

Ideals of Christian Kingship

The Implications of *Elucidarius*, *Konungs skuggsiá*, and *Eiríks saga víðförla*

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This article examines three texts which, while thematically different, each exhibit an explicit interest in the location of a terrestrial paradise and other wonders, divulged through a didactic dialogue between a master and an apprentice.¹ It will be argued that the ideals of a good Christian and a good king, as represented in these texts, are the very same.² The texts in question are *Elucidarius*, *Konungs skuggsiá*, and *Eiríks saga víðförla*.

Elucidarius is a text which is considered to have been written by the theologian Honorius Augustodunensis in the late eleventh century, though the work itself modestly claims to have been written anonymously. It is a didactic text in Socratic conversational form between a *Magister* and a *Discipulus*. The *Discipulus* asks questions regarding creation, Hell, morals and virtues, to name but a few examples, and the *Magister* elucidates the problems set by the *Discipulus*. All of the questions are concerned with being an ideal, informed Christian. The four pillars of Christianity, the prologue to the work says, are sensibility, the glory of the apostles, the wisdom of the forefathers, and the wise

¹ Another comparable text is *Yngvars saga víðförla*, which is also greatly interested with geography and contains a dialogue between a master and a disciple very much akin to that of *Eiríks saga*. Yet its interest in the terrestrial paradise is not as explicit as in the other texts; it must rather be read between the lines and for this reason it has been left out of the present discussion. A closer comparison between *Eiríks saga* and *Yngvars saga* may be found in my doctoral thesis, *Skuggsjá sjálfsins: Skrímsl í lærdómshefð íslenskra sagnaritara 1100–1550* (Reykjavík; Hugvísindasvið Háskóla Íslands, 2017); cf. Haki Antonsson, “Salvation and Early Saga Writing in Iceland: Aspects of the Works of the Þingeyrar Monks and their Associates,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 8 (2012), 71–140.

² The relationship between Christianity and kingship in *Konungs skuggsiá* has already been argued for by A. Hamer, “Searching for Wisdom. The King’s Mirror,” in *Speculum regale. Der altnorwegische Königsspiegel (Konungs skuggsjá) in der europäischen Tradition*, ed. J. E. Schnall and R. Simek (Wien 2000), 47–62; and S. Bagge, “Old Norse Theories of Society. From Rígsþula to *Konungs skuggsiá*,” in ed. J. E. Schnall and R. Simek, *Speculum regale. Der altnorwegische Königsspiegel (Konungs skuggsjá) in der europäischen Tradition* (Wien 2000), 7–45.

concerns of mentors.³ *Elucidarius* existed in Old Norse translation already in the twelfth century, and it is this translation that will be discussed here.

Konungs skuggsiá (“The King’s Mirror”) is another didactic text, written in Norway in the middle of the thirteenth century by some unknown author who, by the same reasons of modesty given in *Elucidarius*, refuses to disclose his identity. It is the same kind of conversation as in *Elucidarius*, between *Sunr* and *Faðer*. The Son asks the Father all kinds of questions about kingship and trading, and also about reports of monsters inhabiting the sea around Iceland and Greenland, among other marvels. All of the Son’s questions are concerned with the ideals of kingship or useful information pertaining to it.

Eiríks saga víðfjörða is the story of a young man who sets out from Norway to find the terrestrial Paradise of Eden.⁴ On his way there he has a sojourn in Constantinople and has private sessions with the king⁵ who teaches him all that he knows in the same magister/discipulus kind of relationship as *Elucidarius* and *Konungs skuggsiá* portray. In this fashion, Eiríkr learns the truth of the Christian paradise and of the lands beyond, including the languages and the many strange people and monsters of the East. The main difference between the different dialogues is that the dialogue of Eiríkr and the king takes place within a narrative framework, whereas the didactic texts are strictly dialogues without narratives.

