

# 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.macleon@bbc.co.uk](mailto:roddy.macleon@bbc.co.uk). This is Litir 578. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 274 corresponds to Litir 578.*

'S e *samh* a' Ghàidhlig air an lus *Rumex acetosa*. Canaidh daoine *common sorrel* ris ann am Beurla. *Samh* ann an Gàidhlig. Thàinig an t-ainm Beurla bho bhlas na duilleig – tha i gu math searbh no *sour*. Ann an Albais, 's e *sourock* a chanas daoine ris.

Chan eil e cho soilleir, ge-tà, cò às a thàinig an t-ainm Gàidhlig, *samh*. A bheil samh làidir air an lus? Cha chreid mi gu bheil.

Shaoileadh tu, mas e *samh* a chanas sinn ri *sorrel*, gum biodh *samhan* a' ciallachadh lus beag dhen aon seòrsa. Loch is lochan, samh is samhan. Ach **chan eil e cho sìmplidh sin**. Tha *samhan* a' ciallachadh lus de sheòrsa gu tur eadar-dhealaichte. Tha e mòran nas motha na samh!

'S e a th' ann an *samhan* seòrsa de dh'aiteann. 'S e an t-aiteann – no *juniper* – *Juniperus communis* do luchd-saidheans. 'S e an samhan *Juniperus sabina*. Ann am Beurla, canar *the savin bush* ris. 'S ann às a' Bheurla *savin* a thàinig a' Ghàidhlig *samhan*. Chan eil e co-cheangailte ri droch fhàileadh idir. Tha e a' faighinn ainm bho shluagh a bha a' fuireach uaireigin anns an Eadailt faisg air an Ròimh – na Sabinaich. 'S e *herba Sabina* – an lus Sabinach – a bh' aig na Ròmanaich air an t-samhan.

Tha an samhan a' fàs gu nàdarrach ann an ceann a deas na Roinn Eòrpa agus Àisia. 'S dòcha gum bi cuid agaibh a' smaoinichadh – carson a bha ainm Gàidhlig air, mura robh e dùthchasach do Bhreatainn no Èirinn? Uill, bha e a' fàs an seo ann an leasan oir tha stuthan ceimigeach ann a bhiodh feumail do lighichean. Agus bha an samhan aithnichte do Ghàidheil an ochdamh linn deug. Tha e anns a' chiad fhaclair againn – am briathrachas a rinn Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair ann an seachd ceud deug, ceathrad 's a h-aon (1741).

Ach tha sin a' fàgail tòimhseachan againn. Carson as e *samh* a th' air *Rumex acetosa*, *the common sorrel*? Chan eil na faclairean Gàidhlig ag innse dhuinn, ach seo smuain bheag agam fhìn. Tha e a' tighinn bho thùs bho chànan na Pòlainn. Na bithibh cho teagmhach. Bidh sinn a' bruidhinn air *bhodca*, nach bi?

Seo an smuain agam. Ann an taobh sear na Roinn Eòrpa thathar a' cleachdadh an t-saimh gu mòr mar bhiadh. Anns an t-seann aimsir ann an Alba is Sasainn bha daoine ag ithe nan duilleagan gu mòr mar ghlasraich. Ach mhair e mar bhiadh anns a' Phòlainn barrachd na Alba. Ann am Pòlainnis 's e *szczaw* (“*shrtav*”) a chanas daoine ris an lus. Bha na h-Iùdhaich ann an taobh sear na Roinn Eòrpa ga chleachdadh gu mòr cuideachd. Agus thog iadsan am facal Pòlainneach. Ann an Iuidis, 's e *shtshav* an t-ainm air an lus.

Co-dhiù, thog luchd na Beurla an t-ainm Iuidis, ga atharrachadh gu *schav*. Chan eil *schav* an-diugh ' ciallachadh an luis fhèin, ach brot a thathar a' dèanamh leis. 'S e brot fuar a th' ann, anns a bheil samh, uinneanan, sùgh liomaid, uighean, siùcar agus uachdar goirt. Ach feumaidh an toiseach gun robh am facal a' ciallachadh an luis fhèin, seach am brot. Agus – an ceum mu dheireadh ann an gluasad an fhacail – thog na Gàidheil *schav* bho luchd na Beurla, ga atharrachadh gu *samh*. Uill, a bheil smuain nas coltaiche agaibh fhèin?

\* \* \* \* \*

**Faclan na Litreach:** samh: *common sorrel, sourock*; searbh: *sour*; samhan: *the savin bush*, leasan: *gardens*; briathrachas: *vocabulary*; tòimhseachan: *puzzle*; bhodca: *vodka*; Iùdhaich: *Jews*; Iuidis: *Yiddish*.

**Abairtean na Litreach:** bho bhlas na duilleig: *from the taste of the leaf*; a bheil samh làidir air an lus?: *does the plant have a strong smell?*; cha chreid mi gu bheil: *I don't think so*; shaoileadh tu, mas e X a chanas sinn ri Y: *you'd think, if we called X Y*; lus beag dhen aon seòrsa: *a small plant of the same kind*; gu tur eadar-dhealaichte: *completely different*; seòrsa de dh'aiteann: *a type of juniper*; canar X ris: *it is called X*; co-cheangailte ri droch fhàileadh: *connected with a bad smell*; a' fuireach uaireigin anns an Eadailt: *living at one time in Italy*; faisg air an Ròimh – na Sabinaich: *near Rome – the Sabines*; ceann a deas na Roinn Eòrpa agus Àisia: *southern Europe and Asia*; mura robh e dùthchasach do Bhreatainn no Èirinn: *if it wasn't native to Britain or Ireland*; stuthan ceimigeach a bhiodh feumail do lighichean: *chemical substances that would be useful to doctors*; a' tighinn bho thùs bho chànan na Pòlainn: *coming originally from the language of Poland*; na bithibh cho teagmhach: *don't be so dubious*; thathar a' cleachdadh an t-saimh gu mòr mar bhiadh: *the sorrel is used a lot as food*; anns an t-seann aimsir: *in olden times*; ag ithe nan duilleagan gu mòr mar ghlasraich: *eating the leaves a lot as vegetables*; brot a thathar a' dèanamh leis: *soup that is made with it*; sùgh liomaid, uighean, siùcar agus uachdar goirt: *lemon juice, eggs, sugar and sour cream*; a' ciallachadh an luis fhèin, seach am brot: *meaning the plant itself, rather than the soup*; a bheil smuain nas coltaiche agaibh fhèin?: *do you have a more likely explanation [thought]?*

**Puing-chànain na Litreach:** *In the Litir I postulate that samh as a name for the common sorrel might derive ultimately from Polish szczaw through Yiddish shtshav and English schav. There might, of course, be another explanation. For example, samh might represent the root in samhradh (“summer”), meaning “summer plant”. The sour taste of sorrel is caused by oxalic acid, named after Oxalis acetosella, the wood sorrel, an unrelated but similarly sour-tasting wild plant. Cameron (“Gaelic Names of Plants”, 1883) gives samh “shelter” as the primary name for this species. This is perhaps based on an alternative form of tàmh – but the vowel length makes this unlikely. Some of you might have thoughts on the etymology of this species' name. Other names for the sorrels are sealbhag (probably based on searbh, “sour”) and surag (from the Scots sourock, the sour one).*

**Gnathas-cainnt na Litreach:** chan eil e **cho sìmplidh sin**: *it's not that simple.*

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