

Sant Brandon Legend

The Brendan problem

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There are some who have gone so far as to deny that St. Brendan ever existed, but the majority of his biographers have regarded him as an historical personage. As nearly as can be determined, he was born in or about the year 484—though some of the old Irish annals deviate considerably from this date—and, consequently, he was a contemporary of some of the other great saints of Ireland. [1] His pedigree is variously given in several manuscripts, though in the main the different accounts agree. The version in the Book of Leinster, [2] for example, is as follows : “ Brendan, the Apostle, son of Finding, son of Elchu, son of Alta, son of Ogaman, son of Fidchuire, son of Delmna, son of Enna, son of Fualascach, son of Astoman, son of Mogaed, who is called Ciar, son of Fergus, son of Ros.”

Thus his father’s name was Findlug ; his mother was called Cara, [3] and he had a brother, Domanigin, [4] who became Bishop of Tuaim Muscraighe. But, next to himself, the best known member of the family was his sister, Brig, who is commemorated on the 7th of January : “ Quam intime diligebat, quia, etsi natura sanguinis reddebat eam carani, gratie tum illustracio faciebat cariorem”—“ whom he loved dearly because, even though the connection of blood made her dear to him, the brightness of her grace rendered her even dearer.” [5]

Not only was Brendan descended from the kings of Ireland, but he is even, in some texts, called “ King of Ciarraige (Kerry) Luachra.” In a French translation of the life of St. Fursey [6] it is stated that King Findlug reigned in Munster and that Brendan was one of the other kings of Ireland. There can be no doubt that Brendan was a Kerryman, though Rodulfus Glaber, [7] who wrote about the year 1048, would make out “ Bendanus,” as he calls him, to have been an East Anglian, “ orientaliū videlicet Anglorum,” probably through confusion with Brendan’s nephew, Fursey, who, as is well known, was connected with East Anglia. The Annals of Boyle state that our saint was born in Connaught, and in an Anglo-Norman poem on St. Moduenna he is said to have been “ . . . un clerc vaillant esteit en Escose vivant.” [8] Thomas Dempster also, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Scotorum*, quotes authors to prove that Brendan was a Scotchman. In a life in Italian prose (*Codex Magliabechiano*, 14th century), we read : “ San Brandano, figliuolo di Silocchia che fu di Scotia oltr’alle parti di Spagna,” where Scotia, as usual in those days, means Ireland. Washington Irving, too, misled by this, informs us that St. Brendan was a Scotch monk. Nor can there be any doubt that the cradle of the saint was at Alltraighe Caille, on the western coast of Ireland, not far from Tralee. As far back as the time of St. Patrick his coming was foretold. In the Tripartite Life of that Saint [9] it is said that the apostle did not visit West Munster, but that, instead, he prophesied that, 120 years after his death, St. Brendan would be born into the eternal life. His future greatness was also foretold by Bec Mac Dé, the celebrated prophet. The following legend is recorded in several manuscripts : [10] “ The mother of Brendan had a vision, that an ingot of gold fell into her bosom, and that her breasts were aflame [alias, shining like snow]. Findlug related that vision to his soul-friend (as the Irish called a father confessor). Bishop Erc, who interpreted the dream to mean that a marvelous child would be born of the woman who beheld that vision. The Bishop himself had a dream of a glow of fire, and it was full of angels from heaven to the ground. On the morrow he went to Finding’s house and took the boy into his arms, and bestowed his protection upon him. That was the night whereon Bec

Mac Dé, the prophet, chanced to be in the house of the king of Ciarraige Luachra, and the king asked him, ‘ What seest thou for us tonight, O Bec ? ’ ‘ I see that thy king is born between thee in the west and the sea. ’ ‘ Truly, ’ saith the king, ‘ we know of no free race between us and the sea that would have a right to reign over us. ’ Bec replied, ‘ The son that is born to Finding this night will be thy king forever. ’ ” [11]

On the night of Brendan’s birth strange things happened in the realm of Finding, his father. A homely passage in the Lismore Life is worth translating : “ A certain wealthy man dwelt in a residence far from Finding’s house ; Airde, son of Fidach, was his name. In that night of Brendan’s birth thirty cows brought forth thirty calves at Airde son of Fidach’s. Thereafter, early on the morrow, Airde arose and kept asking for the house in which the little child had been born, and he found Finding’s house and the babe therein, and he knelt devoutly in his presence and offered him the thirty cows with their thirty calves, and that was the first alms that Brendan received.”

One of the Latin lives of the saint begins in the following poetic manner : “ There was a man of venerable life, Brendan by name, who, like the glowing dawn, dispelled the darkness of sin from the hearts of many, and afforded an infallible guidance to the port of salvation for those who were wandering in the sea of vice.” [12] According to some of our sources, Brendan was baptized at what is now called Tubber na molt, “ the wedders’ well,” in the townland of Tubrid, not far from Ardfert. According to the life of St, Kiaran, [13] Mobhi was the first name given to the boy by his parents,

fair his face ;
A youth hostful, seeking, slender.
He was a help to the men of Erin.

