

# A RHAMPSINITUS STORY FROM SKYE

James Ross \*

GOBAN SAOR 'S A MHAC—AA.—TH. 950

Bha, o chionn taom mór bhliadnaichean air ais, fear ann an Éirinn ris an canadh iad Goban Saor. Agus 'se saor ainmeil a bh'ann. Bh'e air aithris ma dheodhain gun cuireadh e locaire a bhiodh aige dreisigeadh an fhiodha—gun cuireadh e ann an glamaradh i, agus gu faigheadh e fhéin pios fiodh agus gu snaidheadh e e, 's e caimhead air a locaire deich slatan bhuaithe. Agus shnaidheadh e i gos gun tilgeadh e i agus dìreach bha i cho freagarrach dha'n a locaire agus chuireadh e innt' i deich slatan bhuaithe agus bha i cho freagarrach dha'n a locaire agus gad a bhiodh e ma'n cuairt dha'n a locaire fad a latha 'g obair oirre.

Ach bha gill' aige agus dh'ionnsaich e fhéin an t-saor-sainneachd. Agus bha banca 'ga throgail ann an Éirinn agus 's iadsan a ghabh an obair ri deanamh. Agus thuirt Goban Saor ri mhac nair a bha iad a dol air adhart leis—"nach fhàg sinn" as esan "àit an a sheo" as esan "far a faigh sinn daras" as esan "nach mothaich duine sam bith dha agus faodaidh sinn tighean 's airgid gu leòr a bhi againn nair a thogras sinn fhìn" as esan "am banca robaigeadh."

"Bhiodh e glé mhath" thuirt an gille.

Chaidh iad an adhart 's dh'fhàg iad an t-àite, 's chaidh am banc—bh'e ma dheireadh deiseil 's fhuair Goban Saor 's a mhac an cuid fhein air son a seirbheis. Ach bha 'm banca dol air adhart 's airgid a dol a stigh ann 's cléirich ag obair ann. Ach 's ann a chaidh iad aon mhadainn ann 's bha dòrlach che'n airgoid air falbh, agus cha robh fios aca o'n t-saoghal ciamar a sh'fhalbh an t-airgoid. Ach bha duine air leth sgiobalta as an àite agus chaidh fios a chuir air orson ciamar bh'e a smaoineachadh a ghlacte an fheadhainn a bha a toir an airgid as a bhanca—gu dé an dòigh a bh'e a smaoineachadh a

\* Junior Research Fellow, School of Scottish Studies.

bha an t-airgiod a falbh. Bha dorsan glaiste agus cha robhas a faicinn dòigh 'sam bith air an d'fhuaireadh a stigh ann, ach chaidh faotainn a stigh ann agus dh'fhalbh an t-airgiod.

“O wel” as esan “se duine na daoine sgiobalta” as esan “a tha ris an obair, agus tha mise smaoineachadh” as esan “gu bheil àit air fhàgail an àiteiginnich” as esan, “s feumaidh gu bheil. Agus tha mi smaoineachadh gur e'n dòigh a b'fhearr” as esan “air a dheanamh a mach far a bheil e—chan urrainn da bhi cho tearuinte” as esan “ris a chuid eile dhe'n tigh— a chuile toll as an tig ceò a mach” as esan “a stopadh—rud a chur ann, agus daoine bhi caimhead gu math ma chuairt da” as esan “agus teine math a chur na bhroinn, agus a chuile daras na nì a dheanamh cho druidte 'sa ghabhas e deanamh nach fhaigh ceò a mach as agus an t-àit as a bheil a fàiligeadh, tha mi smaoineachadh gu nochd ceò ann” as esan.

Chaidh seo a dheanamh. Fhuaireadh an t-àite ceart gu leòr 's rinn iad a mach far a robh na daoine faighinn a stigh. Ach có bha 'ga dheanamh cha b'urrainn daibh fhaighinn a mach.

Agus thuirt e 'n uair sin gun iad a ghabhail orra nì gun d'fhuair iad sian a mach, agus iad a chur baraille do— togsaid mhór do phitch air a leaghadh am beul na h-oidhche fo'n an daras a bha so, agus gum biodh e cho tiugh an t-àm an d'rachte 'ga robaigeadh—air reothadh suas, agus gu sinceadh an duin' ann agus nach fhaigheadh e as.

Chaidh sin a dheanamh. 'S dh'fhalbh Goban 's a mhac a thoirt tuilleadh airgiod as a bhanca. 'Se Goban Saor a bh'air toiseach. Nair a leig e e fhéin sios dh'fhairich e e fhéin a dol fodha ann a sheo 's dh'eubh e ris a ghille fuireach air ais. “Fiach” as esan “a slaod thu as a seo mi.” Dh'fheuch an gille cho math 'sa b'urrainn e; dh'fheuch e ri shlaodadh as— ach cha b'urrainn e.

