

- (1) To what extent is landscape important in the Lives of the Celtic saints? Illustrate your answer with reference to the traditions associated with one particular saint from the Celtic regions.

Abstract:

This essay will explore the origins of St. Brendan the Navigator in literary and scholarly traditions, specifically examining the importance of the landscape in the life and voyage of St. Brendan. St. Brendan (c.484-577) was an Irish saint whose tale of fantastical voyages has captured generations and instilled nautical and narrative traditions that have been popular for over a millennium. Moreover, this essay will seek to illuminate the pan-Celtic and Christian influence behind the works on St. Brendan, which range from the Vita, Navigatio and Life of St. Columba, who all reveal a variety of details on the life of St. Brendan. This examination will incorporate a plethora of multidimensional landscapes, which reveal different narrative and symbolic aspects to the Life of St. Brendan and will consider a multi-disciplinary approach in order to encapsulate the rich and interesting life of an iconic saint.

Introduction to St. Brendan

Saint Brendan, also known as Brendan the Navigator or Brendan of Clonfert (c. 484 – 577 CE) was one of the early Irish monastical saints and one of the original Twelve Apostles of Ireland, supposedly being tutored by the famous teacher, Finnian of Clonard (Hughes, 1954, pp. 362). St. Brendan's plethora of names identify him as; the Navigator, the Voyager, the Anchorite, and the Bold (Symons, 2022, pp. 2). In Irish Gaelic translations of his name, he is also referred to as Naomh Breannain (Breandan) or Brenainn moccu Alti in medieval Irish (Kenney, 1920, pp. 2). For the ease of discussion in this essay, he will be referred to as St. Brendan of Clonfert or simply St. Brendan to distinguish his name from other saints that share his namesake such as St. Brendan of Birr. St. Brendan is famously known for his mythical seven-year voyage to the west, to find the 'Isle of the Blessed', which is referred to as 'Saint Brendan Island' or an equivalent island of paradise. On his journey St. Brendan encounter a number of phenomenological events, including a giant sea monster called Jasconius. In the time before St. Brendan's birth Ireland was in the throes of moving from Celtic paganism to a Celtic-Christian socio-religious structure, and the work of St. Patrick (Giesbrecht, 2018, pp. 36) in spreading Christianity was continued by the twelve Irish apostles, such as Saint Brendan. St. Brendan was born in 484 CE near Fenit and the coastal port of Tralee, in County Kerry, Munster located along the coast of south-western Ireland, to the Irish clan Ciarraige Altraige (Mocu Alti), instilling a certain level of engagement between Brendan and nautical practices from an early age. St. Brendan's birth like many saints, had preludes and portents of the divine (Life of St. Brendan, 1992, pp. 44-5) and he was later sent to St. Jarlath's monastery in Taum to begin his Christian education.



Fig. 1 - (Joris, 2014). A 15th century manuscript painting of the St. Brendan encountering a whale, with tail in mouth the whale surrounds the ship, one of the landscapes many tests of faith for St. Brendan.

Brendan the Navigator earned his namesake from his many successful voyages to the Aran islands (Ireland), Argyll (Scottish Isle), Wales, and Brittany (Stifter, 2006, pp. 210), there is a small academic contingent that holds the possible belief that St. Brendan was the first European to sail to America, travelling as far as the Faroe Islands before making land in Newfoundland (Doan, 2000, pp. 83; Dunn, 1921, pp. 453). Despite a level of pseudo-propagandic storytelling, the journey was replicated by experimental archaeologist Tim Severin (1978), who replicated the curragh, and journey of St. Brendan, and successfully completed the theoretical journey from Ireland to Newfoundland (Murphy, 2021, pp. 1). Despite the lack of reliable evidence, it appeals to the symbolic construction of Brendan into his sainthood, in which his pious and difficult journey tested his faith, but at the end of which he prevails like a hero of the old Irish Immrama (Hillers, 1993, pp.69). St. Brendan died in 577 CE in Annaghdown (Galway), while visiting his sister Briga, his body was transported to the monastery he founded in Clonfert and interred within Clonfert Cathedral (Life of St. Brendan, 1922, pp. 91-2). The veneration of St. Brendan was confirmed via his recognition as a saint by the Catholic Church, his feast day is celebrated on the 16th of May. Moreover, St. Brendan gathered a following from across Ireland and the localities he visited, now recognised as the patron saint of sailors, mariners, and travellers (Ardfert & Clonfert dioceses, 2022, pp. 5). St. Brendan's activities as a clergyman were directed in Western Ireland, where he had founded monasteries and religious institutions in a variety of places including: Ardfert (Kerry), Inishdroum (Clare), Annaghdown and Clonfert (Galway). His name was used in naming traditions across the Irish landscape e.g., Brandon Point, Mount Brendan, Brandon Bay, and Brandon Head, are revealing of his lasting impact in Christendom and particularly in Ireland (Kenney, 1920, pp. 2-3). In Fenit Harbour a monumental bronze sculpture has been erected to honour the origins and memory of St. Brendan. The iconic voyage of Saint Brendan and his band of brethren monks sailing the ocean in search of an isle of paradise, became one of the most popular stories of medieval Europe (Daly, 1904, pp. 136). Brendan and his fellow monks, trusted in the guidance of God; and along the way they encounter sea monsters, talking birds, mountains of fire and towers of crystals, and strange and otherworldly encounters (Freeman, 2014, pp. 129). This essay aims to evaluate the extensive use of the landscape (and seascape) in understanding the Life of St. Brendan, in which the Christianisation of Ireland amalgamated traditions in what can be loosely considered a Celtic-Christian Sphere.

