Brendan's Time

Emanuel GROSU*

Key-words: aevum, tempus, χρόνος, καιρός, *sacred time*, *profane time*, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*

0. Derived from Old Irish (<*imm-rá* < *imb-rá* = *rows around*), the term *immram* (pl. *immrama*) designates a narrative genre which relates the journey of a hero to the other world or to an imaginary realm, focusing on the adventures *per se* rather than on presenting the destination. Emerged in the period of Irish monasticism (starting with the 7th century), *immrama* could be regarded as a Christian version of ancient Celtic legends whose fundamental *topoi* are preserved in the substrate; thus, they could be seen as a synthesis of elements specific, on one hand, to Christian culture and on the other, to "pagan" culture. Hence, the hermeneutics of such a text involves the use of corresponding and mutually complementary interpretive keys, all the more as medieval literature is also characterized by genre mixture (an autobiographic text such as Augustine's *Confessions* can also be considered a theological text, just like a historiographic text or the story of a real or imaginary journey can be read as a literary text, endowed with moral, dogmatic, liturgical etc. elements). Furthermore, at least starting with the theorizing efforts of Isidore of Seville, medieval literature was also characterized by the "doctrinal heritage of pagan Antiquity within the epistemological system of the western Church" (Curtius 2000: 88).

1. In the paper *La Navigazione di Brandano di Clonfert: un'esperienza tra verità storica, mistica e leggenda* (Percivaldi 2010: 29) and in the introductory study prefacing its edition (Percivaldi 2008: 39–40), Elena Percivaldi touches a sensitive topic for the text in question here: perception of time. "*The Voyage of St Brendan* unfolds in time [...], but also outside time," states the author, and then she provides several examples – the community of Saint Ailbe (chap. XVIII[1]), Saint Patrick (chap. XXIV) and Paul the hermit (chap. XXXIV) – to argue her opinion. To these, we may add meeting Judas in hell (chap. XXXII) or the apparent chronological inconsistency if we relate Brendan's death (occurred in 577, soon after the end of his seven-year journey – *parvo interiacente tempore*, as stated in the last chapter of *Navigatio*...) to his visit to Saint Endeus (who died in 542). Nonetheless, it would be

* "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, Romania.

[1] References concern the text divisions within the Anonymous edition, *Vita Sanctissimi Confessoris Christi Brendani*, translation, notes and commentaries by G. Vincent, Carâcara online publishing, http://www.utqueant.org/net/doc.3.Bren.II.html

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wiser to analyze beforehand the value of time within the narrative, considering that this journey – structured on stages, while obviously observing a linear chronologic pattern, still includes abrupt temporal gaps that break the (natural for us) order of past–present–future.

First of all, we must remark that the chronological references of the book are ambiguous: they mostly refer to durations, to the cycle of Christian holidays or to hourly points of reference whose value is most of the times symbolical. Without further details, it would suffice to mention that the seven-year journey spent by Brendan and his companions should be viewed mostly from the perspective of numerical symbolism, for which the anonymous author manifests a genuine preference. In Christian writings, 7 is a number associated with creation[2] and, from this perspective, the explanation provided to the main character regarding the duration of his journey is far from being a coincidence – "Christ our Lord wished, first to display to you His diverse mysteries..." (*Deus voluit tibi ostendere diversa sua secreta...* – chap. XXXVII). Furthermore, in the case of Mernoc and Barinthus, for instance, the journey took only one hour (chap. I). And if this is the way things are, what value should we ascribe to certain objectively verifiable moments (Saints Patrick, Ailbe, Endeus and Paul the hermit), invoked to anchor this journey in is real life, but which only distort and compromise the attempts to circumscribe the narrative temporally? Indeed, there is no chronological reference point par excellence – such as the birth of Christ – but there are others, for which we would have expected the author to observe the inflexible logic of historical time. In chapter XXXIV, the story of Paul the hermit suggests that the year when Brendan ends his journey coincides with the 90th anniversary of Saint Patrick's death; chapter III shows that the journey begins before the death of Saint Endeus, while chapter XVIII suggests that the first year of the journey coincides with the 80th anniversary of the foundation of a monastic community on an island, by Saint Ailbe and Saint Patrick (the last two seem to have been contemporary). As for the character called Paul the hermit (chap. XXXIV), it is believed that the author of *Navigatio...* expressly refers to Paulus Thebaeus[3], who lived in Egypt between 227 and 341. It is true that there are enough elements to support a similarity between the character featured in *Navigatio...* and Paulus Thebaeus: the longevity (140/114 years old), the 90/91 years spent as a hermit, frugal lifestyle, physical features, lack of disciples, etc, they all point to that Paulus described by Hieronymus in *Vita S. Pauli primi eremitae*[4]. However, his depiction as younger than Saint Patrick raises many doubts, not only from a chronological perspective.

