UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

Off the Map

Modes of Spatial Representation in the Indigenous Icelandic *riddarasögur*

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ABSTRACT

Until relatively recent times, the late medieval Icelandic romances, or *frumsamdar riddarasögur* (indigenous *riddarasögur*) have been considered to be of little critical value. Some of the defining features of the genre, such as exotic settings, supernatural beings, and unrealistic plots have prevented a full understanding of the texts as important expressions of their time. The success that the *riddarasögur* enjoyed in the Late Middle Ages and their abundant use of foreign narrative modes have often been associated with the Icelanders' need to retreat into escapism and fantasy after the loss of political independence between 1262 and 1264. In the past decades, however, new critical perspectives have encouraged a positive re-evaluation of the genre. This project intends to contribute to the valorisation of the *riddarasögur* by investigating the modes of representation of fictional space in the earliest extant romances dating back to the fourteenth century. Foreign inspirations and entertainment are only two sides of Icelandic romances, which are in fact much more complex literary products and witnesses to the Icelanders' continuous commitment to the business of storytelling. A focus on the medieval sources will facilitate the analysis of the historical background in which the *riddarasögur* were produced as well as the formulation of hypotheses about their function in their parent culture. The fundamental premise of the thesis is that learned Icelanders actively contributed to the great material and cultural exchanges that characterised late medieval Europe despite the political disappointments of the late thirteenth century.

The centrality of travels and world descriptions in the texts has encouraged my methodological approach, which focuses firstly on the question of whether Western Europe shared a logic, a common pattern of conceiving and organising space as one of the most meaningful dimensions of the human experience. After addressing Henri Lefebvre's general spatial theory, the basic parameters that guided the production and interpretation of space in medieval Christian Europe shall be defined on ideological grounds, especially through the works of St. Augustine. Then, the fictional space of three selected case studies (*Sigurðar saga þögla*, *Ectors saga*, and *Nitida saga*) will be investigated alongside their possible sources, both learned and popular, local and foreign. A careful analysis of the texts will confirm the adoption in Iceland of a paradigm of spatial thinking that was widespread in religious and highly learned environments, showing an interest of Icelandic intellectuals for complex and allegorical compositions only partially destined to the entertainment of the readers. In fact, the creative engagement of Icelandic authors with new literary trends will reveal their partaking in the

vibrant cultural scenario of the Late Middle Ages thereby finally exorcising the ghost of literary divertissement.

ÁGRIP

Riddarasögur frá síðmiðöldum – þær sem við köllum frumsamdar riddarasögur – voru lengi vel lítils metnar meðal íslenskra bókmennta. Vera má að hin helstu einkenni bókmenntagreinarinnar, þættir á borð við framandi sögusvið, óraunsæjan söguþráð og yfirnáttúrulegar vættir, hafi valdið því að fólk hætti að líta á textana sem mikilvægan tjáningarmiðil síns tíma. Oftar en ekki hefur verið litið á erlend áhrif á frásagnargerð sagnanna og vinsældir þeirra á síðmiðöldum sem vitnisburð um veruleikaflótta – að Íslendingar hafi í menningarsköpun sinni flúið á vit ímyndunaraflsins við fall þjóðveldisins á árunum 1262–1264. Á síðustu áratugum hafa fræðilegar nálganir þó náð að kynda undir jákvæðu endurmati á riddarasögum og fræðimenn hafa þá m.a. leitast við að sýna fram á hvernig þær endurspegla samfélag sitt. Það verkefni sem hér um ræðir kemur til með að byggja á þessu endurmati og fylla myndina hvað varðar hlutverk og merkingu riddarasagna, en áhersla verður lögð á að rannsaka birtingarmynd frásagnarýmis í textum frá 14. öld, þegar elstu sögurnar urðu til. Erlend áhrif og afþreying eru hins vegar einungis tvær hliðar á hinum íslensku riddarasögum, og í raun og veru eru þær mun flóknari bókmenntaverk, auk þess sem þær bera vott um áframhaldandi og stöðugan áhuga Íslendinga á sagnaskemmtun. Með því að beina athyglinni að miðaldaheimildunum sjálfum, riddarasögum frá 14. öld, má greina þann sögulega grundvöll sem þær spruttu úr, og gerir okkur kleift að leggja fram tilgátur um hlutverk sagnanna í menningarlegu samhengi. Sú grunnforsenda sem gengið er út frá er að lærðir Íslendingar hafi – þrátt fyrir hinar pólitíku sviptingar í lok 13. aldar – lagt drjúgan skerf til þeirrar efnismiðlunar og menningarlegu samskipta sem áttu sér stað í Evrópu á síðmiðöldum.

Sú fræðilega nálgun sem hér er beitt er að mörgu leyti mótuð af hinu miðlæga þema sagnanna sem snýr að ferðalögum og lýsingu á staðháttum víða um heim, en fyrst mun ég leitast við að varpa ljósi á þá spurningu hvort Vestur-Evrópubúar hafi deilt hugmyndum sínum um rými, og hvort þeir hafi búið yfir sambærilegu hugsanamynstri þegar kemur að því að ímynda sér og skipuleggja rými sem eina af grunnvíddum mannlegs veruleika. Eftir það mun ég ræða hina almennu rýmiskenningu Henris Lefebvre, og skilgreina þá þætti sem stýrðu mótun og túlkun rýmis í kristnum hugmyndaheimi evrópskra miðalda, einkum í gegnum guðfræði heilags Ágústínusar og annarra kirkjufeðra. Að því loknu mun ég greina og rannsaka frásagnarlegt rými þriggja riddarasagna, eða *Sigurðar sögu þögla*, *Ectors sögu* og *Nitida sögu*, og fjalla um mögulegar heimildir þeirra, íslenskar sem erlendar og lærðar jafnt sem alþýðlegar. Sýnt verður fram á hvernig íslenskir höfundar unnu með hin nýstárlegu sagnaform síðmiðalda og með

hvaða hætti sögurnar bera vott um þátttöku þeirra í hinni litríku menningarflóru evrópskra síðmiðalda. Með þessu má vonandi kveða niður gamlan draug; klisjuna um veruleikaflótta Íslendinga við fall þjóðveldisins.

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1 INTRODUCTION

It may seem easy to think about space, as it is one of the fundamental dimensions of the human experience and can, therefore, easily be taken for granted when it comes to defining it in clear terms. As much as time, space is more easily perceived than described, so deep is its connection with every aspect of our lives. In fact, it seems much easier to talk about different types of spaces than about space in absolute terms. Our mind seems to lean towards a segmentation and compartmentalisation, so that there always seems to be a 'space of…' something rather than space per se. In addition, the word has acquired many different meanings in the history of Western thought, even within the framework of the same socio-cultural entities. For instance, subjects such as physics and astrophysics have been trying to find a unitary definition of space which would embrace both the micro and the macro, the quantum mechanics and the relativity inherent in the word. This is a type of space which cannot be separated from the concept of time, defined by mathematical laws and precise calculations. On the other hand, philosophy, anthropology, and other branches of the humanities may produce their own concepts of space, which may even vary according to the point of view of a single thinker or current of thought.

