

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 388 (which corresponds to Litir 692). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about the Skyeman Keith Norman MacDonald. He published the book Puirt-a-Beul in 1901. A republication of the book was made this year. The editor, William Lamb, examined the origin of puirt-à-beul.

Did they originate because there was a ban on playing the bagpipes? The "ban" was associated with the Act of Proscription in 1747. Lamb says that is not the case. The act prevented people from wearing Highland garb. But there wasn't a ban on the playing of the pipes.

There has been another thought around. That is that instrumentalists were singing their tunes. That was to preserve tunes. Why? Because there was a ban, in some places, in the middle of the 19th century, on the playing of instruments. That was because of a rise in evangelism in the Church.

But there are accounts of puirt-à-beul before that. One was collected in St Kilda around 1770. Boswell and Johnson danced a reel, to port-à-beul, on the summit of Dun Caan on Raasay. That was in 1773. Puirt-à-beul were certainly in

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun Sgitheanach, Cè Tormod Dòmhnallach. Dh'fhoillsich e an leabhar Puirt-a-Beul ann an naoi ceud deug 's a h-aon (1901). Chaidh ath-fhoillseachadh a dhèanamh dhen leabhar am-bliadhna. Thug an deasaiche, Uilleam Lamb, sùil air tùs phort-à-beul.

An tàinig iad gu bith a chionn 's gun robh casg air seinn na pìob-mhòir? Bha an "casg" an cois Achd an Toirmisg ann an seachd ceud deug, ceathrad 's a seachd (1747). Tha Lamb ag ràdh nach tàinig. Bha an achd a' cur stad air daoine bho bhith a' cur èideadh Gàidhealach orra. Ach cha robh casg air seinn na pìoba.

Tha smuain eile air a bhith ann. 'S e sin gun robh luchd nan ionnsramaidean a' seinn nam port aca. Bha sin airson na puirt a ghleidheadh. Carson? A chionn 's gun robh casg, ann an cuid de dh'àiteachan, ann am meadhan an naoidheamh linn deug, air cluich ionnsramaidean. Bha sin air sgàth dùsgadh anns an Eaglais.

Ach tha cunntasan ann de phuirt-à-beul roimhe sin. Chaidh fear a chruinneachadh ann an Hiort timcheall air seachd ceud deug is seachdad (1770). Rinn Boswell is MacIain dannsa-ruidhle, gu port-à-beul, air mullach Dùn Cana ann an Ratharsair. Bha sin ann an seachd ceud

existence in the eighteenth century.

But were they around long before that? Lamb mentions an account from the year 1593. At that time, the authorities were condemning some women. They were saying that they were witches. Three women from Elgin were in court. They had been singing a devilish dancing song.

Gillatrype is the English name for that type of singing. It's thought that gillatrype came from the Gaelic gille a' truimb. That's a tune that would follow the way of playing a trump. People were making dancing tunes with the trump, as well as the voice.

The court account says that the song was a "foull hieland sang". It's thought, therefore, that it was in Gaelic.

deug, seachdad 's a trì (1773). Bha puirt-à-beul gu cinnteach ann san ochdamh linn deug.

Ach an robh iad ann fada roimhe sin? Tha Lamb a' dèanamh iomradh air cunntas às a' bhliadhna còig ceud deug, naochad 's a trì (1593). Aig an àm sin, bha na h-ùghdarrasan a' dìteadh cuid de bhoireannaich. Bha iad ag ràdh gur e bana-bhuidsich a bha annta. Bha trìùir bhoireannach à Eilginn anns a' chùirt. Bha iad air a bhith a' seinn òran-dannsaidh deamhnaidh.

'S e *gillatrype* an t-ainm Beurla a bha air an t-seòrsa seinn sin. Thathar a' smaoinachadh gun tàinig *gillatrype* às a' Ghàidhlig *gille a' truimb*. 'S e sin port a bhiodh a' leantainn dòigh-sheinn an truimb. Bha daoine a' dèanamh phort-dannsaidh leis an tromb, a bharrachd air a' ghuth.

Tha cunntas na cùirte ag ràdh gum b' e "foull hieland sang" a bha anns an òran. Thathar an dùil, mar sin, gur ann an Gàidhlig a bha e.