

SCOTTISH STUDIES

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An t-Each-Uisge

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ABSTRACT

Traditional descriptions of the Gaelic water-horse display intriguing similarities to the mysterious ‘Pictish Beast’ or ‘Swimming Elephant’, the most ubiquitous yet least recognisable creature of our symbol-stones, which is dateable to c. AD 700. This paper sets out a typology of water-horse stories and attempts to show that they can be dated to that period. It then considers whether the iconography of the Beast, the ‘head-lappet’ in particular, can be explained in terms of the ethnography of the water-horse, whose principal attribute is its cap or magic bridle. The Torrs Pony-Cap, Adomnán’s river-monster and the ‘kelpie’ of Lowland tradition are taken into account, and it is suggested in conclusion that the water-horse and kelpie are Gaelic and Anglo-Norman reflexes of a leading Pictish deity, the guardian of their otherworld.



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Ann am beul-aithris Ghàidhlig na h-Alba, tha barrachd air innse mun each-uisge na mu chreutair neo-thalmhaidh sam bith eile. (Ann an Éirinn tha am priomh àite seo aig a’ bhan-shith.) Tha sgeulachdan mun each-uisge a’ tighinn á gach ceàrnaidh den Ghaidhealtachd, ach faodar a ràdh gu bheil iad uile a’ gabhail aon de na trì cruthan seo:

Each-uisge agus tuathanach. Tha tuathanach a’ treabhadh le each nach aithne dha / ga chleachdadadh ceangalite le earball ri eich eile son luchdan a ghiùlan. Chan fhaod e treabhadh as déidh dol sios na gréine / feumaidh e buarach no srian a chumail air an each, neo far an eich, neo uisge a thaomadh air. Nì e dearmad air seo. Tha an t-each ga thoirt leis a-staigh do loch / tha e a’ leum far a muhin le bhith a’ sineadh a-mach a chasan a’ dol tro gheata neo tro bhealach a’ ghàraidh / tha e a’ gearradh dheth a mheur, a tha a’ leantainn ris an each / tha na h-eich eile air an slaodadh a-staigh dhan loch. Tha sgamhain/grùthain/mionaich a’ nochdad (’s a’ toirt ainm dhan àite).

Each-uisge agus boireannach. Tha fear òg maiseach a’ nochdad, a’ cur a chinn an uchd a’ bhoireannaich, agus a’ dol a chadal. Tha i a’ lorg shligeann/gainmhich/plannrais-uisge ’na ghruaig. Tha i a’ gearradh toll anns an dreas aice neo ga thoirt dhith, neo a’ cur ploc fo cheann an duine, agus a’ teicheadh. Tha esan ga toirt air falbh (air Di-Dòmhnaich) á meadhan sluaigh. Tha a sgamhan/grùthan/mionach a’ nochdad san loch (’s a’ toirt ainm dhan àite).

Each-uisge agus clann. Tha àireamh na cloinne air a toirt seachad. (Se Di-Dòmhnaich a th’ ann.) Tha iad uile a’ dol air each nach aithne dhaibh, a tha a’ sìneadh a dhroma gus rùm a dheanamh dhaibh. Tha e gan toirt leis a-staigh do loch. Tha aon den chloinn agus duilleagan Biobaill aige / a’ tighinn far an eich leis an earball / a’ gearradh dheth a mheur, a tha a’ leantainn ris an each. Tha sgamhain/grùthain/mionaich na cloinne a’ nochdad (’s a’ toirt ainm dhan àite).

Mar as trice chan eil dad anns na sgeulachdan mu choltas an eich-uisge, ach tha a’ bheàrn seo air a lionadh dhuinn le sgríobhadairean mar Iain Griogarach Caimbeul (1834–91). Thuirt esan (Black 2005: 109):

In shape and colour it resembled an ordinary horse, and was often mistaken for one . . . The cow-shackle round its neck, or a cap on its head, completely subdued it, and as long as either of these was kept on it, it could be as safely employed in farm labour as any other horse. In Skye it was said to have a sharp bill (*gob biorach*), or, as others describe it, a narrow brown slippery snout. Accounts are uniform that it had a long flowing tail and mane. In colour it was sometimes grey, sometimes black, and

sometimes black with a white spot on its forehead. This variation arose, some say, from the water-horse being of any colour like other horses, and others say from its having the power of changing its colour as well as its shape . . . However much benefit the farmer might at first derive from securing one with the cap or cow-shackle, he was ultimately involved by it in ruinous loss.

