

Imagining Paradise

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The focus of this paper will be on the lore concerning the nature and location of Paradise as represented in Old Norse texts, primarily those whose chief purpose is to inform or edify rather than to entertain. It will consider whether these texts suggest that there was a widespread understanding, among audiences reading or listening in the vernacular, of the distinction between the earthly and the heavenly Paradise, and whether the earthly Paradise was conceived of as being in some sense contiguous with hell, so that the one could potentially be accessed via the other (as Dante, for example, accesses first Purgatory and then Paradise on an imaginary journey via the infernal region, in the *Divina Commedia*). The conclusions drawn will then be used to cast light on the use of the Paradise motif in two Old Norse works of imaginative literature, *Eireks saga víðförla* and *Alexanders saga*.

Veraldar saga is an Icelandic work that stems originally from the late twelfth century and is extant in eleven manuscripts or fragments representing two redactions (Würth, 1998, 173-77). In describing the Creation and the beginning of history it locates Paradise in the uttermost east, far from the habitations of mankind but clearly conceived of as a real place in the real world (*Veraldar saga*, 1944, 5):

Ynðis stadr sa var gorr i avstanverpvm heimi er Paradisvs hetir. sa staðr er fiarliegr hardla þeim iorþvm avðrom er nv erv bygðar af monnvm.

In line with the biblical narrative (Genesis 2:10-14), it states that the stream running through Paradise is the source of four major rivers in the known world, here interpreted as the Ganges, the Tigris, the Euphrates and the Nile (*Veraldar saga*, 5). On the same page the saga notes that Paradise contained all manner of fruit trees (see Gen. 2:9), including the Tree of Life (*lifs tre*, see Gen. 3:22) and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (*froðleiks tre gods oc illz*, see Gen. 2:17), and that the first man was placed there (see Gen. 2:8). The narratives of the creation of Eve and of the Fall then follow, culminating in the human pair's expulsion and the setting of an angelic guard on the gates (*Veraldar saga*, 5-8, corresponding to Gen. 2:21-3:24). At this point the saga departs from the Old Testament narrative but alludes to Luke 23:42-3 by explaining that the consequence of these actions was that no human being entered Paradise after the departure of Adam and Eve until Christ brought to it the soul of the repentant malefactor who was crucified alongside him (*Veraldar saga*, 8):

En siðan rac hann þav i brot or Paradiso oc setti engla sina at veria þan stað með eldi brenanða sva at þangat kom engi maðr fyrr en Iesvs Christr leiddi þangat onð þiofs þes er lif sit let a crosinvm hia drotni.

This is important because it suggests that it is to this Paradise that the souls of redeemed Christians go in the first instance, and that the souls of the righteous who died prior to the Crucifixion went elsewhere; these are topics that will be given further discussion later in the paper. It should also be pointed out here that there is no implication in *Veraldar saga* that this Paradise is or ever was separated from the world in a radical way, although it is situated far from all inhabited lands; it is inaccessible, to all but the redeemed, simply because its entrance is guarded.

Another important work that casts light on the topic of Paradise is the Old Norse *Elucidarius*. The Latin original of this text was probably written in the early twelfth century by the so-called Honorius Augustodunensis (apparently a *nom de plume*); it rapidly achieved great popularity, being used to teach elementary Christianity chiefly to the unlearned laity, and in the course of the Middle Ages was translated into High and Low German, French, Provençal, Italian, English, Dutch and Swedish as well as Old Norse (*Old Norse 'Elucidarius'*, 1992, ix-x). The Old Norse version was in existence by c. 1200, this being the date of the earliest manuscript fragment, AM 674a 4to, which was written in Iceland but may have been copied from a Norwegian original (*Elucidarius*, 1989, xxvii). It agrees with *Veraldar saga* on the basic points: Paradise is in the east (*Old Norse 'Elucidarius'*, 1992, 1.69); Adam was placed there (1.68, but this text adds that he was actually created in Hebron, the place where he also died); and since the expulsion of Adam and Eve, the entrance to Paradise has been guarded by an angel (1.92). To this it adds an important though incidental detail concerning the creation of Eve, to the effect that while Adam was asleep in the Paradise on earth and the rib was being taken from his side, his spirit was taken up into another, heavenly, Paradise (1.70-71a):

Discipulus Huar vas kona scopob.