In summary, the first of the three texts deals with the ideals of Christianity, the second with the ideals of kingship, while the third text, a saga, is greatly influenced by both in that the relevant chapter deals with the ideals of both Christianity and kingship embodied in a single person: the Byzantine emperor. The fourteenth-century saga in this respect has its own relations to other texts which in themselves are interesting points of comparison. My aim here is to explore these connections and the implications the ideals of *Elucidarius* and *Konungs skuggsiá* have for the younger saga.

³ “Inn fyrsta stöpul reisir spámanna skynsemi, inn annan styður postola tign, inn þriðja eflir speki fedra, en inn fjórða festir vitur áhyggja lærifeðra.” Gunnar Harðarson (ed.), *Þrjár þýðingar lærðar frá miðöldum: Lucidarius, Um kostu og löstu, Um festarfé sálarinnar* (Reykjavík 1989), 45.

⁴ To the medieval mind the existence of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise was a fact, and in this regard visionary literature was quite realistic to its audience. Learned men seem to have been in basic agreement on the location of the terrestrial paradise, for example, Isidore of Seville, Hrabanus Maurus and Honorius Augustodunensis in his *Elucidarius*, who all agree that Paradise is located in the east. This location is more specific in Icelandic manuscripts such as Hauksbók and AM 194 8vo which are based on continental learning. Cf. Sverrir Tómasson, “Ferðir þessa heims og annars: Paradís – Ódáinsakur – Vínland í ferðalýsingum miðalda,” in *Tækileg vitni: Greinar um bókmenntir gefnar út í tilefni sjötugsafmælis hans 5. apríl 2011* (Reykjavík 2011), 362–64. On visionary literature in particular, see J. Wellendorf, *Kristelig visionslitteratur i norrøn tradition* (Oslo 2009).

⁵ Norsemen seem not to have made much distinction between emperors and kings, as emperors of Byzantium are frequently referred to as kings.

What are the ideals of Christianity? *Elucidarius* provides an answer by means of carefully putting questions against a carefully thought out set of answers. To the modern reader there is no question so outrageously out of this world that the Master does not know the answer to it, but to the medieval audience of *Elucidarius* the things described therein were very much real. Among these things is the location of the terrestrial Paradise (the same that Eiríkr víðförli seeks after having learned its location from the king), the reason for the creation of mankind and the exact location where it took place, the fall of Satan, why God allows evil to exist, and many other things. *Elucidarius* adheres to the theory of man as *microcosmos* within the greater *macrocosmos* of the world. In this respect, man reflects the world; it is even noted that Adam's head was made spherical like the Earth.⁶

This idea is rooted in Neo-Platonism and possibly reverberated in *Elucidarius* through older works of similar theological thought, such as the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville. While man may be one with nature, in this respect there was room for infractions in Isidore's view. Just as there is variation in individuals with particular cases of monstrous people, there were also to be found among nations entire races of monstrous people. Most importantly, the monstrous races were not to be considered contrary to nature, as nothing could exist except for the virtue of God.⁷ In man's microcosmic reflection of the macrocosm of the *Etymologiae* it is never said what these monstrous infractions meant for the world as a whole. Such a question would probably never have occurred to the author of *Elucidarius*. If it did, he certainly was not keen on answering it. It might stand to reason that had Honorius known of Isidore's point of view (or, in this case, the Icelandic translator or scribe), he would have added or adapted it for his own work, as medieval scribes were wont to do. On the other hand, it might indicate displeasure if he (or the scribe) knew Isidore's influential work and did nothing to incorporate it. There may be other reasons why Honorius did not include the information on monsters in his dialogue. Perhaps he, contrary to many other Christian thinkers, simply did not think it mattered. Whatever the reason for Honorius's neglect of Isidore's teratology, his Norwegian counterparts certainly thought it important enough. The one thing Honorius and Isidore certainly did agree on was that nothing could exist unless God had created it. Scandinavians seemed to have taken this particular theological stance at face value.