A pivotal contribution against segmented definitions of space was elaborated by Henri Lefebvre, whose work had a great impact on the foundation of the modern spatial discourse.[1] Lefebvre starts from the observation that all scholarly research on space up until the last decades of the twentieth century had mainly focused on how to describe a multiplicity of spaces, instead of proposing a general and unitary science of space. The modern capitalistic society has established a dominant trend in spatial thinking which tends towards fragmentation, separation and disintegration[2] – this being especially valid in the dialectic between centre, or centralised power, and periphery, and the sectorisation not only of physical but also intellectual labour. As Lefebvre points out, we are "confronted by an indefinite multitude of spaces […]: geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political […]. The very multiplicity of these descriptions and sectionings makes them suspect".[3] Lefebvre's 'science of space' would not deny the existence of different types of space, but it would make sense of them and their mutual

[1] Lefebvre 1981 [1974].
[2] Lefebvre 1991, p. 7. Quotes from secondary sources in languages other than English are always presented in translation for the sake of clarity and reading flow. References to editions of the cited works in their original languages are always provided either in footnote or bibliography. In this case, see Lefebvre 1981 [1974]. If a cited work does not have an English edition, no double reference is given, and the translation is made by the author of the thesis. Primary sources are usually quoted in two languages with the English translation produced by the author of the thesis unless otherwise indicated.
[3] Lefebvre 1991, p. 8.

relations through the description of one system of spatial production shared by the members of a given society. This system consists of the ways and the logic that govern the organisation of space in a distinct context as well as the meanings attributed to it. Humanities scholar may find inspiration in Lefebvre's theory and move from a purely descriptive approach – i.e. the simple reading of different types of spaces – to a more analytical and comprehensive one. Matthew Boyd Goldie points out that the implications of space might continue to be somewhat obscure "despite (or because of) the contributions of Lefebvre's and others' writings".[4] With this statement, Goldie underlines that the different philosophical models – from Michel Foucault[5] to the recent geocritical school of Bertrand Westphal[6] –, will never really solve the question of what space essentially *is*. However, they may refine our comprehension of what space *can be* for a given society.

Lefebvre's ideas are intertwined with the concept of worldview, as it deals with the overall interpretation of whatever is surrounding a collective subject. The definition of worldview embraces a wide range of aspects, such as the way humans reflect on existence, including how to interpret and evaluate the world and their position in it.[7] Similarly, Lefebvre's proposal requires a reflection on the relationship between individuals and their reality which is dependent on multiple factors, including ethical and existential ones. The logic that results from the negotiation between many individual points of view and underlies the organisation of external reality within a society is the definition of Lefebvrian space, which I embrace in its fundamental aspects. This is a space that changes according to the subject, be it a single 'I' or a collective one, dealing with specific values, desires, and concerns.

Drawing inspiration from Lefebvre to start navigating the sea of Icelandic *riddarasögur* means aiming at more than the simple description of separate spaces within the texts, e.g. 'space of the court' or 'space of wilderness'. The ultimate targets of this research are the *how*'s and the *why*'s, that is, the modes applied by the sagas in order to produce a fictional world and the reasons for it to bear certain characteristics.[8] Thus, Lefebvre offers a layered understanding of space rather than a compartmentalised one. A layered understanding of space implies the existence of a logic of spatial relations not only within a narrative world but also between the text and the environment that generated it. Literary products are reflections of their contemporary cultural landscapes, after all.

[4] Goldie 2019, p. 15.
[5] Foucault 1986. In fact, Foucault's first lectures on the subject took place in 1967.
[6] Westphal 2015.
[7] On the concept of *Weltanschauung*, see Kowalewicz 2013.
[8] For an overview of space and place in medieval romances, see Murrieta-Flores and Howell 2017.

As a start, it is essential to contextualise the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, which means addressing the wider context of the Late Middle Ages first, and then the specific case of late medieval Iceland. An objection may rise about the difficulty of reconstructing the worldview of an age so far from the present times, especially considering the number of documents no longer accessible to modern scholars. Still, the particular case of the Western Middle Ages has at least one element that comes to aid, which is the cultural and ideological hegemony achieved by the Roman Catholic Church in many parts of Europe for a timespan of about a thousand years. The clergy's fundamental role in the evangelisation and alphabetisation of medieval societies constitute at least one reference point for the investigation of a late medieval worldview and an appropriate starting point for a discourse on spatiality.[9] This should also facilitate the interpretation of Iceland's specificity as a land that had to deal with both a relatively new religion and its own geopolitical marginality.

For these reasons, after a definition of the literary genre that is the main object of analysis – the indigenous *riddarasögur* – and an overview of its critical reception, Chapter Two will address the cultural and spiritual authorities that influenced the medieval theocentric worldview. Lefebvre's theory, which will be explained in greater detail, starts from the assumption that the intellectual works of scholars – e.g. architects, philosophers, and authors – have the greatest influence on the spatial production of a given society. Their often-abstract representations may affect the organisation of space both on a material and psychological level. As regards the Middle Ages, Alain Guerreau sees St. Augustine (354–430) as the founder of medieval spatiality.[10] His theology was so widespread and influential that it had an inevitable impact on the ways space was produced and given meaning. As a Church Father, he helped establish not only a monastic rule but a whole worldview for Christian Europe. His thought, together with the thirteenth-century rediscovery of Aristotle (384–322 BC) and Ptolemy (ca. 100–ca. 170), is most likely the decisive factor in the establishment of a late medieval approach to space. Obviously, the Church's philosophical discourse did not end with St. Augustine, but the core elements of his worldview became an important part of Scholastic knowledge and were inherited by many medieval thinkers.[11] This is why St. Augustine's theology and the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology are given major relevance in the chapter.

[9] For a contribution on the Christianisation of Europe with a focus on northern and eastern lands, see Ruhmann and Brieske 2015.
[10] Guerreau 2002, p. 10.
[11] St. Augustine's exegetical understanding of geography was continued by other intellectuals and Church Fathers, such as Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus (485–585), Isidore of Seville (560–636), Venerable Bede (673–735), and Hrabanus Maurus (780–856). For an overview of his influence on early medieval geography, see Lozovsky 2003 [2000], pp. 6–67.

Some material examples will follow, particularly *mappae mundi* that bear traces of a widespread logic of conceiving space based on theological grounds. The perspective may then shift to the point of view of late medieval Iceland. Icelandic maps and world descriptions are analysed in order to determine whether the same logic of spatial production can be detected among the Icelandic educated groups who produced maps, pseudoscientific treatises, and fiction.[12] Any original elaboration of the given spatial model will be underlined and analysed contextually. Finally, three main modes of producing fictional space – or representation of space – are proposed as the results of the initial observations, which are polarisation, concentricity, and condensation. Those are the three ways for medieval scholars to understand space suggested by my research, which tackles them as complementary and simultaneous and integral parts of the same spatial system. Similarly, they are all featured in the selected case studies, although for each saga only one mode is prioritised as an interpretative focus. This criterion has guided the selection of the three texts, which are *Sigurðar saga þögla* (Polarised space), *Ectors saga* (Concentric space), and *Nitida saga* (Condensed space).[13]

The purpose of Chapter Three is to draw an image of the historical context in which the authors of *riddarasögur* produced their works. Therefore, information will be provided on the intensification of commercial and cultural exchanges that characterised late medieval Europe and favoured the reception of new literature in the north. The transmission of chivalric stories to Scandinavia and Iceland is intertwined with the figure of Hákon IV Hákonarsson (1204–1263), king of Norway from 1217 to 1263. The monarch is often depicted as a patron of arts and letters in medieval sources as well as the promoter of the first translations of chivalric romances from continental originals. His figure and the actual impact of his activity are addressed in Chapter Three. Starting from the dynamic scenario of late medieval Europe, the chapter will also investigate the possibility for Icelanders to access a higher education in courts, clerical schools, and foreign universities. The travels of clerics and wealthy laymen to cultural centres abroad shall be the focus in this section. Equally relevant are the records of monastic schools founded in Iceland where the most important Scholastic teachings would be transmitted and elaborated. The diffusion of St. Augustine's thought, and patristic literature in general, was

[12] 'Pseudoscientific' refers to the knowledge contained in medieval manuscripts as they precede the description of an actual scientific method, which was favoured by many medieval developments but not thoroughly elaborated until the sixteenth century.

