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FISI VS. JOURNEYS INTO ST. PATRICK'S PURGATORY
IRISH PSYCHANODIAS AND SOMANODIAS

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Abstract: Early medieval Irish literature presents several types of voyages into the afterworld: *echtraí* (various adventures into Mag Mell), *immrama* (sea travels to the enchanted islands of the Ocean), *fisi* (ecstatic revelations of Christian eschatology), journeys into Saint Patrick's Purgatory. In this paper, we seek to contrast the *fisi* and the descents into the cave of Saint Patrick. From a morphological point of view, both have a great deal of *topoi* in common, which describe the structure of the Christian other world: the waste land of pains, the infernal pit, the ordeal bridge, the land of the blessed, the celestial Kingdom of God, etc. However, between the two genres appear some major differences, such as the order in which these places are visited. The main distinction lies in the fact that the *fisi* are mainly ecstatic voyages (i.e. *psychanodias*), implying a "*raptus animae*", while the voyages into Saint Patrick's Purgatory are physical expeditions (i.e. *somanodias*), during the actual life of the adventurers. Although many of the common themes of the two genres derive from the medieval Christian tradition (especially the apocryphal apocalypses and *visiones*), we argue that the differences may be due to the input of local Irish Celtic heritage.

Keywords: Irish mythology; Christian eschatology; the *fis* genre; ecstatic voyages; Saint Patrick's Purgatory; *psychanodia*; *somanodia*.

The Irish medieval compilers of early legends and stories used type lists that organized and classified the texts by themes: *aided* (death-tale), *aithed* (elopement), *cath* (battle), *compert* (conception, procreation), *fess* (feast), *forfess* (siege, beleaguering), *orcain* (murdering, slaying), *serc* (love-tale), *táin* (cattle-raid) *tochmarc* (wooing, courting), *tochomlad* (invasion, setting), *togail* (attack, destruction), etc.¹ Three of these traditional genres make special reference to the vision of the otherworld: the *echtra* (adventure in Mag Mell, descent into a *sídh*); the *immram* (sea voyage or pilgrimage); and the *fis* (vision or revelation of the Christian otherworld).²

These types are not mere mnemotechnical devices used by the “storytellers” in order to organize their material. As David A. Traill has highlighted, they tend to reflect the main “culture-pattern dreams” of their epoch. They express the stereotypes of the conscious and unconscious mind of the communities, a situation which “makes the question of *Quellenforschung* extremely complex”³. In a book I published in 2006, *La quête manquée de l'Avalon occidentale*, I tried to disclose the narrative pattern of the first two typologies, in a similar manner to V. I. Propp's analysis of Russian fairy tales.⁴ An important characteristic of these fantastic journeys is that they are worldly voyages, which do not imply the transcendence of the actual human condition. The heroes who become, usually by a supernatural marriage, equals of the fairy ladies of the enchanted islands, or of the underground Tuatha De Danann, reach immortality by simply joining the Mag Mell. Also, the monks that sail to Tir Tairngire (*Terra repromissionis sanctorum*) do not have to die in order to enter the garden of God. St. Brendan reaches the island of the Terrestrial Paradise and is allowed to visit it (a “guided visit”) during his normal life, in his bodily condition. He does not suffer a visionary rapture or a mystical ascent of the soul; he does not lose his consciousness in a traumatic or lethal state.

Since in my books dedicated to what I call “failed initiation quests” I was interested mainly in physical journeys to the otherworld, I want to focus now on the third genre of Irish early literature, the *fisi*, in which the voyages are no longer bodily, but spiritual and ecstatic. I will try to underscore its morphology and then to contrast it to a kindred narrative pattern, that of the corpus of texts dedicated to the cave of St. Patrick.

The Irish genre of *fis* (translating the Latin *visio*) is a part of the broader “semantic basin” (“*bassin sémantique*”, to adapt the term coined by Gilbert Durand) of Medieval Christian apocalypses and visions of the afterworld.⁵ In this paper I will tackle the Irish, Anglo-Saxon and English, that is, insular, literature, without referring to the convergent apocalyptic and visionary continental “stream” of German, French, Roman, etc. literature. The main texts I use⁶, extending from the seventh to the twelfth centuries, are (with the dates reported by their first recorders) *The Vision of Fursa*⁷ (633) and *The Vision of Drythelm*⁸ (696) (both reported by Bede in his *Historia ecclesiastica*), an episode from the *Life of Guthlac* by Felix of

Crowland (after 700), *The Vision of the monk of Wenlock*⁹ (716) (reported by St. Boniface in his *Tenth Epistle*), *The Vision of Laisrén*¹⁰ (early tenth century), *The Vision of Adamnán*¹¹ (eleventh century) (included in the *Book of Dun Cow*), *The Vision of Leofric* (before 1057), *The Vision of the Boy William* (1143-7) and *The Vision of Tnugdale*¹² (1148/9) (both included by Vincent of Beauvais in his *Speculum Historiale*), *The Vision of the Monk of Eynsham*¹³ (1196) and *The Vision of Thurkill*¹⁴ (1206) (both reported by the Cistercian Ralph of Coggeshall and reproduced by Roger of Wendover in his *Chronica sive Flores Historiarum* and by Matthew Paris in *Chronica Majora*)¹⁵; and a later vision of an unknown fifteenth-century woman¹⁶ (1422). Merely to mention it, the continental "stream" comprises the visions of Sunniulf (575) and Salvius (590) (both reported by Gregory of Tours in his *History of the Franks*), Barontus (678/9), Rotcharius (early ninth century), the poor woman of Laon (early ninth century), Wetti¹⁷ (824), Raduin (835), Charles the Fat (885), Ansgar (late ninth century), Alberic¹⁸ (c.1100), Orm¹⁹ (1125), Gunthelm²⁰ (1161), Gottschalk²¹ (1190) and so on²².

The loci of the fisi

At its broadest extent, the blueprint for these eschatological revelations consists of several obligatory topics or motifs: 1. the extra corporeal experience ("*raptus animae*"); 2. the battle for the soul or a purgatory ordeal; 3. the ascent of the soul through the planetary skies; 4. God's Throne of Judgment; 5. the wasteland of pains (the upper Hell); 6. the infernal pit (the lower Hell); 7. the bridge; 8. the land of the blessed (the Terrestrial Paradise); 9. the Kingdom of God (the Celestial Paradise); 10. the return of the soul to its body. I will briefly examine each of these *topoi*.

The exit of the soul from the body

In all the texts, the authors or the characters make it clear that the revelation is transmitted via a *raptus animae*. Bede says about St. Fursa: "In his first vision, his soul was conveyed out of the body ("*raptus est a corpore*"), and he was graced with the sight and the hearing of the praises of the Heavenly Hosts".²³ Another saint, Laisrén, relates that, during a mission to Connacht, after a fasting of nine days, he fell asleep in the oratory, heard the voice of a shining figure calling him and "all at once he beheld his soul (hovering) over the crown of his head, and knew not which way she had come out of the body". The *Fis Adamnán* recounts about St. Adamnán that "his soul departed from out his body on the feast of John Baptist, and was conveyed to the celestial realm, where the heavenly are, and to Hell". The soul of Thurkill, a peasant from a village near London, was also abducted during the night, while his body remained sleeping in bed. St. Julian, his guide, took care to explain that he would convey only the soul, leaving in the body a breath of life, for others to know that

Thurkill was not dead (*"sola enim anima tua mecum abibit. Sed ne corpus tuum extinctum putetur, vitalem in te flatum dimittam"*).

Other characters of the *fisi* do not undergo a sleeping trance, but a near-death-experience. In a lethal catalepsy, they depart from their bodies on a journey through the otherworld akin to Er's in Plato's *Republic*. Bede recounts about Drythelm that he became ill one evening, fell down dead, and came back to life the next morning. During this time, he was taken by a shining figure to visit different purgatorial places. St. Boniface counts in his *Letters* the story of a monk from Wenlock who was so shaken by a violent illness that he left his body and acquired a visionary sight freed from the burden of the flesh (*"extra corpus suum raptus in spiritu corporis gravidine subito exutum fuisse"*). Tnugdale, an Irish nobleman, suffers a death-like paralysis for three days (*"Assunt signa mortis, crines cadent, frons obduratur, errant oculi, nasus acuitur, pallescunt labia, mentum cadit et universa corporis membra rigesunt"*). His fellows take him for dead, although he conserves some heat in the chest (*"calor modicus in sinistra pectora"*). After his return, he relates his extra-corporeal experience (*"de exitu animae"*) in which he saw the afterworld. Another character, Edmund, falls gravely ill of quinsy, and enters the monastery of Eynsham. After one year and three months of suffering, the young monk is "rapt in spyryte" (*"in excessu mentis raptum"*). While his body goes into catalepsy, St. Nicholas takes him by the hand (*"manus simul consertas habebamus omni tempore quo corporeis sensibus orbatus mente absens permansi"*) and shows him the eschatological destiny of the souls.

The battle for the soul

While beginning their ascent through the atmospheric and astronomical skies, the ecstatic voyagers witness a confrontation between angels and demons who fight over the souls of the dead. Sometimes this battle involves the character himself, and so it becomes an ordeal meant to determine the purity of his soul. In his second ecstatic voyage, St. Fursa is conveyed by three angels (representing the Trinity) through "clouds of hideous, misshapen demons". The devils try to bar his progress, by casting showers of fiery arrows and globes of fire at him. Drythelm is menaced by imps with burning tongs, but is rescued by his shining guide. An angel protects the monk of Wenlock from the terrible flames that blaze the atmosphere by laying a hand on his head. St. Laisrén is taken by two angels through the roof of a church. He joins an entire host of angels and begins the ascent, challenged by three hordes of demons of different shapes, armed with fiery bulging spears, darts and javelins. Tnugdale's soul also is assaulted by demons, as soon as it exits the body, but is fortunately rescued by an angel.

The theme of a dispute over the soul of the dead was inherited from apocryphal texts such as the *Testament of Abraham* (where the right-hand and the left-hand angels weigh the good deeds and the sins of the souls)²⁴

and *Visio Pauli* (where the holy and the wicked angels take possession of the corresponding souls)²⁵. The violent confrontation between angels and demons has a judicial dimension. As a rule, angels or saints are supposed to help and guide the souls ("*de adventu angeli in occursum anime*"), while devils try to stop or diverge them. If they do not succeed in hurting and rerouting the visitors, the demons pledge against them in a kind of trial of salvation. St. Fursa's acceptance into eternal life is contested by Satan himself, who counts the saint's sins, especially his vindictive spirit. The demons charge St. Laisrén, enumerating the list of the sins he committed during his life, but fortunately the angels answer all charges, arguing that they have been "confessed and atoned for by penance according to the will of a confessor". The monk of Wenlock is confronted with a crowd of evil spirits and a glorious chorus of the higher angels which impersonate his sins and his virtues: greed, vainglory, falsehood, idle word, stubbornness, disobedience, sluggishness, neglect, drowsiness, negligence, carelessness, etc. vs. obedience, fasting, prayer, service of the weak, etc. Eventually the exit of the trial depends on the moral quality of the people being tested.

Thurkill is shown by his guide, St. Julian, a great church situated towards the East, in the middle of the Earth ("*contra orientem usque ad mundi medium*"), where the souls of the dead await Judgment. Their moral quality and chances of salvation are physically marked by taints of black and white. Adapted from the Bible, the motif of the two colours, which also appears in several *echtraí* and *immrama* (Teigue son of Cyan, Mael Duin), was recurrent in early homiletic literature.²⁶ The entirely black souls are weighed by St. Paul and the devil: if the scales turn to the devil, the souls are thrown into a fire pit nearby, the Gehenna; if they turn to St. Paul, the saint sends the souls to a purgatorial ordeal. First they are sent into a big cleansing fire, then into a freezing lake, and finally on a bridge of nails which leads to the mountain of joy ("*mons gaudii*"). The souls tainted with white and black spots are purified by the same fire and ice trial, and thus are justified by the pains of the purgatory ("*per purgatorii poenas*"). The entirely white souls pass without damage through the torments and reach the paradise mountain directly.

Sometimes the trial is not only continued but even replaced by a painful ordeal, which plays the double role of selecting and purifying the souls. The main device for the cleansing is fire. This theme derives from St. Paul's words, widely cited and commented upon by medieval authors: "*Dies enim Domini declarabit, quia in igne revelabitur: et uniuscuiusque opus quale sit, ignis probabit. Si cuius opus manserit quod supraedificavit, mercedem accipiet. Si cuius opus arserit, detrimentum patietur: ipse autem salvus erit: sic tamen quasi per ignem*" (I Cor. 3, 13-16). In a literal interpretation to the redemption of the souls as by fire ("*quasi per ignem*"), the ecstatic visitors are typically confronted by a celestial blaze that consumes their sins, destroying the sinners and purifying the virtuous.

The ascent of the soul through the planetary skies

St. Paul's formula also offered the occasion for an allegorical interpretation of the late antique representation of the world. Based on Aristotle, the Earth was represented as composed of the four circular spheres of the elements: earth, water, air, fire.²⁷ The atmospheric sky was composed by water (vapours) and air. In order to reach the heaven, the souls of the dead and of the ecstatic voyageurs have to cross the atmosphere. The devils that rapture Guthlac drag him through frozen clouds ("*inter nubifera gelidi aeris spatia*"), up to the top of the atmosphere ("*ad ardua aeris culmina*"). From there on extends the last of the four elements that form the material world, namely fire. The great blaze surrounding the whole earth ("*in circuitu totius mundi ignem ardentem videbam*"), which is about to burn the monk of Wenlock, is reminiscent of this fire sphere that delimitates the atmosphere from the celestial skies.

Through an "*interpretatio christiana*", the Aristotelian sphere of fire became a purgatorial barrier that cleanses the ascending souls. St. Fursa has the occasion of contemplating from above four fires dominating the whole earth. The accompanying angels provide the moral reading of the scene, showing that the flames represent the sins that destroy the world: Falsehood, Covetousness, Dissension and Injustice.²⁸ Citing St. Paul, the angels ease Fursa's dismay telling him: "What thou hast not kindled shall not consume thee". Nonetheless, during the return voyage, the saint is once again attacked by demons, which shout at him "a sinner from whom Fursa had accepted a cloak, while ministering to him on his death-bed". As each sin constitutes a weak spot on the spiritual body, St. Fursa is wounded at one shoulder and, once returned to his material body, will conserve a physical scar from the ordeal.

