

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. This is Litir 594. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 290 corresponds to Litir 594.

Cha mhòr nach eil seasgad bliadhna air a dhol seachad bho choinnich Iain Dòmhnallach, “**Bàrd Loch Abar**”, airson a’ chiad turais ri Calum MacGhilleathain, am fear-cruinneachaidh ainmeil de bheul-aithris na Gàidhlig. B’ ann air madainn fhuar gheamhraidh anns an Fhaoilleach naoi ceud deug, caogad ’s a h-aon (1951) a chuir Calum stad air Iain, agus an t-Abrach air a rathad dhachaigh bho aifreann ann an Eaglais Drochaid Ruaidh. Bha Iain seachdad ’s a còig bliadhna a dh’aois agus bha e air a dhol ochd mìle an latha sin air a bhaidhsagal bho a dhachaigh anns an Drochaid Àrd, faisg air Drochaid an Aonachain, airson faighinn don eaglais. Agus cha robh còta air.

Nuair a bhruidhinn Calum ris ann an Gàidhlig, stad Iain agus rinn e gàire. Rinn iad còmhradh airson greis. Cia mheud òran a bha Iain air cruthachadh, dh’fhaighnich Calum dheth. Cha robh cuimhne aig an Abrach – ceud ’s dòcha, ma dh’fhaodte dà cheud. Thuig Calum gun robh e air fear iongantach a lorg a bheireadh an t-uabhas dha de dh’òrain is sgeulachdan is naidheachdan is eachdraidh. Dh’aontaich Iain coinneachadh ri Calum air an fheasgar sin fhèin. Agus lean na coinneamhan eatarra, turas gach seachdain, airson còig mìosan. Chruinnich Calum tòrr stuth prìseil bhuaithe – stuth a th’ againn fhathast **ann an tasg**.

Tha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Bhàrd Loch Abar, chan ann air sgàth ’s gu bheil seasgad bliadhna air a dhol seachad on a thòisich Calum MacGilleathain air a bheul-aithris a chlàradh às leth Sgoil Eòlais na h-Alba, ach air sgàth ’s gu bheil an stuth a chlàr Calum gu bhith ri fhaighinn don mhòr-shluagh ann an cruth didseatach. Tha cruinneachadh a’ Bhàird am measg mìltean de dh’uairean a thìde de stuth prìseil a bhios a’ nochdadh an-ath-sheachdain air làrach-lìn Thobar an Dualchais. Bheir mi an seòladh-lìn dhuibh aig deireadh na Litreach.

Rugadh Iain Dòmhnallach anns an Drochaid Àrd, an treas duine ann an teaghlach de dh’aon duine deug. ’S e Mac Gille Mhanntaich a bh’ orra bho thùs, ach thug iad Dòmhnallach orra fhèin às dèidh a’ chunntais-shluaigh ann an ochd ceud deug, seachdad ’s a h-aon (1871). Bha athair Iain, Seumas Ruadh, na chlachair agus na chroitear. Mar chlachair, bhiodh e a’ siubhal air feadh Loch Abar agus chruinnich e tòrr beul-aithris ann. Thog Iain mòran de a sgeulachdan bhuaithe. Bha Iain fhèin ag obair air na rathaidean agus air rathad-iarainn taobh siar na Gàidhealtachd. Dh’fhàs e ainmeil fad is farsaing airson a chuid eòlais air eachdraidh Loch Abar.

Ach bha a shùil fhèin a’ laighe air gnothaichean an t-saoghail mhòir a bharrachd air gnothaichean a cheàrnaidh fhèin. Seo na sgrìobh Calum MacGilleathain mu dheidhinn anns an leabhar aige *The Highlands*: “Bha e dìreach air òran a sgrìobhadh, is e a’ moladh nan Albannach òga a ghoid an Lia-fàil à Abaid Westminster. Bha a’ chlach fhathast gun lorg oirre.

Chrùb sinn sìos air cùlaibh balla agus sheinn e an t-òran. Bha e làn lùiths agus smior ... bha fhios a’ m gu robh mi air tachairt air duine air leth.”

Bha stòiridhean aig Iain Dòmhnallach mu dhaoine mar Chalum Cille, Raibeart Brus, Dòmhnall Ballach mac Tighearna nan Eilean, Alasdair Mac Colla, Teàrlach Òg Stiùbhart agus mòran eile. Bheir sinn sùil a bharrachd air an dèileib a dh’fhàg e an ath-sheachdain. Gheibhear grèim air an làraich-lìn aig www.tobarandualchais.co.uk.

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Faclan na Litreach: Calum MacGhilleathain: *Calum Maclean*; Sgoil Eòlais na h-Alba: *The School of Scottish Studies*; Mac Gille Mhanntaich: *MacGillivantic*.

Abairtean na Litreach: cha mhòr nach eil seasgad bliadhna air a dhol seachad: *nearly sixty years have gone past*; air madainn fhuar gheamhraidh anns an Fhaoilleach: *on a cold winter morning in January*; agus an t-Abrach air a rathad dhachaigh bho aifreann ann an Eaglais Drochaid Ruaidh: *with the Lochaber man on his road home from mass in the Roy Bridge Church*; an Drochaid Àrd, faisg air Drochaid an Aonachain: *Highbridge, near Spean Bridge*; a bheireadh an t-uabhas dha: *who would give him a terrific amount*; de dh’òrain is sgeulachdan is naidheachdan: *of songs and stories and anecdotes*; gu bhith ri fhaighinn don mhòr-shluagh ann an cruth didseatach: *is going to be available to the general population in a digital format*; thug iad Dòmhnallach orra fhèin às dèidh a’ chunntais-shluaigh: *they called themselves MacDonald after the census*; bha athair Iain na chlachair agus na chroitear: *John’s father was a stonemason and crofter*; chruinnich e tòrr beul-aithris: *he collected a lot of oral tradition*; rathad-iarainn taobh siar na Gàidhealtachd: *the West Highland railway line*; ainmeil fad is farsaing airson a chuid eòlais: *famous far and wide for his knowledge*; a’ moladh nan Albannach òga a ghoid an Lia-fàil: *in praise of the young Scots who removed the Stone of Destiny*; bha a’ chlach fhathast gun lorg oirre: *the stone was still at large*; chrùb sinn sìos air cùlaibh balla: *we crouched down behind a wall*; bha e làn lùiths agus smior: *it was full of vigour and fire*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: **Bàrd Loch Abar:** *the Bard of Lochaber. Notice that in Gaelic we write the place name as two separate words. This reflects the pronunciation “loch AP-uh”; if we wrote it as Lochabar (as it seen on some incorrect signage) we would have to pronounce it “LOCH-ap-uh” which would be erroneous. Authorities differ as to the original meaning of Loch Abar. “Swampy loch” has been suggested but a likely interpretation is “loch of the abers”, abar being a Pictish loanword meaning “a confluence, place where two or more streams meet”. This is backed up by the reference to Stagnum Aporum “the loch of the apors” in Adomnan’s Vita Columbae. And two significant streams – the Nevis and Lochy – flow into the loch at An Gearasdan/Fort William, the “nerve-centre” of Lochaber. An Abrach is a native of Lochaber; the word can be also used as an adjective. We might refer to John MacDonald as Am Bàrd Abrach, although that appellation is also used for the famous seventeenth century poet Iain Lom.*

Gnathas-cainnt na Litreach: stuth a th’ againn fhathast **ann an tasg:** *stuff that we still have stored/archived.*

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