

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.macleon@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 589. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 285 corresponds to Litir 589.

An t-seachdain sa chaidh bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun Bhrataich Shìth – no *Fairy Flag* – ann an Caisteal Dhùn Bheagain anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Bhathar ag ràdh – nuair a bhiodh i air a togail aig àm spàirne, gun tigeadh feachd mhòr shìthichean. Bhiodh na sìthichean a’ toirt taic do na daoine leis an robh a’ bhratach.

Ge-tà, bha cùmhnant an cois sin. Bhiodh e a’ tachairt dìreach trì tursan. Às dèidh sin, chan obraicheadh draoidheachd na brataich tuilleadh. No, nas miosa na sin, thachradh sgrios. Thuirt Coinneach Odhar, am fiosaiche, a rèir choltais, gum faigheadh an ceathramh Tormod – an ceann-cinnidh – bàs ann an tubaist; gun gabhadh Caimbeulach sealbh air na stacan air a bheil “Maighdeannan MhicLeòid”; gum biodh àl aig galla sionnaich ann an tùr ann an Caisteal Dhùn Bheagain; agus gum biodh a’ Bhratach Shìth air a toirt a-mach airson an treas turais. Nuair a thachradh a h-uile càil a bha sin, thuirt e, dh’fhalbhadh glòir nan Leòdach.

Ach cia mheud turas a thogadh a’ bhratach? Chan eil sin soilleir. A rèir beul-aithris, bha i an cois nan Leòdach aig Blàr Bàgh na Fala ann am Muile timcheall na bliadhna ceithir cheud deug is ochdad (1480). Bha na Leòdaich a’ toirt taic do Eòin, Tighearna nan Eilean, ann an cogadh an aghaidh a mhic, Aonghas Òg. Feumaidh nach deach a’ bhratach a thogail air an latha sin oir chaill Eòin.

Cuin, ma-thà, le cinnt a chaidh a’ Bhratach Shìth a thoirt a-mach às a’ bhogsa sa bheil i, is a thogail air beulaibh dhaoine? ’S dòcha aig cathannan eadar na fineachan anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Cathannan leithid ann an Gleann Sligeachan aig deireadh a’ cheathramh linn deug, Gleann Dail anns a’ chòigeamh linn deug, no san Trùmpan no Bhatairnis anns an t-siathamh linn deug.

Anns an Trùmpan, chuir feachd de Dhòmhnallaich Chlann Raghnaill à Uibhist teine ri eaglais nuair a bha coitheanal Leòdach na broinn. Rinn iad sgrios agus chaidh mnathan is clann gu leòr a mharbhadh. Ach mus d’ fhuair muinntir Chlann Raghnaill air falbh, thàinig feachd Leòdach à Dùn Bheagain. Cha robh mòran dhiubh ann ach thug iad leotha a’ Bhratach Shìth. Sa mhionaid a chaidh a’ bhratach a thogail, bha coltas ann gun robh na ceudan ghaisgeach aig na Leòdaich. Rinn iad a’ chùis air na Dòmhnallaich. ’S e glè bheag de na Dòmhnallaich a rinn dol-às.

Tha cuid ag ràdh **nach deach a’ Bhratach Shìth a thoirt a-mach ach dà thuras thuige seo. Ge-tà, tha aithris ann gun deach a toirt a-mach ann an dìomhaireachd airson treas turais** ann an seachd ceud deug, naochad ’s a naoi (1799). Goirid às dèidh

sin, fhuair an ceathramh Tormod ann an sreath a bha na cheann-cinnidh bàs aig muir; cheannaich Caimbeulach Maighdeannan MhicLeòid; **rugadh àl do** ghalla sionnaich a bha na peata do dh'fhear MacIlleathain a bha a' fuireach ann an tùr ann an Caisteal Dhùn Bheagain; agus shearg mòran dhen chumhachd is glòir a bh' aig Clann 'ic Leòid o shean. Ach thuirt Coinneach Odhar aon rud eile – gun tilleadh an glòir dhaibh nuair a dh'èireadh ceann-cinnidh ùr air an robh Iain Breac. 'S dòcha gu bheil a' feitheamh ris fhathast.

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Faclan na Litreach: A' Bhratach Shìth: *The Fairy Flag*; Caisteal Dhùn Bheagain: *Dunvegan Castle*; Coinneach Odhar: *The Brahan Seer*; ceann-cinnidh: *clan chief*; an làthair: *present*; Blàr Bàgh na Fala: *The Battle of Bloody Bay*; Muile: *Mull*; Tighearna nan Eilean: *The Lord of the Isles*; Bhatairnis: *Vatarnish*.

Abairtean na Litreach: aig àm spàirne: *at a time of conflict*; gun tigeadh feachd mhòr shìthichean: *that a big host of fairies would come*; bha cùmhnant an cois sin: *there was a condition attached to that*; chan obraicheadh draoidheachd na brataich tuilleadh: *the flag's magic wouldn't work any more*; gum faigheadh an ceathramh Tormod bàs ann an tubaist: *that the fourth Norman would die in an accident*; na stacan air a bheil "Maighdeannan MhicLeòid": *the stacks called "MacLeod's Maidens"*; nuair a thachradh a h-uile càil a bha sin: *when all of that happened*; dh'fhalbhadh glòir nan Leòdach: *the MacLeods' glory would disappear*; an robh i air a sealltainn do na saighdearan?: *was it shown to the soldiers?*; air beulaibh: *in front of*; cathannan eadar na fineachan: *battles between the clans*; Gleann Dail anns a' chòigeamh linn deug: *Glendale in the fifteenth century*; feachd de Dhòmhnallaich Chlann Raghnaill à Uibhist: *a host of MacDonalds of Clanranald from Uist*; nuair a bha coitheanal Leòdach na broinn: *when a MacLeod congregation was inside*; 's e glè bheag a rinn dol-às: *very few escaped*; shearg mòran dhen chumhachd is glòir a bh' aig X o shean: *much of X's old power and glory withered away*; nuair a dh'èireadh ceann-cinnidh ùr air an robh Iain Breac: *when a new clan chief arose called pock-marked John*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: nach deach a' Bhratach Shìth a thoirt a-mach ach dà thuras thuige seo. Ge-tà, tha aithris ann gun deach a toirt a-mach ann an dìomhaireachd airson treas turais. *That the Fairy Flag was only taken out twice to this point in time. However, there is a report that it was taken out secretly for a third time. Are you clear as to why we say a thoirt a-mach in the first sentence but a toirt a-mach in the second? In the first the noun is present so the verbal noun is lenited (this is a general rule in passives made with "rach" regardless of whether the noun is masculine or feminine, singular or plural). However, in the second sentence there is no noun; we use instead the possessive article with the verbal noun (literally we say "her taking out"). As the feminine third person singular possessive does not lenite a noun, we get toirt rather than thoirt. "That they were taken out" would be "gun deach an toirt a-mach"*.

Gnathas-cainnt na Litreach: rugadh àl do ghalla sionnaich: *a vixen had a litter*.

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