While "he was out of the body" and taken by the angels to heaven, the monk of Wenlock also saw "a mighty fire surrounding the whole earth, and flames of enormous size puffing up on high and embracing, as it were, in one ball the whole mechanism of the world". This would be a fair description of an Aristotelian cosmology, except that the monk, and Saint Boniface who writes down his story, charge it with an allegorical interpretation: the threatening flame is an instrument of the demons, who plan to destroy Earth by a burst of fire. Hopefully, an angel counters it by "the sign of the holy cross" and makes it fade away.

A most elegant adaptation of the theme of the cleansing fire was given by Dante. In his ascent to Heaven, the character leaves the Purgatory and enters the Terrestrial Paradise by traversing a wall of fire that ends the process of purification. The sphere of fire specifically divides the purgatorial mountain into two zones: the body of the mountain that pertains to the material world, and the top of the mountain which is connected to the planetary skies. However, unlike Dante, who presents the nine skies as parts of the Celestial Paradise, the authors of medieval

revelations tend to conceive the planetary circles rather as a purgatorial space.

According to several scholars, the concept of the seven heavens is a reminiscence of the Babylonian magic (mainly in Jewish tradition²⁹) and of mystical Neo-Pythagorean, Gnostic and Hermetic literature (mainly in Christian tradition³⁰). In insular literature, four texts have developed the topos and inspired the *fisi*: *In Tenga Bithna*; a short text *Na Seacht Neamha* from *Liber Flavus Fergusorium*; an old English sermon in Oxford; and a Latin manuscript Karlsruhe MS Augiensis 254. Their direct source could be the Gnostic *Apocalypse of Paul* according to Jane Stevenson,³¹ and the Armenian *Questions of Ezra* after according to Richard Bauckham.³² In a recent contribution, John Carey advanced as more plausible sources several Egyptian Gnostic writings, such as the *Pistis Sophia* treatise, the texts of the sect of the Ophites (as presented by Origen in *Contra Celsum*) and the *Corpus Hermeticum* (Treatise I mainly).³³

Fis Adamnáin combines the motifs of the atmospheric ice and fire barriers and of the astral gates, assigning the first ones to the entrance into the City of God. There are six astronomical gates: at the first the souls are met by the archangel Michael; the second one is represented by a river of fire, in which Ariel "purges the souls of the righteous, and washes them in the stream, according to the amount of guilt that cleaves to them, until they become pure and shining as in the radiance of the stars"; the third one is a fiery furnace, that "the righteous pass in the twinkling of an eye, but the souls of sinners are baked and scorched therein for twelve years"; the fourth is a stream surrounded by a wall of fire; the fifth, a "fiery river, with a strange kind of whirlpool, wherein the souls of the wicked keep turning round and round"; at the sixth, the souls "are illuminated with the lustre and brilliancy of precious stones"; finally, the main doorway of the City of God is represented by a veil of fire and a veil of ice.

In *The Adventures of St. Columba's Clerics*, a text which inserts in the *immram* of Snegdus and Mac Riagla the revelation of a *fis* (*Fis Adamnáin*), the two monks also have to ascend through the seven gates of the sky in order to reach the abode of God. As in most of the *fisi*, but different from the stories about St. Patrick's Purgatory, the purification mission is assigned not to devils, but to angels. Each sky, guarded by an arch-angel and his helpers, is an obstacle that righteous people traverse instantly, but where the guilty ones have to stay and suffer for twelve years. At the first gate, Michael and two virgins beat the sinners with iron sticks; at the second, Uriel washes the souls in a river of fire; at the third, the souls have to cross a burning furnace; at the fourth, they must go through a vertical curtain of fire; at the fifth, they must cross the vortex of a hellish river; at the sixth, they are illuminated by magical stones; finally, the seventh gate opens to the Empyrean Sky. Even though this is not the Catholic Purgatory, the seven purgatorial heavens play the same task as the seven terraces of Dante's Mountain of the Purgatory.

God's Throne of Judgment

After traversing the atmospheric and astronomical skies, the ecstatic visitors are admitted into the abode of God. They are shown the Throne of Judgment and sometimes they are allowed to contemplate God himself. The vision is magnificent. St. Adamnán reports that "this throne is fashioned like unto a canopied chair, and beneath it are four columns of precious stones." Above the throne there is "a great arch, like unto a wrought helmet, or a regal diadem: and the eye which should behold it would forthwith melt away." Hosts of bird-souls and archangels surround the throne, forming an indistinct flaming mass. The Lord himself, in His Glory, is indescribable, as "Heaven and earth are filled full with the light of Him, and a radiance as of a royal star encircles Him."

In the presence of God, the ecstatic voyagers attend the verdict passed on the souls of the dead. The virtuous are admitted into the Kingdom and sent to the Celestial Paradise. The wicked are devoured by fiery dragons, which deliver them to Hell. Based on St. John's *Apocalypse*, Gregory the Great already mentioned several visions in which depraved monks, such as one Theodorus and one from a monastery in Iconium, are delivered over to dragons: "*ecce draconi ad devorandum datus sum*", "*nunc ecce ad devorandum draconi sum traditus, qui cauda sua mea genua pedesque conlegavit, caput viro suum intra meus os mittens*"³⁴ (image that impressed Dante, who used it in his *Inferno*). In his vision, Adamnán also sees that the souls found guilty are thrown into the mouth of twelve terrifying dragons, which take them to the abode of Lucifer. There they will experience "the consummation of all evil, in the Devil's own presence, throughout all ages".

Some texts feel compelled to make the distinction between the individual and the Final Judgement. This distinction is not express theoretically, through concepts, but visually, through the location attributed to the place of judgment. For example, in *The Adventures of St. Columba's Clerics*, Snegdus and Mac Riagla witness the trial of the souls not in front of the throne of God, but in a kind of Limbo, a black desolated region with no tortures. The result of the trial is the same: good men are sent directly to the City of God; those who performed equally good and bad deeds are sent to the land of pains, where they are alternately made to suffer and rest. This regime will last until the end of the world, when good will prevail over evil. Evil men are tortured with different pains: parricides are tied to serpents in a pond of fire; robbers, traitors, corrupt judges, witches, cheats, rebels, heretics are tied with frozen and burning strips and beaten by imps; negligent pious men who succumbed to the pleasures of the flesh are burned in an ocean of fire, but only until the Apocalypse, afterwards they shall be sent to the harbour of life; failing monks, hypocrites, and charlatans are crashed by melted iron and bitten by hell

hounds; dishonest manufacturers and merchants, impious kings, adulterous women are crushed by demons.

The monk of Eynsham is also taken to a place that performs the same function as God's Throne of Judgment, but is not Heaven. Behind a "ful glorious walle of crystal, hoys heythe no man might see, and lenthe no man might consider", he beholds Christ "yn lykenes of man, seated aloft on a throne". The entrance to the Throne of the Son is a gate where a swinging cross makes the selection of the souls: it allows passage to the virtuous, but stops the undecided. Although the dwelling features God on his Throne, Edmund knows "for certen that thys place, were Y saw oure Lorde sythyng yn a trone, was not the hye heuyn of heuyns, where the blessid spiritis of angels and holy sowlys of ryghtwys men ioyin yn the seyghte of God." As such, the place can be assimilated to the lower Paradise, where a first trial, the individual judgment, is held.

Other *fisi*, such as *The vision of Tnugdale*, report the episode of the Throne of Judgment to the final description of the City of God. At the end of his voyage, Tnugdale arrives before the throne of the Holy Trinity ("*sedes Trinitatis*"), where the Final Judgment will be held. The Throne is the "omega point" of the universe, from where all major places of the world – Paradise, Hell and Earth – are equally visible ("*Ab illo ergo loco, in quo tunc stabant, non solum omnem, quam ante viderant, gloriam, verum etiam predictarum supplicia penarum videbant, et quod magis miramur, terrarum orbem quasi sub uno solis radio videre valebant*"). The place attributed to the episode of the Throne, at the beginning of the visionary visit (when it describes rather the individual judgment) or at the end of it (when it generally displays the Final Judgment), depends, as I will try to argue, on two different patterns of the supernatural journey.

The episode of God's judgment of the souls is logically followed by the presentation of the punishments respectively the rewards implied by the verdicts. Consequently, the visitors will be shown the places of Hell and then of Paradise, as the main destinations assigned to people in the Otherworld. Now, in the *fisi*, both Hell and Heaven have two distinct manifestations. When Drythelm is shown a dark place where the souls are scattered by the wind alternatively into fire and into ice, he thinks this should be Hell; and when he sees a blossom plain hosting people in white garments, he is convinced it is Heaven. But in both cases, his celestial guide takes care to enlighten him that these are neither Hell, nor Heaven, as he might believe, but other specific places, more precisely, the land of pains and the land of the blessed. So Hell is divided into an upper Hell (the wasteland of mourning and pains) and a lower Hell (the pit of the demons), while Heaven is composed of the land of the blessed (which corresponds to the Terrestrial Paradise) and the celestial Kingdom of God.

The double structure of Hell may have its origin in the superposition, by the fathers of the Church, of two distinct antique eschatologies: the

classic vision of an underground Hades, described by Homer and Virgil and embraced by the large public; and the Pythagorean, mystical vision of an overground, atmospheric or lunar, Hades³⁵. The wide literature of apocrypha also offers different locations for Hell. *Visio Pauli*, for example, revisits the *Odyssey*, placing Hell in the same land of the Cimmerians where Ulysses found its way to Hades: at the setting of the sun, beyond the great river Oceanus, in a place with no light and joy.³⁶ The process of medieval appropriation of these antique visions is disclosed in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great. In the Book IV, Peter asks Gregory "in what part of the world, I beseech you, are we to believe that hell is?"³⁷ And the Pope reminds us that "some have been of the opinion that hell was in some place upon the earth; and others think, that it is under the earth" ("*nonnulli namque in quadam terrarum parte infernum esse putaverunt, alii viro nunc sub terra esse aestimant*"³⁸). Gregory is cautious ("touching this point I dare not rashly define anything") and doesn't want to decide. So, quoting Psalm LXXXV 13, ("*Liberasti animam meam ex inferno inferiori*"), he accepts both theories: "the lighter hell may seem to be upon the earth, and the lower under the earth" ("*ut infernus superior terra, infernus viro inferior sub terra esse videatur*").

Pope Gregory's approach gives us a hint about how the two antique visions of a hell above respectively beneath earth clashed in early Christianity. The theological concept which permitted the accommodation and the juxtaposition of the two *topoi* is St. Augustine's distinction between the Upper and the Lower Hell: "*Intelligimus tanquam duo inferna esse, superius et inferius; nam unde infernum inferius, nisi quia infernum superius*".³⁹ The theme was revisited by Church fathers and scholars like Cassiodorus (*Expositio in Psalterium*), Pseudo-Bede (*In Psalmorum Librum exegesis*) and Honorius of Autun (*Elucidarium*), and it was used by Irish monks in order to accommodate Celtic and other pagan motifs into the Christian vision of the afterworld.

St. Augustine's conceptual device for distinguishing the two divisions of Hell and Heaven was adapted in certain anonymous Latin and Irish texts such as *Liber de numeris* and *Scél Láí Brátha* (*The Tidings of Doomsday*). In *Liber de numeris*, making "glossae in sacram scripturam" on the numbers 1, 2 and 3, an unknown Hiberno-Latin author distinguishes two kinds of good people ("*Duo in hac vita sunt genera justorum: unum videlicet bene viventium, sed nulla docentium; aliud vero recte viventium, et eadem recta docentium*"), respectively two kinds of bad people ("*Duobus modis Deus respicit in homines, id est, vel ad veniam, vel ad vindictam; ad veniam, sicut respexit Petrum; ad vindictam, sicut in Sodomam et Gomorrhham*").⁴⁰ Evidently, their eschatological rewards are not the same: those who have lived well (according to morals) but learnt nothing (according to theology) are not as good as those who lived morally and learned all. Similarly, there is a difference between the venial and the capital sins, the former can be forgiven, whereas the latter unerringly deserve punishment.

The homily dedicated to *The Tidings of Doomsday* also establishes a hierarchy between different degrees of piety and culpability. There are four categories of souls: the “very bad” (*mali valde*), who go directly to Hell, without Judgment; the “bad, not greatly bad” (*mali non valde*), who will be sent to Hell only after the Judgment (“a troop of them shall be brought to judgment and shall go after their doom to pain and punishment”); the “good who are not greatly good” (*boni non valde*), who will be received in Paradise also only after the Judgment (“another troop of them will be brought to judgment, and they will go after their judgement unto reward”); and the “very good” (*boni valde*), who go directly to Paradise.⁴¹ On this basis, the Irish monk-writers ascribed to the souls *mali non valde* and *boni non valde*, who both need to face the Judgment, two intermediary places, the land of pains, or the Upper Hell, and the land of the blessed, or the Terrestrial Paradise. The colours white, black and the combination of white and black spots, discussed above, correspond to this quaternary eschatological typology.

The wasteland of pains (the upper Hell)

The next region of the otherworld visited by the ecstatic visitors is the wasteland of pains, conceived as the upper Hell. As such, this region is supposed to host the “*mali non valde*”, or “not quite wicked”, that is, the sinners whose final destiny is still to be decided. In this quality, it conflates and overlaps with several other eschatological typologies: the limbo (hosting people that are not punished but cannot enter the Kingdom of God either), “*locus refrigerii*”, a place for awaiting the Judgment, and the Purgatory (a place of repentance and cleansing).

