

Peregrinatio in the Ocean: Allegory and Reality in the Navigatio Sancti Brendani

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Ernest Renan, who called the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* “the most singular product of this combination of Celtic naturalism with Christian spiritualism” (“le produit le plus singulier de cette combinaison du naturalisme celtique avec le spiritualism chrétien”)¹ was by far not the only researcher who noticed the careful matching of realism of the description of sea travel and the rather overdrawn descriptions in the religious fragments of the text.

For a rather long time, the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* was considered an allegorical brain-twister, a literary distortion of one or several historical travels. Researchers were busy in establishing the events that stood behind the phenomena faced by Brendan and his travel companion, the sources of information used by the anonymous author of this story and the exact location of the mentioned islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Various episodes of the travel were placed from Scotland to the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland. In such readings, the Island of Sheep and the Paradise of Birds appear to represent the Faroe Islands. The Island of Blacksmiths is equated with Iceland, a crystal column with an iceberg, thickened sea with polar ice packs, while sea monsters seen by Brendan and his fellow travellers are regarded as whales, dolphins, seals, etc.² The research tradition stating that the description of Brendan's travel was based on an actual travel goes back, in fact, to medieval charts placing Brendan's island in various parts of the Atlantic.³ In 1976, this approach was corroborated by a research journey. Together with three companions, Tim Severin managed to reach

¹ Ernest Renan, “La poésie des races celtiques,” *Revue des deux mondes* 24 (1854) : 473-506.

² For the most concise bibliography of similar works, see: Eugene F. Fingerhut, *Who First Discovered America? A Critique of Writings on Pre-Columbian Voyage* (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1984), 11-29; idem, *Explorers of Pre-Columbian America?* (Claremont: California Press, 1994).

³ Kent Methewson, “St. Brendan's Mythical Isle and Toponymic Drift: from Iceland to Ecuador,” in *Atlantic Visions*, ed. John De Courcy and David C. Sheehy (Dún and Laoghaire: Boole Press, 1989), 51-60; Donald S. Johnson, *Phantom Isles of the Atlantic* (Fredericton, New Brunswick: Goose Lane Editions, 1994), 175-206; Valerio M. Manfredi, *Le Isole Fortunate: topografia di un mito* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1999), 229.

the Island of Newfoundland and visit Scotland, the Orkney, Shetland and Faroe Islands, as well as Iceland and Greenland on board of a currach, that is, a small leather boat, reconstructed after its description in the *Navigatio*.⁴

The perception of the *Navigatio* as a source based on actual historical events is surely not accidental. The text contains a number of elements closely related to the realities of the so-called Golden Age of saints. To begin with, it rests upon the tradition of *peregrinatio pro Dei amore*, which was characteristic solely to Ireland and its movement for rethinking the tradition of penitential exile.⁵ A pilgrimage for the love of God was distinguished by a number of characteristic traits such as the necessary permission of a Father Superior, the detailed description of the currach's construction⁶ and a thorough preparation for the journey. At the same time, the descriptions of certain islands (for instance, of the Island of Sheep and the Paradise of Birds, as well as monastic insular settlements) are in fact highly realistic and resemble extracts from *De Mensura Orbis Terrae* (VII, 11-14) written by the Irish geographer Dicuil,⁷ which certifies that Irish monks had permanent and temporary settlements on the Faroe Islands and in Iceland in the seventh and eighth centuries.⁸ Finally, the geographic space of the text, it seems, fairly corresponds with the Irish medieval perspective on the world, based on a T-shaped chart which can be traced back to the Bible and an understanding of the ocean as an endless abyss,⁹ with numerous islands, the so-called "antipodes" of Virgil of Salzburg, located to the west of Ireland.¹⁰

Only recently, the excessive attention to the historicity of the journey has yielded to the acknowledgement of an existing necessity to study the religious and literary functions of the text itself. The allegorical reading of the *Peregrina-*

⁴ The expedition was described in Tim Severin, *The Brendan Voyage* (London: Arena, 1978). For a review arguing against the scientific character of the journey, see John J. O'Meara, "In the Wake of the Saint," *Times Literary Supplement*, July 14, 1978.

⁵ Thomas Moberly Charles-Edwards, "The Social Background to Irish *peregrinatio*," *Celtica* 11 (1976): 43-59.

⁶ Jonathan M. Wooding, "St. Brendan's Boat: Ded Hides and the Living Sea in Columban and Related Hagiography," in *Studies in Irish Hagiography*, ed. J. Carey, Máire Herbert and Pádraig Ó Riain (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 77-92.

⁷ See, for instance, the comparison with the description of islands in the *Liber de mensura orbis terrae*: Jonathan M. Wooding, "Monastic Voyaging and the *Navigatio*," in *The Other-world Island*, ed. Jonathan M. Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 226-45.

⁸ In recent years, this field is being researched by Barbara Crawford in the framework of the St. Andrews Papar Project [<http://www.paparproject.org.uk/introduction.html>]: *The Papar in the North Atlantic: Environment and History. The Proceedings of a Day Conference held on the 24th of February 2001. The "Papar" Project*, vol. 1, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (St. Andrews: University of St. Andrews, Committee for Dark Age Studies, 2002).

