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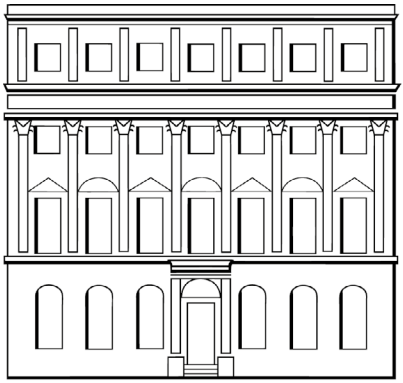

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For the corrected and expanded version of this lecture, see 'Fakten und Fiktionen: Das Fegefeuer des hl. Patrick und die europäische Ritterschaft im späten Mittelalter', in Ernst Bremer and Susanne Röhl (eds.), *Jean de Mandeville in Europa. Neue Perspektiven in der Reiseliteraturforschung* (Munich, 2007), 111–63; subsequently republished in Werner Paravicini, *Ehrenvolle Abwesenheit: Studien zum adligen Reisen im späteren Mittelalter* (Ostfildern, 2017), 31–82 and 566–70 (addendum).

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Fact and Fiction
St Patrick's Purgatory and the European Chivalry in the Later Middle Ages

by

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Fact and fiction – the relationship between these two realities is a theme that occupies us again and again, and more and more, when dealing with the past. By distancing ourselves from the search for truth, because it is not to be found, we discover something new: the tireless ability of each present to create for itself a corresponding past. I don't want to deal with this problem as such in a general way here, but to try and see how it played out in a quite specific individual case. It was more than twenty years ago that I first came across St Patrick's purgatory during my work on the travelling nobility, and my inaugural lecture at the University of Mannheim dealt with this topic, although the text has never been published. So now I have a wonderful opportunity to look at this curious case again, thanks to the kind and gracious invitation by Professor Hagen Schulze to talk to you today. One could say: from inaugural lecture to annual lecture. At that time St Patrick's purgatory was known to only a very few people on the Continent (and to some of them it may still remain a mystery, which indeed it is). But in the meantime much has been published on the topic, and the time has now come to sum it all up, and to look at the outcome in the light of more recent research.

If we accept that purgatory, as a third place between heaven and hell, does not exist, then we will find it even more difficult to believe that a person can enter it while still alive, in the here and now – though not actually *here*, but in Northern Ireland, Ulster, the County of Donegal, on an island in Lough Derg or 'Red Sea', the entrance on the island called Station Island, supervised by a priory on neighbouring Saint's Island. There is hardly any older map of Ireland on which this place is not marked, and as early as 1413 it appeared on an Italian one. On Martin Behaim's *Globus* of 1492 *St. Paterici Fegefeuer* is actually the only Irish entry. Since the end of the 12th century it had

been asserted that living people could see the hereafter *corporalibus oculis*, the idea was immensely attractive, was believed in to a greater or lesser extent by a huge number of people – and then it all stopped. How did this come about?

The Tractatus

Around 1180 or 1190 a monk at the Cistercian abbey in Saltrey, Huntingdonshire, wrote the so-called *Tractatus de Purgatorio s. Patricii*, a version of what he had often heard c.1170/1180 from his fellow Cistercian Gilbert, Abbot of neighbouring Louth Park. Before 1155 Gilbert had apparently spent two and a half years in freshly (though not completely) conquered Ireland, in order to found a monastery there. What he knew about the purgatory was based on what he had been told by an Irish knight, Owein, who had been assigned to him by an Irish ruler and had served him as a lay brother for two years. So, at third hand the monk from Saltrey reports, firstly, on the theory, initial story, and ritual of St Patrick's purgatory, and, secondly, on its practice based on the experiences of that knight Owein (or Oengus O'Brian, as he was thought to have been called at the beginning of the 15th century). He was supposed to have done penance there at the time of King Stephen of England, that is to say between 1135 and 1154, probably 1146/47, for deeds committed during the war in the King's service. This is how the story starts off: In order to promote his work of conversion, St Patrick (in the 5th century) prayed for a miracle that would show the Irish heathens the torments of hell and the joys of paradise. I quote:

> The Lord led St Patrick to a desolate place. He showed him a round pit (*fossa)* that was dark inside and told him that anyone who spent a day and a night in this pit, forearmed with true remorse and faith, and with just intent,

> would be purged (*purgetur*) of all the sins they had committed throughout their life and would see there not only the torments of evil-doers but also, if their faith were steadfast, the joys of the redeemed.

Patrick, so the story goes, immediately built a church on this spot and installed regular canons there. But the pit, 'which is in the cemetery beyond the western façade of the church', he had enclosed by a wall with doors in it. And he entrusted the keys to the prior of the church, so that no one would dare to go in without his permission. He ordered that the accounts of the pilgrims who soon started to swarm there should be written down and kept in the monastery:

> And because a person is cleansed of his sins there, the place was called *purgatorium*; and because it was shown to St Patrick before anyone else it was called *Purgatorium sancti Patricii*.

The monk from Saltrey then describes the *consuetudo* of such a visit, unchanged since St Patrick's time, and uses the pilgrimage of the Knight Owein, who was atoning for his sins, to exemplify this ritual point by point. Almost as soon as Owein is shut into the cave his tour through the underworld begins. These are the most important stations:

> Owein goes into the depths and comes to a hall, similar to a monastery, where monks dressed in white inform him that calling the name of Christ will save him from all dangers, which is what happens. Demons arrive immediately and surge towards him. Once he has fended them off they lead him through the purgatory one after the other to four broad fields, where he sees people being tormented in all sorts of different ways – by fire, but also by cold. In the fourth field he

recognises people he knows from this world, but does not say their names. He also sees the wheel of fire with souls being broken on it and then comes to something that the demons call the 'bath house', where people are dunked into liquid metal – the graver their sins, the deeper. He then experiences a storm which hurls the people from a mountain into an ice-cold river and the well of fire that throws the people up into the air in sulphurous flames. Finally he comes to the river of hell, spanned by the bridge to the hereafter, barely the width of a finger. But faith in God makes it become wider with every step, so that Owein reaches earthly paradise, through which he is led by two archbishops. He sees the entrance to heavenly paradise, wants to stay, but has to turn round and follows the path back to the hall, and arrives at the exit at the very moment when the prior of the monastery opens it from outside.

