

PARADISE (?) IN VERSIONS OF *SAINT BRENDAN'S TRAVELS*

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ABSTRACT

Travel accounts were the most popular genre during the Middle Ages. Travelling went in all directions but preferably to the East, where Paradise was believed to be located. Paradise was hidden behind an ocean, a wall of fire or insurmountable mountains and thus inaccessible. Saint Brendan's voyage went west and the vast majority of scholars have claimed that Saint Brendan arrived in Paradise even if the various texts lack evidence for it, and in several ways. I characterize this apparent Paradise in the *Navigatio* version as a "fake Paradise," because it is located to the west in contrast to the long tradition of Paradise descriptions and the *mappae mundi* where Paradise is always situated to the east. I call the Promised Land in the vernacular *Voyage* version a "pseudo-Paradise" despite the Christian elements, primarily because of its location and because Saint Brendan claims that he had been there.

KEY WORDS: Travel account, Saint Brendan, Paradise, Promised Land, Garden of Eden, Mappa mundi, *Land of Cockaigne*.

RESUMEN

Los relatos de viajes fueron el género más popular durante la Edad Media. El viajero partía en todas direcciones, pero preferiblemente hacia el este, donde se creía que se localizaba el Paraíso. Éste se escondía tras un océano, una muralla de fuego o montañas inaccesibles, por lo que era inalcanzable. El viaje de San Brendano se dirigió hacia el oeste, y una amplia mayoría de especialistas ha destacado, aun sin textos que lo evidencien, que el santo llegó al Paraíso. Yo presento este claro Paraíso de la *Navigatio* como un "Paraíso falso," dado que aparece al oeste en contra de la larga tradición de descripciones y de los *mappae mundi* en los que se sitúa al este. Asimismo, me refiero a la Tierra Prometida del *Voyage* vernáculo como "pseudo-Paraíso," a pesar de los elementos cristianos, debido, sobre todo, a la localización y a que San Brendano defiende que ha estado allí.

PALABRAS CLAVE: relato de viajes, San Brendano, paraíso, tierra prometida, jardín del edén, mappa mundi, *Land of Cockaigne*.



The quest for knowledge, fascination with unknown marvels and wonders and the search for an ideal world led to factual voyages and imaginary speculations about remote lands and islands, their existence and their location, ever since Plato wrote about Atlantis in *Kritias*. During the Middle Ages accounts of travels, fictitious, real or a mixture of both, were by far the most popular genre in Latin and vernacular literature. *Mandeville's Travels* (from mid-14th century onwards) was the most read book in the later Middle Ages after the Bible, to judge from the excessive number of manuscripts preserved (more than two hundred). This was so-called armchair travel, relying on compiled material but immensely popular. A.W. Pollard published the text after the so-called Cotton version with a few corrections and additions from the Egerton manuscript or the French text (Pollard 1964: VI). In his translation from 1983 C.W.R.D. Mosely relies on another text, now in British Library (MS Harley 4383). The versions differ only in a few minor aspects in the description of Paradise.

Also the *Alexandri Magni iter ad paradisum* (12th century etc., later adapted in the *Alexander Novel*), the accounts on *Priester John's Letter to Emanuel* (12th century etc.), *Marco Polo's Travels* (13th century etc.) and others in several copies and versions contributed to satisfy the enormous demand. The accounts combined experiences from real travels, narrated by the travelers, surviving evidence from authors in Antiquity, patristic literature, and mere rumors, in varying combinations.

The voyages to the East were by far the most common but journies went in all directions. Adam of Bremen's *Descriptio insularum Aquilonis* (Description of the Nordic Isles, 11th century), *Eiriks Saga Rauda* (Eric the Red's Saga, 13th century) on Leif Ericson's voyage to Vinland in North America, focused on the North. Some accounts on voyages to Asia included Ethiopia or Mauretania in the South but moving further south was believed to be impossible on account of the excessive heat.