Celtic Christianity

The idea of Celtic-Christianity has become a problematic and popular phrase in modern day- a result of both new archaeological research and theoretical perspectives (Leitch, 2015, pp.7-9). In understanding the importance of the landscape to the study of the life of Saint Brendan, an explanation of the primogenitor Celtic-Pagan religious context should be considered, as it offers a socio-cultural backdrop to the religious developments into the broad term identified as 'Celtic Christianity'. To the broadly Gallo-Celtic religion the natural phenomena of the landscape and animals within, represents a highly venerated and divine symbolistic representation of the Pan-Celtic nature-centric beliefs (Green, 1998, pp. 1). Moreover, the pan-Celtic world of trees, mountains, rocks, springs were said to embody spirits that straddle the link between the mundane and sacred. Saints, like St. Brendan have a contemporary perception as individuals in spiritual harmony with the primeval natural world (Bradley, 200, pp. 123). Furthermore, this Celtic engagement with the land set a stage for the prevalence of Celtic-Christianity in places like Ireland, that would come to inherit a highly localised Celtic gods and spirits, who were multi-functional deities of place (Webster, 2015, pp. 132). This localised divinity can be later observed into Iron age Ireland, in which Christianity's developing roots became embedded into regional flavours of Celtic belief across Ireland, Wales and Scotland (O'Loughlin, 2005, pp. 1). Saints, now emerged as did the spirits of old, coming to represent symbolic vessels of regional of specific belief, perhaps in both a multi-faceted and clever hybridisation of the old (Celtic Pantheon) with the new (Christian beliefs) to direct the populous towards an eventual Christianization. This entangling of worlds and formation of local saints, often spread as with St. Brendan to other cultures and nations (Stockhammer, 2011, pp. 50), but the integration of such stories drew from a slowly disappearing Celtic past, that promoted a Christian future. St. Brendan's journey could represent a manifestation of monastic doctrine to salvation, obedience, and faith' to complete one's pilgrimage, and thus elevate oneself in the eyes of the Christian god.

Sources on Saint Brendan:

The information relating to Saint Brendan's life first emerge in Adamnan's Life of St. Columba (Vita Sancti Columbae or the Irish), which has the earliest (est. 679-704 CE) mention of St. Brendan, which notes his clan identity (Alti), death in 577 CE, and how he often visited islands of Ireland and Scotland on the western coast (Adamnan, 1922, pp. xlv). Adamnan's account is also the first to mention his travels however does not include references to a curragh or the voyages that St. Brendan later became identified with. The earliest recorded depiction of St. Brendan as a mariner occurs in the Martyrology of Tallagh (est. 900's CE) which briefly discusses in prose St. Brenda's legendary seven-year voyage and his encounter with a sea monster (Kelly, 1857, pp. 163). The primary sources of information on St. Brendan are the Irish and Latin versions of the Life of Brendan (Vita Brendani and Betha Brenainn) which explores the humble origins and fantastical journey(s) St. Brendan undertook. The book deals with Brendan's desire to leave his homeland, yet before leaving he returns to his familial lands, to visit a lofty mountain that later bares his namesake, Brendan's Seat (Life of Brendan, 1922, pp. 51). This account heavily engages with various islands and their phenomena, dividing Brendan's voyage into two parts.

Firstly, is the failed but intrepid five-year voyage in which exotic talking birds, whirlpools, and intoxicating water appear to represent physical and metaphysical danger and temptation. The devil appears on the bow of St. Brendan's ship and attempts to beguile the company from its journey; however, St. Brendan's power of faith drives the devil away. Brendan after the 5 years, returned to his homeland, and his clan rejoiced at his return and his enhanced divinity. Secondly, the next mythical voyage became the focus of his fame and involved many more extreme trials and tribulations. Namely, the Isle of the dwarves featuring demonic locals and hellish mountains prelude to the encounter of a tortured Judas, who St. Brendan is compassionate towards and using his divine knowledge to understand that God has spared Judas (albeit fleetingly) from additional suffering. Further into the voyage the group encounters an isle of demonic smiths who hurled red hot iron at them, fortunately, they were protected by God and St. Brendan's divine deliverance. A focal aspect is the encounter of terrible fish (sea monsters), and Griffins that antagonize St. Brendan and the crew, yet the noble words of St. Brendan alongside holy protection ward them away. Finally, as the 7th year since the first voyage dawns they find the Land of Promise, a paradise 'found (with) health, without sickness, pleasure without contention, union without quarrel, dominion without interruption...' (Life of Saint Brendan, 1922, pp. 90). After the prophesised discovery and extasy of the Island of Paradise, St. Brendan returned to Ireland, successful and with a divine association with maritime exploration and endurance of adventure. The Vita ends demarcating the later (more regional) travels of St. Brendan across Europe and concludes with his death and interment at Clonfert (Life of Saint Brendan, 1922, pp. 44-92).

