

## **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 627 (which corresponds to Litir 931). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk).*

*How old is the word siùcar [sugar] in Gaelic? MacBain tells us in his dictionary – Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language – that it came from the Middle English sugre. You'll know the word in several European languages – for example, siùcra in Irish Gaelic, zucker in German and sucre in French. All those words are related to each other.*

*The word siùcar isn't in the Gaelic Bible, however. Or, if it is, I haven't found it. Is that a surprise? I'd say not. The people of Europe weren't familiar with sugar at the time of the writing of the Bible.*

*Apparently, humans started growing ciulc an t-siùcair in the Pacific Islands. That's sugar cane – cuilc an t-siùcair. That knowledge went to India, then to Persia and then to the Arab countries. And the word went with the plant. Shakar in Persian, sukkar in Arabic, sucre in French.*

*It's thought that sugar reached England in the eleventh century. The knights of the crusades were returning home from the middle east. They took knowledge about*

*Dè cho sean 's a tha am facal 'siùcar' ann an Gàidhlig? Tha MacBheathain ag innse dhuinn anns an fhaclair aige – Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language – gur ann às a' Bheurla Mheadhanaich sugre a thàinig e. Bidh sibh eòlach air an fhacal ann an grunn chànanan Eòrpach – mar eisimpleir, siùcra ann an Gàidhlig na h-Èireann, zucker ann an Gearmailtis agus sucre ann am Fraingis. Tha na faclan sin uile càirdeach do chèile.*

*Chan eil am facal siùcar anns a' Bhìoball Ghàidhlig, ge-tà. No, ma thà, cha d' fhuair mise lorg air. A bheil sin na iongnadh? Chanainn nach eil. Cha robh muinntir na Roinn Eòrpa eòlach air siùcar ri linn sgrìobhadh a' Bhìobaill.*

*A rèir choltais, thòisich mac-an-duine air cuilc an t-siùcair fhàs ann an eileanan a' Chuain Sèimh. Sin sugar cane – cuilc an t-siùcair. Chaidh an t-eòlas sin chun nan Innseachan, an uair sin gu Persia agus an uair sin do na dùthchannan Arabach. Agus chaidh am facal leis an lus. Shakar ann am Persianais, sukkar ann an Arabais, sucre ann am Fraingis.*

*Thathar dhen bheachd gun do ràinig siùcar Sasainn anns an aonamh linn deug. Bha ridirean nan cogaidhean-croise a' tilleadh dhachaigh bhon ear-mheadhanach. Thug iad fios mu shiùcar leotha. Aig an àm*

*sugar with them. At that time sugar was very expensive.*

*But when did a Gael utter the word 'siùcar' for the first time. I don't know. And, although the people of northern Europe grow sugar beet today, that didn't start until around 'the year of Charlie' (1745-6) in the eighteenth century.*

*Although the word sugar isn't in the Bible, some people think that sugar cane is named there. For example, in the Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 6, Verse 20 there is this (the Lord is speaking): What use is it should incense come to me from Sheba, and sweet cane from a distant land?*

*Tùis o Sheba – incense from Sheba. Sheba was famous for trading spices. And the sweet-smelling cane from a distant land. That is translated as 'sweet cane from a distant land'. Is that sugar cane? More on this subject next week!*

sin, bha siùcar gu math daor.

Ach cuin a thuir Gaidheal am facal 'siùcar' airson a' chiad turais? Chan eil fhios a'm. Agus, ged a tha muinntir ceann a tuath na Roinn Eòrpa a' fàs biotais siùcair an-diugh, cha do thòisich sin gu timcheall Bliadhna Theàrlaich anns an ochdamh linn deug.

Ged nach eil am facal *siùcar* anns a' Bhìoball, tha cuid dhen bheachd gu bheil e air ainmeachadh cuile an t-siùcair ann. Mar eisimpleir, ann an Leabhar Ieremiah Caibideil 6, Rann 20 tha seo ann (tha an Tighearna a' bruidhinn): *C'uim an tig tùis o Sheba thugam-sa, agus a' chuile chùbhraidh o dhùthaich fad-às?*

*Tùis o Sheba – incense from Sheba. Bha Seba ainmeil airson malairt spìosraidhean. Agus a' chuile chùbhraidh o dhùthaich fad-às. Thathar ag eadar-theangachadh sin mar sweet cane from a distant land. An e sin cuile an t-siùcair? Tuilleadh air a' chuspair seo an-ath-sheachdain!*