

**THE VOYAGE OF BRENDAN
A ONE-DAY CONFERENCE
SATURDAY 24 APRIL 2010
NORWICH CATHEDRAL HOSTRY**

Kissing Heaven's Door

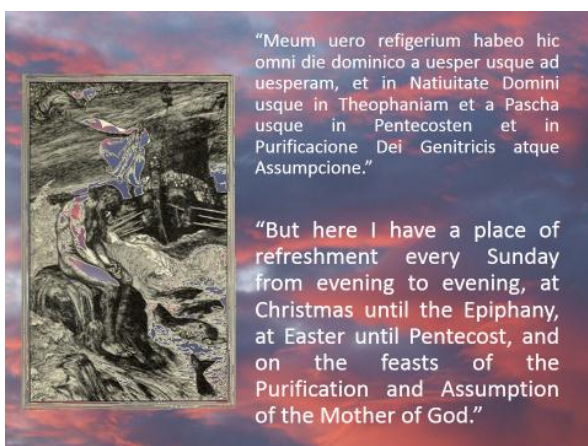
The Judas episode in the Voyage of Brendan

J. S. Mackley

Introduction

The Voyage of Brendan has been described as a Medieval best-seller. It was one of the most widely disseminated texts of the Middle Ages, surviving even now in over a hundred manuscripts from as early as the tenth century, in ten languages and in various forms. There are many differences between these versions; however, one encounter is included in almost all the versions: Brendan's meeting with Judas Iscariot. This paper discusses the Judas episode and a number of versions of the *Voyage of Brendan* and the Irish and Latin *Vitae* (or Lives) of *Brendan*, as well as the 'Twelve Apostles of Ireland'. It considers some of the sources and analogues including the *Apocalypse of Paul*, the *Medieval Legend of Judas* and Dante's *Inferno*. It also addresses the vivid descriptions of torture in the Anglo-Norman version. In all versions the principal theme is generally one of Mercy and Divine forgiveness for the good deeds that one performs in their lifetime; this motif is not universally accepted by writers contemporary with the composition of the voyage and it underscores a 'liberal theology' that is apparent through much of the *Navigatio*.

The details of Brendan's encounter with Judas can roughly be summarised by the *Navigatio*. Having left a fiery mountain which represents the entrance to hell, and after the damnation of one of the crew, Brendan and the remaining monks travel south and see an object in the ocean. When they reach the location, they find a shaggy man on a stone; the cloak he wears is suspended between two iron forks. Waves and wind lash the cloak against his eyes and face.



When Brendan questions him about why he deserves this punishment, the man reveals that he is Judas Iscariot and that this is a respite from hell – the 'torment' on the rock is a 'Paradise of delights' compared to what he normally endures. His usual abode is the fiery mountain, with Leviathan, where Brendan's crewmember was dragged, where Judas is normally burned 'like a lump of molten lead in a pot'. He explains that he is granted a day of respite on Sunday, also from Christmas to Epiphany, from Easter to Pentecost, and on the feast days of the Purification and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. On other days he is

tormented in hell. Judas pleads with Brendan to intercede on his behalf for a further day of respite. Brendan agrees.

Brendan then asks Judas to explain the items he has with him. Judas explains that he gave the cloak to a leper, which saved him from dying in the sun, and now it offers meagre protection from the elements as his intentions had been good. However, the cloth whips him around the face and eyes because he had originally stolen it, and it was not his to give away. The iron forks upon which the cloth hangs represent forks Judas gave to priests to support their cauldrons, and they now pray for him. Finally, the rock upon which Judas sits denotes a stone he placed in a trench on a road, to act as a stepping-stone thus preventing travellers from diverting some distance on their journey. Thus, the suggestion is that no matter how heinous the overall sin, Christ rewards each good deed, in the same way that he punishes each sin.

At the allotted time, the brethren are surrounded by an innumerable host of demons who have come to take Judas back to Hell. They complain that they cannot approach while Brendan is there. Brendan, in turn, explains that it is Jesus Christ who has permitted Judas to stay. One of the demons asks how Brendan can invoke the name of Jesus on behalf of the one who betrayed him. Brendan orders them to leave.

The following day the demons complain that *they* have been tortured because they could not bring Judas back to hell; they threaten to inflict double torture on Judas. Brendan tells them that they do not have the authority to do this, as he speaks in the name of Jesus Christ. The demons drag Judas away and Brendan continues on his journey.

Representations of Judas in the Brendan legend



Jonathan Wooding has described how the encounters on the Voyage correspond with principal locations on the Atlantic: the episode with Judas is no exception. It is possible that the rock upon which Judas enjoys his day of respite is represented by the island of Rockall. This island, nineteen metres high, twenty-five metres across and thirty metres wide, is

situated some 300 miles off the coasts of Scotland, Ireland and Iceland. Rockall is barren and uninhabitable; its isolated bleakness provides a realistic setting where one may conjecture that Judas spends his contemplative, comparative respite.