Much like *Elucidarius*, *Konungs skuggsiá* begins by claiming to be a book of virtues and good advice, but that the author has refrained from naming himself "at eigi bæri suo at. at nockur hafne þui sem til nytsemdar má þar j finnast annat huort firi hádungar sakir edur ofundar edur einshuers fiándskapar

⁶ "Höfuð hans var böllótt í glíking heimballar." G. Harðarson (ed.), *Þrjár þýðingar lærdar*, 55.

⁷ *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. S. Barney et al. (Cambridge 2010), 243–45.

vid þann er giordo,” “so that it will not happen that someone should oppose that which might be useful in the book either out of mockery or envy or some kind of enmity toward him who made it.”⁸ In essence it is the same prologue as the one in *Elucidarius*.

The Father of *Konungs skuggsiá* is no less than the greatest and wisest king among kings,⁹ and the Son, his heir, wants to make sure that he can fill his shoes when his time comes. The first advice is thus:

Ælska þu guð af ollu hiarta þínu oc af ollu afli þínu. oc af ollum mætti þínum. Nu skal guðe unna umfram hvætvætna en ræðaz guð hvært sinne er maðr girmiz rangra luta. oc lata þo laust ranga girn' firi guðs saker. þo at maður hafi dirfð a at hallda firir manna saker. Nu mæð þvi at þu leitar hvat stafrof eða grunnðvollr se til spæcðar nams þa er þætta æitt satt upphaf oc æcki annat. En sa er þætta næmr oc getir. þa misser sa æigi sannrar spæcðar oc allrar gæzko.

Love God with all your heart and with all your spirit and with all your might. You should love God beyond all others but fear him when you are tempted to enact wrongful acts, but always relent for the sake of God, even if you would dare it for the sake of men. Now that you seek what alphabet or basis there is to the attaining of wisdom then this and only this is its true beginning and nothing else, and he who learns this and remembers it will never be lacking in true wisdom and kindness.¹⁰

Besides these examples and the didactic manner of the dialogue between the master and the apprentice, there are other things linking *Konungs skuggsiá* directly with *Elucidarius*. There are chapters on Lucifer's rise and fall, of God's punishment of him, how he tempted Adam and Eve, on how to interpret correctly the word of God, and, finally, it contains a chapter on the relationship between the king and the Church, and his responsibility toward God. Even though Ármann Jakobsson did not compare the two in his book *Í leit að konungi* (“In Search of the King”),¹¹ and without listing all of the parallels between the different texts, it seems that the ideology of kingship present in *Konungs skuggsiá* is similar if not identical to the ideal king as presented in

⁸ L. Holm-Olsen, *Konungs skuggsiá*, *Norrøne tekster*, vol. 1 (Oslo 1983), 2.

⁹ The importance of royal virtues in *Konungs skuggsiá* has also been noted by S. Bagge, *The Political Thought of the King's Mirror* (Odense 1987), 57 and onwards.

¹⁰ Holm-Olsen (ed.), *Konungs skuggsiá*, 3.

¹¹ He does however note that “the emphasis followed by Christian kings in their role as monarchs is often reflected in king's mirrors (*konungs skuggsjár*), essays on royal virtues. Such a mirror was composed in the thirteenth-century in Norway, but the Icelandic *konungasögur* could be said to comprise in part a king's mirror, as in this genre the stories of individual kings are used to reflect upon the monarchy and kingly virtues.” Ármann Jakobsson, *Í leit að konungi: Konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna* (Reykjavík 1997), 314 (my translation).

the konungasögur according to Jakobsson's analysis, in which, among other things, he concludes that:

Royal virtues were both religious and secular. Kings were to protect and support the church in every way possible and serve as an example for others in Christian conduct. This they could do in a number of ways, such as going on crusades and building churches. In sagas including both heathen and Christian kings, the faith of the kings is naturally the central point. [...] The "worldly" virtues of kings are, however, even more important. In kings' mirrors and essays on virtues they are most often four in number: wisdom, strength, temperance and justice. The Icelandic konungasögur indicate that kings needed to possess all of them. In the 13th century European kings emphasized their wisdom and learning, and the same tendency is visible in the Icelandic konungasögur.¹²

