

THE HEATHEN GIANT IN THE VOYAGE OF ST BRENDAN¹

ABOUT 1150, probably in the Rhineland, a Brendan story was composed in the (Frankish) vernacular which came to be known under the title *De reis van Sint Brandaan* (*The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, hereafter referred to as *Voyage*). The original text, O, is lost. Three later versions survive: a Middle Dutch text in verse in two manuscripts (C and H), a German text in verse in two manuscripts (M and N) and another German text in prose (P).² The *Voyage* has an extraordinary framework which gives it a unique place within the Brendan tradition. According to the *Voyage*, Brendan burned a book containing stories about the wonders of God's creation out of disbelief. For this reason he is sent out on a voyage so as to see with his own eyes certain divine manifestations which earlier he had refused to credit. In this way he is to recover the book by refilling it with the wonders which he witnesses on his voyage. The majority of the phenomena which he comes across are related to man's actions and behaviour in this life and the circumstances consequent upon them in the Afterlife. Brendan encounters souls in hell, heaven and paradise. The astonishing and sometimes frightening experiences restore his belief. One of his meetings with an Afterlife-creature is described only in the Middle Dutch version C. It does not occur in any of the extant German versions. Neither is it found in the text which is regarded as the most important predecessor of the *Voyage*, the Latin *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* (hereafter referred to as *Navigatio*).³ It concerns the episode of Brendan's encounter with the speaking head of a dead heathen giant (C lines 137–260). In this episode the following tale is told:

Brendan and his monks find the head of a dead man by the seashore. The head is very large, its forehead measures five feet across. At Brendan's request, the giant tells him that he was a heathen, who for his own profit waded through the sea. He was big and strong, and stood a hundred feet tall. He waylaid the

¹ Translation: Thea Summerfield. I would like to thank Rijklof Hofman and Thea Summerfield for their help.

² See on the relation of the versions and on place and time of origin especially C. Strijbosch, *De bronnen van de Reis van Sint Brandaan* (Hilversum: Verloren 1995) 14–26 [*De bronnen*], (An English translation of this book will appear as *The Seafaring Saint: sources and analogues of the twelfth-century Voyage of Saint Brendan* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000). Version C and H have been edited by E. Bonebakker (ed.), *Van Sente Brandane: Naar het Comburgsche en het Hulthemsche handschrift* 2 Parts in one vol. (Amsterdam, 1894). Diss. Leiden; see for a new edition of C with translation in modern Dutch W. P. Gerritsen, S. Oppenhuis de Jong (ed.), and W. Wilmink, trans., *De Reis van Sint Brandaan: Een reisverhaal uit de twaalfde eeuw*. Vertaald door Willem Wilmink, ingeleid door W.P. Gerritsen, met een uitgave van de Middelnederlandse tekst naar het Comburgse handschrift door een werkgroep van Utrechtse neerlandici onder leiding van W. P. Gerritsen en Soetje Oppenhuis de Jong (eindredactie). Nederlandse klassieken 1. (Amsterdam: Prometheus 1994). An edition of M, N and P is to be found in C. Schroder (ed.), *Sancti Brandan: Ein lateinischer und drei deutsche Texte* (Erlangen: Besold, 1871).

³ C. Selmer (ed.), *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis: From Early Latin manuscripts*. Publications in mediaeval studies 16. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1959). For data on tradition and dissemination see Selmer's introduction in this edition. In this article I leave aside the complicated relationship between *Voyage* and *Navigatio*. See for an exposition of the problems W. P. Gerritsen, 'Brandaan en de wonderen van de wereld: De Reis van Sint Brandaan', in W. P. Gerritsen, Doris Edel and Mieke de Kreek (ed.), *De wereld van Sint Brandaan* (Utrecht 1986) 51–69, esp. 55, for an elaborate comparison of *Voyage* and *Navigatio*, Strijbosch *De bronnen*, esp. 53–85 and 149–87.

sailors and took their goods. For all his outsize proportions he was drowned in a flood. Brendan offers to resuscitate and to baptize him, so as to give him the possibility of obtaining remission for his sins and afterwards going to paradise. The giant refuses, because he is afraid that he will not be able to resist the temptation of sin. This would be worse, for, as he says, baptized souls are tormented much more in hell than heathens are. Besides, he has a terrible fear of dying once again. He wants to go back to his torments (or: poor company) in the darkness. He takes his leave, with Brendan's good wishes. Brendan departs for his ship.

The peculiar contents of the heathen giant episode, and the fact that it occurs only in one Middle Dutch version of the *Voyage* (there is no trace of it in the *Navigatio*) have attracted the attention of a number of Brendan researchers. Three recurring questions have been asked:

1. Did the episode of the heathen giant belong to the original twelfth-century *Voyage*-text (O), or is it a thirteenth-century addition by a Dutch copyist?
2. Which are the sources of the motif of the heathen giant?
3. What is the meaning of this episode within the *Voyage*?

With respect to the first question previous investigations have led to many speculations and few certainties. In answer to the second question several probable sources have been suggested; nevertheless, many aspects of this episode require further investigation and elucidation. Finally, the explanation of the episode's meaning and cultural background has only just begun. A problem here is that a systematic inventory of the sources and especially of the adaptations and changes made to the source material to which this episode can be traced has not yet been made. Hypotheses about the place of this episode in the cultural background of author and audience are built on shifting sands so long as it is unclear if this episode formed part of the twelfth-century original text or originates with the thirteenth-century Dutch version, and so long as it has not been established which elements in this episode are adaptations based on which sources. To place further investigations on a firm footing this article reviews the question of I) originality, II) sources and III) the meaning of the episode of the heathen giant.⁴

I THE ORIGINALITY OF THE EPISODE OF THE HEATHEN GIANT

The episode of the heathen giant only occurs in the Middle Dutch manuscript C. The first part of the second extant Dutch manuscript, H, has been lost. The note at the end of H 'This book contains 2198 lines' makes clear that this first part of H must have contained 323 lines. In the corresponding part of C, which includes the episode of the heathen giant, the point where the text of H starts runs to 337 lines. Because of the nearly equal number of lines and because C and

⁴ Some of the arguments in this article appeared, in a different context, in Strijbosch *De bronnen*, 30–33 and 200–05.

H in the extant episodes are similar in content and sometimes even in vocabulary, it can be assumed that originally H also included the episode of the heathen giant. Probably the episode was already present in the (hypothetical) thirteenth-century Middle Dutch ancestor of C and H, C/H.⁵ The question if the episode of the heathen giant already formed part of the original *Voyage*-text O cannot be answered so easily. In 1918 Wilhelm Meyer published the first part of a dissertation in which he investigated the relations between the extant versions of the *Voyage*. At the end of this part he presented a stemma, with datings. In a footnote to this stemma the episode of the heathen giant is called an *Einschiebsel* ('insertion').⁶ Unfortunately further parts of his dissertation are lost, so that both stemma, time of origin and the qualification 'insertion' can no longer be verified. On the basis of Meyer's stemma Maartje Draak writes: 'This adventure is found neither in the Middle High German version, nor in the Prose rendering. This means that it cannot belong to the original text and must be a peculiarity of the Middle Dutch version.'⁷ Next she argues in favour of the other hypothesis, i.e. the heathen giant belonged to the original *Voyage* O, on the basis of the sources used by the author of the *Voyage*. According to Draak the heathen giant is a Celtic motif. 'Would a Celtic motif not fit in better with the surroundings of the original poet [that is, the author of O]?' Next she argues that if the answer to this question is affirmative, it invalidates Meyer's stemma.⁸ Finally the German scholar L. Peeters assesses the originality of the episode of the heathen giant in the original *Voyage*-text O on the basis of meaning and cultural background. The episode with its obvious interest in circumstances after death is said to harmonize well with a text orientated towards eschatological questions like the *Voyage*. Peeters concludes: 'Evidence from all sides supports the originality of lines 137–260 [that is the episode of the heathen giant] of the Middle Dutch Brendan story.'⁹ Taken together, arguments based on sources or contents appear to offer little of substance to determine the degree of originality of the heathen giant episode. The use of Celtic sources is not restricted to the author of the original *Voyage*-text O, as Draak seems to suppose. The harmonization of the episode with a particular cultural atmosphere, as Peeters suggests, forms an uncertain basis for discussion. A later adaptor will be more inclined to insert an episode when the contents of this episode fit in with the original story. Peeters himself points out this possibility of 'thematic attraction' as an explanation of a later insertion (p.40). Besides, it is difficult to discuss cultural atmosphere as long as it is uncertain which atmosphere is meant: that of the Rhinelandish twelfth or of the Dutch thirteenth century.