Tha seo 'na dhealbh-pinn cho math 's a ghabhas den chreutair neònach ris an canar a' Bhiaist Chruthneach, an t-Ailbhean air an t-Snàmh, no an t-Each/Damh Cruithneach. Se a' Bhiaist (mar a chanas mise ris) an creutair as cumanta a chithear snaidhte sna clachan Cruithneach a tha sgapte air feadh ear-thuath na h-Alba. Tha airceòlaichean agus eachdraichean ealain air a bhith deasbaireachd mu deidhinn fad còrr agus ceud bliadhna. Dé seòrsa creutair a th' innte? Co ás a thàinig i? Oir bha na Cruithnich air leth math air snaidheadh, agus aithnichear na creutairean eile air fad aca anns a' bhad – an tarbh a tha an-diugh 'na shamhla do Shabhal Mór Ostaig, mar eisimpleir.

Is gann a bhios a' Bhiaist ag atharrachadh ga brith dé cho tric 's a tha i air a snaidheadh. 'S i air a faicinn daonnan on dara taobh, tha i a' fiaradh mar gun robh i a' leum no a' snàmh, tha earball fada agus spògan cruinne aice, tha rudeigin crom mar mhuing a' tighinn o mhullach a cinn 's a' leantainn le drum, tha i a' coimhead sìos, agus tha gob fada caol, dlùth dh'a broilleach, a' toirt coltas tunnaige dh'a ceann.

Am faod e bhith, ma-thà, gur e a' Bhiaist an t-eachuisge? Chan eil 'dearbhadh' ann, ach cha mhotha tha 'dearbhadh' ann air nì sam bith, cha mhór, mu ealain nan Cruithneach. Se tha a dhìth ach gun gabh a shealltainn gu bheil na sgeulachdan mun each-uisge cho sean ri clachan nan Cruithneach, agus gun gabh *iconography* – dealbhsgrìobhainn – na Béiste, an *head-lappet* gu sòraichte, a mhìneachadh a réir *ethnography* – sluaghsgriobhainn – an eich-uisge.

Tha a' Bhiaist suaicheanta cheana air clachan 'Clas I', an fheadhainn a chaidh a shnaidheadh eadar AD 650 agus 750. Ann am pàipear a thug i aig Còmhdaill Eadar-Nàiseanta na Ceiltis ann an Dùn Éideann ann an 1995, rinn mo nighean Catriona a-mach bho fhianais ealain-eachdraidheil gun do nochd a' Bhiaist eadar AD 650 agus 680 (Black *et al.* 1999: 497, cf. Curle 1939–40: 75). Thuit cuid a sgoilearan aig an àm gun robh na deatachan seo ro thràth; ach mar as tràithe na deatachan, sann as mhotha an dùbhlann dhuinne. Gu h-ióngantach, sann aig direach an aon àm, timcheall air AD 670, a sgrìobh Eònan 'Beatha Chaluim Chille', anns a bheil e a' cumail a-mach gun do thachair an naomh ri 'biast uisge' ann an abhainn Nis, faisg air ceannabhaile rìgh nan Cruithneach. (Bhiodh seo timcheall air ceud bliadhna roimhe, mu AD 570.) Mharbh a' bhiaist aon duine agus chuir i eagal a bheatha air companach an naoimh, Luighne mac Min, a bha a' snàmh a-null a dh'fhaighinn curach a bh' air an taobh eile. Thog Calum Cille a làmh, rinn e comharradh na croise, agus dh'òrdaich e dhan bhéist gun a dhol nas fhaide, gun beantainn ri Luighne, agus tilleadh an Rathad a thàinig i, rud a rinn i 'cho luath 's gun saoileadh tu gun robh i ga slaodadh le ròpannan' (Adomnán 1995: 175–76).