⁹ See, for instance, Tom O'Loughlin, "Living in the Ocean: the Significance of the Patristic Understanding of *oceanus* for Writings from Iona," in *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba*, ed. Cormac Bourke (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 11-23.

¹⁰ John Carey, "Ireland and the Antipodes: the Heterodoxy of Virgil of Salzburg" *Speculum* 64 (1989): 1-10.

tio as a metaphor of monastic life is much more accepted nowadays.¹¹ However, there has been no comprehensive study of the text revealing the meaning of all its elements. The present paper aims at eliciting the means and functions used by the author, which define the role of reality and allegory and create a multi-level effect in the text, as well as at understanding the role of historical details in an allegoric context.

Eschatological Structure

The *Navigatio*, written approximately between the end of the eighth century and the first third of the ninth century,¹² gives us much more detailed information about the author than about the heroes of the text. It seems that the author either belonged to the ascetic movement of the “clients of God” (*céli Dé*),¹³ which appeared in the end of the eighth/beginning of the ninth century, or

¹¹ This reading, although in a very schematic form, was for the first time used in the following works: James F. Kenney, “The Legend of St. Brendan,” *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, third series 14 (1920): 51-67; Cynthia Bourgeault, “The Monastic Archetype in the *Navigatio* of St. Brendan,” *Monastic Studies* 14 (1983): 109-21; Dorothy A. Bray, “A Note on the Life of St. Brendan,” *Cistercian Studies* 20 (1985): 14-20. For an analysis of the journey as a metaphor of monastic life, see the following articles: Dorothy A. Bray, “Allegory in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*,” *Viator* 26 (1995): 1-10; Tom O’Loughlin, “Distant islands: The Topography of Holiness in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*,” in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition: England, Ireland and Wales*, ed. Marion Glasscoe, Exeter Symposium VI (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1999), 1-20. In Russian historiography a similar reading is proposed by Aron Gurevich in his introduction to the translation of the work by John K. Wright, *Geographicheskie predstavleniya v epohu krestovykh pohodov. Issledovanie srednevekovoi nauki i traditsii v Zapadnoy Evrope* [Geographical lore in the time of the crusades: a study in the history of medieval science and tradition in Western Europe] (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 5-6. In this introduction, Gurevich noted that the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* pertains to the genre of travels to the Other World, popular in the Middle Ages.

¹² Jonathan Wooding proposed the earliest dating (first half of the eighth century): Wooding, “The Latin Version,” in *The Voyage of St. Brendan – Vernacular Versions in Translation*, ed. Ray W. Barron and Glyn S. Burgess (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2002), 18. David Dumville believes that the text can be dated back to 786 [David Dumville, “Two Approaches to the Dating of *Nauigatio Sancti Brendani*,” *Studi Medievali* 29/1 (1988): 87-102], while David Stifter suggests 825 as the approximate date for the creation of the work [David Stifter, “Philologica Latino Hibernica: *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*” (Master thesis, University of Vienna, 1997)].

¹³ *Céli Dé* was an aristocratic movement, which was underlined by the term itself. In the Christian tradition of Western Europe this term was widely used to define the members of the “retinue” (*dám*) of the Lord as his “clients”. The existence of a similar term *mog Dé* also points to the special status of this group as spiritual aristocracy [see, for instance: *The-saurus Paleohibernicus*, ed. and tr. Whitley Stokes and John Strachan, 2 vols. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1903-1905), vol. 1, 694 and vol. 2, 5, 265]. The term can be regarded as a direct reflection of the social and economic classification within the laic community for noble clients (*sóer-chéle*) and not noble clients (*dóer-chéle*), as well as servants (*mog*). Thus, the *céli Dé* have a higher status in the society of those following God (*mog Dé*) thanks to the sanctity of their ascetic life and spiritual wealth.

was in contact with monasteries that became bulwarks of this movement (such as the monastery of Clonfert¹⁴ with St. Brendan being its patron saint).

The movement of the “clients of God” was against the practice of *peregrinatio*. At that time, the ascetic ideal was associated with a stable monastic life that was characterized by a complete renunciation of mundane matters, regular services and fasting, unlike the ascetic ideal of sea travels common from the sixth until the beginning of the eighth century.¹⁵ The *Navigatio* is a peculiar combination of these two concepts of asceticism and a manifestation of the *stabilitas in peregrinatione* principle: the narrative does not accentuate events, while its cyclic nature is meant to reflect the cyclic nature of a monastic year and stable religious life in general. This conception is found in brevity in the so-called *Hermit's Song* written in the tenth century: “I am alone in my small cell,/ There is no one next to me,/ Such a pilgrimage would be dear/ To my heart before I meet with death.”¹⁶ We should base the analysis of the structure of the text, which, according to a widely accepted opinion, bears a distinctive chiliastic character, on this conception.

Although the journey of St. Brendan lasted for seven years, the text describes only three yearly cycles: the first two years and the last one, when the preparations of Brendan and his return took place.