The second source that extrapolates the most detailed information on St. Brendan is The Voyage of St Brendan the Abbot (Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis est. 800's CE) which is entirely concerned with the single seven-year voyage (Moran, 1893, pp. 1-16). The Life of St. Brendan differs from the Navigatio Brendani, as the Navigatio does not address the biographical details of St. Brendan's life and assumes a familiarity of the reader with the life and story of St. Brendan provided by the Vita. Moreover, the structure of the Navigatio has been noted to share resemblance to the Irish immrama (voyage-tales). The immram details a series of disconnected adventures linked by a marine journey performed by a heroic adventurer, the format of an immram is often likened to that of the Greek adventure, Homer's Odyssey (Tracy, 2022, pp. 227-8). The Immrama such as the Voyage of Mael Duin (c. 8th CE) and Voyage of Bran (echtrae), both reflect fantastical nautical Island hopping adventures found within the exploits of St. Brendan, deriving from the 'otherworldly journey', and fulfilment of a hero's destiny to the west (Meyer, 2000 pp. 1-12; Swank, 2019, pp. 75-7). Moreover, the Immrama were written in a Christian era, and preserve elements of old mythology against the backdrop of Christian faith and perseverance (Loughlin, 2022, pp. 215-6). The landscape, and nautical traditions are often venerated for their mythical and historical precedent and are suggestive of a hybridised work of pan-Celtic Christian creation, featuring characters within stories like St. Brendan who are priests, monks, nuns or bare some Christian orientation. There are numerous parallels to be drawn between St. Brendan, and the immram, with possible consideration of the Navigatio as a Christianized immram (Loughlin, 2022, pp. 216-7). The Navigatio highlights a dynamic mix of realistic and fantastical components, concerning the landscape, phenomena, and the natural world. Addressing, St. Brendan's selection of 14 monks and their 40 days fast to purify their bodies for the ensuing journey. Similarly, to the Vita, St. Brendan visits his parents' remote community, that later is referred to as Brandon's Seat, during his visit he constructs a curragh for the journey. The Navigatio's adventure involves many islands of varying topographies, one of which is covered in flocks of sheep. Furthermore, an endearing symbol of St. Brendan appears in the form of the largest fish lasconius (Jasconius), who becomes a friendly protectorate of the expedition and through his reoccurrence part of the landscape to the monks (Har, 2011, pp. 113). Additionally, lasconius is described as forever in pursuit of his own tail, bearing a striking resemblance to the Norse saga's Jormungandr (Ouroboros) perhaps mimicking the cycle of repetition that St. Brendan performs in his island visits (Har, 2011, pp. 109-10). The Natural landscapes reveal mountains fire spewing Island, or barren lands exposed to the elements along with two thick silver crystal columns emerging in the ocean. Finally, the sacred seven years at sea implies a biblical completeness to the journey (Jones, 2008, pp. 4), they arrive at the *terra repromissionis sanctorum*, and it is revealed to be the manifestation of the vision St. Brendan witnessed, and the landscape is enveloped by: Ripe fruits, prevailing light (lack of shadow), and fertile autumnal forests (Moran, 1893, pp. 16).

Other sources that mention St. Brendan include the Middle German De Reis van Sinte Brandaen (Dutch for The Voyage of Saint Brendan est. 12th CE) and is believed to represent another hybrid work using combine elements from Germanic-Gaelic. In this edition St. Brendan's journey begins as a punishment due to his denial of the truth and consequence of burning of a book containing the miracles of creation (De Reis van Sint Brandaan, 2012, pp. 4). This format instils a much dourer allegorical nature to St. Brendan's journey that may have become more applicable as a folk tale for perpetuating Christianity amongst the peasants of the low countries. Despite the varying depictions of St. Brendan there is a consistency in how he is depicted as a strong leader, who's faith and wisdom never wane even in the face of futility, horror, despair, and temptation. Moreover, the tales of St. Brendan engage heavily with the real and imagined scenery, to form an entangled landscape. However, a majority of these writers (The Life of St. Brendan, 1922; Moran, 1893; Adamnan, 1922) are from a (Celtic) Christian hemisphere and their tales of St. Brendan amalgamated this background with voyage tales such as immram to form a multi-dimensional narrative.



Fig. 2 - (Victorian Web, 2004). St. Brendan by Edward Reginald Frampton (1872-1903). The painting portrays St. Brendan on his legendary voyage in which he meets Judas, who is freed from hell briefly on holy days. Another aspect of the tribulations St. Brendan encounters.

The Landscape and Saint Brendan:

The traditions involved with St. Brendan are multifaceted and involve a number of uses and applications of the landscape. (1) The broad literary traditions involved in the telling of a Christianised immrama ranging from island adventures and heroic perseverance, faith, and other noble values. (2) The landscape is vital and represents a variety of experiences real and the imaginary, it is a combination of liminal states in between heaven and hell. (3) The naming of the real landscape and places after Brendan in high frequency on the south-western coast of Ireland.

Real Landscapes

One interpretation of the various tales of St. Brendan (particularly in the *Navigatio*) is the island geography that forms the Voyage of Brendan is actually real topography. Supporting evidence suggests the exploration of the north Atlantic by Irish Clerics who settled religious lives here (Alonzi et al, 2018 pp. 16), until displacement by Viking arrival (Jennings, 1998, pp. 39). The Island of Sheep (Moran, 1893, pp. 4) and the Paradisial Birds are located beside each other may be an interpretation the Faroes Island, reflected by archaeological hybridity amongst early Irish and Scandinavian settlers (Hansen & Sheehan, 2006, pp. 50). Similarly, the above-mentioned crystal pillar (Moran, 1893, pp. 12) may be an identified north Atlantic iceberg (Mackley, 2008, pp. 2-3, displaying the distance travelled and nautical skill of the Brendan and company. The island of demons and smiths who hurl blackened objects at the monks (Moran, 1893, pp. 12) may also represent a volcanic eruption in Iceland (Kendrick & Lavalley, 2016, pp. 4), which would align with the description of the land of the midnight sun ideology in the *Navigatio*. The maritime landscapes ascribed in St. Brendan's voyage attest to a possible reality, however, one popular misconception is the claim that Brendan's Paradise was in North America, instead his journey to Paradise is still a highly symbolic narrative weaving of reality, and Celtic-Christian theology (Johnson, 2019, pp. 42). St. Brendan's experience and journey through the landscape becomes a cornerstone of the appeal of his narrative, instilling a sense of adventure in the reader. The more palatable interpretation of the Voyage of St. Brendan and the landscape is it was based on maritime experiences of the Brendan and the Irish clergy, who engaged with religious ideology to revere a real figure against an otherworldly, and divine context that would become symbolic and significant in places where the voyage was supposed to launch and return (e.g., the NW Irish coast).