The Biblical descriptions of the betrayal and the consequences of Judas's actions are well known and need not be addressed here today, nor does the conundrum of whether Judas was driven by avarice (for, ironically, the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver) or possessed by the Devil; whether he was a willing participant in the betrayal or whether he was a pawn in a Divine Plan of which Jesus had foreknowledge and Judas could not deviate from the course that Fate had dictated for him; or whether the fact that, from the Cross, Jesus asked His father to forgive those who were involved in his execution as they did not know what they did, which, presumably included Judas amongst them, although we might argue that if Judas *did* know what he was doing then it *might* preclude him from forgiveness.



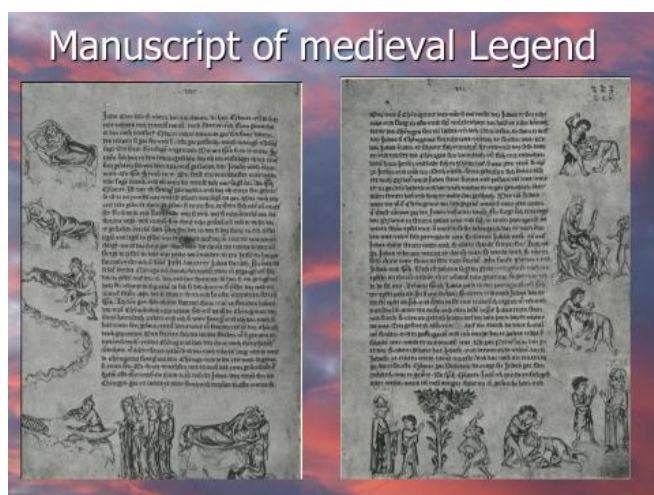
However, the underlying theme of the Judas episode is a primary example of what Dr Rumsey has described as the 'liberal theology' of the *Navigatio* (the other principal example being that of the Neutral Angels – those angels that sided neither with God nor Lucifer and were sent down to Earth until Judgement Day). However, also in the *Navigatio*, Judas refers to the Great Devil as 'Leviathan', which recalls God's punishment of the 'inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity' and the final Apocalyptic battle where God shall 'punish

Leviathan the piercing serpent.'¹ By meeting with Judas, and then the subsequent encounter with a pious hermit called Paul, Brendan is on the threshold of eternity. He needs to understand the message of Divine Mercy: the *Navigatio* is neither as condemnatory as those who state that there is no redemption for Judas, nor as forgiving as those who perceive him as unwilling pawn who is the means of fulfilling God's will. Instead, Judas is dealt with sympathetically. Genuinely repentant, Judas is grateful for the mercy shown to him, and neither rejected from hell, nor accepted by heaven, but in a middle space.

¹ Isaiah 26:21-2. See also Job 41:1.

The concept of a 'middle space' echoes throughout this episode: Judas's respite takes him away from hell, although he is never away from the torture. By returning from hell, Judas has crossed the line that separates life from death, and yet, although he has crossed the threshold towards salvation, he can travel no further. Consequently, Judas is an intermediary who stands between Brendan and the devils. The description of the waves in the *Navigatio* is likewise confused: they batter and torment Judas, but are also described as if frozen over.

Judas sits on a rugged rock, hanging between two iron prongs, beaten by waves. The howling wind tears the cloth that he carries, striking him on the eyes and the forehead; this calls to mind the parallels with the Ædipus myth and the fear of damaging one's eyes. There is a throwaway line in the Italian version of the Brendan legend where Judas says "I killed my father with a stone and lived for a long time with my mother as my wife, without knowing it,



and had many children by her.' This detail, which is omitted by all other versions, refers to the medieval legend of Judas Iscariot. The medieval legend developed in the thirteenth century as a 'pious intention of the blackening of the name of Judas'.² In the medieval legend, Judas' mother, Cyborea, fears a premonition that her child will cause the

destruction of the Jewish race, so she sets him adrift in a chest. The childless queen of the Island of Scariot finds him, and, wanting a prince to succeed her throne, she raises him as her own. She later bears another son; Judas bullies and later kills his 'brother'. Fleeing to Jerusalem, he takes service with Pilate, who demands Judas gathers apples from his neighbour's garden. Judas does so. The owner of the garden tries to stop him, but he is killed by Judas, who then marries the widow to get her property. Judas's wife/mother realises that he has committed patricide and incest, and insists that Judas go to Jesus and redeem himself. The legend then follows the gospels, ending with the betrayal and suicide.³

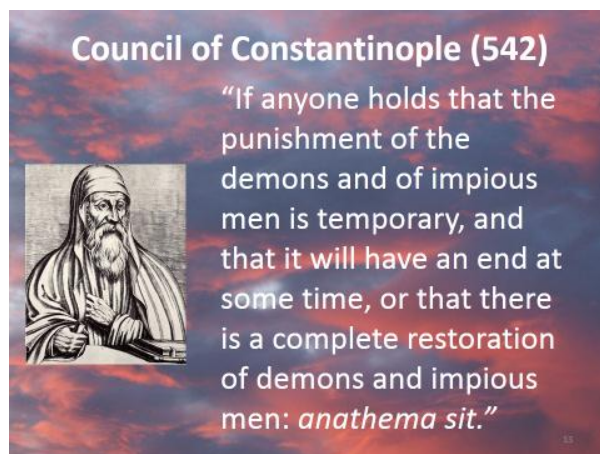
² Paull Franklin Baum, "The Medieval Legend of Judas Iscariot," *PMLA* 31 (1916b): 481-632, pp. 483, 515.

