

# 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](mailto:roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk). This is Litir 564. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 260 corresponds to Litir 564.*

Bha mi a’ bruidhinn an t-seachdain sa chaidh mu dhiofar fhaclan airson *ailbhean* ann an Gàidhlig, agus mar a chunnaic Ceiltich na creutairean Afraganach sin nuair a chaidh arm **Hannibal** tarsainn nan Ailpean gu ruige an Ròimh anns an treas linn ro Chrìosd. Bha mi a’ leughadh seann phàipear ann am Fraingis, air an robh *Les Celtes et Les Éléphants*. B’ e an t-ùghdar H Gaidoz, Àrd-ollamh a’ Chruinn-eòlais agus Sluagh-eòlais anns an *École des Sciences Politiques* ann am Paris.

Ach cha b’ e cogadh Hannibal an aon turas a bha ailbheanan air an cleachdadh ann am batail. Timcheall àm Hannibal bha cath mòr anns an Ear-mheadhanach eadar na h-Èiphitich fo Ptolemy agus na Seleucidich fo Antiochus. Bha na ficheadan de dh’ailbheanan Afraganach aig Ptolemy agus na ficheadan de dh’ailbheanan Àisianach aig Antiochus. Ged a tha an fheadhainn Afraganach nas motha nan fheadhainn Àisianach, a rèir aithris bha an fheadhainn Àisianach na b’ fheàrr ann an sabaid. A dh’aindeoin sin, ge-tà, ’s e Ptolemy a thug buaidh.

Agus dh’fhuiling Ceiltich a-rithist buaidh nan ailbheanan ann an cogadh. Ceud bliadhna às dèidh Hannibal, timcheall na bliadhna ceud, fichead ’s a h-aon (121) RC, chuir na proconsulan Ròmanach, Domitius Ahenobarbus agus Quintus Fabius Maximus, arm gu ruige ceann a deas na Gaille. Anns an sgìre sin bha treubh làidir Ceilteach a’ seasamh an aghaidh cumhachd na Ròimhe. B’ iad sin na h-Arverni fo cheannas an rìgh, Bituitus.

Rinn na Ròmanaich a’ chùis air na Ceiltich agus thathar ag ràdh gur e gun robh ailbheanan-cogaidh aca a bu choireach. Chuir na creutairean mòra sin eagal air na Ceiltich. Nuair a bha e air *Gallia Transalpina* a cheannsachadh, chaidh Domitius air chuairt mhòir tron dùthaich air muin ailbhein.

Agus an do chleachd na Ròmanaich ailbheanan nuair a bha iad a’ ceannsachadh nan Ceilteach ann am Breatainn? Uill, chleachd, a rèir choltais. Tha am Proif. Gaidoz ag ràdh gun do chleachd Iulius Cesar iad. Ràinig na Ròmanaich abhainn far an robh arm Breatannach a’ dol a sheasamh nan aghaidh. Ach ghabh na Breatannaich eagal ro na h-ailbheanan is rinn na Ròmanaich a’ chùis. Tha cuid de luchd-eachdraidh ag ràdh, ge-tà, nach e Cesar a chuir ailbheanan-cogaidh gu feum ann am Breatainn ach an t-Ìmpire Claudius anns a’ bhliadhna 43 AC nuair a ghabh na Ròmanaich smachd air Camulodunum, far a bheil Colchester an-diugh.

An uair sin tha am Proif. Gaidoz a' sgrìobhadh rudeigin car inntinneach. Gabhaibh mo leisgeul ma leughas mi an toiseach e anns an Fhraingis thùsail: *Par un singulier contraste, les descendants de ces Bretons, les Anglais, sont aujourd'hui la seule puissance européenne qui ait des éléphants dans son armée.* Tuigidh sibh mar a bhiodh cuid anns an Roinn Eòrpa a' coimhead air Breatannaich agus Sasannaich mar co-ionann ri chèile! Co-dhiù, tha e ag ràdh gur iad Breatannaich an naoidheamh linn deug an aon fheadhainn Eòrpach a bha a' cleachdadh ailbheanan anns an arm aca. Bha e a' ciallachadh arm Bhreatainn anns na h-Innseachan.

Anns an rosgrann mu dheireadh tha am Proif. Gaidoz ag ràdh gum b' e sin *la revanche des Celtes sur les Éléphants* – **dìoghaltas nan Ceilteach air na h-Ailbheanan**. Mmm. Chan eil fhios a'm mu dheidhinn sin.

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**Faclan na Litreach:** cath: *battle*; dh'fhuiling: *suffered*; treubh: *tribe*; ceannas: *leadership*; Iulius Cesar: *Julius Caesar*; na h-Innseachan: *India*; rosgrann: *sentence*.

**Abairtean na Litreach:** mu dhiofar fhaclan: *about different words*; mar a chunnaic Ceiltich na creutairean Afraganach sin: *how the Celts saw those African creatures*; gu ruige an Ròimh: *to Rome*; anns an treas linn ro Chrìosd: *in the third century before Christ*; Àrd-ollamh a' Chruinn-eòlais agus Sluagh-eòlais: *Professor of Geography and Ethnology*; a bha ailbheanan air an cleachdadh ann am batail: *that elephants were used in battle*; timcheall àm Hannibal: *around the time of Hannibal*; anns an Ear-mheadhanach: *in the Middle East*; na h-Èiphitich fo Ptolemy agus na Seleucidich fo Antiochus: *the Egyptians under Ptolemy and the Seleucids under Antiochus*; bha an fheadhainn Àisianach na b' fheàrr ann an sabaid: *the Asian ones were better in fighting*; a dh'aindeoin sin, ge-tà: *despite that, however*; 's e X a thug buaidh: *it's X that was victorious*; dh'fhailnich orra: *they failed*; ceann a deas na Gaille: *the south of Gaul*; an aghaidh cumhachd na Ròimhe: *against the power of Rome*; thathar ag ràdh gur e gun robh ailbheanan-cogaidh aca a bu choireach: *it is said that it was because they had war-elephants that was responsible*; nuair a bha e air Gallia Transalpina a cheannsachadh: *when he had subdued Gallia Transalpina [the Roman province in southern Gaul]*; air chuairt mhòir tron dùthaich air muin ailbhein: *on a big tour through the country on the back of an elephant*; nuair a ghabh na Ròmanaich smachd air X: *when the Romans took control of X*; anns an Fhraingis thùsail: *in the original French*; a' coimhead air Breatannaich agus Sasannaich mar co-ionann ri chèile: *looking upon British and English as the same as each other*.

**Puing-chànain na Litreach:** chaidh arm **Hannibal** tarsainn nan Ailpean: *Hannibal's army went across the Alps. Is it correct to simply call Hannibal after the English fashion in Gaelic? As modern Gaels live in a bilingual world dominated by English, it's natural that they would understand the English form of his name. It's interesting to speculate what the Gaels of old would have called*

*him, however. The French, for example, drop the “h” after their own fashion and refer to him as Annibal. But often “h” words adopted from other languages were given an initial “t” in Gaelic. Might he have been Tanabal or Tianabal? If you’ve come across an early reference to him, please let me know. The name is reputed to be originally Phoenician, meaning “favoured by Baal (a pagan god)” I’ve taken the Gaelic form of Julius Caesar – Iulius Cesar – from earlier Gaelic authorities, such as Aonghas MacCoinnich (“Eachdraidh na h-Alba” 1867).*

**Gnathas-cainnt na Litreach: dìoghaltas nan Ceilteach air na h-Ailbheanan: *the revenge of the Celts on the Elephants.***

*Tha “Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh” air a maoinachadh le MG ALBA*