In contrast to these, *Saint Brendan's Voyage* went westwards and to a certain extent north and maybe even south. It was rooted in old Irish traditions and due to geographical circumstances it is evident that Saint Brendan must have sailed in the Atlantic. Scholars have interpreted the isles he passed as (mythologized versions of) the Shetlands, the Faroe Islands and Iceland. Even the Canaries have been suggested. But despite the possible landmarks, the primary purpose and ultimate end of the voyage was cosmological and theological—or maybe merely entertainment (Sollbach 62-66).

Saint Brendan's Voyage belonged to the most popular travel accounts, with c. 100 manuscripts preserved. The tradition of narratives on Saint Brendan's Voyage had its origins in Ireland, but during the medieval centuries it spread over most of Western Europe in versions in several vernaculars. It is known in three main traditions. The Latin version, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, from the 10th century onwards, represents the oldest strand in the tradition. Carl Selmer, who edited the text in 1959, was of the opinion that there must have been an original *Urtext*. He endeavored to establish one authoritative text on the basis of no less than 18 manuscripts. His text is used here. The translation into English by J.F. Webb differs from Selmer's text in some aspects.

In the early 12th century a monk named Benedeit developed a text in the vernacular, *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, which created another tradition during the



following centuries. E.G.R. Waters published what is known as the *Anglo-Norman Voyage of Saint Brendan* in 1928. A translation of this text by Jude S. Mackley was published in 2008 together with a comparative study of the Latin and the Anglo-Norman versions.

In Germany a separate tradition was developed on the basis of a (lost) manuscript from the mid-12th century: *Sankt Brandans Reise*. This trend was very popular in the late 15th century. In 1987 Gerhardt E. Sollbach published *St. Brandans wundersame Seefahrt* from the Heidelberg manuscript (1460). Two years earlier Rolf D. Fay had published another version in the same tradition from the first Augsburg print (c. 1476, with several woodcuts).

In this article I focus on the descriptions of the final destination where Saint Brendan and his men arrive at the end of their journey in one selected version within each of the three traditions. I will question the notion common in research until now that Saint Brendan arrives in paradise. I wish to undertake a close reading and interpret the exact content of the descriptions in order to reach a more precise conclusion.

Paradise was only mentioned explicitly three times in the biblical texts: *Luke* 23.43, the *Second Letter to the Corinthians* 12.4, and *Revelations* 2.7. In the exegetic tradition it was discussed whether Paradise was placed on Earth or in Heaven —perhaps even identical with Heaven (Dinzelbacher, *Vision* 105). During the Middle Ages it was normally believed that the Garden of Eden (*Genesis* 2.8-17) was the same as Paradise. In consequence Paradise must be located on Earth. According to the description in *Genesis* the Garden of Eden was situated to the East and all kinds of trees were growing there, among them the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. In Eden there was a river that gave water to the plants and trees and it divided into four streams: Pishon (Ganges), Gihon (the Nile), Tigris and Euphrates. Ezekiel 28,13 furthermore places Eden on a holy mountain and this idea is reflected on a world map by Andrea Bianco (Delumeau 94).

Jean Delumeau traces the idea of Paradise back in history, even before Christianity. Already at that time Paradise was believed to be located in the East. Titus Flavius Josephus (1st century) took it for granted that the four principal rivers in the world emanate from Paradise. Ephrem the Syrian (4th century) saw Paradise in the shape of a mountain and in Delumeau's word: "*le paradis constitue et le lieu initial de l'histoire humaine et aboutissement final de celle-ci*" (Delumeau 61). Cosmas Indicopleustes (6th century), who imagined the world in the shape of the tabernacle, placed Paradise outside the inhabited world (*oekumene*), separated by a huge ocean and thus inaccessible. Honorius of Autun (7th century) was of the opinion that Paradise was surrounded by a desert populated by snakes and cruel animals. John of Damascus (8th century) considered Paradise to be located at the highest place in the world in the Orient so that it was not flooded in the deluge. Gervais of Tilbury (c. 1100) thought that Paradise was protected by a huge wall of fire.

