

Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, written and compiled by Roddy Maclean, and specifically aimed at Gaelic learners who already have some knowledge of the language. A short vocabulary and comments on points of grammar and figures of speech are included with the text. If you have comments, Roddy can be contacted by e-mail at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk **

Seo agaibh tòimhseachan: càite, air uachdar na Talmhainn, a bheil ‘cearcall a’ mhathain’? Tha e ann an àite fuar, gu tuath air Alba. Am bi e na chuideachadh dhuibh ma chanas mi gur e am facal a bh’ aig na Greugaich o shean airson mathan – ‘*arktos*’?

’S e cearcall a’ mhathain an ‘Cearcall Arctach’, loighne do-fhaicsinneach a tha a’ dol timcheall na Talmhainn anns an àird a tuath co-shìnte le crios meadhan na cruinne. Airson a bhith mionaideach, tha e aig seasgad ’s a sia ceum agus trithead ’s a dhà mionaid (66° 32’) gu tuath air crios meadhan na cruinne. Ach carson ‘cearcall a’ mhathain’?

’S e a th’ ann an loighne as fhaide deas bhon phola mu thuath far an gabh a’ ghrian faicinn là is ‘oidhche’, gun dorchadas sam bith ann, aig àm grian-stad an t-samhraidh. Canaidh mi sin a-rithist, oir dh’fhaodadh nach eil am briathrachas furasta dhuibh. ’S e an Cearcall Arctach an loighne as fhaide deas air an t-saoghal, co-shìnte le crios meadhan na cruinne, far an gabh a’ ghrian faicinn ceithir uairean fichead san là aig grian-stad an t-samhraidh. ’S e ‘grian-stad an t-samhraidh’ a’ Ghàidhlig air ‘*summer solstice*’, an là as fhaide a th’ ann. Tha am facal *solstice* a’ tighinn bhon Laidinn *solstitium* a tha a’ ciallachadh ‘grian-stad’, an dearbh abairt a th’ againn ann an Gàidhlig.

Ach carson ‘*arktos*’? Uill, airson sin a mhìneachadh, feumaidh sinn a bhith ag amharc air na rionnagan, no na reultan. Tha mi dhen bheachd gum bi sibh eòlach air an reul-bhad air a bheil *The Plough* ann am Beurla. ’S e a’ Ghàidhlig a th’ air an *Crann-arain*. ’S e crann-arain an t-inneal leacach a bhios fùineadair a’ cleachdadh airson aran a thoirt a-mach à àmhainn.

’S e an crann-arain anns na speuran na seachd rionnagan as soilleire anns a’ reul-bhad mhòr air a bheil, ann an Laidinn, *Ursa Major* – am Mathan Mòr. Agus, gu tuath air a’ Chearcall Arctach, cha bhi am Mathan Mòr, an *arktos* do na Greugaich, a’ falbh uair sam bith fon fhàire. Gabhaidh e faicinn oidhche sam bith dhen bhliadhna, co-dhiù nuair a tha i dorch agus gun sgòthan.

Thathar a’ smaoinichadh gur e an Greugach Hipparchus a chruthaich an siostam airson loighnichean co-shìnte le crios meadhan na cruinne a chomharrachadh. Bha sin anns an dàrna linn ro Chrìosd. Am measg nan sgrìobhadairean a thug buaidh air, bha fear Pytheas a bhuineadh don bhaile Ghreugach a tha a-nise ann an ceann a deas na Frainge, is air a bheil ‘Marseilles’ an-diugh. Bha Pytheas beò còrr is trì cheud bliadhna ro Chrìosd agus tha e ainmeil, am measg eile, leis gur iad na sgrìobhaidhean aige an fheadhainn as sine a th’ againn mu Bhreatainn, oir sheòl e ann agus sgrìobh e mu dheidhinn a thurais.

Nuair a bha e ann an Alba thomhais e àirde na grèine aig meadhan-là agus bhuaithe sin, dh’obraich Hipparchus a-mach gu robh e aig leth-cheud ’s a h-ochd ceum is trì mionaidean deug (58°13’) gu tuath air crios meadhan na cruinne. Tha cuid a’ dèanamh dheth gu robh sin ann an Eilean Leòdhais agus gur dòcha gur e Tursachan Chalanais a tharraing Pytheas don eilean. Bha fada aig Pytheas ri dhol à Leòdhas mus ruigeadh e an t-àite fuar a chomharraich e mar *Ultima Thule* agus, gu dearbh, ‘cearcall a’ mhathain’, ach

tha e inntinneach gur dòcha gu bheil na clachan ainmeil ann an Calanais na cheangal annasach eadar na seann Ghreugaich, an cruinn-eòlas aca agus an dùthaich againn fhèin.

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Faclan na seachdainne: tòimhseachan: *puzzle*; Arctach: *Arctic*; do-fhaicsinneach: *invisible*; grian-stad an t-samhraidh: *summer solstice*; rionnagan, reultan: *stars*; reul-bhad: *constellation*; crann-arain: *baker's bread shovel (also the constellation known as The Plough in English)*; fuineadair: *baker*; Tursachan Chalanais: *Callanish Standing Stones*; cruinn-eòlas: *geography (knowledge of the globe)*; Eilean Leòdhais: *Isle of Lewis*.

Abairtean na seachdainne: air uachdar na Talmhainn: *on the surface of the Earth*; cearcall a' mhathain: *the circle of the bear*; am bi e na chuideachadh dhuibh?: *will it be of assistance to you?*; co-shìnte le crios meadhan na cruinne: *parallel with the equator*; as fhaide deas: *southernmost*; dh'fhaodadh nach eil am briathrachas furasta: *perhaps the vocabulary is not easy*; far an gabh a' ghrian faicinn: *where the sun can be seen*; feumaidh sinn a bhith ag amharc air X: *we must look at X*; airson aran a thoirt a-mach à àmhainn: *to take bread out of an oven*; na seachd rionnagan as soilleire: *the 7 brightest stars*; anns an dàrna linn ro Chrìosd: *in the second century before Christ*; an fheadhainn as sine a th' againn mu Bhreatainn: *the oldest ones we have about Britain*; sheòl e ann: *he sailed there*; thomhais e àirde na grèine aig meadhan-là: *he estimated (measured) the height of the sun at midday*; tha cuid a' dèanamh dheth: *some (people) reckon*; bha fada aig X ri dhol: *X had a long way to go (travel)*.

Puing-ghràmar na seachdainne: agus bhuaithe sin, dh'obraich Hipparchus a-mach gu robh e aig 58°13' gu tuath air crios meadhan na cruinne: *and from that Hipparchus worked out that he (Pytheas) was at 58°13' north of the equator. Do you notice a grammatical difference between the Gaelic and English sentences here? In English 'from' is the simple preposition, but in Gaelic, in a situation like this, where no noun is involved, we would normally say 'bhuaithe sin' which literally means 'from it that'. Bhuaithe is a prepositional pronoun, a grammatical construction which does not exist in English, but which is common in Gaelic (they exist for all common prepositions); it is formed as a combination of the preposition 'bho' and the third person singular masculine personal pronoun 'e'. Why do we assume the use of the masculine prepositional pronoun rather than the feminine (bhuaipe)? I suppose one just has to recognise that the masculine is generally the 'default' position, if gender is not a particular issue.*

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdainne: a bhuaidh don bhaile Ghreugach .. air a bheil 'Marseilles' an-diugh: *who belonged to the Greek town .. which is called 'Marseilles' today. A bhuaidh do/dha – who belonged to (place)*

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