It is apparent that any attempt at connecting the events featured in *Navigatio...* to historical time is deceitful: instead of helping readers understand the text better, they raise more questions. After re-reading the text, the only solution left is to assume that – throughout the entire book – time as a fundamental dimension of our

[2] For other symbolic valences of number 7, see, for instance, Isidore of Seville, *Liber numerorum qui in Sanctis Scripturis occurunt*, PL, vol. LXXXIII, coll. 179 *sqq.*, where 7 is interpreted, among others, as symbol of the century (*omne tempus huius saeculi...*) or of the Holy Spirit (*septiformis Spiritus imaginem portat...*), based on His seven gifts, etc.

[3] *Cf.* Percivaldi 2008: 40.

[4] PL, vol. XXIII, coll. 17–28.

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existence has different values in distinct contexts. Whereas there is no information on the author or on his educational background, anyone who reads *Navigatio...* easily realizes that the author benefited from an enviable education and from great insight into the Christian dogma. Hence, it can also be assumed that the author was especially influenced by the view of time provided by Latin patrology, mainly by Augustine.

2. Eternal and immutable, God created time when He created the world with His word. Eternity – a continuous present – is ascribed only to divinity, while time as dimension of change and inconsistency (not to be mistaken for motion or shifting[5]), "form of the world" (Adămuț 2009: 193), defines the condition of what is created. Past, present and future are the three aspects according to which we perceive the flow of time. The past is now no longer and the future is now not yet, but if the present were always present, it obviously would not be time but eternity (*praesens autem, si semper esset praesens, […] non iam esset tempus sed aeternitas*). As for duration, it cannot be measured for the future, which is not now yet, or for the past, which no longer exists; the present, on the other hand, cannot be divided even into the most minute momentary point (*in nullas iam vel minutissimas momentorum partes dividi possit*) – this perspective turns our present into an antonym of eternity. According to Augustine, time can be perceived and measured (*sentiri et metiri potest*) while it is flowing – not as past, present and future (to accept the direction proposed by Augustine: *cum ex futuro fit praesens [...] cum ex praesenti fit praeteritum*), a time present of things future, a time present of things present and a time present of things past (*praesens de preteritis, praesens de praesentibus, praesens de futuris*). The three are perceived only by the soul, through its specific acts of *memoria* (memory), *contuitus* (experience) and *expectatio* (expectation). Hence, mind is the one that measures the periods of time (*in te, anime meus, tempora metior*); in its turn, time – not identified with motion or rest and without any objective extensions (the future is now not yet, the present is infinitesimal and the past is now no longer) – can only be an extendedness (*distensio*) of the mind itself (*mirum si non ipsius animi*). Ultimately, measuring time is reduced to measuring the impression that things make on you as they pass by (*affectionem quam res praetereuntes in te faciunt*). However, this manner of being affected by the events shows that the human mind fails to perceive reality in any other way but sequentially and consecutively.

However, whereas it sets the reader further away from the perspective of historical time (or physical time, to put it that way), such an interpretation key is still not sufficient to provide minimally valid explanations for the fragment where the author meets Judas in hell or for time dilation in Paradise, admitting that the other chronological inconsistencies (the mention of Saint Endeus; or of Saints Patrick and Ailbe as being contemporary, etc.) would be the consequence of an uncertain, erroneous perception – filtered by legend[6] – of the author concerning the period

[5] *Cf. Confessiones*, XI, 23, 29; XI, 34, 31. For the quotes within this paragraph, references are made, in the order of citations, to *Confessiones*, XI, 14, 17; 15, 20; 16, 21; 17, 22; 21, 27; 20, 26; 27, 36; 23, 30; 26, 33; 27, 36. In addition, Augustine approached the issue of time in *De Civitate Dei*, XI, too.