As was mentioned earlier, there are parts of *Konungs skuggsiá* dedicated to unusual beings. The Son asks the Father about the marvels and the monsters that have been reported to inhabit the oceans around Iceland and Greenland. The Father replies that he is not particularly enthusiastic about the subject as those who have not seen such marvels for themselves are all too eager to accuse those who speak the truth of telling lies, even if what they say is true. The Father mentions that a book has arrived in Norway which is said to have been written in India and tells of the marvels in those lands.¹³ This has been taken to be an allusion to the legend of Prester John, probably the earliest extant reference to that legend in Scandinavian writing. The legend may be taken as a kind of precursor to the fourteenth-century *Book of Mandeville* which is extant in Old Danish translation since the early fifteenth century,¹⁴ by far the most popular book on monster lore in the late Middle Ages.

The Father then explains further that those in distant countries would deem them, too, to be strange and remarkable, just as Norwegians might think exotic peoples to be marvelous – but those who only believe what they have seen are fools, for just as the people of Norway exist, strange as they might seem to others, then others might exist as well equally strange to Norwegians:

Nu er þat ord flestra manna er heyra bokina at þat meigi eigi vera og þat sie eckj nema lygi er þar seigir j þeiri litlu bok. Enn ef giorla skal hier rannsaka j vorum londum. þá eru ecki hier þeir hlutir færri helldur en hinn

¹² Ármann Jakobsson, *Í leit að konungi*, 314–15 (my translation). His analysis in full on kingly virtues may be found on pages 191–239, et passim.

¹³ L. Holm-Olsen (ed.), *Konungs skuggsiá*, 13.

¹⁴ Available in the edition *Mandevilles rejse i gammeldansk oversættelse tillige med en vejleder for pilgrimme*, ed. M. Lorenzen (Copenhagen 1882).

veg eru ritadir. er iafnvndarligir muno þikia edur vndarligri j odrum londum. þeim sem ecki eru slijkir hlutir sienir edur dæmi til birt.

It is the opinion of most men who have read from that book that such things cannot be and that it is naught but a lie which is told of in that little book. But if a thorough inquiry should be made in our realm we should find there are no fewer things here than are reported there, things which would seem equally strange if not more strange in other countries, where such things have not been seen or spoken of before.¹⁵

This is perfectly sound logic and it illustrates a good understanding on the author's part of what is now the basis of monster theory.¹⁶ We need not go further than to the sagas of the people of Hrafnista to see that in Northern Norway – at least in the saga world – one's neighbours in the next fjord could potentially be inexplicably horrible trolls by the standards of one's own community, even if oneself were related to them and even if one's own name literally had the word 'troll' in it, such as in the case of Hallbjörn Half-troll.¹⁷ The ideal king thus not only knows of Christendom, of trade, of courtly manners – the ideal king also knows geography, anthropology and knows of scarcely explicable monsters.

Eiríks saga víðförla, preserved in Flateyjarbók (1387–1394), is the story of young Eiríkr who seeks the terrestrial paradise of Eden, but, as he is religiously ambiguous before he adopts Christianity, he will also settle for the so-called *ódáinsakr*, which may be presumed to mean the Elysian fields. Eiríkr assumes these places to be one and the same – and he is right, it seems. He does eventually find the paradise, but he cannot enter as it is guarded by a heavenly flame and armed cherubim. However, Eiríkr would never have found Eden had it not been for the advice of the Byzantine king. The dialogue between Eiríkr and the king is presented in the third person, rather than in the first as in *Elucidarius* and *Konungs skuggsjá*, and, in terms of its content, it is a mixture of these two texts.