Thereafter he was called Braon-find, “ White-shower,” with reference, the glossator opines, either to the waters of baptism, or to his fair body, or to the rain which flooded the tract of land near his birthplace ; and it is by this name, modernized as Brendan, the generally accepted form, that he has been known to history and fable. The indeclinable Irish word Brenaind is probably the oldest form of the name and is composed of *brén*, “ fetidus,” and *find*, “ capillus,” or it may be borrowed from the Old Welsh *brenhin*, “ a king,” contracted from *bre-en-hin*. [14] The name is found in Irish documents in a variety of spellings, such as Brenann, Brenand, Brenund, Brenunn, Brenain, Brendain, Brenaind. These were probably originally only forms of a pet name, Bréndán, which in the course of time became shortened to Bréndan, Brénden, until finally it came to be pronounced as it is today, Bren’n, unless when the pronunciation is made to conform to the spelling. From Brendan come the forms found in Latin documents, of which, in the oldest period, Brendinus and Brendenus are commoner than the more frequently occurring Brendanus. In the Romance and Teutonic languages the name has taken on a great variety of forms, such as, among others, Brandanies, Brandans, Brenoin, Brandan, Brandain, Brandano, Blandin, Borodon, Morodon. The medieval attempts to explain the word from *broen-* (or *braon-*) *find*, as above, or from *broen-dian*, “ swift rain,” are all erroneous, as is also its apparent connection with *bran*, “ a raven.” [15] In an old Irish poem [16] our saint is invoked as “ Brenuinn breo betha buadhaig,” “ Brendan, flame of a victorious world,” where we perceive another conjecture as to the meaning of the word. In the Old French Roman de Bouduin de Sebourc, Brendan is said to have got his name from the *brandons*, or firebrands, which the devils saw him cast at them when he came near to hell :

Et fu si près d’enfer, che est chertain et clair,
Que de brandons le virent li deable geter,
Et pour che le poet-on saint Brandon appeler.

He is often called “Brendan of Clúain Ferta,” from the name of the cloister which he founded in County Galway, and “Brendenus Mocu Alti,” from the name of his great-grandfather, Alta. In some versions, the latter name is debased to Mac Cualte (Cualti) and Mac Uilte. [17]

Because of his holiness and zeal, large numbers of students and pilgrims came to listen to Brendan and many of them remained with him that they might be under his spiritual guidance. In the life of St. Senan, it is told how a ship touched at Inishcarra, having on board fifty men, Romans by birth or subject to the laws of Rome. These religious had heard of the reputation which Ireland enjoyed for learning and sanctity, and they desired to perfect themselves in scriptural knowledge and to lead lives of stricter observance. They were divided into five bands of ten persons each, and had agreed among themselves that each group should in turn assume the control of the vessel. Each band was destined to place itself under the direction of one of the great masters whose fame they had previously heard of, one of whom was St. Brendan. He became the founder of many monasteries, “And there he ladde a full straye and holy lyfe in grete penaunce and abstynence and he governed his monkes ful vertuously.” [18] St. Gildas, of Wales, whom he visited, called him “Pater Laboriosus.” [19] He founded a monastery called Enach-duin, not far from the shore, in Lough Corrib, County Galway, whither he had retired for rest after his voyage or voyages in search of the Land of Promise. But his greatest establishments were at Ardfert, County Kerry, and the school of Clonfert, which he founded about the year 557 and where, including probably its scattered branches, he is said to have ruled over 3,000 students. Hence ever afterwards Clonfert has been called Clúain-ferta-Brenainn, in the native annals. In the Martyrology, the founder and legislator of the monastery is called “Brenaind colín a eltae,” “Brendan with the multitude of his flocks,” the reference being, it is likely, to the number of his followers. In the Annals of Tigernach, [20] under the year 557, is a quatrain in Old Irish which commemorates the foundation of the church of Clonfert. It begins :

O gabais mac úi hEilta
Brenaind

“Since the great-grandson of Alta, Brendan, with all his perfections, took it [Clonfert], if it be not the better for it, it is not the worse, from that time to this.” Brendan was an abbot, not a bishop, though in some of the versions he is given the title of bishop.

One of Brendan’s many strange undertakings was his visit to hell, to bring back the soul of his mother. [21] There is even a purgatory named after him. Belief in its existence is expressed, for example, in the following tetrastich by Alexander Necham :

Asserit esse Locum solennis Fama dicatum
Brendano, quo lux lucida saepe micat
Purgandas animas, datur hie transire per ignes,
Ut dignae facie iudicis esse queant,

which has been quaintly Englished as follows:

To Brandan sacred, as Tradition says.
There stands a Place, where trembling Lightning plays ;
Hence to be purg’d. Souls pass the cleansing Flame,
To fit them for the Test of Judge supreme. [22]

Brendan is commemorated in countless other ancient documents. In the Martyrology of Tallaght, [23] May 16, Marianus O’Gorman, writes of “Brendan, without a particle of pride,” and Selbhach, in his metrical hst of the Saints of Inisfail, praises :

Brendan, son of fair Findlug,
And Mochuda, son of Findall,
A holy pair with penitential countenances.
Of the race of Ciar, son of Fergus.