Monastic Landscapes

The early descriptions in the *Navigatio* represent a monastic text and narrative in a broad interpretation. That is to say, it is an ecclesiastical product, focused on monastic life and structure. The text begins with the visit of Barinthus to St. Brendan's monastery in Clonfert, afterwards, Barinthus describes the scattered monastic cells yet united faith of the monks (Moran, 1893, pp. 1). Moreover, these small monastic cells are confirmed by the archaeological record (Marron, 2018, pp. 114), which suggests the reader is presented with a realistic portrayal of the early medieval life of Irish Christians and monks. The monks and St. Brendan are all the heroes and the *Navigatio* reinforces the sustained landscapes of monastic life. As is displayed, there is a direct and powerful engagement between St. Brendan and his community at Clonfert, this is a real monastery, that contrasts with their visit to Ailbe monastery that are metaphysical idealisations of their structure

and engagement with faith (Moran, 1893, pp. 11). St. Brendan, on his Voyage visit, the monastic community of Ailbe, who's monks are eternal and live in equilibrium with God. The monks may possess immortal life, but their existence is humble, grounded in a simple lifestyle alongside a vow of silence. Even in their otherworldly and divine closeness to God, these monks live in an individual cell, similar to Clonfert monastery (Johnson, 2019, pp. 43). Furthermore, throughout the *Navigatio and Vita* Brendan's role as an abbot, and father to his fellow monks is accentuated. St. Brendan is referred to as the holy father, venerable or elder in his role (Moran, 1893, pp. 2-3; *Life of Brendan*, 1922, pp. 62). He has a watchful gaze over his monks protecting them when in danger and guiding them in divine liturgy and vernacular. When St. Brendan returns to Ireland, the monks left in Clonfert praise God, as their guiding father whom they love has returned. These literary descriptions paint a positive and attractive image of Brendan, while it is certainly heavily idealised, it does reveal the praise and respect St. Brendan had instilled and how affectionately he was perceived in early medieval Ireland. The landscapes in the *Navigatio and Vita* are liturgical, a mimesis of the monastic nature of the text. The monks' days are structured by daily canonical readings and recitation of psalms on the curraghs. The broader narrative is shaped around the celebration of the liturgical year, amalgamating at Easter, one of the most important feast days in the Christian Calendar (Grosu, 2017, pp. 8;11). The cycle is repeated over the seven-years of voyage and further enforced by cyclical visits to the same locations (Doan, 2000, pp. 81). The importance of the liturgy is the emphasis of the celebration of Easter, when the birds of paradise sing and the monks chant psalms performing a full day of monastic prayer. The memorable tales of St. Brendan's celebrations of Easter, take place on the Isle of Sheep and the back of *Iasconius* the befriended sea creature once considered a whale by contemporary scholars (Loughlin, 2022, pp. 215). These examples illustrate the monastic and liturgical day as actualised and physical parts of the landscape presenting the reader with an externalisation of monastic life in North Atlantic locations (Johnson, 2019;). Furthermore, one unusual aspect is *Iasconius*, who may be a reference to Jonah's whale or a symbolic display. *Iasconius* as he aids the monks and St. Brendan represents a true, unfallen nature (Grosu, 2017, pp. 13), where even the creatures of the vast (and endless) ocean are considered in God's divine plan, his presence indicates a deeper narrative compulsion towards the guiding divine hand of God.

Liminal Landscape

Johnson (2019) stipulates that there is another landscape in the *Navigatio* and to a lesser extent in the *Vita*, being those of 'liminal landscapes' (Johnson, 2019, pp. 45) which she ascribes as those containing supernatural or religious elements alongside a level of surface realism. In the *Tales of St. Brendan*, these liminal states are used to display the movement of the St. Brendan and the monks from one state of temporality or being to another. When St. Brendan first sees the birds of paradise, they are more than they initially appear, one of them flies to Brendan with the wings producing the sound of a handbell, an echo of the monastic summons to prayer (Willmott & Daubney, 2019, pp. 3-4). The talking bird narrates to Brendan that the birds are the souls of beings who were captured in the Fall of Lucifer from Heaven, nevertheless they do not share or bare the weight of his sin (Maron, 1893, pp. 5). These birds are spirits of the landscape, embodied into the elements of air, earth, and sky and suffer not under God's power, moreover, on Easter and other holy days they emerge as birds. These pseudo-angelic birds are representative of a merciful God, but Irish traditions of 'bird people' (Slavin, 2010, pp. 1) and their association with the melding reality and the otherworld. Furthermore, the release of Judas Iscariot from hell to be bound to a rock in the ocean on Holy days (Mackley, 2010a, pp. 1-2), mirrors a level of liminality shown in the birds, this movement of Judas from Hell to the physical plane of Earth, dispenses theological reality through their actualisation upon the landscape (Suhirman, 2014, pp. 8). The most obvious example of a liminal landscape is the journey from the reality of Clonfert, into the otherworldly Promised land of the Saints, where the seascape is imbued with its own agency for engaging St. Brendan and the monks with the world. The Promised Land of the Saints is described as an earthly paradise, that discloses hefty connotations to the Kingdom of Heaven, and New Jerusalem alongside the salvation of the faithful on the coming of judgement day. St. Brendan's journey across literary texts, starts and finishes with a passage between worlds. The Journey begins from the real monastery of Clonfert to the distant and otherworldly Promised Land of the Saints. The use of fog as St. Brendan approaches the Isle of paradise stipulates a transformational state, and the passing of the voyagers from one state to another. They move from the intangible and obscured (within the fog) to the tangible and visible (the island), representative of God's power and the symbolic landscape within St. Brendan's voyage.