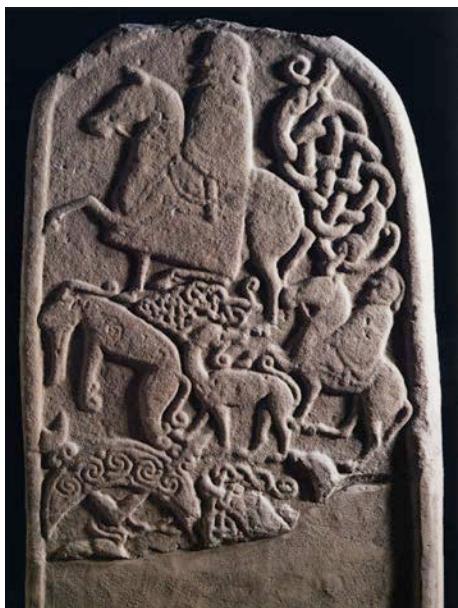
Chum ealainichean Cruithneach orra a' snaidheadh na Béiste fad dhà na thrì cheud bliadhna eile, gu timcheall air AD 900, mun àm a chaidh an sgeul 'Fled Bricrend' a sgrìobhadh. Tha 'Fled Bricrend' ag innse mar a fhuaire Cú Chulainn an dà each-carbaid aige. Thachair e air an Liath Macha ri taobh Linne Léith ann an Sliabh Fuaid. Nuair thàinig an t-each ás an loch dh'èalaidh Cú Chulainn ga ionnsaigh 's chuir e a dhà làimh mu amhaich. Lean iad orra a' carachd uile thimcheall na h-Eireann gus an tainig an Liath Macha an oidhche sin 'na each carbaid aige gu Eamhain Macha.



Tarbh Cheann Bhuirgh, samhla Sabhal Mór Ostaig, a tha gu follaiseach 'na tarbh
© Taigh-Tasgaidh Bhreatann

AN T-EACH-UISGE

Lorg e an Dubhshaoileann san dòigh cheudna ann an Loch Duib Sainglend (Henderson 1899: 38–41). Bheirear fanear gur ann liath (glas) agus dubh a bha na h-eich seo, dathan nan each-uisge.



Clach 'Clas I' á Mígeil, Siorrachd Pheairt
© Alba Aosmhor

ann an dùthaich nan Cruithneach do thri, co-dhiù, de na ceithir naoimh Éireannach aig a bheil eich-uisge a' nochdadadh anns na beathannan aca – Bréanainn, Féichín, Maedhóg agus Ruadhan (Watson 1926: 274, 321–22, 327; MacNickle 1934: 218–19; Ó hÓgáin 1990: 252; Black 2000: 46–48).

Uile gu léir, ma-thà, ged nach deach agam air a nochdadadh gu bheil na sgeulachdan mun each-uisge nas sine na Biast nan clachan (ach faic shìos mu Cheap-Pònaidh nan Torran), lorg sinn rudeigin nas inntinniche fhéin: fianais gun do nochd an t-each-aibhne 's a' Bhiast còmhla mun bhliadhna 670, 's gun robh an t-each-uisge ann mun do sguir na Cruithnich a shnайдheadh na Béiste mun bhliadhna 900.

Tha tighinn oirnn tionndadh a-nis gu nitheòlas, no *material culture*, an eich-uisge – an t-srian 's an còrr – agus faighneachd dé a' chiall a tha e deanamh fa chomhair na Béiste. Tha dealbh-pinn math dheth aig Eachann MacDhuighaill á Cola (1929–30: 127–28).

Bha na Gàidheil ag creidsinn gu'n gabhadh an t-each-uisge ceannsachadh, is a chur an gréim anns a' chrann no an ceann oibreach sam bith eile a bhiodhete a' dèanamh. Am bitheantas, ged thà, is ann ri obair treabhaidh a bhiodhete 'ga chur. Bha dòigh no dhà gus an ceannsal so a chur air. Dheante e le fior neart thar a' chumantais anns an fhear a ghabhadh air féin a laimhseachadh, agus mar an ceudna le cumhachdan eile as eugmhais neart bodhaig. De na dòighean mu dheireadh so, is e srian shònraichte, no buarach na boine, air am bitheanta sgeul. An uair a gheibhte a' bhuarach gu

Bha an t-Oll. Bo Almqvist a' creidsinn (1991: 117, 119) gun robh na bun-stòireannan mun each-uisge làn leasaichte ro c. 1000, oir dh'imrich iad a-mach dha na h-eileanan far an robh Seann Lochlannais ga bruidhinn. Tha 'Eachuisge agus tuathanach' a' nochdadadh anns an *Landnámabók* san treas linn deug, agus dh'aidich an sgoilear Finnur Jónsson (nach robh, mar bu thrice, deònach gabhail ris gun robh buaidh sam bith aig na Gaidhil air dualchas Inis Tile) gun robh e coltach gun tāning e á Alba no Éirinn (Almqvist 1991: 118; cf. Strömbäck 1970: 245–46, 251).

