

# **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 594 (which corresponds to Litir 898). Ruairidh can be contacted at [roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk).*

*There is a quatrain of old Gaelic poetry in the Book of the Dean of Lismore – a manuscript from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It names a certain 'Alexandair Uaibhreach'. I wonder who he was?*

*Well, he wasn't Scottish. The verse tells us that he was a 'flath' from 'Fair Greece'. 'Flath' means 'prince' or 'leader'. It's an old word. 'An Fhionn Ghrèig' means 'fair or beautiful Greece'.*

*I reckon now that you know who that leader is. Alexander the Great, the Greek king of the kingdom of Macedon. Often, we translate Alexander as Alasdair in Gaelic. Thus, I call him 'Alasdair Uaibhreach'. Uaibhreach means 'proud' or 'haughty'.*

*I'm thinking of that old Greek king because I was reading an article that the Gaelic scholar – another Alexander – Alexander MacBain – wrote. The article is about Badenoch. But it is also about a third Alexander – 'big Alasdair the son of the king' who belonged to Badenoch.*

Tha ceathramh de sheann bhàrdachd Ghàidhlig ann an Leabhar Deathan Lios Mòr – làmh-sgrìobhainn bhon t-siathamh linn deug. Tha e ag ainmeachadh fear 'Alexandair Uaibhreach'. Saoil cò bha ann?

Uill, cha robh e Albannach. Tha an rann ag innse dhuinn gur e 'flath' a bha ann 'on Fhionn Ghrèig'. Tha 'flath' a' ciallachadh 'prionnsa' no 'ceannaire'. 'S e seann fhacal a tha ann. Tha 'an Fhionn Ghrèig' a' ciallachadh *fair* no *beautiful Greece*.

Tha mi a' dèanamh dheth a-nise gu bheil fios agaibh cò tha anns an fhlat sin. *Alexander the Great*, Rìgh Greugach Rìoghachd Mhacedon. Gu tric, bidh sinn a' gabhail 'Alasdair' air *Alexander* ann an Gàidhlig. Mar sin, 's e 'Alasdair Uaibhreach' a chanas mi ris. Tha *uaibhreach* a' ciallachadh 'proud' no 'haughty'.

Tha mi a' beachdachadh air an t-seann rìgh Ghreugach sin oir bha mi a' leughadh alt a sgrìobh an sgoilear Gàidhlig – 'Alasdair' eile – Alasdair MacIlleBhàin. Tha an t-alt mu dheidhinn Bhàideanach. Agus tha e cuideachd mu dheidhinn treas Alasdair – Alasdair Mòr Mac an Rìgh, a bhuineadh do Bhàideanach.

*Here's what the author wrote in English: Alasdair] gets confused with his famous namesake of Macedon, also Alasdair Mòr, but the more accurate of tradition-mongers differentiate them easily, for they call Alexander the Great 'Alasdair Uaibhreach Mac Rìgh Philip.' I don't know if I'm a 'tradition monger' but I'll call the Greek king 'Alasdair Uaibhreach' rather than 'Alasdair Mòr'. There's many a Highland crofter that was, or is, called 'Big Alasdair'!*

*The next question, then, is who was Alasdair Mòr Mac an Rìgh? Well, he's known in English as 'The Wolf of Badenoch'. He was a son of King Robert II. He was the most powerful man in the north of Scotland in his day. He was powerful but brutal.*

*Alasdair Mòr and the Bishop of Moray fell out with each other completely. Alasdair burned the towns of Forres and Elgin – and Elgin Cathedral – to the ground. In the end, was he very much different to Alexander the Great of Fair Greece?*

Seo na sgrìobh an t-ùghdar ann am Beurla: *[Alasdair] gets confused with his famous namesake of Macedon, also Alasdair Mòr, but the more accurate of tradition-mongers differentiate them easily, for they call Alexander the Great 'Alasdair Uaibhreach Mac Rìgh Philip.'* Chan eil fhios agam a bheil mi nam 'tradition monger' ach 's e 'Alasdair Uaibhreach' a ghabhas mi fhìn air an Rìgh Ghreugach, seach 'Alasdair Mòr'. 'S iomadh croitear Gàidhealach air an robh, no air a bheil, Alasdair Mòr mar ainm!

'S e an ath cheist, ma-thà, cò bha ann an Alasdair Mòr Mac an Rìgh? Uill, tha e aithnichte ann am Beurla mar 'The Wolf of Badenoch'. B' e mac Rìgh Raibeirt II a bha ann. B' e am fear a bu chumhachdaiche ann an ceann a tuath na h-Alba ri a linn. Bha e foghainteach ach borb.

Chaidh Alasdair Mòr agus Easbaig Mhoireibh a-mach air a chèile gu dubh. Loisg Alasdair bailtean Farrais is Eilginn – agus Cathair-eaglais Eilginn – gu làr. Aig a' cheann thall, an robh e cho diofraichte sin bho Alasdair Uaibhreach na Fionn Ghrèige?