³ Baum, 1916b, 482-3.

Thus, the legend describes Judas guilty of crimes that subvert the natural order of the world: theft, betrayal, fratricide, patricide, incest and suicide. The charges are heaped upon him, in order to prove Judas a character beyond redemption. However, in the *Navigatio*, he repents for his past crimes, and is grateful for the brief respite from hell, although he begs Brendan to save him from another day of torment. Judas acts as a means of blurring the boundaries between good and evil and inverts the expectations of an audience that anticipate his character to be that of the vile betrayer.

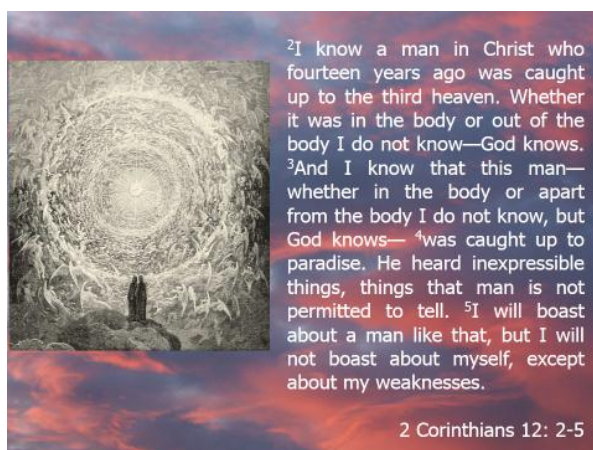
Sources

The concept of a day of respite from hell is not canonical. On this occasion (amongst others)



the *Navigatio* appears to subscribe to Origen’s doctrine of *apokatastasis* – a universal re-integration in which he believed that hell would come to an end and the fallen would be restored to a state of blessedness. Origen’s doctrine was condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 543.

A further influence on the Judas encounter is the fourth century *Apocalypse of Paul*, an apocryphal text that is itself heretical: Augustine, for example, denounces it as ‘full of fables’. The *Apocalypse* is developed from an idea in 2 Corinthians where Paul describes how he met a



man ‘caught up to the third heaven’ (2 Corinthians 12: 2–5). In the *Apocalypse*, Paul witnesses judgements of the righteous and sinners, and the ensuing blessings and punishments. His grief and anguish at the torments in hell is reflected in the Anglo-Norman version of the legend where Brendan laments at Judas’s fate.⁴ However,

in the *Apocalypse* an angel rebukes Paul, asking if he is more merciful than God, and only

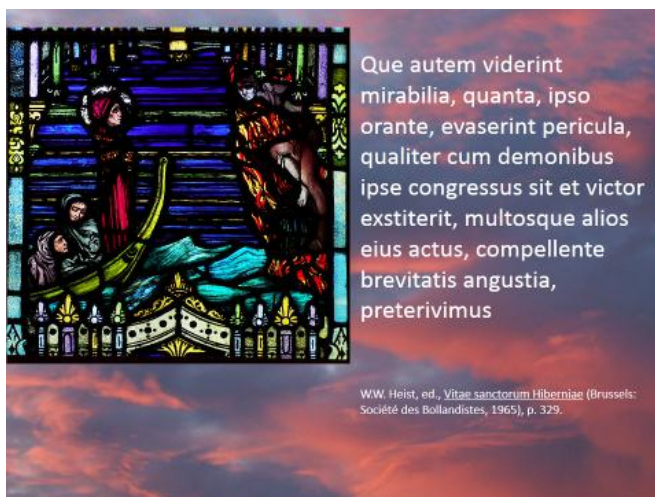
⁴ ‘Pur le parler Brandans ne pout / Avant parler, mais dunc se tout.’ (ll. 1267–8).

when Christ appears in hell do the sinners plead for ‘refreshment’, to which Jesus demands ‘What *good* works have ye done?’ Punishment is inflicted without mercy on those who had no mercy in their lifetime, yet, Jesus grants the sinners grace because of Paul’s intercession for them. Thus, Brendan’s function in the Judas episode is similar to that of Paul in the *Apocalypse*. In the *Navigatio*, the Sunday respite has already been granted by God; Brendan’s intercession only serves to secure an extension. Brendan invokes Christ’s name to command the devils. The Gospel of Luke explains ‘I have given you authority to ... overcome all the power of your enemy’ (10:19). Therefore, *only* the invocation of Christ, rather than a command from the abbot, dispels the devils. However, this liberal theology was condemned at the time: Vincent of Beauvais, for example, distinguished the *Vita* from the *Voyage* of Brendan, the former being an accurate report of a pious abbot and the latter being ‘full of apocryphal ravings’.