But naturally most of the legends connected with Brendan's name relate to his wonderful voyage, or to events the scene of which is laid near by the sea. Even from the beginning he seems to have acquired a reputation for his roaming propensity, and there are innumerable references to it in Irish hagiology. In the Latin "Legenda," it is said of him, "voluit scrutari partes et fines oceani," and, in the life of St. Carthage of Lismore, the birth of that saint was prophesied by an angel to St. Brendan, "qui inuenit terram repromissionis sanctorum." [24] In the life of Laisren, Brendan is described as "peregre proficiscens," "Brendan that journeyeth far from home." [25] Likewise, in the life of St. Flannanus, reference is made to the "mira que in insulis maris oceani viderat (sc. Brendanus) atque narraverat." [26] St. Brendan made a pact of fraternity with St. Albanus, and when the mariner returned from his seven years' pilgrimage on the sea, Albanus visited him. The two saints spent several days together in friendly converse [27] and Brendan related all the wonderful things he had seen on the ocean. One day St. Brendan's ship sank at the mouth of the Shannon, near Limerick, and the son of the king of Britain, who was on the prow of the ship, was drowned. Then did St. Brendan send some of his disciples for St. Ruadanus, who came at their call, and, by his prayers, raised the ship; the son of the king was found asleep in the ship with Ruadanus' hood around his head so as to not feel the water. [28] In the life from which this episode is taken, we learn that the holy abbot Brendan had a cell not far from the monastery of Ruadanus, in a place called "Tulach Brenaind," "Brendan's mound," and the bell of each was heard in the cell of the other. After some time Brendan said, "Ruadanus and I cannot live in the same place," and he departed and came to Connaught. In the life of St. David [29] is an extraordinary exploit attributed to Brendan. St. Bairre, on his way home from venerating the relics of SS. Peter and Paul, at Rome, visited the holy man, David, and, since there was no favoring wind to drive his ship, he asked his host to lend him the horse on which he was accustomed to ride when performing his ecclesiastical duties. Having received David's blessing, Bairre mounted the horse and entered the sea, presumably between what are now St. David's Head, in Wales, and Cork, in Ireland. After he had proceeded a considerable distance, he met St. Brendan, "super marinum cetum miram ducebat vitam," "leading a wonderful life on the back of a sea animal." St. Brendan seeing the man riding on the sea, was astonished, and exclaimed, "The Lord is wonderful in his saints!" When the man on horseback came near, the two saints saluted each other, and Bairre explained how he came to be making use of a horse as a ship. When they had conversed for some time, Brendan said, "Go in peace, I will come to see David," and the two holy men parted company. This Bairre is undoubtedly St. Finnbarr, Patron of Cork, and it is not impossible that the sea tale in his case was suggested by the words which compose his name, *find* meaning 'white' and *barr* meaning 'head,' which were understood to refer to the white-caps of the sea. The same idea is expressed by reversing the order of the words, giving *barr-find*, of which the name Barintus, which is found in Latin documents and was originally the name of a sea-god, may be simply a latinization. Consequently when Geoffrey of Monmouth represents Barintus as a pilot steering the ship in which the wounded Arthur and Taliessin are conveyed to the Fortunate Isles, he was probably only borrowing the name from some Celtic legends which he had read connected with the voyage of Saint Brendan, According to some sources, this Barintus, or another of the same name, of whom we shall have occasion to speak later, was a relative of Brendan. [30]

Though a Kerryman, the long low island of Inchiquin in Lough Corrib, County Galway, seems to have been Brendan's favorite place of abode when he was not on the ocean. Many legends are told of his sojourn in that place. One is of a monk who, during a quarrel between the brothers, was struck on the head and died of the wound. When Brendan saw the monk lying lifeless on the ground, he called him, and the dead man arose and approached, carrying

the iron weapon with which he had been slain still sticking in his head. The saint asked him whether he desired to remain alive or to pass away to heaven, and he at once chose the latter. The scene of this miracle is still called, in Irish, “Leaba an tuillchinn,” or, in Latin, “lectus perforati capitis.”

At Annadown (Enach-duin) within sight of Inchiquin was the nunnery or Brig, Brendan’s sister, of which she, who also became a saint, was abbess, and, with her, Brendan breathed his last. Early one morning St. Columcille, though far away in Iona, saw the soul of Brendan conveyed to heaven by a chorus of angels, and he summoned his servant Diormicius and said, “Hodie enim natalis est sancti Brendani dies,” [31] and gave orders to have a solemn Mass celebrated in his honor : “As Christ told His disciples of the sleep of Lazarus, so did St. Columcille foretell to his disciples the death of the holy Brendan.” [32] Brendan’s death is also recorded in these words in the Annals of the Four Masters : “Ascensio Brenaind in curru suo in aerem,” and by the annalist Tigernach as follows : “Quies Brendain abbatis Cluainferta, die XVI Maii, aetatis sui 94.” In Féilire Oengusso (*The Martyrology of Oengus*), under May 16, is chronicled : “Togainn Brénainn Chluana,” “The calling of Brendan of Cluain into the everlasting, victorious Kingdom.” According to others, Brendan was in his ninety-sixth year when the end came—the sea foam he had breathed on his voyages may help to explain his extreme old age. He is commemorated in the Calendar on May 16, and the year of his death is generally given as 576, though the authorities differ on this point. The Church has also consecrated the date of his “Egressio,” or first voyage, which was formerly celebrated on March 22 in Kerry. An Irish entry in a manuscript at Vienna, [33] in the handwriting of his celebrated countryman, Marianus Scottus, “Marianus the Irishman,” who was Abbot of Ratisbon, contains a tender testimony that in his day (A. D. 1079) the memory of Brendan was not forgotten by Irish missionaries and scholars residing on the continent : “Feil Brenain innocht for Dardain. A impede fordia indilgud do Muiredach tróg ;” “the feast of Brendan, this Thursday night (May 16, 1079). His intercession before God for forgiveness for poor Muiredach (Marianus).”