Liber de numeris tackles upper and lower hell as the “hell of saints” respectively the “hell of sinners”: “*Duos etiam infernos in Scripturis legimus: unus in terra, in quo probantur sancti, alius sub terra, in quo damnantur daemones et impii*”. The concept of “*infernos sanctorum*” is quite puzzling, because it overlaps characteristics specific to several different eschatological places, such as the *sinus Abrahae*, the limb of the patriarchs before the harrowing of Hell, a place for waiting the Final Judgment, and a Purgatory for venial sins. Furthermore, as the author seems influenced by Irish tradition, it is possible that he describes the upper Hell, having liminally in view the Celtic Mag Mell. On this basis, he offers a long series of contrasts between the two places: “*In inferno sanctorum compunctio salutaris, in inferno peccatorum cruciatus poenalis; in inferno sanctorum poenitentia vera, in inferno peccatorum poenitentia sera; in inferno sanctorum abremissio pia, in inferno peccatorum damnatio justa; in inferno sanctorum probatio cum consolatione, in inferno peccatorum poena sine intermissione; [...] in inferno sanctorum nox et dies, in inferno peccatorum tenebrae exteriores; in inferno sanctorum probantur boni, in inferno peccatorum puniuntur pravi; in inferno sanctorum ignis videtur et ministrat, in inferno peccatorum habetur et cruciat; in inferno sanctorum custodiunt angeli, in inferno peccatorum cruciantur*

adversarii; in inferno sanctorum gratia, benignitas et misericordia, in inferno peccatorum amaritudo, ira et indignatio; in inferno sanctorum adjuvantur sancti, in inferno peccatorum damnantur daemones et impii; in inferno sanctorum boni et mali, in inferno peccatorum nihil habetur boni; in inferno pravorum non est finis malorum, in inferno sanctorum spes est regni coelorum".⁴² Inhabited simultaneously by good and bad people who search the remission of their sins under the supervision of angels, the "Hell of saints" mirrors rather the Kingdom of Heaven than Hell.

Similarly, when he is shown Hell, St. Laisrén is first taken to a place to the North, a huge glen like a cave between two mountains, described as the "porch of Hell". Here he sees many Irishmen wailing. The angels explain that "whoever is under the displeasure of God during life after thee, here do they behold (their) souls, and this is their certain fate, unless they repent". Although he is not allowed to talk to them, the ecstatic visitor is told to preach for righteousness and repentance. Like St. Fursa, St. Laisrén is also prepared through his vision for a worldly mission, i.e. to address living people who can still avoid damnation. Nevertheless, the *físi* suggests that souls can also repent after death, and that they are kept in this place of concealment until they satisfy the demands of God. So the large glen seems to be a moral purgatory, combined with a *locus refrigerii*, where souls remain until they repent and so be taken to "a place of comfort away from this evil".

Drythelm is also conveyed into a very long and deep valley, towards the East. The gorge is bordered to the left by walls of terrifying fire and to the right by terrible curtains of hail and ice. Between the two slopes a wind continuously blow and scatter hosts of souls. These two complementary ordeal elements remind us of the battle of angels and demons over the souls, but here their combined effect is, by means of thorough pain, purgation. Although the dead are visibly suffering, the white guide of Drythelm warns him that this is not Hell, as he might believe, but a place with a distinct eschatological aim, i.e. salvation.

In his turn, the monk of Wenlock is shown several "bowels of the earth, many fiery pits vomiting forth terrible flames". On their edges he can see screaming souls in the shape of black birds ("*miserorum hominum spiritus in similitudine nigrarum avium*"). The bird-souls, black in this case, are a wide recurrent motif in medieval visions. Gregory the Great presented in his *Dialogues* several narratives about souls leaving the bodies in the shape of doves.⁴³ Later, in the 14th-15th centuries, the bird becomes a standard symbol of redeemed humankind in the icons representing Mary and the Child.⁴⁴ In several Irish *físi* and *immrama*, it is apparently conflated with a similar Celtic motif. (For example, in *The adventure of Teigue, son of Cian*, Teigue and his warriors meet infernal black birds on a strange island. By eating their eggs, the Irishmen find themselves covered with black feathers, perhaps in accordance with their general sombre sentiments.⁴⁵) Back to the monk of Wenlock, an angel explains to him that the bird-souls

are allowed to get out of the pits only for a while and then fall back again in the depths. "This brief respite shows that Almighty God will give to these souls in the judgment day relief from their punishment and rest eternal." So upper hell is a place for expiation, and the *refrigerium* the souls receive in it is a foresight of the eternal peace they will enjoy after the Final Judgment.

As a rule, the torments in upper Hell are purgatorial. In his *Dialogues*, Gregory has shown that "before the day of judgment there is a Purgatory fire for certain small sins" ("*de quibusdam levibus culpis esse ante indicium purgatories ignis credendus est*").⁴⁶ The Pope is cautious to inform his readers that the remissible sins are only the smallest and most innocent, such as daily idle talk, immoderate laughter, negligence in the current affairs, "ignorant errors in matters of no great weight".⁴⁷ The subsequent authors of visions, especially the Church fathers, will be careful to secure the moral function of Christian eschatology, by assigning to Purgatory only insignificant faults that people failed to confess during life. Saint Boniface, for example, relating the vision of the monk of Wenlock, takes care to state about Purgatory: "*Hic sunt animae, que post exitum mortalis vitae, quibusdam levibus vitiis non omnino ad purum abolitis, aliqua pia miserentis Dei castigatione indigebant, ut Deo dignae offerantur*".

As the imagination of the visionaries seems freer and blunter than that of the fathers in charge, the purgatorial pains described correspond to misdeeds much less benign. Edmund the monk of Eynsham visits three successive places of torment: a swamp where souls are fried in pans, torn up by fiery claws, boiled in liquid metal, eaten by terrifying worms; a huge deep valley between two mountain coasts of fire and ice; a plain with burning braziers where souls are melted and burnt and then reconstituted in order to be tormented anew. Of the three places, the first two are definitely purgatorial, as the tortured souls conserve the hope of salvation. And even when they are eternally doomed, those who had done some good deeds in their lives are regularly allowed refreshment ("*refrigerium supplicii*") as in *The vision of the Monk of Wenlock*, or alternate moments of pause (most frequent on Sundays⁴⁸) as in *The vision of Adamnán*. In a late vision of an anonymous woman from the fifteenth century, the Purgatory is also divided in three regions, which have a purgation function based on the nature of God's implication: the Purgatory of righteousness (deserved by three great fires that turn souls black, then red and finally white), the Purgatory of mercy and the Purgatory of Grace.⁴⁹

As the *fisi* became more and more elaborate, the structure of the upper Hell also grew more complex. *The vision of Adamnán* and *The vision of Tnugdale* develop a manifold and multifunctional Hell that foreshadowed Dante's great system. After crossing a bridge over the pit of flames, Adamnán visits a series of spaces hosting different types of pains: a place where suffering is intermittent, one hour of pains and one hour of calm, for people in whom good and evil are equally balanced, and who will be

released at the Judgment; a sea of fire, with chains like vipers, for fratricides, ravagers of God's Church and simoniacs; a black mire for people perpetually scorched by their girdles with alternate cold and fire and bitten by demons with fiery clubs; a residence for thieves, liars, traitors, corrupt judges, contentious persons, witches and heretics, pricked by streams of fire in the hollows of the face and by nails through their tongues or heads; a silver wall encloses those who "practised mercy without zeal, and remained in loose living", but who will be redeemed at the Judgment; a spot where the regulars who transgressed their rules and the impostors are clad in red mantles down to their middle and devoured by stinking hounds incited by demons; and an area where demons rain showers of red hot arrows on cheating artificers, weavers, merchants, corrupt judges, impious kings and adulterous women.

The most systematic is *The Vision of Tnugdale*. The "*mali, sed non valde*" exist in an intermediary place, hungry, thirsty, sad, exposed to rain and wind, but still not tortured in any way – a place that anticipates Dante's Limbo. Sinners are grouped by categories of sins and types of pains: murderers, patricides, matricides, infanticides and fratricides are burned like coals and squeezed through an iron lid in valley of fire; intriguers and treacherous people are successively exposed to fire and cold on a mountain; the proud have to pass a bridge over a river of sulphur; the avaricious are eaten by a giant worm; the thieves have to cross a bridge over a lake growling with a multitude of terrible beasts; the gluttons and fornicators are slaughtered by hellish butchers in a giant dome; the faulty clerics are eaten by a winged beast that defecates them in an ice pond and impregnates them with snakes that bite them from within; those who accumulate sins without repenting are smitten by infernal blacksmiths that melt them in balls of twenty up to one hundred souls. These eight categories, anticipating Dante's circles, suffer great pains. However, their torturing, that of Tnugdale included, is supposed to have a purgatorial effect, to cleanse the voyagers from their sins, as in St. Patrick's Purgatory.

The infernal pit (the lower Hell)

If the upper Hell is a wasteland for purging sins, the lower Hell is the pit of the damned. There is no redemption and no escape from this place, the tortures are no longer purgatorial, they are an eternal punishment that the Final Judgment will only confirm and make irrevocable. Tnugdale, for example, is told by the angel that no one who entered the pit will ever be allowed to escape from it ("*nullus, qui semel intraverit, exire amplius poterit*"). As the angel informs Tnugdale, God is eager to listen to the sinners that show repentance at their death, but condemns to eternal death those who deny Him ("*qui vel Christum omnino negant, vel negantium opera faciunt*"). In the infernal pit the demons are not only the torturers of the damned, but are also tortured for their own deeds.

Compared to the upper Hell, the lower Hell is most of the times scarcely described. The voyagers to the underworld often pass over it on a bridge with variable geometry and, if they do not fall, they have only a fugitive glance at it, obstructed by the distance, the smoke and the darkness. In St. Laisrén's vision, "Hell itself" (as opposed to the mountain cave and the glen of the "porch of Hell") is minimally presented (maybe because of a loss in manuscript transmission), on the model of the lake of fire from St. John's *Apocalypse* ("*et Diabolus, qui seducebat eos, missus est in stagnum ignis, et sulphuris, ubi et bestia, et pseudopropheta cruciabuntur die ac nocte in saecula saeculorum*", 20, 10),⁵⁰ as a wild sea of fire engulfing the souls of the damned. Some of these, those who practised blasphemy, falsehood, prying and boasting, have nails hammered through their tongues, ears or eyes; others are driven by demons with fiery forks. The monk of Wenlock also has only a distant glimpse of the infernal pit situated in the "lowest depths, as it were in a lower hell". An angel informs him that the people he can hear screaming within will never receive divine mercy and will be eternally tortured ("*Sub illis autem puteis, adhuc in inferioribus et in imo profundo, quasi in inferno inferiori, audivit horrendum et tremendum et dictu difficilem gemitum et fletum lugentium animarum*").

However, in some of the later *fisi* the influence of the Judeo-Christian apocalypses, with their rich imagination concerning the infernal torments, eventually inspired a progressive amplification of the description, culminating in Dante's system. In *The vision of Thurkill*, the presentation of Hell begins with a most elaborated spectacle. In a huge house situated to the North of the eschatological church where souls are being tried, Thurkill attends a complex theatre show, in which the doomed people grotesquely mimic their sins, to the laughter and applause of the demons. Further on there extend four places of torture: in the first, souls are boiled in cauldrons of burning sulphur and liquids; in the second, in cauldrons of ice and snow; in the third, in cauldrons with melting mixtures of venomous herbs; in the fourth, in cauldrons with caustic salted water. Every eight days, the souls are moved from one place to other.

The visit of the infernal pit implies a deeper descent into the underworld, which is most often a new (or the real) "*descensus ad inferos*". After visiting the abodes of the upper Hell, Tnugdale finds himself in a place of incomparable darkness, the "*tenebrae palpabilis*". A quadrangular pit ("*fossam quadrangulam quasi cisternam*") leads to a cloud of flames and smoke, in which dwell a multitude of souls and demons. The origin of the dimness is the prince of darkness ("*princeps tenebrarum*") himself, Lucifer. The enemy of the human race ("*inimicus generis humani*") is described as having a human form, but several arms and tails. In his hands he is crushing crowds of souls, like grapes. He is chained to the ground by all his limbs, otherwise he would destroy the entire world. This is the traditional image of the fettered arch-demon, which traversed medieval popular

mythology, from the demon tied in the “*vale tenebrarum*” of the medieval legends about Alexander and the “marvels of the East”⁵¹ to Dante's Lucifer imprisoned in the ice of Cocytus.

Some visions posit a more drastic separation between lower Hell and the upper one. In his *fis*, Adamnán discovers that “beyond the land of torment there is a fiery wall”, which encloses a place “seven times more horrible and cruel”. The landscape is far more terrifying than that of the land of pains. Adamnán sees mountains with caverns and thorny brakes; bare and parched plains, with lochs full of serpents; sandy, rugged and icebound soil; great seas with horrible abysses; four mighty rivers, of fire, snow, poison and mud. But the main difference between upper and lower Hell in Adamnán's vision is given by their eschatological employ. Upper Hell is a Purgatory and a place for abiding Doomsday. After the Final Judgment, some of its penitents, the “*mali non valde*”, “shall be brought into the Haven of Life”; and some, the “*mali*”, will be thrown into the lower Hell. For now, until the end of the world, the infernal walls of lower Hell imprison only “the Devil's own tribe”. The sinners condemned for “ever and ever” will join them only after Doom (and even then they will still have a respite, of three hours on every Sunday). The infernal stronghold seen by Adamnán, meant to imprison the absolute “*mali*”, stands in the thematic line that goes from Virgil's prison of Tartar to Dante's fortress of Dite.

The bridge

Most often, Hell is separated from Heaven by a bridge (“*pons probationis*”), an ordeal barrier meant to part the damned souls from the blessed ones. As lower Hell is represented as a lake of fire, or as a deep pit underground, and as Christian Hell inherited the rivers and swamps of classical Hades, Acheron, Styx, Cocytus, etc., a bridge would be a logical artefact (similar to the boat of the dead) to cross this obstacle. Nevertheless, being conceived by God in eternity, and not by men, the bridge has more than a pragmatic aim. Generally it enacts a moral function: designed with variable geometry, it is broad and accessible for righteous people, but become narrow, slippery and impenetrable for sinners.

The topos of the bridge, as most scholars agree, seems to originate in early Christian folklore, and was imposed by the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great. In Dialogue 37 of Book IV, the Pope presents the post-mortem destiny of a man called Stephen that died in the plague of 590. The story is told by a soldier who had a near-death experience at the same epoch. While “his soul was in such sort carried out of his body” (“*eductus e corpore*”), the soldier saw “a bridge, under which a black and smoky river did run, that had a filthy and intolerable smell: but upon the farther side thereof there were pleasant green meadows full of sweet flowers, in which also there were divers companies of men apparelled in white” (“*pons erat,*

sub quo niger adque caligosus foetoris intolerabilis nebulam exhalans fluvius decurrebat; transact autem ponte, amoena erant prae, adque virentia odoriferis herbarum floribus exornata, in quibus albatorum hominum conventicula esse videbantur").⁵² Not all the voyagers, Stephen included, have the chance of crossing the bridge, because they don't survive "this manner of trial: if any that was wicked attempted to go over, down he fell into that dark and stinking river; but those that were just and not hindered by sin, securely and easily passed over to these pleasant and delicate places".⁵³ Moreover, conflating the *topos* of the bridge with Jacob's ladder, Gregory recounts that the ordeal is completed by the intervention of "certain terrible men" who rise from the river and drag the passengers downward, and "certain other white and beautiful persons" who pull them upward. So, the bridge re-enacts the theme of the battle of angels and demons over the souls of the dead.

