

Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*Each week the **West Highland Free Press** publishes the text for Roddy Maclean's "Letter to Gaelic Learners" on **BBC Radio nan Gaidheal (103-105 FM)**.*

*The programme is broadcast at 11.50 every Friday morning, and repeated at 7.30 pm the following Monday.**

Bha mi a' leughadh leabhar an latha eile a chòrd rium glan. Leabhar do chloinn a th'ann, air a bheil *Sràid na h-Eala*. Chaidh a sgrìobhadh le Mairi Anna NicDhòmhnaill agus tha e mu dheidhinn dithis chloinne a th'air an toirt air falbh o Alba le Lochlannaich anns an t-seann aimsir. Tha iad nan tràilleagan agus tha iad a' dol a dh'Aimearaga a Tuath leis na Lochlannaich.

Chan eil an stòiridh fìor ach, nan robh, 's dòcha gur e a bh'annta a' chiad fheadhainn às Alba a chaidh a-riamh a dh'Aimearaga. Ach chan urrainn a bhith cinnteach às a sin. 'S dòcha gu robh Albannach air choreigin am measg nan Gàidheal Eireannach air bòrd bàta Naoimh Bhriannain fada ro linn nam maraichean Lochlannach.

Ach tha cuid a' cumail a-mach gur e a' chiad duine às Alba a chuir a chas air tìr ann an Aimearaga a Tuath fear Henry St Clair às Arcaibh. Thuir mi "a' chiad duine às Alba" seach "a' chiad Albannach" agus innsidh mi dhuibh carson ro dheireadh na litreach.

Dh'fhaodamaid an t-ainm Gàidhealach, Eanraig Mac na Ceàrdaich, a chur air, ach cha b' e Gàidheal a bh'ann agus, mar sin, canaidh mi "Henry St Clair" ris. B' e St Clair Iarla Arcaibh, a' chiad duine air an robh an tiotal sin. Chaidh Iarla a dheanamh dheth ann an trì cheud deug, trì fichead 's a naoi-deug (1379).

Bha mi ann an Arcaibh o chionn ghoirid agus chuala mi ann a sin mu dheidhinn St Clair. Tha na h-Arcaich a' cumail a-mach gun do sheòl e thar a' chuain le dusan long is dhà neo thrì cheud duine anns a' bhliadhna trì cheud deug, ceithir fichead 's a h-ochd-deug. Ràinig iad tìr air an taobh thall, agus thathar a' deanamh dheth gur e Alba Nuadh a bh'ann. Ach a bheil fianais sam bith aca?

Uill, beagan. Bha fear Eadailteach còmhla ri St Clair, air an robh Antonio Zen mar ainm, agus sgrìobh e mu dheidhinn a' ghnothaich. Chaidh seann ghunna a lorg ann an cala ann an Eilean Cheap Bhreatainn – gunna de sheòrsa nach robhar a' dèanamh as deidh a' cheathramh linn deug.

Thathar a' smaoinichadh gun do chuir St Clair seachad geamhradh ann an Alba Nuaidh mus do sheòl gu deas, gu Massachusetts, agus an uairsin dhachaigh. Faisg air baile Westford ann am Massachusetts tha clach air an deach iomhaigh de ridire a shnaigheadh. Thathar a' deanamh dheth gun deach a dhèanamh ann am meadhan a' cheathramh linn deug. Tha cuid a' deanamh dheth gur e a th'ann Sir Seumas Gunna, fear à Gallaibh a bha càirdeach do Henry St Clair.

Agus ann an Alba, anns an t-seann chill ris an canar an *Rosslyn Chapel*, faisg air Dùn Eideann, tha iomhaighean ann de lusan Aimearaganach, a' gabhail a-steach arbhar Innseanach, air an snaigheadh ann an cloich. Ach, agus seo an rud inntinneach, chaidh a' chill a thogail leth-cheud bliadhna mus do sheòl Crìsdean Columbus gu ruig' Aimearagaidh. 'S e treas Iarla Arcaibh a thog i.

Uill, sin e, a-reir nan Arcach. Dìochuimhnich Columbus. Bha Henry St Clair ann cha mhòr ceud bliadhna roimhe. A' chiad duine às Alba a chaidh ann le cinnt, neo às Alba mar a tha i an-diugh. Thuirt mi na bu tràithe nach e Albannach a bh'ann. Ri linn bha Arcaibh fhathast fo smachd na Danmhar, a bha an uairsin cuideachd a' smachdachadh Nirribhidh. Agus cha tàinig na h-Eileanan Arcach fo smachd na h-Alba gus an do ghabh Rìgh Seumas a Trì thairis iad trì fichead bliadhna as dèidh do St Clair a chasan, mas fhìor, a chur air tìr ann an Aimearaga a Tuath.

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Faclan na seachdainne: Lochlannaich: *Vikings (or modern Scandinavians)*; tràilleann: *slaves*; Aimearaga a Tuath: *North America*; stòiridh: *story*; Arcaibh: *Orkney*; dh'fhaodamaid: *we could*; Alba Nuadh: *Nova Scotia*; Eadailteach: *Italian*; cala: *harbour*; Eilean Cheap Bhreatainn: *Cape Breton Island*; Sir Seumas Gunna: *Sir James Gunn*; cill: *religious cell, chapel*; arbhar Innseanach: *maize*; cha mhòr: *almost*; smachd, a' smachdachadh: *control, controlling*.

Abairtean na seachdainne: a chòrd rium glan: *which I enjoyed immensely*; chan urrainn a bhith cinnteach às a sin: *one can't be certain of that*; Albannach air choreigin: *some Scot or other*; bàta Naoimh Bhriannain: *St Brendan's boat*; chaidh Iarla a dheanamh dheth: *he was made an Earl*; thar a' chuain le dusan long: *over the ocean with a dozen ships (thar commands the genitive)*; air an deach iomhaigh de ridire a shnaigheadh: *on which an image of a knight was engraved*; a bha càirdeach do: *who was related to*; gu ruig' Aimearagaidh: *to America (genitive after compound preposition)*; na bu tràithe: *earlier*; ri linn: *in his day*; mas fhìor: *if it's true*.

Puing ghràmair na seachdainne: ('Se) leabhar do chloinn a th'ann (*in conversation 'se is sometimes left out*): *it's a book for children*. Do is sometimes used where you might be tempted to say airson or aig. Note also that the feminine singular noun clann (a' chlann) becomes cloinn in the dative. Do lenites it so we get do chloinn. Aig does not lenite the following noun so we would get aig cloinn (or often, colloquially, as it does not contain the article, aig clann). With the articles we get don chloinn, aig a' chloinn. Thoir seo don chloinn (*give this to the children*); tha beachd aig a' chloinn air a h-uile nì (*the children have an opinion on everything*). The Litir also contains the phrase dithis chloinne (*two children*). Cloinne (*of children*) is the genitive form which is used with the special numerals like dithis and trì and in many other instances. Bha mi a' teagasg na cloinne (*I was teaching the children*); seo leabhraichean na cloinne (*here are the children's books*). Ask your teacher for clarification if you are confused, but do remember that the nominative is always clann eg tha a' chlann fadalach (*the children are late*).

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdaine: tha na h-Arcaich a' cumail a-mach: *the Orcadians maintain (make out, claim)*. Tha cuid a' cumail a-mach (*some people reckon, claim*). *This is a common phrase in conversation as is a' deanamh dheth which has a similar meaning*. Thathar a' deanamh dheth (*it is reckoned*).

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