When Brendan felt that the end was at hand, he went to visit his sister. Among other things he taught her concerning the place of her resurrection. “Not here,” saith he to her, “shalt thou rise again, but in thine own land, even in Kerry. Therefore, go thou thither, for that people will gain the mercy of God by thy means. This is a place of men, not of women. Now is God calling me unto Himself out of the prison home of the body.” When she heard that, she was grievously saddened at his premonition of death and said, “Beloved father we shall all die at thy death. For which of us can live when thou art alive and absent, much less when thou art dead.” And Brendan saith, “On the third day hence, I shall go the way of my fathers.” Now that day was the Lord’s Day. Thereon, having made the sacrifice at the altar, he saith to them that stood by, “In your prayers, commend my going forth.” And Brig speaketh and saith, “Father, what fearest thou ?” “I fear,” said he, “I shall journey alone, that the way should be dark ; I fear the unknown region, the presence of the King, the sentence of the Judge.” After these things, he commanded the brethren to carry his body to the monastery of Clonfert secretly, lest, if they did it openly, it should be kept by them among whom they should pass. Then when he had kissed them all, one by one, he saith unto holy Briga, “Salute my friends on my behalf, and say unto them to beware of evil speaking even when it is true, how much the more when it is false.” When he had so spoken and foretold how some things would be in time to come, he passed into ever-lasting rest in the ninety-sixth year of his age. This beautiful and touching trait is found only in one manuscript. [34] The scribes of the other copies omitted it perhaps because they considered that such human shrinking was unworthy of a saint. Indeed, the writer of the Codex Salmanticensis has added in the margin alongside this passage, “nota de timore.”

The intense popularity enjoyed by the Brendan legend is shown by the wide range of places and persons stamped more or less consciously with, or influenced by, the name of its

hero, such an English, Brandon, Brenton ; German, Branden ; Italian, Brandano, Brentano ; Portuguese, Brandão. Our saint has many dedications in Scotland and has left his memory on the local nomenclature of some of the Western Islands. [35] In accordance with the legends which made him visit the Orkneys, the Hebrides and the Shetlands, he is sometimes commemorated as the “Apostle of the Scottish Isles,” “Sanctus Brandanus Abbas Apostolus Orcadum et Scoticarum insularum.” In the year 514, he is said to have founded a monastery “in regione Heth,” which has been identified with the island Tyree (Lat. Terra Heth), and a cloister, Ailech, but whether that place was in Scotland (Perthshire), or in Brittany, or an island, is uncertain. St. Brandan’s Hill overlooks the port of Bristol. On the island of Mull is Cuil-Bhrannain, “Brendan’s Retreat,” which is pointed out to this day, and the sound which separates Arran from Kintyre bears the name of Kilbrannan. There is also a church in the Island of Seil, off the coast of Lorn, dedicated to him. The island of Bute (found as Bót, in Hákonar Saga) is said to take its name from a bothy or cell which the saint erected on it. In Perthshire is “St. Brandon’s Haven,” and many churches in Mull, St. Kilda and other parts of Scotland still preserve his name. [36]

According to the Irish sources, Brendan undertook a journey to, and spent some time in, Britain, as a penance after his seven years’ voyage; and the lives [37] of his disciple Machutus, or Malo, say that, before the famous quest, he was founder and abbot of the celebrated monastery of Llancarvan, in Glamorganshire, and that it was from there that the voyage started. He has probably also left recollections of himself in the Isle of Man, and in the Church of St. Piran (which may be the Irish Ciaran), at Perranzabuloe, in Cornwall, is kept, among other treasures, a tooth of Saint Brendan. Many of the allusions in the Latin lives of Brendan to Britannia have been understood as referring, not to Britain, but, to Brittany, whither he is supposed to have gone from Wales or Cornwall, and where he founded an abbey not far from the beautiful city now called after the name of his pupil, St. Malo. Just at the entrance to the Bay of St. Malo is the fortified island Céseembre (September), [38] which contains the grotto of St. Brendan. Numerous other places in Brittany keep his memory alive, though it does not necessarily mean that we must assume a visit of Brendan wherever we find a dedication or a festival to him. In the Gulf of Morbihan is l’Ile aux Moines, worthy of having been visited by St. Brendan and his companions. South of St. Brieuc, in the Côtes-du-Nord, is a village called by his name, and at least half a dozen other communities have him as their patron, such as Kerlouan, Lanvellec (in the canton of Pontrieux), Lochrévalaire, St. Broladre, St. Brandan, Trégrom, and Broladre, in Normandy. According to the popular Breton almanacs, St. Brendan is invoked for the cure of sores and ulcers. His legend has even penetrated into the Orient. In a very old and defective Irish poem going back to the early part of the tenth century, found written on the lower margin of two pages of the Book of Leinster, [39] and which may be but a fragment of a lost life of Brendan, an unknown person addresses a welcome to the saint and celebrates him for having traveled to the far-off land of Ceylon, and, as a “pilgrim of Ireland,” to the cold waters of the Jordan, to Mount Zion, the cities of Greece, to Rome and Tours. The poem begins : “Mochen, mochen, a Brénaid, a breo rochloss co Lletha,” “Welcome, welcome, O Brendan, flame whose praise was heard to Gaul. Welcome, Lord of Cluain, to whom the victories of the world do service,” and concludes with the following lines :

Áillege deit indá midól
 Ocus fáilte fri fledól
 Tú it luing ó ailén d’ aileón
 Rom chrídeón is mochenón.

