

An Litir Bheag
le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 346 (which corresponds to Litir 650). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleane@bbc.co.uk.

We were looking at the Declaration of Arbroath last week. Here is a section of it: The Britons they first drove out, the Picts they utterly destroyed, and, even though very often assailed by the Norwegians, the Danes and the English, they took possession of that home with many victories and untold efforts.

The Gaels were fundamental to the establishment of Scotland as a kingdom. And they were fundamental to the identity of the Scots. That was at a time when Scotland was in danger. The Declaration of Arbroath demonstrates that to us.

The history in the manuscript is pretty shaky. It says that the Scots came from Greater Scythia by way of the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Pillars of Hercules to Spain. And then to Scotland. Well, perhaps.

The manuscript says that [the Scots] drove out the Britons and utterly destroyed the Picts... I'm not certain that's true. Gaelic spread among the population. As English spread eventually [in a similar way].

And, though [the Scots] were often assailed by the [Scandinavians]

Bha sinn a' coimhead air Taisbeanadh Obar Bhrothaig an t-seachdain sa chaidh. Seo earrann dheth: *An toiseach chuir iad an teicheadh air na Breatannaich, sgrios iad na Cruithnich agus, ged a dh'fhuiling iad ionnsaighean gu leòr bho na Nirribhich, na Dànaich is na Sasannaich, ghabh iad smachd air an dùthaich le buaidh gu leòr agus spàirn mhòr.*

Bha na Gàidheil bunaiteach do stèidheachadh na h-Alba mar rìoghachd. Agus bha iad bunaiteach do dh'fhèin-aithne nan Albannach. Bha sin aig àm nuair a bha Alba ann an cunnart. Tha Taisbeanadh Obar Bhrothaig a' dearbhadh sin dhuinn.

Tha an eachdraidh anns an làmh-sgrìobhainn rudeigin cugallach. Tha i ag ràdh gun tainig na h-Albannaich à Scithia Mhòr, tron Mhuir Thireniach agus Colbhan Hercules gu ruige an Spàinnt. An uair sin a dh'Alba. Uill, ma dh'fhaodte ...

Tha an làmh-sgrìobhainn ag ràdh gun do chuir [na h-Albannaich] an teicheadh air na Breatannaich, sgrios iad na Cruithnich ... Chan eil mi cinnteach a bheil sin fìor. Sgaoil a' Ghàidhlig am measg an t-sluaigh. Mar a sgaoil a' Bheurla aig a' cheann thall.

and the English, many Scots today have Scandinavian and English ancestors.

Why, then is that part [of the document] important? Because it shows how the Scottish nobles were using the Gaels to establish the fact that the Scots were different from the English. They name the Britons, the Picts, the Scandinavians and the English. They make it clear that those peoples were not Scottish.

Well, what people were left? The Gaels. Whether or not the history is correct, the Scottish nobles had a Gaelic identity in the 14th Century.

That's interesting, because the division between Highlands and Lowlands, between Gael and Lowlander, was coming to the fore around that time. But, in terms of Scotland as a kingdom, even the Lowlanders were saying that the Gaels were fundamental to it.

A good thing! But were all the nobles loyal to the Gaelic language? Or were they taking advantage of Gaelic for political purposes? I'll leave that to you [to decide].

Agus, ged a *dh'fhuiling* [na h-Albannaich] ionnsaighean gu leòr bho na [Lochlannaich] is Sasannaich, tha gu leòr de dh'Albannaich an-diugh aig a bheil sinnsirean Lochlannach is Sasannach.

Carson, ma-thà, a tha an earrann sin cudromach? Tha, a' chionns gu bheil e a' sealltainn mar a bha uaislean na h-Alba a' cleachdadh nan Gàidheal airson dearbhadh gun robh na h-Albannaich eadar-dhealaichte bho na Sasannaich. Tha iad ag ainmeachadh nam Breatannach, nan Cruithneach, nan Lochlannach is nan Sasannach. Tha iad a' dèanamh soilleir nach robh na slòigh sin Albannach.

Uill, dè an sluagh a tha air fhàgail? Tha na Gàidheil. Ceart no ceàrr an eachdraidh, bha fèin-aithne Ghàidhealach aig uaislean na h-Alba anns a' cheathramh linn deug.

Tha sin inntinneach oir bha an sgaradh eadar Gàidhealtachd is Galltachd, eadar Gàidheal is Gall, a' tighinn am bàrr mun àm sin. Ach a thaobh Alba mar rìoghachd, bha eadhon na Goill ag ràdh gun robh na Gàidheil bunaiteach dhi.

Deagh rud! Ach an robh na h-uaislean gu lèir dìleas don Ghàidhlig? No an robh iad a' gabhail brath air a' Ghàidhlig airson adhbharan poilitigeach? Fàgaidh mi sin agaibh fhèin.