Although the focus of today’s discussion is on the *Navigatio*, I wanted to throw the nets a little wider to discuss the Judas tradition in other versions of the Brendan legend. I have just mentioned Vincent of Beauvais’s praise for the *Vita Brendani*, a description of the holy deeds of Brendan which exists in Latin and Irish. The principal theme of the *Vita* is that Brendan encounters situations that correspond with Christian hagiography and performs miracles in keeping with those performed by Christ in the Gospels.

The Latin *Vita Brendani*

Although the *Vita* tradition of the Brendan legend is much earlier than that of the *Navigatio*, the manuscripts that survive are not, and have been adapted to incorporate some of the



exciting Voyage material. In fact, of the five Latin manuscripts of the *Vita*, only one of them, the *Vita Salmanticensis Altera*, is not conflated with the later voyage material. However, the redactor clearly knew the legends of Brendan’s voyage as he is frustrated about the material that he is unable to include. On the other hand, a version known as

the *Vita Oxoniensis* does include voyage material; however, the Judas episode is omitted: the narrative jumps from the previous scene (the damnation of one of the brethren) to the scene that follows the encounter with Judas (meeting Paul the Hermit). This might have been because the episode contained a heretical doctrine that could not be included.

In another Latin version, the *Vita Dubliensis*, the monks complain to Brendan about travelling in hail and snow; they speculate that infernal regions could not be worse than the cold that they are enduring. Brendan berates them, alluding to another voyage, and explains

‘We have seen Judas, the betrayer of our Lord, in a dreadful sea, on the Lord’s day, wailing and lamenting, seated on a rugged and slimy rock, which was now submerged by the waves and again emerged from them somewhat. Against the rock there rushed a fiery wave from the east, and a wave of coldness from the west alternatively, which drenched Judas in a frightful manner; and yet this grievous punishment seemed to him a relief from pain, for thus the mercy of God granted this place to him on the Sundays as some ease amidst his torments. What, therefore, must be the torments suffered in hell itself?’⁵

As this version of the *Vita Brendani* is the only section to include the Judas episode in this form, Fr Denis O’Donoghue argued that this scene presents the earliest form of Brendan’s encounter with Judas. It parallels the concept of frozen areas of hell as it appears in the twelfth-century ‘Vision of Alberic’ in which Alberic is taken to the valley where sinners are submerged in ice.⁶ This imagery is also comparable with a later description of Judas’s daily tortures as discussed in the Anglo-Norman version as well as Dante’s description of the lower circle of hell, both of which will be discussed later. However, returning to the narrative structure: by alluding to an earlier voyage, Brendan’s discussion of hell glosses over the details, rather than have the monks and the audience witness them first hand; the author is thus removed from any repercussions that this was something an incident that he composed. Furthermore, it avoids being heretical by containing only the vaguest details concerning Judas’s respite from hell. Without descriptions of Judas’s virtuous acts or Brendan’s intercession, it lacks the moral of later versions of the legend. It cautions about the punishments of hell without detailing them, instead creating an image of appalling weather conditions that the audience would recognise.

⁵ Patrick F. Moran, ed., *Acti Sancti Brendani: Original Latin Documents connected with the Life of Saint Brendan, Patron of Kerry and Clonfert* (Dublin: Kelly, 1872), p. 22.

⁶ Howard Rollin Patch, *The Other World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 112.

The Irish Betha Brennain

There is an Irish version of the legend which contains scenes that appear in the *Navigatio* as well as voyage scenes that appear in the *Vita Brendani*.⁷ Consequently, the narrative is split into two voyages; Brendan's first voyage fails as he cannot reach Paradise in a vessel made from animal hides. On the second voyage, Brendan sees demons in the shapes of dwarves, corresponding to the demon smithy in the *Navigatio*; Brendan then witnesses the damnation of a crewmember – again, this is consistent with the *Navigatio* – before his encounter with Judas. Likewise, the meeting with Judas in the Second Irish version is consistent with the description in the *Navigatio*, although it perhaps loses its impact as the encounter occurs halfway through the narrative (scene 35 out of 70) rather than three scenes from the end.

The most significant difference, however, comes when discussing the items that Judas has with him, he explains that he took the money from the disciples' purse to give to a poor man, but because it was not his to give, it causes him pain; he does not mention the reason for the iron forks in this version which he explains that he gave to the priests and they now pray for him (In one Middle English version, the word "tongs" has been misinterpreted as "tongues", and these tongues hang over the rock upon which Judas stands and the fish gnaw on them – clearly a redactor trying his best with material that didn't seem to make any sense to him!) However, Judas is suspended from these iron forks, and the waves drag him from, and then toss him back onto, the rock. Finally, he explains that he 'laid [the stone] down on the public road' when he was 'in the secular life'. It seems that the concept of Judas being rewarded for the good deeds that he performed in his lifetime had not yet been fully developed. The description of the stone, in particular, is vague and suggests that the author who was marrying the two versions together was not comfortable with the reason that the stone was there. Likewise, it seems that the Temple priests' intercessions on Judas's behalf were not suitable material for this version of the Legend and they were likewise omitted.