⁵ This Middle Dutch predecessor was first suggested in E. Verwijs, "Het Middelnederlandsch gedicht van Sinte Brandane", in *Verslagen en mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Afd. Letterkunde. Second Series vol. 2 (Amsterdam 1872) 243–46 and 254 and has been borrowed by all following researchers. The derivation of C and H from the same ancestor is beyond any doubt and has been accepted by researchers from the beginning.

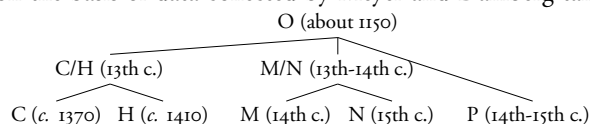
⁶ W. Meyer, *Die Überlieferung der Deutschen Brandanlegende I: Der Prosatext*. Diss. Gottingen, 1918 (Gottingen: 1918) 125.

⁷ M. Draak (ed.), *De reis van Sinte Brandaan* Uitgave, inleiding en commentaar door Maartje Draak, herdichting door Bertus Aafjes. (Repr. with 'Rekenschap Achteraf' [Account Afterwards] Amsterdam: Meulenhoff 1978 [orig. Amsterdam 1948]) 209.

⁸ Draak, *De reis van Sinte Brandaan*, 221.

⁹ L. Peeters, "De Reis van Sente Brandane, v. 137–260", in *Louwen Bijdragen* 59 (1970): 40.

To start with, an opinion on the originality of the episode of the heathen giant should be based on the stemma, on formal data provided by language and text, and on possible indications to be derived from the inner logic of the text. In spite of the lack of supporting evidence for the stemma proposed by Meyer resulting from the loss of later parts of his dissertation, subsequent Brendan research always has been founded on his stemma of the relationships involved.¹⁰ Usually an important modification of this stemma, which was proposed by Dahlberg in 1958, and which, in my opinion, has to be taken into consideration, is overlooked: Dahlberg asserts that N is not, as Meyer supposed, dependent on M. Both texts, M and N, derive from a common ancestor.¹¹ The stemma that can be designed on the basis of data collected by Meyer and Dahlberg takes the following form:



Starting from the principle that an episode found in two out of three branches (Middle Dutch, M/N or P) already formed part of O, the episode of the heathen giant should not be considered original: it only occurs in one of the three branches, i.e. in the Middle Dutch version C/H, so that it was probably inserted by the thirteenth-century Middle Dutch scribe of this version. Disruptions of the pattern of rhyming couplets displayed at points of transition between episodes provide us with formal data which can help to determine the originality of the heathen giant episode. The transition between the preceding episode and the heathen giant episode has a fourfold monorhyme [that is, four identical end-syllables]: man/ghewan/began/man (C lines 135–38). In transitional positions C and H contain fourfold rhymes only on two occasions: in the lines just mentioned and in the lines C 1007–10, H 952–55. Lines C 1007–10, H 952–55 clearly indicate corruption: one episode is missing and to take its place a short, irrelevant repetition is inserted. This means that the fourfold rhymes in C/H are an indication of corruption and insertion, which leads to the conclusion that the episode of the heathen giant was probably inserted by the thirteenth-century scribe of C/H. A study of the rhyming couplets in C and H leads to the same conclusion. R. Peters states: ‘Von den 62 Reimpaaren der nur in C stehenden Verse 137–260 [the episode of the heathen giant] hat [...] nur ein Paar unreinen Reim.’¹² That is a considerably smaller number than in other episodes, especially in episodes that are also extant in German versions. For example: in the 637 pairs of rhymes that C and H have in common (to start with C line 338, that is the line where the extant text of H begins), Peters counts 55 imperfect rhymes, that is approximately 1 in 11. Of 338 rhyming pairs only occurring in C from line 338 onwards (where there are mostly

¹⁰ Meyer, *Die Überlieferung der deutschen Brandanlegende*, 125.

¹¹ T. Dahlberg, “Brandaniana: Kritische Bemerkungen zu den Untersuchungen über die deutschen und niederländischen Brandan-Versionen der sog. Reise-Klasse. Mit komplettierendem Material und einer Neuausgabe des ostfriesischen Gedichtes”, in *Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis* 64 (1958) esp. 93–104. See for a further discussion on the correctness of the Meyer-Dahlberg stemma Strijbosch *De bronnen* 17–52.

¹² R. Peters, “Die Reime der mittelniederländischen Brandan-Versionen”, in *Leuvense Bijdragen* 59 (1970): 67–68. Quotation p. 68.

parallel German texts), 63 pairs show an imperfect rhyme, that is more than 1 in 5, of 204 pairs in H from line 324 onwards (where the extant text of H starts) 90, that is nearly half. Imperfect rhymes often originate because of a transition from Middle High German to Dutch. In other parts of the text the number of imperfect rhymes in C/H seems to be very small when there is no parallel German text: these parts obviously have been inserted in the Middle Dutch version.¹³ The negligible number of imperfect rhymes in C in the episode of the heathen giant seems to increase the improbability that this episode was translated from a German text. That means that this episode was originally written in Middle Dutch and was probably inserted into the Middle Dutch ancestor of C and H, C/H. The inner logic of the text seems to point in the same direction. Twice C mentions that Brendan is going to his ship. Preceding the episode of the heathen giant the text says: 'When he set out for his ship, he found the head of a dead man lying in the sand' (Doe hi te scep gaen began,/ Vant hi thoof van eenen doden man/ Voor hem liggende up tsant (C lines 137–39)). The first lines of the next episode, which describe Brendan's farewell to friends and family, say: 'When they arrived at the ship and bade farewell to friends and family [. . .]' (Doe si te scep quamen/ Ende orlof ghenamen/ An vrienden ende maghen mede (C lines 260–63)). It is not completely impossible to put an interpretation on these lines which makes sense: on his way to his ship where friends and family are waiting for him on the beach, Brendan and his monks come upon a head. Nevertheless it is illogical. It seems as if Brendan sets out twice for his ship, and the meeting with the heathen giant occurs before his leave-taking and embarkation. The encounter is not a part of the actual voyage. None of these arguments in itself offers sufficient evidence to conclude beyond doubt that the episode of the heathen giant was inserted into the Middle Dutch ancestor of C and H and did not form part of O. However, together they make this seem highly probable. But there is one argument which contradicts this supposition. In two places in the episode of the heathen giant the words *aermer scaren* are used (C lines 240 and 250). The Dutch philologists Verwijs, De Vries and Bonebakker successively have argued that these words are an alteration of the originally German word *harmscar(e)*, which means 'vexation', 'misery'.¹⁴ The Middle Dutch Dictionary has for *harmscar*: 'A word only occurring in texts influenced by the High German. From harm and scare, granted fate. Vexation, torment, torture, pain. The word only occurs in the *Voyage* and there, too, it was no longer properly understood.'¹⁵ *Aerme(r) scaren* is also found in C lines 1143 and C 1599. H changed the word(s) into *zee baren* (H line 1088 'high waves of the sea') and *keitivegher scaren* (H line 1541 'miserable hosts'), which makes clear that even the scribe of H did not understand the word. The German versions do not have the corresponding lines. The meaning 'host of miserable creatures', which in lines C 240 and 250 (in the episode of the heathen giant) would be acceptable

¹³ Peters, "Die Reime der mittelniederländischen Brandaen-Versionen", 68.

¹⁴ Verwijs, "Het Middelnederlandsch gedicht van Sinte Brandane", 239. In this article at p. 238–39 there is a discussion of the corrections proposed by De Vries. In the proceedings of the meeting of the Royal Academy at 12-2-1872 in the abovementioned volume at p. 229 there is a notice that according to Dr. Kern *harmscar* is not of German origin. Arguments are not given. See furthermore Bonebakker, *Van Sente Brandane: naar het Comburgsche en het Hulthemsche*, vol. 2, pp. 8–9.

