

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

'Cathair' (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 1,295. There is also a simpler version – An Litir Bheag – which is broadcast at 2:30pm each Sunday. Litir Bheag 991 corresponds to Litir 1,295. The Litir is also available at www.bbc.co.uk/litir and www.learnghaelic.scot/litir. Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learnghaelic.scot.

Tha mi cinnteach gu bheil sibh eòlach air an fhacal *cathair*. Seo na chanas am faclair *Brìgh nam Facal: Cathair: Suidheachan, mar as trice le cùl; sèithear*.

Thathar a' smaoinneachadh gun tàinig am facal *cathair* a-steach don Ghàidhlig bhon Laidinn *cathedra*. Agus fhuair na Ròmanaich am facal sin roimhe bho na seann Ghreugaich. Tha am faclair Laidinn agam ag innse seo dhomh: *Cathedra: armchair, sedan chair, teacher's chair*. Thàinig dà fhacal chumanta a-steach don Bheurla bhon dearbh fhreumh Laidinn – *chair* agus *cathedral*.

Tha faclair Dwelly ag innse seo dhuinn: *Cathair: chair, seat, bench, throne*. Airson dèanamh soilleir gu bheil sinn a' bruidhinn mu *throne*, seach *cathair* air choreigin eile, canaidh sinn *rìgh-chathair* oir bidh rìgh na shuidhe oirre aig amannan. Rìgh-chathair.

Tha ciall eile air *cathair*, ge-tà. Ann am *Brìgh nam Facal*, seo e: *Cathair: baile glè mhòr, nas cudromaiche na baile-mòr*. No, ann am faclair Dwelly – *town, city, fortified city*. Thug Alasdair MacBheathain sùil air *cathair* anns an fhaclair aige 'An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language'. Ghabh e ris gun tàinig *cathair* bho *cathedra* nuair a tha e a' ciallachadh '*chair, seat*'. Ach bha e dhen bheachd gu bheil a' chiall eile a' ceangal an fhacail ri *castrum* ann an Laidinn, agus *caer* ann an Cuimris. Chan eil a h-uile duine – ann an Alba no anns a' Chuimrigh – a' dol le sin.

Cha bu chòir a bhith na iongnadh gu bheil ceangal ann eadar *cathair* agus *baile-mòr*. Bha *cathair* a' seasamh airson *cathedra* – a' chathair mhòr thogte anns am biodh easbaig na shuidhe. Agus, ann an cuid de dhùthchannan, ann an làithean tràtha na h-Eaglaise, b' e 'baile-mòr' no *city* baile anns an robh eaglais aig easbaig. Canaidh sinn *cathedral* ri eaglais aig easbaig ann am Beurla. Agus dè a' Ghàidhlig a th' air *cathedral*? Tha – *cathair-eaglais*.

Mar sin, tha *cathair* leatha fhèin a' ciallachadh '*city*' cuideachd. *Cathair* no *cathair-bhaile*. Airson '*the city centre*', canaidh sinn *meadhan a' bhaile, meadhan a' chathair-bhaile* no *meadhan na cathrach*.

Nise, tha ciall eile air *cathair* agus chithear sin air mapaichean. Tha Dwelly ga aithris mar '*knoll, hillock, fairy-knoll*'. Saoilidh mi gu bheil e co-cheangailte ri slugh no gaisgeach – àite daingeann anns am biodh iadsan no esan a' fuireach.

Tha am facal *cadair* no *cader* ann an Cuimris ag obair anns an aon dòigh. Tha e a' ciallachadh '*chair*' ach cuideachd '*stronghold, fort or mountain shaped like a*

chair'. Tha beinn ainmeil anns a' Chuimrigh air a bheil Cader Idris. Tha sin a' ciallachadh Cathair Idris. B' e Idris **an dàrna cuid** famhair ann am beul-aithris no prionnsa Cuimreach anns na meadhan-aoisean – Idris ap Gwyddno.

A bheil am facal *cathair* a' nochdadh ann an co-cheangal ri cnuic no beanntan ann an ainmean-àite Gàidhlig mar a tha sa Chuimrigh? Uill, tha – agus bheir sinn sùil orra an-ath-sheachdain.

* * * * *

Faclan na Litreach: Alasdair MacBheathain: *Alexander MacBain*; làithean tràtha; *early days*; sluagh: *host, group of people*; daingeann: *fortified*; Cuimris: *Welsh language*.

Abairtean na Litreach: gun tàinig am facal a-steach don Ghàidhlig bhon Laidinn: *that the word came into Gaelic from the Latin*; fhuair na Ròmanaich am facal sin roimhe bho na seann Ghreugaich: *the Romans got that word previously from the Ancient Greeks*; thàinig dà fhacal chumanta a-steach don Bheurla bhon dearbh fhreumh Laidinn: *two common words came into the English language from the very same Latin root*; airson dèanamh soilleir gu bheil sinn a' bruidhinn mu: *to make clear that we are speaking about*; seach cathair air choreigin eile: *rather than some other chair*; bha e dhen bheachd gu bheil a' chiall eile a' ceangal an fhacail ri: *he reckoned that the other meaning links the word to*; cha bu chòir a bhith na iongnadh gu bheil: *it shouldn't be a surprise that*; a' chathair mhòr thogte anns am biodh easbaig na shuidhe: *the large raised chair in which a bishop would sit*; chithear sin air mapaichean: *that can be seen on maps*; tha beinn ainmeil anns a' Chuimrigh air a bheil X: *there is a famous mountain in Wales called X*; a bheil am facal *cathair* a' nochdadh ann an co-cheangal ri cnuic no beanntan ann an ainmean-àite Gàidhlig?: *does the word cathair appear [is it appearing] in connection with hills of mountains in Gaelic place names?*

Puing-chànain na Litreach: B' e Idris **an dàrna cuid** famhair ann am beul-aithris no prionnsa Cuimreach anns na meadhan-aoisean: *Idris was either a giant in oral tradition or a Welsh prince in the middle ages. Although dàrna means 'second' in a series, it is also used idiomatically to indicate one of a pair (as in air an dàrna làimh 'one the one hand'). Thus, it can be used for a choice of one out of two as in bidh an dàrna cuid Seumas no a bhràthair ann 'either James or his brother will be there'.*

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: Chan eil a h-uile duine a' dol le sin: *not everybody agrees with that.*

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