Dearer to thee than quaffing mead and good cheer at banquet, is it to sail in thy boat from island to island. Welcome, my heart.

As might be expected, the places most closely associated with Brendan's name are in southwest Munster, and more particularly in his native County Kerry, of which he is the patron. Such places are very numerous. On Valentia Island is a well-known cliff called Colbha, which means literally "a bed post," with a natural fissure along its face, where, so tradition says, St. Brendan landed after one of his voyages. Brandon's Bay, with its oval beach, is some 5 miles west of Castlegregory. A few miles north of Dingle and near the wind-blown coast is the cloud-capped Mount Brandon, Cnoc Bhréantháin, as the old people call it, the second highest mountain in Ireland. From this lofty eminence the sight is truly grand. Almost at the foot of the mountain the Atlantic dashes itself into foam and spray on the tall precipitous headlands. From that point the saint is said to have scanned the broad expanse of the "Mare Brendanicum," as that ocean has since his day been called, toward the setting sun and the longed for Land of Promise. Not far away are Brandon Peak, one of the highest mountains in County Kerry, with Brendon's Oratory and Brendon's Well on its summit, Brandon Head, and, on one of the Blasquets, the westernmost of all Irish islands, is the Cloghan, where the sailor-saint is believed to have lived for some time. For a long time the inhabitants regarded the western slopes of Brandon Mountain so sacred as not to allow any animal to be killed there, except fish in certain rivulets, which was given to the poor and had to be eaten at once. The cattle, wild deer and boars which lived there were unmolested and the birds and hares were nearly tame. The people of the Dingle peninsula imagine some religious connection between Kilmalchedar, near which is Fotharach Brandain, "the Ruins of Brendan's House," mentioned in the saga of Cellachan of Cashel, and Brandon Mountain. Near Cahirciveen are several beehive-shaped houses and an old church, and, on the island of Innistooskert, in the foaming Atlantic beyond Mayo, is a stone cell believed to have been built by St. Brendan. Proceeding north we find on Innishglora, St. Brendan's Oratory, and it is said that sailors from Mayo when sailing by Innishglora used to lower their sails in honor of St. Brendan. Near the church and monastery of Ardfert is a clear spring of water called Brandon Well, which is reputed to be holy, and there is also a townland of the same name in the parish of Ardfert.

The earliest extant account of the life and adventures of Brendan dates from at least 500 years after the events are said to have taken place. The first mention of a sea voyage made by our saint is found in the two instances quoted above in connection with the life of St. Brigit, where he is spoken of as "navigans mare" and "quaerens terram repromissionis," and in the entry in the ninth century Martyrology of Tallaght, March 22, "egressio familiae Brendani." Leaving aside the belief which was current in the twelfth century, that Brendan himself left behind a written account of his adventures, and a Latin life of the saint which Washington Irving [40] and others, on what authority we do now know, assert once existed in the archives of the Cathedral in the Grand Canary, and such scattered notions of a legendary quality as are found in the lives of saints already referred to, our main sources of information on the subject are the following: First, the incomplete Irish *Betha Brendain*, "Life of Brendan," which is found in the Book of Lismore, a fifteenth century manuscript. [41] A fragment of this *Betha*, closely resembling the Lismore text, is found in a nineteenth century manuscript containing the life of St. Finan. [42] The *Betha Brenainn* is not an original work but essentially a Middle Irish production which could not have arisen before the end of the eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth century. Moreover, the fact that it is not mentioned among the *Immramha*, or "Sea-Voyages," in the old catalogues of Irish literature, is significant. Its prototype may be lost; at all events, though it contains material not found elsewhere, it shows the influence of other versions and can by no means be regarded as the source of the later texts. There are also Irish versions in two manuscripts at Brussels, in the British Museum and in the *Liber Flavus Fergusorum*, in the Royal Irish Academy. [43] Our second main source of information is the Latin "Vita Brendani," which is preserved in several manuscripts, and the third is the Latin *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, of which there are numerous versions [44] and which would appear to have been known on the continent before they were known in Ireland. The oldest form of the *Navigatio* thus far discovered is found in

a British Museum manuscript [45] which dates from the tenth century, but which is clearly a copy of a yet earlier manuscript. It has been alleged that a version also exists in a ninth century manuscript in the Vatican Library, but this statement has not been proved. The unknown author of the *Navigatio* composed his compilation out of whatever material he had at hand, and, to fill up the events of the seven years' voyage already ascribed to Brendan, he drew chiefly from the Voyage of Maelduin and other Irish sea voyages, and, for the description of heaven and hell, he had recourse to such Irish tales as the Vision of Adamnan and the Tidings of Doomsday. These three main versions differ much from one another. The Latin recension in John Capgrave's *Nova Legenda Anglie* (London, 1516) was compiled from the *Acta Brendani*.