Fig. 3 - (TheStampCentre, 1994) – A modern day Faroese stamp depicting St. Brendan and his monks landing in the Faroe Islands (top). The passing of the Brendan and monks across the volcanic islands with songbird approaching (lower).

Prophetic Landscape (Apocalyptic or Divine)

The liminal state of the landscape coalesces well with the idea of apocalyptic or divine landscapes, as the liminal blurs the boundaries between reality and theological imagination. The appearance of Heavenly Jerusalem, cited in the Book of Revelations (The Holy Bible: Book of Revelation, 21:9-22-5), the final book in the Christian biblical sagas shares many similarities with St. Brendan's Island. In fact, the cohesion of this biblical text is the prophetic end of time and space, as we as mortals can understand it. This conceptualised the idea of a new heaven and earth with a New Jerusalem at its centre, may have formed a basis for the materialised paradise of St. Brendan's Island (Søndergaard, 2014, pp.3). Moreover, the usage of the Kingdom of Heaven has powerful imagery and connotations for the Christians who are reading about the life and exploits of St. Brendan. Thus, the reimagined landscape of New Jerusalem may be applied on an Island landscape within St. Brendan's voyage, a liminal journey to a divine place. In examining a prophetic landscape, the use of light is an important component. In Revelations, the New Jerusalem shines with the light of God (The Holy Bible: Book of Revelations, 22:5), and the Promised Land of the Saints, whose light is provided by Jesus (Maron, 1893, pp. 15-16). The removal of earthly phenomena such as the moon and sun as providers of chronology, suggest St. Brendan has moved to an otherworld, beyond the need for corporeal time (Selling, 1998, pp. 293). Furthermore, in the Promised Land of the Saints, each plant is eternally flowering, and each tree is perpetually fruiting revealing to Brendan that it consistently occurs there. This possesses parallels to the Tree of Life, which bears fruit year-round, resembling the perfection of the Garden of Eden as a primordial pursuit of St. Brendan's voyage. When on the Promised Land of the Saints a river divides two parts of the Island, St. Brendan remarks that they are not permitted to cross the river yet, and so a taste of a heavenly kingdom is all that is permitted until the days of final judgement (The Holy Bible: Book of Revelations, 22:2). Indicative of an allegorical narrative that until the judgement days the Followers of Christ will not be able to enter New Jerusalem (or Earthly Paradise). However, even from beginning of their journeys the monks are told by Brendan: *'Your lives here (at Clenfort) are the very portals of paradise, and lies not far away from the island, called the Land of Promise of the Saints'* (Maron, 1893, pp. 2), suggesting that this isle of paradise is not necessarily a form of reality but a place obtainable through a (romanticised) monastic adventure of faith, belief and perseverance in the eyes of a Christian God.

The sea and islands

The sea is an often-overlooked symbolic landscape in the tales of St. Brendan, water is both a symbol of purification and earthly life, it is a space that must be crossed on one's way towards their heavenly home (Mackley, 2010a, pp. 5). The sea throws storms and physical challenges to the voyage, and perseverance and knowledge is required to know the correct route. While a calm and passive sea is the endurance of time and patience, these varying responses to the landscape reflect the ordeal and pseudo-superhuman feat of obtaining sainthood (Grosu, 2017, pp.10). Water is a liminal space, it is a means of traveling to the otherworld, and earthly paradises, however, the sea is a barrier that restricts and commands one's movements. In St. Brendan's tale the sea dictates their perceptions of the world and requires that they build a curragh worthy of the task. The monks and St. Brendan must observe its undulating chaotic movements and Island formations to survive a seven-year long voyage. Stories like that of St. Brendan are liminal themselves and amalgamate the sea as a living extension of the divine (God) and through engagement with a vast portal to otherworld's, they entrust

themselves to God's judgement and journey. Moreover, the Islands encountered by St. Brendan are portals to plains of divine, demonic, or neutral ideals, this variety of encounters informs the reader of the danger and the conceptual fantasy-beyond the normal journey. It is similar to the death as a barrier, like oceans, rivers, and lakes from Norse mythology, in which Islands aid in a metaphysical bridging of this gap (Heide, 2014, pp.64).