'The Twelve Apostles of Ireland'

There is a short Irish text that borrows scenes from the Second Irish Life and begins to discuss Brendan's journey, entitled 'The Twelve Apostles of Ireland'.⁸ In this brief text, a

⁷ Charles Plummer, *Lives of Irish Saints*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), vol. 1, pp. 44–95.

⁸ Published as 'Dá apstol décc na hÉirenn' in Charles Plummer, *Lives of the Irish Saints*, vol. 1, pp. 96–102, and in translation in vol. 2, 93–98.

flower from the Land of Promise appears among the twelve Patriarchs and they draw lots to decide who should travel. Although it is initially decided that Brendan of Birr should go, although they agree that, instead, the comparatively younger Brendan of Clonfert should undertake the journey.⁹ The descriptions of the 'wonderful flower' link the Brendan legend to Celtic mythology, most particularly *The Voyage of Bran* where a silver branch entices Bran to seek the Otherworld.¹⁰

On one occasion in the 'Twelve Apostles', the Devil appears on the mast of the monks' vessel: Brendan alone can see him. Brendan questions the Devil as to why he has 'come from



Hell before his proper time'. The devil explains that he has come to be 'tortured in the deep prisons of this black dark sea.' Thus, this scene echoes the encounter with Judas that is seen in the *Navigatio*, except that it is the devil that has been moved from his normal hell, rather than Judas. The devil explains that no one can see hell and

survive, and still reveals it to Brendan. There follows an excessive list of monstrous descriptions of the torments. Then Brendan hears helpless weeping at the bottom of hell. On a huge rock, washed over by an infernal sea, Judas is hit by a wave of fire from the front and ice from behind. Judas explains that he will be tormented thus until Judgement Day. He does not repent of his sins; his message is against avarice and the 'despicable useless riches of the world'. Judas then recounts some 'little verses' as a memorial for Brendan in which he explains that he 'died not ... I find not death but remain alive.' The text then ends.

The scene leading to Judas has clearly been borrowed from the second Irish Life and parallels the *Apocalypse of Paul*; however, the appearance of the Devil and Judas's day of Respite (which has, in turn, been borrowed from the *Navigatio*) are separate incidents in the Second Irish Life: when the Devil appears, he does not reveal Judas's suffering in Hell. Instead, when

⁹ Carney believed that Brendan of Birr was the hero of a lost version of the *Navigatio*; or perhaps, as Wooding suggests, the replacement by Brendan of Clonfert represents the 'outgrowth of a cult of another early Brendan', Jonathan M. Wooding, 'Introduction,' *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature*, ed. Jonathan M. Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), xi–xxvii, p. xvi.

¹⁰ See Eleanor Hull, 'The Silver Bough in Irish Legend,' *Folklore* 12 (1901), 430–45.

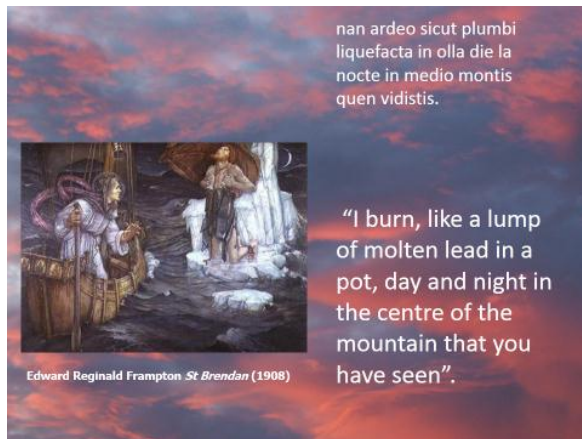
the door of hell is opened, one of Brendan's companions looks through and dies. Brendan then prays and restores his companion to life. Clearly, what survives of the Twelve Apostles was not intended to be the full text: after the introductory scenes, one might speculate that Brendan was expected to travel to the otherworld, to return with the wonderful flower and only be parted with it as the herald of his death in a manner akin to St Ailbe. However, Séamus Mac Mathúna observes that the Judas episode is what most interested the author of the 'Twelve Apostles' rather than the actual voyage.¹¹ The scene has only the vaguest of similarities with the encounter with Judas as it appears in the *Navigatio*, most particularly that Judas stands on a rock battered by waves. The detail that the waves are fire and ice is a motif that is seen in the later Dutch and German versions. In this version, however, Judas does not enjoy a day of respite: Brendan has to look inside hell and Judas's lamentation comes from the very depths. The author of the 'Twelve Apostle' has, like Dante, placed Judas in the furthest place from God.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider Judas's fate in Dante's *Inferno*: Judas is in the deepest circle of Hell, called Cocytus, a lake fed by Satan's bloody tears and frozen by his flapping wings. Ironically, then, Satan is trapped by his own lamentation. Cocytus is the locus of traitors and betrayers; it is divided into four sections, the last of which, Judecca – named after Judas himself – is reserved for those who betray their benefactors. Satan has three faces and each mouth chews a prominent traitor: Brutus and Cassus were the leading assassins of Julius Caesar – whose murder Dante equates to the destruction of the Unified Italy. Judas is in the centre mouth, headfirst. Here, then, Judas's torment is excruciating and eternal, and there is no relief of even anticipating a respite.