Some idea of the marvelous popularity and spread of the Brendan story may be got by considering the number of extant manuscripts which contain it, and the number of translations, transformations and imitations which have been made of it. It was probably Irish monks who first carried it to the continent, where it enjoyed even greater vogue than at home and where it was believed and read and listened to with feverish admiration and afforded entertainment for centuries. It would seem as if every great monastic and public library of medieval Europe possessed it in some form or other, and it has been treated in almost every modern European language. The Spanish and Portuguese versions mentioned by Jubinal [46] (the statement has been repeated by Douhet [47] and others) have not been discovered, unless possibly in sea tales in which the name of the hero is St. Amaro. The most famous of the redactions in a popular language of the Middle Ages is the Anglo-Norman poem which was composed by a certain Donz Beneiz, about the year 1121 for, and dedicated to, Adelaide of Louvain, shortly after her marriage as second wife of Henry I, "Beauclerc," of England. The work is clearly a translation, but of what is uncertain, unless it be of some version of the Latin *Navigatio*. It is the second oldest Norman poem written on English soil. The opening lines in which the poet, who was perhaps a bishop, expresses the hope that Lady Aelis will bless England with religion, justice and peace, are as follows :

Donna Aaliz la reine,
 Par qui valdrat lei divine,
 Par qui creistrat lei de terre,
 E remandrat tante guerre
 Por les armes Henri lu rei
 E par le cunseil qui ert en tei,
 Salvet tei mil e mil feiz
 Li apostoiles danz Benediz
 Que comandas qo ad enpris,
 Secund sun sens entremis.
 En letre mis e en romanz,
 E si cum fud H teons cumanz,
 De Saint Brendan, le bon abeth ;
 Mais tu l' defent ne seit gabeth.

There are many other French versions in verse and prose. Next to the Anglo-Norman poem in order of age is the Flemish prose version, *De Saint Brandainne le moine*, dating from the end of the twelfth century, and to about the same period belongs a French poem entitled *De Saint Brandans qui erre vii ans par mer ei les merveilles qu'il trouve*. The version in an Arsenal MS. begins :

Seignor, oiés que jo dirai,
 D'un saint home vos conterai :
 D'Yrlande estoit, Brandans ot non,
 Molt ert de grant religion.

There is a short version dating from the fifteenth century in Old Provençal, which is an abridgment from a Latin “*Legenda in Festo Sti Brendani*.” According to it our saint, who is called “*Sant Branda, lo sant baro*,” was possessed of a desire “to see the relics of the saints.” It contains some curious mistakes. For instance, the name Ahenda is given to an island instead of to the holy man, Aende, who dwelt in it. Its only reference to the whale-island is a misunderstanding of the Latin “*in dorso bellue*,” which it renders “*en la ciutat de Velluer*,” thus making it the name of a city. Another interesting Romance group consists of four Italian texts dating from the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, of which one is in old Venetian, and another in Tuscan, prose. [48] In several respects the Venetian version differs from the Latin *Navigatio*, its description of hell being especially graphic, for example, where the demons call out the various torments which await their victims: “*E oldiua bosie che sonaua dir : al fuoco, al fuoco ; altri diseua ; al’ aqua, al’ aqua ; altri diseua : liga, liga ; altri diseua : muora, muora, tuti di nostri nemisi che se serui de dio ! . . . E oldiua bosie che diseua : rosti, rosty, meti in fuoco, baty, baty, taia, taia, siega, siega, strenzi, strenzi*.” The influence of the Brendan story is seen more or less directly elsewhere in Italian literature, as in the description of the enchanted gardens in Boiardo’s *Orlando Innamorato* and in Pulci’s *Morgante Maggiore*, while Armida’s garden in which Tasso represents Rinaldo as detained has been identified with St. Brendan’s Fortunate Island. [49] Other poems merely mention Brendan as a figure well known in medieval literary circles. The following lines in the *Roman de Renart*, [50] where the Fox, disguised as a Breton minstrel, says :

Ge fot savoir bon lai breton
Et de Merlin et de Noton,
Del roi Artu et de Tristan,
De chevrefoil, de Saint Brandan,

are important as showing that in the thirteenth century there existed a French *lai* on St. Brendan and that his legend was regarded, incorrectly of course, as belonging to the Arthurian cycle. In Chrétien de Troies *Yvain* [51] there is a passage describing the numerous birds on trees “singing Mass,” a motive which seems to be borrowed from the “*Paradysus Avium*” or “*Fowelen Parays*,” in the Brendan story. Again [52] Chrétien describes birds singing canticles. Consequently, he must have been acquainted with the Voyage of St. Brendan and with the idea, common in Celtic belief, of souls appearing in the form of birds. Furthermore, the Brendan legend is closely related to the literature of vision, of which it forms an important chapter and, possibly in ways yet to be discovered, it will be found to throw some light on the Grail romances. In Pseudo-Chrétien, for example, Perceval’s mother is described as going on pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Brendan. [53]