Its literary success

The monk of Saltrey's tract enjoyed enormous literary fortune. No less than c. 150 manuscripts of the original Latin have been found so far and just as many vernacular versions. In the 13th century the legend of St Patrick's purgatory found its way into Latin encyclopaedias, exempla-collections and saints' books, for example those of Caesarius of Heisterbach, Vincent of Beauvais, Etienne de Bourbon, Jacobus de Voragine, whose *Legenda aurea* was the most popular, most-translated book of saints' legends in the Middle Ages, and was also included in the English chronicles of the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries. As early as c. 1208 Marie de France translated the *Espurgatoire de saint Patrice* into French, which we know, incidentally, from only one single manuscript. But there are at least

seven other French verse versions with eight manuscripts, and 15 manuscripts of a French prose version. We know of middle English verse and prose versions from the 13th century, and of a Leonese translation; there is a translation into Catalan (dedicated to a noble lady by a secular lawyer) of 1320; from the end of the 14th century we know of translations and editions in the Netherlands and in Germany. And even in the 15th century French, Catalan and German versions were still being printed.

The report of the pilgrimage in the *Visio Georgii* of 1353, which will occupy us later on, founded its own literary tradition of St Patrick's purgatory, especially in the Bavarian-Austrian-Bohemian area, with 17 Latin manuscripts, a translation into Czech and no less than four German translations with 24 manuscripts, some illustrated, spread all over the place and as far afield as the church library of Michelstadt in the Odenwald. The report by Louis of Auxerre of 1358 is also available in an Italian translation and the Catalan report by Ramon de Perellós of 1397, translated several times into Provencal in the 15th century, was the start of an even more significant tradition in Spain that led to dramas about St Patrick's purgatory by Lope de Vega and Calderon. Shakespeare alludes to it in *Hamlet*; Ariost, Rabelais and Erasmus use it in their works. It crops up in popular books like *Fortunatus* and the knight Malegeis around 1500, and at the end of the 14th century it is alrèady in the Italian knightly romance named *Guerrino il Meschino*. A hundred years earlier it is certain that Dante also knew the *Tractatus*, but did not borrow more than a few motifs from it.

Admittedly the *Tractatus* and its derivatives were not actually the most widespread vision of the hereafter in the Middle Ages, as was thought at the time. More than 160 manuscripts are known of the *Visio Tnugdali* or 'Vi-

sion of Todal' written by an Irishman in Regensburg around 1153, far more than of the *Tractatus*. But in the period when the sources become more plentiful, from the 14th century, it is quite clear that almost everyone had heard of and read about St Patrick's purgatory. Now the manuscripts were no longer just to be found in monasteries, but also in lay libraries. Let me remind you of the Leonese translation of 1320. In 1386 the Infant of Aragon asked Ramon de Perellós in Paris for the text of a knight's report of the purgatory and in 1394, having become King, he gave a translation to his sister, the Countess of Foix, as a present. The *Visio Georgii* was read by Austrian nobles and Viennese patricians, and when the opportunity arose they tried to learn more about it from eye-witnesses. In England Froissart questioned Sir William de Lisle who had been in Ireland in 1394 with Richard II and had ridden to St Patrick's purgatory with other nobles, a detour also made by some members of the French expeditionary army in Scotland in 1385. William Caxton, the printer, talked about St Patrick's purgatory with the mayor of Bruges in the 1470s, knight Jan de Baenst, and with an Irish canon from Waterton. The Bohemian noble Leo of Rozmital asked questions about it on his travels in England in 1466, as did the Breslau citizen and knight Nikolaus von Popplau in 1483, though without daring to go quite as far as Ireland. The companions of Archduke Ferdinand made enquiries about it of their hosts when they were forced to go ashore in the small harbour town of Kinsale south of Cork in 1518 on their way from Castile to Flanders.

The Visio Georgii

For a hundred a fifty years there was just the monk of Saltrey's text and its derivatives. Then suddenly something new came along. The *Visio Georgii* of 1353 emerged,

supposedly depicting a journey of atonement made by the Hungarian knight George Crissaphan or György Krizsafán, undertaken on foot and with only one servant. Having committed many sins in the Neapolitan wars of the house of Anjou (which also ruled in Hungary and Naples), this mercenary knight sought and found redemption in St Patrick's purgatory. The report has many curious features. Firstly, no one has so far managed to identify this traveller, nor his family. Given the wretched state of the Hungarian-Neapolitan records this could be a coincidence, were it not for something else. It says that the man initially sought to save his soul at the *curia* in Avignon, then as a pilgrim in Santiago de Compostela and as a hermit in nearby Cape Finisterre – but in vain. Only St Patrick's purgatory *in finibus mundi* possesses the power of redemption. This is a classical topos by which the value of a sanctuary is enhanced in the competition between places of pilgrimage – in which of all Christianity's top spots only Jerusalem is missing, Avignon having taken over from Rome. The pilgrim is received with numerous honours by the local religious and secular authorities and later given a farewell. When he arrives at the cave the three heavy stones that block its entrance – stones that have not budged for thirty years – move of their own accord at the sign of the cross. But we know that the Purgatory was already widely known of before that, and that at least *one* noble pilgrim, who died in 1352, had visited it. In the visions described there are now striking contemporary references: the writer gets his own back on the Franciscans and Dominicans (at the *curia* the dispute about mendicant orders had flared up tremendously); the wanderer to the hereafter comes to the gate of paradise, but is not allowed to look in (the dispute about the *visio beatifica* had been a topic amongst theologians, and especially at the *curia*). Then heavenly embassies are sent

to the archbishop of Armagh (about lifting the interdict on a major harbour town, which can only have been Drogheda), to the Pope, to the kings of France and England (who had been split by the Hundred Years' War) and to the Sultan of Babylon, that is to say Egypt.
One particular series of documents gives the report special credibility, namely six of them, precisely dated to the period between 7 December 1353 and 22 February 1354, and reproduced word for word, which testify to Georg's journey in a seemingly incontrovertible way. They were written by the Prior of St Patrick's purgatory, the Bishop of Clogher, the Prior of the Knights of St John in Ireland, and three by the Archbishop of Armagh. I am particularly eager to collect documents like this of such high documentary value for a work on written records of the travelling nobility. A lovely ensemble. But: is it genuine? No parallel records confirm their legal existence. This could perhaps be explained by the fact that the corresponding archbishopal register is lost. But the documents all come from Ireland, from the archbishop's sphere of power. In other cases we have at least the (indispensable) letter of safe-conduct from the English king, or some other piece of evidence; here they are missing completely. In the case of such a highly-placed personality one would expect them to have been registered. The very fact that the Irish documents were integrated to such a huge degree into the report of the visions is what calls its authenticity into question. And at the *curia*, knowledge about the Hungarian nobility was supposedly not very great.

