

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.macleam@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 579. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 275 corresponds to Litir 579.

An t-seachdain sa chaidh bha mi a’ bruidhinn mun fhacal samh – *the common sorrel* no *sourock* – agus mar a thàinig e gu bith – bho Phòlainnis gu Iuidis gu Beurla gu Gàidhlig. Uill, ’s dòcha. Bha mi a’ leughadh leabhar prìseil an latha eile – am faclair beag Gàidhlig a rinn Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair ann an seachd ceud deug, ceathrad ’s a h-aon (1741). Agus cha robh guth aige air samh am measg ainmean lusan. Ach seo na bh’ aige airson “Sowrocks or Sorrels”: *Sealbhagin, Puinneogin*.

Tha mi an dùil gu bheil a’ chiad ainm a’ tighinn bho *searbhag* oir tha blas searbh air an duilleig. Ach dè mu dheidhinn *puinneag*? Tha sin aig MacBheathain anns an faclair aigesan ceud gu leth bliadhna às dèidh Mhic Mhaighstir Alasdair ach chan eil e a’ cur beachd air adhart air tùs an fhacail.

Tha Iain Camshron anns an leabhar aige *Gaelic Names of Plants* (ochd ceud deug, ochdad ’s a trì, 1883) ag ràdh seo mu *puinneag*: *Name given possibly for its efficacy in healing sores and bruises (a pugilist, puinneanach)*. Mmm. Uill, dh’fhaodadh gu bheil rudeigin aige. Ach saoilidh mi gu bheil e nas coltaiche gun do dh’èirich *puinneag* bho *buinneag*, “twig” no “sprout”. Agus, gu dearbh, tha Dwelly a’ toirt dhuinn “*sorrel shoot*” airson *buinneag*, am measg eile.

Co-dhiù, sin gu leòr de dh’ainmean airson *Rumex acetosa*. Ciamar a bhiodh – no a bhitheas – daoine ga chleachdadh? Uill, uaireannan, bhiodh iad a’ cur pìosan beaga dhen duilleig ann an sailead no ann an sabhs. No bhiodh iad a’ goil na duilleig airson ithe mar ghlasraich. Bhathar a’ cumail a-mach gun robh e ag obair an aghaidh an tachais-thioraim, no *scurvy*. Tha gu leòr de bheothaman C sna duilleagan.

Nuair a bhiodh daoine a’ buain buntàta, agus am pathadh orra, ’s ann tric a bhiodh iad a’ sùgadh an t-sùigh bho na duilleagan. Oir bidh an samh a’ fàs gu tric am measg buntàta. **B’ e sùgadh sùgh an t-saimh cleachdadh a bh’ aig na Ròmanaich.** Tha an t-ainm *rumex* a’ tighinn bhon Laidinn *rumo*, a’ ciallachadh *sùg*.

Seo cunntas inntinneach mu chleachdadh saimh aig deireadh an t-seachdamh linn deug air a’ Ghàidhealtachd. Tha an Sgitheanach, Màrtainn MacIlleMhàrtainn, a’ sgrìobhadh mu a thuras gu Hiort anns an leabhar aige *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*. Tha e ag innse mu dhuine a bha a’ fulang leis an *luibhre* no *leprosy*. Bha e air fàs uabhasach reamhar agus cha mhòr nach robh a sgòrnan air dùnadh. Thug MacIlleMhàrtainn comhairle dha mu bhiadh agus eacarsaich. Dh’iarr e air salann a ghabhail le feòil, gun a bhith a’ gabhail cus geire, agus a bhith ag ithe samh.

Cha robh an Hiortach ro dheònach samh ithe, a rèir an ùghdair. Ach thuir MacIlleMhàrtainn ris – seall air mar a bhios am fulmair ga ithe. Mheòraich an duine air sin. Mar a bhiodh na Hiortaich gu lèir, bha e measail air an fhulmair. Agus ghabh e comhairle an Sgitheanaich, agus an samh leis. Taobh a-staigh beagan làithean bha a ghuth mòran na bu làidire agus bha e a’ dol am feabhas.

Nise, mus ruith sibh a-mach don mhachair no pàirc, a’ sireadh samh, seo rabhadh beag. Feuchaibh dìreach beagan dheth anns a’ chiad dol a-mach, oir faodaidh e droch bhuaidh a thoirt air cuid. Beannachd leibh.

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Faclan na Litreach: samh: *common sorrel, sourock*; Pòlainnis: *Polish (language)*; Iuidis: *Yiddish*; prìseil: *valuable*; puinneag, sealbhag: *sorrel*, MacBheathain: [*Alexr.*] *MacBain*; Iain Camshron: *John Cameron*; [an] tachas-tioram: *scurvy*; beothaman C: *vitamin C*; pathadh: *thirst*; Sgitheanach: *Skyeman*; Màrtainn MacIlleMhàrtainn: *Martin Martin*; Hiort: *St Kilda*; [an] luibhre: *leprosy*; eacarsaich: *exercise*; deònach: *willing*; rabhadh: *warning*.

Abairtean na Litreach: cha robh guth aige air samh am measg ainmean lusan: *he didn't mention samh among plant names*; chan eil e a’ cur beachd air adhart air tùs an fhacail: *he doesn't put forward an opinion on the origin of the word*; dh’fhaodadh gu bheil rudeigin aige: *perhaps he has something*; ciamar a bhiodh – no a bhitheas – daoine ga chleachdadh?: *how did – or do – people use it?*; bhiodh iad a’ goil na duilleig airson ithe mar ghlasraich: *they would boil the leaf to eat it as a vegetable*; bhathar a’ cumail a-mach gun robh e ag obair an aghaidh: *it was maintained that it worked against*; ’s ann tric a bhiodh iad a’ sùgadh an t-sùigh: *often they would suck the juice*; bha e air fàs uabhasach reamhar: *he had grown corpulent*; cha mhòr nach robh a sgòrnan air dùnadh: *his throat had almost closed*; dh’iarr e air salann a ghabhail le feòil: *he asked him to take salt with meat*; gun a bhith a’ gabhail cus geire: *not to eat too much fat*; seall air mar a bhios am fulmair ga ithe: *look at how the fulmar eats it*; bha e a’ dol am feabhas: *he was getting better*; mus ruith sibh a-mach don mhachair no pàirc: *before you run out to the machair or grassy field*; feuchaibh dìreach beagan dheth anns a’ chiad dol a-mach: *just try a small amount of it to begin with*; faodaidh e droch bhuaidh a thoirt air cuid: *it can have a bad effect on some people*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *I can't be sure what Gaelic name Martin Martin used for "Sorrel" as his account is in English (although the St Kildans at the time spoke only Gaelic) and I'm not certain it was samh (Rumex acetosa). It might have been the very similar sealbhag nan caorach (sheep's sorrel, Rumex acetosella) which certainly grows on St Kilda. Or it might have been a closely related docken such as the curled dock or copag chamagach (Rumex crispus) which is recorded as having been used as a treatment for leprosy. The Gaels used several of the sorrel and docken species in herbal medicine and for food, as did peoples throughout Europe.*

Gnathas-cainnt na Litreach: **b’ e sùgadh sùgh an t-saimh cleachdadh a bh’ aig na Ròmanaich:** *sucking the juice of the sorrel was a practice of the Romans.*

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