The Anglo-Norman Version

In the *Navigatio*, Judas's punishment is dismissed in one line: "I burn, like a lump of molten lead in a pot, day and night in the centre of the mountain that you have seen". Thus, the author indicates the horrors of hell without actually describing the torments. Conversely, the Anglo-Norman version of the *Voyage of Brendan* spends 110 lines illustrating Judas's anguish, describing horrific torture practices that were contemporary at the time as writing

¹¹ Séamus Mac Mathúna, 'The Irish Life of Saint Brendan: Textual History, Structure and Date,' *The Brendan Legend: Texts and Versions*, eds. Glyn S. Burgess and Clara Strijbosch (Leiden: Brill, 2006):117–58, p. 151 n. 87.



as well as those that are described for the torture of the Christian martyrs and also in Apocryphal Biblical sources, most notably the Book of Maccabees.¹²

Although the Anglo-Norman version is dependent upon the *Navigatio* as its source, it was clearly composed for a different audience; the salutation praising the queen at

the beginning suggests that this was composed for a courtly, rather than a religious audience, perhaps at the behest of the Queen herself, for the benefit of those courtiers that did not speak Latin. By diluting the ecclesiastical flavour of the text and by editing the text to exclude elements that slow down the narrative and indeed by embellishing certain scenes that contain violence and gore from which the author of the *Navigatio* shies away, the narrative of the Anglo-Norman version is much more tense and exciting.

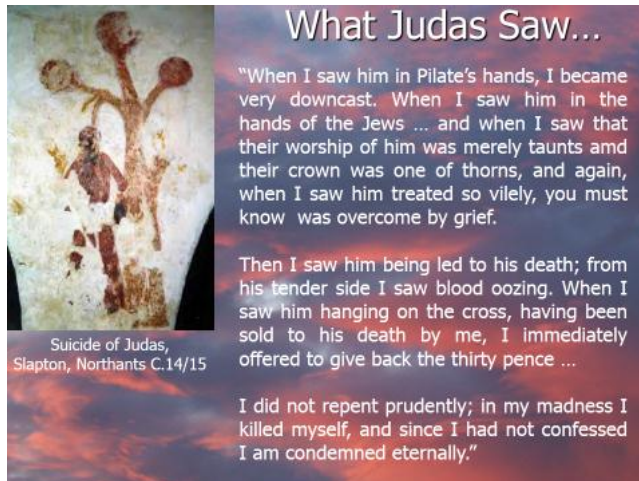
The scene with Judas in the Anglo-Norman *Brendan* is an opportunity for the author, Benedeit, to describe the torments of hell in vivid detail. Scenes of violence are very few in the narrative, so when they come, they are graphic and terrifying. As Brendan approaches Judas he is described as naked, 'lacerated and torn', and beaten by the waves. His face is covered by the cloth; however, he must cling to a pillar so that the waves do not drag him away. Benedeit describes his voice as 'hoarse and weary', and adds a twelve-line lamentation that moves Brendan to tears, echoing Paul's anguish in the Apocalypse.¹³ Brendan calms the storms and questions him about his torment. Judas recounts events that occurred as they appear in the Bible, namely that he acted as treasurer for the disciples (and adds that not only did he steal the money from the purse, but that he squandered it surreptitiously), sold his saviour, and was 'downcast' – a euphemism, if ever there was one – when he saw Jesus in the hands of Pilate and then the Jews. [PPT#14] Judas returns the thirty pieces of silver, but his restitution is not accepted. He explains to Brendan that he did not

¹² J.S. Mackley, 'The Torturer's "Art" in the Judas episode of Benedeit's *Voyage of St Brendan*' in *Notes and Queries* (April, 2007):24–27.

¹³ E.G.R. Waters, ed. *The Anglo-Norman Voyage of St Brendan by Benedeit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), ll. 1433–44.

repent, but killed himself and the reason for his eternal damnation is because he did not make his confession. Therefore, Judas claims that his crime is not that he betrayed Jesus, but that he despaired of Christ's mercy.