The first cycle is placing the itinerary of the journey into a spatial as well as a thematic structure. Already the description of the first year reveals the eschatological theme of the narrative, when one of the brothers died after having stolen a silver snaffle, being misguided by a daemon.¹⁷ In this cycle, the monks are confronted by a somniferous spring. Having received a warning, they all act differently: they drink once, twice or thrice and fall asleep accordingly for one,

¹⁴ See Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organization in Ireland, A.D. 650 to 1000* (Maynooth: Laigin Publications, 1999, repr. 2002), 248-61. The thirty-seventh paragraph of *Tecosc Maíle Ruain* (*The Rule of Tallaght*), ed. and tr. Edward J. Gwynn, *Hermathena* 44/2 (1927): 22-3 explains the necessity of physical chastity through the interaction of Máel Ruain with his pupils, including the heads of the main monasteries, particularly the head (*erenagh*) of Clonfert, Muirchetach mac Olcobhair.

¹⁵ Jonathan Wooding has developed this idea and underlines a number of similarities between the text of the *Navigatio* and *Tecosc Maíle Ruain*, the teaching of Máel Ruain, who died in 791, as well as the set of rules of the *céli Dé* [Jonathan Wooding, “Fasting, Flesh and the Body in the St. Brendan Dossier,” in *Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults*, ed. Jane Cartwright (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 161-76].

¹⁶ *M'óenurán im aireclán / cen duinén im gnáis: / robad inmuin ailethrán / ré indul i ndáil mbáis*; Gerard Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 18.

¹⁷ *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, ed. Carl Selmer (Notre Dame: Indiana, 1959), § 6, 12-5. For convenience, I am using the numeration of Selmer's edition in my work. In the earlier manuscripts there was no division in chapters. There exists also a Russian translation of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* [*Plavanie Svyatogo Brendana. Srednevekovye predaniya o puteshestviyah, vechnyh strannikah i poyavlenii obitateley inyh mirov* (The Journey of Saint Brendan. Medieval legends about travels, eternal travelers and the appearance of inhabitants of other worlds), ed. and tr. Nikolay Gorelov (Saint Petersburg: Azbuka-Klassika, 2002)].

two or three days. This was a turning point for the travellers in the realization of the implacability of death and responsibility for their deeds, which could not be avoided despite the constant protection of the Lord. Brendan told them that God had given them food, but they harmed themselves with it.¹⁸ In another extremely important scene from the first cycle, Brendan tells his fellow travellers to put the oars aside and rely on God's will, when they found themselves in the frozen sea, and this helped them to escape the dangerous area.¹⁹ In allegorical interpretation, the monks feel the Judgment Day and their death (allegorically symbolized by the dream), as well as the evil forces approaching and learn to trust their vessel, representing their lives, to the Lord, and in full obedience follow advises of their mentor.

The second cycle sets the continuity and systematicity of the narrative and thus intensifies the theme of monastic life and stability. The last cycle ultimately discloses the eschatological theme of the *Navigatio*. The travellers have visions of the anticipation of Judgment Day. After a standard opening at the Island of Sheep, Jasconius and the Paradise of Birds (§ 20), they cross a transparent sea (§ 21), see a crystal column (§ 22), the Island of Blacksmiths (§ 23), and a mountain spouting fire (§ 24), meet Judas Iscariot (§ 25) and Hermit Paul (§ 26) waiting for Judgment Day on an island. Finally they celebrate Easter and visit Canaan.

The monks are searching for Canaan not through advanced movement but by following the liturgical year with its regular cycle and celebrating every important event in the life of Christ with prayer and religious service – therefore by systematic breaks in the travel. The temporal cycle is reflected in movements in space: all the feasts are celebrated in the same locations every year and always on the same island, or – in the case of Jasconius – in the same location in the ocean. The monks follow the same route one year after another, and although the narrative leads them to unknown islands almost in every cycle, they always go back to places they visited in the first cycle and which became inherent to their feast rites. Thus, Christmas is always celebrated in the monastery of Saint Alba, the Great Lent is spent on the island of a *procurator*, who always replenishes their goods; Easter is celebrated on the back of Jasconius (*iasc* in Irish means fish), a mysterious Irish sea monster, which was probably initially called Casconius (*casc* in Irish means Easter²⁰); and during the period from Easter until Pentecost the monks stay on the Island of Birds. The liturgical cycle is also symbolized by fish, biting their tales (§ 10, 21).²¹

For that matter, the monks are not “travelling” but following vows of obedience in the world of monastic *stabilitas* and *stasis* until they are allowed to reach the Divine world. The structure of the text in fact denies any development

¹⁸ *Navigatio*, 30: *Dominus dedit nobis pastum, et uos fecistis inde detrimentum.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, § 14, 39.

²⁰ See more information on differences between a number of manuscript groups: Ludwig Bieler, “Casconius, the Monster of the *Navigatio Brendani*,” *Eigse* 5 (1945-1947): 139-40.