[13] I have decided to adopt the modern spelling of most titles – for instance, *Sigurðar saga þögla* instead of *Sigurðar saga þgla* – for the sake of clarity and orientation through the sources. Exceptions are made for indeclinable Latin calques, such as Clári (instead of Klári), thus *Clári saga*, and Nitida (instead of Nítíða), thus *Nitida saga*. At the same time, the quotations from available diplomatic editions of Old Norse texts have been adapted to the accepted spelling standards of the Íslenzk fornrit. My own transcriptions from manuscript pages are rendered diplomatically.

a comprehensible process in post-Conversion Iceland, since the ideas of the Church Fathers had already shaped the cultural discourse in the continent by the eleventh century. It is safe to say that the process of evangelisation and literacy in early Christianised Iceland must have followed the same theological principles circulating in Western Europe at that time. The prolific production of clerical texts and translations of saints' lives as the earliest vernacular literature in Iceland does not surprise in this regard.[14] In other words, Chapter Three will make sure to trace back the possible contact points between the educated groups of the Icelandic society and the main philosophical ideas that used to circulate in the rest of Christian Europe at the time.

Chapter Four dives deeper into the defining features of the indigenous *riddarasögur* as a genre. Both structural and content-driven observations are used in order to delimit the subject matter of the work and offer a useful identikit of the texts that are taken into consideration. A list of essential themes is provided together with various examples from the main corpus of texts. The gradual shift from theory to contents and direct observation presented by this chapter is the bridge that connects the theoretical premises to the selected case studies. The three sagas were not only selected for their configuration of fictional space, as they can also be connected to one another in meaningful ways. While *Sigurðar saga þögla* (Chapter Five) and *Ectors saga* (Chapter Six) address the concept and values of chivalry in two distinct ways that may be put in comparison, *Nitida saga* (Chapter Seven) offers the opportunity to reflect on the relationship of *riddarasögur*'s female characters with space, knowledge, and power, which puts Nitida also in relation to *Sigurðar saga*'s female protagonist, Sedentiana. In fact, *Nitida saga* shows similarities with both other sagas, since part of its spatial design displays parallels with *Ectors saga*, as well. Chapter Eight consists of a comparison between the results of the analyses of the case studies in order to confirm the existence of a spatial paradigm in late medieval Iceland and further specify its parameters. Final conclusions about authorship and agency will follow. Starting from some considerations on the sagas' authors and their possible profiles, the function of indigenous *riddarasögur* in the literary landscape of late medieval Iceland will also be addressed.

In general, this research aims to align itself with the works of other scholars who have attempted at revaluating the complexity and literary value of Icelandic *riddarasögur* in recent years. My contention is that the importance of the texts is to be found underneath their kaleidoscopic surface of fantastic elements. A deeper investigation should let new aspects emerge that have to do with the Icelanders' fruitful communications with Europe and their remarkable commitment to the production of indigenous literature. An active relationship with

[14] Lindow 2001.

the continent and the models offered by foreign romances and encyclopaedic sources should once and for all exorcise the ghost of Iceland's cultural escapism due to the disappointing historical developments of the late thirteenth century. Moreover, the underlying structural complexity of the texts would encourage a re-evaluation of the authorial effort and a problematisation of the audience regardless of the sagas' foreign inspirations.

The title chosen for this work condenses this approach in a few different ways. *Off the Map* refers most obviously to the peculiar settings of *riddarasögur*, which often feature remote lands at the edge of the known world full of supernatural creatures and uncanny forces. At the same time, *Off the Map* is the alleged position of Iceland in late medieval cartography as a liminal terra incognita full of dangers and demonic forces. In this case, the phrase is to be read ironically, since this work aims to demonstrate the actual involvement of Icelandic scholars in the European cultural discourse despite the prejudices of remoteness and isolation. Finally, *Off the Map* is an invitation for our scholarly community to test new interpretative strategies in order to understand and evaluate the complexity of the chivalric literature produced in Iceland. Exploring new critical paths might seem risky and not always rewarding, and yet getting off the trails established by previous research might be the only way to fully discover the raison d'être of these text.

1.1 A note on Genre, Taxonomy, and Terminology

One of the main challenges when dealing with the Icelandic *riddarasögur* is defining them as a genre, assuming that a taxonomy of sorts can in fact be established within the Icelandic literary corpus. A debate in this regard has been going on for some forty years now among saga scholars, proving that it is not easy to categorise the kaleidoscopic variety of themes, characters, plots, and settings presented by the sagas. The medieval sources do not offer much help in this regard, as the terminology used today to refer to saga genres was largely made up by modern critics. In fact, only the terms *konungasögur* and *riddarasögur* are attested in manuscripts.[15]

A fundamental question, which has surprisingly been avoided by much of the previous research, regards the concept of genre itself and the possibility of adapting this modern idea to the literary production of medieval Iceland, where different compositional criteria were applied that do not necessarily allow us to force the texts into strict normative categories. Even today, literature demonstrates a variety of creative possibilities that do not always comply with the

[15] Bampi 2017, p. 5. Other terms that appear in medieval sources are *lygisögur* (lying sagas) and *ævintýri*. The former was most likely applied to refer to indigenous *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, although it has been mostly abandoned due to its vagueness and slightly derogatory implications.

established labels that guide, for instance, the arrangement of aisles in a bookshop. Moreover, a definition of genre does not only have to face the various forms that literary products may take in a specific space and time as it also has to deal with the ways in which texts change and evolve over time and according to the different circumstances. This is why too rigid categorisations of the Icelandic sagas – which were produced over a long period of time, in different contexts, and with different purposes – cannot be completely satisfactory, after all. Recent research has tried to tackle the issue by anchoring the definition of genre to descriptive stances that would take extraliterary factors into consideration. Massimiliano Bampi considers the definition of genre in the Middle Ages designed by Hans Robert Jauss as a good starting point for new perspectives on the matter: Genres "are to be understood not as genera (classes) in the logical senses, but rather as groups or historical families. As such they cannot be deduced or defined, but only historically determined, delimited, and described".[16] Jauss's definition is essential as it allows us to improve the guidelines that have determined the most widely accepted, although problematic, taxonomy of the sagas. Previous studies have mostly focused on two normative criteria to make order in the diverse corpus of Old Norse-Icelandic sagas, which are the texts' subject matter and their internal chronology.[17] For instance, the *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of the Icelanders, or Family sagas) are usually defined as the stories of the first generations of settlers, encompassing from around the year 870 up to the conversion of the island (1000), or shortly after.[18]

Bampi's suggestion to turn to descriptive and historically determined parameters is an adequate one to face the highly various corpus of the sagas. It is not unusual to see elements ascribed to certain genres in other types of texts, and there are plenty of examples of hybrids between different categories. Extraliterary factors can help investigate the reasons of this generic intermingling. This is the perspective of the polysystem theory, for instance, which analyses the positions of different genres within the same literary system based on cultural and historical factors.[19] Thus, genres would be hierarchically organised, which means that one genre would occupy the central most relevant position in the system, with others taking over the periphery at a given time. The balance of each systemic configuration would be constantly changing according to external factors. One example regards *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, which became so prominent to exert influence, for example, on the younger *Íslendingasögur*.[20]

[16] Bampi 2017, p. 7.
[17] Bampi 2017, p. 5.
[18] Bampi 2017, p. 5.
[19] For general information on the theory, see Shuttleworth 1998.
[20] Bampi 2017, p. 10.

Although this work will still make use of the most accepted taxonomy of the sagas as recorded by Bampi himself, an effort shall be made in order to anchor the chosen case studies to their historical backgrounds.[21] It is important to note that such categories are mainly functional to the feasibility of the work and the definition of some conventional boundaries in which to delimit the scope of the analysis – as Stephen Mitchell would say, a "modern archival convenience".[22] The Icelandic *riddarasögur* will still be addressed as products of their time, which means that reasons will be suggested for their composition, and hypotheses will be made about their function in their parent culture. In fact, one of the main objectives of this work is the re-evaluation of the literary endeavours of late medieval Icelanders after the loss of political independence in 1262.[23] This cannot be done without the definition of a historical framework and some considerations on the position of late medieval fiction in the picture. A short overview of the manuscript transmission of each case study is also provided for a clearer contextualisation.