“Wel,” thuirt Goban “cha bhi agams ach am bàs co dhiubh” as esan “nair a gheibhear a seo mi, agus bi 'm bàs agadsa cuideachd” thuirt e. “Agus biodh e cho math gum biodh aon neach againn air ar sàbhaladh agus geàrr an ceann dhìom” as esan “agus thoir leat e agus tiodhlaic e far nach fhaighear e agus cha bhi ac' ach colann gun cheann as a bharaille” as esan “s cha bhi fhios aca fhathast có rinn e.”

Chaidh so a dheanamh. 'S dh'fhalbh an gille leis a cheann s rinn e toll faisg air an tigh aige fhein 's leig e sios ann e. Chuir e talamh air a mhuin ann a shin. 'S nuair a chaidh iad chon a bhanca fhuair iad colann gun cheann as a bharaille 's

bha iad cho miosa 'sa bha iad reimhe—cha deanadh iad a mach có bha ris a robaigeadh.

Ach co-dhiubh, chaidh fios a chur air an duine—a chomh-airliche bha seo a rithist. Dh'innseadh mar a thachair.

“O wel” as esan “bha barrachd is aon duine ma chuairt da” as esan “agus tha duine sgiobalta fhathast ri fhaotainn ma's fhaighear a mach có bha toirt air falbh an airgid. Ach,” as esan “tha mucan agad” thuirt e. “Tha”, thuirt e.

“Cumadh tu stigh ma tha” as esan “fad dà neo trì lathaichean iad, 's cha toir thu greim biadh dhaibh” as esan “'s bi iad glé acrach an uair sin” as esan “'s leig a mach iad, 's a fear a tha caimhead as deodhaidh na mucan, leanadh e iad, 's iongantach leam mar a trog iad an t-fhàileadh aig a cheann far a bheil e air a thiodhlacadh agus fainichear an uairsin co th'ann nair a gheibhear e.”

“O ro-mhath” thuirteadh ris, 's dh'fhalbh e 's chaidh na mucan a chumail a stigh. Chaidh a leigeadh a mach an ceann trì latha 's dh'fhalbh iad agus collas orra bha uamhasach le acras—a ruith 's a snòdach. Bha 'n duine 's e na fhallus as an deodhaidh. Ach chunnaic mac Ghobain Saoir a tighean iad agus thug e gu dé bha dol a thachairt. Dh'fhalbh e agus thòisich a mhuime ('s i mhuime bh'ann, cha robh mhàthair beò) thòisich i air caoineadh nair a chunnaic i na mucan a tighean 's eagal oirre gum biodh an gill' air a thoirt air falbh 's air a chur gu bàs.

Dh'fhalbh e agus thug e mach furm a bh'aig agus bròg a bha feumach air a càradh agus sgian-ghriasachd agus pios leathair. Agus chuir e furm a bh'aig air uachdar far a robh ceann athair agus shuidh e air. 'S thòisich e air gearradh na bròige 's nuair a bha na mucan faisg air thug e sgrìob mhór air a mheur 's thug e droch ghearradh orra 's thòisich an fhuil air ruith a mach aisde. 'S thainig na mucan 's iad a snòdach ma'n cuairt da.

“Gu dé tha ceàrr air a bhoireannach” thuirt a fear a bha 's deodhaidh nam muc ris. “Tha,” as esan, “tha i cho gòrach,” as esan “gheàrr mise mo mheur 's mi gearradh bròige ann a shco, 's tha i smaoineachadh gu bheil mi dol a thràghadh” as esan.

'S bha 'n duine 'na fhallus as deodhaidh na mucan. “Tha thu air do shàrachadh as deodhaidh nam biastan sa” thuirt e ris.

“O tha,” as an duine.

“Tha mi creidsinn” as esan “gun cuireadh tu feum air greim bidhidh.”

“S mise chuireadh sin” thuirt e.

“Thalla a stigh” thuirt e ri mhuime “s dean biadh dha’n duine.”

Dh’fhalbh a mhuime stigh, ’s chaidh an duine stigh a ghabhail biadh. ’S bha seòmbar aig mac Ghobain fo’n talamh an àiteiginn ’s nair a fhuair e stigh e dh’fhalbh e agus chuir e na mucan—a chuile h-aonan dhiubh—an comhair an cinn sios dha’n an t-seombair a bha seo ’s dhùin e àite bh’aig air an uachdar ’s cha robh aonan ri fhaicinn dhiubh. Ruith e stigh an uair sin far a robh ’n duine ’s e gabhail biadh a stigh ’s thuirt e ris gun do theich na mucan a chuile gin riamh dhiubh ’s thug iad sios orra rathad a chladaich—“s chan eil fhios agamsa cà ’n deach iad na cà ’n do stad iad.”