Conclusion:

This essay has aimed to elucidate the vital importance of the landscape, both physical and metaphysical in the life of St. Brendan. The literary traditions of the Irish (post-Christian) *immrama* and (pre-Christian) *echtra* were no doubt influential in the formation and popularity of the Navigatio, Vita and Middle-Dutch versions of St. Brendan's story. St. Brendan is by no means a miracle worker like other saints, but he is a twofold masterful sailor and man of unshaken faith. The story of St. Brendan is a tale of adventure, overcoming adversity through belief and faith in a higher power, while encountering otherworldly phenomena and beings. Moreover, the tales of St. Brendan while seemingly fantastical are likely based on the adventures of Irish monks to distant islands in search of a more intimate relationship with God. The story of St. Brendan amalgamates these features and embraces the hybridisation of real and imaginary landscape to form places that become believable. With a clever use of narrative, particularly in the Navigatio it distorts the boundaries of nautical adventure inspiring many later works, and thoughts on what may lie to the far west of the North Atlantic. St. Brendan is depicted as a noble and heroic figure, like the heroes of old Irish folklore, and the tales of him unify a Celtic-Christian narrative that has perpetuated popular culture. The traditions embodied by St. Brendan are multifaceted in their engagement with the landscape and may act as both a fantastical tale, but also as a guiding voyage to those that would sail west for tangible and intangible spiritual mediation.

Reference:

Hughes, K. (1954), The Historical Value of the Lives of St. Finnian of Clonard, The English Historical Review, Vol. 69, No. 272, pp. 353-372, Published by: Oxford University Press, Url: https://www-istor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/pdf/555042.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A75f9e7107c0dd41ffdab4f311007ca1d&ab_segment_s=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1, Accessed online: 22/04/23

Symons, D. (2022), The Voyage of St. Brendan Began European Interest in North America: Relevance to Oak Island, Now that Season Nine of The Curse of Oak Island is Drawing to a Close, Oak Island and Vikings, pp. 1-11, Published by: Acadia University, Url: <https://psychology.acadiau.ca/files/sites/psychology/resources/pdfs/St.%20Brendan%20Oak%20Island%20Symons%202022.pdf>, Accessed online: 22/04/23

Giesbrecht, J. (2018), CELTIC CHRISTIANITY IN IRELAND: THE QUEST FOR THE SPIRIT OF CELTIC CHRISTIANITY, Faculty of Biblical and Theological Studies, pp. 1-78, Published by: Canadian Mennonite University, Url: https://www.academia.edu/43797839/Celtic_Christianity_in_Ireland_The_Quest_for_the_Spirit_of_Celtic_Christianity_BA_Honours_Thesis, Accessed online: 24/04/23

Mathuna, S.M. (2006), The Brendan Legend, The Irish Life of Saint Brendan: Textual History, Structure and Date, The Northern World, Vol. 24, pp. 117-158, Published by: Brill, url: https://brill.com/display/book/edcoll/9789047410256/B9789047410256_s008.xml, Accessed online: 22/04/23

Moran, P.F. (1893), Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis [the Voyage of St Brendan the Abbot], Translated by O'Donoghue, pp. 1-16, Published by: O'Donoghue, D. & Brendiana, Url: <https://markjerry.blogs.com/StBrendan.pdf>, Accessed online: 22/04/23

The Life of Saint Columba, (2012), THE LIFE OF SAINT COLUMBA, ABBOT AND APOSTLE OF THE NORTHERN PICTS AND PATRON OF THE MONASTIC ORDER IN IRELAND, Translated by: Murphy, J. Published by: Project Gutenberg, Url: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38682/38682-h/38682-h.htm>, Accessed online: 22/04/23

Adamnan, St. (1922), THE LIFE OF SAINT COLUMBA(COLUMB-KILLE) A.D. 521-597 Founder of the Monastery of Iona and First Christian Missionary to the Pagan Tribes of North Britain by Saint Adamnan A.D. 679-704, Translated with Notes and Illustrations by: Wenworth, H. pp. 1-255, Published by: George Routledge & Sons Limited, London, Url: <https://cristoraul.org/ENGLISH/readinghall/pdf-library/Biographies/521-597-Saint-Columba.pdf>, Accessed online: 22/04/23

Kelly, M. (1856), calendar of Irish saints, the martyrology of Tallagh, with notices of the patron saints of Ireland, and select poems and hymns, pp. 1-189, Published by: J. Mullany 1st Parliament Street, Dublin, Url: [https://codecs.vanhamel.nl/Kelly_\(Matthew\)_1857a](https://codecs.vanhamel.nl/Kelly_(Matthew)_1857a), Accessed online: 22/04/23

Riain, P.O. (1993), Anglo-Saxon Ireland: the evidence of the Martyrology of Tallaght, Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures, Vol. 3, pp. 1-22, Published by: University of Cambridge, Url: <https://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/publications/Chadwick/HMC%20Vol%203%201992%20%C3%93%20Riain.pdf>, accessed online: 22/04/23

Korandey, F. (2015), The Vita Sancti Brendani in the Russian National Library, A LATIN MANUSCRIPT OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY, pp. 117- 127, Published by: Tyumen State University, Russia, Url: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/942497/0711.pdf, Accessed online: 22/04/23

F, J.E. (2000), The Voyage of St. Br age of St. Brendan: Celtic Other Brendan: Celtic Otherworld T world Tale, Christian ale, Christian Apologia, or Medieval Apologia, or Medieval Travelog? Associação Brasileira de Estudos Irlandeses, Newsletter, Vol. 2, pp.79-85, Published by: ABEI, url: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1150&context=shss_facarticles, Accessed online: 22/04/23

Johnston, E. (2019), THE VOYAGE OF ST BRENDAN LANDSCAPE AND PARADISE IN EARLY MEDIEVAL, Brathair: Celtic and Germanic Study Group, Vo. 19, No. 2, pp. 35-51, Published by: Brathair & UCD Dublin, Url: <https://ppg.revistas.uema.br/index.php/brathair/article/download/2071/1531/5664>, Accessed online:22/04/23