Questions about the person of the archbishop, the primate of Ireland, help us a bit further. He was called Richard FitzRalph, born in Dundalk of English descent, an educated theologian, a figure known at the time, who played an important role at papal Avignon, the centre of

Europe, took a strong stance against the mendicant orders in the dispute, and indeed in the question of the *visio beatifica*. We know that he spread the story of the *Visio Georgii* to the *curia* via his nephew of the same name. And we also understand why he did so: it was for the sake of his arch-diocese, to promote Ireland's only supraregional place of pilgrimage, which he wanted to give European status. Maybe not only the vision is a fiction, but the account of the journey with all the documents as well?

I know that my argumentation rests solely on plausibility and the *argumentum ex silentio*. One single external document could bring it crashing down. If this Knight George really did exist, and I generally tend to believe the sources rather than distrust them, then other people must have seized upon his journey and made a story out of it, in the way that was most useful to them. And seeing how successful it was, they were quite justified.

The French Louis and Malatesta the Hungarian

The next report that has been passed down, the travel account by the 'French knight Louis from the town of Auxerre', also known as *Lodovycus de Sur* (= Auxerre) is authenticated in a different way. Here too we find precise dates: on 17 September 1358 he was in the purgatory; on 1 January 1360 (or 1361 in the new style?), in Rome, he dictated his recollections of it to a Franciscan from the monastery of S. Maria in Ara Coeli and gave the following information: *Aperiens oculos vidi dominum Malatestam Ungarum de Arimeno* – 'When I opened my eyes I saw the Lord Malatesta, the Hungarian from Rimini'. Other versions of the text add: *cum familia magna*, with a large entourage. This man can easily be identified. He is Galeotto Malatesta 'Guastafamiglia' from the family of the lords of Rimini. On 17 December 1347 King Louis of Hungary, of

the House of Anjou, had knighted him on the market square in Rimini and given him his unusual name. And there's more: for this Malatesta and also for his noble companion (others do not mention documents of this sort) the squire (and humanist) Niccolò de' Beccari from Ferrara, King Edward III presented a testimonial letter to Westminster on 24 October 1358 concerning the visit to St Patrick's Purgatory, in which letters by the royal justiciary of Ireland, the Prior of Lough Derg *et etiam aliorum auctoritatis multae virorum literae* are mentioned. Here we have external confirmation as the Archimedean point. Malatesta really was there. But does this also prove that this Louis was there too? Couldn't this be a particularly refined version of fiction that uses elements of indisputable reality in order to seem more authentic? And it does not help much that at the end of his account Louis of Auxerre says that he will be damned if he has not told the truth. But, who could be interested in another fiction? Louis can also be identified, though not with complete certainty: he could have been Louis de Chalon, the younger son of the Count of Auxerre in Burgundy, even if this person was not actually knighted until 1364. One reason for his travelling to England could have been that his grandfather Jean II was imprisoned in London, after being taken prisoner at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356. So, not fiction, as it seems, but coincidence. But we still have the problem of the visions.

Ramon de Perellós

A particularly crass example of this can be seen in a case that occurred a generation later. Ramon de Perellós, a native of Catalan Roussillon, and a Baron splendidly introduced in France, set off in 1397. Here too there is an Archimedean point, the English letter of safe-conduct of 6 September 1397. But although we hope to read of new

visions in his account, all we get is a verbatim translation of the *Tractatus*, with only one addition: In the purgatory, he says, he saw a Franciscan friar from Gerona, a nephew of his who he didn't know had died – a masterstroke, to increase the credibility of the account – and above all King John I of Aragon. Everything points to the fact that Perellós embarked on the entire journey in order to be able to write that he saw and spoke to King John I of Aragon in the purgatory and not in hell: King John, his lord and close friend, had died suddenly in 1394 without confession or the sacraments. Because of this his advisors were put on trial, including Perellós, who was staying at Avignon. His pilgrimage to Lough Derg seems to be a form of penance and political exile; the report, written in his native tongue, an act of self-defence.

Drawing such bridges between the here-and-now and the hereafter is one of the topoi of visionary literature. We know of it from Dante's work. The knight Owein in the *Tractatus* saw some of his contemporaries in the purgatory, without naming them; Georgius saw there (1353) noble friends and acquaintances, his father with three of his brothers, a *domicella*, to whom he had entrusted his jewels (all these as demons), and then in the purgatory his mother, acquaintances and friends and the recently deceased rulers Robert of Naples (d.1343), Philipp VI of France (d. 1350) and Alfons XI of Castile (d. 1350). Much the same applies to the accounts by William of Stranton of 1408 and Lörinc Tar, the similarities in Stranton's version being particularly striking: Local Yorkshire saints appear to him and hurl bitter accusations at him; he sees a priest whom he had known; his own good works and heartfelt sacrifices aid him in the other world.

Lörinc Tar (Laurentius Rathold de Pászthó) and Antonio Mannini

The journey undertaken by Laurentius Rathold de Pászthó whom I have just mentioned is not only the best documented of all, but his account is even supplemented by a parallel Italian description, which makes it a particularly informative source. Laurentius, also called Laurenz, Lorenz and, using the name of his lordship, Lörinc Tar, is once again a Hungarian, but this time one who is well documented and well known. He was a diplomat in the service of King Sigismund of Hungary, later Roman king and emperor, and a high steward of his wife, Queen Barbara of Cilli. Since he used the pretext of a pilgrimage in order to conduct negotiations on behalf of his lord in Venice n 1413, it is possible that things were similar here. In order that the account of his journey could be written in Latin, he takes into his service in Dublin an 'imperial' notary. In this case we have: King Sigmund's general letter of recommendation, specially for Santiago and the Purgatory (which once again crop up together here), already written on 10 January 1409 and reproduced in the registers of the archbishop of Armagh; the testimonial letter by the Prior of the Purgatory of 12 November 1411, included in the certification by the Archbishop of Armagh of 27 December, a copy of which has also survived in one of the Archbishop's registers, and where there is also an entry granting him a father confessor; and finally the exit-permit granted by Henry IV of England, issued in Westminster on 2 April 1412 and preserved in the Chancery Rolls of the time. The dossier is fairly comprehensive and unquestionable, even if the English entry permit is (as yet) missing.