²¹ *Navigatio*, 21, 58.

of the narrative, and its cyclical repetition is ultimately interrupted. The only explanation to the fact that the travellers had spent exactly seven years in order to reach Canaan is heard from a young man, who tells Brendan that he could not have found Canaan immediately, because God wanted to reveal numerous mysteries of the ocean to him.²²

Theoria and Praxis

The *Navigatio* was conceived as a two-layered work.²³ It is easy to draw a distinctive line between the two types of situations described in the text. On the one hand, there are standard episodes of an ordinary sea travel, with a time and space framework clear to the readers. On the other hand, there are accounts of phenomena which lay outside common human experience and are profoundly alien and unknown to the listeners of the story. Based on this division, one should understand “regular” parts of the text as historical narrative, pointing to the realities familiar to the audience of the text and revealing ideals of *praxis*, while allegorically described episodes related to “miraculous” events are meant to illustrate the Divine world, which can only be understood through contemplation (*theoria*).²⁴

A whole range of characteristics helps the reader to distinguish between the different layers. One of the most important characteristics is the presence of liturgy which serves as means of highlighting ordinary time and events. The liturgy, always heavenly and at the same time terrestrial, becomes a link connecting these two domains. These worlds seem to incorporate each other on miraculous islands during the most important events of the liturgical year. In the text, the fasting of the monks is very tightly connected to the liturgy. It represents not only a part of the monastic life, but a very significant, if not the key element of the narrative, as the text contains forty references to food.²⁵

Sharply defined contrasts between descriptions of regular and “miraculous” parts of the story also help to distinguish between the two layers. Some episodes offer detailed information regarding directions and length of the journey and everyday events, while others talk about misty clouds, travelling in circles, loss of direction and fading time.

²² Ibid., § 28, 80: *Ideo non potuisti statim [illam] inuenire quia Deus uoluit tibi ostendere diuersa sua secreta in oceano magno.*

²³ The most detailed analysis of this concept is presented in O'Loughlin, “Distant islands: The Topography of Holiness in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*.”

²⁴ A binary opposition of *theoria* and *praxis*, very common to the tradition of early medieval spirituality, was sometimes seen as a characteristic Irish tradition [see, for instance, Clare Stancliffe, “Early ‘Irish’ Biblical Exegesis,” *Studia Patristica* 12 (1975): 361-70]. Although it is impossible to prove this, it is very probable that the author of the *Navigatio* was acknowledged with this tradition and could expect his audience to be familiar with it.

²⁵ See, for example, a table composed by Jonathan Wooding in “Fasting, Flesh and the Body in the St. Brendan Dossier,” 171.

A third characteristic which helps to define the layers are Biblical allusions. Although they are spread all over the text, their distribution is not even. “Miraculous” parts of the text, which require an allegorical reading, often contain visionary references to the language and images of the Old and New Testament.²⁶ Finally, when heroes of the *Navigatio* are confronted with evil, there is no place for allegories, as the author introduces moral teaching in confinement with the laws of ethics.

I would allow myself to briefly illustrate the two-layered structure of the text with the introductory narrative of Barintus, which defines the paradigm for the rest of the text. The narrative starts with the genealogy of the saint, which has a significant meaning. By reading that Saint Brendan was the son of Finnlug, descendant of Alta, of the race of Eoghan and was born in Munster, the reader is immediately placed among familiar characters and realities, and the story unfolds in “real” time and space. It was important for the author to underline that the starting point of the story was located within grasp, while the finishing point of the narrative, just like the life of any Christian, lay far beyond the borders of this world. But Brendan, a man of great abstinence and famous for his miraculous deeds, who was related to many readers through kinship, had lived in their world, in Clonfert.²⁷

The readers of the *Navigatio* also learn the biography of Barintus²⁸, of the race of King Niall, the relative of Brendan who died in c. 548-549. Barintus and Brendan are presented to the readers as simple monks, who pray every day, follow the vows and commit deeds of valour (*in suo certamine*), which each Christian should commit (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). *Certamen* plays one of the most important roles in the lives of Barintus and Brendan and indicates that they lived as they ought to, unlike a number of monks who did not follow all the regulations of monastic life.

It is in this ordinary world that the monks discover the “miraculous” realm, so different from their everyday environment. The transition from one world to another is imbedded already in the request of Saint Brendan, because he does not want to hear only about the ocean, an unexplored part of the world, but also about the numerous miracles, which can be observed there and do not pertain to the terrestrial world. The author names the reasons for mentioning the miracles: first of all, they are meant to reveal the Word of God to the monks (*indica nobis uerbum Dei*) and thus become a medium of Divine revelation; secondly, miracles were supposed to inspire the monks.²⁹ Thus, the delight of acquiring knowledge about sea monsters is mated in the text not with a mere entertainment for the readers, but with spiritual instruction. It may seem that the

²⁶ See, for instance, notes 7, 10, 47, 48, 59, 85 in Selmer's edition of the *Navigatio* (*Nauigatio*, 83, 88, 90).

²⁷ *Nauigatio*, 3, §1: *uir magne abstinencie et in uirtutibus clarus*.

²⁸ There is yet another explanation associating Barintus with a sea deity, Manannán mac Lir [Arthur C. L. Brown, “Barintus,” *Revue Celtique* 22 (1901): 339-44].