De reis van Sint Brandaan, (2012), De reis van Sint Brandaan literaire klassieken - reeks middeleeuwen, Dutch foundation for literature, Translation into Dutch by: Wilmink, W. pp. 1-47, Published by: Nederlands letterenfonds, url: https://bulkboek.online/bulkboek.online/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2-Online_Sint-Brandaan_2020.pdf, Accessed online: 22/04/23

Dunn, J. (1921), The Brendan Problem, The Catholic Historical Review, Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 395-477, Published by: Catholic university of America Press, Url: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25011716.pdf>, Accessed online: 22/04/23

Rollason, D. (2004), Reviewed Work: Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West by Alan T. Thacker and Richard Sharp, The English Historical Review, Vol. 119, No. 481, pp. 434-436, Published by: Oxford University Press, Url: [https://www.jstor-
org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/pdf/3490241.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A8d26a5bbccda173dbcea2d9bc425bf5b&ab_segmen
ts=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1](https://www.jstor-
org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/pdf/3490241.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A8d26a5bbccda173dbcea2d9bc425bf5b&ab_segmen
ts=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1), Accessed online: 22/04/23

Cadw, (2011), Cadw: Pan-Wales heritage interpretation plan Celtic saints, spiritual places and pilgrimage, Cymynrodd y Seintiau Celtaidd: The Legacy of the Celtic Saints, Interpretation plan Prepared by Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants, Red Kite Environment and Creu-ad, pp. 1-80, Published by: CADW, Url: https://cadw.gov.wales/sites/default/files/2019-04/InterpplanCelticSaints_EN.pdf, Accessed online: 22/04/23

Yoko, H. (1997), The promised land of the Saints in the Navigatio Sancti Brendani, 藝文研究, The geibun-kenkyu : journal of arts and letters, Vol. 73, pp.48-47, Published by: Keio Associated Repository of Academic Resources, Url; <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/145765955.pdf>, accessed online: 23/04/23

Talbot-Crosbie, B. (1911), Tobar na Molt, Kerry Archaeological Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 7, pp.421-436, Published by: Kerry Archaeological Magazine & Jstor, Url: [https://www.jstor-
org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/pdf/30059659.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Af0ddfe5e5e167c5409ed4fff08599acd&ab_segmen
ts=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1](https://www.jstor-
org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/pdf/30059659.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Af0ddfe5e5e167c5409ed4fff08599acd&ab_segmen
ts=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1), Accessed online: 23/04/23

Life of Brendan, (1922), Bethada Naem Nerenn, Lives of Irish Saints: Brendan of Clonfert, Edited from the Original MSS. With introduction, Translations, Notes, Glossary, Indexes by: Plummer, C. Vol. 2, pp. 44-92, Published by: Oxford University Press, Url: <https://archive.org/details/bethada02plumuoft/page/n5/mode/2up>, accessed online: 23/04/23

Kenney, J.F. (1920), The Legend of St. Brendan, Presented by DR. A.G. Doughty F.F.S.C. (Read May Meeting), pp. 1-13, Published by: Aughty.org [Online], Url: http://www.aughty.org/pdf/legend_st_brendan.pdf, Accessed online: 23/04/23

Stifter, D. (2006), Brendaniana, etc. KF, Vol. 1, pp. 191-214, Published by: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft Universität Wien, Url: https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/13014/1/DS_brendaniana.pdf, accessed online: 23/04/23

Radosav, D. (2017), PHILOBIBLON, Transylvanian Journal Of Multidisciplinary Research in the Humanities, Editorial, Vol.22, No. 1, pp. 1-18, Published by: PHILOBIBLON, Url: file:///C:/Users/Matth/Downloads/NAVIGATIO_SANCTI_BRENDANI_ABBATIS_ALLEGO.pdf, Accessed online: 23/04/23

Tracy, R. (2002), All them Rocks in the Sea: "Ulysses as Immram", *Irish University Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 225-241, Published by: Edinburgh University Press, Url: [https://www.jstor-](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3009682)

org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/pdf/25504906.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A5da847a2c7596cfcd1c7994116145754&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1, Accessed online: 24/04/23

Jones, S.E. (2008), The Biblical Meaning of Numbers from One to Forty, companion to The Genesis Book of Psalms, pp. 1-41, Published by: God's Kingdom Ministries, Url: <https://pdf4pro.com/cdn/the-biblical-meaning-of-numbers-from-one-to-forty-124a16.pdf>, accessed online: 24/04/23