[6] *Cf.* Percivaldi 2008: 191–192, nn. 27–28.

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when the two saints actually lived. At least regarding the Paradise time, it would be helpful to mention the psychological definition of time as "an extendedness of the mind itself" (in such different contexts as the Paradise and the terrestrial world, the mind is also affected *differently*, which entails a blatant inconsistency in durations; or more likely, the difference between the state of holiness previous to Adam's original sin and the condition of the man fallen from this state involves such a clear difference of perception, that the "mind extendedness" is incongruent from one case to another). However, this definition is inefficient for the episode of the encounter with Judas, just like the *method* of the "time present of things past" suggested by Augustine instead of the past that "is now no longer". In this sense, the dialogue with Judas in hell is not a mere recollection (*memoria*) of the evangelical character, but in the economy of the book, it is as real and present as the ship used by Brendan for his journey or as the birds that can speak, the damned souls in an indefinite time (soon after the fall of Lucifer, however).

Hence, there are also realities situated at an "intermediate" level, between the time of the human condition and eternity. In this respect, the author of *Navigatio...* was able to follow Augustine's views rather than those posited by Boethius. At the end of book eleven of the *Confessions*[7], Augustine explicitly stated that "no times are coeternal with thee, nor is any creature, even if there is a creature 'above time'"[8]. A reference was made to the beginning of the Genesis (*In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram*), where Augustine understands *caelum* as *caelum caeli* (*caelum intellectuale*), as intelligible heaven, while *terram* as an unformed and lightless matter (*invisibilis atque incomposita terra*). Their situation outside time but also outside divine eternity corresponds to *aevum*, a concept that Augustine explains in *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, 72: "Or did the eternal times signify the *aevum*, the difference between the latter and time being this: the *aevum*, is unchangeable, whereas time is subject to change?" (*An aeterna tempora aevum significavit, inter quod et tempus hoc distat, quod illud stabile est, tempus autem mutabile*). Hence, to avoid mistaking *aevum* for the infinity of time, one must rely on its fundamental feature, that of being stable, of not being subject to change. However, can the *aevum* be stable in any other capacity but as a dimension of stable, unchanging realities?[9]

Boethius makes a similar distinction between *tempus*, *sempiternitas* and *aeternitas*. In *Consolatio Philosophiae* (V, pr. 6, 4), he defines eternity as "possession, without succession and perfect, of interminable life" (*interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possesio*). In *De Trinitate*, IV, 28–32, on the other hand, he presents sempiternity in relation with both extremes in terms of perpetuity: "Our *now* brings about continuous time and perpetuity, whereas the divine Now, persistent and motionless and constant, brings about eternity" (...*nostrum nunc,*

[7] This is not the only occurrence. For a better insight into the way in which Augustine perceives time, eternity and the *aevum* (intermediate level), it is very useful to read in parallel book eleven of *Confessiones* and that of *De Civitate Dei*.

[8] *Confessiones*, XI, 30, 40: *...ulla tempora tibi esse coeterna nec ullam creaturam, etiam si est aliqua supra tempora* – Augustine stated by synthesizing a long tradition (see Alliez 2004).

[9] An issue later debated by Thomas Aquino, too, in *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 10, a. 5, r, in an attempt to correlate the terms *innovatio* and *veteratio*. See also Adămuț 2009: 197.

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quasi currens tempus facit et sempiternitatem, divinum vero nunc permanens neque movens sese atque consistens aeternitatem facit). Therefore, *sempiternitas* (a synonym of *aevum*) is for Boethius an endless row of moments not joined together (like in the case of Augustine's *aevum*) by the unchanging character (*illud stabile*), this time reserved exclusively to eternity.