¹⁵ *Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek* 3, 160.

and in C line 1599 is not completely nonsensical, in line C 1143 (and corresponding H 1088) does not make any sense. Here the meaning is doubtlessly 'vexation', 'misery' (like the meaning of the German *harmschar(e)*). In his important article on the episode of the heathen giant, published in 1887, G. Huet concludes on the basis of this discussion: 'For the time being it is impossible to assume exactly because of this word [*harmschar*], which is also found elsewhere in the poem and, in addition, has been corrupted in the manuscript's history, that our episode could be the creation of an interpolator of the Middle Dutch text.'¹⁶ The idea that the episode of the heathen giant was translated from German is entirely at odds with the large number of perfect rhymes in this episode, a fact that suggests a Middle Dutch origin for the episode. Also Huet's proposal that '[the] story may have been translated from German, even if it did not form part of the original [. . .]; it may have been inserted by a German adaptor in a manuscript that was the source of our poet' does not offer a solution.¹⁷ A more acceptable explanation of the conflicting information would seem that the words *aerme(r) scaren* were originally used by the scribe of the Middle Dutch text C/H, with the meaning 'host of miserable creatures', without any influence from an earlier German text. It is precisely in the episode of the heathen giant that this meaning makes sense. Later usage of the phrase in C would seem to indicate that these words were taken over from the German, retaining the same meaning, however strange in this context. The strangeness of the later places may have been the reason for the author of the other Dutch version, H, to replace *aerme(r) scaren* by other expressions. Weighing up all the facts from the stemma and textual data, the best conclusion seems to be that the episode of the heathen giant did not form part of the original *Voyage O* and was interpolated into the thirteenth-century Middle Dutch version C/H.

II THE SOURCES OF THE EPISODE OF THE HEATHEN GIANT

In general, Brendan researchers who have dealt with the heathen giant have concentrated on answering the question formulated by Maartje Draak as: 'And from which source does the Middle Dutch adaptor derive the motif of the heathen giant?'¹⁸ This question is especially urgent, since in the *Navigatio*, the most important source of the *Voyage*, there is no trace of either a heathen giant, an offering of baptism, or a discussion on the fate of pagans and christians in hell. Previous research, based on Huet's article, mentioned as possible sources: *Vita of Malo* (or Maclovius), the *Trajan legend* and the *Vita Macarii* in the *Vitae Patrum*.¹⁹ Draak also refers to 'the Irish text of a Brendan voyage [. . .] from the Book of Lismore.' In addition she stresses the similarities with the *Vita of Malo*, whereas L. Peeters points out the influence of the Macarius legend.²⁰ In what follows data from all

¹⁶ G. B. Huet, "Van Sinte Brandane, vs. 137–260", in *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche taal- en letterkunde* 7 (1887) 87.

¹⁷ "het verhaal kan uit het Duitsch vertaald zijn, zonder daarom in het origineel gestaan te hebben [. . .]" – Huet "Van Sinte Brandane, vs. 137–260", 87.

¹⁸ Draak, *De reis van Sinte Brandaan*, 219.

¹⁹ Huet, "Van Sinte Brandane", 87–92.

²⁰ Draak, *De reis van Sinte Brandaan*, 220–21, Peeters, "De Reis van Sente Brandane", 29–30.

these sources will be collected and, if necessary, explained and completed. Furthermore, some sources which have not been mentioned before and which may have influenced the episode of the heathen giant in the *Voyage* will be discussed.

The *Vita of Malo (Maclovius)*.

'The Malo-legend' or 'the Life of St. Malo',²¹ that is, the vita dedicated to Saint Malo or Maclovius, is mentioned as an important source of the episode of the heathen giant in all previous investigations. However, the tendency to refer to 'the Malo-legend' or 'the Life of Malo', without clarifying which text or texts are referred to by that name, has done little to improve research on the relationship of the *Voyage* with Malo-texts. The *Vita of Malo* is extant in five versions, of which the three older texts are important in our discussion of the heathen giant episode: i) The vita of Bili, ninth century; ii) An anonymous version from the ninth century, in a long and a short recension; iii) the version of Sigebert of Gembloux, eleventh century.²² Huet based his observations on an edition of 1613 which, as can be concluded from Kenney's survey, derives from the long redaction of ii.²³ Draak made use of the eleventh-century vita of Sigebert of Gembloux. Writing during World War II, it was impossible for her, she says, to consult the vita written by Bili (i).²⁴ These unhappy circumstances caused her to miss some details that precisely connect the older Malo vitae with the episode of the heathen giant in the *Voyage*. In short, the episode of the heathen giant in the ninth-century versions of the *Vita of Malo* (version i, written by Bili, and version ii in both redactions) runs as follows:²⁵

[paraphrase] Malo and his monks (Malo's master Brendan is also present in this company) come upon a huge tomb. Malo resuscitates the buried person. A man (i) or giant (ii) rises. Answering their questions he tells the assembled company that he has suffered the torments of hell. During his lifetime he was a heathen. At his request Malo baptizes him. Thereupon Malo asks him if he can lead them to the Island of Ima for which they are searching. Wading through the waves the giant pulls the ship through the sea. A storm and the tide²⁶ impede their progress, so that they have to return to the island. The man/giant dies and is buried again.

²¹ Indicated as such in respectively Huet (n.15) 88–90, Peeters, "De Reis van Sente Brandane", 28–29 and Draak *De reis van Sinte Brandaan*, 220.

²² For further details about the *Vita of Malo* see Strijbosch *De bronnen*, 160–61 and literature mentioned here. For a short survey see J. F. Kenney, *The sources for the Early History of Ireland: an introduction and guide. I: ecclesiastical*, (repr. Shannon: Irish University Press 1968 [New York 1929]) 417 and 418.

²³ Huet, "Van Sinte Brandane", 90; Kenney, *Sources*, 417.

²⁴ Draak, *De reis van Sinte Brandaan*, 220.

²⁵ The life of Malo by Bili after the edition of F. Lot, *Melanges d'Histoire Bretonne* (Paris 1907) 331–430; ii anonymous life of Malo, short recension after the edition of A. de la Borderie, *Autre vie de saint Malo écrite au IXe siècle par un anonyme* (Rennes 1884) 131–57, long recension after the ed. Lot 287–329; iii The life of Malo by Sigebert of Gembloux has been consulted in the ed. Migne, PL 160, 729–46.

²⁶ According to version i: 'an adverse wind and a heavily streaming sea' (*ventus contrarius et mare vehementer fluctuans*); version ii has 'the rising flood and raging storm' (*ferventibus fretis insanientibusque ventis*).

The life of Malo by Sigebert of Gembloux which Draak studied contains the first part of the story, but it lacks the tale of the giant wading through the sea, pulling the ship, and being prevented by wind and waves to reach the island. 'Wading through the sea' and 'rising storm and flood' are also notable elements which play a part in the story of the heathen giant in the *Voyage*. The giant in the *Voyage* tells the monks that he used to wade through the sea to rob ships. In a rising flood he was drowned (C lines 159–70). If the vita of Malo influenced the episode of the heathen giant in the *Voyage*, it was not through the eleventh-century version of Sigebert of Gembloux, but through one of the ninth-century versions.

The *Vita of Brendan*.

It will be remembered that Maartje Draak also remarked on the similarity of the episode of the heathen giant with 'the Irish text of a Brendan voyage [. . .] from the Book of Lismore.'²⁷ Doubtlessly what is meant here is the Vita of Brendan as edited by Whitley Stokes in his *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*.²⁸ The Brendan vitae handed down to us add up to a confusing range of mixtures of vitae and *Navigatio*-texts. Kenney mentions seven extant vitae, among which the aforementioned vita from the Book of Lismore, which he qualifies as *Vita of Brendan* 6.²⁹ An episode involving a heathen of gigantic size also occurs in two other versions of the *Vita of Brendan*, *Vita of Brendan* 2 and the late *Vita of Brendan* 7.³⁰

²⁷ Draak, *De reis van Sinte Brandaan*, 221 and, in her wake, Peeters, "De Reis van Sente Brandane", 28.