The sources of the theme are not entirely clear. Scholars from the *Religions-geschichtliche Schule* (from Miguel Asín Palacios to P. Dinzelbacher) have argued that the motif of the bridge has its origin in the Iranian theme of the *Cinvat*, and from there that it was successively adapted by the Muslim *mi'raj*, by Irish mythology and by Medieval Christian visions. Recently, Ioan Petru Culianu has discarded the "Irish connection", showing that the theme was most likely transmitted directly from Muslim to Christian eschatology.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, in Irish literature there appear all types of ordeal bridges. They are present in all the literary species that tackle with the otherworld, *echtraí*, *immrama*, journeys to St. Patrick's Purgatory, *fisi*.

For example, in *The Adventures of Art son of Conn*, Art travels to Tir na nIngnadh to find Delbchaem, his future wife. Among the many dangers and perils he has to avoid there is a slender narrow bridge over an icy river, guarded by a warrior giant.⁵⁵ The most formidable of these bridges is the Bridge of the Cliff that Cu Chulainn has to traverse in order to please the father of his future bride Emer. "And this is the way the bridge was: the two ends of it were low, and the middle was high, and whenever any one would leap on it, the first time it would narrow till it was as narrow as the hair of a man's head, and the second time it would shorten till it was as short as an inch, and the third time it would get slippery till it was as slippery as an eel of the river, and the fourth time it would rise up on high against you till it was as tall as the mast of a ship".⁵⁶ In order to cross it, Cu Chulainn has no other recourse than to go berserk and perform the "hero's salmon leap".

In *The Voyage of Mael Duin*, the coracle of the heroes stops nearby a fortress with a bronze gate and a bridge of glass, running over a small river. "When they used to go up on the bridge they would fall down backwards". A sinless young lady greets and accommodates them for three days, then disappears together with the castle.⁵⁷ In the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, when the saint reaches Tir Tairngire (*Terra repromissionis*

sanctorum), which is assimilated to the Terrestrial Paradise, he learns that the island is divided into two regions by a river. The *procurator* allows him to visit the first one, but not the second. The same as in the case of the Garden of Eden, prohibited to mankind after the original sin, Brendan is warned not to try to find a passage or a bridge over the river: "*Istud flumen non possumus transire*".⁵⁸ The *pont-levis* to the Kingdom of God has been raised!

The bridge is an important piece of the narrative pattern of the journeys into St. Patrick's Purgatory also.⁵⁹ In contrast to classical Acheron, which parts the realm of the living from the realm of the dead, in Irish descents into the purgatorial cave a river or an abyss separates the kingdom of the damned from the Kingdom of God. A narrow, slippery, blade-like bridge ("*tres estroit, et aussi poli comme glace et tout esculent*", says Jacques of Voragine) links the two banks. It is a trial instrument which tests not only the faith and moral quality of the characters, but also their courage. Owein and Nicolas cross it without aid, by their own forces. George is secured by the archangel Michael, who supports and protects him from the onslaught of the devils. William tumbles upon a ladder with blade-like stairs high as a man each.

In the *fisi*, the bridge is, rather than a test of courage and heroic skills, a moral ordeal that carries out the same selection function as the trial by angels and demons in the atmospheric sky, the purgatorial fire in the astronomical skies and God's Judgment of the souls. It is just another way of separating the good from the bad: it allows the passage of the virtuous but determines the fall of the vicious in the hellish pit beneath. In *The Adventures of St. Columba's Clerics*⁶⁰, the monks are taken to visit Hell. The first region they see is a kind of a limbo, a black desolated plain, with no penance and suffering. Here the souls have to pass a trial bridge, wide for the just, but narrow and slippery for the sinners. In the *Vision of Adamnán*, after attending the divine Judgment, "little Adam" (Adamnán is a diminutive for Adam) is taken to the underworld. From a "land burnt black, waste and scorched", a bridge conveys the souls upon a pit in flames. The bridge changes its dimensions and form: it is large and easy for the chaste, the penitent and the diligent people; it is narrow at the beginning and large at the end for the converted; and it is large at the beginning and narrows at the end for the sinners. Obviously, the bridge is developing the traditional allegory of human destiny as a road determined by either virtues or vices.

The bridges have not only a selection, but also a purgatorial function, through the pains they inflict to the passengers. In the vision of the monk of Wenlock, reported by St. Boniface, the ecstatic visitor is shown a bridge of wood ("*lignum pontis*") over Tartarus, a river of fire and burning sulphur ("*igneum piceumque flumen, bulliens et ardens*"). The virtuous souls cross it without difficulties, but the others fall into the river and sink up to the knees, or waist, or shoulders. The angels explain that these are people who

died before confessing venial sins and need purification. After the immersion, a soul rises "far more brilliant and beautiful than when he fell into the foaming and pitchy river." In the *Vision of Tnugdale*, several zones of the upper Hell are provided with trial bridges. The deep valley of the arrogant people is traversed by a long and narrow bridge that conveys the humble. The lake of thieves is also crossed by a bridge with iron nails ("*clavis ferreis acutissimis, qui omnium transeuntium pedes solebant penetrare*") and each voyager has to go over it carrying on his back what he had stolen during his life (a cow in the case of Tnugdale).

All in all, the bridge has the same function and is a synecdoche of the whole upper Hell. As such, it can appear at its entrance (selecting those who should undergo the purgatory ordeal), during its crossing (selecting those who cannot be purified and are doomed to fall into the lower Hell) or at its end (selecting those worthy of leaving it and entering the Terrestrial Paradise).

The land of the blessed (the Terrestrial Paradise)

When the moral and penitential visit to Hell is over, the ecstatic voyagers reach the land of the blessed. The landscape changes dramatically, from darkness to light and from pain to happiness. Just as the partition of Hell into an upper and a lower zone allowed medieval authors to collect into the former different pagan topics such as the underground Mag Mell (the world within the *sidhe*) and its Christian equivalent, St. Patrick's cave, the distinction between the land of the blessed and the celestial Kingdom of God made possible the conservation, within the topic of the first zone, of several pagan themes, such as the "*locus amoenus*", the insular Mag Mell, the Elysian Fields or the Islands of the Blessed. Making use of prolific visions such as those of St. John, St. Peter and St. Paul, these Celtic and classical topics were assimilated to several Judeo-Christian themes, such as the Land of Promise, the Land of the Saints, the "*sinus Abrahae*", and the Terrestrial Paradise.

Both Bede and Boniface describe Paradise with the classical terms of the *locus amoenus*. The "*supernum conuentum*" where St. Fursa is received by Beoanus and Meldanus is filled with an exquisite perfume of flowers and an ethereal music of angels that charm and transport him ("*Tunc anima illius ad dulcedinem superni modulaminis ac sonitum ineffabilis laetitiae ultra caelum sonantis intendens, circumfulsit*"). In such a place there is no grief, sorrow and misery ("*In hoc caelesti regno nulla umquam tristitia nisi de hominum perditione fieri potest*"). Drythelm sees the "*boni non valde*" gathered in a pleasant plain, full of flowers ("*tantaque flagrantia uernantium flosculorum plenus*") whose perfume kills the unpleasant odour of Hell. The monk of Wenlock discovers in the "Paradise of God" a multitude of people in a state of blissful joy, nourished by the divine fragrance of the field ("*amoenitatis locus, in quo pulcherrimorum hominum gloriosa multitudo miro laetabatur gaudio*"). Tnugdale, after seeing Hell, is shown the plain of joy

("campus letitie"): beautiful landscape, perfumed flowers and fruit, clear light, pleasant and temperate air, etc. The Celtic apple-trees (Emain Ablach or Avalon are the islands of the apple-trees) which give immortality are supplanted by a source of eternal youth: "*Fons quoque hic, quem vides, vocatur vivens: si quis gustaverit ex hac aqua, vivet in eternum*". This is the place for the "*non valde bonorum*", those who were good, but not enough, to be received directly into the Kingdom of God.

In late medieval iconography, Paradise was often represented as a twofold image: in the lower part of the drawings, was a garden of delights (inheriting the *topos* of the Garden of Eden), and in the upper part, the City of God (inheriting the *topoi* of the Kingdom of God and of the Heavenly Jerusalem). The Irish monks moulded their Celtic legacy according to this pattern. In the middle of the plain of joy, Tnugdale sees a castle miraculously suspended, rich and resplendent ("*domus mirabiliter ornatum, cujus parietes et omnis structura ex auro errant et argento et ex omnibus lapidum pretiosarum generibus*"). This dome reuses the motif of the magical stronghold of the fairy people living in Mag Mell, and upgrades it to the magnificence of the Pauline Celestial Jerusalem. As such, it is the afterworld abode of Christian kings like Conchobar and Donnchad, placed in paradise because of their patronage of the Benedictine monastic federation to which the author of *Visio Tnugdali* belonged.

In other *fisi*, the vision of the lower Paradise is assimilated to the Land of Saints. Adamnán discovers that the site is divided into four cardinal dwellings: the eastern abode houses the saints from the East, the southern the saints from the South, etc. The same partition of the Land of the Saints appears in the account of the two ecstatic monks of *The Adventures of St. Columba's Clerics*. This division of paradise into quadrants is amplified, in *The Adventure of Cian's son Teigue*, into the concept of four cardinal paradises, each situated at one of the cardinal points of the world. In Adamnán's description, the wondrous companies of the Host of the Saints, "clad in cassocks of white linen, with hoods of radiant white upon their heads", "keep singing marvellous music in praise of God."

Lower Paradise is a mansion where the saints wait for the Final Judgment or, as Adamnán puts it, "abide continually in even such great glory as aforesaid, until the great Parliament of Doom, when the righteous Judge, on the Day of Judgment, shall dispose them in their stations and abiding places". If in Tnugdale's *fis* the historical extension of the plain of delights is unlimited or not specified, being potentially coextensive with Hell and Paradise (the plain of joy is conceived as "the resting place of the not quite good"), in other texts its duration in time is bounded by Doomsday, when all intermediary places will be closed. As such, lower Paradise can be presented as Abraham's bosom, an ancient Hebrew *topos* related to the idea of return to the ancestors and utilised especially by Oriental Christianity as a name for the place of rest where dead people sleep until the resurrection. In *The vision of Barontus*, a continental vision that I

exceptionally invoke here for its plain utilisation of the Judeo-Christian terminology, the place where souls wait for the Judgment and the accession into the Kingdom of God is specifically called "*sinus Abrahæ*". Travelling between Paradise and Hell, Barontus sees Abraham seated on a huge throne and receiving into his bosom the souls of the dead who do not go directly to God.

Finally, the effort of incorporating the pagan *topoi* of "*locus amoenus*" and Mag Mell into the Christian concept of the Otherworld led to their assimilation to the Garden of Eden, as in Godfrey of Viterbo's sapiential poem *Pantheon*⁶¹. In the medieval tradition, the Biblical Garden, permanently closed by God after the original sin, was however open to some special cases, such as Enoch and Elias, to which sometimes were added Moses or St. John the Evangelist. In the Bible, Enoch and Elias were two peculiar samples of people being miraculously abducted "*in corpore*", during their lifetime. Originating perhaps in a lost apocryphal text (in the opinion of Montague James), already present in St. Irenaeus's *Contra Haereses* (V.5.1.) and in *Visio Pauli* (20a-b), the theme of Enoch and Elias appears in several Irish texts. The most explicit and complete is *Dá brón Flatha Níme* (*The Two Sorrows of the Kingdom of Heaven*), where they are presented as saints who await, in their mortal bodies, the end of the world. Elias is pictured preaching about Doomsday to birds which are souls of the just. Unlike all other humans, who had to pay by death the price of Adam's sin, the two saints are allowed to remain alive until the Judgment, when they are supposed to confront the Antichrist and die as martyrs. D. N. Dumville is of the opinion that Terrestrial Paradise was the most logical place that medieval writers could attribute to this physical immortality, as opposed to the Celestial Paradise reserved for the spiritual immortal beings such as the angels and the souls of the righteous.⁶²

The scene from *The Two Sorrows of the Kingdom of Heaven* reappears *tale quale* in the *Vision of Adamnán*, in its final section. Elias, we are told, preaches to "bright white birds", which are "the souls of the righteous, under the Tree of Life, which is in Paradise." He is teaching them about the two journeys of the dead, to the "joys and delights of the Heavenly Realm", or to the "pains and torments of Hell", and about the woes of Doomsday. The description of Judgement Day produces a "look of sorrow" upon the faces of Elias and of Enoch, and a great lamentation among the birds. The whole episode happens before the time when "will the Lord render due recompense to every one on earth" and the saints will be borne "to a lasting habitation in the Kingdom of Heaven". Adamnán's Terrestrial Paradise is then a land where the souls of the righteous, not in human but in bird form, await for the Last Day. It is analogous to the Land of Saints or similar places where, in other *fisi* such the *Vision of St. Fursa*, angels or saints instruct the visitors about the chances of salvation deriving from of their moral comportment in life.

The lower Paradise visited by Thurkill is also assimilated to the Garden of Eden, although it is not named so. As in the already cited medieval legends about the Terrestrial Paradise situated at the end of the marvellous India,⁶³ the garden and the mansions of the City of God dwell on a high mountain, "*Mons gaudi*" (Dante will reuse this solution placing the Terrestrial Paradise on the top of the mountain of the Purgatory). As for the biblical Eden, from the middle of the garden there springs a source which divides itself into four rivers (alluding to the ancient Tigris, Euphrates, Phison and Gihon). Near the source there grows a resplendent tree, which is obviously the Tree of Life. Under its crown there stands Adam, a gigantic figure contemplating his successors. With one eye he cries for the sinners, with the other he laughs for the righteous.⁶⁴

The Kingdom of God (the Celestial Paradise)

After the lower or Terrestrial Paradise comes the Celestial Kingdom of God. In Christian dogma, this is the final destination for righteous souls, the spotless *boni*. If sometimes the intermediary places such as the Land of Promise, the "*locus amoenus*", the "*locus refrigerii*", the Land of the Saints, Abraham's bosom or the Garden of Eden are meant to last only to Doomsday and be destroyed together with the physical world, the Celestial Paradise is the eternal abode of God himself. In its description there converge several Judeo-Christian topics such as the Third Sky, the Empyrean Sky, the City of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Thus, the circle of the visionary journey closes upon itself. When they departed from their bodies, the ecstatic visitors were taken to the Throne of God, following the trajectory of the human beings after death. There, they were taught about the two directions assigned to souls depending on the result of God's Judgment: Hell or Heaven. In order to have a complete instruction, they had to perform a "*catabasis eis antron*" and to see the eschatological destiny of the sinners. Afterwards, they are invited to an "*anabasis*" in order to contemplate the fate of the faithful after death. Unavoidably, the description of the Kingdom of God revisits and continues the previous visions of the Throne of God, attended in the initial ascent of the soul.

However, not all visitors manage to enter the City of God. In *The voyage of St. Brendan*, the island of the Terrestrial Paradise is divided into two parts by an impassable river and only the first half is open to visitors. This interdiction is valid mainly for the pilgrims who go on a physical quest, in their actual bodies, from St. Brendan to all the searchers of the oriental Paradise up to John Mandeville. But sometimes the prohibition also concerns the ecstatic visitors.

Most often, its protection is ensured by an impenetrable wall, rivers of water, ice or fire, and angel guardians. This motif should be compared to the wall that protects the Terrestrial Paradise in Alexander's *Iter ad Paradisum* and other medieval texts dealing with the Garden of Eden

situated in Asia.⁶⁵ The monk of Wenlock sees the shining walls, infinitely tall and long, of the Celestial Jerusalem (*"citra illud flumen speculatur muros fulgentes clarissimi splendoris, stupendae longitudinis et altitudinis immensae"*), but is not even able to gaze at them. Drythelm is also conveyed to the shining walls of the Celestial Paradise. He can feel the amazing scents that exude from within and hear the ethereal choruses of angels, but his guide stops the visit abruptly and takes him back.

Fortunately, the majority of ecstatic voyagers do receive the permission to contemplate the Kingdom, as their worldly mission will consist in describing the eschatological destiny not only of the sinners, but also of the righteous. After crossing the Garden of Eden, Thurkill arrives before a wall of gold with a gate of precious stones. Behind it lies the City of God, with several *"mansiones"* for martyrs and saints, such as the beautiful temple hosting the martyr virgins Catherine, Marguerite and Osith. The visits stop here, as the visitor is conveyed back to his body.

St. Adamnán is also allowed to have a glance of the Celestial Jerusalem, which has the attributes of a moral and theological utopia: "This, then, is the manner of that City: A Kingdom without pride, or vanity, or falsehood, or outrage, or deceit, or pretence, or blushing, or shame, or reproach, or insult, or envy, or arrogance, or pestilence, or disease, or poverty, or nakedness, or death, or extinction, or hail, or snow, or wind, or rain, or din, or thunder, or darkness, or cold, – a noble, admirable, ethereal realm, endowed with the wisdom, and radiance, and fragrance of a plenteous land, wherein is the enjoyment of every excellence". The description is reminiscent of St. John's *Apocalypse*: the City of God is surrounded by seven crystal walls; its floor is of fair crystal, shot with blue, purple, green; the passage between the choirs of angels and saints is of red gold and silver; the rows and seats of precious stones, diverse gems, and carbuncles. Seated on his throne, God is presented as a blazing energy, facing all those who surround Him, that is, being simultaneously and ubiquitously present to all.

The most elaborate vision, anticipating once again Dante's system, is that of Tnugdale. The Kingdom of God is divided into skies dedicated to different virtues. The first sky (*"De Gloria conjugaliū"*), of an airy nature, is a waiting place for those who did not commit any sin and await God's Judgment in order to be accepted into the Glory (*"expectantes illam beatam spem et adventum glorie magni dei"*). The second sky (*"De Gloria martyrum et continentium"*), of an ethereal nature, is occupied by martyrs and people who took the monastic vows after a laic life. The third sky (*"De gloria monachorum et sanctimonialium"*) is the *"Olimphus"*, where monks leave in tents and play music instruments (this is a literal transcription, an *ekphrasis*, of late medieval paintings about Paradise). The fourth sky (*"De defensoribus et constructoribus ecclesiarum"*) is the *"firmamentum"*, where the spiritual Church is represented as an allegorical cosmic tree, hosting the souls in the shape of birds. The fifth sky, of fire (*"celum igneum"*), and the

sixth (*"celum angelorum"*) lodge the nine orders of angels (*"angelos, archangelos, virtutes, principatus, potestates, dominationes, thrones, Cherubin et Seraphin"*), the patriarchs, the prophets, the martyrs, the apostles, the virgins, the saints and the bishops. The last and supreme place, the "omega point" of the universe, is the Throne of God (*"sedes Trinitatis"*).

The return of the soul to its body

Eventually, after the ecstatic visitors have seen the entire structure of the Otherworld, they are driven back to their normal life. The return of the soul into the body (*"de reditu anime ad corpus"*) may be instantaneous, as in the case of Tnugdale: *"Et cum hoc dixisset angelus, conversa est anima. [...] Nullum enim intervallum nec unum temporis sensit interesse momentum, sed in uno atque eodem temporis puncto in illis loquebatur ad angelum et in terris se sensit induere corpus suum"*). Otherwise, it may follow the same route as when ascending, and thus confront once again the demons' trial and the fire ordeal, as in the case of St. Fursa.

Very often, the voyagers find it very difficult to re-enter their catatonic bodies, perceived as corpses, and the angels have to comfort them or to oblige them to do it. The monk of Wenlock finds its body disgusting, as nauseating as the presence of demons: *"In omnibus illis visionibus nihil tam odibile, nihil tam despectum, nihil tam durum foetorem evaporans, exceptis demonibus et igne flagrante, videret, quam proprium corpus."* Neither are his organs fully functional, and it takes him a week to recover his sight, as his eyes were filled with bleeding tumors.

The purpose of the voyage is the enlightenment of the ecstatic traveller. Most of the time, the characters of the *fisi* experience similar ordeals and pains to those of the knights visiting the cave of Station Island. Nonetheless, unlike the descents into St. Patrick's Purgatory, the main goal of spiritual voyages is not a purgatorial one. They are not supposed to cleanse the voyagers of their sins, in order to prepare their ascent into the Kingdom of God. Their real purpose is to reveal the journey of the souls after death and the destiny that awaits them in the afterworld.

The main lesson taught by the angelic guides is that morality and piety in earthly life determine the eschatological destiny of all humans. St. Fursa, for example, is instructed at length about what he should tell and preach after the return to his existence in the world. The mission of the ecstatic voyagers is to narrate what they had seen about the fire and ice ordeals, about the demons' and angels' trial, about God's Judgment, about purgatorial pains and eternal torments in the upper and in the lower Hell, about the expectation and preparations in the Terrestrial Paradise, and about the unlimited bliss of the Kingdom of God. The Christian *fisi* is designed to inform the characters about the geography of the Otherworld, to change their further terrestrial life, to prepare them for the afterlife, and to serve as a pious converting story for their worldly audience.

The loci of the descents into St. Patrick's Purgatory

The suite of motifs listed above is an ideal blueprint for the medieval ecstatic visions. The order in which these places are visited may differ from *fis* to *fis*, but their functional logic remains the same. I would like to compare it to another kindred pattern, the topology of St. Patrick's cave.⁶⁶ In brief, the journey prototype of the *fisi* can be significantly contrasted with that of the descents into St. Patrick's Purgatory, taking into account the succession in which the eschatological abodes are visited.

One of the legends attributed to the "Apostle of Ireland"⁶⁷ is the opening of the famous cave of Station Island on the Red Lake (Lough Derg). The story goes that, upset by the incredulity of the Irish people, the saint created an entrance (a sort of a "portal") to the Otherworld, in order to show the sinners what they should expect after death. During incubation visits to the cave, penitents were shown by angels or by monks the main places of Christian eschatology, from Hell to Heaven. The underground trip was supposed to have a purgatorial effect on the visitors, "cleansing" them, through fear, pain and moral examples, of their sins and bad inclinations. Throughout the late Middle Ages, a rich literature developed on the subject, starting from the *Tractatus de purgatorio sancti Patricii* by H. of Saltrey,⁶⁸ and its verse free translation by Marie de France *Espurgatoire Saint Patriz*,⁶⁹ the *Narracio de milite et Gulino* by Peter of Cornwall,⁷⁰ the adventure of Nicholas related in the *Golden Legend* by Jacob of Voragine,⁷¹ the story of Lodovico de Franza from the town of Auchisodia, the *Visiones Georgii* ⁷², the *Roman de Perellós*, the *Vision of William of Stranton* and the pilgrimage of Laurence Rathold de Pászthó.⁷³

The stories about St. Patrick's cave develop a rather consistent vision about the Otherworld. After a rapid descent by a spiral staircase or a vertical tunnel, the penitent finds himself in a desolate black land inhabited by demons, corresponding to the Christian Hell, divided into an upper and a lower zone. The upper Hell is a place for tortured souls, which serve as ethical counter-models for the penitents. Traversing it, seeing its torments and even suffering its pains operates a catharsis on the voyagers. The lower Hell, situated at the bottom of a gigantic pit, is the abode of demons and great sinners. The penitent has to pass over it by a very narrow and slippery bridge, which tests his moral virtues. Beyond the bridge there lies a wonderful plain, which combines motifs of the Christian Garden of Eden with motifs of the classical Elysian plains and of the Celtic Mag Mell. Above this Terrestrial Paradise, there rises the City of God and the Empyrean Sky. Thus, although its entrance leads to the underground, St. Patrick's cave offers a complete view of all the eschatological places of Christian doctrine: Hell, Purgatory, trial bridge, Garden of Eden, Celestial Paradise.

There exist, thus, two slightly differing patterns of the journey in the Otherworld. In the *fisi* the eschatological places are organised on a vertical

vector. The mystical voyage begins with the rapture of the visitor and the ascent of his soul to the heavens. Here it attends the divine Judgment, which divides the good people from the wicked. From God's Throne of Judgment, the sinners are sent down to Hell and the blessed ascend to Heaven. The ecstatic visitor is conveyed to both these destinations, then returns to his body. This is the journey schedule for the vast majority of the *fisi*, such as *The Vision of Fursa*, *The Vision of Laisrén*, *The Vision of the monk of Wenlock*, *The Vision of St. Adamnán*, *The Adventures of St. Columba's Clerics*, or *The Vision of Thurkill*. The route is rather sinuous: the ascent of the soul ("raptus animae") is followed by a "katábasis eis antron", and then by an "anabasis" to Heaven. As a consequence, the ecstatic visitors follow a course that, by a paradoxical solution of continuity, leads them from the bottom of the hellish pit to the Celestial Paradise. As I have already suggested, Dante masterfully solved this contradiction by prolonging his descent to the centre of the Earth with an ascent to the opposite hemisphere, where lies the island of Purgatory.

The stories about St. Patrick's Purgatory simplify the course of the journey in the Otherworld, following a horizontal vector: after an initial (short) descent into the cave, the traveller follows a horizontal (slightly ascending) trajectory: the plain of penitential pains ends with an ordeal bridge, which crosses the infernal pit and leads to the land of joy. The moral and allegorical signification of this itinerary is patent: those who did not manage to purge themselves in the cave are expected to fall into Hell, those who did – to reach the abode of the blessed. If the *fisi* follow what we could define as a chronological logic, in which the ecstatic traveller covers the trajectory of human souls after death, the descents into Saint Patrick's Purgatory pursue a topological or space logic, in which the places are crossed in their geographic succession, from the lowest to the highest abode of the Otherworld.

While the topological scheme secures a linear systematic presentation of the Otherworld, the chronological scheme sends the visitors towards two opposite vectors. This crossroads is somehow reminiscent of the Pythagorean Y, as it appears in Eneas's underworld journey, and in several apocrypha, such as *The Testament of Abraham*⁷⁴ and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.⁷⁵ In *The vision of Drythelm*, the double direction is deployed on a geographical horizontal scale. At the beginning, Drythelm walks towards the North-East ("contra ortum solis solsticialem"), which leads him to the Valley of pains and points to the Gehenna; then he turns to the South-East ("contra ortum solis brumalem"), which leads, after the crossing of a wall, to a "locus amoenus" and then to the "regnum coelorum". In *The vision of Thurkill*, the horizontal scheme is overlapped by a vertical one. Thus, the "church in the middle of the world" (which is an eschatological reduplication of Jerusalem, the "navel of the world" where Jesus Christ established his Church through his sacrifice) is the central point of the Y that structures the Other World. The left arm leads to the North and also

downwards, because it opens to the pit of the lower Hell; the right arm leads to the East and also upwards, as it conveys to the Mount of Joy, on which is located the Garden of Eden and the City of Christ with its church-like mansions.

In the rest of the *fisi*, the crossroads is simply vertical, one direction indicating Hell, the nadir of the universe, the other Heaven, its zenith. This eschatological bifurcation, pointing alternatively down and up, obliges the ecstatic travellers to follow successively both directions. The central point of the universe is the Throne of Judgment, from which all destinations are equally visible. Nevertheless, within this symmetrical structure, the double purpose of the ecstatic journey allows several loose reduplications and overlapping of the eschatological places and episodes. The fire ordeal of the soul ascending into the heavens anticipates or replaces the purgation of the soul in the wasteland of the upper Hell, and can be also revisited in the last part of the voyage, when the visitor ascends again from Hell to the celestial Kingdom. The purgatorial bridge can also be found either at the beginning of the voyage, during the ascension, or within the Land of pains, or at the end of Hell and the passage to Heaven. And the Throne of God can be visited either at the beginning of the ecstatic voyage, when it features rather the individual judgment, or at the end, when it discloses the Final Judgment.

So, what is the meaning of these two divergent patterns? Are they simply two variations of the same archetype, or do they rely on different backgrounds and representations of the Otherworld? To my knowledge, scholars generally assume the first possibility, considering the (other)worldview of the *fisi* to be consistent and homogenous with that of St. Patrick's and other fantastic voyages, such as the *immrama* and the *echtraí*. Nevertheless, I would like to question this homogeneity and explore if it could not be explained by the development of two different journey schemes.

Christian sources for Irish *fisi* and descents into St. Patrick's Purgatory

The main source for early and medieval Irish literature is considered by contemporary scholarship to be Christian: the Bible, apocryphal texts, writings of the Fathers, etc.⁷⁶ The visions of the Otherworld specifically feed on the Judeo-Christian genre of the Testamentary and apocryphal apocalypses, especially *Visio Pauli*.⁷⁷ Our hypothesis is that some peculiarities in the construction, evolution, translation and reception of *The Apocalypses of St. Peter* and *Saint Paul* led to the formation of two distinct patterns for the voyage in the Christian Otherworld.

The *Apocalypse of Peter* was written somewhere in the first half of the 2nd century. It survives in two main versions, an Ethiopic translation and a Greek version (the Akhnim fragment), and two small Greek fragments.⁷⁸

The Ethiopic translation seems to follow closely the (lost) original of the text, while the Akhnim fragment seems a later version (possibly belonging to the Gospel of Peter), that partially reorganises the sequences of the epic. As a whole, the *Apocalypse of Peter* departs from the more authoritative model of the *Apocalypse of John*, as it appears to express different concerns. As E. Hennecke puts it, "In contrast to the Revelation of John which displays the final struggle and triumph of Jesus Christ, its interest no longer lies on the person of the Redeemer, but on the situation in the after-life, on the description of different classes of sinner, on the punishment of the evil and the salvation of the righteous."⁷⁹

The shift of interest between the two revelations may reflect an evolution of the collective mind of Christian believers. While the synoptic apocalypses in the Gospels, the letters of Saint Paul and the *Apocalypse of John* suggested that the end of the world was near, maybe during the lifetime of Paul himself, with the passing of years, decades and centuries, Christians were obliged to accept that the Second Coming of Christ might be delayed, for an unknown lapse of time. The expression of this concern has been given in the second Epistle of Peter, probably one of the last texts accepted in the canon of the New Testament and considered now an pseudepigraphic. In order to combat the rising scepticism concerning the promise of the Second Venue, pseudo-Peter uses Psalm 90, 4, where a day of God appears as the equivalent of one thousand years of men, to explain that "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3, 9).

This delay raised a several problems and dilemmas, such as: What happens to the souls of the dead in the interval between the First and the Second Advent? While the eastern fathers and then the Oriental Church tended to cling to the primitive idea of the dead put to sleep until the Resurrection and the Final Judgment, Western fathers and Rome finally accepted the idea that dead survive in a spiritual form in the Otherworld and will receive their bodies back at the Resurrection. The current destiny of the souls became a major preoccupation. It also raised the questions of the condition of the souls, of their status after death, and of their abodes in the afterworld. If they were to inherit the Kingdom of God immediately, or be doomed, they needed an earlier judgment than the Final one at the end of time.

Therefore, collective imagination imposed the complementary ideas of an individual and a General Judgment of the souls. The two main versions of the *Apocalypse of Peter* may reflect this evolution of interest and accent. If the older one, the Ethiopic translation, presents Jesus on the Mount of Olives disclosing "the signs of thy Parousia and of the end of the world", the latter Greek version rearranges the revelation by Jesus ("And he showed me in his right hand the souls of all (men) and on the palm of his right hand the image of that which shall be fulfilled at the last day") as

a vision of Peter (compare to "But I saw also another place", etc.). While in the first Jesus presents Hell and Heaven as foresights of the future, in the second Peter speaks of Hell as a vision of something already in place. In this sense, Anthony Hilhorst comments: "Both deal with judgment, but whereas the Ethiopic version clings firmly to judgment at the end of time, the Greek fragment has all the appearance of being a revision made to replace the idea of a future General Judgment with a present-day particular one".⁸⁰

The Ethiopic version is composed of several episodes: Jesus and the disciples on the Mount of Olives (1); the parable of the fig-tree (2); the false Christ, or the deceiver of the last days (Enoch and Elias being sent to unmask him) (2-3); the Parousia (4); the resurrection of the dead (4); the destruction of the world (5); the Final Judgment (6); Hell and the sinners (7-12); the field Acherusia, which is called Elysium, and the righteous (13-14); Jesus and the disciples on the Mount of Zion (15); apparition of Moses and Elias, in an episode which paraphrases The Transfiguration from Matthew 17 (16); a vision of the Garden with the fathers put to rest (16); ascent of Christ (17). The central episode is Judgment Day. From it ensue the descriptions of Hell (with many scenes and details) and of the Kingdom, treated as the Elysium. Apparently, there is a repetition or an overlapping of the episodes concerning the righteous. In fact, the function of the two descriptions is clearly distinct: the field Acherusia, to be comprised by the Kingdom, describes the destiny of the righteous after the Final Day; the garden of Eden, in custody of Moses and Elias (but we already know that it is Enoch and Elias who are kept in stock for the confrontation with the false Christ), is the resting place for the fathers and the martyrs until the Judgment: "Hast thou seen the companies of the fathers? As is their rest, so also is the honour and glory of those who will be persecuted for my righteousness' sake." So, the two descriptions of the *Garden* and of the *Elysium* refer to the respective abodes of the elect before and after the end of the world.

The Greek version is approximately three times shorter. As scholars have suggested, it is possible that the author of the Greek version reorganised the episodes, in order to adapt the apocalypse into a broader Gospel of Peter.⁸¹ It starts with a reference to the false prophet (1-4, corresponding to some phrases from episode 2 of the Ethiopic version), and continues with Jesus and the disciples praying on the holy mountain (5, corresponding to episode 15); apparition of the two shining figures (without being identified as Moses, Enoch or Elias) (6-13, corresponding to 16); the abode of the righteous ("a widely extensive place outside this world") (14-20, conflating 13-14 and 16); description of Hell (21-34, corresponding to 7-12), but omitting some scenes, for example those in which are mentioned the angels of God Ezrael, Uriel and Tartarouchos as punishers of the sinners. So, the author of the Greek version gives a different *sequence* of the episodes, with the result that Peter is made to

relate, in his own wording, a short version of Christ's judgment, with Jesus announcing the Kingdom for the righteous and Hell for the sinners. As the spectacle of the Doomsday is reduced to the brief mention of the false prophet, the distinction between the abodes of the elect before and after the end the world fades away; the Garden of Eden, as a place of rest for the fathers and martyrs, is conflated to the Kingdom of God, open to all the *boni*.

Let us turn now to the *Apocalypse of Saint Paul*,⁸² the main source for the medieval visions of the Otherworld.⁸³ Written originally in Greek by the end of the second or the beginning of the third century (the text did not survive), it was translated into Latin somewhere between the fourth and the sixth centuries. From this Long Latin text, conserved in two versions, derive the majority of the later versions and translations. Starting from 2 Corinthians 12, the text pretends to unravel the visions of Saint Paul during his rapture to the third heaven and offers the description of no less than five *topoi* of the Otherworld. After the introductory episodes of the complaint of the elements against man and God's decision, the angel which guides Saint Paul starts by showing him the voyage of the souls of the dead, their confrontation by the angels, and the judgment of God (11a-18c). This is the individual judgment, occurring at the death of each human, and not the Final Judgment, at Doomsday. In order to disclose the destinations of the souls, the angel successively introduces Saint Paul to Paradise, which is inhabited for the moment only by Enoch and Elias, but has the names of the future elects carved on the poles of its gate (19a-21a); then to the Land of Promise, situated at the margin of the Earth, beyond the river Ocean, where the righteous will be received after the destruction of the world (21b-22c); then to the City of Christ, beyond the lake Acherusius (22d-31a); then to the river of fire and the abyss of the damned, to the West, beyond the river Ocean (31b-44f); and finally back to Paradise, which is Adam's garden of Eden with its four rivers, now fully inhabited by patriarchs, saints and righteous people (45a-51).

Because of these loose reduplications, scholars agree that *Visio Pauli*, in its long version, is a composite work, in which successive rewritings and interpolations have created a series of inconsistencies. For example, Jean-Marc Rosentiehl thinks that chapters 19-21 (Paradise as the third Heaven) and 45-51 (Paradise as the Garden of Eden) were lately inserted in a previous text which already contained the description of the Land of Promise and of the City of God, respectively of the land of the damned.⁸⁴ Claude Carozzi, in *Eschatologie et au-delà: Recherches sur l'Apocalypse de Paul*,⁸⁵ has argued that the vision has a well-ordered structure, but his opinion did not reach consensus.⁸⁶

I think that the text, be it the product of a single author or of several compilers, is not completely loose, that it follows a logic of its own. However this logic does not suit a topographical or cosmological design,

but a criterion of authority and also a chronological order. Working on the apocalypses of Saint John, of Saint Peter and other apocrypha, the author(s) felt compelled not to discard any of the traditional *topoi* referring to the Otherworld, but to include them in a single total description. The most comprehensive structure which could host them all was a temporal one, in which the eschatological places are presented both in the present time, tackled by the visions about the individual judgment, and after the end of the world, as represented in the visions about the Last Judgment.

As Saint Paul has its experience during his life, in the actual course of history, the Paradise he is first shown in the third heaven is Adam's Paradise lost, which remains closed and empty until Doomsday, with only Enoch and Elias as its custodians. The Land of Promise and the City of God are the millennial kingdom and the Heavenly Jerusalem from John's *Apocalypse*. As the Millennium precedes the Kingdom of God, it appears to be a kind of waiting place for the patriarchs, saints and righteous. The second description of Paradise, as Adam's Paradise regained, seems to be a vision of the future, after Doomsday and the destruction of the earth, when the elect will be received in the Kingdom of God. So, in the first recurrence Paradise is presented in its actual status, empty, as seen by Saint Paul while witnessing individual judgments of the souls; and in the second recurrence Paradise appears in its future status, after the Final Judgment. The Land of Promise and the City of God seem to fit the scheme as intermediary places and millennial abodes for the elect before the final instauration of the Heavenly Kingdom.

From *Visio Pauli* in its long versions derive a series of short versions. Theodor Silverstein has counted all in all eleven short redactions, and latter M. E. Dwyer published a new variant, that he called Redaction XI.⁸⁷ Most of these limit themselves to the description of the punishments in Hell; only Redactions VI and XI conserve a brief allusion to Paul's journey to paradise, namely the description of the Land of the Just in Heaven.⁸⁸ So, they simplify drastically the plethoric structure of the long versions, focusing on the destiny of the sinners and alluding, at least marginally, to the fate of the righteous. By this simplification they also complete the process of shifting the interest from the Final Judgment to the individual judgment.⁸⁹ If the long versions tackle both the fate of individual souls and Paradise in its actual status, and Doomsday and Paradise after the end of the world, the short versions are interested only in the immediate fate of individuals after death, that is in the torture they are to expect in Hell, and sporadically in the bliss they will enjoy in Heaven.

Among other apocrypha, such as the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *The Apocalypse of Thomas*, *The Book of Jubilees*, *I Enoch*, *III and IV Esdras*, *Visio Pauli* was the best known in Ireland, both in the Long and in the Short Latin versions.⁹⁰ If for the Long versions there is no extant textual evidence,⁹¹ the short versions are impressively well represented. Of the eleven short

Latin redactions investigated by Theodore Silverstein, at least two, redaction IV and redaction VI, played an important role in Irish literature. Both influenced, as researchers tend to agree, texts such as the *Vision of Adamnán*, *The Vision of Tnugdale*, the *Voyage of Snegdus and Mac Riagla*, *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, the visions in St. Patrick's Purgatory, etc.⁹²

Moreover, it seems that they suffered in their turn the influence of Irish material. R. Willard thought that redaction IV, which is the widest known short recension, was worked out in the British Isles, incorporating Celtic influences.⁹³ Redaction VI, which is the most interesting, as it represents a "complete rewriting of the Apocalypse"⁹⁴, was composed, in D. Dumville's opinion, in Ireland or in an Irish continental centre in close connection with the home culture.⁹⁵ As such, it could have assimilated influences, in Theodor Silverstein's opinion, from early Irish texts such as the visions of Laisrén and Adamnán, the *Voyage of the Hui Chorra* and the Celtic Version of the *Transitus Mariae*.⁹⁶ Finally, Redaction XI also was compiled, in Charles D. Wright's opinion, by an Irish monk or nun, probably on the continent.⁹⁷ The direct dependence of Redactions VI and XI on the Long Latin version also testifies indirectly that the latter one was known and used in Ireland.

It appears, then, that we can ascertain a long process of differentiation in the evolution of the genre of *visiones*. An important series, based on the synoptic apocalypses and on St. John's apocalypse, described the Second Advent and the Final Judgment, while another series, starting somewhere in the 2nd century, began to focus on the individual judgment and the fate of the souls before Doomsday. *The Apocalypse of Peter*, in its Ethiopic translation, still clings to the cosmic vision, while in the Greek fragment, applying maybe the explanation from 2 Peter concerning the delay of the Second Coming, shifts its focus on the individual judgment and destiny of the souls. *The Apocalypse of Paul* pushes this process further on and, while the Long versions encompass visions both of the initial judgment of the dead and of the Final Judgment (which generates the somehow chaotic itinerary of the ecstatic voyager), the short versions simplify the schema and limit themselves to the description of Hell, comprised as an actual place for sinners, and sometimes of Heaven, as a reward for the just.

These two models both influenced Irish *fisi* and insular visions. The two early samples of revelations offered by Venerable Bede in his *Historia ecclesiastica* mirror the two patterns. Linda L. Miller contrasted them exactly on this basis. As an apocalyptic visionary, St. Fursa is shown and explained the structure of the whole universe. He is taken to Heaven and invited to contemplate the world with the four fires menacing to engulf it. In contrast, "Drythelm enters the other world as a soul gone to judgment after death. He experiences his miracle with the perspective and understanding of a finite being".⁹⁸ *The Vision of Fursa* displays the cosmic

landscape of the Final Judgment, while *The Vision of Drythelm* is rather a personal revelation of the individual judgment.