Magister Iparadiso ór riue souanda mandz. []

Discipulus Hui licr vas suefn sia.

Magister Gops ande nam hann up í himnesca paradi-sum. oc sa hann þa þat at christus oc sancta cristne mōnde berasc ór hans cyne.

Given the brevity of this allusion, it is likely that Old Norse audiences of *Elucidarius* were expected to be familiar with the distinction between the earthly Paradise and its heavenly counterpart. We are further told that immediately after the Crucifixion the souls of Christ and the repentant malefactor went to Paradise (1.160), but it is not made clear which of the two places is meant; whichever it is, however, no doubt the same place is to be understood when it is said, in 1.161, that Christ led to Paradise the souls of those whom he rescued in the harrowing of hell: *for hann þaðan meðr sigri ok leiddi i paradiz þan er hann tok abrot or helviti*.

The distinction between the earthly and the heavenly Paradise is made very clear in the section of *Stjórn* that constitutes a glossed and expanded paraphrase of Genesis and part of Exodus, a section that is likely to be Norwegian work from the early fourteenth century, as implied by the prologue to the whole compilation (see Jónas Kristjánsson, 1992, 143-44). In addition to giving the expected information about the trees and rivers associated with the Paradise in which Adam is placed (*Stjórn*, 1862, 31-2), the redactor states that Lucifer, on taking possession of the serpent prior to tempting Eve, was motivated by the wish to see Adam driven from the earthly Paradise as he himself had been driven from the heavenly (p. 34):

Ok fyrir þann skyldd at sua sem Lucifer uar brott rekinn af himneskri paradiz. aufundadi hann manningum at uera í iardneskri paradiz. uitandi þat at hann mundi þadan brott rekinn. ef hann gengi af guds bodordi.

One other point of interest in this text's treatment of the theme is that when Adam and Eve are driven out of Paradise and seek consolation in sexual intercourse with each other, their departure is characterised as entry into the exile of this world (p. 41):

Sem þau Adam ok Eua uaru brott rekin af paradiso i utlegd þessar ueralldar. þa leitadu þau til mannligrar hugganar.

Here the reference to 'this world' as the place they enter on leaving their previous home suggests that the earthly Paradise is conceived of at this point as being separate from the world we think of when we speak of the earth.

That the earthly Paradise is separated from the actual earth and yet is a real location is spelled out in MS AM 194 8^{vo}, in a passage that forms a preamble to *Leidarvisir*, which is an eye-witness account of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land by an Icelander, most likely Abbot Nikulás Bergason who died in 1159 or 1160 (Hill, 1993, 390). The section of MS AM 194 8^{vo} that includes *Leidarvisir* and its accompanying material was copied in 1387 according to a note on f. 33^v. Kålund (*Alfræði islenzk*, 1908-18, I xx-xxi) argues, on account of its appearance in union with *Leidarvisir*, that the preamble may well stem from the late twelfth century; but he does not set a latest possible date for the material except that of the manuscript. There is, however, some scholarly opinion that the most of the texts in AM 194 8^{vo} stem from the early thirteenth century at the latest (see Clunies Ross and Simek, 1993, 166). It is stated emphatically in the preamble that Paradise is neither on earth nor in heaven but is halfway between the two (*Alfræði islenzk*, 1908-18, I 3-4):

Paradisus heitir stadr, sa er eigi aa himnum ok eigi aa iordu, helldr er hann i midio lopte iamnær himni ok iordu, sva sem hon var sett af gudi.

Paradisus er XL milna hærri en Noa flod vard.

