

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Dòmhnall Alasdair MacCoinnich (1)

Each week the West Highland Free Press publishes the text for Ruairidh's "Letter to Gaelic Learners" on BBC Radio nan Gàidheal (103.5-105 FM). Broadcasts are as follows: 2:55pm on Sunday as part of BBC Radio nan Gàidheal's hour-long learning zone, following the Gaelic Learners' programme 'SpeakGaelic Extra', with a repeat at 10.30 pm on Wednesday. This is Litir 1,281. There is also a simpler version – An Litir Bheag – which is broadcast at 2:30pm each Sunday. Litir Bheag 977 corresponds to Litir 1,281. The Litir is also available at www.bbc.co.uk/litir and www.learnghaelic.scot/litir. Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learnghaelic.scot.

An cuala sibh riamh air Dòmhnall Alasdair MacCoinnich? Bha e na sgrìobhadair agus na bheul-aithrisiche. Sgrìobh e gu leòr air creideamh, miotas-eòlas agus antrop-eòlas. Tha mi a' dol a thoirt sùil air fear de na leabhraichean aige.

Fhad 's as aithne dhomh, cha do thogadh Dòmhnall leis a' Ghàidhlig.

Rugadh e ann an Cromba ann an Ros an Ear ann an ochd ceud deug, seachdad 's a trì (1873). Thog e sgìlean mar neach-naidheachd ann an Glaschu. Ann an naoi ceud deug 's a trì (1903) ghluais e air ais don Ghàidhealtachd. Bha e na dheasaiche air a' phàipear-naidheachd *The North Star*. An dèidh sin, bha e ann an Dùn Dè agus Dùn Èideann, a' sgrìobhadh airson phàipearan-naidheachd.

Bha ùidh mhòr aige ann am miotas-eòlas, no *mythology*. Am measg nan leabhraichean a sgrìobh e, tha *Egyptian Myth and Legend*, *Indian Fairy Stories*, *Myths from Melanesia and Indonesia* agus *Crete and Pre-Hellenic Myths and Legends*.

Cha robh obair agus a bheachdan gun chonnsaid. Mar eisimpleir, anns an leabhar aige *Wonder Tales from Scottish Myth and Legend*, tha a h-uile càil ann am Beurla agus chan eil an t-ùghdar a' soilleireachadh nan tùsan aige.

Co-dhiù, tha mi airson rudan a tharraing bhon chiad dà chaibideil anns an leabhar sin. Ma tha sibh eòlach air beul-aithris nan Gàidheal, faodaidh sibh ur beachd fhèin a thoirt air cho creideasach 's a tha e.

Tha Caibideil 1 mu dheidhinn '*Beira, Queen of Winter*'. Tha seo stèidhichte air a' Chaillich Bheur no Bheura, caractar làidir ann am beul-aithris nan Gàidheal. Seo mar a tha an cunntas aig MacCoinnich a' tòiseachadh: *Dark Beira was the mother of all the gods and goddesses in Scotland. She was of great height and very old, and everyone feared her. When roused to anger she was as fierce as the biting north wind and harsh as the tempest-stricken sea. Each winter she reigned as Queen of the Four Red Divisions of the world ...*

Tha sin a' sealltainn gu bheil an teacsa stèidhichte air dualchas nan Gàidheal. Cha bhiodh '*the Four Red Divisions of the world*' a' ciallachadh dad ann an saoghal na Beurla. Ach canaidh sinn sin fhathast ann an Gàidhlig nuair a tha sinn a' bruidhinn air an t-saoghal air fad – 'ceithir rannan ruadh an domhain'. Gu litreachail – '*the four red divisions of the world*'.

Tha an teacsa aig MacCoinnich ag innse dhuinn nach robh a' Chailleach Bheura a' faighinn bàs le aois oir bhiodh i ag òl uisge sònraichte à Tobar na h-Òige. Tha an tobar ri lorg air an Eilean Uaine – eilean a bhios air fleod air an taobh an iar. Tha an samhradh ann an sin an-còmhnaidh.

Nuair a dh'òladh a' Chailleach an t-uisge, bhiodh i a' fàs òg a-rithist. Ach, fhad 's a bhiodh an samhradh agus foghar a' dol seachad, dh'fhàsadh i sean a-rithist. Agus, leis an aois, thigeadh droch shunnd agus fearg. Gu dearbh, bha i greannach.

Cha robh aice ach aon sùil. Bha a fiaclan ruadh mar a' mheirg agus bha a falt cho geal ri canach an t-slèibhe. Bha a cuid aodaich liath agus bha seàla odhar thairis air a guailnean.

Chaidh i air feadh na Gàidhealtachd. **Thathar ag ràdh gur i a chruthaich a h-uile beinn** ann an Siorrachd Rois. Agus, an ath sheachdain, innsidh mi dhuibh mar a chruthaich i Loch Obha ann an Earra-Ghàidheal.

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Faclan na Litreach: beul-aithrisiche: *folklorist*; Cromba: *Cromarty*; deasaiche: *editor*; air fleod: *floating*; Loch Obha: *Loch Awe*.

Abairtean na Litreach: An cuala sibh riamh air Dòmhnall Alasdair MacCoinnich?: *did you ever hear of Donald Alexander Mackenzie?*; sgrìobh e gu leòr air creideamh, miotas-eòlas agus antrop-eòlas: *he wrote prolifically on religion, mythology and anthropology*; cha robh obair agus a bheachdan gun chonnsaid: *his work and opinions were not without controversy*; chan eil an t-ùghdar a' soilleireachadh nan tùsan aige: *the author doesn't throw light on his sources*; faodaidh sibh ur beachd fhèin a thoirt air cho creideasach a tha e: *you can give your own opinion on how credible he is*; nach robh a' Chailleach Bheura a' faighinn bàs le aois: *that the Cailleach Bheura wasn't dying of old age*; oir bhiodh i ag òl uisge sònraichte à Tobar na h-Òige: *because she would be drinking water from the 'well of youth'*; tha an samhradh ann an sin an-còmhnaidh: *it is always summer there*; fhad 's a bhiodh an samhradh agus foghar a' dol seachad, dh'fhàsadh i sean a-rithist: *as the summer and autumn elapsed, she would grow old again*; thigeadh droch shunnd agus fearg: *a bad mood and anger would come*; cha robh aice ach aon sùil: *she only had one eye*; bha a fiaclan ruadh mar a' mheirg: *her teeth were as red as rust*; bha a falt cho geal ri canach an t-slèibhe: *her hair was as white as the bog cotton*; bha a cuid aodaich liath: *her clothing was grey*; bha seàla odhar thairis air a guailnean: *a dun shawl lay across her shoulders*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: **Thathar ag ràdh gur i a chruthaich a h-uile beinn: it is said that it was she that created every mountain.** *I could have said thathar ag ràdh gun do chruthaich i a h-uile beinn 'it is said that she created every mountain' and that would have worked. However, the structure I chose emphasises 'i' – it was her hand that created the mountains and nothing else.*

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: Fhad 's as aithne dhomh: *as far as I am aware.*

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