²⁹ *Nauigatio*, 4, § 1: *refice animas nostras de diuersis miraculis que vidisti in oceano*.

main character had been allotted a function of illustrating the structure of the text which is built on the juxtaposition of spiritual and physical repletion.³⁰

Later, Barintus starts the account of his journey. At first, he goes to one of the monasteries on the Delightful Island (*Insula deliciosa*) which despite its name was located somewhere in the physical reach of the text's audience. It is said that the island is situated next to the Slieve League (*iuxta montem lapidis*) in Donegal County,³¹ exactly three days of boat ride away from the Irish shores. It is another ideal monastery, similar to the convent of Brendan. It is important that the potential audience of the text knew it very well or even had been there. The time within the monastery walls is the same earthly time as in every monastery. We learn that Barintus stayed there overnight. Because the narrator, Barintus himself, did not introduce any adjustments to the interrelation between the insular and regular times, the audience very well understood the length of his stay. At the same time, the author shows that the space of the island was familiar to the readers, because Barintus managed to encompass the whole island while he stayed there.³²

After visiting the Delightful Island, Barintus went westwards and found himself in the space which one should not nor can perceive literally. Right after visiting a familiar island, the travellers were caught in misty clouds (*ista caligo circuit illam insulam*), which were meant to symbolize the border between the two dimensions of reality. After this event, time and space are placed outside of the direct dimension; Barintus and Mernóc are whirling in the fog, practically not being able to see anything, and the time terminated its regular development, as it seems that the travel lasted only for one hour. Having crossed through the fog, the travellers find themselves on an island which is not familiar to the audience. After the narrative leaves the readers' world and places them in a different reality, where the divine is closer and less concealed, everything they were to face there will be understood as an allegory.

The land the travellers find themselves at is amazingly similar to New Jerusalem as described in the last visionary of the Apocalypses (Rev. 21:10-22:5). Thus, we learn that the Promised Land of the Saints is incredibly abundant with herbs and fruits (*terra herbosa pomiferosaque ualde*); the travellers, as Barintus says, do not see any plants without flowers nor trees without fruit (*nihil herbe uidimus sine floribus et arborum sine fructu*). This description seems to be an allusion to "the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month" (Rev. 22:2)³³, not subjected to the change of seasons. All the stones in this land are precious (*lapides enim ipsius preciosi generis sunt*), just like New Jerusalem which shines like a precious stone (Rev. 22:11) with its

³⁰ Ibid., 25.

³¹ According to a common opinion in scholarship, *Mons Lapidis* is associated with Slieve League [*The Voyage of St. Brendan: Journey to the Promised Land*, tr. John J. O'Meara (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1976), XIX].

³² *Nauigatio*, 4, § 1: *isulamque totam perambulanti*.

³³ All quotations from the Bible are taken from the King James-version of the text.

walls adorned with different precious stones (Rev. 21:19-21). On the fifteenth day the travellers find a river in the centre of the island, crossing it from the east to the west, which is similar to the river running across the Heavenly City (Rev. 22:1). On the island, the monks do not lack clothes, food or drink – all the needs representing imperfection and moral decay after the Fall.³⁴ There is no place for signs of imperfection and sin in the Heavenly City, as “there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie” (Rev. 21:27). On the island, Barintus and his travel companions are approached by a certain angelic figure, a man in grand splendour (*vir cum magno splendore*), who addresses them all by their names and tells them about the peculiarities of this place. In a similar fashion, the Revelation (Rev. 21:9) tells about an angel appearing to John who knows his name and explains him his visions. Another point of contiguity between the island and the Heavenly City is the absence of a division of the day in day-time and night-time. The island which is not exposed to the light of a certain material celestial body, does not have nights, which again is again emphasized in the Revelation: “And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light” (Rev. 22:5). There is light on this island which is similar to the light shining upon John in the city of Apocalypses; it lacks neither sun nor moon, because God himself illuminates the existence of its inhabitants (*Dominus noster Ihesus Christus lux ipsius est*). The appearance of Christ in this instance can be easily explained, as it directly springs from a line in the Revelation, according to which the Holy Lamb is the light of the city (Rev. 21:23).

The most common characteristic of the Promised Land of the Saints is the absence of any limitations. It is mostly reflected in the limitations of material space and time which appeared with the creation of all the creation, as it is told in the Genesis. Time and space of the island are not identical with time and space of our world. Unlike all the other islands, the Promised Land of the Saints requires more than fifteenth days in order to walk it all. Time-wise, the situation is similar: Barintus and his companions imagine that they spend only fifteen days according to the earthly time line, when they are told that fifteen days on the island are equal to a year on earth. The passing of time is not perceived appropriately because it is always day-time on the island and there is no difference between light and darkness; the travellers do not suffer any needs, such as feelings of hunger and thirst, which also create the time line. Thus, it is an island which is perceived not through ordinary physical experiences, but with the help of higher mystic knowledge, which is subject to understanding only through allegory.

After leaving the Promised Land, the travellers once again have to overcome the misty clouds dividing the two dimensions. They again find themselves in a perfect monastery, but this time they possess knowledge that the Gates to

³⁴ As it is well known, all these needs were perceived as one of the punishments for Adam's sin. Clothes are mentioned in Gen. 3: 7, 21. On the necessity of working in order to make bread: Gen. 3: 18, 19.

Paradise (*porta paradisi*) are located somewhere very near to the monastery, and thus very near to any (ideal) monastery in Ireland.