The passage continues with the statement that Paradise is square (*Paradisus er öll iamþng ok iambreid*), which suggests an association with the holy city, the new Jerusalem, which the writer of Revelation describes as descending from heaven after the new heaven and earth have been created and the old ones have passed away (Rev. 21:1-2) and which is said to be as long as it is broad (Rev. 21:16). The new Jerusalem is also like the Paradise described in the *Leidarvisir* material in that it does not experience night (Rev. 21:25), but it differs in that it needs no sun, since the Lamb of God is its light (Rev. 21:23), whereas the Icelandic text emphasises the presence of the sun and its great power (*Alfræði islenzk*, 1908-18, I 4):

Þar er hvorki hatr ne hungr, ok alldri er þar noitt ne myrke, helldr er hinn sami dagr avallt, ok skinn sol þar VII hlutum bjartari en i þessum heim, þviat þar kemr vid aull birti himintungla.

Here the phrase 'brighter than in this world' confirms what has already been stated, that the Paradise described is separate from the earth; but the detail of there being perpetual and invariant daylight further implies, if taken literally, that the separation is more radical than can be accounted for by the great altitude mentioned in the previous quotation – in short that this Paradise belongs to a different world. It is made clear, however, that this is the Paradise in which Adam fell, for we are told that in the midst of it is a wood that contains the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (p. 4):

sja skogr er i midri Paradiso. Eitt tre med avexti var bannat Adami, þar er i folgin vitra godz ok illz.

In this context it is stated, furthermore, that this is the place to which the souls of the redeemed go to await the Day of Judgement (p. 4):

Þangat skolo fara salur godra manna ok una þar til doma-dags, sidan er gud lauk upp, þa er hann leiddi þangat ond þiofs þess, er lif sitt lét aa crossinum.

It is also implied, despite what is said about the sun, that this Paradise occupies a location in physical space, albeit one at a great height above the earth, for the phoenix, the bird of Paradise, is described as flying habitually between the place and Egypt, accompanied on the return journey by lesser birds for as far as they can manage to fly (pp. 4-5):

Enn þa er sa enn fagri Fenix flygr upp or Paradiso á Egipta-land ok er þar xv vikur, þa safnaz til hans allz kyns fuglar ok syngia um hann á hveria lund. [] Þa er xv vikur ero lidnar, ferr enn fagri Fenix aprt til Paradisar. Allir fuglar fluga med honum, sumir fyrir nedan hann, en sumir fyrir ovan ok a hvora-tvegiu hlið. En þa er þeir mega eigi fara leingra, þa ferr hverr til sins heima.

After giving more details of the phoenix and its theological significance, the passage appears to make a fresh start and further confirms the reality of Paradise as a physical location by declaring it to be in the east (*i austri heims*) and by giving the usual information that the stream flowing through it is the source of the rivers Ganges, Nile, Tigris and Euphrates (pp. 6-7). What we therefore have in this text, which is one that purports to describe the world in geographical or quasi-geographical terms, is a composite account in which the Paradise where Adam fell, and where the souls of the redeemed await Judgement Day, is a real place connected with 'this world' to the extent that the four great rivers of the earth have their sources there, but dissociated from the world by its being situated at an unreachable altitude; at the same time the dislocation or transcendence is so great that this Paradise has either partly been confused with its heavenly counterpart or, more likely, has simply attracted to itself the imagery of perpetual day, which is more appropriate to vision-literature accounts of the new Jerusalem.

One of the most influential pieces of actual vision literature in the Middle Ages was the *Visio Pauli*, which was probably in existence in Greek by the mid third century and is best represented by a long Latin version from the fifth or sixth century (*The Apocryphal New Testament*, 1993, 616). This takes as its starting point 2 Cor. 12:2-4, where the apostle Paul, presumably referring to himself, says that he knew of a man who was caught up into the third heaven and into Paradise, and who there heard words which it is unlawful to utter. In a repetitious and somewhat confused narrative, the writer supplies an account of what the apostle supposedly saw. The work was translated into Old Norse in the twelfth century (Dinzelbacher, 1993, 706); for the following brief account, however, references are to a modern English translation of the Latin (*The Apocryphal New Testament*, 1993). The vision includes descriptions of the third heaven (p. 627), the heavenly Paradise (p. 628) and the city of Christ (p. 630) – which oddly enough contains rivers of honey, milk, wine and oil, identified as the earthly rivers Pison, Euphrates, Gion and Tigris (p. 630) – then of hell (p. 633) and of the Paradise 'in which Adam and his wife erred' (p. 639). Since the visionary moves about 'by the swiftness of the Holy Spirit' (p.630) it is unfortunately not possible to determine the spatial relations between these various places, if indeed they can be said to have spatial relations at all.