Thainig an duine mach ’s chaidh e dhachaidh an deodhaidh an t-àite shiubhal ’s dh’innis e mar a thachair, gun do theich na mucan air ’s nach robh fàireadh ri fhaotainn orra.

Chaidh fios a chur air a chomhairliche rithist.

“O wel” as esan “se duine sgiobalta tha ris an obair, ach ni sinn an gnothaich air” thuirt e. “Tha saighdearan agad a dol a mach air bhileidean uaireannan” thuirt e.

“Tha” thuirt an duine ris.

“O wel” as esan “cuireadh tu saighdear dha’n a chuile tigh th’air an oighreachd agad. Agus” as esan “a fear a gheibh muc le bhìadh” as esan “cumadh e bìdeag dhith”, as esan “agus bìdh sin” as esan “na dhearbhadh c’ait a bheil na mucan. Agus” as esan “faodadh tu deanamh air an duine sin” as esan “nair a thilleas a saighdear a bheil dhuit a mhuc. Bìdh ’n duine” as esan “air a ghlacadh.”

Ach chaidh saighdear a chur chon a chuile tigh ’s chaidh fear a chur go mac Ghobain mar a chaidh a chur go càch. Agus dh’fhoighneachd mac Ghobhain dheth dé bhiodh e air a shon le shuipeir. “O,” as esan, “tha mise coma ach ruith an taighe fhaotainn.”

“An toigh leat muc” thuirt e.

“O ’se mo roghainn biadh i” thuirt a saighdear.

“Wel ma tha gheibh thu do leòr dhith ’n ceartair” thuirt e.

Fhuair iad a mhuc ’s dh’ith iad na bha dhith orra dhith. Chaidh a leabaidh a shealltainn dha na’n t-saighdear, far an d’rachadh e chadal. Ghabh mac Ghobain go tigh a’ nabaidh—“tha saighdear agad” as esan. “Tha” as a nàbaidh.

“A bheil fhios agad carson a tha e agad” as esan “a chaidh a chuir ’gad ionnsaidh?”

“Chan eil sian a dh’fhios agam” thuirt e.

“Tha” as esan “gu bheil tuilleadh sa chòir ann dhiubh” as esan “’s iad a fàs doirbh am beathachadh” as esan “’s a chuile fear” as esan “nach bidh shaighdear air a chuir leis na creagan” as esan “air a bhàthadh a màireach” as esan “bidh e” as esan “air a chur a mach as an fhearann ’s cha bhidh ploc fearainn aige.”

“Mas ann mar sin a tha” as a nàbaidh “cha bhidh mise gun fhearann.”

“Wel thoir fios dha do nàbaidh” as esan. “Se fios a fhuair mise fios a thoir dh’thusa agus thusa thoir fios dha do nàbaidh agus ruitheabh air a chéile mar sin” as esan “gos a faigh a fear ma dheireadh fios.”

Dh’fhalbh e ’s thug e fios dha nàbaidh ’s dh’innis e dha mar a bha. Thill e fhéin dhachaidh ’s fhuair e poca mór mór. Bha saighdear bochd ’na chadal ’s thug e buille dha as a cheann an toiseach gos nach deanadh e cus air a shon fhéin is lùb e ’s chur e ’m broinn a phoc e ’s dh’fhalbh e air a mhuin leis ’s dh’fhalbh mac Ghobain le shaighdear fhéin ’s dh’fhalbh a chuile fear leis na saighdearan. Bha creagan móra shios fo’n an àit as a robh iad ’s a mhuir ghorm fòdha ’s thilg iad a mach air na creagan a chuile fear aca.

Agus nair a fhuair mac Ghobain a fear ma dheireadh shios dhiubh—”na gabhaidh oirbh a nise” as esan, “gu faca sibh saighdear riamh” as esan “air neò theid a chuile duine agabh a chrochadh” thuirt e.

“Nach robh dùileam gur ann. . . .”

“Siuthad thus” as esan “na gabhaibh oirbh e. Rinn sibh murt a chuile duine agaibh ’s ma ghabhaibh sibh oirbh gu faca sibh saighdear riamh chan eil fhiosam gu dé thachras dhuibh.”

“O ma’s ann mar seo a tha gu dearbha cha ghabh.”

Chaidh fios a chur air na saighdearan orson gun tilleadh iad ’s cha do thill saighdear, ’s chaidh foighneachd dhe na daoine. “Cha fhaca sinne saighdear riamh” thuirt a chuile duine dhiubh riutha, “cha robh saighdear a rathadsa.”

Cha robh fios gu dé dheante. Chaidh fios a chuir air a chomhairliche rithist.