²⁸ W. Stokes (ed.), *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford 1890) 99–116 (Irish text) and 247–61 (English translation). The episode of the heathen giantess at 255.

²⁹ Kenney, *Sources*, 412–14. See for a careful description of the *Vitae Brendani* (unfortunately in an order differing from Kenney's) I. Orlandi, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* 1: Introduzione. Testi e documenti per lo studio dell' Antichità 38. (Milano 1968) 9–41; for a survey, Strijbosch *De bronnen*, 145–55 and 300–05; also G. Burgess and C. Strijbosch, *The legend of Saint Brendan: a critical bibliography* (Dublin 2000 [forthcoming]).

³⁰ *Vita Brendani* 2 has been consulted after the edition of C. Plummer (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* 2 vols. (Oxford 1910) 1: 98–151. *Vita Brendani* 7 after the edition of C. Plummer (ed.), *Bethada Naem nErenn: lives of Irish saints* (Oxford [1922] 1968) 2: 44–92. The episode of the heathen giantess in *Vita Brendani* 2, 68, (Plummer 135), and *Vita Brendani* 7, 28, (Plummer 61). In these three vitae the differences in this episode are minimal. I quote from the translation by Whitley Stokes of *Vita of Brendan* 6³¹:

It was not long after they had gone thence when they found the maiden smooth, full-grown, yellow-haired, whiter than snow or the foam of the wave; and she was dead, the blow of a spear having gone through her shoulder and passed between her two paps. Huge in sooth was the size of that maiden, to wit, a hundred feet in her height, and nine feet between her two paps, and seven feet in the length of her middle finger. Brenainn brought her to life at once, and then he baptised her and asked her concerning her kindred. 'Of the inhabitants of the sea am I,' saith she, 'that is, of those who pray and expect their resurrection.' Brenainn asked her what she desired: 'Wilt thou go at once to heaven, or wilt thou go to thy fatherland?' The girl answered in a language which no other save Brenainn understood, and this she said: 'To heaven,' saith she, 'for I hear the voices of the angels praising the mighty Lord.' So after the girl had partaken of the Body of Christ, and of His Blood, she died without any distress, and she is buried honourably there by Brenainn.

Unlike the account in the *Vita of Malo*, the dead person of gigantic size is not a man but a girl. Furthermore she died because of a spear wound. She does not ask to be baptized herself. Brendan gives her the option to go to heaven or to her relatives, and she chooses heaven. A tomb is not mentioned. To Maartje Draak the fact that this episode is found in a Brendan vita indicates that the story of the heathen giant is a 'Celtic Brendan motif' which belonged 'to the Brendan legend.' With these words she

However, the *Vita of Malo* contains details missing in the *Vita of Brendan*, which show similarities with the episode of the heathen giant in the *Voyage*: the wading through the sea, the return because of the storm and tide. Moreover, the *Vita of Brendan* mentions a woman, whereas the *Vita of Malo*, like the *Voyage*, has a man of gigantic size. In spite of Draak's anger, if the choice has to be made between the vitae of Brendan and Malo it does seem more likely that the author of the *Voyage* derived the episode of the heathen giant from the *Vita of Malo* than from the *Vita of Brendan*. Nevertheless the version of the episode of the heathen giant in the *Vita of Brendan* will prove an important link in the history of the development of the motif of the gigantic heathen head.

The *Vita of Macarius*.

As early as 1887 Huet pointed out the differences in the story of the heathen giant in the *Vita of Malo* and in the *Voyage*: 'Brendan finds a skull, Malo a complete body. The giant in the latter legend consents to baptism, the one in the *Brendan* refuses. The latter story is imbued with a peculiar, pessimistic atmosphere which is totally absent in the Malo-legend.' With regards to the motif of the head he also mentions similarities with the *Trajan legend* and the *Macarius legend* in the *Vitae Patrum*.³⁴ According to the *Trajan legend* the pagan emperor Trajan was released from hell because of his merits, after an intercession by pope Gregory the Great. Some versions of this legend have it that Trajan's skull was found in a tomb. As in the episode of the heathen giant, this story concerns a dead heathen who is released from hell. Huet rightly states that the similarities with the heathen giant in the *Voyage* are small, except for the fact that both stories belong 'to the same group of religious imagery'.³⁵ Merits are not mentioned in the episode of the heathen giant in the *Voyage*, neither are intercessions. The Trajan stories mentioning the discovery of Trajan's skull are dated much later than the *Voyage*, so that their value as sources is immaterial. Huet considered the Macarius legend more important for the *Voyage*. Peeters also stresses the influence of this legend on the *Voyage*.³⁶ He draws attention to the thematic relationship between the two stories. The *Macarius legend* tells the following story:³⁷

[paraphrase] On a trip in the desert the hermit Macarius finds the head of a dead man lying on the earth (*caput hominis mortui in terra jacens*). After touching it with a stick, the head tells Macarius his tale. In life he was a heathen priest, but now he suffers the pains of hell. However, Macarius' prayers offer some mitigation. It is added that in hell Christians are punished more severely

claims originality of the motif for the *Vita of Brendan* instead of the (continental) *Vita of Malo*. Angrily she writes: 'Why is the trumpet blown about the fame of the pupil [Malo] at Brendan's cost? Why are the famous adventures of Brendan ascribed to Malo?'³² The mutual relationship of the *Vita of Brendan* and the *Vita of Malo* is extremely unclear, and it is difficult to decide in which of the two the heathen giant originated.³³ (Berlin 1957), esp. 65–74. However, as I am not convinced by his arguments, I shall not follow his conclusions.

³⁴ Huet, "Van Sinte Brandane", 89–91, quotation at 89.

³⁵ Huet, "Van Sinte Brandane", 91.

³⁶ Peeters, "De Reis van Sente Brandane", 29–31.

³⁷ *Vita Macarii*, in *De Vitis Patrum*, L. VI, PL 73, esp. 1013–14.

than are heathens. According to the text: 'In his turn the old man said: 'Is there a worse torment than this one?' The head answered him: 'There is worse punishment under us.' The old man said: 'And who suffer this?' The head said: 'To us, who did not know God, some mercy is given. Those who knew God but denied him and did not do His will, are under us.'³⁸ After that Macarius buries the skull.

As is the case in the Middle Dutch *Voyage*, in the *Vita of Macarius* a saint has a conversation with the head of a dead person, who tells him that Christians in hell are punished more severely than heathens. Two important aspects of the heathen giant-episode in the *Voyage* are not found in the *Vita of Macarius*: Macarius buries the skull without any baptism or proposal of baptism, nor are we told that the skull is of extraordinary size. Briefly, previous research has pointed out three texts as possible sources for the episode of the heathen giant in the *Voyage*:

1. The *Vita of Malo*, of which the following aspects seem to be important for the heathen giant in the *Voyage*:
 - a A heathen giant is resuscitated and at his own request baptized
 - b He says that he was in the torments of hell
 - c Wading through the sea, he pulls Malo's ship. He is forced to return by the force of wind and waves
 - d He dies and is reburied.
2. The *Vita of Macarius*, with the following aspects:
 - a Macarius holds a conversation with the speaking skull of a heathen
 - b The skull says that he was in hell, where Christians are punished more severely than heathens.
3. The *Vita of Brendan*. The only element that may have influenced the *Voyage* is the fact that in the *Voyage* the gigantic woman gets a choice whether she wants to go to heaven or back to her relatives.

Other Saints' Lives.