A quite different approach to Paul's vision can be found in *Páls saga postola II*, which exists in a manuscript written in 1325 although the passages quoted below have had to be supplied from a manuscript of the mid fifteenth century, due to the loss of a folio in the earlier copy (*Postola sögur*, 1874, iii and xix). At the point in the narrative where it is mentioned that the apostle was caught up into the third heaven and into Paradise, the saga writer makes a brief digression, lasting some two pages in the printed text, the chief purpose of which is to clarify what the terms 'third heaven' and 'Paradise' signify, in part by determining the positions of the places to which they refer. Hence the third heaven is that which lies beyond the first two, which are the sky and stary firmament (*Postola sögur*, 1874, 268):

En því er þetta kallað enn þriði himinn, at fyrst er talt loptið einn himinn, ok þar næst festingarhiminn, er ver siam himintungl a faust vera, ok var giorr annan dag viku, enn þriði er himinn, sa er yfir þessum er.

It is the true heaven, the place of eternal glory after the Day of Judgement (p. 268):

En því er himinriki enn þriði himinn, at þat er yfir þeim tveim, er aðr voru nefndir, ok sa Pall postoli himneska dyrð ok leynda luti eilifrar sælu, þeirar er vera skal eptir domsdags.

The Paradise where the souls of the redeemed await their final blessedness is understood to be a separate place, since the text continues:

En þat er hann [Páll] segir, at hann var leiddr i paradisum, þa glosa þat sva helgir feðr, at honum hafi syndir verit hvílldarstaðir, er rettlatra manna andir skolu hafa til domsdags.

The saga writer, however, immediately distinguishes this place from that where Adam fell, which he sets at an even greater height than was suggested in the *Alfræði* extract discussed above and which he locates in the east of this world. It should be noted that according to this text it is not to the Adamic Paradise but to the other that Christ took the soul of the crucified malefactor (*Postola sögur*, 1874, 268-69):

En þeir skyra sva, at i tvenningu se paradisus: su aunnur, er þessa heims er ok Adam var i settr, ok er þat land, er liggir i austurvegi, ok sva nauckuru hatt sem tungl gengr. [] En aunnur paradis er kaulluð hvílldarstaðr, sa er goðra manna salur hafa annars heims, sem aa visar sialfr drottinn Jesus Kristr i guðzspialli, þa er hann mællti i pisl sinni til illvirkians: Hodie mecum eris in paradiso.

Since the destination of the malefactor's soul is also declared to be the place to which the souls of the righteous dead were then brought after the harrowing of hell, there ensues a discussion of the place in which these souls had previously resided, which is understood to have been a pain-free zone in the infernal regions. This is defined as a third Paradise, one that is now deserted (p. 269):

En þessi staðr er stundum kallaðr at bokmali paradisus, en stundum limbus inferni. [] En sa staðr er nu eyðdr, ok hvar sem nu eru annars staðar salurnar i hvíll annars heims, þa heitir sa staðr paradisus.

There is no doubt that this third so-called Paradise is not merely contiguous with hell but actually a part of it, since the text continues from the previous quotation as follows:

Annarr staðr i helviti heitir purgatorium, þat þyðiz hreinsanarstaðr [] Enn þriði staðr i helviti heitir puteus inferni, þat þyðiz pyttir helvitis.

It is important to note that, of the texts so far discussed, only the last associates the name 'Paradise', used in a special sense, with hell. There is no suggestion in any of these works that the place where Adam fell, or where those redeemed by Christ await the final blessedness, or where the great rivers of the world have their source, should be thought of as adjacent to hell. There is some evidence, nevertheless, that Christians in the Old Norse world, as elsewhere, may have imagined that a bridge existed between hell and Paradise, by which certain people could pass from one place to the other.

