

MS found in the garderobe of Castle Weary, Benbecula.

Editor's notes:

The MS was in terrible condition, tattered, torn, and stained as if it had long been exposed to the elements. It appears to be a scaldic poem, recording a hitherto unknown Viking voyage to these islands. It is in several hands and several styles. Its textural analysis will present considerable difficulties to future scholars.

Dark the morning, white the pavement
When the longbus, named the Hunter,
Travelled Westward, and then Northward,
Captained by the bold John Baldwin.

Through the snow and o'er the mountains
Journeying westward, ever westward,
To the final big sea crossing
Where they met on windswept pierside,
Waiting for the promised longship
That would bear them ever westward
O'er the green-grey foam-flecked water.

Comes at last the promised ferry, called
Columba of the late arrivals
Swift it bears them to North Uist,
Then through blackness, cold and snowy
To the longhouse of Dark Island.

Praise unto the fearless voyager!
Skolars all of Northern studies!
Long their patience, long their lineage,
Sung in halls with ale o'er flowing!

[Here there is a break in the MS giving the lineages; although the manuscript is extremely fragmentary some details can be gleaned from what remains]

Argyll, son of Ambleside, son of Islay, son of Caithness, to the
twelfth generation...

[the MS apparently continues with the names of some war party]

John of the stopwatch
Long David of the five marriages
Wee Davie of the bathroom
Barbara, the seeker of tings
Donald Archie of the tall tales

[Then the poem resumes)

On the morrow, snow is falling,
All arise to face the day
Long it is, and hard the faring,
As they ransack, pillage, range
From end to end North Uist island.

Every dun and every barpa
Visited is then lectured o'er.
Every rock and every township,
Every hill and every dale
All they visit until tiring,
Come they to the western seaboard.

Here they meet a tall grey figure
High priest of the geomorphs
'Come,' he says, 'to meet thy macher,
Where the tide and seashore meet.'

So for days they range and pillage
Chapels, churches, stones and pubs,
Till at last there comes an ending
To the Skolars Northern voyage.

In the Longhouse of Dark Island
Lights are lit and food is brought,
Guests arrive and pipes and singers,
Feasting fills the hall with gladness.

On the morrow, homeward turning,
O'er the Minch's churning waters,
They will leave, the Northern Skolars,
Rain-drenched, sad at such a parting.

From the Uists, land of bent grass,
Grey of sky and warm of welcome,
They will go, but take home with them,
Memories long of place and people ...

[The MS ends here, except for a short piece of doggerel verse in another hand – this may or may not be contemporary with the rest of the poem]

We've machered here; we've machered there,
We've machered bloody everywhere;
Is it of sand, is it of shell,
That damned great pile named 'Crawford's Tell?'