Metaphorical and Physical Journey

The stay of the monks in the Promised Land of the Saints is described in the first and the last but one chapter (or in the last chapter, according to Giovanni Orlandi, who regarded the last, twenty-ninth chapter, as a later insertion).³⁵ The account of the journey of Brendan is situated between these two allegorical fragments of the text. Being a metaphoric description of monastic life, this journey unfolds in the real world, which cannot be perceived otherwise than *historialiter*. This juxtaposition of the two worlds can be clearly detected at the analysis of apocalyptic visions. Fragments describing immediate confrontation with the forces symbolizing evil and moral corruption leave no place to any allegoric reading. All the six chapters talks about events take place in our time and space. The incident with the monk stealing a silver snuff³⁶ and the meeting with Judas Iscariot³⁷ take place in the space dimension of the ocean and the islands next to the shores of Ireland. Monsters are seen as representatives of our world or a world which is close to us in its materiality. In a similar fashion, chapters talking about confrontation with demonic forces³⁸ present the Gates to Hell as a miraculous but inherent part of our world. The text of the *Navigatio* gives an impression that there is no symmetry between the Gates to Heaven and an infernal volcano, where one of Brendan's fellow travellers is found. The abstract appearance and superficial perfection of places marked by divine presence symbolize their spiritual essence and distinguish them from the episodes dedicated to the confrontation with forces of evil.

Thus, the metaphoric journey becomes associated with physical movements in the world, which is similar to the world of the audience of the text, and not accidentally it is presented as an entirely reliable historical travel, according to medieval standards. The paradox is characteristic not only of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* but of the entire early Irish literature, which associates the metaphor of travelling with a physical journey.

This characteristic is reflected in the attitude to the phenomenon of *peregrinatio* that existed in early medieval Ireland. Motives of the fragility of human life, the constantly changing and unpredictable nature of the earthly existence and of *peregrinamur a Domino* (2 Cor. 5:1-2, 4, 6) are often found in medieval

³⁵ Giovanni Orlandi, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* (Milan and Varese: Cisalpino Goliardica, 1968), vol. 1, 72-3.

³⁶ *Nauigatio*, 15-6, § 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-8, § 25.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 61-5, § 23-4.

writings,³⁹ but only the Irish monastic culture associated it with the ascetic deed of “wandering”. One of the most famous Irish pilgrims, Saint Columbanus, developed this concept and compared the human life (*vita*) with a road (*via*), which the Christians had to plod along in an endless journey of “guests of this world”:

...for the end of the road is ever the object of travellers’ hopes and desires, and thus, since we are *travellers and pilgrims* in the world, let us ever ponder on the end of the road, that is of our life, for the end of our roadway is our home ... Therefore let this principle abide with us, that on the road we so live *as travellers, as pilgrims*, as guests of the world, entangled by no lusts, longing with no earthly desires, but let us fill our minds with heavenly and spiritual impressions, singing with grace and power, ‘When shall I come and appear before the face of my God?’⁴⁰

Thus, according to Columbanus, everyone should hasten to one’s true fatherland, which is where the Father is, but not to loose home from love to the roadway itself.⁴¹

It is important to underline that despite his love to elevated style, Columbanus did not perceive *peregrinatio* only as an abstract notion. He directly connected this concept with wandering, physical alienation from the fatherland when he wrote that he was a pilgrim in the honour of God⁴² or urged to prepare for physical sufferings and losses: “Therefore, since these things are so, ‘let us make ready our mind, [not for joy, not for security, as the Sage says, but] for temptations’ [Eccles. 2.1] and trials, for grieves and toils.”⁴³ However, in some works Columbanus seems to have consciously mingled these dimensions of *peregrinatio*. Thus, the Ninth Sermon mentions “the foreign lands”,⁴⁴ where Columbanus and “his dearest friends” live, which clearly points to the earthly *peregrinatio*, juxtaposed to the heavenly fatherland. However, along with it, the sermons of Columbanus give realistic descriptions of lands that the saint used to live in.

The same idea is met in the Life of Saint Columba, another very famous pilgrim. The author of his life, Adamnan, wrote about the last hours of the saint: “Thus far have the last words of our venerable patron, as he was about to leave this weary pilgrimage for his heavenly country, been preserved for recital in our brief narrative.”⁴⁵ This example again shows the incorporation of the two con-

³⁹ Reginald Grégoire, “Saeculi actibus se facere alienum. Le ‘mepris du mondes’ dans la littérature monastique latine médiévale,” *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 41 (1965) : 251-87.

⁴⁰ Italics by F. D. Prokofiev, “Columbanus, ‘Instructio,’” in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. and tr. George S. M. Walker (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1957) vol. 2, 96, VIII, 2.

⁴¹ Columbanus, “Instructio,” 94-6, VIII, 1.

⁴² Columbanus, “Epistula,” 16, II, 6.

⁴³ Columbanus, “Instructio,” 80-2, IV, 2.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 102, X, 3.

⁴⁵ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba, Founder of Hy*, ed. William Reeves (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), III: 24.

cepts of *peregrinatio* – as a spiritual and physical journey. Thus, for the Irish, as Thomas Mobray Charles-Edwards notes, physical the *peregrinatio* appeared to be a clear and tangible image of the transient nature of human life on earth.⁴⁶

We find an almost analogical reading in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*. It should be stressed that the term *peregrinatio* did not acquire the meaning of a religious practice in Ireland until the end of the seventh century and was used there in a broader sense, which is close to its initial meanings such as “wandering”, “travelling”, “staying in foreign lands” (*peregrinus* stemming from “per” – across and “ager” – land, country, field, etc.), which were consolidated by first translations of the Holy Scripture into Latin. It seems that the author of the *Navigatio* used the word *peregrinatio* in regard to the journey of Saint Brendan not as a pilgrimage *pro Dei amore* but as a term, which incorporates physical movements and the allegorical stay of the soul away from the heavenly fatherland.