Eiríkr first asks the king who created Heaven and Earth, to which the king replies that it was the work of the one and only God. He goes on to answer question after question on the nature of God, his tripartition, his glory and power, his all-encompassing wisdom, his residence in heaven, about hell and Satan, and on related subjects. Eiríkr is shocked to hear all this, not least about the fate of heathens who shall be punished in hell: "Never before have I heard

¹⁵ L. Holm-Olsen (ed.), *Konungs skuggsjá*, 13.

¹⁶ Cf. J. J. Cohen, "Monster Culture: Seven Theses," in *Monster Theory*, ed. J. J. Cohen (Minneapolis 1996), 3–25.

¹⁷ This is explored in more detail in my article "'Er þat illt, at þú vilt elska tröll þat:' Hið sögulega samhengi jöðrunar í Hrafnistumannasögum," *Gripla* XXIV (2013), 173–210; and in my dissertation *Skuggsjá sjálfsins*.

such things about them,”¹⁸ he says, and agrees to convert to Christianity because of the wisdom of the king. After this a kind of confirmation sequence follows in which Eiríkr wishes to know more: Where is hell? What is above the earth? What is above the air? More questions follow and Eiríkr is amazed by the wisdom of the all-knowing king.

In the following section Eiríkr poses questions about geography: What is the distance between Heaven and Earth? What is around the Earth? The ocean, the king replies. What is the farthest land in the southern hemisphere? India, he hears in reply. Eiríkr then asks the one question he really wishes to know the answer to: where is the place called *ódáinsakr*? Not only does the king know the answer to this very question, identifying it as the Christian Paradise, but he also informs Eiríkr that the Paradise is impenetrable. Having specified that it lies east of the outermost parts of India, the king implores Eiríkr to stay with him for three whole years before going in search of it, so that he may learn more and heed the king’s every counsel. The king exhibits the knowledge of the subject material of *Elucidarius* and thus Eiríkr’s mission is bound to fail per se, even if Eiríkr does reach his destination.

Eiríkr asks about many other things, such as the characteristics of nations, the layout of lands, the whole of the eastern and southern part of the world, the strange people and the customs of many nations, serpents and dragons and all kinds of animals and birds, and of precious gold and gemstones – which in medieval lore were frequently guarded by griffins. It is said that the king answered all of these questions readily and with wisdom, and after this Eiríkr and his men were baptized.¹⁹ It is to be understood that Eiríkr would not have been as successful in his journey had he not enjoyed and heeded the advice of the king.

It is not particularly common that kings express knowledge of paranormal phenomena as the king of *Eiríks saga víðförla* does, let alone the knowledge of the themes directly borrowed from Pliny’s *Naturalis historia*, even though they were widely disseminated in Icelandic learned literature.

One interesting parallel can be found in *Ynglinga saga*, which starts with a short geographical treatise not altogether unlike those of the encyclopedic texts mostly extant since the start of the fourteenth century until its end, prime examples being the fragment AM 736 I 4to, *Hauksbók*, *Stjórn* and AM 194 8vo, which are all related to one another, albeit to a varying degree.²⁰ The manuscript

¹⁸ “Aldri heyrða ek slíka hluti fyrr frá þeim sagða,” *Eireks saga víðförla*, ed. Guðni Jónsson et al., *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* 3 (Reykjavík 1944), 446–50.

¹⁹ Guðni Jónsson et al. (eds.), “Eireks saga,” 450.