Although in broad outlines the episode of the heathen giant in the *Voyage* can be found in the three sources mentioned above, some aspects of this story remain unexplained. Moreover, a way out of the opposition suggested by Draak between the *Vita of Brendan* and the *Vita of Malo* as the source of the episode of the heathen giant, as well as a way of tracing the path which the motif has followed in the Brendan-stories and of understanding the role that the *Vita of Macarius* has played

³⁸ *Rursum dixit senex: Est pejus tormentum ab his? Respondit caput illud: Major poena subtus nos est. Dixit ei senex: Et qui sunt in ipsa? Dicit ei caput illud: Nos qui ignoravimus Deum, vel ad modicum habemus aliquid misericordiae; hi vero qui cognoverunt Deum, et negaverunt eum, nec fecerunt voluntatem ejus, hi sunt subtus nos.*

in the shaping of the motif, is offered by older Irish and Anglo-Saxon literary traditions. The motif of a resuscitated and baptized heathen giant appears as early as the seventh-century *vita* of the famous Irish saint Patricius. In the *Collectanea* of Tírechán, dated the second half of the seventh century, a collection of stories on conversions and church foundations by St. Patrick, the following story is told:³⁹

And holy Patrick came through the plains in the territory of Macc Erce in Dichuil and Aurchuil. And in Dichuil Patrick came to a huge grave of astounding breadth and excessive in length, which his people had found, and they were amazed, with great astonishment, that it extended a hundred and twenty feet, and they said: 'We do not believe that there could have been such a thing as a man of this length'. Patrick answered and said: 'If you wish you shall see him', and they said: 'We do', and he struck the stone on the side of the head with his staff and signed the grave with the sign of the cross and said: 'Open, o Lord, the grave', and it opened. And a huge man arose whole, and said: 'Thanks be to you, o holy man, that you have raised me even for one hour from many pains', and, behold, he wept bitterly and said: 'May I walk with you?' They said: 'We cannot have you walk with us, for men cannot look upon your face for fear of you. But believe in the God of heaven and receive the baptism of the Lord, and you will not return to the place in which you were. And tell us to whom you belong.' 'I am the son of Cass son of Glas; I was the swineherd of Lugar king of Hirota. The warrior band of the sons of Macc Con killed me in the reign of Coirpre Nie Fer' (a hundred years ago from now). And he was baptized, and confessed God, and fell silent, and was laid again in his grave.

Ludwig Bieler hints at the correspondences of this story with two similar episodes in two saints' lives, the *Vita of Cainnech* and the *Vita of Cronan*.⁴⁰ In the *Vita sancti Cainnici* there is the following story: One day the monks of saint Cainnech 'saw the old head of a dead man on the earth' (*antiquum capud* (sic) *mortui hominis super terram conspexerunt*). One of them expresses the wish that the head would talk, 'because it has been buried since the old times, and it could tell us stories (*fabulas*)'. Cainnech blesses the head and a man rises. He greets the saint in Irish, mentions his family and his name, tells the tale of his life, shows his grave and says that his soul has been in hell for 300 (or 30) years. Apart from this he tells them many tales from the old times, which the author omits. In the end the man begs for baptism, is baptized, dies and is buried again.⁴¹ What is remarkable in this

³⁹ Quotation from the edition of L. Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979), chap. 40, pp. 154–55. On the dating of the *Collectanea* see L. Bieler, "Ancient hagiography and the lives of St. Patrick", *Forma Futuri: Studi in onore del cardinale Michele Pellegrino* (Torino 1975) 650 and 655 for dating. Bieler remarks that Szöverffy's late dating, c. 720, (Joseph Szöverffy in his "Heroic Tales", 194) is a consequence of his supposition that the Whitby Life of Gregorius, which among other things contains the *Trajan legend*, was a source for Tírechán. Bieler does not share this belief. He considers a dating late seventh or early eighth century more likely. Also Kenney, *Sources*, 329–30 gives as date 670–80 (p. 329–30).

⁴⁰ L. Bieler, "Zur Interpretation hagiographischer Parallelen", *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften; Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 32/7 (1974) 10–12.

⁴¹ "Vita sancti Cainnici abbatidis de Achad Bó Cainnich", C. Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* 1, 155–56.

story, as far as the *Voyage* is concerned, is that it is not a man, but a head that is found. In the *Vita sancti Cronani* the episode is given as follows:⁴²

When Cronan walks with his disciples through the regions of Connacht, they see an enormous grave and they say: 'If the one who is buried here had greeted us in his lifetime, he could have told us a lot about the invisible things' (*de invisibilibus*). Cronan commands the dead body to rise in the name of Christ. Immediately a man of astonishing size rises, and he tells them a great deal about his life as a heathen and about his place in hell. He begs to be baptized and receives baptism at the hand of the saint. The latter immediately lets him die again, and the baptized man is reburied in peace.⁴³

The aspect of stories told about the invisible things, things from the Other World or Afterlife, which we find in the *Vita sancti Cronani*, also play a part in the Third *Vita of St. Patrick*:

[paraphrase] When king Echu died he asked his servants not to bury him until saint Patrick had come to him, because the saint had promised him life in heaven. Shedding tears Patrick resuscitated Echu temporarily. He baptized him and instructed him in the christian faith. After that he said: 'Tell us everything you saw about the punishments of the infidels or the bliss of the saints, so that the ones to whom I preach, will believe that I tell the truth about heaven and hell.' After he had told them about what he had seen Patricius asked him if he wanted to live again or to go to heaven. Echu died, by his own will, because he wanted to go to the eternal bliss he saw in heaven. He received the body of Christ and after that he went to heaven.⁴⁴

In this story the motif of telling stories about heaven and hell is used with a didactic purpose: the saint wants his preaching about the Afterlife to be supported by the tale of an eye-witness. Here it is made very clear that baptism is the only possible means for a heathen of having access to heaven. Ludwig Bieler considers the story of Tírechán to be original, because it shows a clear and well-considered composition. In this version the motif for the astonishment of the disciples is the size of the grave, and the size of the buried man later on explains the impossibility of granting his wish to go with them. Also the desire to know this man and the reason for his resuscitation are explained by their amazement at his size. Tírechán's story was probably the model of the stories in the vitae of Cronan, which is closest to this model, and Cainnech. In the *Vita of Cronan* and the *Vita of Cainnech* the motifs of the resuscitation of a giant, stories about his torments in hell, baptism and stories about a life long ago, are not integrated into a consistent tale.⁴⁵ However, both of them give a beautiful explanation for the wish to see the dead man resuscitated: he may be able to tell old tales, or even stories about the 'invisible things'. The examination of motifs in the vitae discussed above shows that very

⁴² Bieler "Zur Interpretation", 10.

⁴³ "Vita sancti Cronani abbatis de Ros Cree", C. Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* 2, 23.

⁴⁴ "Vita Tertia", L. Bieler (ed.), *Four Latin Lives of St. Patrick: Colgan's vita secunda, quarta, tertia, and quinta* (Dublin 1971), chap. 66, pp. 163–64.

⁴⁵ Bieler "Zur Interpretation", 10–12.

early in Irish tradition a story already existed about the resuscitation of a dead giant which contained the following elements:

1. A saint and his company come across a grave of extraordinary size, or, in the *Vita sancti Cainnici*, the head of a dead person.
2. The saint's companions utter the wish for the buried person to be alive, either because they are eager to meet such a huge person, or because he may be able to tell them about things from times gone by, or about the 'invisible things'.
3. The saint resuscitates the dead man or head.
4. The resuscitated person proves to be a giant and a heathen (The *Vita sancti Cainnici* does not mention a giant, and that he is a heathen is not clearly stated but may be inferred from his stay in hell and his wish to be baptized).
5. He tells them that he suffers in hell, about the torments in hell, or about the place where he lives in hell.
6. He tells the story of his life, and his ancestry.
7. He is offered baptism, or begs to be baptized, in order not to have to return to hell. He is baptized, dies, and is buried again (The *Vita sancti Cainnici* does not clearly say that he dies, but that is probably the case, because he is buried again).