The parallel account comes from the pen of Antonio di Giovanni Mannini. This Florentine merchant, who was 'eking out an existence' in Dublin (A. Esch), had joined up with Lörinc Tar and on 24 February 1412 recounted his experiences in the Irish capital to Corso di Giovanni Rustichi, another Florentine, in London. A copy, given to his brother Silvestro Mannini whom he visited in Florence in 1413, exists in extracts in the family's *Ricordanze*. The letter is a text of exceptional quality, which no other hand has interfered with and given literary form after the event. In any case Mannini was sufficiently educated to be able to quote Dante. From this text we know that he was a genuine penitent. By means of this journey and other pilgrimages he sought to deflect the misfortune that had befallen him and his family. For 12 years earlier, in 1399, the deposition of King Richard II of England had plunged the Mannini bank into bankruptcy, and removed it from the lucrative business of transfers to the *curia*. And so the last of the four requests he makes in the 'hereafter' (the same number as we encounter in the *Visio Georgii*) is that 'I should regain my honour and status and that of our family, like we had before'. According to the oracle, he was supposed to found a church of St Mary in Dover; but whether he ever did so we do not know.

Lörinc Tar, a sensible man, equipped himself not only with numerous relics for his journey to the hereafter, which he hung around his neck, and with a *libellus* of the seven penitential psalms, but also with candles, of which he burnt exactly nine in the darkness.

Mannini, on the other hand, as his detailed letter shows, was terrified almost beyond endurance. When a 'bird of death' flew up from the island which he was approaching by boat, rowed by a canon from Lough Derg, then his hair literally stood up on end. Clumsy as

he is, he almost capsizes the boat shortly before reaching land, plunges into the water, and then experiences his first miracle when his companion pulls him out. This brush with death weakens him to such an extent that he can no longer walk unaided. When the cellar door has opened, and the canon has warned him, as he must, that many have not returned, some have been thrown up dead on one of the other islands, his heart almost stops and his hair stands on end again. *Lagrimando forte, ed alta voca chiamando la misericordia di Dio* (Sobbing violently and calling for God's mercy at the top of his voice), he now climbs into his cellar – and the first thing he sees is a giant black spider, which is only repelled by calling upon Christ. Here we get a feeling for the extraordinary tension and self-mastery required of the devout person by this pilgrimage. And also, indeed, for the unintentionally comic aspects of it.

Those who didn't see anything

For the problem, after all, is that there wasn't actually anything to see and nothing happened. But was it conceivable that a person could realise that there was nothing going on after everything that had been told, was written in the accounts and was ritually impressed upon them on the spot? Was it at all possible to admit disappointment and to testify to it in public? These people were, after all, seeking respect and salvation.

From 14th and 15th century accounts of journeys we learn that the spiritual exercises on Saint's and Station Island largely corresponded to the report in the 12th century *Tractatus*. In Lough Derg there were fixed customs, legitimised by that text, which we can now see quite clearly. Three warnings about the dangers of the enterprise. Two weeks of prayer and fasting with only bread and water. A *requiem*, repeated several times, dur-

ing which the candidate lies on the floor like a corpse with arms folded, or even has to crawl into a cataphalc covered with a black cloth. The pilgrim makes his last request and says where he would like to be buried. He gets undressed (the pilgrim is barefoot and bareheaded) and puts on a three-fold white tunic without belt or cap. 24 hours in the purgatory, then another two weeks of prayer and fasting. Occasionally the full programme was reduced. Tar and Mannini came in November, when it was terribly cold. The Prior allowed Tar to fast for just five days because of *debilitas corporis*, but he still had to endure the regulation 24 hours in the purgatory, lightly clothed as he was, while his less robust companion Mannini only had to fast for three days, and was allowed a mere five hours in the purgatory. Guilbert de Lannoy said that he was actually only in there for two to three hours. And there is no mention of fasting afterwards. The prior seems to have been content with a *Te Deum*, at least when it came to pilgrims of this sort.

But it is not as if belief in purgatory as such, and in St Patrick's purgatory in particular, was universally accepted. The Orthodox Church consistently rejected purgatory, as did the Hussites. The Viennese theologian Heinrich von Langenstein was, like Nicolas Oresme at Paris, a convinced opponent of 'Purgatory' and others were equally critical. It could all be explained by natural causes, or otherwise was the product of the visitors' imagination. And indeed we do have news from several pilgrims who were there, but still remained sceptical.

When travelling through England on horseback in 1395, Jean Froissart, the great historian from Hainault, took the opportunity to ask Sir William de Lisle what this business with the Purgatory was all about. Sir William, who had been on a royal expedition to Ireland the previous year and had visited the spot, willingly gave this

information: Yes, he and his companion, another English knight, had been shut in there over night; their heads had become quite warm and they had sat down on the steps, and then fallen fast asleep for the night. Had they had visions in their sleep? Yes, *en dormant ils entrerent en ymaginations tres-grandes et songes merveilleux, et veoient, ce leur sembloit, en dormant trop plus de choses que ils n'euissent fait en leurs chambres sur leurs lits* – 'in their sleep they entered the realms of great imagination and wonderful dreams and saw in their sleep – so it seemed to them – far more than they would have seen in their beds in their rooms'. When it was opened up again in the morning, they went out *et ne nous souvint de chose que euissions veu, et tenions et tenons encoires que ce soit toute fantosme* – 'and we couldn't remember anything that we had seen, and we thought, and still think, that it was all fantasy'. This was the judgement of a lord well-tested in war – he dismissed his dreams with a wave of the hand, but he did nevertheless ride there.