From the 11th century descriptions were multiplied. The rise of the four rivers in various locations far from Paradise was explained on the basis that they run underground to the places where they pop up. In Paradise the light is always clear, the air fresh, the fields fertile, the trees fair with fruit, roses, lilies and other flowers



smell fragrant, and the gems in the four rivers from Paradise have special lustre. There is always light and eternal spring. There can be found fountains, vines, and laurel. The land flows with milk and honey and edible fruits are abundant. There are no wild animals. The only two people in the Earthly Paradise are Enoch and Elijah, the prophets from the Old Testament whom God placed not in Limbo but in the Earthly Paradise where they should await the final judgment.

Characteristic features are the lack of various general human evils and everyday annoyances, enumerated in long lists. There is neither death, nor illness, nor age, nor fear, nor anger, nor treachery in Paradise. There is no cold, no storm, no ice, no snow nor hail, no excessive summer heat and no drought during autumn. Howard Rollin Patch gives a detailed description with exact references to the patristic literature, i.e., Prudentius, Ambrose, Isidore, and many others and he finally sums up: "By the twelfth century, then, the idea of the Earthly Paradise was fairly well established in many respects: it is located in the east, it is cut off from the rest of the world by its high location, or its ocean barrier, or perhaps by a fiery wall, its features are the familiar ones in Genesis described with almost a traditional form and vocabulary" (Patch 148).

According to *Genesis* and later texts Paradise was located in the Far East and accordingly the world maps (*mappae mundi*) located Paradise here, as we can see on Lambert of Saint Omer's and Honorius Augustodunensis' world maps c. 1180 (Edson 108-09 and 114-15). On both maps Paradise is separated from the world by an ocean. On Lambert's map the four rivers that pour from Paradise are indicated. God reigns in Heaven, i.e. above: he first created Paradise and consequently Paradise must be at the top. This means that Asia covers the upper part of the map, Africa the lower part to the right and Europe the lower part to the left. In George Lakoff's and Mark Johnson's metaphor theory "up" contains positive connotations while "down" is negative and this metaphoric is operative on the world maps.

On the extremely small but detailed *The Psalter World Map* (c. 1265) Christ resides over the world with his right hand raised in a gesture of benediction and holds a symbolic globe in his left hand, while a double Leviathan is placed at the bottom under the world, i.e. to the west. The faces of Adam and Eve can be seen on each side of the Tree of Knowledge. The *Hereford Mappa Mundi* (c. 1285) is even more detailed. The Garden of Eden is separated by an ocean but at the same time it is surrounded by a protective wall. The only entrance goes via a gate but it is firmly closed. Eve receives the apple from the serpent in the Tree of Knowledge and Adam at the same time is taking the first bite (simultaneity is commonplace in medieval iconography). The four rivers that emanate from Paradise are indicated with their names (Edson plate VI, VII and X and Harvey 1992: 83, 84, 86, 88 and 92).

Paradise is mentioned explicitly in various travel accounts. Alexander the Great undertook his voyage to the east as an *Iter ad Paradisum*. Joinville mentions that ginger, rhubarb, aloe and cinnamon come from the terrestrial Paradise. *Visio Gunthelmi* relates that the archangel Raphael leads people to Paradise and Saltrey says "*quod paradisus in oriente et in terra sit, narracio ista ostendit*" (Dinzelsbacher 107). Saltrey makes certain reservations in so far as he refers to the narration from which he had heard about paradise and he uses the subjunctive mood.



Mandeville in the mid-14th century repeats Saltrey's reservations by referring to other informers: "Of Paradise I cannot speak properly, for I have not been there. But I shall tell you as much as I have heard from wise men and trustworthy authorities in those countries" (Mosely 184). Mandeville in many ways compiles earlier descriptions and his narration is rather detailed. He repeats that Paradise is situated on an elevated place so that Noah's flood could not affect it. A stone wall surrounds it and there is one entrance, guarded by God's flaming sword. In the middle there is a spring from whence the four rivers run underground until they rise to the surface, each at its proper place.

Mandeville underlines that Paradise is not accessible: "You should realize that no living man can go to paradise" (Mosely 185). By land there is a barren landscape, with hills and rocks and wild animals, that no man can cross. Access is likewise prevented by darkness. By sea, the water rages with extreme currents and waves and at the same time the wind blows with such a force that no boat can sail against it. Many people have tried, all of them without success, Mandeville adds.