Finally, the texts I will be referring to as 'the main corpus' correspond to the Icelandic *riddarasögur* edited in the 1960s by Agnete Loth with the title *Late medieval Icelandic Romances.*[24] Her focus is on the earliest sagas preserved on vellum, even when in a fragmentary form, as they are most certainly datable to the late medieval period.[25] The choice of focusing on the medieval sources is justified by the need to minimise the philological and interpretational issues and draw an accurate image of the texts and the socio-cultural context in which they emerged. I believe in the value of this approach regardless of the exact label that one might decide to give the selected texts, since they are all part of the same 'textual family', or children of the same historical context, with its specific worldview, desires, and concerns.

Before proceeding any further, it seems important to clarify at least the distinction between three groups of sagas which share similar characteristics and similar spatio-temporal coordinates in terms of production and circulation. The Icelandic *riddarasögur*, translated *riddarasögur*, and *fornaldarsögur* (or legendary sagas) are nowadays almost unanimously accepted saga genres, dating back to the early fourteenth century.[26] This period of Icelandic literary

[21] For the definition of those categories as intended today, the 2006 round-table discussion in *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2 deserves a mention (Quinn et al. 2006).
[22] Mitchell 1991, p. 12.
[23] For more information on these events, see 3.1.
[24] Loth 1962–65.
[25] It is not unusual for Loth to integrate fragmentary medieval versions of the sagas and post-medieval copies in order to accomplish some completion.
[26] The earliest manuscripts containing *fornaldarsögur* date back to around 1300. Still, Tulinius (2005, p. 452) affirms that the genre might have established in Iceland as early as the 1180–90. Although this hypothesis may be valid, most *fornaldarsögur* are preserved in late medieval and post-medieval manuscripts, similar to indigenous *riddarasögur*.

history has been defined in the past century as representing the decline of saga literature, because of the number of foreign influences in both contents and narrative modes, and the abundance of fantastic elements. This definition was given in opposition to the so-called classic or "golden" age of saga writing,[27] characterised by a predominance of the more 'sober' prose of the *Íslendingasögur*. An important re-evaluation of the late medieval sagas in the past few years has encouraged a more objective analysis of the different phases of Icelandic literary history and a more scientific classification of the different saga genres. Bampi sums up the last decades of scholarly research as follows:[28]

- *Fornaldarsögur* (Sagas of the ancient time or legendary sagas): A genre encompassing a variety of heterogeneous texts marked by different styles, brought together thanks to their chronotopic characteristics. The action is set in Scandinavian territories – or lands known by the Scandinavians – before the colonisation of Iceland and its conversion to Christianity.
- *Þýddar riddarasögur* (Translated chivalric sagas): This genre encompasses translations of chivalric romances, mostly from French sources via an Anglo-Norman mediation, into Old Norse. It is believed that most of these translated sagas were done at the request of Hákon IV Hákonarson, king of Norway between 1217 and 1263. A reconstruction of the actual transmission of these texts is rather problematic, due to the lack of original Norwegian manuscripts. Most textual witnesses consist of later Icelandic elaborations (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries). Some sagas, mostly in later manuscripts (seventeenth century), mention Hákon IV directly as patron of the work.
- *Frumsamdar riddarasögur* (Original sagas of knights): These texts were crafted in Iceland without a specific continental source, partly following the model of translated chivalric sagas and partly the most adventurous of *fornaldarsögur* (also labelled by German scholars as *Abenteuersagas*). The setting is exotic, which usually means non-Scandinavian lands of the south and the east, and the fantastic elements are abundant. The main characters, mostly knights, kings, and princesses, do not correspond to any historical figures and are not borrowed from the Arthurian legends or any other chivalric cycle, although some inspirations may occasionally be detected. Consequently,

This is informative of the particular taste of late medieval Icelanders for fantastic literature. This aspect and their formal similarities with *riddarasögur* justify the inclusion of *fornaldarsögur* in this chapter.

[27] As defined by scholars such as Turville-Petre 1967, p. 213.

[28] Bampi 2017. The categories below are based on Bampi's summary, with only minor additions from my part.

the geopolitical configuration of the ecumene is also typically imaginative. These sagas became extremely popular over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and were widely copied in post-medieval times, as well.[29] Since Kurt Schier's *Sagaliteratur*, German scholarship has often referred to most indigenous *riddarasögur* as *Märchensagas*, because of their alleged relation to folktales.[30] This term has been debated and criticised for its specificity, as it would exclude a large number of texts whose characteristics do not quite fit in the definition.

Generally speaking, the three groups of sagas share some common features, including non-Icelandic settings, a pre-settlement or highly vague chronological framework, and the extensive presence of paranormal or fantastic elements. Indigenous *riddarasögur*, in particular, have also been referred to with the label *lygisögur* (lying sagas), especially in the past century.[31] The term is rather imprecise and ambiguous, as it has been used by some post-medieval scholars to indicate not only indigenous *riddarasögur*, but also texts which present hybrid characteristics between these and the *fornaldarsögur* that are, therefore, hard to enclose in one specific category.[32]

The use of *lygisögur* has been tentatively justified by the fact that it is one of the few terms found in medieval sources which may reveal some sort of generic awareness on the part of Icelandic writers.[33] Icelandic post-medieval scholars, despite a generally harsh criticism of these texts, have been especially hostile towards the use of 'lying sagas', as this definition seems to bear a rather negative connotation. Yet, *lygisögur* is still featured in Matthew Driscoll's chapter "Late Prose Fiction (*lygisögur*)", where it refers to original chivalric romances composed in Iceland in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[34] The same use of the term is made in Marianne Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell's *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*. A slightly broader meaning for the word seems to be intended by Margaret Schlauch in her 1934 study *Romance in Iceland*. Here, the author's terminology appears as somewhat more uncertain, when

[29] See Bampi 2017, pp. 4–14.
[30] See Schier 1970, pp. 105–12 and Glauser 1983.
[31] Driscoll, 2005, pp. 190–91.
[32] The distinction between indigenous *riddarasaga* and *fornaldarsaga* has caused debates. On the topic, see van Nahl 1981, Kalinke 1985b, and Bibire 1985. Kalinke (1985b, p. 79) underlines the use of the term *lygisögur* made by some critics to embrace both *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*. Bibire's article also addresses the ambiguous use of this label.
[33] The episode is told in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*. Both prose and poetry are recited out loud in front of the guests at a wedding as means of entertainment. A reference is made to King Sverrir of Norway's preference for a particular kind of saga called *lygisaga*. The term *riddarasögur* is found in medieval texts as well, e.g. *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, *Möttuls saga* and the younger *Mágus saga* (Kalinke 1985b, pp. 77–78). The term *fornaldarsögur* was made up in post-medieval times, i.e. Rafn's *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* (1829–30).
[34] Driscoll 2005.

she refers to romances, fictitious sagas, and *lygisögur* without proposing a systematic taxonomy and making examples from both corpora of *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*.[35] Merit should be given to Schlauch for producing the first ever book-length study on romances in the north, particularly in a period when the attention of most scholars was directed at different types of texts, especially the *Íslendingasögur*. Her contribution provided a starting point, but it still represents a fundamental reference point for all *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* scholars. The years of scholarly debate that separate Schlauch's contributions and the present one should be taken into consideration when addressing the possible inaccuracies of that first monographic endeavour. The term 'romance' itself might cause some controversy over its vagueness, as it has been used elsewhere to refer to various kinds of fantastic late medieval narratives, and uncertain application, due to the significant formal differences between the continental *romans courtois*, usually in verse, and the Scandinavian and Icelandic prose narratives translated from or inspired by them.[36]

In the following sections, I will be referring to 'Icelandic romances' in the same way as Kalinke and Mitchell, that is encompassing the Icelandic *riddarasögur* as a corpus.[37] More frequently, however, the labels 'indigenous *riddarasögur*' or 'Icelandic *riddarasögur*' will be preferred, in order to reflect the most recent developments in the scholarly debate and distinguish them from the translated *riddarasögur*. The same practical solution was offered by Astrid van Nahl in the 1980s and Geraldine Barnes, in the introductory remarks of her recent volume *The Bookish Riddarasögur*.[38] The great relevance of Barnes's contribution to the field of study and the present research makes her suggestion particularly valuable. It should be noted that most of the above-cited works share similar if not identical views on the definition of indigenous *riddarasögur*, especially the most recent ones, such as those by Bampi and Barnes. Differences may still be traced in the works of single authors regarding the number of texts encompassed by the given definition, but they tend to be based more on the possible hybrid features of some sagas rather than controversies over the established criteria.