Likewise another much-travelled knight, this time from Walloon Flanders, and in the service of the Duke of Burgundy – Guilbert de Lannoy. He described his visit himself. By 1414 he already wanted to ride to Ireland to the Purgatory, but was taken prisoner in England on the way. It was not until 1431 that he managed the journey, being sent as an envoy to the King of Scotland. He lists the stations of his journey, names rulers and borders, observes the poverty of the country and also describes the features of the island and the location of the cave, estimates its dimensions in feet and compass-points. And what does he write of his experiences: 'at the lower end of the hole (*trau*), where I was shut in for two to three hours, there is, as one might call it, an abyss leading to hell, but St Patrick blocked it with a stone which is still there'. That is all. Nothing about visions or apparitions.

What Guilbert de Lannoy, who had seen a lot of the world, discreetly does not mention is finally talked about towards the end of the century. Two people questioned by Caxton around 1475 in Bruges, declared that they had seen nothing unusual:

> I haue spoken with deyuerse men that haue ben therin / And that one was an hey chanon of Waterford, which told me that he had ben theirin .v. or vj. tymes / And he sawe ne suffred no suche thynges / he saith that with procession the Relygious men that ben there brynge hym to the hool and shette the dore after hym / and than he walketh groping in to it / where as he said ben places and maner of cowches to reste on / And there he was alle the nyght in contemplacion and pryer / and also slepte there / and on the morn he cam out again / other while in their slepe somme men haue merueyllous dremes et other thing sawe he not / And in lyke wyse told to me a worshipful knight of bruggis named sir John de Banste that had ben therin in lyke wyse and see none other thing but as afore is sayd.

Finally, in 1494, an Augustine canon from the Dutch monastery of Eemstein had the courage to draw the obvious conclusion when, in fear and trembling (*tremens et horrens*) he spent his night in the Purgatory and waited in vain for demons and purgatory. Not at a loss for a solution to the problem, he concluded that now that the Irish had been converted, superfluous miracles had ceased, and he denounced Lough Derg to the Pope as an enterprise designed solely to extract money from believers. We can well imagine that all the religious and secular lords demanded money from the pilgrim on his way or at least expected presents – the first one to say so is that member of the strictly reformist congregation of

Windesheim who mentions in his account with great indignation that he had to pay everyone: the Bishop, the Irish Prince, and the Prior.

His protest was successful, since in 1497 the cave was destroyed by order of the Pope, which we only know from his anonymous report and from a contemporary entry in the Annals of Ulster – so far no confirmation has been found in the Vatican Archives. Indeed the cave was destroyed several times over, for the last time in 1780. But the pilgrimage still exists today; the only difference is that the entrance to the cave has been replaced by a night's wake in the locked church. An attitude of expectancy, clearly based on either reading or hearing the old pilgrims' accounts, can also be discerned in the case of William of Stranton in 1409. He goes searching for the bridge to the hereafter, so it says, and does not find it. Or the account of 1518 about the statement of an Irishwoman who was in Lough Derg and expected a journey to the hereafter, but remained in the cellar. Lough Derg itself naturally preserved this pressure of tradition. In the Prior's certificate of 1411 for Lörinc Tar it states explicitly that he had been in the *spelunca, in qua fuerunt sanctus Nicholaus* [thus the *Legenda aurea*] *ac Georgius filius Grifani militis de partibus Ungarie* [thus the *Visio Georgii*] *et Eugenius dictus obrian de Anglia* [thus the *Tractatus*]: the old texts, the 'precursors' in the literal sense, were present, not only on the spot but all over Europe.

Purgatory and St Patrick's purgatory

What is striking is that the great literary success of the *Tractatus* did not immediately give rise to a European pilgrimage. We do hear, around 1200, of yet another journey to St Patrick's purgatory, dated around 1170, but the author of this account, a prior in London, was again an Irishman.

Around the middle of the 14th century it suddenly all changes. A French chronicle from the last quarter of the century mentions in its obituary for the Lord of Beaujeu in Beaujolais, who died outside Calais in 1352, that he had been in the *espurgatoire de Saint Patrice*, and gives information, acquired via his squire, about the visions he saw there. George, the Hungarian, went on his journey in 1353. Then, around 1358, we have the account of the journey of Louis of Auxerre and the certificate from King Edward III for Malatesta and his company. And so it goes on through the 14th and 15th centuries, where the only things worth mentioning are that in 1400, on his return, the Lord of Brederode in northern Holland founded a St Patrick's chapel in Zandvoort, near Haarlem (there is an older parochial church of St Patrick in Rouen), that the town council of Antwerp twice imposed a punitive pilgrimage to St Patrick in Ireland in 1410, that a nobleman from Savoy, Jacques de Montmayeur, arrived there around the middle of the century and also knight Leonhard Vetter, an Ulm patrician of the time of Maximilian I, and gained particular fame from this journey. Five other accounts of journeys have survived, and we alreadyknow all of them: Ramon de Perellós (1397), the English cleric William of Stranton (1409), Lörinc Tar and Antonio Mannini (1411) and Guilbert de Lannoy (1431). What we must not forget is that the Irish chronicles do not mention the pilgrimage to St Patrick's purgatory until the end of the 15th century, and as far as individual pilgrims go – only one French knight in 1516, who is entertained and given presents by one O'Donnell, an Irish chief, and then proceeds to show his appreciation by means of a huge siege-gun, which is forthwith put to use.

The story of the Irish Purgatory can and should now be seen in relation to the story of purgatory in general. The

dates – 1180/1190 as the start of the literary success in Europe and ca. 1350 as the sudden extension of the pilgrimage beyond the British Isles – these dates are very telling. The idea of purgatory as a third place between heaven and hell, a temporary hell, in which the souls are periodically comforted by an angel of the Lord, is quite familiar to us, but is by no means as old as we might think. More than twenty years ago Jacques Le Goff showed – despite certain justified criticism of detail – that the term 'purgatorium' only comes into common usage in the 1170s, and indeed in the Cistercians' writings. The *Tractatus* is one of the earliest explicit texts and is probably what helped the term to become well-known. It is the Cistercians who localised purgatory, so that no sooner had the idea of purgatory taken shape, than it was already possible to visit it. The cave on Station Island really did exist, just like the hole in the wall of the Château d'If in the Bay of Marseille, through which the hero of Alexander Dumas' novel, the Count of Monte Cristo, made his spectacular escape.