It is precisely this aspect that may indicate that the paradise featured in *Navigatio...* is more likely inspired by Augustine; a time of a certain *quality* "flows" even there. Though it may follow a different rhythm, there night never falls nor day closes (*dies namque est semper*; chap. I). No other change occurs, because "[this island] [s]uch as you see it now, so has it continued from the beginning of the world" (*sicut illam vides ita ab inicio mundi permansit*, chap. I), as Barinthus learns at the beginning of the book, and "just as it appears now, (...) so does it ever remain" (*sicut modo apparet vobis [...] ita omni tempore permanet*), as Brendan is told at the end of his journey (and of the book: chap. XXXVII).

3. We may try to explain time-related issues by mentioning the difference between χρόνος and καιρός. *Navigatio...* does not mention explicitly the phrase *illud tempus* used by Hieronymus to translate into Latin the Greek ὁ καιρός. However, the author of this book may have realized it and used the difference between the elements of this binomial.

The measurable, quantitative time – ὁ χρόνος – is the calculable dimension that one cannot define in the absence of movement or change; in their turn, movement or change cannot be perceived and described in the absence of space. As an empirical aspect of temporality, flowing in one direction and divisible into hours, months, years, etc., ὁ χρόνος is perceptible based on the triad past–present–future, whose inconsistency had made Augustine, as shown previously, assume three kinds of present and to define time as an "extendedness of the mind".

From a theological perspective, ὁ χρόνος can be defined as a time of fall, of the condition acquired following the sin of the first people. It is identified with the historical, homogeneous and profane time of events and personal life. Hence, human life is inserted within historical time, but, – through the individual's behaviour – it is ascribed a meaning insofar as it is connected and oriented toward the divine. Because it is not a simple flow, a mere chain of moments, the sense of χρόνος is provided by man's continual aspiration toward spiritual matters. A time of waiting for the Messiah in the Old Testament (Christ's embodiment is the axis of history, while the latter is perceived as history of redemption), a duration between the arrival of Christ and the end of the world according to the New Testament, ὁ χρόνος is future-oriented and it acquires an eschatological function, insofar as it is used for salvation, which is the ultimate human goal. *Tempus generale* is the time of living, of falling and rising from sin, of our journey through creation toward *civitas Dei*.

Ὁ χρόνος is not repeatable: it has a beginning and it will have an end. Deprived from its eschatological function, it is a prelude to death. Its relationship with the divinity is defined not only by the eternal and immutable God as the creator

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of time, but also by man's possibility of discovering – in this partial and consecutive time – the greatness of creation and of the Creator, implicitly[10].

καιρός is non-mathematisable singularity, critical point of rupture and openness[11], it does not have an extension, just like χρόνος. A qualitative time *par excellence*, it cannot be quantified and defined by relating it to movement/ change.

From a theological perspective, ὁ καιρός "is time related to eternity, time open to atemporal and supratemporal experience [...] qualitative time of interpersonal communion" (Istrati 2010: 91–92), thus highlights the cohesion between divine and human, a unique experience above time (χρόνος), in various forms: prayer, divine service, visions, mystical ecstasies, prophecies, etc. As for *tempus speciale* (*tempus per opportunitatem/occasio*), the Bible uses this term to circumscribe temporally the interaction between divinity and man; its value is given by "the inner rhythm of the union with God" (Istrati 2010: 93). In the Gospels, καιρός marks those special moments that favour the manifestation of God's kingdom on Earth – Matthew, 8:29 (πρὸ καιροῦ); Matthew, 11:25 (Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ); Matthew, 13:21 (ἀλλὰ πρόσκαιρός ἐστιν); Romans 5:6 (κατὰ καιρὸν); I Corinthians, 4:5 (πρὸ καιροῦ) –, it is the time of theophany. Ultimately, it is the crossroad between eternity and χρόνος.

