

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 870 (which corresponds to Litir 1,174). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I'm going to tell you about The Book of Deer. Here is an opinion of it from William Watson. Watson was a Professor in the Celtic languages in Edinburgh University. Here's what he wrote:

'This is the oldest Gaelic we have in Scotland, and for that reason alone, it is worthy of great esteem from us. But more than that, the book casts much light on the old history of the country...'

In the book Rosg Gàidhlig [Gaelic Prose], that was originally published more than a hundred years ago, Watson says: 'The Book of Deer belonged to the Monastery of Deer in Buchan that was established, according to the book itself, by St Columba and by Drostan.'

The Book of Deer is an extremely old book. It contains the gospel according to [St] John, and some other gospels – in Latin. But there are also notes in old Gaelic. They were written in the twelfth century. That's what makes the book so valuable.

In the rest of this Litir and next week, I'm going to read you the first part of the Gaelic notes in the book.

Tha mi a' dol a dh'innse dhuibh mu Leabhar Dhèir, *The Book of Deer*. Seo agaibh beachd aig Uilleam MacBhàtair air. Bha MacBhàtair na Àrd-ollamh anns na cànanan Ceilteach ann an Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann. Seo na sgrìobh e:

'Is i seo a' Ghàidhlig as sine a tha againn an Albainn, agus air an adhbhar sin a-mhàin tha i airidh air gach urram uainn. Ach a bharrachd air sin tha an leabhar a' cur mòran solais air seann eachdraidh na dùthcha ...'

Anns an leabhar *Rosg Gàidhlig*, a chaidh fhoillseachadh an toiseach o chionn còrr is ceud bliadhna, tha MacBhàtair ag ràdh: 'Bhuineadh Leabhar Dhèir do Mhanachainn Dhèir am Buchan, a chaidh a shuidheachadh, a rèir aithris an leabhair fhèin, le Colum Cille agus le Drostan.'

'S e fìor sheann leabhar a tha ann an Leabhar Dhèir. Tha an soisgeul a rèir Eòin ann, agus cuid de na soisgeulan eile – ann an Laidinn. Ach tha notaichean ann cuideachd ann an seann Ghàidhlig. Bha iad air an sgrìobhadh anns an dàrna linn deug. 'S e sin a tha a' dèanamh an leabhair cho prìseil.

Anns a' chòrr dhen Litir seo agus an-ath-sheachdain, tha mi a' dol a leughadh dhuibh a' chiad earrainn de na

Perhaps I should tell you where Deer is. It's in the north-east, near Aberdeen. The book reminds us that Gaelic was once spoken in the north-east.

The account tells us how Deer got its name, according to oral tradition. We'll come to that next week. And two characters appear in the first sentence. The first one is St Columba. You all know who he is – the old abbot of Iona.

The second man is a saint called Drostan – Drostan mac Chosgraich. Drostan was Columba's dalta. Dalta means a 'foster child' or 'stepchild'. But perhaps it also meant 'follower, disciple' in olden times. Next week we'll look at the text.

notaichean Gàidhlig san leabhar. 'S dòcha gum bu chòir dhomh innse dhuibh cà' bheil Dèir. Tha e anns an ear-thuath, faisg air Obar Dheathain. Tha an leabhar a' cur nar cuimhne gun robh Gàidhlig air a bruidhinn uaireigin anns an ear-thuath.

Tha an cunntas ag innse dhuinn mar a fhuair Dèir ainm, a rèir beul-aithris. Thig sinn gu sin an-ath-sheachdain. Agus tha dithis characteran a' nochdadh anns a' chiad sheantans. 'S e a' chiad fhear Calum Cille no Colum Cille. Tha fios agaibh uile cò tha ann – seann aba Eilean Ì.

'S e an dàrna fear naomh air an robh Drostan mar ainm – Drostan mac Chosgraich. B' e dalta aig Calum Cille a bha ann an Drostan. Tha dalta a' ciallachadh 'foster child' no 'stepchild'. Ach 's dòcha gun robh e a' ciallachadh 'neach-leantainn' cuideachd anns an t-seann aimsir. An-ath-sheachdain, bheir sinn sùil air an teacsa.