

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Cè Tormod Dòmhnallach agus Puirt-à-Beul (2)

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.maclea@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 691. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 387 corresponds to Litir 691.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Chè Tormod Dòmhnallach a dh’fhoillsich *The Gesto Collection of Highland Music* ann an ochd ceud deug, naochad ’s a còig (1895). B’ aithne dha Màiri Mhòr nan Òran. Mhol Màiri gun sgrìobhadh e gu tè Sgitheanach eile a bha a’ cruinneachadh seann òrain – Frangag, no Frances, Tolmie. Coltach ri Cè Tormod, bha Gàidhlig aig Tolmie bho dhùthchas, agus bhuineadh i do theaghlach a bha rudeigin beartach.

Fhuair Cè Tormod ceathrad ’s a còig òrain bho Tholmie. Nochd feadhainn dhiubh ann an leabhar a dh’fhoillsich e nuair a bha e a’ fuireach ann an Dùn Èideann ann an naoi ceud deug ’s a h-aon (1901). B’ e ainm an leabhair *Puirt-a-Beul: or Songs for Dancing as Practised from a Remote Antiquity by the Highlanders of Scotland*.

An robh Cè Tormod ceart ann a bhith ag ràdh gu robh **puirt-à-beul** àrsaidh? Feumar tuigsinn gun robh e fhèin, agus a charaid, Alasdair MacIlleMhìcheil, a dh’fhoillsich *Carmina Gadelica*, a’ strì an aghaidh beachd ann am Breatainn nach robh anns na Gàidheil ach daoine aineolach, **gun chultar a b’ fhiach**. ’S dòcha nach bi fios againn a-chaidh, ge-tà, dè cho sean ’s a tha puirt-à-beul.

Brochan lom, tana, lom, brochan, lom sùghain – bidh sibh eòlach air an òran sin. Tha e anns a’ chruinneachadh aig Cè Tormod Dòmhnallach. Bha mi a’ bruidhinn ri fear an-uiridh agus thuirt e gun robh e air aon òran Gàidhlig ionnsachadh na òige, ach nach robh fios aige dè bha na faclan a’ ciallachadh. Agus ghabh e Brochan Lom. “*It means,*” thuirt mise ris, “*bare, thin, bare gruel, bare sowans gruel.*” “*Aha,*” ars’ esan, “*it’s a song of great philosophical depth, then!*”

Sin mar a tha mòran de phuirt-à-beul. Chan eil iad a-mach air cuspairean mòra. Ach tha an ruitheam annta cudromach. Agus tha iad a’ dèanamh iomradh air rudan a bha mar phàirt de bheatha nan Gàidheil – daoine, gaol, sealg, an àirigh, eilthreachd, gaisgeachd, nàdar is mar sin air adhart. Tha na h-òrain sin am measg nan rudan as prìseile a bhuineas dhuinn mar shluagh.

Thàinig eagan ur a-mach dhen leabhar aig Cè Tormod – Puirt-à-Beul – na bu tràithe dhen bhliadhna seo, air fhoillseachadh le Taigh na Teud anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Chaidh a dheasachadh le Uilleam Lamb. Chuir Lamb aiste inntinneach is fiosrachail an cois an leabhair mu phuirt-à-beul fhèin – cuin agus carson a dh’èirich an stoidhle seinn seo?

Bha Cè Tormod a’ ceangal “Gille Calum” ri fear a bha a’ cruinneachadh nan cìsean airson Calum a’ Chinn Mhòir, Rìgh na h-Alba, a bha beò mìle bliadhna air ais. Tha Lamb ag ràdh, ge-tà, nach urrainn a bhith cinnteach a bheil susbaint anns a’ bheachd sin.

Gu deireadh an t-siathamh linn deug, bha am facal port a’ ciallachadh “fonn airson na clàrsaich”. Às dèidh do chluich na clàrsaich a chrìonadh, bhiodh daoine a’ cleachdadh an

fhacail airson fonn-dannsaidh a dh'fhaodadh a bhith air a chluich air ionnsramaid no air a sheinn leis a' ghuth.

Tha dà bheachd-smuain air a bhith gu tric co-cheangailte ri tùs phort-à-beul. 'S e a' chiad tè dhiubh gun do dh'èirich an dòigh-sheinn sin an cois Achd an Toirmisg às dèidh Blàr Chùil Lodair. 'S e an dàrna tè gun do dh'èirich i an cois dùsgadh anns an Eaglais anns an naoidheamh linn deug. Bheir sinn sùil orra sin an-ath-sheachdain.

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Faclan na Litreach: Cè Tormod Dòmhnallach: *Keith Norman MacDonald*; àrsaidh: *ancient*; Alasdair MacIlleMhìcheil: *Alexander Carmichael*; an-uiridh: *last year*; eagan: *edition*.

Abairtean na Litreach: feumar tuigsinn: *it must be understood*; a' strì an aghaidh beachd: *struggling against an opinion*; nach robh anns na Gàidheil ach daoine aineolach: *that the Gaels were just an ignorant people*; 's dòcha nach bi fios againn a-chaidh, ge-tà: *perhaps we'll never know, however*; gun robh e air aon òran Gàidhlig ionnsachadh na òige: *that he had learned one Gaelic song in his childhood*; tha an ruitheam annta cudromach: *the rhythm in them is important*; a' dèanamh iomradh air rudan a bha mar phàirt de bheatha nan Gàidheal: *saying something about things that were part of the life of the Gaels*; gaol, sealg, an àirigh, eilthreachd, gaisgeachd, nàdar: *love, hunting, the shieling, emigration, heroism, nature*; chaidh a dheasachadh le: *it was edited by*; aiste inntinneach is fiosrachail an cois an leabhair: *an interesting and informative essay in the book*; cuin agus carson a dh'èirich an stoidhle seinn seo?: *when and why did this singing style arise?*; fear a bha a' cruinneachadh nan cisean airson Calum a' Chinn Mhòir: *a man who was collecting taxes for Malcolm Canmore*; nach urrainn a bhith cinnteach a bheil susbaint anns a' bheachd sin: *that [we] can't be certain that opinion has substance*; às dèidh do chluich na clàrsaich a chrìonadh: *after the playing of the harp diminished*; fonn-dannsaidh a dh'fhaodadh a bhith air a chluich air ionnsramaid no air a sheinn leis a' ghuth: *a dance tune that could be played on an instrument or sung with the voice*; dà bheachd-smuain: *two ideas*; an cois Achd an Toirmisg às dèidh Blàr Chùil Lodair: *along with the Act of Proscription after the Battle of Culloden*; dùsgadh anns an Eaglais: *a rise of evangelism in the Church*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: **puirt-à-beul:** *literally 'tunes from [the] mouth' and sometimes called 'mouth music' in English, although the Gaelic term is generally preferred, even in English. The singular is port-à-beul, the plural is puirt-à-beul. While port was once used, it appears exclusively, for a classical Gaelic tune played on the harp, in the days when the harp was 'king' in Gaelic musical circles, it is now used more generally for a tune played on any musical instrument, often as an accompaniment to dance. The sense that puirt-à-beul have a strong link to dance is still alive in our culture, although the origins of such songs remain a matter of debate.*

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: **gun chultar a b' fhiach:** *without a culture worth talking about.*

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