²⁰ Editions of these texts may be found, respectively, in B. S. Kristjánisdóttir et al. (eds.), *Heimskringla* I (Reykjavík 1991); R. Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie: Studien und Quellen zu Weltbild und Weltbeschreibung in Norwegen und Island vom 12. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert* (Berlin 1990), 429–32; *Hauksbók*. *Udgiven efter de Arnagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 4*

fragment known as *Kringla*, which tragically was burnt for the most part during the great Copenhagen fire of 1728, is the basis of our extant *Heimskringla* and thus *Ynglinga saga*. It is thought to have been written in 1260 so it is quite close in age to the geographical treatises of AM 736 I and *Hauksbók*, both of which directly inspired the passages in AM 194 and, perhaps, were an influence on *Stjórn* as well. How these ideas and this knowledge circulated and mixed outside of the remnant extant manuscripts is unclear. *Konungs skuggsiá* is written at about the same time as *Kringla* and perhaps this coincides with a presumable spike in the popularity of Isidore's *Etymologiae* and other similar texts, as exhibited by the existing manuscript evidence. These texts all go to great lengths to explain strange creatures and monsters in the lands to the East and the South, evident not only in learned sources but also in the sagas such as *Eiríks saga víðförla*, preserved in *Flateyjarbók*, written ca. 1387–1394,²¹ and *Yngvars saga víðförla*, extant in two fifteenth-century manuscripts, AM 343 a 4to (c. 1450–1475) and GKS 2845 4to (c. 1450).²² Notwithstanding, many scholars believe that it was originally written in Latin by the twelfth-century Benedictine monk Oddr Snorrason.²³

The relevant passage in *Ynglinga saga* refers to Scythia having various nations and many tongues, giants and dwarves, *blámenn*, strange peoples and amazingly big animals and dragons. The passage quoted in full is thus:

Kringla heimsins, sú er mannfólkið byggir, er mjög vogskorin. Ganga höf stór úr útsjánum inn í jörðina. Er það kunnigt að haf gengur frá Nörvasundum og allt út til Jórðsalalands. Af hafinu gengur langur hafsbötn til landnorðurs er heitir Svartahaf. Sá skilur heimsþriðjungana. Heitir fyrir austan Asia en fyrir vestan kalla sumir Evrópu en sumir Eneu. En norðan að Svartahafi gengur Svíþjóð hin mikla eða hin kalda. Svíþjóð hina miklu kalla sumir menn eigi minni en Serkland hið mikla, sumir jafna henni við Bláland hið mikla. Hinn nyrðri hlutur Svíþjóðar liggur óbyggður af frosti og kulda, svo sem hinn syðri hlutur Blálands er auður af sólarbruna. Í Svíþjóð eru stórhéruð mörg. Þar eru og margs konar þjóðir og margar

þamt forskellige papirshåndskrifter af Det kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab, ed. Finnur Jónsson et al. (København 1892–1896); *Stjórn. Tekst etter håndskriftene*, ed. R. Astås, *Norrøne tekster* vol. 8 (Oslo 2009); *Alfræði íslenzk* I, ed. K. Kålund, STUAGNL 37 (København 1908).

²¹ The seminal study on *Flateyjarbók* is E. Ashman Rowe's *The Development of Flateyjarbók: Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389* (Odense 2005).

²² Jón Helgason, "Til Yngvars sagas overlevering," *Opuscula* 1, *Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana* vol. 20 (København 1960), 176–78; E. Olson, "Inledning," in ed. E. Olson, *Yngvars saga víðförla: jánte ett bihang om Ingvarsinskrifterna* (København 1912), i–xxiv.

²³ G. Jensson, "Were the Earliest fornaldarsögur Written in Latin?," in *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed*, ed. A. Lassen, Ármann Jakobsson, and A. Ney (København 2009), 79–91; Haki Antonsson, "Salvation and Early Saga Writing," 74–77, 107–8. Cf. D. Hofmann, "Die Yngvars saga Víðförla und Oddr munkr inn fróði," in *Speculum Norrænum. Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. U. Dronke et al. (Odense 1981), 188–222.

tungur. Þar eru risar og þar eru dvergar, þar eru blámennt og þar eru margs konar undarlegar þjóðir. Þar eru og dýr og drekar furðulega stórir. Úr norðri frá fjöllum þeim er fyrir utan eru byggð alla fellur á um Svíþjóð, sú er að réttu heitir Tanaís. Hún var forðum kölluð Tanakvísl eða Vanakvísl. Hún kemur til sjávar inn í Svartahaf. Í Vanakvíslum var þá kallað Vanaland eða Vanaheimur. Sú á skilur heimsþriðjungana. Heitir fyrir austan Asía en fyrir vestan Evrópa.