At the point in the Anglo-Norman Version that Judas recounts the story of the betrayal,



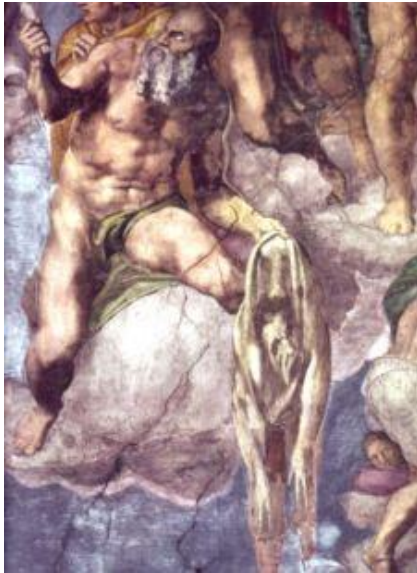
repeating the phrase 'when I saw' six times, equating to his six days of torture in hell. He explains there are two hells and that he is the only one who suffers in both of them: the first hell is on a mountain top; hot and sweaty and the more painful. The other hell is in a valley, cold and stinking and the more horrible of the two; the two are separated by the sea.

Judas lists his daily tortures: on the Monday in the mountain-hell, he is 'turned on the



wheel', presumably to induce dizziness, rather than being broken on the wheel as suffered by St Catherine. His second punishment, having been hurled into the valley-hell, is to be chained to a bed of spits. He is then crushed with rocks and lead and his body is 'all pierced through by being spitted there'. His punishment on Wednesday in the mountain hell is to be boiled in pitch then burned in a fire so intense that it would melt marble, and presumably Judas would have been blinded

and suffocated by the pitch as it formed a mask around his face; by contrast on Thursday, when he is hurled again into the valley, he is frozen so intently that he longs for the fires of the previous day. This is an appropriate contrast to the tortures on Wednesday and seems to be a reversal of the scene of torture in the *Apocalypse of Paul* where the sinners are plunged into a river of fire, but corresponds with Dante's description of the lower circle of Hell



Judas's fifth torture is an amalgamation of suffering: he is flayed until nothing remains of his skin, then pushed into a compound of salt and soot with a burning stake. However, the flesh grows back after each bout of torture so the torment can be repeated. He is then forced to drink molten lead and copper in anticipation of Saturday's punishment, when he is hurled into the valley-hell and imprisoned in a filthy dungeon where he swells with nausea as he cannot vomit because of the molten metal he has ingested. Although his Sunday is spent away from the

two hells, and he still receives a comparative physical torture through being lashed by the waves and the cloth, his tortures also take on a further dimension: his respite gives him time to reflect and thus the torture becomes a psychological anguish.

Despite the detailed descriptions of Brendan's suffering, particularly in the Anglo-Norman version, Judas only *narrates* his suffering, describing what happened in the past and what will happen in the future: Brendan does not witness it firsthand. 'Thus, the violence is performed



... *through* language... The act of cruelty consists in the articulation of effective acts'.¹⁴

Brendan only witnesses the terror of Judas's torture in hell in the Dutch version. Here, when dawn breaks on Monday morning, Judas's despair is so great that he weeps tears of blood, reminiscent of Christ sweating blood in the garden of Gethsemane. There is a vivid

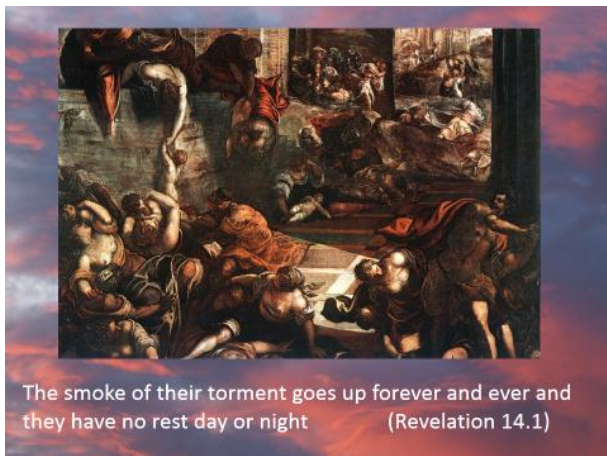
description of the army of devils flying over the deck, breathing pitch and flames from their snouts. However, the description of torture culminates with the devils dragging Judas back to hell, stabbing him with burning hooks, and breaking every bone in his body.¹⁵

¹⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 134.

¹⁵ 'Crauwels brochten si alle, / Die gloyden ende sneden; / Onlanghe dat zijs vermeden, / Maer in hem dat sise sloughen. / Onscone dat sine droughen / Met alle metten steene; / Si quelden sine beene.' H.P.A. Oskamp, ed. *De Reis van Sente Brandane*. Zutphen: NVWJ Thieme & Cie, 1972, ll. 1520–26.

When Judas explains that he is released from hell on Sundays and for certain festivals, it actually transpires that he enjoys his comparative release from hell for 106 days a year. The intense torture is 259 days, but it has to be remembered that the respite is only comparative: Judas still suffers in both. Equally, when Brendan first sees Judas, he believes that Judas is being tortured. Judas's respite echoes Brendan's journey. When Judas is released from hell at Easter, Brendan travels from an island of giant sheep to the back of an enormous fish that the monks initially mistake for an island. By Pentecost, he has reached the Paradise of Birds which is the abode of angels that sided neither with God nor Lucifer, and were cast out of heaven for their apathy. The parallel is clear: the angels have been removed from heaven, Judas has been granted a release from Hell. The characters are in motion, but they are uncertain about their ultimate fate.