The idea of such a bridge was popularised, if not invented, by Gregory the Great, whose influential and widely disseminated *Dialogi* (1924, IV.37) contain an account of how a certain unnamed soldier was lying near death when his soul was transported out of his body. The Latin text does not explicitly state where the soul was taken to, but the Old Norse translation, which is Icelandic and dates from the latter part of the twelfth century (Jónas Kristjánsson, 1992, 130), comments that 'things of another world' were revealed to the man (*Heilagra manna sögur*, 1877, I 250):

Þa vas oc ond riðara necqvers leid fra licama sinom, oc voro honom svndir annars heims hiutir, oc com aptr siþan til licams.

Following the original closely, the translation continues with an account of how the disembodied soul saw a bridge over a stinking river that had beautiful lands on the far side of it; people who were righteous were able to run across safely into the beautiful lands, whilst the wicked fell from the bridge into the foul water (p. 250, with some changes in orthography):

En hann sagði sva, at hann sa á micla, þa es brú vas yfir, oc ór þeirri á up lagði þoco svartá oc illan daun. En öþrom megin arennar voro fagrir staþir oc vellir blomaþafir ollom enom fegrstom grosom, oc vas þar ilmrv dvrliqr oc fiólþi liosa manna. [] En a brunni gærþisc su mannaun, at vandir menn fello i áena, es yvir vildo ganga, en þeir es svþpalausir voro, runno yfir bruna øruggir til ens fagra staþar.

Since the passage goes on to mention that the soul then saw the torments of a certain man called Petrus, *bundinn iarni i myrcom staþ* (p. 250), it is apparent that the near side of the river represents hell or Purgatory and the far side represents a place of blessedness, which may be Paradise but is not named thus.

A variation on the theme of the perilous bridge also occurs twice in *Duggals leiðsla*, the Old Norse translation of the mid-twelfth-century *Visio Tnugdali*, which was most likely commissioned in thirteenth-century Norway by King Hákon Hákonarson (Wolf, 1993, 705). In this account of a disembodied soul's journey through regions of the next world, two bridges are described, both of which are entirely within the region of suffering, and in each case the crossing of the bridge is itself a trial and torment that the soul is forced to undergo: according to the angel who accompanies the soul, the valley into which those who fall from the first bridge will plunge is the place where the proud are punished (*Duggals leiðsla*, 1983, 31; Latin text from *Visio Tnugdali* 1882 is at foot of page); and the second bridge, which is covered in steel spikes, represents a torment for thieves (pp. 43-44). After passing both of these trials the soul moves on through what is clearly hell, named as such (*helviti*) in a passage describing an encounter with Lucifer (p. 77). Eventually, however, the soul

and the angel pass through a gateway into a blessed region reminiscent of Gregory's beautiful land (*Duggals leiðsla*, 1983, 84-85, 681a text):

Epter þat geingu þau um stund og komu at garðzhliði er þegar laukzt upp fyrir þeim og <er> þau uoro inn komin þa sa þau en fegursta stad allan fullan blomandi grasa með godum illm og þar <uar> miog undarligt og uar þar otaligur salna fioldi og allar með fogru aliti og uar þar eingi not þar skein dagur iafnan og þar uar brunnur lifanda uaz.

In this vision there is no stinking river separating hell from Paradise, and no perilous bridge connecting them – this latter motif, having been deployed twice already, is notable for its absence in the passage just quoted. Every clear-headed person in the Old Norse world, who knew both *Duggals leiðsla* and the translation of Gregory's *Dialogi* or their sources, must therefore have understood that the works are symbolic and are different in their symbolism, or have conceded that they are inconsistent if taken literally. Any such people who also knew the tradition of cosmological lore discussed above must also have been aware that these literary visions are inconsistent with the supposed facts set out there, which do not include references to a bridge or gateway between hell and Paradise. (In this connection it should be noted that the Paradise equated with *limbus inferni* in *Páls saga postola II* would have been empty by Gregory's time and could never have contained the spring of living water mentioned in *Duggals leiðsla*, so it is not relevant to these texts even though it is located in the vicinity of hell.) For the woolly-minded or ignorant, however, *Duggals leiðsla*, like Gregory's anecdote, may have given the impression that hell and Paradise were somehow adjacent, and that a man who was able to enter one might potentially advance to the other.