The author of the *Navigatio* appears to have played on purpose with the consonance of the words *via* and *vita* in the last chapter of his work, when he wrote about Brendan, predicting his near death: *narravit omnia que accidisse recordatus est in uia et quanta ei Dominus dignatus est miraculorum ostendere portenta* (§ 29).⁴⁷ The same tight connection between the life and travel of Brendan, on the one hand, and his stay away from the heavenly fatherland and his journey described in the *Navigatio*, on the other hand, can clearly be observed at the example of the twenty-eighth chapter, where a young man is foretelling Brendan that the days of his “earthly pilgrimage” are about to end and Brendan may soon be resting in peace among his saintly brethren.⁴⁸ Thus, the author extrapolated the popular concept of *peregrinatio pro Dei amore* on a broader concept of *peregrinatio* as wanderings of the soul on the way to the New Jerusalem:

Thus, just like symbolic historiography ..., which regarded events of the earthly life as revelation of the transcendental plan of being, the divine plot, the geography of this period was also first of all symbolical: it was meant to reveal a roadway to men. Not as much a roadway to other countries and cities, but a spiritual road to the salvation of his soul. Thus, an earthly journey was easily transformed into a journey in the outer world ... The geography of a medieval man is first of all the topography of his inner world.⁴⁹

Monastic Community

A monastery is placed in the physical and metaphysical centre of the journey. The monastery is never defined; it can be any monastic community, which

⁴⁶ Mobray Charles-Edwards, “The Social Background to Irish *peregrinatio*,” 102, note 38.

⁴⁷ *Navigatio*, 81.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 80, § 28.

⁴⁹ Aron Y. Gurevich, “Predislovie” [Introduction], in Wright, *Geographicheskie predstavleniya*, 9.

helps travellers to reach their spiritual fatherland through chaste life, deeds of valour or *certamen*. All these monastic communities are situated on the border between our world and the Divine world, not far from the Gates to Paradise. At the same time, despite the physicality of monastic islands, dictated norms of existence are of Divine character.

Thus, for instance, the author of the *Navigatio* notes that the community of Mernóc monastery⁵⁰ followed traditional religious virtues (*erat enim habitacio eorum sparsa, sed tamen unanimaliter illorum conseruacio in fide, spe et caritate*)⁵¹, liturgical hours, norms of communal meals (*una refectio, et ad opus Dei semper fuit coadunate*) and ascetic vegetarian diet.⁵² It is worth stressing that a significant attention is given not to physical and scholarly activities, but to hours of praying, liturgy and fasting. “Theologians judged contemplative life, allowing men to become closer to God, higher than deedful life, and thus placed monks closer to the Divine in hierarchy than all the rest of humankind.”⁵³ According to the author of the *Navigatio*, followers of Alba spoke only in gestures and used their voices only for praising God, had been on the island for eighty years, had become neither old nor weak (*attamen senectus aut languor in membris nostris minime amplificatur*), and had not suffered from any weakness of body or soul, which were so common among humankind (*nullus ex nobis sustinuit infirmitatem carnis aut spirituum qui uagantur circa humanum genus*).⁵⁴

The perfection of monastic life with its astonishing daily routine and absolute prevalence of the spirit is allegorically mirrored in the ideal structure of a local church, which can be compared to the New Jerusalem in its perfection. In the *Navigatio*, the church is described as a square building with seven lamps – three before the altar in the middle and two pairs of lamps in front of two other altars. The altars were made of crystal, just like all the vessels used in services. At the same time, there were twenty four seats placed in a circle.⁵⁵ This description contains striking allusions to the Heavenly City as found in the Revelation. The Revelation describes the New Jerusalem as a quadrate structure,⁵⁶ with twenty-four seats placed in a circle (4:4) and seven lamps (1:12).⁵⁷ The divine

⁵⁰ Charles Plummer, “Some New Light on the Brendan Legend,” *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 3 (1905): 129, note 1.

⁵¹ Allusion on Phil. 3: 20: “For our conversation is in heaven,” and 1 Corin. 13: 13: “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”

⁵² *Nauigatio*, 4-5.

⁵³ Aron Y. Gurevich, *Srednevekovyi mir: kul'tura bezmolstvuiushego bol'shinstva* [The medieval world: culture of the silent majority] (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 39.

⁵⁴ *Nauigatio*, 32, § 12.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Ezek. 48:16: “And these shall be the measures thereof; the north side four thousand and five hundred, and the south side four thousand and five hundred, and on the east side four thousand and five hundred, and the west side four thousand and five hundred.”

⁵⁷ Exod. 25:37: “And thou shalt make the seven lamps thereof: and they shall light the lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it”; Numbers 8:2: “And thou shalt make the

character of nature on the island is revealed in a very significant episode of the *Navigatio* which talks about self-illuminating lamps shining with spiritual light (*spirituale lumen*), similar to the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai which was a sign to the reaching of the Promised Land.⁵⁸ This divine light is sharply contrasted with the infernal volcano, marked by earthly characteristics.