“O wel” as esan “tha mise faicinn an duine th’ann nach gabh gnothach deanamh air, agus tha mi smaoinichadh” as esan, “ga brith có ’n duine th’ann” as esan “’s math an airidh e air rud sam bith th’e a faighinn air—’se duine sgiobalta a th’ann” as esan. “Agus ’se’n aon dòigh air a faigh thu mach e” as esan “cuir fios air a chuile duine th’air an oighreachd agad,

agus dean litir, agus cur suas na do làimh i,” as esan “’s abair riutha fear a bha deanamh na h-obrach ma ghabhas e ris, gu bheil litir ann a shiod a gheibh e gu faigh e a nighean agad ri phòsadh, agus sin agad an aon dòigh a tha mise a smaoin-eachadh a ghabhas gnothach deanamh air an duine.”

Chaidh a litir a dheanamh ’s bha tigh mór ann ’s chaidh an cruinneachadh ann ’s dh’innis’ an duine mór dhaibh gu de fàth air an do chruinnich e iad. Thuirt e ’n duine a bha ris an obair gu robh litir a siod ’s gu faigheadh e nighean aige ri pòsadh na’n aidicheadh e. Dh’éirich mac Ghobain as a measg ’s ghabh e null ’s spion e litir as a làimh ’s fhuair e nighean an duine ri phòsadh—an deòdhaidh dha bhi robaigeadh a bhanca ’s na mucan aige cur as da ’s na saighdearan aige cur as daibh. Bha mac Ghobain air fhàgail as deòdhaidh sin.

The above story was told by Somhairle Thorburn, Glendale, Skye, in June 1957. He heard it more than forty years ago from his father Somhairle Beag, who was a well-known local story-teller. A previous recording was made in August 1954. The diction of the two renderings is different, but the content is the same. In the sound-recording archive of the School of Scottish Studies, these renderings bear the numbers RL 37 and RL 628 respectively.

#### GOBAN SAOR AND HIS SON—TRANSLATION

There was, a great heap of years back, a man in Ireland they called Goban Saor. And he was a famous joiner. It was said about him that he would put the adze that he used to dress wood into a vice, and that he would take a piece of wood and fashion it, looking at the adze-head ten yards away. And he would fashion the wood [into a handle] and fling it and he would fit it into the adze ten yards away. And it would fit the adze exactly, as though he would be round the adze all day working at it.

Anyway, he had a son and he learnt the joinery also. And there was a bank being built in Ireland and it was they who contracted to do the work. And Goban Saor said to his son as they were getting on with it—“Shall we leave a place here,” said he, “where we shall get an entrance which nobody will see and we can come and have plenty of money whenever we like,” said he, “and rob the bank?”

“That would be very good,” said the son.

They carried on and they left a place and the bank was at last finished and Goban Saor and his son got their reward for their services. The bank was in business with money going into it and clerks working there. But one morning when they went there, a good deal of the money had gone, and they did not know how in the wide world the money had gone.

But there was an unusually clever man in the place and he was sent for in order to find out how he thought the people who were taking away the money from the bank could be caught—in what manner he thought the money was being taken. The doors were locked and they couldn't see any way of entry at all, but it had been entered and the money had gone.

"O well," said he, "the work is being done by a clever man or men, and I think there must be a place [of entry] left somewhere, and it must be so. And I think," said he, "that the best way to discover it—it cannot be as secure as the rest of the building—is to block every hole out of which smoke can come and to put men around watching closely. Put a big fire inside it and fasten every door and opening as closely as possible so that no smoke can come out, and the place in which the fault is—I think that smoke will appear there," said he.

This was done. They found the place right enough and they discovered where the men were getting in. But who it was they could not make out.

And he said then that they should not let on that they had found anything at all out, and that they should put a barrel, a large hogshead of melted pitch, under this entry at nightfall, and that it would be so thick by the time the bank would be robbed—frozen up, that the man would sink in it and be trapped.

That was done. Goban and his son went to take more money from the bank. Goban Saor was leading. When he lowered himself he felt himself sinking there and he shouted to his son to stand back.

"Try," said he, "to pull me out of here."

The son tried as best as he could but he couldn't. He tried to drag him out but he failed.

"Well," said Goban, "death will be my lot anyway," said he, "when I am found here, and you will be killed too; let us be content that one of us should be saved, and cut my head off; take it with you and bury it where it won't be found, and they will be left with a headless body in the barrel," said he, "and they will never know who did it."

This was done. The son went with the head and he made a hole near his own house and he buried it there. He put earth on top of it. And when they went to the bank they found a headless body in the barrel and they were as bad as they were before—they could not make out who was at the thieving.

Anyway the man—this counsellor—was sent for again. An account of what happened was given to him.

“O well,” said he, “there is more than one man at it anyway, and there is a clever one to be caught yet before it can be discovered who was taking the money away. But,” said he, “you have pigs?”

“Yes,” said the other.

“You will keep them inside then,” said he, “for two or three days, and you will not give them a bite of food, and they will be very hungry then and release them. And the man who looks after them let him follow them, and I shall be surprised if they do not smell the buried head, and when it is found, it will then be known who it is.”