The other date, ca. 1350, can also be seen in relation to the history of piety. The oldest representation of purgatory so far, which, moreover, describes it explicitly as St Patrick's Purgatory, comes from the year 1346. It was discovered in 1974 in a monastery of the Umbrian Todi. In seven places of torture all those are punished who have committed one of the seven deadly sins. Research on the Comtat Venaissin and on the region round Toulouse has shown that here purgatory does not crop up in documents of practice, especially wills, until some time between 1333 (Avignon) and about 1360 – that is when it came to attention of laymen for the first time, as it were. This already happened before the great plague of 1348, precisely the time when the European pilgrimage to St

Patrick's purgatory started. The *Visio Georgii* corresponds very precisely to a simultaneous change in piety – and underpins and uses it very skilfully if, as I suspect, it is actually a deliberate piece of propaganda.

The correlations go even further. To the question often posed in the visions as to how the souls in purgatory can be helped, wanderers in the hereafter in the second half of the 14th century regularly receive the answer: by masses. In reality this corresponds to the years 1340-1420 which saw the emergence of funds, brotherhoods, chapels for the souls in purgatory and an unprecedented flood of new masses, culminating in the 25,000 founded by the Lord of Langoiran in Bordelais in 1338, and the 50,000 founded by the record-holder, the Captal de Buch, in 1369. Purgatory had changed: it was no longer a notion entertained by theologians and writers; it had become a firm article of faith for laymen.

Written records of travelling noblemen

So if we now look at the European pilgrimage that emerged in this way in the European context, many different elements can be observed. First of all, the degree to which the travelling nobility needed written documents. Pragmatic written evidence, which can be reconstructed, and indeed has partially survived, accompanies the nobility on the move – to some extent is what makes travelling possible at all. Even if the record of the *Visio Georgii* is a fake, then it still proves that such letters of safe-conduct and certificates were common currency, even expected. That this was indeed the practice is illustrated by those pieces that are undoubtedly genuine. But: I have never heard of a letter of this sort written by a ruler from western or central Europe to an Irish chief. Such letters were only ever sent to the King of England, the nominal ruler of Ireland, and to princes of the same rank. In 1397

Ramon de Perellós brought letters to England from Charles VI of France, the Duke of Berry and the Duke of Burgundy specially addressed to King Richard II. Those who issued them in Ireland were always the religious institutions, the Archbishop of Armagh, the Bishop of Clogher and the Prior of the monastery that supervised the purgatory. Copies of such letters are to be found here and there in the Archbishop's records, where they have survived. No one has so far checked what is in the records of the royal English chancellery, apart from the three pieces published in Rymer's *Foedera*. And there must be more to be found in the 14th and 15th-century papal records.

Religious Experience and Test of Knightly Courage

What we learn, or are supposed to learn, about the pilgrims' motives constantly points to a serious religious affair, to particular guilt and particular sorrow. As in Rome or Jerusalem or Canterbury – the only really international place of pilgrimage in the British Isles apart from the Purgatory and, to a lesser degree St Andrews in Scotland – there was no fighting against heathens or heretics like there was, for example, in Russia, Granada and North Africa, so that numerous clergy and non-noble people also came as pilgrims. Nonetheless, the Purgatory became the object of a noble pilgrimage. There is no difficulty in understanding this. It was all about the costly effort involved in going on a journey to the very edge of the known world (costly in a dual sense) – it meant overcoming fear, putting oneself to the test in the greatest danger. The pilgrimage to St Patrick's Purgatory was a test of courage, and as such respected by the world of the nobility, striving, as it always was, for the individual to be put to the test and for boundaries to be constantly overstepped. In *Orlando Furioso* Ariost stirringly describes it as one of the *audaci imprese*, as a

courageous venture, and this is also how it is perceived and described in other, older texts. The Cistercians did not make a monk, burgher or peasant into the first hero of the purgatory, but a knight. It is as if, when writing about it, they had a quite specific sort of readership in mind. It is not just that Owein is a *miles*, a knight, he also has the knight's true manly spirit (*vere militis animus, virilis animi miles*); he expects the demons, wondering which one of them will be the first to challenge him. He is a *miles christianus* and does not forget the weapons of the religious chivalry. His descent into the purgatory is a *nova militia*, a *nova generis militia* - how could we fail to be reminded here of the text written by Bernard of Clairvaux fifty years earlier in praise of the Templars, *De laude nove militiae*, especially since Owein, having completed his penance in the purgatory, takes up the cross, then travels to Jerusalem, and later considers joining a monastic order. Admittedly the martial tones are somewhat less strident in Marie de France. But even the pilgrimage to Lough Derg described by Peter of Cornwall in 1200 on the basis of statements by the Cistercians is called a journey of a *quidam miles*.

The George of the *Visio Georgii*, who bore the name of the knight-saint par excellence, was likewise a knight of baronial rank. In the report by Louis of Auxerre it states similarly:

> I have dedicated myself excessively to acts of war, which is why I was soon involved in war games, in jousting, in duels, with the French, with the Germans, with the Italians, with various other nations, so that I shed a great deal of Christian blood, and fell prey to numerous other sins.

These were people with whom the European nobility could identify. It is significant that there is no evidence of a woman ever making the pilgrimage to the Purgatory, or

indeed any prince. Neither could be expected to expose themselves to such a danger.

It is certainly striking that nearly all those nobles we know of who travelled to the purgatory in their own names had already been elevated to the chivalry, while others travelled to Jerusalem or to Prussia to attain the honour of becoming a knight. Yet the moment before the battle with the demons was just as appropriate for elevation to the chivalry as the silence before hostilities on the battlefield. On Station Island, at the entrance to the purgatory, Ramon de Perellós knighted four of his companions, including two of his own sons, though we never hear of men being knighted by the Prior of the Purgatory. It is, of course, conceivable that he did so because a Franciscan regularly elevated men to the chivalry in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

The chivalrous-literary nature of the journey to Ireland was further underscored by the fact that the British Isles were most closely connected with the very quintessence of chivalry, King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. On their journey the travelling noblemen constantly recalled the Arthurian places and relics of the 'matière de Bretagne' that could be seen and visited in Dover and elsewhere. Remembering Lancelot, a beautiful French version of which he had once lent to his lord, and other Arthurian legends, Ramon de Perellós saw the Isle of Man as the estate of the 'King of the Hundred Horses' at the time of King Arthur. Indeed, in Dover he did actually visit preserved Arthurian relics: Gavein's skull and Karados' coat. Guilbert de Lannoy noted precisely the Arthurian souvenirs in Bambourough, Sterling and Carlisle. By the 16th century at the latest it was known that King Arthur, too, had been in St Patrick's Purgatory.

