

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, designed for 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, Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 425. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 121 corresponds to Litir 425.

Nuair a bha mi a’ fuireach anns an Eilean Sgitheanach cha robh mi uabhasach fada bho sheann chaisteal a tha a-nise na thobhta – Caisteal Dhùn Sgàthaich. Chuala mi bho dhaoine anns an eilean gun robh e air ainmeachadh airson Sgàthach, seann bhanrigh a bha a’ fuireach anns an Eilean Sgitheanach nuair a bha Cuchulainn na ghille. **Cha b’ ann an-dè no a bhon-dè a bha sin.** Bha Sgàthach cruaidh, comasach, gaisgeil – agus borb cuideachd.

Dh’ainmich mi Cuchulainn. B’ esan am balach! Ged a tha muinntir na h-Èireann ga agairt dhaibh fhèin, agus ged a bha e na Ultach – fear a bhuineas do dh’Ulaidh – bha buinteanas aige do dh’Alba cuideachd, mar a chì sinn.

Tha Cuchulainn a’ nochdadh, am measg eile, anns an sgeulachd ainmeil, *Táin Bó Cuailnge* – ’s dòcha an sgeulachd as sine a th’ anns an Roinn Eòrpa a tha a’ buntainn ri gaisge nan seann làithean. Gu tric ann am Beurla thathar a’ gabhail *The Cattle Raid of Cooley* air. Táin Bó Cuailnge.

Tha an stòiridh a’ tòiseachadh – thathar a’ smaoinichadh, faisg air dà mhìle bliadhna air ais – le rìgh is banrigh Chonnacht – Ailill agus Medb. Bha an dithis aca beartach. Bha iad a-mach air a chèile mu dheidhinn na bh’ aig gach duine aca de stòras. Bha Medb farmadach mu tharbh air leth math a bh’ aig Ailill. Bha an tarbh ann an treud Medb an toiseach ach cha robh e toilichte a bhith fo smachd boireannaich agus dh’fhalbh e gu treud Ailill. ’S e **Finnbhennach** an t-ainm a bh’ air. Tha sin a’ ciallachadh “fionn-adharcach”.

Uill, bha Medb ag iarraidh tarbh a cheart cho math ris, agus bha i air cluinntinn mu fhear donn ann an Cuailnge ann an Ulaidh. Bha an tarbh sin le ceann-feadhna air an robh Daire MacFiachna.

Bha Medb deònach pàigheadh airson an tarbh a ghabhail air mhàl. Ach cha robh na teachdairean aice uabhasach gleusta. Leig iad fhaicinn do Dhàire MacFiachna gum biodh iad air an tarbh donn a ghoid bhuaithe mura robh e air a bhith deònach a thoirt seachad air mhàl. Uill, chuir sinn crìoch air a’ bhargan. Chaidh teachdairean Medb dhachaigh a Chonnacht às aonais an tairbh.

Bha Medb fiadhaich. Chuir i roimhe an tarbh donn a thoirt air ais ge b’ oil le Daire. Chuir i arm ri chèile. Fhuair i taic bho ghaisgich à Mumhan, mòr-roinn eile de dh’Èirinn. Gheall Medb fearann, airgead – eadhon a nighean fhèin – do dh’fhir a bhiodh deònach sabaid às a leth.

Thòisich an t-arm air a shlighe a dh’Ulaidh. Nochd bana-bhuidseach agus thug i rabhadh do Mhedb gun a dhol air adhart leis a’ chogadh. Ach cha do dh’èist Medb rithe.

An toiseach bha cùisean a’ coimhead fàbharach do dh’arm Chonnacht. Bha fir Uladh uile tinn. Bha, co-dhiù, ach aon duine – Cuchulainn. Aig an àm bha Cuchulainn dìreach seachd

bliadhn' deug a dh'aois. Agus bha aige ri Ulaidh a dhòn leis fhèin. Ach 's e a bha gaisgeil. Mharbh e mòran saighdearan.

Mu dheireadh bha cùmhnant ann eadar an dà thaobh. Dh'aontaich Cuchulainn sabaid na aonar an aghaidh gaisgeach sam bith – fhad 's a dh'fhuiricheadh na saighdearan Connachtach far an robh iad. Fear às dèidh fear, latha às dèidh latha, rinn Cuchulainn a' chùis air gach gaisgeach a chuireadh air a bheulaibh.

Ach latha a bha seo, cò nochd mu a choinneamh ach a bhràthair dalta, Ferdiad. Chì sinn gu dè dh'èirich eatarra an ath-sheachdain. Agus chì sinn carson a dh'ainmich mi Sgàthach agus an t-Eilean Sgitheanach aig toiseach na Litreach.

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Faclan na Litreach: Sgàthach: *Sgàthach (a legendary warrior queen based on Skye)*; Ultach: *Ulsterman*; farmadach: *envious*; treud: *herd*; ceann-feadhna: *clan leader*.

Abairtean na Litreach: Caisteal Dhùn Sgàthaich: *Dunsgaith Castle*; bha X cruaidh, comasach, gaisgeil – agus borb: *X was tough, able, heroic – and brutal*; b' esan am balach!: *he was the [cool] guy!*; ged a tha muinntir na h-Èireann ga agairt dhaibh fhèin: *although the people of Ireland claim him as theirs*; fear a bhuineas do dh'Ulaidh: *a man who belongs to Ulster*; a tha a' buntainn ri gaisge nan seann làithean: *which deals with the heroism of ancient times*; mu dheidhinn na bh' aig gach duine aca de stòras: *about the riches each possessed*; cha robh e toilichte a bhith fo smachd boireannaich: *he wasn't happy being under the control of a woman*; bha Medb ag iarraidh tarbh a cheart cho math ris: *Medb wanted a bull just as good as him*; deònach pàigheadh airson an tarbh a ghabhail air mhàl: *willing to pay to hire the bull*; cha robh na teachdairean aice uabhasach gleusta: *her messengers weren't very diplomatic*; gum biodh iad air an tarbh donn a ghoid bhuaithe: *that they would have stolen the brown bull from him*; chuir sinn crìoch air a' bhargan: *that put paid to the bargain*; ge b' oil le Daire: *regardless of Daire*; Mumhan, mòr-roinn eile: *Munster, another province*; gheall Medb fearann, airgead – eadhon a nighean fhèin: *Medb promised land, money – even her own daughter*; dh'aontaich X sabaid na aonar an aghaidh gaisgeach sam bith: *X agreed to single combat against any warrior*; a chuireadh air a bheulaibh: *who was put in front of him*; a bhràthair dalta: *his foster-brother*; gu dè dh'èirich eatarra: *what happened between them*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: **Finnbhennach:** Finnbhennach (Fionn-bheannach, “fair-horned”) might be a male chauvinist bull but he has an interesting name. Irish dictionaries list “horn” as the primary meaning of beann even today which gives the word a long pedigree (the same can be said of fionn which remains an active word in the languages of both countries). But beann has shifted in Scottish Gaelic where even in Dwelly's day it meant “horn” only in Islay. An oblique form of the word – beinn – has become our standard word for “mountain” (presumably as an extension of the idea of a pointed object). The common term today for “horn” in Scottish Gaelic is adharc, which is derived from an old Celtic root meaning “defend”.

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: **Cha b' ann an-dè no a bhon-dè a bha sin:** *lit. that wasn't yesterday or the day before – ie it was a very long time ago.*

* Tha “Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh” air a maoineachadh le Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig.