

The Tradition of Saint Patrick's Purgatory between Visionary Literature and Pilgrimage Reports

Giovanni Paolo Maggioni

Università degli studi del Molise
giovanni.maggioni@unimol.it

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Abstract

Saint Patrick's Purgatory on Lough Derg is one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Western Europe. The tradition of the Purgatory is strictly connected with the diffusion of a text, the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, composed in the last part of the twelfth century, which tells of an Otherworld journey undertaken physically by a living person after having crossed a geographical threshold located in Ireland. This treatise, however, does not explicitly mention any recognizable place on the Irish isle. On the other hand, there exist accounts of a pilgrimage ritual a few years later in a place that can be identified as an island (or two) on the Lough Derg in the North of Ireland. In other words, in the tradition of Saint Patrick's Purgatory, the primary literary text originated and developed independently from a given place, just as the ritual of pilgrimage to the Purgatory was independent from a given text. But both the text and pilgrimage came together in Avignon around 1353, from which time both textual traditions and pilgrimage reports began to interact and modify each other, inspiring and shaping new texts and new ritual forms, while creating fictional characters derived from historical figures and, conversely, portraying literary characters as historical figures.

Keywords

Purgatory; pilgrimages; medieval literature; medieval history; Saint Patrick

Resumen

La tradición del purgatorio de San Patricio. Entre la literatura visionaria y los relatos de peregrinación

El Purgatorio de San Patricio en Lough Derg es uno de los lugares de peregrinación más importantes de la Europa Occidental. La tradición del Purgatorio está estrictamente

relacionada con la difusión de un texto, el *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, compuesto a finales del siglo XII, que relata el viaje al otro mundo experimentado por una persona viva, físicamente, después de haber cruzado un portal geográfico localizado en Irlanda. Sin embargo, este tratado no menciona explícitamente ningún lugar reconocible en la isla irlandesa. Por otro lado, años después se tuvo noticia de una peregrinación a un lugar que sería posible identificar como una isla (o dos) en Lough Derg, en el norte de Irlanda. En otras palabras, en la tradición del Purgatorio de San Patricio, el texto literario primario nació y se desarrolló independientemente de un lugar geográfico concreto, y, asimismo, el ritual de peregrinación al Purgatorio nació independientemente de ningún texto. Pero ambos, texto y peregrinación, coincidieron en Aviñón alrededor del año 1353, y a partir de ese momento tanto las tradiciones textuales como los informes de peregrinación comenzaron a interactuar entre sí, modificándose mutuamente, inspirando y moldeando nuevos relatos y nuevas formas rituales, creando personajes ficticios derivados de figuras históricas y, al contrario, atestigüando personajes literarios como figuras históricas.

Palabras clave

purgatorio; peregrinación; literatura medieval; historia medieval; San Patricio

The hagiographical traditions are, in a certain sense, dynamic fields where several forces work and influence each other. Cults, rituals, narratives, (but also cultural ideas, as conceptions regarding the time and the space, the human body and so on) play an important and obvious role, whose boundaries are nevertheless not exactly definable, since their interaction is inextricable. But each of these forces contribute to shape and address traditions that in turn will influence and model cults, rituals and narratives.

Here I would like to show a case, Saint Patrick's Purgatory on Lough Derg, where a hagiographic text, developed from a particular literary tradition, met a place and its rituals.

In the tradition of Saint Patrick's Purgatory, the primary literary text was born and developed independently from a given place, as well as the ritual of pilgrimage to the Purgatory was born independently from a given text. But they, text and pilgrimage, met in Avignon around 1353 and from that time both textual traditions and pilgrimage reports began to interact with each other, modifying each other, inspiring and shaping new texts and new ritual forms, creating fictional characters, derived from historical figures and, on the contrary, testifying literary characters as historical figures.¹

Description of a Purgatory

A text: *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*

In Ireland, nowadays, there is a place of rest and meditation.² It's a little island in the middle of a little lake, with a sanctuary where it is possible, in summer, to live an experience of personal growth, achieved in three days of fasting and vigil.³ This place has a long tradition, that started from a text, the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, written in 1184/88.⁴ But this text doesn't mention any lake (and neither any island). It describes only an Otherworld voyage, in a way very similar to many other 'Visiones', in a literary tradition that in Western Europe has its roots in the *Visio Pauli* and its various textual forms and heritages.⁵

The *Tractatus* has two exclusive features. First, the experience of the Otherworld voyager is 'in corpore', not 'extra corpore'. In other words, this experience is lived by a man with in human body. Second, this Otherworld experience is lived by the pilgrim deliberately and it is not caused by a direct intervention of God's grace. This feature derives from the particular background of the Irish tradition, the *Echtraí* and the *Immrama*, where the hero experiences some epic

1. This contribution resumes the essential lines of my introduction to the outcoming volume *Il Purgatorio di san Patrizio*, cur. G. P. Maggioni, P. Taviani, R. Tinti, Firenze 2017. So far, the most exhaustive volume on the Purgatory is *The Medieval Pilgrimage to St Patrick's Purgatory*, cur. M. Haren-Y. de Pontfarcy, Enniskillen 1988.

2. The bibliography about the St. Patrick's Purgatory and the Pilgrimages on Lough Derg is almost countless. Here I refer to the exhaustive list compiled by B. Weitemeier (ed. comm.) *Visiones Georgii. Untersuchung mit synoptischer Edition der Übersetzung und Redaktion C* Berlin 2006, p. xii-660 (Texte des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit 43), at the p. 491-521. See also the Bibliography of the volumes *The Medieval Pilgrimage to St Patrick's Purgatory* and *Il Purgatorio di san Patrizio*, cit., n. 1.

3. See <<http://www.loughderg.org>> (last visit 30/12/16).

4. We have two main editions of the text, though they are not 'critical editions' in a strict sense: K. Warnke, *Das Buch vom Espurgatoire S. Patrice der Marie de France und seine Quelle*, Halle an der Saale, 1938 and R. Easting, *St Patrick's Purgatory: Two versions of Owaine Miles and The Vision of William of Stranton Together with the Long Text of the Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, Oxford 1991.

5. On this concern, see P. Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart 1981.

adventures in the fantastic spaces of the Otherworld or of the Ocean.⁶ The *Navigatio sancti Brendani* is a sort of Christian interpretation of this thema, narrating of the sailing of the saint and of his companions (all with their human bodies) in the Ocean, searching for the the Isle of the Earthly Paradise.⁷ The *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii* is a step further, joining the fantastic adventure of an hero (and his body) with the Otherworld scenarios that are characteristic of the medieval literary genre of *Visiones*.

The *Tractatus* begins describing the origin of St Patrick's Purgatory. God wanted to help Saint Patrick in his preaching and created for him a sort of deep chasm, a cave inhabited by demons, for the vision of the infernal pains could help to convert the Irish. If someone descended and was able to survive for twenty-four hours, resisting the demonic temptations, after his death he would have been exempted from any other purgatorial expiation. The text also tells of a knight named Owein, who, during the reign of King Stephen (1135-1154), descended into the cave and resisted the demonic temptations, coming out of there after twenty-four hours, alive and purified.

Origin of a literary subgenre

The *Tractatus* was read in two ways. Firstly, the text was read as a *Visio*, which followed the canons of the tradition of visionary literature, to which contributed with an original interpretation of the topics of this literary genre. It was a devout reading that, although separated from any tradition of pilgrimage, was edifying and useful to illustrate the landscape of the afterlife and the eternal destiny of souls after death.⁸

But the *Tractatus* was also read as a real testimony concerning a real, although nameless, place of worship: in this sense it is the first text of a long pilgrimage tradition that from the first vague indications became more and more specific, until the definitive identification of the Purgatory with an island in Lough Derg, more than a century later.

The *Tractatus* had a considerable success: it was almost immediately vulgarized,⁹ and its reputation and the consistent circulation of the manuscripts

6. Dumville, D. N., *Echtrae and Immram: Some Problems of Definition*, in "Ériu" 27 (1976), 73-94.

7. On the *Navigatio* see *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, ed. G. Orlandi - R. Guglielmetti, Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2014, with an exhaustive introduction.

8. Already in 1206 the *Tractatus* was indicated in first place, after the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, among the antecedents which had influenced the composition of the *Visio Thurkilli* and two centuries later in a North Italian treatise on the plague was mentioned among the devotional texts that, in the Po valley, were deemed useful to heal the soul, a necessary prerequisite to the health of the body.

9. The *Tractatus* was almost immediately translated in verse by Marie de France, with the title *Espurgatoire Saint Patriz* (see the edition of Warnke, n. 4 and *Maria di Francia, Il Purgatorio di san Patrizio*, cur. S. M. Barillari, Alessandria 2004). In addition to Maria of France, we have at least

led him to be cited and discussed by Cistercian monks and Dominican friars in some important theological works.¹⁰ This important diffusion contributed to give birth to a kind of literary sub-genre of the Otherworld *Visiones*, in which the background scenery was precisely Saint Patrick's Purgatory in Lough Derg.

As we will see, the first text of this sub-genre was the *Visio* of Georgius Grissaphan (written by Petrus de Paternis about 1353-4), which in a certain way re-launched the fame of Saint Patrick's pilgrimage in the Avignon papal court, founding a tradition that fascinated aristocratic and historical figures such as, for example, Ungaro Malatesta, who in turn, since they were noble and at the same time were in some way 'literary characters', inspired many pilgrimages and more or less adventurous tales of other travellers until the destruction of 1497 and beyond.

Pilgrims

More or less simultaneously with the composition and the spreading of the *Tractatus*, some news began to circulate, about a place of pilgrimage in Ireland related to the hagiographic tradition of Saint Patrick: according to this information, accomplishing the pilgrimage would allow purification from any sin, granting an exemption from any other purgatorial punishment. But we have to remember that the *Tractatus* does not contain any explicit reference to a definite place where the experience of the knight Owein could be located, and there is no indication in it about where it would have been possible to experience an otherworld journey through St Patrick's Purgatory. In the text the name of the place of Purgatory abbey is called *Reglis*, but the term is generic, corresponding to the Irish *reicléis*, which means precisely a small church (if it is not to be referred to the Latin *regula*, and thus to any monastic foundation).¹¹ Only in the longer version of the *Tractatus*, which was composed probably a little later, a particular witness of a Bishop

seven French vernacular texts in verse, attested by 8 manuscripts, and a prose version, studied by Martina di Febo; starting from the XIII century, several versions in English were composed; in 1320 the *Tractatus* was translated into Catalan; we have also German and Dutch versions and revisions by the end of the fourteenth century; already in the fifteenth century French, Catalan and German prints appeared. See W. Paravicini, *Fakten und Fiktionen: Das Fegefeuer des hl. Patrick und die europäische Ritterschaft im späten Mittelalter*, in Jean de Mandeville in Europa. *Neue Perspektiven in der Reiseliteraturforschung*, cur. E. Bremer - S. Röhl, München 2007, p. 111-163 at the p. 115-116.

10. For example, St. Patrick's Purgatory is discussed in the works of Caesarius Heisterbacensis, Stephanus de Borbonis, Vincentius Bellovacensis, Humbertus de Romanis, Iacobus de Voragine. See *Il Purgatorio di san Patrizio*, n. 1.

11. Y. de Pontfarcy, *The Historical Background to the Pilgrimage to Lough Derg*, in *The Medieval Pilgrimage to St Patrick Purgatory*, cur. M. Haren - Y. de Pontfarcy, cit., pp. 13-14, remember the connection of the term *reglis* (*reicléis* in Old Irish) with the Latin word *regula* and the fact that the term was used to indicate a cell annexed to a monastery (in the *Annals of Ulster* the word is referred to the monasteries of Armagh and Derry, see J. Dunning, *The Arroasian Order in Medieval Ireland*, in "Irish Historical Studies" 4 (1945) p. 297-315, at p. 305-306).

named Florentianus is introduced: this quotation implicitly refers the Purgatory to the diocese of Tyrone, whose area could include the Lough Derg. But only very few persons could notice this detail that was, in practice, correctly interpretable only by those who knew the prelate or the history of his diocese. In any case, in the *Tractatus* there is no topographic reference to any lake or to the Lough Derg, where the well-known tradition of pilgrimage to St Patrick Purgatory was born and continue to develop until the present days.¹² The vagueness of the information contained in the text of the *Tractatus* is probably deliberate, resulting from the fact that the experience of the Knight Owen had not to be referred to an identifiable geographical place: in some sense, this indeterminacy hid the most controversial problem of the text (i. e. the possibility of an Otherworld experience *in corpore* accessible to all), limiting the chances to cross the Purgatory threshold and to live and verify actually the Otherworld purifying experience.

Lough Derg, ('Red Lake' in English) has always had a strong legendary connotation, especially for the etiological tales explaining the name and referring simultaneously to the figure of Saint Patrick and to the demons that infested the island. A legend explains the name with the color taken from the lake after that Saint Patrick killed here Corra ('Caothannach'), the mother of the devil, who had fled from Croagh Patrick.¹³ Another tradition attributes the name to the blood of a dead monster wounded by the hero Finn MacCumhaill and according to another myth, reported by J. D. Seymour, the name derives from Lough Dearc, 'Lake of the cave'.¹⁴

The first redaction of Giraldus Cambrensis' *Topographia Hibernica* (1186), composed just some years after the *Tractatus*, provides the first evidence of the presence in Ireland, more precisely in Ulster, of a purgatorial place accessible to all, placed in a bisected island.¹⁵ The association with the hagiographic legend of Saint Patrick was added only to the second edition, in 1189. We can therefore note that an Irish purgatorial tradition existed almost concurrently with the composition of

12. In this regard it is useful to remember that the Lough Derg is currently in the diocese of Clogher, close to the borders of the diocese of Raphoe and Derry.

13. This legend left its traces in the reports of Antonio Mannini and Laurent de Pasztho. See Y. de Pontarcy, *Account and Tales of Lough Derg or of the Pilgrimage*, in *Medieval Pilgrimage to St Patrick's Purgatory*, cit., p. 35. According to an old tradition, Saint Patrick expelled the demons from the Crough Patrick (a mountain in Connacht), throwing against them his bell and chasing them into a cave on the northern slope of the mountain. Only Corra escaped, taking refuge precisely in Lough Derg.

14. J. D. Seymour, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory: A Medieval Pilgrimage in Ireland*, Dundalk 1918, p. 9-10.

15. Giraldi Cambrensis *Topographia Hibernica* II, V, ed. in *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia Hibernica et Expugnatio Hibernica*, in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* V, London 1867 (Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores) For the problem of the several versions of the text and their dating, see the introduction of F. Dimock to his edition and the introductory study of J.-M. Boivin to the French translation of Dimock's edition (*L'Irlande au Moyen Age. Giraud de Barri et la Topographia Hibernica* (1188), Paris 1993).

the *Tractatus* and in all probability it was even earlier, since Giraldo did not write as a direct witness, but report an indirect tradition. It can be observed that the description of the island bipartition could fit the pair Saints' Island / Station Island, the two island where pilgrimage tradition developed in 14th century: in particular, the mention of a purification ritual, that consisted in passing the night in one of the nine pits, could be linked to the mounds on Station Island, probably the remains of a Celtic cemetery or of 'beehive' cells, relatively common in Ireland.

In 1200 Peter of Cornwall gave more precise geographical indications, also mentioning the name of his witness, Britius, former abbot of the monastery of Saint Patrick: the Purgatory is a day of travel far from Armagh and two days from Down, in whose diocese is located (the equivalent kilometeric distance corresponds more or less to the Lough Derg position).¹⁶ The rituals of the pilgrimage would take place between two islands separated only by a small and easily crossable water. Thus an identification of this place purgatorial with Lough Derg would be possible.

In the thirteenth century, Saint Patrick's Purgatory gained a huge celebrity, partly, as we have already seen, as result of the lucky vernacular version of Mary of France, and mostly since it has been the subject of various texts composed in the Cistercian and Dominican orders. The Dominican dealt with the Irish Purgatory also in a theological perspective, because an Otherworld journey *in corpore* raised not few and not trivial problems.

However, also for the authority of the witnesses,¹⁷ the testimonies of Caesarius of Heisterbach¹⁸ and Humbert of Romans¹⁹ confirmed the reliability of the *Tractatus*; but in these texts the description of the real Purgatory remained too vague and conditioned by traditional canons. However, we can observe that both texts described Saint Patrick's Purgatory as an established tradition that could be experienced by everyone. The *Golden Legend* of James de Voragine represents a special case: this hagiographical collection modified in some points the story of the *Tractatus*, changing the role of Saint Patrick (James attributed to him an active part in the creation of Purgatory) specifying the formula of the ritual invocation and substituting the name of the protagonist Owein (or Ouenus) with *Nicolaus*, undoubtedly an easier name for Latin readers.²⁰

16. Petrus Cornovallensis, *Liber Revelationum*, ed. R. Easting, *Peter of Cornwall's Account of St Patrick's Purgatory*, in "Analecta Bollandiana" 97 (1979), 410-416.

17. Caesarius relates the witness of another Cistercian abbot and Humbert de Romans was master of the Dominican Order.

18. Caesarius Heisterbacensis, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, XII, 38-39, ed. J. Strange, Coloniae-Bonnae-Bruxellis 1851, II, 347-348.

19. Humbertus de Romanis, *De dono timoris*, 3, ed. C. Boyer, Turnout 2008, CC CM 218, 85-86.

20. Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda aurea*, XLIX, 10-51, ed. G. P. Maggioni, Traduzione italiana coordinata da F. Stella, Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007, 368-372.

The development of the tradition. The adventurous capstone of a Grand Tour for noble pilgrims

The first veritable pilgrimage evidences date from the fourteenth century and significantly develop the Dominican tradition of the previous century and the strong position taken by Humbert de Romans.

The very first evidence, still vague, is inserted in the *Libellus de descriptione Hybernie abbreviatus* written in Ireland by the Dominican Philip Slane, who in 1323-4 closed the chapter on Saint Patrick's Purgatory, derived in large part from the assembly of the *Topographia Hibernica* of Giraldo Cambrense with the *Golden Legend*, giving an information, unfortunately without details, about a woman who shortly before had entered and had come out successfully from Purgatory, 'in the same way followed by the knight Nicolas' (being the latter the protagonist of the *Golden Legend*).²¹ The fact that Philip Slane wrote of a woman, an unique event among the experiences of pilgrimage to Purgatory, subtracts in some sense the story to the suspicion of being a mere repetition of clichés collected elsewhere. We can also note that Philip spoke of two islands, mixing the news of Giraldus Cambrensis, Peter of Cornwall and James de Voragine.

Around the middle of the fourteenth century, the second witness is given by the squire of the Sir of Beaujeau and is reported in the *Chronique des quatre premiers Valois*, but it is very clearly an imaginative tale, if not a mere bragging of the squire.²²

Three years later, in 1353-4, the *Visiones Georgii Grissaphani*²³ give more accurate geographic data: the Purgatory, accessible through a staircase that descends into the deep well, is in the diocese of Clogher, not far from the Lough Derg and Tyrone, and is, according to the text established by L. L. Hammerich,²⁴ on an island eight days far from Armagh. The indication of such a journey, does not correspond to the two days of travel necessary to go from the Lough Derg to the seat of the Primate of Ireland at that time, but it is probably caused by a corruption of the manuscript tradition.

To well understand the role that the *Visiones* had in the revival of the pilgrimage to Saint Patrick's Purgatory, the impressive documentation assembled

21. Philip de Slane, *Libellus de descriptione Hibernie*, XVI, G. P. Maggioni, Firenze, 2018, forthcoming.

22. *Chronique des quatre premiers Valois*, ed. S. Luce, Paris 1862, 22-23.

23. About the text, its several versions and its context, see B. Weitemeier, *Visiones Georgii. Untersuchung mit synoptischer Edition der Übersetzung und Redaktion C*, cit. above (n. 2). Eszter Nagy, working for a PhD thesis at the EHSS in Paris, demonstrated that the text was composed by Petrus de Paternis (Peyre de Paternas or Perne), master of theology at the Avignon monastery of the Augustian Hermits.

24. Text edited by L. L. Hammerich, *Visiones Georgii. Visiones quas in Purgatorio Sancti Patricii vidit Georgius miles de Ungaria*, A.D. MCCCLIII, København 1930.

by Archbishop Richard FitzRalph, consisting of six accompanying letters, is extremely important.²⁵ In addition, we can not ignore the fact that Georgius before his arrival in Ireland made a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and to Santa Maria of Finis Terrae, remaining disappointed. In this case, the Purgatory on Lough Derg is a culmination of a pilgrimage that allows to go beyond the more usual and more popular pilgrimage experiences.

Thus it is not surprising that a very impressed John of Tewksbury reported to have met Georgius Grissaphan in Oxford,²⁶ on the return journey to Avignon, and to have listened his fascinating experience, nor that the *Visiones Georgii Grissaphani* have become one of the favourite readings of the Viennese nobility, nor that in 1386 the Infant of Aragon had requested to Ramon de Perellós in Paris a copy of a report on Purgatory and that the same Infant, after becoming king, had given a translation of it to the Countess of Foix.²⁷ At the same time the translations of the *Tractatus* into vernacular languages were multiplying and some sanctuaries were also built in places even far away from Ireland, as in Colzate - Vertova, in the province of Bergamo, Italy, probably on the initiative of the local merchants.²⁸

In 1358 Saint Patrick's Purgatory was the destination of Ungaro Malatesta's pilgrimage, an enterprise that had a resonance destined to last centuries and that was also confirmed by a patent letter of Edward III dated 24 October 1358.²⁹ This letter therefore constitutes the first independent documentary evidence - i. e. not dependent on a religious context or linked to devout tradition - that witnesses the pilgrimage. However, in none of the contemporary texts that celebrated the adventure of Ungaro Malatesta (nor in any of the skeptical ones) there are sure references to the geographical location of Purgatory, besides the fact that it was in an Irish town.³⁰ The only exception is a note entered in the text of the almost contemporary *Visio Ludovici*, according to which the protagonist met Ungaro at the end of the purgatorial experience, in a small island.³¹

25. A. Gwynn, *Archbishop Fitzralph and George of Hungary*, in "Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review" 24 (1935), 558-572

26. These pages of John of Tewksbury are edited in *Il Purgatorio di san Patrizio*, cit. (n.1), based on the ms. Manchester, Chetham's Library, ms. A.4.100 (6681), ff. 49r-52r.

27. See W. Paravicini, *Fakten und Fiktionen: Das Fegefeuer des hl. Patrick und die europäische Ritterschaft im späten Mittelalter*, in *Jean de Mandeville in Europa*, cit., n. 9.