Patch believes that at least the Garden of Eden was universally believed to exist. The Garden of Eden could be traced back to the Bible whose authority was impossible to question in the Middle Ages (Patch 134). Ranulf Higden (mid-14th century) argued that the terrestrial Paradise must exist for four reasons: 1) historical narratives told about Paradise, 2) reliable people asserted that they had been there and had seen Paradise, 3) the sources of the Nile and the other principal rivers had never been found, because of their origin in Paradise and their subterranean course, 4) the tradition of Paradise had been kept alive during the six thousand years since God created the world (Delumeau 76).

John of Damascus and Mosès Bar Céphas (9th century) ascribed a reality to Paradise but they discussed the possibilities of a double nature, partly physical and partly symbolic (Delumeau 64). Augustine had earlier appreciated there were three possibilities: 1) it is generally acknowledged that Paradise has a physical existence, 2) the evidence of Paradise has to be interpreted in a spiritual and thus symbolic way, 3) both the physical and the spiritual are aspects of Paradise (Patch 143).

The authors of the Brendan texts were well aware of the way Paradise was described at their time. They related in the wake of a long Irish tradition of voyages to the west but they integrated elements from the Paradise descriptions and in the case of the later versions from other-worldly descriptions, among them the Irish narrative *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* (12th century) and the Irish poem *The Land of Cockayne* (early 14th century).

In *Navigatio sancti Brendani Abbatis* Saint Brendan and his followers need to have a guide (*procurator*) in order to reach the Land of Promise of the Saints. Without him they will not be able to enter the *terram repromissionis sanctorum*. He leads them towards the east for forty days. After that time they encounter a foggy darkness and the guide tells Saint Brendan that the fog and darkness surround the island they have been searching for during seven years.

They leave the vessel to enter the Land of Promise of the Saints, which is described in this way:



Before them lay open country covered with apple trees laden with fruit. The monks ate as much as they wanted and drank deeply from the springs. The island was so wide that forty days' wandering still did not bring them to the farther shore. One day they came upon a vast river flowing through the middle of the country. "What are we to do?" asked Brendan. "We have no idea of the size of the country and we cannot cross this river" (Webb 67; Latin in Selmer 78).

There are a few features in common between this description in *Navigatio* and the descriptions of voyages to Paradise: there are apple trees, ripe with fruits that can be eaten and there are wells they can drink from. Likewise on his way Saint Brendan encounters a fog and darkness that separate the ordinary world from the land they want to get access to.

But the differences are crucial. First of all it is explicitly stated that Saint Brendan and his men enter the land they arrive at whereas Paradise is inaccessible. Paradise is located far in the east but Saint Brendan sails to the west in the Atlantic and even if he goes eastwards for forty days, as we are told, he has no chance of arriving before the Paradise as it is described in the visions and travel accounts or shown on the *mappae mundi*.

In the *terra repromissionis sanctorum* there is no spring that gets divided into four rivers that run underground but instead a river in the middle of the land that divides the land into two parts where Saint Brendan can only get access to one part. To this may be added that in *Navigatio* God's first priority is not to lead Saint Brendan to the Land of Promise of the Saints (interpreted as Paradise) but to show him the richness of his wonders on various isles underway (Selmer 80; Webb 68).

Various scholars identify Saint Brendan's Land of Promise with Paradise. Patch speaks of: "(...) the land of Promise, which is Paradise" (40). Selmer invokes "(...) the terrestrial paradise, the goal of this voyage" (91). At the beginning of *Navigatio* the monk Barinthus who is a relative of Saint Brendan tells about an earlier journey he made. His description in fact is more elaborate than the later narration about Saint Brendan's own voyage. The description of Paradise is summary and pale in contrast to lively descriptions of other isles and other events during his voyage.

Barinthus tells the monks in the abbey the story of his and his son abbot Mernoc's voyage. He describes how they pass thick clouds and arrive in brilliant light in a spacious land which is exceedingly fruitful. There is no need of sleep as there is always day and never night. This land is the Land of the Promise of the Saints which he identifies with Paradise. He appeals to the monks by asking them if they can smell the fragrance from Paradise in their garments and the monks readily accept that Barinthus and Mernoc had been there (Selmer 4-9).