Within the main corpus of *riddarasögur* collected by Loth, specific attention shall be paid to three selected case studies: *Sigurðar saga þögla*, *Ectors saga*, and *Nitida saga*.[39] Loth's volumes, although containing only diplomatic editions of the texts, are particularly important as they represent the only existing editions of many of these sagas. Loth makes a list of thirty-two

[35] Schlauch 1934.
[36] On the broad spectrum of texts that the term may embrace, see Eriksen 2017, p. 59.
[37] Kalinke and Mitchell, 1985.
[38] Van Nahl 1981 and Barnes 2014.
[39] Loth 1962, p. 65.

indigenous *riddarasögur* overall, including both the fifteen edited in her collection and another seventeen which had already found publication as early as the 1960s. As Driscoll points out, a few Icelandic *riddarasögur* only preserved in younger paper manuscripts were probably redacted in medieval times, which makes them useful for the sake of comparison.[40] Evidence in this regard is founded, for instance, on their connection with older popular literature, such as the *rímur*. Loth's list of indigenous *riddarasögur* is reproduced below:

Edited by Loth	*Other editions*
Viktors saga ok Blávus	*Ála flekks saga*
Valdimars saga	*Blómstrvalla saga*
Ectors saga	*Bærings saga*
Saulus saga ok Nikanors	*Dámusta saga*
Sigurðar saga þögla	*Dínus saga drambláta*
Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns	*Drauma-Jóns saga*
Adonias saga	*Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*
Sigurðar saga fóts	*Gibbons saga*
Vilhjálms saga sjóðs	*Grega saga*
Vilmundar saga viðutan	*Kirialax saga*
Nitida saga	*Mágus saga jarls*
Sigrgarðs saga frækna	*Melkólfs saga ok Salomons konungs*
Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands	*Mírmanns saga*
Sigurðar saga turnara	*Rémundar saga keisarasonar*
Hrings saga ok Tryggva	*Samsons saga fagra*
	Þjalar-Jóns saga

Sagas outside of Loth's collection will be taken into consideration, particularly when the argument benefits from a comparison between them and the main corpus. Not all of them are going to be mentioned or directly involved in the analysis, as it is essential to focus on the selected case studies in order to reach reasonable results; however, it is important to underline that I have consulted most medieval sources describable as Icelandic *riddarasögur* during the

[40] Driscoll 2005, p. 193.

research process. Other chivalric sagas preserved in paper manuscripts with no evidence of a possible medieval origin have been discarded for the sake of the feasibility of the project, as they would increase the number of texts to over a hundred.[41]

1.2 A Controversial Reception

The decades following the Icelandic pledge of allegiance to the Norwegian crown (1262–1264) may represent a useful watershed when it comes to contextualising the "amazing revolution in literary taste"[42] mentioned by Schlauch that determined the popular success of legendary and chivalry sagas. After the loss of political independence, which took place in the same years when a growing influence of foreign courtly literature was registered, Icelandic literary taste seemed to shift from the pseudorealistic style of the family sagas to the kaleidoscopic and adventurous style of chivalric and legendary sagas. Understandably, this process did not take place in a few years – in fact, there are reasons to believe that the translation and copy of chivalric romances in Iceland started long before 1262 as a sign of the audience's interest in different types of texts.[43] As Jürg Glauser points out, *Íslendingasögur* were still being written in the late medieval period, even though the younger ones, such as *Grettis saga* or *Laxdæla saga*, show more evident traces of the impact of continental romances by making a more extensive use of foreign motifs and narrative modes.[44]

Icelanders did not abandon one type of saga in favour of a new one in a day, and both romances and family sagas most likely exerted a mutual influence on each other. The graduality of this evolution can also be attested by looking at the younger *riddarasögur*. A great number of Icelandic romances are only preserved in post-medieval manuscripts, which does not necessarily imply a younger composition. An example is *Nikulás saga leikara*, whose earliest manuscript dates back to the seventeenth century, but has most likely a late medieval origin.[45] This argument may also be supported by the saga's close relationship with other medieval texts, such as *Nitida saga*, which might have functioned as a model.[46]

The spatial and chronological abstraction, the abundance of fantastic elements, and the debt to foreign sources have convinced many scholars, especially Icelanders at the beginning of

[41] Cf. Driscoll 2005, p. 193.
[42] Schlauch 1934, p. 10.
[43] The origin of *Clári saga* as a translation from a Latin original found in France has been debated (cf. Hughes 2008, pp. 135–63), and the text may thus be proof of the early interest taken by Icelanders in various types of narratives. Equally problematic is the origin *Breta sögur* as a translation fashioned in Norway, cf. 3.1.3.
[44] Glauser 2007, p. 383.
[45] Wick 1996, p. 3.
[46] See Chapter Seven.

the past century, to label *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* as banal and purely escapist, with little to no critical value. The disinterest, if not disdain, of figures such as Sigurður Nordal[47] and Finnur Jónsson[48] towards these genres may be explained by taking a closer look at the historical and cultural context of the first half of the twentieth century. As mentioned above, at the basis of this negative attitude there is an unfortunate comparison between *riddarasögur* and *Íslendingasögur*, which enjoyed the almost undisputed interest of the Icelandic intelligentsia from the post-Reformation period up to the past century.[49] Their neat and sober style, usually accompanied by concise descriptions and a somewhat stronger attachment to historical events, has contributed to their success in the scholarly environment. The apparently limited number of foreign influences, hence their supposed originality compared to chivalric and legendary sagas, also contributed in making *Íslendingasögur* the most studied saga genre.[50]

Reconnecting to a past of copious manuscript production and remarkable storytelling became vital for Icelanders ever since Romantic times, when a national awareness started to awaken, together with a pressing desire for political independence. After some six hundred years of subordination to Norway and Denmark, the learned groups of Icelandic society felt the urge to start building a cultural identity on the memory of the Icelandic *þjóðveldi* (Free State, or Icelandic Commonwealth) the era of self-sovereignty and statelessness in Iceland prior to 1262.[51] This battle for freedom was fought mainly on cultural and literary grounds, in absence of an adequate military force, and was only won in the twentieth century, with the recognition of Iceland's full sovereignty in 1918 (Danish-Icelandic Act of Union) and the establishment of the Republic of Iceland in 1944.[52]

For these reasons, the sagas about the first generations of settlers on the island have been held dear by both literary scholars and public opinion in the early twentieth century. Finnur Jónsson's harsh judgement of *riddarasögur* as products of limited imagination and poor value dates back to 1904.[53] W. P. Ker was of the same mind in 1908, when he defined them as "some of dreariest things ever made in human fancy".[54] The often-exaggerated scenes featured in both *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* were considered proof of a lack of literary taste by Åke

[47] Nordal 1953.
[48] Finnur Jónsson 1923–24.
[49] Driscoll 1997, pp. 1–33.
[50] On the genesis of Icelandic sagas, see Clunies Ross 2010, pp. 37–71.
[51] For an investigation on the relationship between saga literature and cultural memory, see Hermann 2009 and 2013.
[52] The cultural nature of this struggle for independence and the role played by the reminiscence of the medieval Icelandic literary ferment is confirmed by the enthusiasm shown by the citizens of Reykjavík at the return of the first manuscripts from Denmark in April 1971.
[53] Finnur Jónsson 1904, pp. 229–30.
[54] Ker 1908, p. 282.