Returning to *Navigatio...*, χρόνος is used for the phases of the journey according to the most common perception (days, months, years...), measuring the distance covered from one island to another. On the one hand, καιρός is used to describe the holidays; χρόνος is the time dedicated to physiological needs (eating, drinking, sleeping), καιρός is the time of prayer, rituals and divine service; χρόνος is used for the dialogue between Brendan and his companions, καιρός for the dialogue between Brendan and Judas or between Brendan and the talking birds (chap. XII). Finally, χρόνος is the time of Barinthus's narrative and of Brendan's seven-year journey. καιρός is the moment when Brendan decided to go searching for the island called *Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum*. It also depicts the unreliable duration of the journey made by Barinthus and Mernoc, the fate of death for the first and the instant of prediction for the latter.

By definition, χρόνος is a limiting dimension: the hours, days and months are too short for what human plans. In exchange, καιρός opens toward a horizon that ignores this type of constraint. Paradoxically, however, the characters of *Navigatio...* do not perceive physical time as a constraint. They never hurry and time is always enough for them: the stages of their journeys begin and finish without rest, without "sooner" and "later". The rhythm of the holidays – not only of the "cardinal" ones on which the liturgical year is based: the Birth of Christ, the Epiphany, Easter and the Pentecost – as manifestations of the sacred within daily life are the guarantee of historical time rhythmicity. χρόνος – par excellence time of a precarious existential

[10] This is the reason why Brendan spends seven years for the same journey Barinthus covered in one hour (*Deus voluit tibi ostendere diversa sua secreta...* – chap. XXXVII).

[11] *Cf.* Balibar, Büttgen, Cassin 2004.

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status – does not acquire a meaning only through καιρός, the temporal aspect of the states of grace. The spiritual life dominated by καιρός is infinitely more important than the material aspect of living, than all that exists, objects? or facts; the spiritual life is submitted to χρόνος.

Χρόνος measures the duration of the journey stages but also the durations of human lives. However, longevity as a "sacrificial reality", as reward for a heroic life, is ultimately a divine gift, a temporal prolongation (χρόνος) of a model (*exemplum*) to follow. We refer especially to Paulus the hermit, whose age – suggested in chapter XXXIV of *Navigatio...* – is significantly greater than that of his model, Hieronymus[12], but also to the abbot of the monastery on Saint Ailbe island (described as *senex nimie gravitatis capellis niveo candore*) or to Saint Patrick, also presented as *senex* (*apparuit mihi quidam senex* – chap. XXXIV). Hence, the longevity of saints has the value of an instrument of God's presence in the world: this way, they will contribute to people's salvation; time (καιρός) is a dimension of the union between God and man, a measure of the stability and consistency of this union.

4. If we analyze the text from the perspective of Celtic legends – whose fundamental *topoi* are present in the substrate, we may find an explanation for the difference between the sacred and the profane time.

"For religious man time [...] is neither homogeneous nor continuous," according to Eliade (1995: 54), because he lives in "two kinds of Time" (*ibidem*: 55), the sacred and the profane. As a dimension of human actions without religious connotations, profane time can be assimilated to historical time, to the afore-presented χρόνος. Its linear structure – a succession of moments or intervals that circumscribe common, mundane facts and events – is split by intervals of sacred time. In Christianity, profane time is not a fully desacralized time, insofar as historical time has a "transhistorical finality", which is salvation; profane time is irreversible, it acquires a particular meaning and goal due to the cyclic nature of the sacred time of holidays as reactualization – in the case of Christianity – of certain historical moments: the Birth and Death of the Saviour, events in the life of the Apostles, the martyrdom of saints, etc. As in the case of the binomial χρόνος/ καιρός, profane time is subordinated to sacred time, because the latter is perceived as a measure of the spiritual life lived to get back an ontological condition that is superior to the current one. According to the same Eliade, Sacred time, is an ontological time par excellence" (Eliade 1995: 54). Qualitatively superior to the profane, reversible, indestructible, sacred, it depicts the interest paid by religious man to sacred history, as well as his desire to live in the proximity of divinity. It ultimately shows the refusal of the visibly fallen condition of Christianity, mostly in terms of considering ascetic life as *status vivendi* par excellence.

Upon interpreting the aspects of temporality within *Navigatio...* from the perspective of this dichotomy, it is not difficult to distinguish the elements subordinated to sacred time and to profane time. Brendan covers the distances

[12] See note 3 above.