Considering, like Bieler, Tírechán's story to be the most coherent one, such a tale probably was at the root of the story of the heathen giant in the *Vita of Malo*. However, neither for the *Vita of Malo* nor for the *Voyage* is it possible to consider Tírechán's story, or only Tírechán's story, as a model. Tírechán's giant is very brief and vague about the hell he has come from, whereas the vitae of Cronan, the *Third vita of Patrick*, the vita of Malo and the *Voyage* are quite clear on this point. None of the preceding vitae contain the story from the *Vita of Malo* about the wading through the sea. Only the *Vita sancti Cainnici* mentions the head of a dead person, but this story does not mention, as does the story of Tírechán or the *Vita sancti Cronani*, a giant. As we have seen, the Middle Dutch *Voyage* combines the two motifs 'head' and 'giant'. Is it reasonable to assume on the strength of this combination that the author of the *Voyage* joined these traditional elements on his own initiative? Before we go any further it should be noted that a similar combination is found in one other Irish story. The Life of Colum Cille (Columba), written in Irish by Manus O'Donnell, finished in 1532, contains the following episode:⁴⁶

Once when Colum Cille was walking beside the river Boyne a human skull was brought to him. The size of the skull was a wonder to Colum Cille and his holy men, for it was much bigger than the skulls of the people of that time. Then

⁴⁶ I quote from the translation of B. Lacey, *The Life of Colum Cille by Manus O'Donnell* (Dublin 1998), 74.

his followers said to Colum Cille; 'It's a pity we don't know whose skull this is or the whereabouts of the soul that was in the body on which it was.' Colum Cille answered: 'I'm not leaving this place until I find this out from God for you.' Then Colum Cille prayed earnestly to God for that to be revealed to him, and God heard that prayer so that the skull itself spoke to him. It said that it was the skull of Cormac mac Airt, son of Conn of the Hundred Battles, king of Ireland, and an ancestor to himself, for Colum Cille was tenth generation after Cormac. And the skull said that although his faith wasn't perfect, he had a certain amount of faith and, because of his keeping of the truth and that as God knew that from his descendants would come Colum Cille who would pray for his soul, He had not damned him permanently, although it was in severe pain that he had awaited these prayers. Then Colum Cille picked up the skull and washed it honourably, and baptised it and blessed it; then he buried it. And Colum Cille did not leave that place until he had said thirty masses for the soul of Cormac. And at the last of the masses, the angels of God appeared to Colum Cille, taking Cormac's soul with them to heaven to enjoy eternal glory through the prayers of Colum Cille.

This is the only *Vita of Columba* that mentions the skull of a heathen giant. Earlier redactions of this vita do not contain the motif.⁴⁷ O'Donnell made use of many preceding Irish stories, but Brendan voyages are not mentioned as a source of his Life.⁴⁸ In the extant literature the combination skull-giant is found only in the *Voyage*. Did O'Donnell derive his story from a Brendan voyage written on the continent in a vernacular tongue? This does seem highly improbable. There are some indications that the motif of the gigantic skull appeared much earlier in Brendan tradition, but in the extant texts it has become all but unrecognisable.

The *Liber monstrorum*.

Very early support for the supposition that there must have existed a story about a giant at the seashore who is wounded in the head, is found in the *Liber monstrorum*, probably written about between 650 and 750, by an Irish or Anglo-Saxon author:⁴⁹

And we have heard tell of a certain girl, not yet with swelling breasts, discovered on the western shores of Europe, whom the waves of the sea had brought to land from the Ocean; they marked her size with stones. Indeed fifty feet was

⁴⁷ The most important earlier *vitae* of Columba are the *vita* by Adomnan, to be found in A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (ed.), *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (London [1961] repr. Oxford 1991) and the "Betha Choluim chille", as edited in Stokes, *Lives of Saints*, 20–33 (Irish text) and 168–81 (English translation). These *vitae* do not contain the story about the gigantic skull.

⁴⁸ See for a survey on the sources O'Donnell made use of the introduction in A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (ed. and trans.), *Betha Colaim Chille: Life of Columcille* (Urbana 1918) xlvii–ii.

⁴⁹ Edited in A. Orchard, *Pride and prodigies: studies in the monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge 1995). For date and place of origin see Orchard 86–87 and M. Lapidge, "'Beowulf', Aldhelm, the 'Liber Monstrorum' and Wessex." *Studi Medievali* ser. 3/ 23 (1982) 151–91, esp. 163–67. Whether the *Liber monstrorum* was written in England, Ireland or on the Continent is a subject of debate; speculations on an Irish origin of the work are numerous.

the length of her body, and she was seven feet wide between the shoulders. She had come dressed in a purple cloak, bound with saplings, and fatally wounded in the head.⁵⁰

A story like this seems to have been at the basis of the giant girl in the *Vita of Brendan*, where, as in the *Liber monstrorum*, a giantess who had died because of a wound, is mentioned. The report from the *Liber monstrorum* mentions a lethal wound in the head, the *Vita of Brendan* a wound in the shoulder. Similar reports as the one in the *Liber monstrorum* are found in several Irish annals, although these were probably written at a later date than the *Vita of Brendan*.⁵¹ Generally the motif of the finding of a skull in Irish stories is ascribed to the influence of the widely-spread *Vita of Macarius*.⁵² This *vita* doubtlessly was at the root of subsequent stories about finding the skull of a heathen who was then engaged in conversation about the Hereafter. Probably the *Vita of Macarius* was connected at an early stage with a story about a gigantic woman who was washed ashore, having been killed by a wound in the head. Next a story must have come into being about a discussion of the Hereafter with a giantess who was wounded in the head, or with the skull of a dead giant or giantess.⁵³ None of the above-mentioned stories can be considered the exclusive source for the episode of the heathen giant in the *Voyage*. Besides, there is the ever-present but elusive influence of oral tradition, which doubtlessly played a role in the development of the stories about the finding of a giant skull. However, the extant texts seem to indicate that even in very early insular tradition stories existed about a giantess who was washed ashore, having previously been killed by a wound in the head. Summing up, we have seen that the following elements of the episodes of the heathen giant in the *Voyage* appeared in earlier sources:

1. All the stories paraphrased here, with the exception of the *Vita of Macarius* and the *Vita sancti Caimnici*, mention a dead giant.
2. The head is derived from the *Vita of Macarius*, or the *Vita sancti Caimnici* (which may have been influenced by the *Vita of Macarius*). Possibly the *Vita of Macarius* was connected at an early stage with a story about a wounded giantess washed ashore.
3. The combination of giant and head is found in the *Vita Colum Cille*, here combined with the death of an old Irish hero; it is not impossible that the

⁵⁰ *Et quandam puellam in occiduis Europae litoribus, necdum turgentibus mammis, repertam didicimus, quae undae gurginum ab Oceano terris aduexerunt, cuius magnitudinem lapidibus designabant. Erat enim ipsius corporis longitudo .L. pedum et inter humeros .VII. latitudinis habuit. Purpureo induta pallio, virgis alligata et in caput occisa perueniat.* Ed. and transl. Orchard, *Pride and prodigies*, 266–67.

⁵¹ Orchard, *Pride and prodigies*, 108 mentions the *Chronicon Scotorum*, the *Annals of Ulster*, the *Annals of the Four Masters* and the *Annals of Inisfallen*, all about 900. On the dating of the *Vita of Brendan* as late 8th century or ca. 800, see Orlandi, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, 72–73.

⁵² R. Flower, *The Irish tradition* (Oxford 1947) 7. Orchard, *Pride and prodigies* 107 also draws attention to the influence of the Aeneid (II. 557–58) where it is told that the huge headless corpse of Priam is found at the sea-shore. However, this story makes no reference to a conversation with the dead person.

⁵³ At an intermediary story points an episode in a late Irish text, mentioned by Orchard, *Pride and prodigies*, 107, which seems to repeat the story in the *Liber monstrorum*, but does not speak of a wound in the head, but of a cut-off head.

combination is found earlier, as the appearance in the *Liber monstrorum* suggests. The report in the *Liber monstrorum* also makes clear that the giant girl in the *Vita of Brendan* is probably based on a very old insular, perhaps Irish, source.

4. All stories report, more or less elaborately, that the giant(ess) is in hell. The Irish stories and the *Vita of Malo* state a detail not found in the *Vita of Macarius*, that is, that the dead man begs to be baptized, or is offered baptism, to obtain his release from hell.
5. The choice to go either to the place where he/she came from or to heaven (or to go back to life) is found in the *Third Vita of Patrick* and in the *Vita of Brendan*.
6. The declaration that Christians are punished worse in hell than heathens is found in the *Vita Macarii* 7. The wading through the sea and the impediment in the form of wind and tide is also only found in the *Vita of Malo*.