In contrast to Saint Brendan's later journey the end of the journey is mentioned here with the name of Paradise here but nevertheless there are disturbing elements. Barinthus and Mernoc row westwards in order to arrive at the island, called the Land of Promise of the Saints and by Barinthus identified with Paradise, even if Paradise was always situated to the East. They are also able to enter the land as Saint Brendan is later on, in contrast to the Paradise visions.



It is significant that Saint Brendan's voyage ends in the Land of Promise of the Saints while Paradise is not mentioned, at least not explicitly. The Land of the Promise of the Saints may be interpreted as a metaphorical expression but compared to the texts on visions and voyages to the east it is remarkable that the exact expression is only used in the initial narration on the forerunners of Saint Brendan.

Together with the many features that do not fit in with the descriptions of the many voyages to Paradise in the Far east this leads to the conclusion that Saint Brendan does not arrive in Paradise but at another island which in some aspects is reminiscent of Paradise but where the major part of the evidence points in another direction. Saint Brendan's fantasy isle is a compilation of various elements, some Christian and some of other origins. To sum up it may be called a *fake Paradise*.

In *The Voyage of Saint Brendan* from the 12th century the Christian elements are prevalent. This versified version in Anglo-Norman, i.e. the vernacular, begins with Saint Brendan's prayers to God that he should let him see Paradise before he dies (Mackley vv. 48-52 and 60). Barintus' narrative (vv. 72-102) differs from the narrative in the Latin versions. He relates his god-son Mernoc's voyage to a neighboring island so close to Paradise that he can smell the fragrance from the flowers in Paradise and hear the angels from there.

When Saint Brendan himself with his men undertakes his journey he moves towards the east and arrives before Paradise where the clouds are so thick and foggy that he is unable to see anything. Adam's heirs cannot return there, due to his expulsion from Paradise. Saint Brendan sails on in full speed and on the fourth day they leave the fog behind them. They encounter a wall that reaches to the clouds. It is made in one piece without any work and it is adorned with various sorts of gems. The entrance is guarded by fiery dragons and a hanging sword with the point down is described in a lucid and detailed way. God's messenger, a handsome young man, welcomes them and lets them enter. He guides them through Paradise. There is a marble hill with a golden mountain on the top. Saint Brendan hears angels and their melodies. They see fair meadows with trees and fragrant flowers and ever-ripe fruits but no evil plants like brambles, thistles, or nettles. The rivers run with milk and reeds exude honey. There are gentle birds and fish. It is always summer; the sun is always shining. Unpleasant weather does not exist in Paradise:

He who will be here will have no suffering there
Nor will he ever know whence evil comes
Neither heat, nor cold, nor affliction
Nor hunger, nor thirst, nor privation
He will have all his desires in abundance
No matter how great is his desire. (Mackley vv. 1765-70)

The description in *Voyage* follows a long way the description from *Genesis* and the patristic tradition, but the material needs are added to the list. Other features are absent: the well and the four rivers; Enoch and Elijah as the only two inhabitants. The young guide asks Saint Brendan to take precious stones with him as a token that he has been in Paradise. As a conclusion the poem states that Saint Brendan



has been in Paradise physically and that he will soon return in spirit in order to stay there until the Last Judgment.

The Voyage of Saint Brendan is heavily influenced by the travel accounts and the visions about Alexander's and other travelers' experiences or fantasies about a Paradise in the east. In this vernacular version Saint Brendan moves east. On a geographical level he is not able to reach Paradise but if the account is interpreted in a symbolic way it can be regarded as a Christian pilgrimage at an allegorical level. The Voyage is placed in a Christian framework as if it were a (not *the*) Christian Paradise.

Nevertheless the place where Saint Brendan arrives must be characterized as a *Pseudo-Paradise*. Everywhere in the narratives on travels towards Paradise travelers go east whereas Saint Brendan goes west (modified with 40 days sailing towards the east). While Saint Brendan is sailing on the Atlantic Ocean all other travelers move over land in Asia until an obstacle (a stone wall, a desert peopled by ferocious animals, an ocean with extreme torrents, or a fiery wall) prevents them from further onward movement.