Lagerholm in 1927.[55] In 1934, Jón Helgason dismissed the genre rather quickly as an insignificant form of art.[56] Finally, Sigurður Nordal criticised the Icelandic romances a few years after the Icelandic declaration of independence, proving that it took some time for scholars to eradicate their prejudice towards these forms of medieval literature. As Nordal states: "[Icelandic romances are] extremely unoriginal and paltry products".[57]

Literary criticism, as well as literature itself, is subject to gradual developments. A couple of decades before Nordal's statement, Schlauch published her study on the Icelandic romances, a volume which still represents a milestone in the field. The seeds for a re-evaluation of *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* had been planted then, although it took some time for a complete abandonment of any bias towards them. In fact, this process is still being completed.[58] Schlauch herself showed conflicting opinions on the Icelandic romances, which she called "lamentably inferior" compared to *Íslendingasögur* and yet analysed them with great accuracy, demonstrating a complexity that is hard to consider banal.

Nonetheless, the supposed inferiority of *riddarasögur* to the family sagas, makes the transformation in literary taste even more surprising for Schlauch: "[As if] one turns from the austere simplicity of *Laxdæla saga* to the phantasmagoria such as *Gibbons saga ok Gregu*. It is difficult to believe that the same nation should have produced and apparently delighted in both within a comparatively short period".[59] Schlauch's reference to the apparent delight of the audience with regard to the new saga genre is mostly based on the manuscript transmission of *riddarasögur*. Evidenced by the quantity of extant medieval and post-medieval manuscripts containing romances, it is not hard to notice the popularity of these genres in Iceland throughout the centuries.[60] The post-Reformation period, which Driscoll describes as an era of generally negative judgements towards romances, still saw a great expansion of manuscript production. The cultural monopoly was still in the hands of the Church, so that the first non-religious books started being printed quite late.[61] Therefore, some sort of underground artisanal production of texts had to develop, especially for those popular genres which were disregarded by the public opinion. Even after the founding of the press at Hrappsey in 1773 and the end of the Church's monopoly on printed material, romances remained a rather unattractive product:

[55] Lagerholm 1927, p. xvi.
[56] Jón Helgason 1934.
[57] Nordal 1953, p. 268.
[58] For a reflection on the evolution of *riddarasögur* scholarship, see Hughes 2021 and Eriksen 2017, pp. 59–73. Eriksen (2013) addresses the position of *riddarasögur* from a polysystemic perspective.
[59] Schlauch 1934, p. 10.
[60] Kalinke 1985a, p. 316.
[61] This is despite the introduction of the first printer in Iceland in the sixteenth century.

> While on the continent, in Britain, and much of the rest of Scandinavia, translations, adaptations, and imitations of medieval chivalric romances had formed the basis of a booming book trade from the sixteenth century onwards, in Iceland such material circulated almost entirely in manuscript.[62]

Before the Reformation, it is plausible to assume that these narratives were mainly – but in no way exclusively – conceived by and for the 'upper classes', some kind of aristocracy, as defined by Henric Bagerius, consisting of rich and educated landowners with a sophisticated literary taste, and the powerful clergy.[63] With the establishment of the Lutheran church in Iceland, a growing antipathy started to be displayed by both the clergy and the secular authorities for romances, legends, *rímur*, ballads, and popular literature in general.[64] Understandably, the Enlightenment was not a period of great appreciation for imaginative works such as *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, so that written documents and letters can be found of important intellectuals to prove their general scorn for these genres.[65] A few decades later, while elsewhere in Europe the Romantic movement promoted a re-evaluation of folklore literature, a different perspective was taken by Icelandic scholars. The journal *Fjölnir*, which contributed to the spread of Romanticism in Iceland,[66] featured Tómas Sæmundsson's concern about the risk of giving people "hvað hann [á] að biðja um",[67] referring to mediocre books of popular literature. Considering the harsh criticism that one of the first editions of chivalric sagas received after its publication in 1852, it is easy to confirm this general attitude amongst Icelandic scholars.[68]

The above-mentioned points of view should not call into question the credibility or the calibre of the scholars who rejected *riddarasögur* and/or *fornaldarsögur* as valuable products of

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[62] Driscoll 1997, p. 1.

[63] Bagerius 2009, p. 34. Bagerius endorses the use of the term, although the living conditions of the richest Icelanders in the Late Middle Ages were not as comfortable as those of other feudal lords on the mainland. He underlines the desire of this social group to distinguish itself from the rest of the Icelandic society, thus chasing an ideal of nobility that might have encouraged the circulation of chivalric literature or didactic texts such as the *Konungs skuggsjá* (pp. 55–60). The formation of the Icelandic aristocracy began already in the 1220s – thanks to the close relationships that the Norwegian king sought with the powerful local chieftains – and developed throughout the fourteenth century (p. 35). On the authorship of indigenous *riddarasögur*, see also Glauser 1983, pp. 219–33.

[64] Driscoll 1997, p. 13.

[65] An example is Magnús Stephensen of *Landsuppfræðingarfélag* (literally The Icelandic Society for the Education of the Nation) (Driscoll 1997, pp. 16-21).

[66] *Fjölnir* was a publication of fundamental importance for the Icelandic culture. It was founded in 1835 by the so-called *Fjölnismenn* (The men of *Fjölnir*) and published annually until 1847.

[67] "What the public [shall] demand", Tómas Sæmundsson 1839, p. 104.

[68] *Fjórar Riddarasögur*, edited by Einar Þórðarson and Hannes Erlendsson. Benedikt Gröndal's invective against Einar and Hannes is the most accusatory one, insinuating that the texts might have been written from scratch by the editors themselves (Driscoll 1997, p. 27).

their time. Cultural scenarios change, and so do the social concerns and needs of a community. This is particularly valid for Iceland, a country that had been looking for its own identity and space on the international stage until relatively recent times. Twentieth-century scholars were still deeply influenced by the critical literature that preceded them, and this should not be regarded as a fault. The *Íslendingasögur*'s laconic style and references to the material life of the first settlers have brought scholars to make courageous comparisons between them and the modern novel.[69] The current scholarly community will always be indebted to those who have engaged in studies, editions and analyses of the family sagas, but it seems important not to disregard other genres, especially when the manuscript transmission speaks for their relevance within their parent culture.

A first step forward in this direction was made when the first critical editions of *riddarasögur* was published. Although some of these publications were limited to translated romances, some of them deserve a mention as significant contributions towards a change of critical perspective. In 1927, Åke Lagerholm edited *Ála flekks saga* and *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*.[70] In 1954, Bjarni Vilhjálmsson published his six-volume collection *Riddarasögur*. A few years later, the first editions of *Dínus saga drambláta* and *Viktors saga ok Blávus* were fashioned by Jónas Kristjánsson, the latter of which contains an important introduction by Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Loth's diplomatic editions from the 1960s have been mentioned. In more recent years, the works of Matthew Driscoll on *Sigurðar saga þögla*[71] and of Sheryl McDonald on *Nitida saga*[72] have been appreciated. The first English translations of *Sigurðar saga fóts*, *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* and *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* were only published respectively in 2010, 2013 and 2020.[73] Other recently translated sagas outside the main corpus are *Ála flekks saga* and *Tiódels saga* (2018),[74] and *Vilmundar saga viðutan* (2021).[75]

In the same fifty years of the twentieth century when the first editions were given to the press, the scholarly community started to channel new enthusiasm towards romances into specific events, such as the fourth and fifth International Saga Conferences, respectively addressing *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* as distinctive genres. The 1980s saw the publications of Glauser's extensive study *Isländische Märchensagas*[76] and Astrid van Nahl's *Originale Riddarasögur*.[77]

[69] Ker 1908, pp. 182–83.
[70] Lagerholm 1927.
[71] Driscoll 1992.
[72] McDonald 2009.
[73] See Hall et al. 2010; Hall, Richardson and Þorgeirsson 2013; Lavender et al. 2020.
[74] Hui et al. 2018; Hall et al. 2018.
[75] Hui 2021.
[76] Glauser 1983.
[77] Van Nahl 1981.