Although the Anglo-Norman version describes two hells, the *Navigatio* is closer to the Biblical descriptions. In the *Navigatio*, hell is effectively positioned in the heart of a volcano which erupts when another soul is claimed. The Bible describes how Hell is "in the earth and in the foundations of the mountains" (Deuteronomy 32:22); it is "deep underground" (Job 11:8); it is "a pit" (Isaiah 14:15; Ezekiel 31:16) most importantly, Hell is eternal and irreversible.

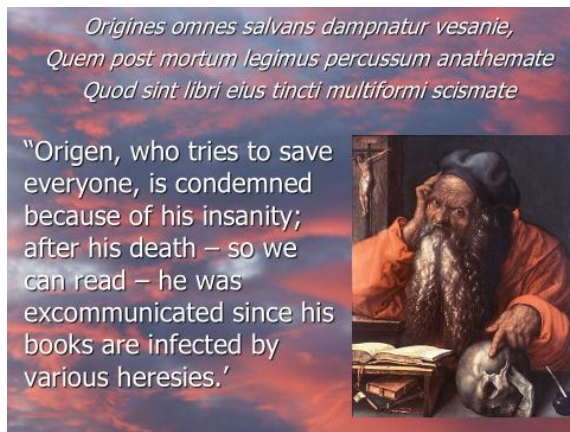


Revelation 14.1 describes how the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever and they have no rest day or night.' So, here is where the true heresy that pervades much of the Brendan legend is revealed – the heresy is that there is some release from hell. This is also the assertion of Origen whose writings in the third century suggest

that at the end of the world [souls] are possessed of free-will and may, of their own accord admit either good or evil ... angels may become men or demons and again from the latter they may rise to become men or angels. Once again, the liberal theology that is being presented concerning the concept of mercy, as shown by both Judas and the neutral angels, is based on censured teaching.

In the thirteenth century, Latin satirical verses were circulated which specifically address Origen and the concept of the meeting place between heaven and hell where Judas, or the

neutral angels, can enjoy a moment of respite. It suggests that “Origen, who tries to forgive



everyone, is condemned because of his insanity; after his death – so we can read – he was excommunicated since his books are infected by various heresies'. To the author of these satirical verses, once fallen, whether devil, neutral angel or betrayer, condemnation is eternal. There is no mercy, not even the relief of being able to invoke the name of God.

However, while Benedeit's principal focus is on Judas's suffering in hell; however, the message of this scene (as with the *Navigatio*) is that God rewards the good deeds one performs in their lifetime. The Anglo-Norman version mentions *some* of the deeds described in the *Navigatio* but not all of them; but, they are also embellished. While the *Navigatio* states that the cloth was not Judas's to give away, in the Anglo-Norman version, Judas uses the alms from the disciples' purse to buy the sheet for a poor naked man (or in some versions, a leper) to prevent him from dying in the sun, and thus it now protects Judas from the waves and prevents him from drowning; however, it offers no defence in hell as it was not bought with his own money. Similarly, Benedeit embellishes Judas's use of the rock. In the *Navigatio*, the rock represented a stepping stone which he placed in a ditch, meaning that travellers did not have to deviate so far on their journey; in the Anglo-Norman version, the rock has become a hillock, and there is the addition of a small strong bridge which suggests that Judas was indeed helping travellers overcoming a serious impediment on their journey. However, none of these good deeds appear in the Bible, where Judas is cast as a 'devil', a 'thief' and the 'one who betrayed' Jesus, and this additional characterisation, creating sympathy for him, also does not conform to the medieval stance towards the punishment of their perfunctory betrayer.

Conclusion

The encounter with Judas is, without doubt, the most popular episode in one of the most popular medieval texts, this is attested by its inclusion in almost all versions, and the fact that the legend was so widely translated and survives in so many manuscripts.

Consequently, the theme of Divine forgiveness and Mercy that appears in all versions in one form or another, through the concept of Judas's Sunday rest, was one that was known to a very wide audience. Some versions of the episode warn that even though this is a *release* from hell, the punishments – they are generally described as extreme heat or cold – are still severe and are presented in a way that medieval audiences would have recognised. In addition, the respite witnessed by Brendan is still perceived as both physical and psychological tortures, and the knowledge that the torment in hell is worse.

However, the Judas episode represents a message of hope. On account of his good deeds, Judas is temporarily allowed to reach the threshold of hell and look upon a world without



infernal torment. However, despite his punishment being less severe, he is never truly away from it. Likewise, at the end of the episode, Brendan stands at the threshold of ending his seven year voyage and finally achieving Paradise. As for Judas, the irony is that he got closer to Jesus the man than any of us could hope to. And yet, by kissing him, the Way to

heaven, he effectively closed the doorway to heaven for himself. The Sunday Respite may be a release. It may be something for him to look forward to during his suffering (although his suffering may be so intense he can think of nothing else), but it is also a further tantalising torture that he takes a frustrating step closer to salvation, but cannot go any further.