Medieval chroniclers and mapmakers never doubt that Saint Brendan's islands and among them the *terra repromissionis sanctorum* were located somewhere in the Atlantic. On late medieval maps, for instance the globe of Martin Behaim (1492), the *insula de Sanct Brendan* is located in the middle of the ocean. Before America was discovered it was believed that sailing west would finally lead to India and accordingly the western brim of the map shows India and surrounding islands that were known from earlier travel accounts (Delumeau 97).

By the 15th century the story of Saint Brendan had spread over most of Europe. The German version in *St. Brandans wundersame Seefahrt* (1460) differs remarkably from both the *Navigatio* and the *Voyage* tradition. First of all the description of the *Bona terra*, as the promised land is called, is much longer and more elaborate than in the earlier versions (covering more than three pages).

In *Brandan's Seefahrt* there is neither fog nor darkness that Saint Brendan and his men must pass in order to enter the land, as was the case in the earlier versions. There are plenty of cereals (a new feature), wine and fruits and the sweet fragrance takes away their weariness and weakness. No wolves or other dangerous animals are to be found there.

Most of the text is devoted to a description of a castle they arrive at via a suspended road which is floating in the air. The castle is made of crystal and the walls are covered by gems, gold, copper and bronze. Images of animals like lions, boars, panthers, elephants and snakes, boars, swine, dogs, hares and deer are carved into the stones on one of the walls. On the second wall wild and tame birds are depicted, as if they are flying in the air. The third wall is covered by all sorts of depictions of tournaments and other activities, performed by innumerable men and women, kings, emperors etc. Many sorts of crafts are rendered. Also leisure pursuits such as the playing of lutes and harps can be seen on the wall.

Inside the castle 700 doors and several beautiful halls are decorated with gold. The beds are covered with gold and silk. The floors are made of blue glass and decorated with gems. In the garden there is a cedar in a green and beautiful meadow: "*Und an dem Baum hingen schöne Trinkgeschirre und Schenkgefässe und ein schöner Tisch,*



und auf dem Tisch die beste Speise, die man sich denken kann” (Sollbach 165). Several sorts of birds sing. There is a clear and cold well and a spring. In the rivers which rise there plenty of fish can be found. At the end the narrator lacks sufficient words: “*In dem Haus war jede Art von Wonne, die es auf der Erde geben kann*” (Sollbach 167).

The idea of the castle is common in the literature about Heaven and in the poems and fabliaux on the Land of Cockaigne (Dinzelbacher 108). God presides over the castle and Saint Peter stands at the gate with his key to decide whether the dead souls can be let in or not. The description leads the imagination in the direction of a king’s or a duke’s castle. The conclusion is remarkable. Saint Brendan admonishes his brothers that they should not steal anything from the castle—not even a stone as a token—and that they must haste back to the ship so that the devil cannot follow them and seduce them.

The most interesting passage in the text is quoted above: the table with all the best plates that anyone can imagine and the casks, probably with wine or beer. The interest in exquisite food and drink is characteristic, not of Paradise but of the Land of Cockaigne. Other features are typical of the Land of Cockaigne: no work and access to meat: “*Da hatte man das Fleisch von Ziegen und allerhand Vieh. Die Fische in dem Wasser gehen selbst an Land zu den Leuten*” (Sollbach 161-63). The last detail is reminiscent of Bruegel’s painting of *Schlaraffenland*, where the chicken places itself on the plate ready to be eaten without effort. In the earlier Saint Brendan tradition the only food mentioned was fruits, in accordance with the description in *Genesis*.

An Irish narration from the 12th century, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, tells about a land which differs substantially from Paradise: In order to arrive there the protagonist has to pass a milk sea before he reaches a castle, built of thick omelets, bridges of butter, the palisades of flesh, the gate of meat, the pillars of cheese. The fountain springs with wine and in the rivers run beer or mead. This is an early vision of the Land of Cockaigne (Patch 51; Dinzelbacher 86-87).

