

## **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 977 (which corresponds to Litir 1,281). Ruairidh can be contacted at [fios@learngaelic.scot](mailto:fios@learngaelic.scot).*

*Donald Alexander Mackenzie was a writer and folklorist. He wrote prolifically on religion, mythology and anthropology. I'm going to look at one of his books.*

*As far as I know, Donald wasn't raised with Gaelic. He was born in Cromarty in Easter Ross in 1873. He picked up skills as a journalist in Glasgow. He was working as a journalist and writer in the Highlands and Lowlands.*

*He had a great interest in mythology. Among the books he wrote are Egyptian Myth and Legend, Indian Fairy Stories and Myths from Melanesia and Indonesia.*

*His work and opinions were not without controversy. In his book Wonder Tales from Scottish Myth and Legend, everything is in English. The author doesn't publish his sources.*

*Anyway, I want to draw things from the first two chapters in that book. Chapter 1 is about 'Beira, Queen of Winter'. That is based on the Cailleach Bheur, an important*

Bha Dòmhnall Alasdair MacCoinnich na sgrìobhadair agus beul-aithrisiche. Sgrìobh e gu leòr air creideamh, miotas-eòlas agus antrop-eòlas. Tha mi a' dol a thoirt sùil air fear de na leabhraichean aige.

Fhad 's as aithne dhomh, cha do thogadh Dòmhnall leis a' Ghàidhlig. Rugadh e ann an Cromba ann an Ros an Ear ann an ochd ceud deug, seachdad 's a trì (1873). Thog e sgilean mar neach-naidheachd ann an Glaschu. Bha e ag obair mar neach-naidheachd agus sgrìobhadair air a' Ghàidhealtachd agus Galltachd.

Bha ùidh mhòr aige ann am miotas-eòlas, no *mythology*. Am measg nan leabhraichean a sgrìobh e, tha *Egyptian Myth and Legend, Indian Fairy Stories, agus Myths from Melanesia and Indonesia*.

Cha robh obair agus a bheachdan gun chonnspaid. Anns an leabhar aige *Wonder Tales from Scottish Myth and Legend*, tha a h-uile càil ann am Beurla. Chan eil an t-ùghdar a' foillseachadh nan tùsan aige.

Co-dhiù, tha mi airson rudan a tharraing bhon chiad dà chaibideil anns an leabhar sin. Tha Caibideil 1 mu dheidhinn 'Beira, Queen of Winter'. Tha seo stèidhichte air a' Chaillich Bheur, caractar

*character in the oral traditions of the Gael. Here's how Mackenzie's account commences: 'Dark Beira was the mother of all the gods and goddesses in Scotland ... Each winter she reigned as Queen of the Four Red Divisions of the world ...'*

*That shows that the text is based on the heritage of the Gaels. 'The Four Red Divisions of the world' would mean nothing in the world of the English speaker. But we still say in Gaelic – when we are talking about the entire world - – 'ceithir rannan ruadh an domhain'. Literally – 'the four red divisions of the world'.*

*The Cailleach had only one eye. Her teeth were as red as rust. Her hair was a white as the bog cotton. Her clothes were grey and there was a dun shawl over her shoulders.*

*She went throughout the Highlands. It's said that she created every mountain in Ross-shire. I'll have more about her next week.*

làidir ann am beul-aithris nan Gàidheal. Seo mar a tha an cunntas aig MacCoinnich a' tòiseachadh: *Dark Beira was the mother of all the gods and goddesses in Scotland ... Each winter she reigned as Queen of the Four Red Divisions of the world ...*

Tha sin a' sealltainn gu bheil an teacsa stèidhichte air dualchas nan Gàidheal. Cha bhiodh '*the Four Red Divisions of the world*' a' ciallachadh dad ann an saoghal na Beurla. Ach canaidh sinn sin fhathast ann an Gàidhlig – nuair a tha sinn a' bruidhinn air an t-saoghal air fad – 'ceithir rannan ruadh an domhain'. Gu litreachail – '*the four red divisions of the world*'.

Cha robh aig a' Chaillich ach aon sùil. Bha a fiaclan ruadh mar a' mheirg. Bha a falt cho geal ri canach an t-slèibhe. Bha a h-aodach liath agus bha seàla odhar thairis air a guailnean.

Chaidh i air feadh na Gàidhealtachd. Thathar ag ràdh gun do chruthaich i a h-uile beinn ann an Siorrachd Rois. Bidh tuilleadh agam oirre an-ath-sheachdain.