Ma tha e fior gur ann on Breatnais/Chuimris/Chruithnis *ceffyl-pol, celpow* 'each-puill, each-aibhne' a thàinig am facial Albais *kelpie*, mar a chuir mi fhìn air adhart (MacilleDhuibh 1999; Black 2005: 372), buinidh am facial do linn nan Cruithneach. Tha coltas na h-aoise air an sgaradh eadar creutair Gaidhealach a tha a chòmhnaidh ann an uisce sèimh agus creutair Gallda a tha a chòmhnaidh ann an uisce ruith (Stewart 1885: 40–41; Mackenzie 1935: 237, 238; Black 2005: 115). Agus gabhaidh a leigeil fhaicinn gun robh làraichean coisrigte



Each-uisge? A' Bhiast bho chloich eile ann am Mígeil
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sònraichte m'a cheann no m'a amhaich bha e cho còir ri each sam bith eile. A thaobh cui'd a choltais dheth, cha robh a' bheag de eadar-dhealachadh eadar e féin is each nàdurr a an fhuiinn. Gun teagamh, bha a chomas aig an each-uisge a chruth is a dhath atharrachadh, oir, mar a thugas fa-near, rachadh e an riochd an duine féin. Ach eadhon 'na chruth féin, mar each, dh'aithnicheadh an t-sùil eòlach e seach each an fhuiinn. Am bitheantas is ann dorcha a bhiodh e anns an dath, ged a bhiodh e air uairean is fiamh glas dheth. Bha earball is muing fhada dhosrach air, a shròn fada, sleamhuin, is air uairean ball geal 'na aodann.

An uair a gheibhte a làn-cheannsachadh is a chur gu feum, cha robh obair a rachadh a chur m'a choinneamh ro throm leis. Leathan 'gam biodh an t-achadh ris an seolte e an ám a chur anns a' chrann sa mhaduinn, is e glé bheag dheth a bhiodh glas an ám an fheasgair. A dh'aindeoin sin uile, ged thà, direach mar chuideachadh nan sithichean féin, cha bhiodh obair an eich-uisge gu a bheag de bhuaidh dhàsan a chuireadh an cuing e. Luath no mall, dheante dearmad a thaobh-eigin an ám a laimhseachadh: dheante diochuimhne air an t-srian sheunaidh, no a' bhuarach, a chumail an ceangal gu dionghulta air, agus an uair sin dh'éireadh an dosgainn sgriosail a bhiodh eu-comasach a casg do'n fhear a bu treise.

Theagamh gur e gach crann, gach each eile a bhiodh an cuing leis, is eadhon an duine no na daoine a bhiodh 'na fhochair a tharruing leis do'n Loch a dheanadh e; agus de na beothaibh a bheireadh e leis, a chaoidh tuille chan fhaicte dhiubh ach na sgamhain. Thigeadh a' chuid sin de am buill-cuirp, eich is daoine, gu tir am measg cobhair is ruaim an locha an ath latha.

Na'n tachradh gu'm faigheadh fear le neart bodhaig lamh-an-uachdar air an each-uisge, is a mharbhadh, cha bhiodh air fhàgail air an lom air am biodh a' chòmhrag ach silteach streamhain de rud sleamhuin, tiacte, mar gu'm biodh muir-tiac no sùil eisg. Tha aon iomradh mar so air each-uisge a bhi air a mharbhadh, agus an uair a chaidh crioch air an iomairt is a sgaoil an ceathach a thog i, cha robh r'a fhaicinn ach sgonnan phloc far an do thuit an t-each marbh fo 'n fhuar-bhuille a rinn an gnothach air mu dheireadh thall.

Seo ma-tà na h-aon fheartan mu'n cuala sinn roimhe – an t-srian sheunaidh no a' bhuarach mu cheann no mu amhaich, an cruth-atharrachadh, an dath dorcha no glas, an t-earball fada, a' mhuing dhosrach, am ball geal 'na aodann, an t-sròn fhada shleamhainn. Ach tha rud eil' ann cho math: ma mharbhar an t-each-uisge théid e 'na shilidh neo 'na phluic. Tha seo aig a' Chaimbeulach cuideachd. Nuair chaidh each-uisge Ratharsair a mharbhadh, ars esan (Black 2005: 112), 'the monster proved to be merely grey turves (*pluic ghlas*), or, as others say, a soft mass (*sgling*) like jellyfish (*muir-tiachd*)'. Chithinn seo mar innleachd gu mìneachadh ma tha a leithid de nì ann ri each-uisge 's ma ghabhas a mharbhadh, ciamar nach deach corp eich-uisge a lorg riamh – ach gu bheil an 'sgling' ud ri fhaotainn air na monaidhean . . . (Campbell 1890: 204).