Every time Brendan and his fellow travellers find themselves on a monastic island, they express their amazement with the life of its community and their desire to stay there.⁵⁹ But already the beginning of the text tells us that the travellers ought to return to their home monastery, as the heir of Alba tells Brendan that he must come back home with his fourteen companions, as God had already prepared their burial places.⁶⁰ Thus, the text clearly expresses the thought according to which every monastery, following traditional rules and leading a spiritual life, is a paradise on earth, or according to the *Life of St. Samthanne*, a place from where one can reach the Heavenly Paradise.⁶¹

It remains to note that the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* is basically a monastic creation, a story about monks told by monks, or at least its original manuscript addressed to monks, based on the clerical mindset of the author and his dominating interest in the doctrines and ascetic life. The *Navigatio* should not be taken only as a narrative about the miracles of God or a description of geographical travels of Irish monks, but should be analyzed in the history of the Irish Church in the eighth and ninth centuries, as well as in the context of the ascetic movement of the “clients of God”. As Dorothy Bray has noted, history existed on the level of *immram* (the Irish term *immram* is synonymous to the Latin *navigatio*), as well as on the level of a Christian allegory in the historical context of Irish monasticism and represented monastic life as means of achieving the perfection of life in the afterlife.⁶² The *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* propagates monastic ideals of stability and faith. The regularity of prayers, fasts and services followed by Brendan’s companions coincides with a strictly harmonized cycle of monastic lifestyle. The constant encouragement which Brendan’s pupils experience from their master, his unflinching faith in God’s protection against the forces of evil and support of the monks’ spiritual and material existence makes Brendan an ideal abbot, as well as the father and head of a community.

seven lamps thereof: and they shall light the lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it.”

⁵⁸ *Nauigatio*, 28-37.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 36, 52, § 12, 17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 36, § 12.

⁶¹ “Vita Samthanne,” in *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, 2 vols., ed. Charles Plummer (Oxford, 1910, repr. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), vol. 2, 260.

⁶² Dorothy A. Bray, “Allegory in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*,” 185-6.

One can argue that the presence of historical details in the text is not accidental. The author intended to unite the two dimensions and place the journey both in geographical and liturgical realities, in historical and eschatological perspective. These two dimensions can be joined in this world by two means – with the help of liturgy and chaste life. Wherever the monks happen to be, whatever initiative they undertake, they inalterably sing psalms and observe regularity of annual sacraments. Monastic life itself appears to become a preparation for an afterlife. The moral of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* is centred on a monastery, which does not have a certain location, a monastery defined by a community of people. An ideal monastery is located on the junction of the two worlds, connected with the Heavenly world and close to the Gates to Paradise. Thus, numerous historical details allow the author to picture a two-level reality as well as to make his instruction at most substantive and univocal, on the one hand, and counter a miraculous abstract world with a physical and sinful world, on the other hand. Using the characteristic given by John Tolkien to *Beowulf*, also in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* “the elusion of historical truth and perspective... is largely the product of art.”⁶³

⁶³ John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, *Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 5.

MEDIEVAL TRAVEL IN RUSSIAN RESEARCH

MEDIUM AEVUM QUOTIDIANUM

SONDERBAND XXVII

MEDIEVAL TRAVEL IN RUSSIAN RESEARCH

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Translated from Russian by

Irina Savinetskaya

Krems 2011

GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG
DER ABTEILUNG KULTUR UND WISSENSCHAFT DES AMTES DER
NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG

niederösterreich kultur

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– ISBN 978-3-901094-29-6
– ISSN 1029-0737

Herausgeber: Medium Aevum Quotidianum. Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der materiellen Kultur des Mittelalters, Körnermarkt 13, A–3500 Krems, Österreich. Für den Inhalt verantwortlich zeichnen die Autoren, ohne deren ausdrückliche Zustimmung jeglicher Nachdruck, auch in Auszügen, nicht gestattet ist.

Druck: KOPITU Ges. m. b. H., Wiedner Hauptstraße 8-10, A–1050 Wien.

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Preface

The present special volume of *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* is another result of the cooperation with the editors of the Russian journal *Одиссей: человек в истории*. It is the third time that we got the chance to offer translations of contributions published in *Одиссей* which deal with aspects of daily life and material culture of the Middle Ages.¹ We are happy to make again some results of Russian research available to a broader, international audience this way.

This time, we publish three studies selected from the 2009 volume of the Russian journal that concentrated on the main topic ‘Travel as a Cultural and Historical Phenomenon’ (‘Путешествие как историко-культурный феномен’).² The contributions deal with travelling in different parts of the Middle Ages. Fedor D. Prokofiev analyses reality and allegory in the eighth-/ninth-century *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*. Svetlana I. Luchitskaya studies the daily life of crusaders and pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land, mainly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Olga I. Togoieva deals with the role that travel plays in the sources about the life of Joan of Arc. The articles offer new results in a field of medieval studies that has found particular interest in Medieval Studies during recent years.

Gerhard Jaritz

¹ See Gerhard Jaritz, Svetlana I. Luchitskaya and Judith Rasson, eds., *Images in Medieval and Early Modern Culture (Approaches in Russian Historical Research)*, *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*, Sonderband XIII (Krems, 2003); Grigorii V. Bondarenko, Some Specific Features of the Perception of Early Medieval Irish Feasts, *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 54 (2006), 7-19; Vladimir Ia. Petrukhin, The “Feast” in Medieval Russia, *ibidem*, 20-28.

² Moscow: Nauka, 2010.