Ireland lay at the edge of the world, as contemporaries, even the Irish themselves, always stressed, and espe-

cially Gaelic Ulster, subject as it was to Anglo-Norman influence, and populated, so it was said, by virtual savages who had no knowledge of wine, who showed their private parts as readily as their faces, and who wore spurs on their naked feet. Just to go there at all was an achievement in itself. The route generally went via Dover to London, and then on to a harbour on the West coast of England, usually Chester, and then by ship to Dublin. After that it went North via Drogheda and Dundalk to the Archbishop of Armagh, and West to Lough Derg. Only Guilbert de Lannoy, who was coming from Scotland, made straight for Drogheda and then took the direct route via Kells to Lough Derg – or indeed the indirect route since he often had to dismount from his horse due to fallen trees lying across his path, which could have reminded him of the 'wilderness' between Lithuania and Prussia. The journey to St Patrick's purgatory was a complicated business: despite reducing the length of his penance it took Mannini three and half months to return to Dublin.

As far as we know, the pilgrims took away no tokens of their pilgrimage or written proof of indulgences. They seem not to have hung up coats of arms, there are not even any engravings, graffiti, wall-paintings of the sort that usually enhanced the appearance of places of pilgrimage (and of universities, inns, and spas) or, indeed, did not enhance their appearance – which is what contemporaries thought even then. But perhaps this is because nothing has survived. If the original cave still existed, no doubt it would look just like the former dormitory of the noble pilgrims on Mount Sinai: covered from top to bottom with identifiable coats of arms. The name of our Guilbert de Lannoy is still engraved in the wall there to this day. And other places were also regarded as access-points to the underworld: Mount Etna (where Arthur

waited for revival), the Lipari islands, Iceland, in other words, all places with volcanic activity and thus with visible proof of hell. In the case of the Sibyll's cave in the Apennines a French nobleman and author, Antoine de la Sale, who visited it in 1420, has even left us various copied inscriptions, amongst them his own motto.

If we look at the pilgrims of noble rank known to us, it further becomes clear that Lough Derg had become one of the destinations by which nobles could prove themselves – albeit not the main one. Whether it be Beaujeu or Malatesta, Perellós, Lannoy or Tar, Baenst or Montmayeur – these were all people to be encountered in Prussia or in the Holy Land, or at the front against the heathens in Spain or North Africa. They were all much-travelled, though certainly none of them as much as Konrad von Scharnachtal from Berne who spent his whole life collecting certificates of travel, of which some of the originals still survive to this day: unfortunately, the one for Lough Derg has been lost. Lörinc Tar immortalised the tokens he acquired on his travels above the entrance to the church he founded, and so did Oswald von Wolkenstein who put them on his portrait: he too had been in Ireland. The surprising journey by Malatesta Ungaro has a remarkable parallel in the journey to Prussia undertaken by Maso degli Albizzi of Florence in the winter of 1388-89. The further the distance (in this case to acquire knighthood by fighting the heathens), the greater the honour.

Witnesses are, perhaps, somewhat thin on the ground. For the journey to Ireland clearly always remained something special; no social season could be expected here as in Königsberg. Who could have organised a table of honour there like in Prussia or on Rhodes? But in this very context, the table of honour, we learn that people on the spot certainly knew if someone had come through adventures of this sort. In 1391 the Austrian knight Konrad von

Richardsdorf sat at the table of honour, and this is what is whispered about him in the *Ältere Hochmeisterchronik*:

> He was one of the most esteemed men in knightly business since he had travelled overland to the Holy Sepulchre. He also went with other knights to a hollow mountain, and stayed in there a day and a night. All the others died in there, but he came back. All his life he would never tell anyone what he saw or heard in the mountain.

What cave should this have been if not St Patrick's purgatory? At any rate the report by the French Louis suggests that people of rank certainly were to be found at Lough Derg. And Lörinc Tar had taken a herald with him on his journey, a person quite indispensable for spreading one's own fame. The fact that people travelled to the purgatory with a suitable entourage and not just a few servants and on foot, as the *Visio Georgii* would have it, also corresponds precisely to the habits of wealthy nobles in the European late Middle Ages, and not only then. Perellós ordered a retinue of 30 men and 20 horses.

Finally, the extent to which Lough Derg had become part of the canon of chivalrous practice is clearly shown by King Sigismund's letter of recommendation written in 1409 for Lörinc Tar, where it says: *Pro actibus militaribus exercendis et augendis diversa mundi climata perlustrare intendit*. (He intends to traverse various regions of the world to practice and increase his chivalrous deeds).

The same can be seen in numerous other letters of recommendation and safe-conduct of the time, which were given to noble travellers on pilgrimages and chivalrous or courtly journeys to other destinations. Lough Derg, solitary and remote, becomes both in myth and reality a part of pan-European history, to which this periphery – and in the early Middle Ages it was by no means a periphery – belongs just as much as the history

of the western and southern European centres with all their cultural treasures.

We do not know how many pilgrims visited Lough Derg in the course of the years. We can name but about 35 of them. If only we had that book mentioned in the *Tractatus*, a successor of which the papal nuncio Chiericati saw on Saint's Island in 1517! As he writes to Isabella d'Este, the names of the five pilgrims who had just climbed out of the purgatory

> *furno posti sul libro, che sta in chiesa, nel qual sono descripti tutti chi vano. Il primo fu descripto nel libro Guarino da Durazzo, qual io cresi esser fabula. Ma adesso ivi lho visto descripto antiquamente in un libre pergameno.*
> (were entered in the book which is placed in the church, and in which are inscribed the names of all who come there. The first name inscribed was that of Guarino da Durazzo, which I had believed to be a fable. But now I saw it anciently inscribed there in a parchment book).