It is evident from the above survey that the Old Norse texts which set forth lore concerning Paradise contain a good deal of variation and disagreement over details, and even over some major issues. Not surprisingly, in view of what is said in Genesis, there is concurrence over the fact that the Paradise where Adam ate the forbidden fruit is located in the east and contains the ultimate source of the four great rivers of the world; but *Elucidarius*, *Stjórn* and *Páls saga postola II* make a clear distinction between this place and the heavenly Paradise, whereas *Veraldar saga*, the material associated with *Leiðarvísir*, *Duggals leiðsla* and the translation of Gregory's *Dialogi* do not. The last two works, as vision literature, describe blessed souls in Paradise (or, in the case of the *Dialogi*, a paradisiacal land), but they do not equate this place with that in which Adam lived. *Veraldar saga*, however, states that the soul of the crucified malefactor was taken to the Adamic Paradise, whilst the *Leiðarvísir* material confirms this fact and adds that all the souls of the righteous go there to await Judgement Day; *Elucidarius*, which distinguishes between the earthly Paradise and its heavenly counterpart, does not specify which Paradise it is to which the souls of the righteous are taken, but *Páls saga postola II* states categorically that they go to a Paradise which is different from that in which Adam was set. *Veraldar saga*, furthermore, does not appear to represent (the earthly) Paradise as separated from the world in any radical way, though it is inaccessible because guarded; *Páls saga postola II*, in contrast, declares it to be 'of this world' but locates it at an immense height, whilst *Stjórn* implies that it does not fully belong to this world, and the *Leiðarvísir* material gives it a physical location but imbues it with other-worldly attributes. On the question of the

spatial relationship between Paradise and hell, *Páls saga postola II* locates a so-called Paradise, equated with *limbus inferni*, within the confines of hell, otherwise only *Duggals leiðsla* and the *Dialogi* anecdote, the works of vision literature, suggest that the two places may be adjacent to each other; and only the *Dialogi* passage speaks of a bridge between the place of torment and the home of blessed souls.

The contradictions and uncertainties in the lore concerning Paradise, as evidenced by the texts discussed above, would no doubt have been a source of frustration to anyone in search of exact doctrinal correctness, but would also have offered the benefits of freedom and ambiguity to those writing works of imaginative literature. Two such works will now be given brief consideration.

Eireks saga víðförla is an Icelandic work from about 1300 (Jensen, 1993, 160). In it we have an edifying but pleurably fantastic tale of a journey to Paradise – one that freely combines and modifies several of the motifs that have been set out in this paper. Eirekr and his companions journey east through India and through a country of darkness; having passed through a great forest, they come to a river spanned by a bridge that leads to a paradisiacal land (*Fornaldarsögur norðrlanda*, 1885-89, III 522-3):

Þá koma þeir um síðir fram ór mörkinni. Þá tók at íýsa ok ljóst at gera ok litu fyrir sér á mikla. Á henni var steinbogi. Öðru megin árinna sá þeir land fagrt með miklum blóma ok gnótt hunangs ok kendu þaðan sætan ilm. Þangat var bjart at lita. Öngva sá þeir hæð né hól né fjall á því landi.