Grosu, E. (2017), Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis: Allegory of the Characters, PHILOBIBLON Transylvanian Journal Of Multidisciplinary Research in the Humanities, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 7-18, Published by: Philobiblon, Romania Url: <https://www.philobiblon.ro/en/article/navigatio-sancti-brendani-abbatis-allegory-characters>, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Slavin, B. (2010), The Irish Birdman, "The Irish Birdman: Kingship and Liminality in Buile Suibhne", pp. 1-17, published by: Academia.Edu, Url: https://www.academia.edu/2001320/The_Irish_Birdman, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Daly, D. (1904), The Legend of St. Brendan, The Celtic Review, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 135-147, Published by: Celtic Review Url: https://www-istor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/pdf/30069787.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A16dfc1eda398577ebfdc3056cbc9727e&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Mackley, J.S. (2010a), Some Celtic otherworld motifs in Brendan's Voyage to Paradise, International Medieval Congress (IMC), pp. 1-8, Published by: University of Leeds & Northampton, Url: <http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/4949/7/Mackley20104949.pdf>, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Mackley, J.S.(2010b), THE VOYAGE OF BRENDAN A ONE-DAY CONFERENCE SATURDAY 24 APRIL 2010 NORWICH CATHEDRAL HOSTRY, Kissing Heaven's Door The Judas episode in the Voyage of Brendan, pp. 1-17, Published by: University of Northampton, Url: <http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/5005/1/Brendan%20Norwich%20Paper%20Nectar%20Version.pdf>, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Suhrman, H. (2014), OF LIMINALITY: EXPERIENCING LANDSCAPE IN THE IN-BETWEEN Would un-familiar settings de-familiarise familiar activities? An investigation into that leap between thresholds, pp. 1-174, Published by: Lincoln University, New Zealand, Url: https://researcharchive.lincoln.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10182/6773/Suhrman_MLA_open.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Søndergaard, L. (2014), PARADISE (?) IN VERSIONS OF SAINT BRENDAN'S TRAVELS, Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, VO. 68, pp. 13-25, Published by: Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, url: https://riull.ull.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/915/4551/RCEI_68_%282014%29_01.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Selling, K. (1998), THE LOCUS OF THE SACRED IN THE CELTIC OTHERWORLD, Open journals: Library of Sydney, pp. 293-401, Published by: University of Sydney, Url: <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/SSR/article/view/12112/11257>, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Alonzi, E. (2018), Traveling Monastic Paths: Mobility and Religion in Medieval Ireland at Five Early and Late Medieval Irish Monasteries, pp.1-169, Published by: Arizona State University, Url: https://keep.lib.asu.edu/flysystem/fedora/c7/195066/Alonzi_asu_0010E_17930.pdf, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Jennings, A. (1998), Iona and the Vikings: survival and continuity, Northern Studies, Vol. 33, pp. 37-54, Published by: Scottish Society for Northern Studies, url: https://www.ssns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Jennings_1998_Vol_33_pp_37_54.pdf, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Hansen, S.S. Sheehan, J. (2006), The Leirvík "Bønhústoftin" and the Early Christianity of the Faroe Islands, and beyond, Archaeologia Islandica, Vol. 5, pp. 27-54, Published by: National Museum of the Faroe Island & University College Cork Ireland, Url: https://fornleifur.blog.is/users/5c/fornleifur/files/stumann_hansen_sheehan_2006_18236.pdf, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Mackley, J.S. (2008), Disguising natural exotica: St Brendan's travels to 'Iceland', Paper Presented to: International Medieval Conference, University of Leeds 07-10 July 2008, pp. 1-10, Published by: University of Northampton, Url: <https://pure.northampton.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/208460/Mackley20085018.pdf>, accessed online: 25/04/23

Kendrick, J. Lavalley, Y. (2016), Volcanic and Magmatic Studies Group, Dec 2016 Newsletter, No. 33, pp. 1-4, Published by: VMMSG.org, Url: https://vmmsg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Newsletter_December_2016.pdf, accessed online: 25/04/23

Marron, E. (2018), The communities of St Columbanus: Irish monasteries on the Continent? Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature, Vol. 118, pp. 95-122, Published by: Royal Irish Academy, Url: <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/10.3318/priac.2018.118.06>, accessed online: 25/04/23

Carragain, T.O. (2015), Is there an archaeology of lay people at early Irish monasteries? Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre | BUCEMA, No. 8, pp.1-19, Published by: OpenEdition Journals, url: <https://journals.openedition.org/cem/13620>, accessed online: 25/04/23.

Zebrun, C.K. (2015), Saints and the Animals that Served them, St. Brendan, pp. 15-20, Published by: Department of Christian Education, America, Url: <https://dce.oaca.org/assets/files/resources/Saints-Animals.pdf>, accessed online: 25/04/23

Willmott, H. Daubney, A. (2019), Of Saints, Sows or Smiths? Copper-Brazed Iron Handbells in Early Medieval England, Archaeological Journal, Vol. 177, No. 1, pp. 336-355, Published by: University of Sheffield, Url: <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/141877/1/Of%20saints%20sows%20or%20smiths%20post%20referee.pdf>, Accessed online: 25/04/23

The Holy Bible: The Revelations to John, 1:22, New International Version (1978), Published by: Biblica, Url: <https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~rfrey/PDF/166/Judaism%20Christianity/166%20Book%20of%20Revelation.pdf>, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Heide, E. (2014), Isolated Islands in Medieval Nature, Culture and Mind eds. Jaritz, G. and Jørgensen, T., Holy islands and the otherworld: places beyond water, pp. 57-80, Published by: CEU Medievala Url: https://www.academia.edu/2401059/Holy_islands_and_the_otherworld_places_beyond_water, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Image References:

Fig. 1 - Joris, R. (2014), Irish Hagiographical Lives in the Twelfth Century: Church Reform before the Anglo-Norman Invasion, Published by: Medievalists.net, Url: <https://www.medievalists.net/2014/09/irish-hagiographical-lives-twelfth-century-church-reform-anglo-norman-invasion/>, Accessed online: 25/04/23

Fig. 2 – VictorianWeb, (2004), St. Brendan by Edward Reginald Frampton (1872-1903). 1908. Oil on canvas, 137 x 183 cm, Published by: Victorianweb.org, url: <https://victorianweb.org/painting/frampton/paintings/2.html>, accessed online: 25/04/23

Fig. 3 – TheStampCentre, (1994), Faroe Islands 1994 Europa - St Brendan, u/m SG253-4+MS255, Published by: Stamp Centre, Url: <https://thestampcentre.co.uk/products/1994-europa-st-brendan-u-m-sg253-4-ms255>, Accessed online: 25/04/23