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between several islands, taking the holidays as chronological reference. There are no seasons in *Navigatio...*, and the number of months, days or hours – when it does not hold a symbolic value (40, eight, seven, three, etc) – depends upon this milestone. The rhythmic nature of time is guaranteed by the rhythmic sequence of holidays. The lives of certain saints (whose longevity was stated above) do not function, as one may expect, as chronological references outside the journey. One cannot situate this adventure in the real history based on the lives of saints. Moreover, had the author wanted that, he would have used *Annus Domini* as a reference point. The meeting with Judas in hell, the halt in the isle of Strong Men and those in the island of Birds are phases of a spiritual peregrination and they are related to the sacred time just like prophecies are. For the prophecy is a theophany, or rather, some kind of union of the divine with the human or, in chronological terms, a point of intersection between God's eternal present and the future of our ephemeral life. Hence, prophecy or vision is extensively temporal, an act of interiorizing and conforming to divine will, based first of all on "the conscience of ontic and moral fall and alienation" (Istrati 2010: 66). For Augustine, prophecy – a prediction of the future which is impossible to make in the absence of God's goodwill – essentially equated with the future projection of the correct interpretation of a chain of present causalities[13]. However, nothing pertaining to this opinion can be found in *Navigatio...* The prophetic time, category of the future-oriented sacred, is not a mere projection of our present, but an actualization of the eternal present where God governs the world. Such actualizations are the predictions made to Brendan on the island of Birds, those transmitted once arrived to *Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum*(including the one referring to the moment of his death), but also those through which Brendan anticipates the sin of his fellow monk tempted by an evil spirit (*diabolus*, *infans aethiopis* – chap. VI). In other words, God bestows onHis chosen ones (Mernoc, abbot of the monastery on the isle of Saint Ailbe, Paul the hermit, Brendan, etc) the gift of overcoming the sequential perception of reality, seen as a certain indicator of the fallen condition, and of learning facts and events from a time which, for them/us, "is not now yet" (*nondum est*, in Augustine's words), but whose imminence is often a source of insecurities.

A year spent in *Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum* equates 15 days in our world. This time dilation marks the difference between the two existential conditions: the one before the fall (can one imagine a "greater" proximity between creature and God than that of Adam before eating of the forbidden fruit?), which must be recovered through the continuous sanctifying effort and the condition after the fall. Time was created with the world. Before creation, there was no time, in the words of Augustine. In Paradise, rivers flow, which means motion, and where there is motion there is time; consequently, time is also measurable there (like a potter's wheel turning round[14]), but, there is a qualitative difference between our time and the one in Paradise, like the difference between the fallen and the paradisiacal condition.

[13] Augustin, *Confessiones*, XI, 18, 24: *Cum ergo videri dicuntur futura, non ipsa, quae nondum sunt, id est quae futura sunt, sed eorum causae vel signa forsitan videntur, quae iam sunt...*

[14] *Cf.* Augustin, *Confessiones*, XI, 23, 29.

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Linear, homogenous, with diverse rhythmicity, time no longer measures the painful toil and the sweat of the human being[15] (nothing is hostile to man in Paradise), its degree of alienation from God, but it defines another manner of relating the creature to the eternal present of divinity. In Paradise, time is not destructive; it does not contribute to biological degradation; on the contrary, it can be ascribed a regenerating function. Mernoc and Barinthus, for instance, spend 15 days/ one year in *Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum* without felling the need to eat[16], drink or sleep. However, Barinthus exclaims "yet, so complete was our bodily refreshment, that we would seem to others to have been filled to repletion" (*in tantum habuimus de satietate corporali ut ab aliis videbamur repleti musto* – chap. I). The different passage of time and the lack of any physical grievances are a symbol of the desire to defeat death – in other words, to overcome the precarious and ephemeral character of the fallen condition – and to (re)acquire the perpetuity of a happy life. Ultimately, according to the Christian doctrine, it is the purpose of life, which can only be attained through a state of holiness, of moral and spiritual perfection, thus a "transhuman model" (Eliade 1995: 77) of humanity assumed through faith.

