

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 474. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 170 corresponds to Litir 474.

Ann an ceann a tuath Eilean Hòdhaigh ann an Arcaibh tha àite air a bheil Glens of Kinnaird. Tha an t-ainm sin a’ coimhead rudeigin Gàidhealach, nach eil? Ach a bheil e? Chan urrainn dhomh a bhith cinnteach. Thug an sgoilear Ùisdean Marwick sùil air a’ chùis tràth san fhicheadamh linn agus cha b’ urrainn dhàsan a bhith cinnteach nas motha. Ann an grunn àiteachan ann an Arcaibh, lorgar *glen* no *glens*, agus *loch* – is eadhon *lochan*. Ach ’s dòcha gur e as coireach nach eil na h-ainmean sin uabhasach sean, no gun deach na faclan fhèin a-null mar fhaclan-iasaid don Bheurla Arcaich.

Thug Marwick sùil air ainmean-àite ann an Arcaibh a dh’fhaodadh a bhith Ceilteach – bho chànan nan Cruithneach a bha a’ fuireach ann ro na Lochlannaich – no eadhon bhon Ghàidhlig. Tha cuid dhen bheachd gun robh Gàidhlig aig na manaich a lorg na Lochlannaich ann – tha ainmean mar Papa Westray, Papa Stronsay is Papdale a’ comharrachadh nam manach sin.

Bha Marwick dhen bheachd gu robh bailtean-fearainn air a bheil Airy a’ faighinn an ainmean bhon fhacal Gàidhlig *àirigh* – a *shieling*. Tha fios againn gun deach am facal sin a-null do chànan nan Lochlannach ann an Alba. Tha àiteachan air a’ Ghàidhealtachd air a bheil ainmean Lochlannach, le a-r-y –*ary* aig an deireadh. ’S e sin a’ Ghàidhlig *àirigh* – ach ann an Lochlannais. ’S e Kernsary ann an Ros an Iar eisimpleir dhiubh.

Chan urrainn dhomh mìneachadh carson a ghabh na Lochlannaich grèim air an fhacal Ghàidhlig sin oir bha facal acasan a bha a’ ciallachadh an aon rud – *setr* ann an seann Lochlannais. Tha ainmean-àite ann an Leòdhas a’ tighinn bho *setr* – leithid Siadair, Ungasiadair is Cairisiadair. Ach bha am facal a thàinig bhon Ghàidhlig air a chleachdadh ann an Lochlannais anns an t-seann làmh-sgrìobhainn mu Arcaibh – an *Orkneyinga Saga*.

’S e facal eile a nochdas ann an ainmean Arcach a dh’fhaodadh a bhith bhon Ghàidhlig – *bràighe*. Tha e càirdeach don fhacal *brae* ann an Albais ach tha e a’ nochdadh ann an co-dhiù dà ainm Arcach ann an riochd car Gàidhealach – Braemore faisg air Stenness air Tìr-mòr Arcaibh, agus ann am Faraclett ann an Rousay far a bheil leathad air a bheil Brae-an-finyan. A-rithist, chan urrainn dhomh a ràdh dè cho sean ’s a tha **fear seach fear** de na h-ainmean sin.

Ann an Eilean Shanndaigh – no Sanday – tha àite ann air a bheil *the Kirk and Kill o’ Howe* – dà chnoc le ceud meatair eatarra. Bha Ùisdean Marwick dhen bheachd gum b’ e an *Kill* – *ceall* no *cille* ann an Gàidhlig, is gun robh seann eaglais ann ri linn nan Ceilteach. An uair sin thàinig na Lochlannaich agus thog iad *kirk* no eaglais aca fhèin pìos beag air falbh bhon t-seann eaglais Cheiltich.

Tha feadhainn cuideachd dhen bheachd gu bheil *egil* anns an ainm Egilsay – eilean eile ann an Arcaibh – a’ tighinn bho *eaglais*. Agus gu bheil Kili Holm, eilean beag dìreach gu tuath air Egilsay, a’ ciallachadh *eilean na cille* – le Kili a’ tighinn bhon Ghàidhlig.

Chan urrainn dhomh a ràdh le cinnt cia mheud facal Gàidhlig, no Cruithneach, a tha beò an-diugh ann an ainmean-àite Arcaibh. Glè bheag, chanainn. Tha a’ mhòr-chuid de na h-ainmean Lochlannach, ged a chaidh an atharrachadh gu dreach ùr stèidhichte air a’ Bheurla Arcaich. Ach tha iad gu math inntinneach, agus tha iad mar phàirt de dhìleab làidir nan Lochlannach anns na h-Eileanan mu Thuath.

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Faclan na Litreach: Hòdhaigh: *Hoy*; Arcaibh: *Orkney*; bailtean-fearainn: *farms, fermtouns*; àirigh: *shieling (equivalent to the Old Norse setr, modern Norwegian setter)*; leithid: *such as*; leathad: *slope*; Cruithneach: *Pictish*.

Abairtean na Litreach: tràth san fhicheadamh linn: *early in the 20th Century*; cha b’ urrainn dhàsan a bhith cinnteach nas motha: *he couldn’t be certain either*; lorgar X: *X is found*; ’s dòcha gur e as coireach nach eil na h-ainmean sin uabhasach sean: *perhaps the reason is that those names are not terribly old*; mar fhaclan-iasaid don Bheurla Arcaich: *as loanwords into the Orkney dialect*; bho chànan nan Cruithneach: *from the language of the Picts*; a’ comharrachadh nam manach: *commemorating the monks*; aig an deireadh: *at the end*; ’s e X ann an Ros an Iar eisimpleir dhiubh: *X in Wester Ross is an example of them*; a bha a’ ciallachadh an aon rud: *which meant the same thing*; càirdeach do X ann an Albais: *related to X in Scots*; co-dhiù dà ainm Arcach ann an riochd car Gàidhealach: *at least two Orkney names in a rather Gaelic form*; dà chnoc le ceud meatair eatarra: *two hills a hundred metres apart*; ri linn nan Ceilteach: *at the time of the Celts*; dìreach gu tuath air X: *just to the north of X*; chan urrainn dhomh a ràdh le cinnt: *I can’t say for certain*; chaidh an atharrachadh gu dreach ùr stèidhichte air a’ Bheurla Arcaich: *they became changed to a new form based on the Orkney dialect*; dìleab làidir nan Lochlannach anns na h-Eileanan mu Thuath: *the strong legacy of the Norse in the Northern Isles*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *Here’s a few more Orkney place-names which might contain Gaelic elements – whether as pre-Norse nomenclature or as Norse or Scots elements derived as loanwords from Gaelic: Partan Taing (Crab Spit) on Linga Holm, Cairn Head on Holm of Papa, Point of Tobar (possibly Well Point) on Faray, and Strathore and Rosecraigie on Shapinsay. One of the highest hills on Hoy is called Cuilags. It ought to be Norse (given the surrounding nomenclature) but I haven’t been able to locate a derivation, and Peter Drummond’s “Scottish Hill Names” doesn’t contain any suggestions. WJ Watson gives a Gaelic derivation for Coulags in Wester Ross (Na Cùileagan). But the Hoy Cuilags appears to be the hill itself. Can a reader help?*

Gnathas-cainnt na Litreach: **fear seach fear** de na h-ainmean sin: **one or other** of those names. With a feminine noun (ainm is masculine) we would say **tè seach tè (dhiubh)**.

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