28. P. Gusmini, *Il santuario di San Patrizio*, Vertova 1987, p. 25.

29. S. M. Barillari, *La "coppia d'Arimino" fra il Triumphus cupidinis e il Purgatorio di san Patrizio. (Una ballata per Viola Novella dal codice Maglabechiano VII, 1078)*, in *Dai pochi ai molti. Studi in onore di Roberto Antonelli*, cur. P. Canettieri- A. Punzi, Roma 2014, I, 89-114.

30. For example Dominicus Bandini, *Fons Memorabilium Universi*, Oxford, Balliol College, ms. 238c, ff. 46v-47v or Checco di Meletto Rossi, *Epistola ad magnificum dominum Malatestam Ungarum de Malatestis*, ed. A. Rossi, in *Filologia, grammatica e retorica negli scrittori trecenteschi, II, Cecco di Meletto Rossi fra gli Ordellaifi e i Malatesta, fra Petrarca e Boccaccio*, "Poliorama", 3 (1984), 11-22, in part. 17-18.

31. The text has a very intricate tradition. See the critical edition Tadeus Gualandis de Pisis *Visio Ludovici* in *Il Purgatorio di san Patrizio*, cit. (n.1).

In the fourteenth century the testimonies of the fame of Saint Patrick's Purgatory multiplied, belonging or not to the subgenre of visionary literature relating to the descent in the den of Lough Derg. The reputation of Purgatory was in fact so popular that in 1385, as told in Froissart's *Chronicle*, some riders belonging to the French expedition to Scotland made a detour to Ireland, instead of returning directly home.³² A decade later, in 1398, the noble Catalan Ramon de Perellós went on pilgrimage to Lough Derg.³³

Directly related to the Lough Derg is the testimony of Laurent de Rathold Pasztho dated 1411 and reported by James (Iacobus) Yonge.³⁴ It speaks of two islands named respectively 'Regles' and 'Sanctorum', that could easily correspond to Station Island and Saints' Island. The text is accompanied by a certificate of the Archbishop of Armagh testifying that he received a letter from Matthew, *prior Purgatorii sancti Patricii Clothof Raynes diocesi*. Besides the visit of Laurent, in this letter Prior Matthew also cited two well-known predecessors (Nicholaus, the protagonist of the story of James of Voragine, and Georgius Grissaphan, the protagonist of the *Visiones Georgii*) and provided a testimony, the only at our disposal, about the pilgrimage of *Eugenius de Anglia dictus Obrian*. After James Yonge there is a certain uniformity in the pilgrimage stories of the 15th century, until the last one, the story of the destruction of Purgatory described in the *Annals of Ulster* that place it explicitly in Lough Derg, albeit in an underground cavern. Many and remarkable resemblances are undoubtedly visible also in Francesco Chiericati's letter to Isabella d'Este, that in 1517 attested the unexpected resurrection of Purgatory, describing in detail the journey and the difficulties crossing the territories of Armagh, Tyrone (?) and Omagh.³⁵ During the sixteenth and early seventeenth century the flourishing documentation on pilgrimages referred always coherently to the Lough Derg, as well as the story of the destruction (this time more drastic) of 1627.

Many documents testify that the Purgatory of Saint Patrick in the second half of the fourteenth century had become part of a sort of *Grand Tour* who passed for the most famous European pilgrimage destinations. For example, before 1433 the young Savoyard Count Jacques de Montmayeur, after being knighted in Jerusalem, after having visited Santiago de Compostela and having conducted at his own expense a military expedition against the Moors of Granada, went to Purga-

32. Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*, K. de Lettenhove, XV, Bruxelles 1871, p. 403.

33. We will discuss his case below.

34. James Yonge, *Memoriale super uisitatione domini Laurencii Ratholdi*, ed. H. Delehaye in *Le pèlerinage de Laurent de Pasztho au purgatoire de S. Patrice*, in "Analecta Bollandiana" 27 (1908), 43-60.

35. The letter is conserved in Mantova, Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Archivio Gonzaga, Serie B xxxiii, 10, Busta 85, cc. XXXVr-XXXVIIIr. A transcription of it is edited in *Il Purgatorio di san Patrizio*, see n. 1.

tory (and later visited many other holy places scattered everywhere in Europe).³⁶ A short time later, between May 1447 and July 1448, a Bern nobleman, Conrad von Scharnachtal, undertook a long journey through southern France and the Iberian Peninsula, that led him (among other places) to Santiago de Compostela and then (probably by sea) in the British islands and to Saint Patrick's Purgatory³⁷. Still in 1466, the Bohemian Baron Leo von Rozmítal mentioned Saint Patrick's Purgatory in his travel report³⁸ and in 1483 the Wrocław knight Nikolaus von Popplau wrote that he had met in England many pilgrims to Purgatory, expressing his perplexity about them.³⁹ The list of pilgrimages to Lough Derg in the French area between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries is enough to demonstrate the number and the nobility of the pilgrims (and the protagonists of the reports): Edouard, Sir of Beaujeu and Prince of Dombes, the knight Louis d'Auxerre in 1358, Guillaume de Coucy in 1397, Iohannes Garhi and Franciscus Proly *presbyteri civitatis Lugdunensis* with Iohannes Burges *puer et famulus eorum*, in 1485, an anonymous French knight recorded in *Ulster Annals* in 1516, Jean de Monluc, Bishop of Valence and Die in 1545.⁴⁰

In addition to this, The Purgatory of Saint Patrick was reported in the Italian maps since the first part of the fifteenth century⁴¹ and appeared in 1459 on the world map of Fra Mauro of Camaldoli (as *Purgatorio de S. Patrizio*) and in the anonymous Catalan world map (ca. 1450) in the north-western part of Ireland. Purgatory long remained on the geographical maps, as shown by the map of Lafreri (1588)⁴² where is designed like a cave with the words *Purgatorium S. Patricii* and the *Erdapfel* of Martin Behaim,⁴³ where, as *St. Paterici Fegefeurer*, is the only location reported in Ireland.

There are other signs of the rampant success of this pilgrimage in fifteenth century. An example is the fact that a magistrate of Antwerp in 1410 imposed twice a retributive pilgrimage to Purgatory. A second one, dated roughly in 1455, is the warning presented by Donald (or Daniel) McGrath, *coarb* of Ter-

36. See *Il Purgatorio di san Patrizio*, cit. (n.1), p. 00.

37. W. Paravicini, *Seigneur par l'itinérance? Le cas du patricien bernois Conrad de Scharnachtal*, in *L'itinérance des seigneurs (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)* cur. A. Paravicini Bagliani - E. Pibiri - D. Reynard, (Cahiers Lausannais d'Histoire Médiévale 34) Lausanne 2003, 27-72.

38. K. Hrdina ed., *Commentarius brevis et iucundus itineris atque peregrinationis, pietatis et religionis causa susceptae ab Illustri et Magnifico Domino Leone, libero barone de Rosmítal et Blatna [Olomuc 1577]*, Praha 1951, p. 42. Cit. in W. Paravicini, *Fakten und Fiktionen*, cit., p. 117.

39. P. Radzikowski ed., *Reisebeschreibung Niclas von Popplau, Ritters, bürger von Breslau*, Krakow 1998, p. 60. W. Paravicini, *Fakten und Fiktionen*, cit., p. 118.

40. See *Il Purgatorio di san Patrizio*, cit. (n.1), p. 00.

41. T. J. Westropp, *Early Italian Maps of Ireland from 100 to 1600, with Notes on Foreign Settlers and Trade*, in "Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy" 30 (1912-13), 361-428, notably p. 428.

42. *Ibidem*, p. 426.

43. W. Paravicini, *Fakten und Fiktionen*, cit., p. 113.

mon lands and Thomas Mc Creanyre (or Treanor), abbot of the abbey of SS. Peter and Paul of Armagh, who sought to prevent that the only Raymond Maguire, Augustinian prior of Saint Patrick's Purgatory, could benefit from the offerings left by pilgrims. To understand the success and fame of the pilgrimage to Saint Patrick's Purgatory should therefore be considered the adventurous aura, in some sense comparable on the one hand to the events narrated in the chivalric literature, on the other to visionary texts as well as, not least, Dante's *Divine Comedy*: this pilgrimage was a kind of experienceable *Queste*, in a world that was becoming less and less mysterious and increasingly more representable and knowable, thanks to countless religious and mercantile travels. A good example of this chivalric aura are the words used in 1408 by Sigismund of Hungary to present Laurent Pasztho who was traveling to Santiago de Compostela and to the Purgatory of Saint Patrick 'to expand their military experience and chivalry, covering different areas of the world'.⁴⁴

But the primary example of this atmosphere, in my opinion, is the fame of Ungaro Malatesta's experience, whose pilgrimage has not only left lasting traces in the literature of the time, but has even transformed himself, an historical figure, into a literary character. After visiting Saint Patrick's Purgatory in 1358, Ungaro Malatesta has become a character, quoted in a (obviously fictitious) tale of Sacchetti's *Centonovelle* (dated 1393-1400)⁴⁵ and, above all, has become the protagonist of a legend that has lasted until the present day, according to which he went into the Otherworld through the Purgatory to meet the soul of his beloved, killed by a jealous husband.⁴⁶ Vice versa, in 1517 Francesco Chiericati saw with his own eyes the registration of the name of Guerrin Meschino, a fictitious character from the Italian popular literature of the fourteenth century, recorded as the first visitor of Purgatory.⁴⁷

Witnesses between history, tradition, literature and devotion

An important issue in the study of the documentation on Saint Patrick's Purgatory is the complementarity and (sometimes) the more or less explicit contradiction between two kinds of witnesses. On the one hand there are literary (or paraliterary) documents that reflect canons and images that are presupposed by the literary genre to which these texts belong. On the other hand there are chancellery documents or chronicle reports that describe realistically and effectively

44. Ed. H. Delehaye in *Le pèlerinage de Laurent de Pasztho au purgatoire de S. Patrice*, in "Analecta Bollandiana" 27 (1908), p. 46.

45. Franco Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, ed. A. Lanza, Firenze 1984, X, p. 20-21.

46. S. M. Barillari, *La "coppia d'Arimino" fra il Triumphus cupidinis e il Purgatorio di san Patrizio*, cit. (n. 29). See also A. Falcioni, v. *Malatesta Galeotto, detto Malatesta Ungaro* in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, v. 68 (2007) 44-47.

47. See *Il Purgatorio di san Patrizio*, cit. (n.1), p. 00.

the journey to reach the Purgatory, the ritual for admission and the external appearance of the place. Finally, there are documents that combine these two approaches in a single text, which testifies both the pilgrim's earthly journey (usually described with detailed realism) and his otherworldly experience (often presented through the usual literary canons of *Visiones* tradition). This unusual (and contradictory, in many respects) association of two complementary but different sections has caused the insertion in the text of one or more transition passages between the two parts. These transitions consist of psychic impressions, that are marked by falls, thunders, faintings, or experiences, such as the pass through a certain threshold: these passages safeguard somehow the overall coherence of the testimony, creating almost two narrative levels.

This complementarity and this overlapping of two narrative levels has its first important example in the *Visiones Georgii Grissaphani*, written by Petrus de Paternis, a text that reports the travel and the pilgrimage experience of a young Hungarian nobleman, who took part to the expedition of Louis I of Hungary. Precisely the contradiction inherent in the presenting as testimonial evidences texts that reflected actual literary canons has probably induced a sort of re-writing of the *Tractatus sancti Patricii*: The *Visiones Georgii* describe a revised Purgatory, more appropriate to a cultural context marked by the success of Dante Alighieri's *Comedy*. Besides the insertion of explanatory theological parts, in the *Visiones Georgii* more accurate descriptions, through analogies and metaphors, emphasize the literary aspect and therefore implicitly invite the reader not to stop at the literal meaning of the text, but also to look for an allegorical and moral sense, following the example of Dante.

In other words, an internal coherence of these texts had to be safeguarded, trying to hold together both the narrative of an otherworld journey and the report of a pilgrimage to a particular geographical place on an island (or two) of Lough Derg, where only a few simple masonry buildings were visible. As a matter of fact, the *Visiones* had to be interpreted and adapted in a different context, addressing not only to devoted readers established in some monastery, but also to pilgrims who looked forward to travel heading to a penitential Otherworld experience.

Avignon 1353

Exactly the composition of the *Visiones Georgii Grissaphani* in Avignon around 1353-4 and their diffusion from the papal curia are a crucial point in the history of the pilgrimage to Saint Patrick's Purgatory and its documentation.⁴⁸

48. W. Paravicini, *Fakten und Fiktionen*, cit., 118-123. See also B. Weitemeier, *Visiones Georgii. Untersuchung mit synoptischer Edition der Übersetzung und Redaktion C*, cit. above (n. 2) and the n. 23-5 above. Text edited in *Visiones Georgii. Visiones quas in Purgatorio sancti Patricii vidit Georgius Miles de Ungaria A.D. MCCCLIII* (ed. L. L. Hammerich, cit., see n. 30).

Accompanied by a remarkable documentation dated 1353, the *Visiones Georgii* of Petrus de Paternis are the first original and detailed testimony on a pilgrimage to Saint Patrick's Purgatory. Three accompanying letters of Richard FitzRalph, archbishop of Armagh, occupy a particularly prominent position before the pilgrimage report. Three other letters confirm that the pilgrimage took place, but FitzRalph's letters attest authoritatively: a) the veracity of the narrative; b) the nobility of the pilgrim; c) the opportunity of its divulgation even outside the Avignon court.⁴⁹ This triple certification amplifies the contrast that is visible in the first lines of the text in relation to the traditional pilgrimage sites, and particularly Santiago de Compostela, the first destination originally chosen by Georgius to integrate his penance. Precisely the Galician sanctuary had not met the expectations of Georgius especially for the mundane crowd that did not allow there an adequate segregation from the world.⁵⁰

In the text of the *Visiones Georgii* we can read for the first time the liturgy that accompanied the pilgrim to the Purgatory threshold, a ritual that is very similar to a veritable funeral. After the prescribed time of fasting, funeral offices were celebrated for the pilgrim, as if he was really dead. He was placed in a blessed coffin, covered with black cloth, and for him a Requiem Mass was celebrated. Recitation of the offices and tolling of bells followed, and the liturgy ended with a procession of religious and civil authorities accompanying the pilgrim at the veritable threshold of the Otherworld.⁵¹

The Otherworld that Georgius found beyond the threshold is quite different from that, essentially bipartite, described in the *Tractatus*. Owein passed through a place of trial and purification and then came to an earthly paradise, where the purified souls congregate before ascending into Heavens; conversely Georgius, to reach the final divine vision, traversed an Otherworld more complex and crossed by two *pontes subtiles*, where, between the trial section and the Heavenly Paradise, visited a veritable Purgatory, in which the seven deadly sins were punished (in sequence: pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth).⁵² The elaboration also concerns the access to the purgatorial cavern. In the *Visiones Georgii* the pilgrim descends into a pit through over a two miles long spiral staircase, in darkness except in the final part, pervaded by an increasing glare.⁵³ The vertical cavity is a peculiarity that in 1411 influenced also the narrative of Laurent Ratholdi, who himself was led by an angel through 'circular and vertical steps', and has traits in common with the description of the visit to Purgatory of the 14th century fictional character Guerrin Meschino of Andrea da Barberino. Another innovative

49. *Visiones Georgii*, ed. Hammerich, cit., see n. 30, p. 75-86.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 93-7.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 166-206.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 97-8.

feature of the text that will affect the later tradition are the temptations to which the pilgrim was submitted by demons disguised as girls,⁵⁴ a particular that is visible also in the pilgrimage report of Ludovico d'Auxerre in 1358.

But we must consider that about Georgius Grissaphani we do not know anything else than what is reported by the text and by the letters accompanying it, except the short mention contained in the pilgrimage report of Laurent de Pasztho⁵⁵ and the brief remarks inserted in *De situ universorum* of John de Tewksbury,⁵⁶ according to which Georgius Grissaphani (but tradition is not unanimous about the spelling of the surname) was a twenty-four years old son of a Hungarian baron residing in Naples, who despite his young age was appointed by Ludovico of Hungary as captain of some Apulian areas, including the city of Troy and the castle of Canosa. In this occasion, according to the text, the young man was guilty of atrocities, such as looting and mass murder (at least 350 men). To expiate them, he went to Santiago de Compostela and from there, since it was not satisfied by the penitential experience in Galician shrine, to the Church of Santa Maria de Finibus Terre and then to Saint Patrick's Purgatory. However, it is surprising that a person of such distinguished rank, honoured with such responsibilities and author of such atrocities has left no trace in the chronicles and documents. It is also remarkable also the substantial coincidence of Georgius' itinerary with the stopovers of the journey of his compatriot Laurent de Ratholdi Pasztho.

Another perplexing point is the substantial coincidence with the pilgrimages of two young noblemen connected to Ludovico of Hungary. The first is perhaps the most famous pilgrim to Saint Patrick's Purgatory, Galeotto Malatesta, precisely nicknamed 'Ungaro' (the Hungarian): the dating of the *Visiones Georgii* in 1358 coincides substantially with Ungaro Malatesta's arrival in Avignon. 1358, year of death of Isabelle of France, addressee of one of the embassies entrusted to Georgius, is precisely the *terminus ante quem* of the *Visiones Georgii*, certainly composed after the accompanying letter of 22 February 1354.⁵⁷ In the year 1358 also the aforementioned young Hungarian Laurentius de Pasztho made a pilgrimage to Saint Patrick's Purgatory: his account of the visionary experience presents many points of contact with the *Visiones Georgii* and attest in a part of the manuscript tradition, as we have seen, even a meeting with Ungaro Malatesta in the Otherworld.

We must remember here the central role of Richard FitzRalph, who had recently been appointed Archbishop of Armagh, in documenting and divulging the pilgrimage of Georgius Grissaphan, and we must also consider his devotion

54. *Ibid.*, p. 115-8.

55. Ed. H. Delehaye in *Le pèlerinage de Laurent de Pasztho au purgatoire de S. Patrice*, (cit. see n. 40), p. 58.

56. Ms. Manchester, Chetham's Library, ms. A.4.100 (6681), ff. 49r-52r (see n. 26).

57. See n. 29.

to the apostle of the Irish and his undoubted interest in the promotion of a pilgrimage tradition that seemed in decline. Thus it seems probable that Richard FitzRalph, taking advantage of the presence of the grandson at the papal court, has had strong political and economic reasons to inspire the composition of *Visiones Georgii* that were destined, through the Avignon Curia, to the faithful of the whole Church. His purpose was obviously to revive the pilgrimage to Lough Derg, rewriting the *Tractatus* in a modernized form and providing it with some updated authentications and with an explicit political significance.

The *Visiones Georgii* have not been merely a rewriting of the *Tractatus*, but certainly also constitute a real aesthetic and formal elaboration of the tradition in a period marked by the fortune of Dante's *Comedy*. The *Visiones* were a better literary product than the old *Tractatus*, and were related not only to the tradition of visionary literature and its limited testimonial purposes, but especially to an erudite context that made possible also allegorical interpretations. In this way the contradiction between the descriptive part of the real pilgrimage and traditional part of the literary *visio* was less strident.

The account of the experience of Georgius Grissaphan can therefore be seen as an improvement, a reworking, even a formal update of the *Tractatus*, whose tradition was in this way finally and explicitly linked to Clogher and to the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland. In this perspective, it may not be accidental, in the final part of the text, the description of the veritable spoliation of the pilgrim by the devotees in search for relics, perhaps bringing to light a possible trade of devout religious objects linked to Saint Patrick's Purgatory. In any case, it is nevertheless true that the text of the *Visiones Georgii* had a great success and represented an important milestone for the reputation of the purgatorial pilgrimage on Lough Derg. Ungaro Malatesta's decision to undertake the pilgrimage while residing at Pope Innocent VI's court at Avignon could be an example of the fascination that the story of the Hungarian knight had at the time.

Ramon de Perellós

On September 6, 1397, Ramon, first Viscount of Perellós (in Roussillon), received a safe-conduct from King Richard II to go to Lough Derg. He visited Saint Patrick's Purgatory and, according to the account of his journey, he met John I of Aragon, recently dead.⁵⁸

58. About Ramon see L. Badia - L. Cabré, v. *Bernat Metge*, in L. Badia (dir.), *Literatura medieval*, II, Segles XIV-XV, Barcelona 2014, 185-238 (Història de la literatura catalana, II, dir. A. Broch). See also M. De Febo, *Il Viatge al Purgatori di Ramon de Perelbos: dalla visione al viaggio*, "La Parola del testo", 2 (2008), 309-330 and D. M. Carpenter, *The Pilgrim from Catalonia/Aragon in The Pilgrim from Catalonia/Aragon: Ramon de Perellós, 1397* in *The Medieval Pilgrimage to St Patrick's Purgatory*, cur. M. Haren - Y. de Pontarcy, Enniskillen 1988, cit., 99-119.

Ramon was an important personality of his time, as well as his father Francesc, who was Mayor and Councillor of Peter III and even Chamberlain and Admiral with Charles V. Grown at the French court, where he was also Chamberlain, soon he became Confidante of the Infant John I and then, when the latter became king, Mayor and Chamberlain, and finally Viscount of Perellós. In 1390 he was one of the Aragonese ambassadors who went to visit by Charles VI in Béziers. In 1391 he was appointed Viscount of Roda and in 1392 was sent by John I in Sicily as a military commander. In 1395 he was in charge of negotiations for the marriage of the son of the king of Cyprus, John of Lusignan, Prince of Antioch, with the sister of the King of Aragon. These, however, were interrupted in May 1396 at the king's death in unclear circumstances, when Ramon was in Avignon, the crucial place for the tradition of Saint Patrick's Purgatory, but he was forced to return to Roussillon to deal with the claims of the Count of Foix, who wanted to assert the rights of succession of his wife, sister of John. After a process that involved several officers of the late king, he remained in the entourage of Martin I of Aragon, of which he was councilor and chamberlain. Ramon supported the succession of Jaume of Urgueil and was deputy of the Generalitat until his death, that presumably took place in 1419.

The account of his voyage of 1397 (although in the manuscript tradition is dated 1398), entitled *Viatge al Purgatori de Sant Patrici*, has survived and is a further testimony of the complexity of the textual stories related to the reports of pilgrims to Saint Patrick's Purgatory. In fact there are at least two versions of the text, in Catalan and in Occitan, to which we can add a seventeenth-century Latin translation derived, through an intermediary Castilian text, from an Catalan original that however does not seem to match the known version.

The *Viatge to Purgatori de Sant Patrici* is a unique blend of reality, verisimilitude and inalienable traditional stereotypes that characterized from George Grissaphan onward the literary subgenre of the pilgrimages to Saint Patrick's Purgatory.⁵⁹ The descriptive frame geographically corresponds to the trip between Avignon and Ireland, including the route to Dublin via London (Ramon arrived in the capital from Calais, via Canterbury, crossed England, embarked in Chester, made a stop in Holyhead and on the island of Man) and even the characters that are mentioned are historically documented: the meeting with Richard II is demonstrated and also the meetings with Roger Mortimer, Earl of March, and with the local nobility are plausible. Immediately after landing in Ireland, the author's voice takes the bemused tone of a traveler at the borders of the known world, describing Ireland as a remote 'finis terrae' and a place of wonders, a land of savages heretics, where there is no guarantee to be safe outside the territories belonging to the king of England. The description of the

59. Text edited in A. Jeanroy - A. Vignaux, *Visions de Tindal et de St Paul, Textes languadociens du quinzième siècle*, Toulouse 1903.

clothes of Irish king Yrnel's subjects, who dress shamelessly exposing their private parts, is coherent with this context of wild wonder.⁶⁰ In this narrative we can also detect a certain Arthurian suggestion that probably has fascinated the pilgrim: the Isle of Man is described as 'the island of the king of the hundred knights of the times of King Arthur' and in his way back Ramon went to visit the relic of Sir Gawain's head that was conserved in Dover.⁶¹

The integration of historically believable parts with other parts that rely heavily by the collective and traditional canons is visible in particular in the shape of purgatorial site, where we can recognize both the space corresponding to the testimony of the fifteenth century pilgrims (a small site, four cubits in length with a bend to the left, with a particularly oppressive atmosphere) and the vast traditional cavity attested in the *Tractatus* and in the *Visio Georgii Grissaphani*. The ritual seems to concern only the island of Purgatory, Station Island, where the pilgrim is conducted directly by boat, without an intermediate stop in an abbey on the mainland, as in the previous pilgrimage accounts.⁶² An overwhelming sound of thunder, which causes the fainting of Ramon, is the dividing line between the objective description of the pilgrimage and the traditional representation of Saint Patrick's Purgatory.⁶³ Coherently, at the end of the experience, another thunder woke him in front of the door through which he had entered, so that he could meet the prior and return to our world.⁶⁴

We can also observe that in this narrative some graves are shown to Ramon, in which those who failed the purgatorial experience were buried.⁶⁵ Since 1231, in the *Flos Historiarum* of Roger of Wendover,⁶⁶ it had been attested that Purgatory was adjacent to a cemetery, but this burial place was not destined to the pilgrims who, precisely, in case of failure did not come back, getting lost in the purgatorial site with their body and their soul. The fact that the monks could retrieve the corpses suggests instead a small space, such as the purgatorial site that is described in the *Viatge* and the small building witnessed by other pilgrims.

But the *Viatge to Purgatori de Sant Patrici* is very important in the tradition of the Purgatory also for another reason, since it more of other texts allows us to understand the political value of this kind of narratives and the reasons that caused the destruction of the site of pilgrimage ordered by Pope Alexander VI as well. There is indeed an intimate connection between the sudden death of King John, to whom Ramon was very close, and the composition of *Viage*, since the lack of confession in case of sudden death instilled doubts about king's salvation

60. Ibidem, p. 10-23.

61. Ibidem, p. 53.

62. Ibidem, p. 19.

63. Ibidem, p. 22.

64. Ibidem, p. 51.

65. Ibidem, p. 19.

66. Ed. in H. O. Coxe, London, English Historical Society, 1841, II, 256-274.

and could also adumbrate a fate of eternal damnation, not to mention the support given to the antipope Benedict XIII.⁶⁷

To understand the context in which is located the composition of *Viatge de Ramon de Perellós* we have also to consider another important literary fact: in 1399, shortly after the return of Ramon and almost simultaneously with the composition of *Viatge*, another courtesan of king John, Bernat Metge, one of the most important Catalan writers, composed a dialogue inspired by the *Somnium Scipionis* and strongly influenced by Dante's *Comedy*, in which the soul of John is located precisely in Purgatory.⁶⁸

The two texts (*Viatge* and Bernat's *Dialogue*) are a kind of certification of the salvation of the soul of the sovereign, and in this sense - as statements of witnesses - we must read in Catalan and Occitan versions the many mentions in the *Viatge* of contemporary personalities as the adventurer Pere Maca (Peyre Masco), the knight Thomas (probably Montague) and Guillame of Courcy, who on behalf of John I had brought a globe as a gift to Charles VI,⁶⁹ as well as the sons - Lluís and Ramon - and the grandson - Bernat de Centelles - of Ramon. Other meetings have a moral meaning: Ramon meets in the Purgatory the Franciscan Frances Despuig (expiating the kidnapping of a nun) and, to his surprise, his niece Aldonça de Quaralt, of whose death he was unaware, who was punished for her excessive love for the things of the world and for her cult of the vain exterior beauty.⁷⁰

In this context, the *Viatge* has thus also assumed a subtle but undeniable political significance. The certification of King John's salvation was also an indirect, but clear, support to the Catalan Antipope, Benedict XIII, Pedro de Luna, that John had backed against Boniface IX, since the salvation (albeit in Purgatory) of the king demonstrated the authenticity of the office of the Catalan pope with the consequent corollary: the Roman pope was a usurper without the power to excommunicate. In previous years Benedict XIII had received some missions which invited him to abdicate:⁷¹ the *Viatge* therefore had a strong political meaning.

In addition, Ramon had been involved in the turbulent political events immediately following John I's death and the imminent invasion attempt of the troops of the Count of Armagnac, nephew of Mata, the first wife of the king. In

67. See A. Rubió y Lluch, (ed.), *Documents per l'història de la cultura catalana mig-èvol*, Barcelona 1908, I, p. 342 ff.,

68. See M. de Riquer, v. *Berat Metge*, in *Historia de la literatura catalana*, Barcelona 1964, II, 357-432; M. Boni, *La prima segnalazione di Dante in Spagna*, in *Dante e Bologna nei tempi di Dante*, Bologna 1967, 389-402

69. A. Rubió y Lluch, *Documents per l'història de la cultura catalana*, cit., I, p. 294-295.

70. Ed. A. Jeanroy - A. Vignaux, *Visions de Tindal et de St Paul*, cit., p. 33.

71. In May 1395 a large delegation of King Charles VI came to Avignon to persuade him to respect his own declaration of 1393 when as papal legate in France had stated that the great schism was to end with the abdication of both popes and that he himself would have abdicated, if elected pontiff. The Charles VI's delegation did not achieve, however, any success, and neither did an Anglo-French mission in May 1397 and a German one a year later.

fact, the counselors of the late King were charged with supporting the count of Foix, king John's first marriage son, and were blamed for having caused, albeit indirectly, the death of the sovereign. In this sense the journey of Ramon and his personal interview with the deceased king in the Otherworld represented one of the best professions of innocence.

A few years after the translation of O'Sullivan, the *Viatge al Purgatori de Sant Patrici* of Ramon de Perellós was used as a source - probably in the Castilian version - in one of the purely literary texts inspired to Purgatory, Juan Perez de Montalvan's *Vida y Purgatorio de San Patricio*, (Madrid 1628), a work that later inspired Calderón de la Barca and his *El Purgatorio de San Patricio*. Particularly in Calderon we can recognize some details of the *Viatge*: the location of Purgatory in the mountains,⁷² the deafening thunder that marks the beginning of otherworldly experience and the encounter with the fatuous nephew the deceased just before.

The *Viatge* of Ramon (and its later influence in Hispanic literature), is therefore another example of the mutual interference between historical reality and literary tradition in the reports Pilgrimage to Saint Patrick's Purgatory.