Se an *head-lappet* prìomh fheart na Béiste; se an t-srian prìomh fheart an eich-uisge. Tha dealbh-sgrìobhainn na Béiste a' sealltainn gu soilleir 's gu



"Is gann a bhios a' Bhiaist ag atharrachadh..." Bho Chlach Ghailspidh (shuas, © Alba Aosmhor) agus bho Chlach Thulaich Dhíarmайд (shios, © Pinkfoot Press)

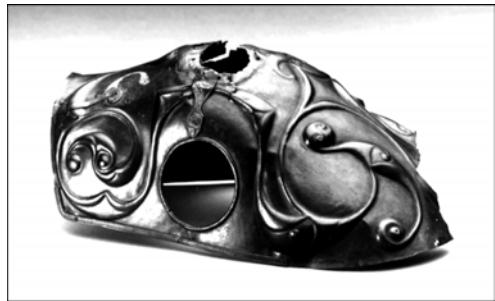
cunbalach nach eil an *lappet* 'na phàirt dh'a bodhaig ach 'na sheòrsa de churrac fada air a ceann. Tha e a' siubhal fada air ais ri drum far am bu chòir dhan mhuing a bhith (feumaidh gur e an t-srian a chuir ás dhan mhuing). A réir a' Chaimbeulaich 's an Dùghallaich sann leis an t-sréin a tha an tuathanach a' gabail smachd air, ach saoilidh mi gu bheil iad ceàrr. Tha an t-srian air an each-uisge cheana nuair thig e ás an loch, agus sann le bhith ga toirt dheth a tha an tuathanach a' gabail smachd air (Stewart 1823: 147–57; Polson 1926: 82), a cheart choltach ri cochall na maighdinn-mhara a tha an tuathanach a' cur air an fhardoras an uair a phòsas e i (Campbell 1960: 116–19; Black 2005: 108). Mar their Alastair MacBheathain, 'the horse is ready caparisoned' (Macbain 1887–88: 248).

Tha briathrachas na sréine dà-fhillete no trì-fhillete. Ann an Gàidhlig cluinnidh sinn mun t-sréin 's mun bhuardh. Mar as trice se tha ann am buarach ach rud leis a bheil casan-deiridh na bà air an ceangal aig àm bleoghainn. Ann am Beurla cluinnidh sinn mu *bridle*, *shackle*, neo, aig a' Chaimbeulach a-mhàin, *cap* (Black 2005: 109, 111). Feumaidh gun tug e *cap* bho fhacal mar 'chopan' (*the boss of a bridle*, Dwelly 1977: 252). Sann ann an Alba a lorgadh an aon cheap-pònaidh a th' againn bho Linn Iarainn Taobh Siar na Roinn Eòrpa, ás na Torran ann an Siorrachd Chille Chùbaid, bhon treas linn ro Chrios (Calder 1989: 97–99). Ma ghabhar ris gum buin an *Torr's Pony-Cap* air dhòigh air choreigin do sheanchas an each-uisge, tha e a' cur toiseach na sgeòil againn mìle bliadhna ron chiad Bhéist Chruithnich.