There are two renditions of the Brendan story in early English, one, in verse, belonging to the fourteenth century, the other being Wynkyn de Worde’s prose redaction of two hundred years later. Caxton, the first English printer, published a translation of the Brendan Voyage in 1483, so that it was among the very first books printed in English. A most interesting group of vulgar versions consists of those in German and Dutch, and an Old Norse fragment which seems to be Norwegian with an Icelandic coloring. By the end of the twelfth century arose a Middle Frankish poem, now lost, from which grew all the German versions. Most closely related to it is a Middle Dutch poem of the first half of the thirteenth century. *Van Sinte Brandane*, the original of which is lost. Also to the twelfth century belongs another recension of the Middle Frankish, which is represented by the poem. *Von Sente Brandan*, and probably arose on the right bank of the lower Main. In the fourteenth century was composed the Low German version, *Van dem hilgen Sunte Brandan*. The German prototype may go back to a lost Latin redaction of the *Navigatio*, which differed from the existing version. It is just as likely, however, that the German redactor got the story from one of the many Irish monks who were along the middle and lower Rhine in the twelfth century. [54] There are

reminiscences of St. Brendan in the *Lohengrin*, the *Wartburgkrieg* [55] and other old German poems. In the Middle High German poem by Moriz von Craon, we read

Ich waene sant Brandan
Durch wunder her gevorn ist.

I think St. Brendan has come here by a miracle.

Many German chap books were printed on the life and adventures of Brandan. One which appeared at Augsburg about 1475 is entitled *Sant Brandon Legend : Hir heht sich an sand Brandon's Buck was er wunders erfahren hat*. [56] Others, with almost identical titles, such as *Ein hübsch lieblich lesen von sant Brandon, was er wunders uff dem mör erfahren hat*, were published at Basel, Ulm, and Strassburg. The Strassburg print of 1510 contains woodcuts representing Brendan throwing his books into the flames, and relates how he made a ship well bound with iron, after the fashion of Noah's ark, and took on board great stores of food and clothing for twelve years and consecrated a chapel on board. It shows Judas Iscariot sitting on a half-hot, half-cold stone, half-frozen and half-roasted. In the German versions the motive of Brendan's voyage is explained in an original manner. One day he read in a rare book a description of all sorts of impossible things, of three heavens, two paradises, nine purgatories, monsters of the deep and such like extravagances, which so disgusted the good man that in anger he threw the book into the fire. Then an angel appeared to him and chided him for his incredulity, saying, "Why hast thou despised the truth. ? Knowest thou not that God can do greater wonders than thou hast read of in the book.?" As a penance he was made to wander for seven years on the ocean in order that he might see with his own eyes the wonders which had seemed to him so incredible, and afterwards to describe what he had witnessed. In Ireland, too, we find that Brendan had acquired, as early at least as the first half of the twelfth century, the reputation of being a doubter, for in a litany in the Book of Leinster he is called the Irish "Thomas Apostolus."

In a group of Irish versions, [57] Brendan's voyage is motivated in a more poetic manner. Once the twelve apostles of Erin were learning with Findan of Clonard and he had prepared a feast for them. And when the feast was at its height the guests saw a wondrous large flower appear, as a sign from the Land of Promise. They disputed as to who should go to seek the land of the flower, but no one claimed it more than another, and they cast lots in pairs and it fell to the lot of the two Brendans. These two then decided between them and Brendan of Birr was chosen, and all felt sore at heart that the oldest of the saints of Ireland should go "into the maw of the sea and of the great ocean." Our Brendan then volunteered to undertake the journey. Other Irish lives state that it was the words spoken at his ordination, "And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting," (Matt., xix, 29) and those other words, "Exi de terra tua et cognatione tua" (Acts, vii, 3) which left so deep an impression on his mind that he asked the Lord to give him a secret land in the sea removed from men. And as he slept he heard a voice saying, "Brandane, exaudita est postulatio tua a Domino," and again, "Brandane, fiet tibi secundum desiderium tuum." According to some French versions, the Arsenal manuscript for example, [58] Brendan prayed God to show him the paradise where Adam first lived, and also hell. One version of the life of St. Malo [59] explains that it was not out of a desire to see marvelous things but to escape from the envy and jealousy of their comrades that Brendan and his young disciple decided to sail to the solitary islands. The usual exordium, however, is that one day Brendan was visited by his master, Barintus, whose foster son, Mernoc, had retired to a solitary place in the promised land of the saints where he found a very delectable island. Mernoc had persuaded his foster father to accompany him on one of those voyages. In the Middle English version, Brendan chides Barintus for his sadness : [60] "And saynt Brandon comforted him the best wyse he coude, sayenge, 'Ye come hyther for to be joyful with me, and therefore for Goddes love

leve your mournynge, and tell me what mervayles ye have seen in the grete see ocean, that compasseth all the worlde aboute, and all other waters comen out of hym, whiche renneth in all the partyes of the erth.”

Let the Irish life tell us how Brendan and his companions put to sea :

So Brendan, son of Finding, sailed then over the wave-voice of the strong-maned sea, and over the storm of the green-sided waves and over the mouth of the marvelous, awful, bitter ocean, where they saw the multitude of the furious red-mouthed monsters, with abundance of great sea-whales. And they found beautiful, strange islands, and yet they tarried not therein. [61]

And they took no provisions with them, for they trusted that God would sustain them wheresoever they might go, and they sailed wherever the wind carried them ; time, distance and direction meant nothing to them.