In conclusion, the concern of the Long Latin versions of *Visio Pauli* to reflect both the individual judgment, as experienced by people at their death, and the Final Judgment, as attended in cosmic revelations of the Otherworld, gave the pattern for the "zigzag" itineraries of several *fisi* and *visiones*, such as *The Vision of Fursa*, *The Vision of Laisrén*, *The Vision of the monk of Wenlock*, *The Vision of St. Adamnán*, *The Adventures of St. Columba's Clerics*, or *The Vision of Thurkill*. In contrast, the simplified short redactions of *Visio Pauli*, preoccupied with what happens to the souls at death, especially the tortures of hell, offered the pattern for a linear itinerary, in which the otherworld abodes are disposed on a monodrome trajectory, such as in *The Vision of Drythelm*, *The Life of Guthlac*, *The Vision of Tnugdale*, *The Vision of the monk of Eynsham*, *The Revelation of Purgatory by an Unknown Fifteenth-Century Woman*, and the corpus of descents into St. Patrick's Purgatory. The first series are mainly anabases, as the ecstatic visitors are taken to the throne of God, witness the trial of the souls and the individual judgment, and then are shown the abodes of the dead, at the nadir and the zenith of the universe. The second series are mainly catabases, as the visitors begin by descending into Hell and eventually, if they are "good enough" to go forward, are shown the Terrestrial and the Celestial Paradises.

Psychanodia / Somanodia

Nonetheless, there is still another major difference between the scheme of the *fis* and the scheme of the descent into St. Patrick's Cave. The *visiones* are mainly *psychanodias*, that is ecstatic voyages of the soul. The vast majority of authors pretend that the revelations were given to them during a "*raptus animae*", not in their corporeal status. It is true that, somehow surprisingly, *Visio Pauli* already adopted a clear decision in St. Paul's original dilemma concerning his condition during the rapt (2 Corinthians, 12, 1-5): the apocryphal saint states that he was abducted "in his body" (*Apocalypse of Paul*, 3)! However, to my knowledge, only one insular vision, the one included in *Vita Guthlaci*, affirms that the holy man was abducted by devils "*corporaliter*": "*Quomodo corporaliter maligni spiritibus ad portas inferni illum asportaverunt*". And this is also dubious, as it is impossible to ascertain if the statement pertained to the original experience of the saint or was a scholar interpretation by Felix of Crowland (as he had in mind *Vita Antonii* as a model), or even by a later redactor (as the idea appears only in the title of the chapter, but not in the narration itself).

Unlike the insular visions, the journeys into the Purgatory of St. Patrick have a worldly and physical character, they are *somanodias* or rather *som(a)catodias*. Although on Station Island, at the entrance of the

cave, there were built a series of penitential chairs or thrones ("*sedes*"), called beds in latter sources, which rather suggest an incubation rite⁹⁹ and an oneiric voyage, as a general rule the texts present the descent into St. Patrick's cave as a bodily one. The people entering it do not travel in a state of trance or ecstasy; their souls remain within their bodies. Unlike the Catholic dogmatic Purgatory, which hosted the souls of those who had to do further penitence after their death, St. Patrick's cave was intended to perform the purification of the visitors during their actual life. The catharsis was supposed to eventually ensure their salvation. The concept of the *somanodia* or som(a)catodia found its major accomplishment in Dante's *Comedy*, as the narrator undertook his voyage in his bodily condition.

A Christian-based explanation for the shift from spiritual to corporeal otherworld voyages is to be found in the Irish practice of penitentials. Instead of the antique practice of the public penitence, Irish monks instituted the confession to the *anmchara*, the master of conscience, who was supposed to decide the mortifications appropriated for each sin. During the 6th century, several saints provided their monasteries with Latin books of Penitentials. St. Finian, Columbanus, Cummean conceived detailed lists of transgressions with the correspondent lists of penances able to atone for these sins. An 8th-century Penitential in Irish goes further by establishing fines payable to the Church and giving "a detailed list of how imposed penances, which were often applicable for many years in the case of serious offences, could be curtailed".¹⁰⁰ Confirming the influence of the Irish Church in Occident, the Council in Laterano IV (A.D. 1215) accepted the general use of lay confessions and penitential practices.

On such bases, it appears that an *ordalie* such as the trials to which were submitted those who entered St. Patrick's cave was the ideal means of drastically curtailing severe sins. Ruled by Augustinians and encouraged by Cistercians, the institution of the Purgatory became easily a supporting example (even if rather in literary and not in actual practice form) for the idea of atoning sins by harsh penitence. The greater the difficulty and dangers of the journey, the greater the gravity and number of the misdeeds purified. Now, in order to really endure this purification, the voyagers had to be in their bodily condition, and to do it during their lifetime. If they survived the trial, they were supposedly closer to justification, as all or part of their sins had been atoned by their voluntarily submission to contact with infernal tortures and death hazard.

But why would insular writers deal upon such an isolated detail of *Visio Pauli* as the corporeal condition of the revelation and generate, with the descents into St. Patrick's cave, a new genre, i.e. the *somanodies*, going against the well established tradition of the ecstatic psychanodies? Of course, most probably they were not aware of such a distinction and treated as isomorphs the revelations in the *fisi*, in the *immrama* or in St. Patrick's Purgatory. But it is a fact that during the 12-13th centuries, an

important trend in literature emerged: the ecstatic visions, read in a spiritual code (*spiritualiter*), begin to be rewritten either in a realistic code (*corporaliter*) or in an allegorical code. While the second code is to be understood as an upgrade and a sophistication of the visions, the first might look like a regression. The preoccupation of the Church with penitential practices may explain why it supported and gave a theological base for the descents into the Purgatory, but does not explain why the theme emerged in Ireland (this could have happened anywhere on the continent where the Christian *visiones* were popular), or the source of all the details of the corporeal voyage in the Other World.

Celtic influences

My hypothesis is that the surfacing and the subsequent exit of the second pattern (the *somanodies*), can be explained by the Celtic background that nourished the imagination of insular, especially Irish, writers. I am well aware that “anti-nativist” scholars are not ready to admit such an influence, as long as no extant texts from the Pre-Christian time are available (and will never be, as Celtic pagan culture was fundamentally oral), and all documentation we have comes from Christian monks and authorities. But then a question of procedure arises. I am ready to concede that, dealing with themes in early Irish literature, the most economical (if not logical) solution is to ascribe them to a Christian (and not a pagan Celtic) source, if they have scriptural precedents in Christian tradition (the Bible, apocrypha, works of the fathers: Augustine, Isidore of Seville, Gregory the Great, Bede, etc.). But it seems to me that this no longer applies to the situations in which Christian sources are not available and, even more, the themes themselves go against the general spirit of Christian theology and imagination.

Topoi such as for example the different tortures in Hell, or the trial bridge, can be conveniently explained by recourse to the apocrypha or Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*. Conversely, other *topoi*, such as the Tir-nam-Ban (The Islands of the women) or the distortion of time in the Irish Otherworld, don't have enough parallels in Christian or classical literature and they cannot be explained away by loose similarities or fortuitous matches with motifs from other mythologies or be simply dismissed, because of lack of documentation in local Pre-Christian mythology. In such cases, I think we can cautiously attribute the themes for which we don't have any other documentary source to the local background. After all, the scholars from the Warburg Institute had argued convincingly enough that older traditions don't simply disappear, that they survive inbuilt in the vision of the world dominant in certain epochs.

In the specific case of the two patterns contrasted above, we have highlighted two main differences concerning the graphical blueprint of the itinerary on the one hand, and the condition of the voyager on the

other. Relating to the first difference, we have seen that the main medieval tradition of visions involved an ecstatic voyage of the character, anticipating the itinerary of the souls after death, their ascent to the Throne of judgment and then to the places assigned to them in the afterworld. The simplification of this zigzag itinerary to a linear one might be an internal process of the genre, as copies and rewritings tended, at least initially, to shorten the *Apocalypse of Paul* and other apocrypha. However, we can still raise the question why some of the most important short redactions attesting this evolution were composed in Ireland and not elsewhere on the continent.

As for the second difference, the corporeal condition of the visionary traveller, my opinion is that, even if it was inspired by the information given about Paul's journey at the beginning of the Long Latin version of *Visio Pauli*, it was adopted and developed mainly in Ireland because of its structural similarity with the eschatological concept present in other Irish genres such as the *echtra* and the *immram*. As I tried to argue in my book *La quête manquée de l'Avalon occidentale*, in the *echtra*i and in the *immrama* (but not in the *fisi*), the characters go into Mag Mell in their actual corporeal condition.¹⁰¹ If they remain there, they will escape death (a *topos* that the *interpretatio christiana* transformed into: they will remain alive until Doomsday). The contingent dimension of the journey in St. Patrick's cave is akin to the otherworld bodily adventures or navigations of several pagan or Christian Irish characters.

As already suggested, the double structure of Hell (upper and lower) in the *fisi* and in the descents into St. Patrick's seems to be the result of the conflation of two distinct eschatological typologies: the Celtic underworld and the Judeo-Christian lake of fire and pit of the damned. According to primitive Christian theology, the infernal pit of Hell and the celestial Kingdom of God are trans-historical; dead people, put to sleep for the actual moment of history, will be sent to them only after the Resurrection and the Final Judgment; in Medieval Christian theology, these places were already opened to the souls of the dead, but only in their spiritual condition. In contrast to these characteristics, the places visited by penitents in St. Patrick's Purgatory are both intra-historical and physical. Even the *Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum* in the *Voyage of Bran*, and the Terrestrial Paradise situated by Gotfried of Viterbo's poem *Pantheon* in an island in the Ocean, are intra-historical places where Enoch and Elias, the two patriarchs that Medieval Christian mythology hosted in the lost Garden of Eden, wait for the Apocalypse to come. Upper Hell (the Purgatory) and Lower (or Terrestrial) Paradise have a corporeal and contingent dimension which is not specific either to primitive or to medieval Christian eschatology and should be attributed to other influences, such as Celtic mythology among others. So, the pressure of the Irish Celtic literary context might well have moulded the scheme of the descents into St. Patrick's Purgatory, and, as we have no other better

source-explanations, we could see it as a survival or a re-emergence of a local Celtic pagan vision of the (Other)world.

Notes

¹ See Miles Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948); Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1980), 66-81. Seán Ó Súilleabháin and Reidar Th. Christiansen have applied Aarne and Thomson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* to the Irish corpus, in *The Types of the Irish Folktale* (Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki, 1963).

² It would be interesting to compare the ancient Irish themes with the repertory of Folk motifs established by modern scholars. For example, in the *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, the journey to the otherworld counts about 200 articles.

³ David A. Traill, *Walahfrid Strabo's Visio Wettini*, Text, translation, and commentary, Herbert Lang (Frankfurt: Bern & Peter Lang, 1974), 13-14.

⁴ Corin Braga, *La quête manquée de l'Avalon occidentale. Le Paradis interdit au Moyen Âge - 2* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 9-78. See also *Le paradis interdit au Moyen Âge. La quête manquée de l'Éden oriental* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).

⁵ Many important syntheses have been dedicated to the ecstatic voyage of the soul. Here I cite only H. R. Patch, *The Other World according to descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); Jacques Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981); Ioan Petru Culianu, *Psychanodia. A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983), and *Expériences de l'extase* (Paris: Payot, 1984); Claude Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà d'après la littérature latine (V^e-XIII^e siècles)* (Roma: École Française de Rome, 1994); Robert Easting, *Visions of the Other World in Middle English* (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 1997).

⁶ Several have been gathered by Maria Pia Ciccicarese, in *Visioni dell'Aldilà in Occidente, Fonti, modelli, testi* (Firenze: Nardini Editore, 1987): the visions of Sunniulf, Salvius, Fursa, Barontus, Drythelm, the monk of Wenlock, Guthlac, the poor woman of Laon, Wettii; and Eileen Gardiner, in *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante*, Illustrations by Alexandra Eldridge (New York: Italica Press, 1989): the visions of Fursa, Drythelm, Wettii, Charles the Fat, Tnugdale, the monk of Eynsham (resuming an earlier error, the editor spells Evensham), and Thurkill.

⁷ Venerabilis Beda, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, liber III, caput XIX: "Ut Furseus, apud Orientales Anglos monasterium fecerit; et de visionibus vel sanctitate ejus, cui etiam caro post mortem incorrupta testimonium perhibuerit", in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* [PL], vol. 95, col. 145-149.

⁸ Beda, liber V, caput XII: "Ut quisdam in provincial Nordalyhmborum a mortuis resurgens, multa et tremenda et desideranda quae viderat narraverit", in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* [PL], vol. 95, col. 247-252.

⁹ *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, Translated with an Introduction by Ephraim Emerton (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1976).

¹⁰ Edited by Kuno Meyer, "Irish Stories and Songs", *Otia merseiana. The publication of the Arts Faculty of University College Liverpool*, vol. I, (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1899), 113-119.

- ¹¹ C. S. Boswell, *An Irish Precursor of Dante. A Study on the Vision of Heaven and Hell ascribed to the Eight-century Irish Saint Adamnán*, with Translation of the Irish Text, Published by David Nutt at the Sign of the Phoenix (London: Long Acre, 1908).
- ¹² The Latin, English, German, Dutch and Icelandic versions have been edited by: *The Vision of Tnugdali*, Translated from Latin by Jean-Michel Picard, With an Introduction by Yolande de Pontfarcy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1989); A. Wagner, *Visio Tnugdali*. Lateinisch und Altdeutsch (Erlangen, 1882); Nigel F. Palmer (ed.), *Visio Tnugdali*, The German and Dutch translations and their circulation in the Later Middle Ages, (München and Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1982); R. Mearns, *The Vision of Tundale* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1985); P. Cahill, *Duggals Leidsla (La vision de Duggal)*, with an English translation (Reykjavík Stofnum Árna Magnússonar, 1983).
- ¹³ Edited by H. E. Salter, *Eynsham Cartulary* (Oxford: Oxford Historical Society LI, 1908); *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham*, Edited by Robert Easting (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- ¹⁴ Edited by Paul Gerhard Schmidt, *Visio Thurkilli. Relatore, ut videtur, Radulpho de Goggeshall* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1978).
- ¹⁵ See H. R. Patch, *The Other World according to descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950).
- ¹⁶ Marta Powell Harley, *A Revelation of Purgatory by an Unknown, Fifteenth-Century Woman Visionary*, Introduction, critical text, and translation, *Studies in Women and Religion*, volume 18 (Lewinston & Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985).
- ¹⁷ David A. Traill, *Walahfrid Strabo's Visio Wettini*, Text, translation, and commentary, Herbert Lang (Frankfurt: Bern & Peter Lang, 1974).
- ¹⁸ *Visio Alberici*, Kritisch ediert und übersetzt von Paul Gerhard Schmidt (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997); A French translation in *Poèmes et récits de la vieille France, L'autre monde au Moyen Âge. Voyages et visions: La Navigation de Saint Brendan, Le Purgatoire de Saint Patrice, La vision d'Alberic*, Trois récits traduits par Jean Marchand (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1940).
- ¹⁹ Hugh Farmer, "The Vision of Orm", *Analecta Bollandiana* vol. 75, fasc. I-II (1957): 72-82.
- ²⁰ Giles Constable, "The Vision of Gunthelm", *Revue bénédictine* 1-2 (1956): 92-114.
- ²¹ *Godeschalcus und Visio Godeschalci*, Mit deutschen Übersetzung und herangezogen von Erwin Assmann, (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1979).
- ²² See Carol Zaleski, Appendix to *Otherworld Journeys. Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 206-209; Robert Easting, *Visions of the Other World in Middle English* (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 16.
- ²³ For the English translation, see Boswell, 167.
- ²⁴ *Testament d'Abraham*, XII-XIII, *La Bible. Écrits intertestamentaires*, Édition publiée sous la direction d'André Dupont-Summer et Marc Philonenko (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 1673-1678.
- ²⁵ *Apocalypse de Paul*, 14c, *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, vol. I, Édition publiée sous la direction de François Bovon et Pierre Geoltrain, Index établis par Sever J. Voicu (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 809.
- ²⁶ See John Carey, "The Valley of the Changing Sheep", *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 30 (1983): 277-280.