That the land on the far side of the river is made up of level ground accords with the description of Paradise in the *Leidarvisir* material, which states that *þar er hvorki fjall né dalr* (*Alfræði islensk*, 1908-18, I 4). If it is indeed Paradise, then it has been reached simply by travelling eastwards in accordance with what is said in *Veraldar saga*, as discussed above; the difficulties that would stem from the immense height at which Paradise is set, in other texts, have been circumvented. The strongest allusions, however, are clearly to Gregory's *Dialogi*: although this land is flat whereas Gregory's has beautiful hills and dales, the two places share an abundance of blossom and a delightful scent; and there is the river with its bridge. The last two features of Gregory's text, nevertheless, are significantly altered in the saga: whereas in the *Dialogi* the nearside of the river is hell, in the saga it is merely a distant part of the earth (so the idea that hell and Paradise are in some way adjacent does not occur in this work); as Gregory tells his tale, furthermore, the people who try to cross the bridge simply slip off into the water if they are unworthy to enter the realm of blessedness, but in the saga the bridge is guarded by a dragon into whose jaws Eirekr runs (and so he never physically enters the paradisiacal land, as far as one can tell, though he is granted a visionary experience in which he is shown the real Paradise before he returns out of the dragon's mouth); finally, the river in Gregory's account is a foul and stinking stream, but no such motif appears in the saga. Eirekr in fact guesses that the river which separates him from the beautiful land is none other than the Phison, one of the four rivers whose source is in Paradise (*Fornaldarsögur norðrlanda*, 1885-89, III 523): *Þat kom honum í hug, at á sú mundi falla ór Paradiso ok heita Phison*. What we have in this saga, therefore, is an ambiguous and non-committal account that combines and modifies motifs from various geographical, cosmological and visionary writings

on Paradise; it is perhaps less notable for anything it says about the subject than for the imaginative freedom with which it uses the available lore.

Alexanders saga, which was probably composed by an Icelander for the king of Norway in the 1260's, is a translation of Walter of Châtillon's twelfth-century epic, the *Alexandreis*; it does not contain a journey-to-Paradise narrative, but an oblique reference to such a journey becomes a major crux in the action – one that prompts questions about the assumptions concerning Paradise that the audience might have brought to bear on the work. At the point in the story at which Alexander the Great has almost reached the full extent of his eastern conquests, we are told that his thoughts turn to searching for the source of the Nile (*Alexanders saga*, 1925, 142):

ioðro lage vill hann eptir leita hvar oen Nil sprettr vpp. er heiðnir menn
gatv margs til. en ðngir vissv.

Alexander never actually says that he wishes to find Paradise, much less to conquer it, but the audience would doubtless have understood that if he had led his army to the source of the Nile, Paradise is the place that he would have found; this is made clear earlier in the saga (p. 20) when it is mentioned that Paradise contains the source of the four great rivers of the earth. A little later Alexander tells his men that after conquering the whole of this world he will make war beyond its confines (p. 144):

'Pat er upp at kveða er ec hefe raðet fire mer. at iannan heiminn scal heria
þa er ec hefi þenna undir mec lagt allan'.

This statement, together with the resolution to find the source of the Nile, brings about Alexander's death because it incurs the wrath of the goddess Natura, who urges the Devil to destroy the conqueror before it is too late and he attacks hell in addition (pp. 146-7):

Nu stefnir hann futhavet sialft. oc etlar ef honom byriar at koma þar sem
Nil sprettr vpp. oc heria siðan iparadisum. oc ef þu gelldr eigi varhvga
við. þa man hann oc heria á yðr helvitis buana. Oc fire þvi gerðu sva vel
fire minar sacir oc þinar. hept hans ofsa oc hegnn fyr en siðar.

The juxtaposition of Paradise and hell in this speech may echo what is perhaps implicit in Alexander's resolution to seek the source of the Nile and to go raiding in 'the other world'. The question that arises, therefore, is whether the Old Norse audience of *Alexanders saga* would have been likely to see a connection between conquering Paradise and conquering hell. Is Natura's logic simply that a man who was strong enough to breach the first place would be strong enough to attack the second? Or is there an underlying assumption that access to the one would grant access to the other?

On the basis of the cosmological writings discussed above, the answer to the last question must be 'no'. None of these texts suggests that Paradise is adjacent to hell or connected to it, the exception being *Páls saga postola II*, which places one of its three versions of Paradise within the confines of hell itself – but this so-called Paradise is not the one that contains the source of the Nile and so could not be accessed via that river. *Duggals leiðsla* and the *Dialogi*, on the other hand, do give the impression that the two places are connected, though clear-headed people who knew both texts would have seen that the spatial relations suggested by such works are not to be taken literally. In particular, Gregory's image of the bridge between hell and Paradise may well have encouraged the unwary to give easy credence to Natura's assertion that Alexander might attack hell after annexing Paradise; more critical

thinkers, however, would have seen that though the image may lend force to her rhetoric it does not support the validity of her claims.

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