunta/Shianta

A' Choille Mhòr – The Big Wood, above Loch Sheunta/Shianta

Eilean Fhlòdaigearraidh – Flodigarry Island. Also called Altaviag. From Norse Alpta-vik – Swan Island. Also Eilean a' Chinn Mhòir – Island of the big Head(land)

Sgeir na h-Èireann – The skerry of Ireland, the flat rock adjacent to and north of Flodigarry Island

Poll Dòrais – Doras's Pool, the water between Flodigarry Island and Flodigarry

Loch Leum nam Bràdh – Loch of the Leaping Quern Stones; beside the old Digg schoolhouse

Cuith-rang – round fold/pen

Na Dùnanan – The Dunans, dùnan being a small rounded hill.

Loch na h-Ìghne – the loch of the girl, about 100 years ago, a young girl (nighean Sheumais Lachlainn) was drowned in the loch

Ceàrrara – Ceàrr-àiridh, Kerrara, the sheiling to the left

Bhoilltir – possibly boill (lump(s) or bosses as on a shield) and tìr (land) so, land of the lumps

An Crògan – possibly 'the hollow'

Cnoc Bhoilltir – hill of Voilteir

Dìg – Digg from Norse dìk, a ditch

Stafainn – Staffin – the staff, from Norse stafr, a staff

Clachan from G. clach, a stone, pl. Clachan, also diminutive, a little stone. 1. The monk's or anchorite's beehive stone cell, built where wood or wattle was scarce 2. Developed into meaning oratory or kirk, and from the cluster of clachans making a monastic community, into a village

Cill Dòrais – Dorus's cell or kirk

Staffin or Stenscholl Island, formerly Flodda

TRANSCRIPTION FROM THE GAELIC BY MAOILIOS -

Lachie Gillies talking about fishing in the early 20th century

Lachie: There was fishing and crofting going on, they had specific times for the lobsters, starting in October till after New Year and into the beginning of February. Then the big line fishing would start and then the herring fishing in the summer around (the coast) here; Yes, I remember when I was a youngster going to the shore with my mother perhaps to get herring. The boats were coming in to the port with herring. They would give you ... you would ask for 100 herring. You would get a hundred herring for £1.

Interviewer: Where were the boats from?

Lachie: Well, from here itself, fishing boats.

Interviewer: As well as my uncles, were there other fishermen in Flodigarry?

Lachie: Och, yes, Lachlainn Theàrlach's folk were at the fishing, och, yes, all the time. Yes they had fishing boats, goodness me, yes, they had fishing boats. Also, Eàirdsidh Phàdraig's folk, they were at the fishing as well.

Interviewer: Where did they keep their boats?

Lachie: Just down below Lachlainn Theàrlach's house ... Again there was Port an Leathad, there were boats on Port an Leathad, big boats more than 20 feet, up to 22 or 23 feet. They had small boats as well, dinghies of 14-15 feet. They would be out in summer with them fishing for haddock, fishing with small lines and suchlike. Oh, yes, there was a lot of fish then, something we don't have today. Oh, yes, it's totally different nowadays.

Calum Nicolson talking about ploughing in Flodigarry in the early 20th century

Interviewer: Turning to crofting. You said people had horses when they came here. Did everybody have horses, when you grandfather first came here I mean?

Calum: It was after they came here that they got the horses. These people didn't have land (ie before they came to Flodigarry), it was after they came they got the horses. These people didn't have land, they were cotters. Some of them had a cow or two, or a few sheep on land around the place where their house had been, but they had no horses, it was after coming here that they got horses, and they worked in partnership with a neighbour, for at ploughing time you needed a pair of horses.

Interviewer: For the plough?

Calum: For the plough, we were here at number 8. It was Dòmhnall Sheòrais at number 5 who was with us. We had our horse and they had theirs for ploughing, that's the way it was all done. Always, the ones they partnered with, they did a lot of work together. If there was any help needed, very often these were the ones who would work together to do things, although there were others helping neighbours. But when the day for planting the potatoes came, all the households would gather, young people and everybody ... It was a day's work to plant the potatoes, I know here they would plant about 6 hundredweights of potatoes.

Interviewer: With the horses?

Calum: With the horses, and that took them all day. They would start in the morning and they would be ploughing and planting the potatoes. They had a system, there were three furrows going on ... There was a system that you closed one furrow and another one was opened. The last furrow in which you planted the seed potatoes, you waited until these were hidden and then you would open the next furrow there, and then you followed again with the seed potatoes putting them in the trench, and that's how they did it, and then they would stop at mealtime.

Interviewer: What kind of fertiliser was used?

Calum: Manure, cow's manure.

Interviewer: Would you put that in with the potatoes?

Calum: No, not here. That method was used before my day, where they put the manure in the trench, but from when I remember we spread the manure on the ground and it was ploughed into each furrow. It wasn't put in the furrow with the potatoes at all.