On the basis of this survey it seems highly probable the author of the thirteenth-century Middle Dutch version of the *Voyage* used the *Vita of Malo* and the *Vita of Macarius* (or a similar story inspired by the latter *Vita*). However, apparently he also used earlier insular or Irish sources mentioning a heathen skull or a giantess wounded in the head, and probably also a source (like the *Vita of Brendan*) in which the dead person is given the choice between going to heaven or returning to the place where he or she came from.

The drowning and the refusal of baptism.

So far two motifs from the episode of the heathen giant in the *Voyage* have remained unexplained: the story which the giant tells about his life, which he spent wading through the sea as a robber, his death by drowning in a flood, and the refusal of the baptism offered. Like nearly all other elements in the episode of the heathen giant the motif of the wading through the sea after a life as a sea-robber probably has its source in Irish tradition. The Irish vitae in the tradition of Patrick say that the dead man tells the story of his life and the *Vita of Brendan* calls the girl one of the inhabitants of the sea. In the *Vita of Malo* the giant wades through the sea, pulling the ship at the saint's request until the rising water stops him. Here again the *Liber monstrorum* seems to be the oldest source. According to this text, 'giants used to grow to such an enormous size that it is said that all the sea were passable to them on foot'.⁵⁴ However, none of them gives a story like the one in the *Voyage* about a life spent wading through the sea with the express purpose of robbery. This story may have been inspired by Irish tales about Fomores, giant monsters, who were said to come out of the sea or to sail from islands on the other side of the sea. They demanded tribute from Ireland, asking for offspring, corn and milk. Their name may be explained as 'ghostly giants', from *mar* = mare

⁵⁴ Orchard, *Pride and prodigies*, 286–87.

(compare *nightmare*). They represent the eternal enemies of Ireland and in folklore they became ordinary robbers and pirates.⁵⁵ It seems likely that the author of the *Voyage* also derived this aspect of the giant from insular, probably Irish, stories. Hard to place but nonetheless intriguing with regard to the giant pirate in the *Voyage* is an episode in the Welsh Life of St. Cadoc, written about 1100.⁵⁶ According to this life, Saint Cadoc resuscitates a giant during his visit to Scotland. The giant, Caw, tells him that he used to raid the Northern parts of Britain. According to other eleventh-century stories, Caw is the progenitor of numerous saints, of whom the most famous is St. Gildas.⁵⁷ St. Gildas had a reputation as an authority on questions of morals and monastic discipline, and in this capacity he appears in the *Vita of Brendan*. Two versions of the *Vita* have the story that Brendan's behaviour causes the death by drowning of one of his disciples. Brendan is sent to England, to receive his punishment from St. Gildas.⁵⁸ It is not impossible that this tale about a trip to England may be connected with an episode in the *Vita S. Davidis*, where a voyage by Brendan to Wales on the back of a sea-monster is described.⁵⁹ All this information points in the same direction: Wales, with its face turned to Ireland. The *Vitae* of Cadoc, David and Gildas all originated, or were actually written, in Wales. The three saints are known for their Irish connections. The scarce details suggest that Brendan travelled towards the Welsh coast, perhaps on his way to St. Gildas. Kenney suggests that 'the Brendan Legend seems to have passed to the continent of Europe by way of 'Britain' (i.e., Wales-Cornwall) and Brittany.'⁶⁰ It seems likely that not only Brendan, but also the motif of the resuscitated heathen giant travelled eastwards from Ireland. It is hard to say whether the author of the *Voyage* derived the detail of the plundering giant direct from Irish or from intermittent British or Breton sources. However, the ultimate provenance of the motif seems to be Irish. The theme that the giant is drowned in a storm probably derives from the Bible. In Genesis 6,4–8 we are told:

[paraphrase] In those days [the days of Noah] there lived giants on the earth, because the sons of God had had intercourse with the daughters of men, who bore them sons. They were the famous men of the old times. And Jaweh, seeing how evil increased, decided to sweep away humanity from the earth by means of a flood, except for Noah.

⁵⁵ See on *Fomores* E. H. Ahrendt, *Der Riese in der mittelhochdeutschen Epik* Diss. Rostock (Gustrow 1923), esp. 21–33; on their name R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert* 2 parts in one vol. (Halle 1921), esp. 64; on *Fomores* in folk-lore D. Edel, *Helden auf Freiersfüßen: 'Tochmarc Emire' und 'Mal y kavas Kulhwch Olwen.'* *Studien zur frühen inselkeltischen Erzähltradition* (Amsterdam 1980) 106.

⁵⁶ "Vita Sancti Cadoci": "The life of Saint Cadog." A. W. Wade-Evans (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* (Cardiff 1944) 24–141, esp. 82–85.

⁵⁷ R. Bromwich (ed.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff 1978) 301–02.

⁵⁸ *Vita Brendani* 2, chap. 81–85 and *Vita Brendani* 3, chap. 14–15. *Vita Brendani* 3 has been edited as "Vita S. Brendani Clonfertensis e codice Dubliniensi", P. Grosjean (ed.), in *Analecta Bollandiana* 48 (1930) 99–121.

⁵⁹ J. W. James (ed.), *Rhigyfarch's life of St. David: the basic mid twelfth-century Latin text* (Cardiff 1967), esp. 17.

⁶⁰ J. F. Kenney, *Sources*, 412. See this work, p. 176–80 for the place of origin of the *Vitae* on St. Cadoc, St. David and St. Gildas.

This is the story of the deluge, which only Noah and his companions in the ark will survive. The second motif, the refusal of baptism, cannot be traced. On the contrary, most stories say that the dead person begs to be baptized, in order to be released from hell. The giant's argument that Christians suffer greater pains in hell than do heathens clearly derives from the *Vita of Macarius*. However, the link with the refusal of baptism and the giant's fear of a second death is found only in the *Voyage*. It would seem that nearly all the elements in the episode of the heathen giant may have been derived from insular, and probably from Irish tradition. The author of the *Voyage* probably combined stories from his sources without taking much notice of the logic of the newly created tale. It is most peculiar, for example, that Brendan is said to have found a head, when later on the giant tells him he was drowned. Equally odd is the fact that the giant speaks before he is resuscitated. Moreover, the episode contains some double motivations. The giant was a heathen and a robber. Although emphasis on his paganism suggests that this is the reason for his sojourn in hell, his robbery adds a motif for his suffering after death. There is also twofold motivation for the refusal of baptism: the giant does not want to be baptized, because he fears the consequences of a sinful life as a Christian, and because he fears dying a second time. Seemingly the author of the *Voyage* has joined all known stories about the resuscitation of a pagan head and the drowning of giants together to form a new story. The logic of the resulting text does not seem to have been his major concern.⁶¹ It is more likely that he intended to create a story which, by means of an accumulation of arguments, would impress his audience and put them in the right mood for following Brendan's further adventures. This leads us to the meaning of the episode.

III THE MEANING OF THE EPISODE OF THE HEATHEN GIANT

For which purpose did the Middle Dutch adaptor insert the episode of the heathen giant in his story? The most important information on the intentions of the author of the Middle Dutch *Voyage* with regards to this episode can be derived from elements which he added to his sources or changed. As we have seen, such elements are the drowning of the giant in a flood after a life as a pirate, and his refusal to be baptized because of his fear of punishment for a sinful second life and of an – elaborately described – second death. By means of the addition of the first element, the drowning in a flood, Brendan's voyage is connected with the story of Noah's survival of the deluge. Brendan sets out like a second Noah. He has his ship, as the text states, built after the example of Noah's ark.⁶² The giant was drowned in a flood like the Biblical giants from ancient times, symbols of sinners and pagans, who perished in the deluge.⁶³ From the beginning of the story the different fates awaiting Christians and heathens is made clear in this way by means

⁶¹ For a discussion of the *Voyage* author's method of compilation and the lack of logic of his text, see Strijbosch *De bronnen*, 237–44.

⁶² As is stated in C lines 98–100, M 94–96, P 164,9.