- [1] On Brendan's birth, see *Acta Sanctorum, Maii III*, 1738, 600. col. 1.
[2] fo. 349d.
[3] Brigitta, or Brigida, according to others.
[4] And two other brothers, according to others.
[5] PLUMMER, *Vitae SS. Hiberniae*, i, 100.
[6] *Acta Sanctorum*, Jan. 44 ; *Romania*, xvii, 1888, p. 384.
[7] *Collect, des mém. relatifs a l'hist. de France*, vi, p. 204 ; *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, v, 137 note.
[8] *Romanische Studien*, i, p. 558.
[9] P. 208 ; *Revue Celtique*. x, 142-143.
[10] *Book of Leinster*, 371. *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*.
[11] Féilire Oeng., May 16 ; *Book of Leinster*, 391, col. 1.
[12] PLUMMER, *Vitae SS. Hiberniae*, i, 98.
[13] Beatha Chiaráin Saighre, p. 63.
[14] KUNO MEYER, *Miscellanea Hibernica*, University of Illinois Studies, ii, Nov. 16, 1916, p. 10, note 2 ; *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum u. d. Litt.*, Bd. xxxiii.
[15] *Revue Celtique*, xxvii, 169.
[16] *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, pp. 103-104.
[17] *Codex Salm.*, p. 306
[18] THOMAS WRIGHT, *Sanct Brandan*, p. 35.
[19] *Irish Eccl. Record*, 1912, 173-174.
[20] *Chron. Scotorum*, 559 ; *Revue Celtique*, xvii, 142.
[21] *Revue Celtique*, xxxi, 309-311.
[22] HARRIS-WARE, ii, 15-16.
[23] MORAN, *Acta S. Brendani*, p. 7.
[24] PLUMMER, *l. c.*, i, 170 ; *Codex Salman*.
[25] *Ibid.*, ii, 139.
[26] *Codex Salman.*, 649-650.
[27] *Ibid.*, 531-534 ; PLUMMER, *l. c.*, I. 25. 29.
[28] *Vita Sti. Ruadani*, *Codex Salm.* ; PLUMMER, *o. c.*, ii, 244.
[29] Rees, *Cambro-Brit. Saints*, pp. 435-436.
[30] *Revue Celtique*, xxii, 339 ; *Annates de Bretagne*, xv, 534.
[31] MORAN, *Acta Sti. Brendani*, 140 ; *Codex Salman.*, 851 ; *Acta Sanctorum*, Maii III, 596.
[32] PLUMMER, *l. c.*, i, 151.
[33] *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vii, 1857-1861, p. 300.
[34] PLUMMER, *l. c.*, i, 150 note ; *Codex Salman.*, pp. 771-772.
[35] FORBES, *Calendars*, 233, 286-287.

- [36] O'HANLON, pp. 466-477.
- [37] *Deux Vies inéd.*, pp. 37, 46, 132, 139.
- [38] *Prima Vita Sti. Mack.*
- [39] *Book of Leinster*, pp. 366. 369 ; *Sitzungsberichfe der Kgl. preuss. Akad.*, 9 Mai 1912, pp. 436-443 ; *Zeitschrift für celtische Philol.*, ix, 187.
- [40] *Life of Columbus*, Appendix.
- [41] Text and translation by Whitley Stokes, *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore* ; text, pp. 99-116 ; translation, pp. 247-261 ; notes, pp. 349-354.
- [42] *Zeitschrift für celtische Philol.*, ii, 564-565.
- [43] Egerton, 1781. For these MSS., see O'Curry, *On the Manuscript Materials*, p. 533.
- [44] *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, ix, 75 fl.; *Romanische Forschungen*, vii, 1893, 1-48.
- [45] Additional. 36736.
- [46] Page x.
- [47] Pages 278-279.
- [48] *La Leggenda di S. Brandano*, P. Villari, *Antiche Leggende e Tradizioni che illustrano la "Divina Commedia,"* pp. 82-109, Pisa, 1865 ; NOVATI, *Navigatio Brendani*, xiii-xiv.
- [49] *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Canto xvi.
- [50] I, 2389 fl.
- [51] Lines 471-472 ; *Zeitschrift für vergleich. Litteraturgeschichte*, XI, 492-498.
- [52] Lines 384 fl.
- [53] ALFRED NUTT, *The Legend of the Holy Grail*, 265 ; *Revue Celtique*, X, 347.
- [54] *Literaturblatt für germ. u. roman. Philol.*, 1919, p. 82.
- [55] 2 Edit. M. Haupt, 1871, 1. 884-885.
- [56] *The Irish Book Lover*, ix, 133.
- [57] Gorman's *Martyrology*, ix, x ; Egerton, 1781 ; Liber Flavus Fergus., and two Brussels MSS.; *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, X, 1915, pp. 408-420.
- [58] *Zeitschrift für Roman. Philol.*, II, 1878. pp. 438-457.
- [59] *Annales de Bretagne*, xxii, 709.
- [60] Edit. Wright, p. 35.
- [61] Stokes' translation with slight changes.

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