Tha fianais ann, gun teagamh, gum faodte an t-srian fhaicinn mar nì simplidh draoidheach seach mar shreath amallach de dh'iallan 's de bhucaill, no de mhurain 's de shnaoimeannan. Cha robh anns an 't-sréin draoidhich' a bh' aig Griogar Willox mun bhliadhna 1830 ach pìos pràise mu'n tuirt fear a chunnaic 's a tharraing e 'it has not the most distant resemblance to any part of a bridle' (Lauder 1881: 5; McGregor 1994: 12). Tha simplidheachd den t-seòrsa seo feumail ann am buidseachd, ann an creideamh, 's ann an seanchas, mar chithear san sgeulachd 'Each-Uisce Pholl nan Craobhan', anns an robh 'srian loinnireach' an each 'air a cheann' agus chan ann air a shròin (MacDougall 1910: 308–15). "Cha'n 'eil 'san t-sréin aon chuid sparrag (*bit*) no smeachan (*chin-strap*)," tha cailleach dhubbh Allnaig a' cur an céill do dh'Iain Beag; "agus, uime sin, an uair a gheibh thu dlùth gu leòir, bheir thu leum a dh' ionnsaidh na sréine, agus spionaidh tu dheth i. An sin bithidh an t-each dubh fo do smachd, agu nì e ni air bith is foil leat, cho fad is a chumas tu an t-srian uaith. Bi cùramach mu 'n t-sréin, air neo is ann duitse is miosa e." Agus chaidh leis, oir "le cruidh leum fhuair e greim air an t-sréin loinnirich, spion e bhàrr an each i, agus rug e air a bhad-mullaich air (*he caught him by the forelock*)".

Air an làimh eile tha sgeulachd aig Alastair Stiùbhart mu shrian draoidheach nach eil air a slaodadh far each chrosta idir, ach air a faotainn le dròbhair air bruach lochain (Stewart 1885: 44):

As he sat on a stone by the side of the lake he saw something glittering in the moonlight, which, on taking it up, he found to be a horse-bridle. Dòmhnull Mòr carried the bridle home with him, and was surprised next morning to find that the bit and buckles were of pure silver, and the reins of a soft and beautifully speckled sort of leather, such as he had never seen before. What astonished him most was, that on touching the silver bit it felt so hot as to be unbearable. He was very much frightened as well as astonished, and now wished that he had let it lie where he found it. It was only when a 'wise woman' was sent for from a neighbouring glen that the truth became known. She declared it to be a water-horse's bridle, the bit of deep down,



Srian eich-uisge bho Linn an Iarainn? Ceap-Pònaidh nan

Torran

© Taighean-Tasgaidh Nàiseanta na h-Alba

subterranean silver still retaining part of the heat which belonged to it in its primeval molten state. The reins, she said, were the skin of *Buarach-Baoibh*, a sort of magical serpents, dreadfully poisonous, that frequent such rivers and lakes as are inhabited by the kelpy and water-horse.

Tha a' bhuarach-bhaoibh 'na seòrsa de *lamprey* neo de dh'easgann dealain (Black 2005: 118), ach tha barail na cailliche gar tilleadh chun na buaraich, 's a' toirt ceist eile gu bàrr: on as ann de dh'airgead a bha an sparrag agus na bucaill seo, nach fhaodadh e bhith gum biodh currac airgid ann uaireannan cuideachd, coltach ris a' churrac umha bh' air pònaidh nan Torran?

Se an currac, neo an copan, an dara nì as fheàrr, as déidh a' ghuib, a nì an ceangal eadar a' Bhiaist 's an t-each-uisge. Nuair sgríobh an Caimbeulach 'the cow-shackle round its neck, or a cap on its head, completely subdued it' (Black 2005: 109) feumaidh gun robh dealbh 'na cheann de dhà rud seach aon, dà stuth seach aon, 's nam b'e a' bhuarach páirtean boga na sréine, b'e an *cap* na páirtean cruidhe – bucaill, sparrag, currac sam bith.

A-nise, ma tha a' Bhiaist 'na h-each-uisge, nach bu chòir casan eich a bhith aice mar anns na sgeulachdan? Chaidh a coltachadh ri creatairean mara mar a' phèileag (Hicks 1993a: 49–50; Hicks 1993b: 199), ach chanainn fhìn gu bheil a casan leathach-shlighe eadar cruidhean eich agus spògan ròin, agus co-dhiù bha cruth-atharrachadh 'na phàirt de làdar an eich-uisge. Tha ar beul-aithris gu léir a' déiligeadh ri cruth an eich-uisge air tir seach anns an uisge, ach tha e coltach gur e snàmh a bh' air inntinn an luchd-ealaín a bhiodh a' snaidheadh na Béiste. Tha seo gar stiùireadh chun a' cho-dhùnaidh gu bheil a' Bhiaist a' riochdachadh an eich-uisge sa chiad dhreuchd aige, se sin, mar bhandia nan aibhnichean 's mar fhreiceadan air an t-saoghal eile.