A parodic Irish poem, *On the Land of Cockaigne*, from the early 14th century, compares Paradise with Cockaigne and the comparison does not fall out in favor of Paradise:

Thus Paradise be mirth and bright
Cockaigne is of fairer sight
What is there in Paradise
But grass and flowers and green twigs
Thus there be joy and great duty
There is no meat but only fruit
There is not hall, table nor bench
Only water to quench man’s thirst
There are only two men
Elijah and Enoch also. (Haskell 375)

The rest of the 190-line poem is devoted to a description of the Land of Cockaigne. A survey of the texts on the Land of Cockaigne is given by Dieter Richter and Leif Søndergaard (Richter; Søndergaard). There is no land in the world where there is so much joy and pleasure. The first thing to mention is the meat and drink



at free disposal and it is explicitly stated that the meat is tender. The description to some extent follows the line from the Paradise texts. The enumeration of absent evils is further developed and includes the lack of everyday annoyances. To the well-known features concerning eternal life and no death, perpetual day and never night, the weather conditions, and wild and tame animals are added several others: Nobody is blind. Neither men nor women can be angry. There are neither fleas nor flies nor lice in that land.

The rivers run with milk, honey, olive oil and wine. The water is only used for washing. Fruits are not for eating but only for the digestion. The parody is further developed in a description of an abbey built with provisions as building materials. This is maybe the most typical feature for the ideas of the Land of Cockaigne. Equality and community are emphasized. Everyone can eat as much as he wants; everything belongs to everyone; the weak and the strong can take from the same purse.

This utopian society foreshadows the abbey Thélème in Rabelais' novel *Gargantua* (1534). In the meadow a tree exudes scents of ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, various birds are singing, etc. There are four springs, like the four rivers that emanate from Paradise, and in them gold and many sorts of precious stones flow. The roasted birds fly directly into your mouth. This description and the idea of Cockaigne in general stems from ordinary people's lives in the village under feudal conditions (Graus 7-9). Here the problems with excessive work, lack of food and drink, wild animals, annoying insects, etc. are absent. Hard everyday life is replaced by a pleasant life in perpetual pleasure and joy.

The second half of the poem is devoted to a parody on and inversion of the daily life in an abbey. The young monks are able to fly through the air and when the abbot wants them to land he displays the bare bottom of a young maiden. At a nunnery nearby the young nuns undress and jump into the water. The monks immediately approach and the dance goes up and down, as it says. The most potent monk lies with twelve nuns every year and he is rewarded for it. The laziest monk is appointed abbot.

In this context the most interesting parts of the poem include the description of the Land of Cockaigne where it both resembles and distinguishes itself from the description in the German *Brandans Seefahrt*. In general many features are common to the Paradise tradition and the Cockaigne tradition and can be found in both types of texts. It is characteristic of *Brandans Seefahrt* that food and drink are foregrounded. And this means that Saint Brendan's voyage in the German version does not go to Paradise but rather to the Land of Cockaigne. Juliette De Caluwé-Dor characterizes the Land of Cockaigne as an *anti-Paradise* (Caluwé-Dor 103).

Sollbach, who edited the manuscript, seems to be quite certain that the voyage reaches Paradise. He provides the German translation with the title "*Hierkommen siezudem Paradies*," even if there is no title in the manuscript itself. In the text the land is called *Terra bona* and it is characterized with a comparison: "(...) *alsobsie in dem Paradieswaren*" (161, 163 and Introduction: 41). The "as if" tells clearly about another place but a place which is similar to Paradise, at least in some respects.

In the *Terra bona* the religious elements are counterpoised and overruled by secular materialistic elements in a way that allows us clearly assert: Saint Brendan



does not arrive in Paradise. To this may be added that the same reservations that were taken in relation to the two earlier versions are also operative for the German version. Sailing towards the west in the ocean is contrary to all descriptions in the Bible, among the church fathers, theologians, and narrators who agree that travelers must go east over land to India in their search for Paradise. Paradise in this version is rather a *counter-paradise*.

In another German version (printed in Augsburg c. 1476) which in most aspects is very much like the Heidelberger version the island where Saint Brendan arrives with his men is interpreted in a totally different and opposite way: “*Hyekommen syzüdem gütenetrich, das dem Paradeys geleychet, darynnen warenauchteüfel*” (Fay 42). The land is very much like Paradise but as there are devils present it is quite clear that the land can under no circumstances be identical with Paradise.