⁶³ See J. H. Winkelman, "Proloog en expositie van de Middelnederlandse Brandaan", *Leuvense Bijdragen* 77 (1988) 411–34, esp. 422–24. For other examples of giants as exponents of pride see Orchard, *Pride and prodigies* 58–84.

of the exemplary lives of the heathen giant and the Christian Brendan. The same frame of mind accounts for the second change, a remarkable one with respect to the sources: the giant's refusal of baptism. Maartje Draak is probably right when she writes: 'The baptism of the heathen surely was the original point of the motif. Doubtless the refusal is [. . .] a consequence of twelfth-century eschatological refinement [. . .]. The refusal of baptism is not a glorification or defence of the heathen point of view: it is the ultimate expression of the fear that medieval people should have where the punishments in hell are concerned.'⁶⁴ This addition impresses on the audience its privileges and duties as Christians. The giant refuses baptism by referring to the more severe punishment of Christians in hell. 'If I were baptized and sinned again', the heathen giant says, 'I would be in a worse plight than I am now.'⁶⁵ Another renewal with respect to the sources is the elaborate description of the terrors of dying. In his refusal of baptism the giant expresses a profound fear of a second death. 'All things are transitory', he says, 'except for heaven and hell.' In an imaginative way his twofold motivation to refuse baptism reminds Brendan and the audience with which prospect before them they should live their lives. Christians know God because they live in the age of mercy. Unlike pagans they can reach heaven, on condition that during their lifetimes they hold themselves aloof from sin and corruption. To clarify the meaning of the episode, L. Peeters points at the importance of the discussion between Brendan and the giant about the different punishment of Christians and pagans in hell. He connects this discussion with the interest in disbelief, heresy and eschatology, which is apparent both in the Macarius legend and the *Voyage*. 'Would it not be possible that the disbelief which raised its head about 1100 AD on the continent plays a part in the way matters are represented precisely in the Middle Dutch and Middle High German Brendan versions?'⁶⁶ The German scholar J. Winkelmann also emphasizes the role of disbelief. 'The giant provides an exhortative example [to the audience] and demonstrates where disbelief and pride can lead.'⁶⁷ In the discussion with the heathen giant it is made clear that pagans are in hell. 'Worse than the fate of those who did not know God, are circumstances in hell for those who denied God or did not do His will', says the giant. A more outspoken warning addressed to saint Brendan and the audience cannot be imagined. They are Christians and do know God. If Brendan on his voyage does not recover his faith, terrible torment awaits him in the Hereafter. The same will happen to those members of the audience who, in their turn, are reluctant to believe the marvels which Brendan saw. According to Winkelmann, fear of death and hell as expressed by the giant, function so as to 'guide reception. The episode of the speaking skull forms a part of the whole deterrent which is to prevent an attitude of disbelief in the reception of the story [. . .]. The skull, afraid of a second death and referring, as it does, to the horrors of punishment in hell, is only an example of heathen disbelief. Christian disbelief on the part of members of the audience who have their agony of death in

⁶⁴ Draak, *De reis van Sinte Brandaan*, 220.

⁶⁵ C lines 217–28.

⁶⁶ Peeters, "De Reis van Sente Brandane", 29–34, quotation at 34.

⁶⁷ See Winkelmann, "Proloog en expositie van de Middelnederlandse *Brandaan*", 427–29.

front of them, will lead to even worse suffering in hell.’⁶⁸ Both researchers seem to base their interpretations on a misunderstanding of the function of disbelief. Peeters connects Brendan’s disbelief with the giant’s. Winkelman even connects the disbelief with which the audience of the *Voyage* regards the wonders described in the *Voyage* with this heathen disbelief. In both cases two completely different kinds of disbelief are treated as if they were the same thing. However, Brendan never denied God’s existence, he only did not wish to believe that all the marvels he had read about were true, and the same reaction may be expected from the more sceptical minds in the audience of the *Voyage*; although the text suggests a similarity between the two, the denial of God’s existence is not the same as the denial of the existence of certain marvellous occurrences. Besides, as both researchers stress, heathen disbelief is something completely different from Christian disbelief. Moreover, Winkelman’s presentation of the giant’s attitude seems more negative than the text justifies. He connects the giant’s disbelief with pride. But the heathen giant does not refuse baptism because of pride, but out of fear. He is more like an unhappy miserable person than a fear-inspiring sinner. The giant is in hell, but it is suggested that the reason for this sad fate does not originate in his sins so much as in his condition as a heathen to whom Christian mercy did not yet extend. The arguments which the giant advances to justify his fear of a second life and death sound plausible and underline the privileged and responsible position of Christians. The heathen giant functions as an edifying example rather than as a warning. Christians live *sub gratia*. They can reach heaven, with the help of God’s mercy. On the other hand they are obliged, more than heathens are, to live exemplary lives, in the awareness of the hour of death which awaits them. By inserting the episode of the heathen giant before Brendan’s voyage actually starts, the Middle Dutch author of the *Voyage* has given Brendan’s adventures a position in the perspective of the History of Salvation. The giant is a representative of heathens, those who did not know God and are for that reason reprobated. Brendan’s voyage leads through a creation which, after the coming of Christ, is characterized by mercy. As a second Noah Brendan will be saved in his ship. God’s mercy offers him, as it does all Christians, the opportunity to escape from eternal damnation. The *Voyage* is centred around questions about God’s mercy and the Afterlife. As a rule sinners and heathens go to hell, righteous Christians await Heaven.⁶⁹ But between these opposites there is an obscure area where God’s mercy works miracles. This area must have fascinated the author of the *Voyage*. It led him to raise questions like: ‘Is there any mercy for Christians who are starting to doubt or for those who committed horrible sins but did penance before their hour of death? And what about those who are already in hell, and heathens? Where do they go after death?’ The episode of the heathen giant fits in perfectly with this series of questions. It clarifies that for heathens the only possibility of salvation is baptism and a new life, and it stresses the possibility for Christians to be saved, by means of a righteous way of life and of God’s mercy. Christians should keep their gaze

⁶⁸ Winkelman, “Proloog en expositie van de Middelnederlandse *Brandaan*”, 427.

⁶⁹ See C. Strijbosch, “Een reis naar inzicht: *De Reis van Sint Brandaan* tegen de achtergrond van twaalfde-eeuwse theologische opvattingen over zonde en genade”, *De nieuwe taal* 81/6 (1988) 526–43, esp. 528–31.

fixed on their hour of death and their fate in Afterlife, in order to reach heaven. With his story the giant prepares the audience of the *Voyage* for the themes that shape the story that is to follow: the consequences of man's actions and behaviour in this life and of God's mercy for circumstances in Afterlife.

IV CONCLUSION

1. The episode of the heathen giant did not form part of the original *Voyage*-text O. On the basis of data derived from the stemma, patterns of rhyming couplets in the transitions between episodes, and textual logic it seems probable that the episode was inserted in C/H, the thirteenth-century Middle Dutch ancestor of C and H.
2. The thirteenth-century Middle Dutch scribe of *Voyage* version C/H borrowed elements from the episode of the heathen giant not only from the *Vita of Malo* and the *Vita Macarii*, but also from earlier, very often insular or, more specifically, Irish sources, in which the finding of a gigantic head or a giantess wounded in the head is mentioned. It is possible that he also borrowed from Irish stories on pirates. Further elements are added from the Bible. Parts of these sources have been joined without much consideration for the logic of the text.
3. The refusal of baptism, plus the arguments given for this refusal, are new elements which are original to the *Voyage*. These changes give an indication of the meaning of the episode. The episode of the heathen giant puts Brendan's voyage in the perspective of the History of Salvation and prepares the audience for the themes governing the story: mercy and the Afterlife.

In short, the thirteenth-century Middle Dutch adaptor of the twelfth-century *Voyage* of Saint Brendan inserted the episode of the heathen giant, assembling elements from – sometimes very old – Irish or Anglo-Saxon sources, fused with new elements to make it fit in with his own intentions and the wider framework of his story. His use of Anglo-Saxon or Irish stories shows that not only for the twelfth century Rhinelandish author of the *Voyage* of Saint Brendan but even for his thirteenth century Dutch successor, insular, and especially Irish literature formed a well-known and living tradition.

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