

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 rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 574. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 270 corresponds to Litir 574.

Bha An t-Urr Alexander Pope na mhinistear ann am Meagrath ann an Gallaibh anns an ochdamh linn deug. Anns a’ bhliadhna seachd ceud deug, trithead ’s a naoi (1739) no mar sin, chruinnich e beul-aithris Ghàidhlig ann an Gallaibh. Ann am bliadhna nuair a tha am Mòd Nàiseanta gu bhith ann an Gallaibh, saoilidh mi nach dèan e cron sam bith sùil a thoirt air an obair aige.

Am measg na chruinnich e bha *Duan Diarmaid*. Seo na sgrìobh e fhèin mu dheidhinn: *Tha bodach anns an sgìre seo a bheir dheth a bhonaid gach turas a ghabhas e “Duan Diarmaid”. Fhuair mi a-steach don taigh agam e, thug mi botal leann dha agus dh’iarr mi air “Duan Diarmaid” a ghabhail. Às dèidh còmhradh beag, thuirt e gun dèanadh e sin airson ministear a pharaiste a thoileachadh ach thug e a bhonaid dheth. Dh’iarr mi air stad agus a bhonaid a chur air. Ach thug e leisgeul air choreigin.*

Cho luath ’s a thòisich e air seinn, dh’èirich mi agus chuir mi a bhonaid air a-rithist. Rinn e guidheachan agus dhiùlt e an tuilleadh a ghabhail mura leiginn leis a cheann fhàgail gun cheann-bheart. Thug mi a shaorsa dha agus sheinn e gu foghainteach. An uair sin dh’fhaighnich mi dheth gu dè an t-adhbhar a bh’ aige [a bhith a’ seinn gun cheann-bheart]; thuirt e rium gur e urram don ghaisgeach a bu chuireach [a’ ciallachadh Diarmaid]. Dh’fhaighnich mi dheth an robh e dhen bheachd gun robh spiorad a’ ghaisgich an làthair; thuirt e nach robh ach gun robh e iomchaidh dhaibhsan a bha na shliochd a bhith a’ toirt urram do a chuimhne.

Tha ochdad ’s a còig loidhnichean anns an duan. Chan eil e furasta a leughadh oir cha do sgrìobh Mgr Pope a’ Ghàidhlig leis an t-siostam litreachaidh a th’ againn an-diugh. Tha an duan a-mach air mar a mharbh Diarmad an torc nimhe airson dearbhadh do Fhionn MacCumhail gun robh e airidh air Gràinne a bhith aige mar bhean-chèile.

’S aithne dhomh trì àiteachan ann an Alba far a bheilear ag ràdh gun do mharbh Diarmad an torc – Gleann Sìdh, Tòrr an Tuirc faisg air an Òban agus Beinn Laghail ann an Dùthaich MhicAoidh. De na trì àiteachan sin, ’s e Beinn Laghail as fhaisge air Meagrath ann an Gallaibh. Gu dearbh, chithear a’ bheinn à Meagrath air latha soilleir. Ach gu h-inntinneach tha an duan a chruinnich Mgr Pope ann an Gallaibh a’ gabhail àite ann an Gleann Sìdh, seach ann an Dùthaich MhicAoidh.

Am measg na chruinnich e tha sgeulachdan na Fèinne a tha a’ toirt a-steach Fionn, Oisean, Oscar, Caoilte is Conlaoch – na laoich air a bheil sinn eòlach bho sgìrean eile. Ach tha stòiridh aige nach fhaca mi ann an àite sam bith eile – *Duan Learmoin*. Tha

Oisean, mac Fhinn, a' caoidh mar a chaill rìoghachd athar gu dubh aig làmhan nan Lochlannach.

B' e Learmon fear cumhachdach a bh' ann an co-bhanntachd le Fionn. Ach nuair a nochd cabhlach mòr à Lochlann, cha robh Learmon deònach **cath a chur**. Lagaich sin na Gàidheil agus thug na Lochlannaich buaidh orra. Saoil an robh an sgeulachd sin na chomharra air rudeigin a thachair ann an eachdraidh nan Gàidheil – eadhon ann an Gallaibh – o chionn fhada?

* * * * *

Faclan na Litreach: Meaghrath: *Reay (parish)*; Gallaibh: *Caithness*; torc nimhe: *wild boar*; Gleann Sìdh: *Glenshee*; Beinn Laghail: *Ben Loyal*; Dùthaich MhicAoidh: *The Mackay Country (N Sutherland)*; seach (ann an): *rather than (in)*; Oisean, mac Fhinn: *Ossian, the son of Fionn*; co-bhanntachd: *coalition*; cabhlach: *fleet*.

Abairtean na Litreach: saoilidh mi nach dèan e cron sam bith: *I reckon it won't do any harm*; thug mi botal leann dha: *I gave him a bottle of ale*; gun dèanadh e sin airson ministear a pharaiste a thoileachadh: *that to oblige his parish minister he would do so*; leisgeul air choreigin: *some excuse*; rinn e guidheachan: *he swore*; dhiùlt e an tuilleadh a ghabhail: *he refused to sing any more*; mura leiginn leis a cheann fhàgail gun cheann-bheart: *unless I allowed him [his head] to be uncovered*; thug mi a shaorsa dha: *I gave him his freedom*; sheinn e gu foghainteach: *he sang with great spirit*; gur e urram don ghaisgeach a bu choireach: *that it was out of regard for the hero*; an robh e dhen bheachd gun robh spiorad a' ghaighich an làthair: *if he thought that the spirit of the hero was present*; gun robh e iomchaidh dhaibhsan a bha na shliochd: *that it well became them who descended from him*; a bhith a' toirt urram do a chuimhne: *to honour his memory*; airidh air Gràinne a bhith aige mar bhean-chèile: *worthy of having Gràinne as his wife*; 's aithne dhomh: *I know*; chithear a' bheinn air latha soilleir: *the mountain can be seen on a clear day*; a' caoidh mar a chaill rìoghachd athar aig làmhan nan Lochlannach: *laments how his father's country lost at the hands of the Norsemen*; na chomharra air rudeigin a thachair: *a representation of something that happened*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *Since first coming across Buaile Oscar, an ancient hillfort on the top of Beinn Freiceadain near Halkirk in Caithness, I have been intrigued as to whether the name means "leap fold" as in local tradition or whether it is linked to the great legendary Gaelic hero Oscar (or Osgar), son of Oisean and grandson of Fionn MacCumhail. A local tradition connects the hill by a leap (of a giant) to the next hill to the north where there is a supposed footprint called Lorg an Fhamhair. But Rev Pope's collection shows us that Oscar was a significant figure in Caithnessian Gaelic tradition, as he was elsewhere in Gaelic Scotland. The collection includes ten Fingalian legends from Caithness, and Oscar is mentioned in five of them. If you have any information on Fingalian connections to Caithness and Sutherland, I'd love to hear from you.*

Gnathas-cainnt na Litreach: cha robh Learmon deònach **cath a chur**: *Learmon wasn't willing to wage war.*

Tha "Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh" air a maoineachadh le MG ALBA