“Excellent,” was the reply, and he went and the pigs were kept in. They were let out at the end of three days and they went—with an appearance that was dreadful with hunger—running and sniffing. The man was in a sweat after them. But Goban Saor’s son saw them coming and he understood what was going to happen. He went, and his foster mother (it was his foster mother, his mother wasn’t alive) began to weep when she saw the pigs coming, thinking that the boy would be taken away and put to death.

He went and took a stool which he had and a shoe which needed mending and a cobbling-knife and a piece of leather. And he put the stool over the place where his father’s head was, and he sat on it. He began to cut the shoe and when the pigs were near him he slashed his finger and cut it badly and the blood began to flow out of it. The pigs came sniffing round him.

“What is wrong with the woman?” said the man who was after the pigs to him.

“She is so foolish,” said he, “I cut my finger while I was cutting a shoe here and she thinks that I am going to bleed to death.”

And the man was in a sweat after the pigs.

“You are exhausted after those beasts,” said he to him.

“O yes,” said the man.

“I believe,” said he, “that you could use a bite of food.”



"I would indeed," said he.

"Go inside," said he to his foster mother, "and prepare food for the man."

His foster mother went in and the man went in to take food. And Goban's son had a room under the ground somewhere and when he got him inside he went and flung the pigs—everyone of them—head first down into this chamber and he shut something he had over them and not one of them was to be seen. He ran inside then to the man who was taking food and he told him that the pigs had run away, every one of them and they took themselves down towards the shore—"and I don't know where they have gone or where they have stopped."

The man came outside and he went home after searching everywhere and he related what happened, that the pigs had run away and that there was no sight of them to be seen.

The counsellor was sent for again.

"O well," said he, "it is a clever man who is doing the work, but we will beat him. You have soldiers going out to billets sometimes," said he.

"Yes," said the man to him.

"O well," said he, "you will place a soldier in every house in your estate and the one who gets pig for his food let him keep a bit of it and that will establish where the pigs are. You can go straight to that man when the soldier returns with the pig's flesh. The man," said he, "will be caught."

A soldier was sent to every house and one was sent to Goban's son as well as to the others. And Goban's son asked him what he would like for his supper.

"O," said he, "I shall be satisfied with whatever is in the house."

"Do you like pig?" said he.

"It is my choice of food," said the soldier.

"Well you will get enough of it in a little while," said he.

They got the pig and they ate as much as they wanted of it. His bed was shown to the soldier, where he could sleep—and Goban's son went to his neighbour's house.

"You have a soldier," said he.

"Yes," said the neighbour.

"Do you know why you have him," said he, "why he has been sent to you?"

"I have no knowledge," said the other.

"It is because there are too many of them and they are

growing difficult to feed," said he, "and everyone whose soldier isn't thrown over the rocks and drowned to-morrow he will be evicted from his holding and he won't have a clod of land."

"If that's the way it is," said his neighbour, "I won't be without land."

"Well, take word to your neighbour," said he. "The word I got was to take word to you and for you to take word to your neighbour and inform each other in that way until the last one is told."

He went and took word to his neighbour and told him how things were. He returned home and got a great big sack. The poor soldier was asleep and he gave him a blow on the head first so that he couldn't do too much for himself; then he bent him and put him inside the sack and he went with him on his shoulders, and Goban's son went with his own soldier and everyone with the soldiers. There were great cliffs down below the place where they were and the blue sea underneath and they flung over the rocks every one of them.

And when Goban's son got everyone of them down he said—"you must pretend now that you have never seen a soldier or everyone of you will be hung."

"But did I not think that . . ."

"Let that be," said he, "don't give anything away about it. You have committed murder every one of you and if you admit that you have ever seen a soldier, I don't know what will happen to you."

"If that is the way it is, indeed we will not."

The soldiers were sent for but no soldier returned, and the people were asked about it.

"We haven't seen one soldier," said everybody who was asked, "no soldier came this way."

There was no knowing what to do. The counsellor was sent for again.

"O well," said he, "I can see that whoever it is cannot be beaten, and I think that he deserves anything he gains by it; he is a clever man. And I can tell you," said he, "that the only way to find him out is to call all your tenants together, and compose a letter and hold it high in your hand and tell them that should the man who was doing the work own up to it, that there was a letter for him to the effect that he will get your daughter's hand in marriage, and that is the only way I think he can be beaten."

The letter was written and there was a big building into which they were gathered and the laird told them why he had called them together. He said that there was a letter there for the man who was doing the work that he would get his daughter's hand in marriage should he confess. Goban's son rose from among them and he went and snatched the letter from his hand and he got the man's daughter to marry—after he had been robbing his bank and killing his pigs and his soldiers.

Goban's son was left alone after that.

#### SYNOPSIS OF ABOVE VERSION (A)

1. A clever builder and his son build a bank and leave a concealed means of entrance in the wall. They steal money from the bank.

2. A wise man advises the laird to light a fire in the bank to discover the secret entrance.

3. Wise man suggests that a hogshead of pitch should be placed underneath the hole as a trap. This is done and one of the thieves is trapped, and beheaded on request by the other.

4. Pursuit of the accomplice; each phase undertaken in accordance with the wise man's advice. (a) A herd of pigs is used to locate the head. Hero's foster-mother screams as they approach but he deliberately cuts himself as a diversion. He tricks the escort and kills the pigs. (b) Soldiers are billeted throughout the district to report on the appearance of pig-flesh at mealtimes. Hero persuades the tenantry to kill the soldiers. He is then pardoned by the laird.

#### GOBAN SAOR

This character appears in different contexts in Scots Gaelic and Irish tradition. In the Scots tradition he is sometimes called Cupan Saor or Boban Saor. He is generally portrayed as a clever character, both in the sense of being a highly skilled craftsman and in being able to outwit his opponents. Current tradition in Skye from another storyteller (RL 43: Murdo MacIcod) speaks of his skill with an axe. Another reciter from North Uist (RL 137: Donald Macdougall) tells how, in conjunction with his son, he outwitted a nobleman in Ireland for whom he built a castle.

It is Goban Saor's capacity as a builder that receives most emphasis in both modern and early tradition. Traditions existed that Gobbán Saer built the round towers of Ireland

and that he built a wooden church (duirtheach) for St Moling. These traditions impressed George Petric so much that he speaks of "this celebrated Irish architect" as flourishing in the early seventh century (1845: 380).

While it is difficult to make genuine claims as to his historicity, the great antiquity of the modern traditions concerning Goban Saor must be acknowledged. The opening section of the present tale for instance, in speaking of Goban's marvellous powers of fitting a haft to an implement from a distance is closely paralleled in the legend related in the ninth-century Cormac's Glossary under the entry *Nescoit*, describing the activities of the three artisan deities of the Tuatha De Danann at the second battle of Mag Tuired:

. . . intan tuccad cath Muige Tuired boi Goibniu goba isincerdcha oc denam nanarm do Tuathaib Dé Domnann 7 boi Luchtine saer oc denam nacrand isnagáib 7 boi Credni incerd oc denum semand isna gáib cetna. Dicunt autem Scoti Góibniu goba faiciebat hastas fri teora grésa 7 bafeth in gres dédinach. Dogníd tra Luctine nacrana friteora snassa 7 bafeith insnass dédinach. Sic et Créidne faiciebat na semanda. dodobghad Góibne asintenchar nagáei conglendais isinursain. doleced Luchtine na crandu inandíaid 7 ba lór dianindsma . . .

When the battle of Mag Tuired was being fought, Goibniu the smith was in the forge making weapons for the Tuatha dé Danann and Luchtine the wright was making the shafts for the spears and Creidne the bronze worker was making rivets for the same spears. The Scots say that Goibniu smith made the spears in three processes and the last process was the perfecting one. Luchtine also made the shafts in three whittling processes and the last process was the perfecting one. So also Creidne made the rivets. Goibniu threw the spearheads from the tongs so that they stuck in the door post. Luchtine flung the spearshafts after them and it was enough to fasten them . . .

The tradition occurs again in the text, *The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, edited by Stokes. The tale describes how the weapons of the Tuatha Dé were renewed during the battle:

Ar cia no clotis a n-airm-sium andiu atgainidis armarach, fobith roboi Goibnenn Goba isin cerdchai ag denam calc 7 gai 7 sleg, ar dognith side na harma sin fria teorai gressai. Dognit (h) dono Luchtine soer na crondo fri teora snasau 7 ba feith an tres snas 7 ata ind(s) mad hi cro an grai. O robidis arm de isin leth ina cerdchai dobidcet-som na crou cusna crandoib 7 ni bo hecin aitherrach indsma doib.

For though their weapons were broken and blunted to-day, they were renewed on the morrow, because Goibniu the smith was in the forge making swords and spears and javelins. For he would make these weapons by three turns. Then Luchtaine the wright would make the spear-shafts by three chippings and the third chipping was a perfecting one and he would set them in the ring of the spear. When the spearheads were stuck in the side of the forge he would throw the rings with the shafts and it was needless to set them again.

The attributes of the two artisan figures Goibniu the smith and Luchtaine the wright appear to have been merged into the one character called Goban Saor. The first element in the compound name is related to *goba*, or *gobha*, (smith) and the second is modern Gaelic for carpenter.

In this connection it is interesting to observe that O'Rahilly (1946: 314-17 and 525-7) maintains that the triumvirate of artisan figures, Goibniu, Luchtaine and Creidne, was the result of a process of multiplication which took place in early Irish tradition, based on the various attributes of one "Craftsman-god". In the Goban Saor of the present tale we have to conclude either that a reverse process, or a coalescence of attributes, has taken place since that period, or that we have in reality a continuation of a more general craftsman figure such as O'Rahilly visualises. A solution to such a problem could only be attempted by a study of early Irish mythology.

It remains to be asked why such a character should become involved in a "clever thief" story. Some light may be cast upon this by an unusual tradition about Luchtaine preserved in the *Lebor Gabala*:

"Luichne saer ba sir barr berg," "Luichne the carpenter was an enduring, perfect, plunderer" (Vol. 4: 246).

#### THE TALE

The international folk-tale of which this is a variant first appears in written form in Herodotus, who related it as he heard it told in Egypt of the rich King Rhampsinitus. It occurs again throughout the late mediaeval and early modern period in the popular compendium of tales known as *The Seven Sages of Rome*. The great popularity of this group of tales and the fact that it was translated into many languages would suggest that it may have played an important part in the continuity of a tale such as this. Its development in the *Seven Sages*,

however, remains simple and stereotyped, with limited development of the search episodes and emphasis on the wickedness of the thief rather than on his cleverness (K. Campbell 1907: lxxxv). A synopsis of the *Gaza* story in the Rolland metrical version of 1578 (Black 1932: 91-8) will show the pattern of the *Seven Sages* type.

1. A knight in Rome who gives up most of his time to worldly pursuits and thus loses his wealth, suggests to his son that they should break into the Emperor Octavian's treasury. They do this by opening a hole in the wall.

2. Similar to the third episode in the Skye version. The trap is a barrel filled with "pick, birdlime and sic-like wair."

3. Pursuit of the accomplice. The body of the father is dragged around the city so that his family may be identified by their weeping. The son wounds himself and thus deludes the soldiers. The body is then hung on a gallows and the son makes no attempt to recover it.

The printed Gaelic language versions vary fundamentally from the general *Seven Sages* type (J. F. Campbell, 1860: 320-53; Ó Laoghaire 1895: 62-81; Ó Tiománaidhe 1935: 25-47; Ó Lubhaing 1935: 303-8; Hyde 1901: 490-508; AN STOC Jan.-Feb. 1931: 9).

In all these versions there is no suggestion of any moral condemnation of the thief. They differ again from the *Seven Sages* in that the quest for the second thief becomes multi-episodic. In all versions other than *A*, a certain amount of expansion also occurs at the beginning of the story. In the Irish versions there is an introduction which normally deals with the adventures of the three sons of the *Barr-Scológ*, who is a brother of Aristotle. The story then follows the career of the youngest son who takes an apprenticeship with a tradesman. He persuades his master to steal a pig belonging to the King and initiates the sequence of episodes which is the essential Rhampsinitus story. In the J. F. Campbell version, the hero is the son of a widow who advises him to go to the Black Thief to learn the trade of thieving. After some adventures with the Black Thief he hangs him by means of a trick and takes lodging with a carpenter. He then persuades the carpenter to steal butter and cheese from the king's storehouse. *A* appears to be the only Gaelic-language version which does not have this introductory development, and is also the only one which establishes a prior relationship between the thieves and the treasury.

Elaboration of the pursuit of the second thief is to be expected in a tale of this kind. Episodes can be attached to the story in a purely additive way without any interference with the structure of the plot. This section has never any fewer than two episodes in any of the Gaelic versions, while the Campbell and Hyde versions have four. Were one to insist on the importance of the written texts of the *Seven Sages* in the continuity of the story one would have to assume that these episodic accretions were a modern development. Herodotus, however, has two such episodes, while the mediaeval French *Dolopathos*, which is acknowledged as being earlier than the *Seven Sages*, has no fewer than five. The elaborate version of this story found in the *Dolopathos* is instructive in revealing the antiquity of some Gaelic motifs. The text analysed for this purpose is the Old French metrical version by Herbert (about A.D. 1200) edited by Brunet and Montaiglon. It is accepted that the *Dolopathos* is based directly on oral tradition (K. Campbell 1907: xx).

As in all the Gaelic versions, each episode of the story directed at trapping and identifying the thieves is undertaken by the king in accordance with the advice of a counsellor. In the *Dolopathos* he is an old blind thief, and this characteristic of blindness is also found in three of the Gaelic versions. In Ó Laoghaire, the counsellor is called *Dall Bán an Churraigh*, in Ó Tiománaidhe, *Seandall Glic* (both names indicating blindness) and in Campbell, *Seanaghall*, which is probably a mistranscription of the phonetically equivalent *seana dhall*—"an old blind man."

The *Dolopathos* is similar in its introductory development to the Skye version, except that in the former the theft is committed by a knight, who used to be the guardian of the treasury, and his son. Very close agreement is maintained in the method used to discover the secret entrance, i.e. lighting a fire in the building. The *Dolopathos* then proceeds in the standard way, a vat of resin is placed underneath the hole, the father is caught and the son beheads him. The vat of pitch or glue occurs in all except Ó Tiománaidhe, where the glutinous substance is spread.

Again four of the five quest episodes in the *Dolopathos* are closely paralleled in the Gaelic versions. The carrying of the headless body around to evoke signs of sorrow occurs in all except *A*, in which the initial quest is for the head. A variation on the carrying motif occurs, however, in the Hyde version, where the body is left by a stream where women are accustomed to wash clothing. The thief prevents the widow going to the

stream and steals the body. The second quest episode in the *Dolopathos*, the repetition of the first with a different kind of evasion by the thief, is not paralleled in the Gaelic versions. The third, the hanging of the body with soldiers to guard it is found in Ó Tiománaidhe and Campbell. This is perhaps one of the most well known motifs, being found in Herodotus and in the *Seven Sages*. In Ó Tiománaidhe the young thief persuades the old thief's widow to impersonate an angel while he pretends to be the devil, thus frightening the guards away from the body. In Campbell, as also in Herodotus, the guards are made drunk. The episode of the king's daughter being used as a decoy as in Herodotus is again common in the Gaelic versions although not found in *A*. The fifth quest episode in which a child is used to detect the thief by handing something to him is also found in Campbell.

In brief notes such as these, it is not possible to make any statement as to the ancestry of the above version of the Rhampsinitus story. It is certainly different in important respects from the other published Gaelic versions. These versions, however, cannot be accepted as giving a good indication of the form of the story in current or recent tradition.

While it seems to be rare in current tradition in Gaelic Scotland, the above being the only example in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies, it is not so in Ireland and a large number has been collected by the field-workers of the Irish Folklore Institute.<sup>1</sup> An analysis of these is a prerequisite to any statement about the ultimate source of any given example. In such a widely disseminated story it is doubtful even whether any statement of that kind could be made in the absence of analytic studies of its occurrence in neighbouring ethnic groups. Huet's story of the type (Huet 1918) reveals interesting differences between selected groups of African, European and Asiatic versions, but does not provide the information which a geographically limited and more analytic study could give.

The above notes show, on the one hand, the great antiquity in the native tradition of the character Goban Saor, and on the other, the antiquity in a more general tradition of the various motifs in the printed Gaelic-language versions. This establishes that they are not dependent on any of the known literary versions of the *Seven Sages*, thus agreeing with Killis Campbell's views on a number of European traditional versions (1907: lxxxviii-xc).



## NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> For the Irish references and for the information relating to unpublished versions in Irish, I am indebted to Mr. Seán Ó Súilleabháin of the Irish Folklore Commission. Two other Irish stories similar to the introductory phases of the above have been examined, *Béaloideas* 11 (1941) 101-2, and Douglas Hyde, *Leabhar Sgeulaigheachta*, Dublin (1889) 7-12. They do not, however, develop into the Rhampsinitus story proper.

## REFERENCES

- BLACK, G. F. (ed.)  
1932 *The seuin Seages*. Translated out of prois in Scottis meter be IOHNE ROLLAND in Dalkeith. . . . M.D.LXXVIII. The Scottish Text Society. Third Series Part 3 (1931). Edinburgh.
- BRUNET, G. and MONTAIGLON, A. DE (editors)  
1856 *Li Romans de Dolopathos*. Paris.
- CAMPBELL, J. F.  
1860 *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*. Vol. I. Edinburgh. With English translation.
- CAMPBELL, KILLIS  
1907 *The Seven Sages of Rome*. Albion Series. Boston (Mass.).
- HUET, G.  
1918 "Le Conte du Trésor Pillé." *Revue des Traditions Populaires* 33: 1-17; 253-73.
- HYDE, D.  
1901 *An Sgealuidhe Gaedhealach*. Dublin. With French translation.
- MACALISTER, R. A. S.  
1941 *Lebor Gabála Érenn*. Vol. 4. Dublin.
- Ó LAOGHAIRE, P.  
1895 *Sgeuluidheacht Chuige Mumhan*. Dublin.
- Ó LUBHAING, MÍCHEÁL  
1935 "Rócáin agus Sgéalta." *Béaloideas* 5:373-308.
- O'RAHILLY, THOMAS F.  
1946 *Early Irish History and Mythology*. Dublin.
- Ó TIOMANÁIDHE, M.  
1953 *An Lampa Draoidheachta*. Dublin.
- PETRIE, G.  
1845 *Ecclesiastical History of Ireland anterior to the Norman Invasion*. Dublin.
- STOKES, W. S.  
1862 *Three Irish Glossaries*. London.  
1891 "The Second Battle of Moytura." *Revue Celtique* 12:92-4.