5. The three interpretation keys presented above fully prove that the author of *Navigatio...* constructed his narrative by using more than one dimension of time. Brendan's journey, insofar as it is understood as a movement between two points situated at a certain distance from each other, should be subordinated to physical time, divided into *before*, *now* and *after*. These three sequences are absolutely necessary for our perception; if we understand it as an adventure experienced in a certain historical period, even in the absence of the chronological reference of *Annus Domini*, some characters mentioned (Patrick, Ailbe, etc) should provide the reference points necessary to include this adventure within a certain historical context. However, such a thing does not occur, as we have already seen. First and foremost, *Navigatio...* is a spiritual journey, a voyage in search of a lost ontological condition that needs recovering through a constant effort of divine participation. This entails the need for another, more important temporal dimension, within which the character's need for knowledge can be featured, "the world as it came from the Creator's hands, fresh, pure, and strong" (Eliade 1995: 71) as well as the man's effort of overcoming the level of the fallen condition. Hence, Brendan's time is presented like a linear, monotonous flow (ὁ χρόνος/ profane time), divided by verticalizations (ὁ καιρός/ sacred time), by moments when man "communicates", with God even for an infinitesimal time. For, if our life or history has an eschatological finality, to get as closer as possible to the "transhuman model" of humanity that guarantees us a higher ontological status, ὁ χρόνος is insufficient, just like one's own struggle is insufficient (though necessary).

[15] *Cf.* Genesis, 3:17: *In laboribus comedes ex ea cunctis diebus vitae tuae*.

[16] An aspect that Corin Braga (2006: 152–153) interprets as follows: *L'immortalité est une sorte d'arrêt qui interrompt le cours du temps et immobilise les héros dans leur condition actuelle. Figés dans le diaporama de l'éternité, ils n'auront plus les besoins et les désirs des mortels, ces tendances contradictoires qui provoquent, selon saint Augustin, la* distensio animi *et la chute dans le temps.*

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As for the mention of Paul the hermit (chap. XXXIII-XXXIV), if we admit that he is not the image of an obscure historical character whose memory has not been transmitted to us and it actually refers to Paulus Thebeus, as suggested by similarities, maybe it would be better to see behind this character[17] a double suggestion On one hand, that the hermit like way of living of the those who inhabit the island originates in the activity of Saint Patrick; on the other, that the author of *Navigatio...* – sharing Hieronymus' belief regarding the origins of continental monasticism[18] – wished to establish, through the name and the manner of depicting his character, a direct connection between Paulus Thebeus and the first Irish hermit. Moreover, this optics would fully correspond to the general intention of the book: of presenting consecrated life as a higher *status vivendi*, assumed thanks to the example provided by an entire plethora of saints: Patrick, Ailbe, Endeus, Brendan himself...

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[17] Elena Percivaldi (2008: 211, n. 139) believes that this is *un personaggio a metà tra storia e leggenda*.

[18] Hieronymus, *Vita S. Pauli primi eremitae*: *Inter multos saepe dubitatum est, a quo potissimum Monachorum eremus habitari coepta sit. [...] Amathas vero et Macarius, discipuli Antonii [...] etiam nunc affirmant, Paulum quemdam Thebaeum principem istius rei fuisse.*

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Abstract

Navigatio Sancti Brendani – a work whose manuscripts date to the 10th century – describes the voyage undertaken by Saint Brendan of Clonfert (cca 484–577) to find the so-called "Island of the Saints". Thus, the anonymous author of this writing reiterates a commonplace of classic literature, but which he revalorizes from a Christian pastoral perspective: the mythical place of ancient Greco-Latin literature is now depicted as *Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum*, thus a place destined to those who follow Christian teachings and the lifestyle promoted by it. The entire imaginary of this *Navigatio...* is constructed starting from both classic and Christian sources, within an osmosis of symbols, literary motives, and philosophical topics through which the author aims to turn his work into a writing destined to Christians but also to those not affiliated to the Church. In our study, we propose an analysis of temporality aspects, considering that, in the aforementioned work, time also has dimensions that escape the perception of the triad past–present–future and that elude the common ways of measuring durations.

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