This Guarino da Durazzo is none other than the hero of the Italian tale of chivalry *Guerino il Meschino*, written in 1391, who, it was said, had visited St Patrick's Purgatory. Now his name was there in the pilgrims' book – and fiction had become reality.

But the opposite path was also taken: from reality to fiction. Around 1394-1396 Thomas III, Marquis of Saluzzo, wrote, or dictated, a lengthy novel in Turin prison entitled *Livre du Chevalier errant.* In Fortune's Castle, in the palace of the 'Sièges de Sûreté', the travelling knight meets someone we already know:

> *Veez monseingneur Ungher Malateste de Rimeni, qui bon chevalier fu et desmesuréement ama la Viole Nouvelle, un citoyenne de Rimeni, qui de beauté les dames d'Ytalie passoit. Son mari l'apperceut; si la tua. Monseingneur*

Ungher ne pouvoit vivre sanz elle; en Enfer la cercha et entra par le Puis Saint Patrice et la la vit et parla a elle et s'en revint et mean bonne vie, et moult en raconta.

(Behold Lord Malatesta Ungaro of Rimini, who was a good knight and loved beyond measure Viola Novella, a citizen of Rimini whose beauty surpassed that of all the ladies in Italy. Her husband noticed this and so he killed her. Lord Ungaro could not live without her; he searched for her in Hell, entered it via St Patrick's cave, saw her, spoke to her and then came out again, lived a good life and told a great deal about it.)

According to this, in 1358 Ungaro Malatesta (d. 1372) did not descend into St Patrick's purgatory in search of salvation, but for the sake of love. A generation had gone by, but the Marquis of Saluzzo clearly still remembered this widespread story. Nothing was more prestigious in the culture of chivalry than ill-fated love and adventures in far-off lands.

Facts and Fictions

As we have seen, records such as pilgrims' books can also promote a fiction. Fiction and archive are by no means two separate worlds, and the truth cannot be saved by the latter. And anyway, which truth? But at some point – in this case the end of the 15th century – facts and fictions diverge. Myth gives way to sober reality, namely that there is nothing there and nothing happens. Or else the vision of that terrifying landscape, whatever dark dream may have called it forth, left a mark that was potentially life-threatening. The ever-sceptical Erasmus, in his *Adagia*, was already describing something of the sort: *Qui descendunt aiunt sibi ridendi libidinem in omni vita ademptam*. (Those that went down there say that the lost the desire

to laugh for their rest of their lives).

Fifty years later Froben Christoph Count of Zimmern (d. 1566) wrote in his family chronicles something remarkable about the husband of Anna von Zimmern who lived around the middle of the 15th century. A famous reader read this entry, Ernst Jünger. After the Second World War, on his return from France to the remote village of Kirchhorst near Hanover, he wrote on 7th of November 1945:

> Finished: the von Zimmern family chronicle. It is one of the books that can be re-read every year.
>
> In one of the first chapters St Patrick's purgatory is mentioned. It is located in a cave in Ireland, in which the torments of the damned can be seen. The husband of Anna von Zimmern, Hans von Gerol[d]seck, went there. When he came back he remained quiet and sad for the rest of his days, he spoke little and died shortly afterwards.
>
> We hear the same sort of thing today about people who have been held for a while in horrible places, then come back and die or commit suicide. There are aspects of the infernal that distress a man and rob him of his life-force – then he becomes like someone who has looked into a filthy kitchen and pushes his plate away.

Ernst Jünger was thinking of quite different places of torment from the one which the pilgrims to St Patrick's Purgatory hoped or feared to see. Here it was not fiction that prevailed, which could be ignored if necessary, but the unimaginable, the deepest fear, that had become reality. Admittedly, we have no need to fear such things here and now. Yet even in our relatively peaceful Europe this one unimaginable thing remains – that after life comes death, first of one's parents, siblings, friends, and

then one's own. As Odo Marquard never tires of reminding us, our life is short, a *vita brevis*, and our existence 'existence unto death'. We want to know what comes after that, yet we cannot experience it. Hardly surprising that the desire to know pushes itself into this gap and allows fictions to flourish which, for a time at least, satisfy our unquenchable curiosity about the hereafter, even in a dark cave in barren Ireland. We have no reason to smile patronisingly at our forefathers. We too have to face up to this question, in our own way, to the bitter – or merciful – end.

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Since an extended German version of this text with all the necessary apparatus will be published in the *Acta* of the conference *Jean de Mandeville in Europa. Neue Perspektiven in der Reiseliteraturforschung*, held on 15th and 16th March 2004 at the German Historical Institute Paris (Series *Mittelalter-Studien*, Munich 2005), it may suffice just to give a few recent titles to illustrate the sources used, and to add some others not yet cited. The basic work is *The Medieval Pilgrimage to St Patrick's Purgatory. Lough Derg and the European Tradition*, ed. M. Haren/Y. de Pontfarcy, Enniskillen 1988. K. [Strnad-] Walsh, *A Fourteenth-Century Scholar and Primate. Richard FitzRalph in Oxford, Avigon und Armagh*, Oxford 1981, is essential reading, and this author has since published other important articles, the most recent of which are: 'Pilger, denen Santiago nicht genügte: Spätmittelalterliche Bußfahrten zum Purgatorium Sancti Patricii', in: *Stadt und Pilger. Soziale Gemeinschaften und Heiligenkult*, ed. K. Herbers, Tübingen, 1999 (*Jakobus-Studien*, 10), pp. 69-108; '*... in finibus mundi.* The Late Medieval Pilgrims to St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg, and the European Dimensions of the Diocese of Clogher', in: *A History of the Dioceses of Clogher*, ed. Henry A. Jeffries (forthcoming), and (with E. Taddei) '*In finibus mundi.* Francesco Chiericati berichtet Isabella d'Este Gonzaga über seine Reise zum *Purgatorium Sancti Patricii*', in: *Innsbrucker Historische Studien* 23-24 (2003 [2004]), pp. 127-73 (I am most grateful to Professor Walsh, Innsbruck, for offprints and copies of Irish publications inaccessible in Paris). Other titles: Franco Cardini, 'Malatesta Ungaro al

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Translated by Jane Rafferty