Destruction and Resurrection

In 1497 the site of Purgatory on Lough Derg was destroyed by order of Pope Alexander VI, as attested by the *Annals of Ulster* and by a manuscript that is cited in the *Acta Sanctorum*,⁷³ but nowadays lost. The remote cause of the destruction was probably the fact that the Irish Purgatory was competing with the Roman sale of indulgences, but the immediate cause was the lamentation of a monk (or a regular canon) of Eymstadt (Holland) that has been greatly disappointed by the pilgrimage to Lough Derg and the purgatorial experience. In particular, according to the text transcribed in the *Acta Sanctorum*, the pilgrim's deluded dismay was caused by the absence of any supernatural experience in some way referable to the narrative of the traditional texts: a drying up that occurred, according to the Dutch monk, long before, but that the inhabitants of the place denied for personal interests. The text shows that the pilgrimage to the Purgatory of the pious and poor monk was marked by several demands of money and by his great difficulties to be admitted to this experience of salvation, without paying the amounts demanded.

There are many doubts that the demolition of Purgatory narrated in the *Annals of Ulster* - a destruction which occurred under the impassive eyes of the Archbishop of Armagh - had really affected that traditional pilgrimage site

72. This peculiarity derives from a misunderstanding of the term *montanhas* that in *Viatge* could be a hiaspoanism, as Aurelio Roncaglia showed ("*Sarraguze, Ki est en une muntaigne*" in *Studi in onore di Angelo Monteverdi*, cur. G. Gerardi Marcuzzo, Modena 1959, II, 629-640), meaning 'land covered with forests or woods', as in the poem of the Cid and throughout the Middle Ages.

73. AA. SS. *Martii* II, p. 590.

on Lough Derg which was described more or less coherently by many fifteenth century pilgrims. A notable difference is that according to the *Acta sanctorum* the Dutch pilgrim didn't enter into the purgatorial den through a door, but was lowered with a rope. Indeed what in the text is indicated by the expression *lacum profundum* is clearly an subterranean cell or some sort of underground tank where the pilgrim (and a piece of bread and a jug of water later) was lowered. Thus it is possible that the monk of Eymstadt has been, so to speak, misled to an alternative Purgatory location for having shown himself as a particularly nagging and controversial pilgrim.⁷⁴

In any case, in 1517 the resurrection of Purgatory is attested by an extraordinary witness: Francesco Chiericati.⁷⁵ Chiericati was one of the most important diplomats of his time: he was bound by a special friendship with one of the most important figures of the Italian Renaissance, Isabella d'Este, daughter of Ercole I and wife of Francesco II Gonzaga, to whom, during his travels, for she was curious, as Chiericati wrote, 'not only of the great things, but also of the smallest', he sent numerous descriptive letters that are, among other things, important documents about uses and daily habits in Europe at the beginning of 16th century.

The letter to Isabella of 28 August 1517 is precisely one of the most significant examples of the curiosity and of the observation skills of Francesco.⁷⁶ The letter is very interesting also from an ethnographic point of view, testifying the customs and traditions of the Irish population at that time, which disconcerted the traveler for the absence of the concept of private property and the consequent inclination to appropriate (i.e. to steal) other people's property. The itinerary to Lough Derg is described in detail and almost all the stopovers are well indicated.

Concerning Saint Patrick's Purgatory, the description substantially coincides with the reports preceding the destruction, with the exception of the size of the island that in the text, which is probably corrupted here, measures only twenty steps in length and sixteen in width, an area incompatible with the buildings and the rituals that Chiericati himself describes.

But we can observe that the procedures for the admission have changed in a better professional way: the pilgrims from the shore signal their presence playing a horn and waving a kind of flag, then pay the ferry to be transported one at a time on the island, where, in addition to a small church of stone, there is a wooden building to host them. On the island lived three canons and their two servants. Even the preliminary rituals have changed and consist of nine days of

74. See D. Mac Ritchie, *A Note on St Patrick's Purgatory*, in "The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland" 30 (1900) 165-167. The same hypothesis is shared by A. T. Lucas, *Southern: The Literary Evidence*, in "Béaloideas" 39-41 (1971-3), 165-191.

75. As a starting point about Chiericati's biography see A. Foa, v. *Francesco Chiericati*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Roma 1960, 24, (1980), 674-689.

76. For the text, see n. 34.

fasting with immersions in the waters of the lake, and prayers in front of three 'bells' dedicated to St. Bridget, St. Columba and St. Patrick. Francesco Chiericati didn't enter in the Purgatory, unlike two persons of his entourage who did not seem to have suffered too much the experience: in fact, Chiericati writes that in that occasion the greatest penance was his own deprivation, since he almost exhausted his food supplies waiting for his companions. Standing outside, Chiericati describes a penitential place carved in the rock, covered in masonry and illuminated with torches. As in some previous reports, the site is described with a curve at the end. Chiericati learned that in the end there was a kind of millstone closing the entrance to hell, a particular that was already reported in the pilgrimage of Laurent de Pasztho. This double entrance allowed a rational explication of the differences between the Otherworld experiences described the *Tractatus*, that could have happened beyond the millstone, and what was actually visible before this second threshold. Chiericati wrote that two canons and five pilgrims entered in the site and recorded their different reaction at the exit. Two pilgrims said to have lived a visionary experience: the first of them having been beaten, the second having seen some beautiful women. The other three pilgrims didn't experience anything, except 'cold, hunger and a great weakness'.

From Chiericati's letter it seems pretty obvious that after the destruction of 1497 (if there was a destruction) the site of the Purgatory has been restored for a better reception of pilgrims: for example three 'bells' dedicated to the three main Irish saints have been erected and in the Purgatory building up to twelve people could rest comfortably and there was an opening in the wall for the 'natural necessities', which was essential for a stay of twenty-four hours closed in a little indoor space.

But a detail of the Chiericati description is extremely important to illustrate the mutual influence between literary canons (and fictitious narratives) and historical accounts in the tradition of the Purgatory of Saint Patrick. The Italian diplomat consulted the register of pilgrims, where he read at the first place the name of Guarino da Durazzo, the protagonist of the *Guerrin Meschino*, a literary or fictional work written by Andrea da Barberino.⁷⁷ In this book, an adventure of the character took place precisely in the Irish Purgatory.⁷⁸ Chiericati pointed up that he was impressed, since he believed that the *Guerrin Meschino* was only a fictional character, and his testimony remains extremely important for us.

Conclusions

The tradition of the Purgatory of Saint Patrick originated from a literary text of the 12th century, the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, an Irish interpretation of medieval Otherworld visions. Beside this literary tradition, a ritual

77. Text edited in *Il Guerrin Meschino*, ed. M. Cursietti, Padova 2005.

78. *Ibidem*, l. VI, c. IV-X, p. 385-399.

pilgrimage developed on an island in Lough Derg, testified by experiences and witnesses of real pilgrims. These two branches of tradition merged in Avignon in 1353, thanks to the Archbishop of Armagh, Richard FitzRalph. Given these origins, the pilgrimage reports show a surprising mixture of some fictitious elements, derived from literary tradition, with some features derived from a reality described as it was perceived. In this context, fictional characters were transformed into historical personalities and vice versa. But this mixture had ancient roots and was presupposed from the very beginning of the tradition, because Saint Patrick's Purgatory was a real geographical threshold, penetrable by physical bodies, but at the same time it led to supernatural experiences, creating a contrast between what was perceived and what could be reported in writing, respecting the canons of the literary genre. Each of the pilgrims was thus a witness of a real experience, that was original and different from any other, but at the same time was an interpreter of a literary tradition which imposed general and unavoidable canons.

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