In 1990, Marianne Kalinke's *Bridal-Quest* was published.[78] New approaches generally aimed at recognising a previously neglected complexity to Icelandic *riddarasögur*, whose fantastic and adventurous elements may be but the surface of much relevant information about the late medieval Icelandic society.

From the 1990s up to the present day, the valorisation of Icelandic *riddarasögur* has been proceeding with remarkable results.[79] Specialists have addressed indigenous *riddarasögur* both directly and indirectly, partially and extensively, in book-length contributions but mostly through articles, papers and book chapters. The focus has often been on particular sagas or specific aspects of the texts, such as literary motifs, language and style, or narrative modes, and the need for longer and more comprehensive contributions has not been satisfied as of yet. Similarly, the need for modern critical editions is still perceived, as many indigenous *riddarasögur* are only available via Loth's collection. It is true that some of the sagas found translation in languages other than English, which also indicates a general growing interest towards the texts.[80]

Among the shorter publications on the matter, Driscoll's 1990 article on the position of *riddarasögur* in the Icelandic literary landscape should be mentioned.[81] Shortly after, Fulvio Ferrari published his comparative analysis of the theme of voyage in *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*. His article represents a quite unique case in the Italian scholarly environment – where translations and analyses of Old Norse-Icelandic materials have mostly focused on *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*. Other thematically specific contributions are Ármann Jakobsson's study on the figure of the helping dwarf,[82] Barnes's geopolitical analysis of *Nitida saga*,[83] and Inna Matyushina's papers on fantastic objects[84] and emotions in the indigenous *riddarasögur*.[85] The 13th International Saga Conference (2006) on the fantastic in Old-Norse Icelandic literature was one of the most prolific events in this regard in recent years.[86] Two of the above mentioned articles belong to the proceedings of this conference. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir has also addressed Icelandic *riddarasögur*, including in her paper on gender,

[78] Kalinke 1990.
[79] See also Tulinius 1993. Here, the author suggests an alternative label that would encompass both indigenous *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, that is, *íslenska rómansan*.
[80] See for instance Glauser, Kreutzer, and Wäckerlin 1998. The Spanish scholarship has been particularly productive in recent years, e.g. Gonzáles Campo 2010 and Pérez 2017.
[81] Driscoll 1990.
[82] Ármann Jakobsson 2008.
[83] Barnes 2006.
[84] Matyushina 2006.
[85] Matyushina and New 2020.
[86] McKinnel, Ashart, and Kick 2006.

status and violence in Old Norse literature.[87] Björn Bandlien has tackled the impact of courtly literature on the Scandinavian and Icelandic representation of love and gender relations.[88] Other specific approaches were taken about the *meykóngr* (maiden-king) motif as a typical feature of the indigenous *riddarasögur*, including by Marianne Kalinke,[89] Sif Ríkharðsdóttir,[90] and Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir.[91] These studies focus on the specificity of the motif and reflect on its possible genesis, thus, keeping a useful comparative approach.[92] Another popular *riddarasögur* theme is the depiction of monstrosity and otherness. Ármann Jakobsson's study on dwarfs has been mentioned, but his work on troll-like figures in Old Norse literature should not be forgotten, either.[93] Arngrímur Vídalín's PhD dissertation on monsters in the worldview of Icelanders from 1100 to 1550 represents one of the latest additions to the field.[94] Hendrik Lambertus has recently addressed monstrosity in relation to knighthood, as well.[95] In 2020, Védís Ragnheiðardóttir wrote about monstrous masculinity in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*.[96] In the same year, Minjie Su defended her PhD dissertation on werewolves in sagas, including *Ála flekks saga*.[97]

Among the various critical perspectives that have been provided for the indigenous *riddarasögur* there is also the analysis of fictional space. In fact, a growing interest in this topic has risen on an interdisciplinary level after the so-called 'Spatial Turn' that has affected the field of humanities in recent years.[98] New approaches have been developed in order to study the various facets of space and the design of narrative worlds as well as the contextual space of literary production. For instance, new perspectives have re-theorised the relationship between cartography and literature, as Dale Kedwards points out.[99] As for *riddarasögur*, a few contributions are worth a mention, such as Werner Schäfke's study on the semantics of space

[87] Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2016.
[88] Bandlien 2005.
[89] Kalinke has given a remarkable contribution in the research on both translated and indigenous romances from a wide range of perspectives. See Kalinke 1990 and her volume on the evolution of the genre (2017).
[90] See Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 2010.
[91] See Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir 2012.
[92] For another contribution on the *meykongr* motif, see Guðbjörg Aðalbergsdóttir 1994.
[93] Ármann's bibliography on the paranormal is wide and has improved the current research significantly. On troll-like figures, see Ármann Jakobsson 2017. See also Ármann Jakobsson and Mayburd 2020. On the lexicon of paranormal, see Ármann Jakobsson 2013.
[94] Arngrímur Vidalín 2017. The structure of Arngrímur's thesis and the emphasis put on geographical and anthropological aspects make his contribution particularly valuable.
[95] Lambertus 2013.
[96] Védís Ragnheiðardóttir 2020a. Védís's chapter on the genre also deserves a mention (2020b).
[97] On *Ála flekks saga* and memory, see Künzler 2017.
[98] This topic is addressed in general terms by Sverrir Jakobsson (2017, pp. 175–86). See also Rösli 2018; Glauser 2007. The *16th International Saga Conference* (2015) was focused on space. Space in the so-called 'post-classical' *Íslendingasögur* is a topic of research in Merkelbach 2020. On space and landscape, see Tulinius 1990. On the general traits of the Spatial Turn, see Warf and Arias 2009.
[99] Kedwards 2020, p. 12.

in chivalric and legendary sagas.[100] The above-mentioned research of Lambertus on *riddarasögur* pays great attention to space as a defining aspect of the otherness in the texts.[101] An interesting approach was also taken by Anna Hansen in her analysis of the fantastic space in *Valdimars saga.*[102] An ecotheological reading of *Ála flekks saga* has recently been offered by Tiffany N. White.[103] Sheryl McDonald has addressed the topics of geography and narrative space, among other aspects of *Nitida saga*.[104] The same was done by Barnes, in her article "Margin vs. Centre".[105] A chapter of Barnes's *The Bookish Riddarasögur* is dedicated to the mapping and measuring of the world in a selection of three Icelandic *riddarasögur*.[106]

[100] Schäfke 2013.
[101] See also Lambertus 2009 on the spatial structure of *Ectors saga*.
[102] Hansen 2009.
[103] White 2020.
[104] McDonald Werronen 2016, pp. 89–123.
[105] Barnes 2006.
[106] Barnes 2014, pp. 31–52.

2 LATE MEDIEVAL SPATIALITY: AN OVERVIEW

"The earth is our greater book; what was promised in
God's book, I see there fulfilled"

– St. Augustine of Hippo, *Epistulae*

Chapter One introduced the thought of Henri Lefebvre, who endorses the necessity to establish a unitary logic of spatial production for distinct socio-cultural subjects. Despite his decidedly Marxist approach, Lefebvre illustrates how his model of spatial production may be applied to different contexts, including the Late Middle Ages, so long as they are clearly defined. Specifically, Lefebvre's model is based on a triad of concepts whose simultaneous analysis would help describe the spatial production of a given society. Each of these three levels conveys the definition of a shared logic of representing, living, and constructing space.

a) *Pratique spatiale* (Spatial practice): The first term indicates the way a certain society approaches the material production and organisation of space. It has to do with the relations between physical spaces. In Lefebvre's words: "The spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space",[1] which means the observation of habits and patterns related to space in everyday life.
b) *Représentation de l'espace* (Representation of space): This is the abstract intellectual space of scholars, scientists, urbanists, and architects, who identify what is lived and perceived with what is conceived and designed. Lefebvre considers this the dominant layer of spatial production in every society.
c) *Espaces de représentation* (Representational spaces): This category refers to spaces which are effectively lived through the symbols associated to them. Representational space is not exactly the physical one, as it rather embraces it by highlighting the symbolic value of its elements. It is a type of space dominated by non-verbal signs.