²⁷ Cf. II Enoch, III, 2-3: "And there I perceived the air higher up, and higher still I saw the ether. And they placed me on the first heaven", in J. H. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. I, (New York, 1983), 110.

²⁸ Cf. St. Paul's *Apocalypse*, where the saint is also confronted with four major 'powers': *spiritus detractiois*, *spiritus fornicationis*, *spiritus furoris* and *spiritus audaciae*.

²⁹ Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Seven Heavens in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses", , *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*. eds John J. Collins & Michael Fishbane (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 86.

³⁰ Carozzi, 611.

³¹ Jane Stevenson, "Ascent through the Heavens, from Egypt to Ireland", *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 5 (1983): 21-35.

³² Richard Bauckham, "The Apocalypse of the Seven Heavens: The Latin Version", *Apocrypha* 4 (1993): 141-154.

³³ John Carey, "The seven heavens and the twelve dragons in Insular apocalyptic", *Apocalyptic and Eschatological Heritage. The Middle East and Celtic Realms*. ed. Martin McNamara (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 121-136.

³⁴ Gregorii Magni, *Dialogi*, Libri IV, A Cura di Umberto Moricca (Roma: Tipografia del Senato, 1924), 293, 295.

³⁵ See Félix Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956).

³⁶ *Apocalypse de Paul*, 31b, *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, vol. I, 809.

³⁷ *The Dialogues of Saint Gregory, surnamed the Great: Pope of Rome*, Translated into our English Tongue by P. W. and printed in Paris in MDCVIII, Reedited with an Introduction and Notes by Edmund R. Gardner (London: Philip Lee Warner, MDCCCCLI).

³⁸ Gregorii Magni, *Dialogi*, 301-302.

³⁹ Augustin, *Ennaratio in Psalmum LXXXV*, 17, J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* [PL], vol. 37, col. 1093.

⁴⁰ *Liber de numeris*, J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* [PL], vol. 83, col. 1301.

⁴¹ *The Tidings of Doomsday. An Early-Middle-Irish Homily*, ed. Whitley Stokes, *Revue celtique* IV (1879-1880): 251.

⁴² *Liber de numeris*, J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* [PL], vol. 83, col. 1298.

⁴³ Gregorii Magni, *Dialogi*, Liber II, 34; Liber IV, 11.

⁴⁴ See for exemple in the Uffizi Museum in Florence the paintings by Lorenzo Monaco (~1300), *Madonna col Bambino e santi*; "Francesco" (~1300~1400), *Madonna col Bambino tra i Santi Giovanni Battista e Nicola*; Rosello di Jacopo Franchi (1377-1456), *Madonna con Bambino e i santi Giovanni Battista, Francesco, Matteo e Magdalena*; Lippo d'Andrea (1377-1457), *Madonna in trono con Bambino e i santi Caterina d'Alessandri, Francesco, Zanobi e Maria Magdalena*; Mariotto di Nardo (~1388-1424), *Madonna dell'Umiltà celeste tra i santi Stefano e Reparata*; Giovanni di Paolo, *Madonna col Bambino e i santi Domenico, Pietro, Pado e Tommaso d'Aquino* (1445).

⁴⁵ "The Adventure of Cian's son Teigue", *Silva Gadelica, A Collection of Tales in Irish*, With extracts illustrating persons and places, ed. Standish H. O'Grady (London: Williams and Norgate, 1892).

⁴⁶ Gregorii Magni, *Dialogi*, Liber IV, 41, p. 295.

⁴⁷ *The Dialogues of Saint Gregory, surnamed the Great: Pope of Rome*, Book IV, 39, 232, 233.

⁴⁸ The theme of the Sunday respite seems to originate in the medieval Rabbinical tradition of a Sabbath-day rest in Hell, which already influenced later redactions of *The Apocalypse of Paul*. See Theodore Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli. The History of the Apocalypse in Latin together with nine texts* (London: Christophers, 1935), 79-81.

⁴⁹ *A Revelation of Purgatory by an Unknown, Fifteenth-Century Woman Visionary*, 79-82.

⁵⁰ *Novum Testamentum graece et latine*, Utrumque textum cum apparatu critico ex editionibus et libris manu scriptis collecto, Imprimendum curavit Eberhard Nestle, Edition septima recognita (Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1923).

⁵¹ See for example Alexandre de Paris, *Le Roman d'Alexandre*, III, L. 160, trans. Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994), 471.

⁵² Gregorii Magni, *Dialogi*, Liber IV, XXXVII, 287-288.

⁵³ *The Dialogues of Saint Gregory, surnamed the Great: Pope of Rome*, Book IV, 224-225, 226.

⁵⁴ Ioan Petru Culianu, *Psychanodia. A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983), chapter IX.

⁵⁵ Edited by Kuno Meyer & John Strachan, "The Adventures of Art son of Conn", *Eriu. The Journal of the School of Irish Learning* VII (1907).

⁵⁶ *The Courting of Emer*, in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne. The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster*, Arranged and put into English by Lady Gregory, With a Preface by W. B. Yeats (London: John Murray, 1902), 35. It is of less importance here if Lady Gregory, who was not a scholar editing a medieval text, but rather a writer, used an earlier theme or invented it in accordance to a later tradition.

⁵⁷ Edited by Whitley Stokes, "The voyage of Mael Duin's Boat", *Revue celtique* IX (1888): 489.

⁵⁸ *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, from Early Latin Manuscripts, ed. Carl Selmer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 79. See also W.R.J. Barron & Glyn S. Burgess, *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, Representative Versions of the Legend in English Translation (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002).

⁵⁹ See the texts in Michael Haren & Yolande de Pontfarcy, *The Medieval Pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Purgatory. Lough Derg and the European Tradition* (Enniskillen: Clogher Historical Society, 1988).

⁶⁰ *The Adventures of St. Columba's Clerics*, *Revue celtique* XXVI (1905).

⁶¹ Gottfried of Viterbo, *Pantheon*, Joannes Pistorius, *Germanicorum scriptorum, qui rerum a germanis per multam aetates gestarum historias vel annales posteris reliquerunt* (Hanoviae: Typis Wecheliani apud haeredes, 1613), col. 29 sqq.

⁶² See D. N. Dumville, "Biblical Apocrypha and the Early Irish: A Preliminary Investigation", *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 73, section C, number 8 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1973): 309; also Martin McNamara, *The Apocrypha in the Irish Church* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1975), 25.

⁶³ See Corin Braga, *Le paradis interdit au Moyen Âge. La quête manquée de l'Éden oriental* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).

⁶⁴ Cf. *Le Testament d'Abraham*, XI, 4-10, *La Bible. Écrits intertestamentaires*, 1672-1673.

⁶⁵ Lawton P. G. Peckham, Milan S. La Du (ed.), *La Prise de Defur and Le Voyage d'Alexandre au Paradis Terrestre* (Princeton & Paris: Princeton University Press & Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1935), XLI sqq.

⁶⁶ See my book *La quête manquée de l'Avalon occidentale. Le paradis interdit au Moyen Âge* - 2, 169-187.

⁶⁷ About St. Patrick, see James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), 324-327.

⁶⁸ *St. Patrick's Purgatory*. Two versions of Owayne Miles and *The Vision of William of Stranton* together with the long text of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, ed. Robert Easting (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). *Poèmes et récits de la vieille France, L'autre monde au Moyen Âge. Voyages et visions: La Navigation de Saint Brendan, Le Purgatoire de Saint Patrice, La vision d'Alberic*, trans. Jean Marchand (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1940). I also refer to a late and rather rare translation *Le Purgatoire Saint Patrice*, imprimée en caractères gothiques, sans date, ni nom de lieu, recueillie dans *Le Conservateur ou Collection de morceaux rares, & d'ouvrages anciens*, 1758.

⁶⁹ *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*. A Poem by Marie de France, trans. Michael J. Curley (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1993).

⁷⁰ Robert Easting (ed.), "Peter of Cornwall's Account of St. Patrick's Purgatory. *Narracio de milite et Gulino*", *Analecta Bollandiana* 97 (1979): 411-415.

⁷¹ *La Légende du dit saint Patrice*, Jacques de Voragine, *La légende dorée*, Edition critique, dans la révision de 1476 par Jean Batallier, d'après la traduction de Jean de Vignay (1333-13458) de la *Legenda aurea* (c. 1261-1266), publiée par Brenda Dunn-Lardeau (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997), 363.

⁷² *Visiones Georgii. Visiones quas in Purgatorio sancti Patricii vidit Georgius miles de Ungaria* A. D. MCCCLIII, Edidit L. L. Hammerich (Kobenhavn: Bianco Lunos Bogtrykkeri, 1930).

⁷³ The corpus has been gathered by Michael Haren & Yolande de Pontfarcy, *The Medieval Pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Purgatory. Lough Derg and the European Tradition* (Enniskillen: Clogher Historical Society, 1988).

⁷⁴ *Testament d'Abraham, La Bible. Écrits intertestamentaires*, eds. André Dupont-Sommer, Marc Philonenko, (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 1671-1672.

⁷⁵ *Apocalypse d'Abraham, La Bible. Écrits intertestamentaires*, 1619-1621.

⁷⁶ James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955); Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990).

⁷⁷ See M. McNamara, *The apocrypha in the Irish Church*.

⁷⁸ For the texts, see E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, Edited by W. Schneemelcher, English translation edited by R. McL. Wilson, Volume 2. *Writings relating to the Apostles. Apocalypses and related subjects* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964); *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, vol. I, Édition publiée sous la direction de François Bovon et Pierre Geoltrain, Index établis par Sever J. Voicu (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

⁷⁹ Hennecke, 667.

⁸⁰ Anthony Hillhorst, "The Apocalypse of Paul: earlier history and later influence", in *Apocalyptic and Eschatological Heritage. The Middle East and Celtic Realms*, ed. Martin McNamara (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 74.

⁸¹ Hennecke, 666-667.

⁸² *Apocalypse de Paul, Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, vol. I.

⁸³ Henricus Fros lists 112 texts influenced by St. Paul's vision, in "Visionum medii aevi latini repertorium", *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, eds. Werner Verbeke, Daniel Verhelst and Andries Welkenhuysen, Series *Medievalia Lovaniensia*, I, 15 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 481-498.

⁸⁴ Jean-Marc Rosentiehl, « L'itinéraire de Paul dans l'Au-delà : Contribution à l'étude de l'Apocalypse apocryphe de Paul », *Carl Schmidt Kollokium an der Martin-Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg*, 1988, ed. P. Nagel (Halle, 1990), 197-212.

⁸⁵ Carozzi, 35.

⁸⁶ Hilhorst, 64.

⁸⁷ M. E. Dwyer, "An Unstudied Redaction of the *Visio Pauli*", *Manuscripta* 32 (1988): 121-138.

⁸⁸ Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli*, 58-59.

⁸⁹ "What had developed during a gradual process of reorientation – the replacement of the General Judgment at the end of time by a particular judgment for each human being at his or her death – apparently found classic expression in the *Apocalypse of Paul*." Hilhorst, 74.

⁹⁰ Martin McNamara, *The Apocrypha in the Irish Church*, 20-21, 26-27, 102-103, 106-108, 119-121.

⁹¹ From the fact that the Long version was familiar to Adhelm and Aelfric in England, Charles D. Wright infers that during the same period (700-1000) it must have been known in Ireland also. *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 108. See also Martin McNamara, "Apocalyptic and eschatological texts in Irish literature: Oriental connections?", *Apocalyptic and Eschatological Heritage. The Middle East and Celtic Realms*, ed. Martin McNamara (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 81.

⁹² Martin McNamara, *The Apocrypha in the Irish Church*, 24-27.

⁹³ R. Willard, "The Latin Texts of the Three Utterances of the soul", *Speculum* 12 (1937): 157.

⁹⁴ "Not only has its interpolations that are easily isolated from the older materials, but the original incidents themselves are in general merely starting-points for an elaboration which entirely changes their appearance and meaning." Martin McNamara, *The Apocrypha in the Irish Church*, 24-27.

⁹⁵ D. Dumville, "Towards an Interpretation of *Fis Adamnáin*", *Studia celtica* 12-13 (1977-1978): 70.

⁹⁶ Silverstein, 82-90.

⁹⁷ Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 113.

⁹⁸ Linda L. Miller, "Drythelm's Journey to the other world: Bede's literary use of tradition", *Comitatus. A Journal of Medieval Literary Studies* 2 (1971): 12-14.

⁹⁹ A striking similitude with antique incubation caves is supplied by Giraldus Cambrensis. In his *Topographia Hiberniae* (1188), Giraud of Barri describes an island in Ulster, divided in two, the first part of it being visited by apparitions of saints, the other possessed by demons. On the latter there were nine holes or pits in the ground in which people who dared to spend the night there were seized and tortured by demons. Those who survived rested assured that they were to be spared further afterlife torments in Hell. Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hibernie*, Text of the First Recension, ed. J. O'Meara, *Proceedings R.I.A.*, vol. III, 1949.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Richter, *Medieval Ireland. The Enduring Tradition* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005), 74-75. See also D. A. Binchy, "The Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations", *Eriu* 19 (1962): 54.

¹⁰¹ Braga, *La quête manquée de l'Avalon occidentale*, Chap. II, "Les voyages initiaques irlandais".

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