The world's orb, that which humans inhabit, is cut up by many fjords. Great oceans penetrate the land from the outward sea. It is known that an ocean reaches from Nörvasund all the way to the land of Jerusalem. From that ocean a winding deep sea runs to the land, north of which is called the Black Sea. It divides the three parts of the world. To the east it is called Asia but on the western side some call it Europe while others call it Enea. Reaching from the north to the Black Sea is Sweden the great or the cold.²⁴ Sweden the great is by some men said to be no smaller than Saracenland the great, and some equate it with Blueland the great²⁵ in size. The northern part of Sweden the great is uninhabited due to frost and cold, such as the southern part of Blueland is barren due to it having been scorched by the sun. In Sweden the great there are many great provinces. There are many kinds of peoples and many tongues. There are giants and there are dwarves, there are *blámennt*²⁶ and there are many strange peoples. There are animals and dragons of astonishing size. From the north, from the mountains that lie outside of all settled regions, a river runs through Sweden the great the right name of which is Tanais. Once it was called Tanakvísl or Vanakvísl. It reaches the sea by the Black Sea. By the Vanakvísl lay Vanaland or Vanaheimur. This river divides the thirds of the world. East of it lies what is called Asia, to the west of it Europe.²⁷

For some reason this description of the world precedes a voluminous narrative of kings which otherwise is not overtly interested in such things. At around the same time in a small book in Norway, the aforementioned *Konungs skuggsiá*, geographical interest is portrayed as explicitly important to a king. In the fourteenth-century *Eiríks saga víðförla* an image of the perfect king emerges, one who not only knows about the many lands and their strange inhabitants, but who is also a true servant of God.

²⁴ Sweden the great, or *Svíþjóð in mikla*, refers to Scythia or roughly modern day Siberia.

²⁵ Bláland refers to Ethiopia and Africa south of Sahara.

²⁶ *Blámennt* (sing. *blámaðr*) is a complex term, in this context especially it is uncertain what it was meant to entail as usually they were not to be found in the north but rather in Africa or India. It can mean a 'black man,' 'muslim,' 'moor,' and 'demon,' among other things. The meaning of the term *blámaðr* is addressed more closely in my forthcoming article "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling-Champions: The Semantic History of Blámennt from the 12th to the 20th Century."

²⁷ B. S. Kristjánisdóttir et al. (eds.), *Heimskringla* I (Reykjavík 1991), 7.

True to the popular theology of the Middle Ages, the texts that have been discussed in the preceding pages portray a king as the person who not only recognizes true faith and the existence of strange creatures, but who realizes – much as Augustine and Isidore did before him – that the latter informs the former and vice versa, and thus that knowing both is of equal importance. The creator is reflected in his creation, to put it differently. Knowing God means knowing all of his creation,²⁸ even its darker half. A good king, therefore, should be equally knowledgeable about the good and the bad, the terrestrial Paradise and the damned nations on the Earth's periphery, for knowing the other is to know oneself.

²⁸ Cf. A. Hamer, "Searching for Wisdom: The King's Mirror," 59–60: "If one were asked to summarise the contents of *Kgs* [...] in Part I, the heavens and the heavenly bodies, the seas, the earth and its marvels, the winds; learning in the whole text, and eloquence in the court (Parts II and III); death and hell (and the downward-sloping paths that lead there) throughout the work. The difference between the belief of idolaters and that of the Christian is that the latter is grounded in the knowledge that 'all creation serves the one true God.' That is the humble basis for the understanding of God's creative love, and for the Christian's loving fear of God, itself the beginning of wisdom."