Ann an seachas na Gàidhlig, tha an t-each-uisge 'na gheàrd air lochain mhòintich a tha 'nan dorsan dhan t-saoghal eile. Tha e 'na chreutair eagallach ach tha e comasach air a dhol 'na riochd taitneach. Ma tha dàimh aige ris a' Bhéist, tha sin a' deanamh dà rud dheth, neo trì: Cruithneach, dia, neo (nas miosa fhéin) dia Cruithneach. Ann an seachas na Beurla, tha an *kelpie* 'na fhreiceadan air aibhnichean 's tha ainm, masa fior, 'na fhacal Cruithneach. Tha sin ga cheangal ris a' chreutair a thachair (a réir Eònan) ri Calum Cille. Tha an t-ainm a' ciallachadh an dearbh rud, cha mhór, ri 'each-uisge'. Tha gu leór an-seo gu toirt oirnn a chreidsinn gun robh a' Bhiaist air a meas 'na creutair aibhne seach locha.

Tha leasachadh na Béiste, mar sin, 'na cheist chruinneòlais. Bha na Cruithnich agus luchd na Beurla a' fuireach ri taobh nan aibhnichean móra. Sann annta a lorgadh iad na diathannan aca. B' iad na Gaidhil a thuinich an talamh àrd, ach (mar a thachras le gach sluagh a tha a' dol ás) bha na Cruithnich mu dheireadh ri fhaotainn àrd anns na monaidhean iad fhéin. Mar sin, ann an seachas nan Gaidheal bha suaicheantas nan Cruithneach ceangailte ri lochain mhòintich. Sann sa chruth sin a nochd e ann an Éirinn mu AD 900.



Griogar Willox agus an t-srian a ghoid e, masa fior, bho each-uisge
(Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, *Legendary Tales of the Highlands*, 1841)

AN T-EACH-UISGE

Aig na Gaidhil 's aig luchd na Beurla bha an t-each-uisge 's an *kelpie* 'nan nàmhaid. Aig na Cruithnich bha a' Bhiast 'na caraid. Chan eil dad a choltas bagairteach mu deidhinn, 's gu dearbh bha taobh eile ri pearsantachd an eich-uisge fhéin, air na chuir MacDhughail a chorrag (1929–30: 125–26):

Tha aon bheachd a dh'fhaodamaid meomhrachadh air; agus is e sin ged a bhiodh clann is cailean òga air an toirt do'n loch, nach 'eil mi ro chinnteach gu'n robhas anns an t-seann aimsir ag creidsinn gu'n robhtar 'gam marbhadh no 'gam bàthadh. Bha còmhnuidhean dhaoine, is saoghal dha féin anns an doimhne fo'n chuan is fo lochan tire . . . mur robh anns an each-uisge ach teachdaire gu sluagh a thoirt air falbh do'n tir àluinn so, bhiodh e coltach gu leor gu'm fàgadh iadsan 'nan déidh am ball-cuirp sin – an sgamhan – air nach biodh iad a nis ag cur an corr feuma.

Agus uaireannan ann an 'Each-uisge agus boireannach' tha an sgeulaiche a' cumail a-mach gu bheil uisge an loch a' dol dearg, ach a réir Nèill MhicGille Sheathanaich (1938: 18) chan e fuil na maighdinn a th' ann idir: "An uair a thill an creutair neo-chneasda so air ais do'n Loch ás an d'thàinig e, 's a mhothaich na h-uile-bheisteann eile gu'n robh e an comunn neach talmhaidh, ghealac iad cho searbh is gu'n robh uisge an locha dearg le am fuil." Bha cho math dha 'caileag bhrèagha' a ràdh an àite 'neach talmhaidh'.

Tha seo gar toirt gu leantainneachd creidimh. Tha a' Bhiast nas bitheanta air na clachan na creutair sam bith eile, agus chithinn-s' i mar phrìomh dhia (neo spiorad) nan Cruithneach. Mar sin tha an sgeul aig Eònan, a tha a' cur na Béiste san aon dealbh ri comharradh na Croise, 'na shamhla. Ma thogar a' cheist an uair sin car son a tha a' Bhiast a' nochdadhl air na h-aon chlachan 'Clas II' (c. AD 750–850) ris a' Chrois, tha i furasta a freagairt on eòlas a th' againn air làithean tràthha na Crìostaidheachd: cha deach cur ás dhan Bhéist, chaidh gabhail rithe mar shuaicheantas nan Cruithneach, mar spiorad, 's mar aingeal diona air an t-saoghal ud eile fon uisge.

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