The place with all its gems and precious stones is interpreted by Saint Brendan as the devil’s endeavor to tempt and trick his men so he warns them that they should not take anything with them. Instead he hastily leads them back to the ship. On their way back they encounter monsters with swine’s heads, hands like human beings, but with dogs’ claws, and cranes’ necks. They are equipped with bows and arrows but Saint Brendan succeeds in pacifying them when he addresses them in the name of God, and Saint Brendan and his followers can return to their ship unharmed (Fay 48-49). Dinzlacher talks about a secularized variant of Paradise (84). I prefer to characterize the island as a “false Paradise.”

In the two German versions of *Brandan’s Seefahrt* access to the hanging castle goes via a road which is floating in the air. *Navigatio* Saint Brendan and his men, after having sailed for forty days, were enveloped in *caligo* (fog) and “darkness, so thick that they could hardly see each other” (Selmer 78; Webb 67). The foggy darkness lasts for an hour and after that they arrive at the island and suddenly they are able to see everything clearly. In the Anglo-Norman *Voyage* the description is enlarged considerably: fog and great clouds that surround Paradise make darkness so thick and impenetrable that the travelers lose their sight completely. In order to pass the foggy belt they have to sail for three days at full speed.

These ways of describing the passage to the Promised Land, either via a floating road or through fog and darkness may be interpreted as “fiction markers.” They indicate that Saint Brendan and his men are now passing from the real world into a fantasy world. It may be remarked in passing that some of the other islands that Saint Brendan visits are fictitious too. Mackley interprets the development in the *Navigatio* and the *Voyage* as a movement from the familiar to the fantastic-uncanny and on to the marvelous.

The use of fiction markers parallels the way they are displayed in the beginning of the Irish poem on the *Land of Cockaigne*: “Fur in see bi west Spayngne/ Is a lond ihothe Cockaygne” (Haskell 173). When the poem was performed no isles west of Spain were known, and consequently an island located there must necessarily be imaginary. At the end the fictitious mode is made even clearer: those who want to go to the land of Cockaigne must walk seven years through swine dung up to the neck. There are several fiction markers in the narratives about the Land of Cockaigne (Søndergaard 176-80).



The question of to what extent the narratives about Saint Brendan's travels were believed to be real or imaginary is hard to answer. Probably there existed a continuum from substantial belief to total disbelief and skepticism, where some people believed in some things while others doubted more or less, maybe all of it, depending on their credulity and their ability to interpret the fiction markers.

Some scholars have tried to take Saint Brendan's experiences as real and to locate the places he visited geographically: but not very convincingly (Sollbach 77). Some of the related events and places are mythologized versions with a point of departure in real events or geographical locations, but others are sheer imagination in the wake of old authorities or popular belief. Saint Brendan's voyage is rendered in a fictitious mode but a more important conclusion has to be that Saint Brendan *does not go to Paradise in any of the versions* —as Paradise is envisaged in the long historical tradition from the Bible, patristic literature, theologians, chroniclers and popular narrators.

I have characterized Paradise in the *Navigatio* as a “fake Paradise,” which is not the ultimate goal for the travelers and at the same time it is located to the west in contrast to the long tradition of Paradise descriptions where Paradise is situated to the east. I call the Promised Land in *Voyage* a “pseudo-Paradise” despite the Christian elements, again because of its location. I see Paradise in *Sankt Brandans Seefahrt* as a “counter-Paradise” with characteristic prevalent elements from the Land of Cockaigne, and Paradise in the Augsburg-version as a “false Paradise,” where the devil plays his tricks.

The attentive reader will recognize the fiction markers and read or listen to the narratives as imaginary descriptions of wonders and marvels, especially in respect to Paradise. If we include *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* and *Far West of Spain* we may label the place they describe as an *anti-Paradise* with a polemical and parodic attitude towards the normal, serious Paradise descriptions.

In none of the Brendan narrations does Saint Brendan go to Paradise. They are nonetheless interesting as fictitious literature and they give access to fascinating aspects of medieval mentalities.

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