Lefebvre frequently comes back to this triad in order to approach the production of space in different contexts, including the medieval western societies.[2] When he mentions the

[1] Lefebvre 1991, p. 38.
[2] As one of the most influential philosophers of the past century, Lefebvre had a strong impact on many fields, including sociology and politics. His model was taken up by various thinkers, such as the anglophone Marxist human geographers of the 1980s and 1990s (Smith 2019, p. 69). As hard as it is to account for the general impact of Lefebvre's thought, it should be relevant to mention at least recent geocritical studies, e.g. Westphal 2015, Tally

Middle Ages, implying the geographically and temporally bound framework of feudalistic Western societies, Lefebvre reflects on what founded the spatial production of the time:

> In the Middle Ages, spatial practice embraced not only the network of local roads close to peasant communities, monasteries and castles, but also the main roads between towns and the great pilgrims' and crusaders' ways. As for the representations of space, these were borrowed from Aristotelian and Ptolemaic conceptions, as modified by Christianity: The Earth, the underground 'world', and the luminous Cosmos, Heaven of the just and of the angels, inhabited by God […]. A fixed sphere within a finite space, diametrically bisected by the surface of the Earth […]. Representational spaces, for their part, determined the foci of a vicinity: The village church graveyard, hall and fields, or the square and the belfry. Such spaces were interpretations, sometimes marvellous successful ones, of cosmological representations. Thus, the road to Santiago de Compostela was the equivalent, on the earth's surface, of the Way that led from Cancer to Capricorn on the vault of heavens.[3]

By giving representations of space a dominant position, Lefebvre validates the importance of those intellectual products that stood the test of time for the reconstruction of a late medieval worldview. The doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, as interpreted by the Church Fathers, played an essential role in determining spatial production in the Middle Ages, which is why Christian ideology is a useful starting point in the present analysis.

Storyworld theorists, such as Mark J. Wolf, have addressed the production of fictional spaces (or 'secondary worlds') in medieval literature, including St. Augustine and Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) as significant examples of how the construction of secondary worlds was bound to the Christian ideology for centuries. The spaces described by the two intellectuals, although far apart in time, are both consistent with the clerical conception of the cosmos: "St. Augustine's *City of God* described a utopia not to be found on Earth, and centuries later Dante Alighieri envisioned what heaven, purgatory, and hell might be like in his *Divine Comedy*".[4] As products of the cultural élite, these representations of spaces might have had an impact on their respective cultures, at least among other intellectuals who could approach their works. St.

2014, and Peraldo 2016. Geocriticism has in turn been applied to medieval studies, for instance by Robert Rouse (2011). Within the framework of Old Norse literary criticism, Lefebvre has influenced, for instance, Sverrir Jakobsson (2010) and Hansen (2009).

[3] Lefebvre 1991, p. 45.

[4] Wolf 2012, p. 71.

Augustine, as a Church Father, probably had the greatest influence in the light of his moral authority.[5] Besides the elaboration of the Augustinian worldview, the period between the second half of the thirteenth century and the end of the fifteenth saw a systematic reintroduction of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmologies in the cultural discourse.[6] This reappropriation was gradual, as the ideas inherited from the classical antiquity had to be adapted to the new ideological framework. This process, together with the study of the Bible and the Church Fathers, shaped the worldview of late medieval Europe. Christian Scholasticism and the seven liberal arts served the establishment of ideological uniformity, as they maintained an unquestioned prominence in the field of intellectual training as long as the theological unity endured, that is, before the Reformation.[7] Although access to education was extremely limited, we can assume that the evangelising attitude of Church representatives helped the Christian worldview make its way into the lowest layers of European societies as well. The pedagogic purpose was not only achieved through the production and transmission of texts, which involved a small percentage of people, but also via oral preaching and readings.[8]

The depth and extension of the Christian ideological hegemony in most of Europe is confirmed by the huge impact of other intellectual authorities such as Isidore of Seville (560–636) and Venerable Bede (673–735), whose pseudoscientific *compendia* were copied widely throughout the Middle Ages.[9] Alain Guerreau's work is based on these premises for the analysis of a shared medieval worldview.[10]

> It is necessary to start from the founding idea of the alterity of the Middle Ages and set a simple hypothesis: medieval civilization was provided with a completely original system of spatial representation, which probably constituted the main axis of the whole representational system of this society.[11]

[5] Cf. Guerreau 2002, p. 10.
[6] Cf. Pognon 1984, pp. 335–37. On the reception and elaboration of St. Augustine in the Late Middle Ages, see Saak 2012. On the rediscovery of Aristotle and Ptolemy in the thirteenth century, see de Leemans, 2010 and Grant 1997.
[7] On these aspects, see 3.1.1.
[8] Salvucci 2006, p. 867.
[9] Simek (1990, pp. 10–74) argues that some encyclopaedic works were well-known in Iceland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, at least in some translated or partially rewritten form. Encyclopaedic authors such as Isidore were essential readings for the development of an Old Norse-Icelandic cosmography. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (2000) has dedicated part of her research to the reception of universal history and encyclopaedic literature in Iceland, for instance by analysing the contents of AM 764 4to (late fourteenth century) and making convincing suggestions on the manuscript's possible sources.
[10] Guerreau 2002, p. 4.
[11] Guerreau 2002, p. 2.

It is possible to notice a similarity between Guerreau's and Lefebvre's approaches. Both scholars reject the segmentation of space and search for ideological consistency instead. For this reason, their proposals are the starting point of this research. Indigenous *riddarasögur* feature a great deal of learned materials and descriptions of the world that invite a broad analytical perspective. As remarkable examples of representations of space themselves, they deserve to be investigated beyond the veil of their adventurous plots.

In fact, the research of a unitary system of spatial representation in the Late Middle Ages involves the possibility of seeing it applied to the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, as well. This does not exclude the chance of coming across elements and patterns which are genuinely indigenous. In fact, being able to compare the Icelandic worldview and the continental one should make any local instances even more interesting, as they might reflect a complex relationship of Icelandic authors with their sources beyond the limits of simple imitation.

2.1 *Civitas Dei / Civitas Homini*: The Spatial Implications of the Augustinian Theology

Alain Guerreau recognizes two main characteristics of medieval space influenced directly by St. Augustine's philosophy, which are hierarchy and concentricity.[12] Hierarchy refers to the vertical axis that connects God in the heavens and men on earth, whilst concentricity indicates God's central position in the cosmos. Everything in Creation is made by Him and ultimately leans back to its source. This cosmological setup is allegedly inspired by St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God), a literary utopia that illustrates the saint's worldview through the fundamental dichotomy *Civitas Dei* and *Civitas homini*, or Creator and Creation. The City of God is a symbol of the higher dimension from which God creates the world, while the City of Man symbolizes the earth as the place where God's ideas are manifested or emanated. This concept, borrowed from Neoplatonism,[13] implies a First Principle (the One/God) that expands His creative power into the world. Creation, however, is only an imperfect reflection of God's perfect plan and is, therefore, subject to evil as an absence of good.[14] Similar to sunlight, God's creative irradiation gradually fades away as it leaves its source, which makes room for corruption to infiltrate the world, as well as the human soul. This helped Augustine give an explanation to evil that distanced itself from the Manichean conviction of evil as an ontological entity.

[12] Guerreau 2002, pp. 7, 13.
[13] Wurm 2013 [1998], p. 456.
[14] For the reception of St. Augustine in the Latin Middle Ages, see Saak 2012.

Guerreau believes that these principles influenced abstract spatial thinking and inspired representations of the cosmos that were both hierarchical and concentric. Hierarchy is represented by a symbolic vertical axis (*axis mundi*) connecting heaven and earth, the receiving end. Concentricity refers to God's central position in the universe. Earth too takes a central position, although on a lower cosmic plane. An eleventh-century English drawing of *Genesis* perfectly renders the hierarchical and concentric structure of the cosmos (*fig. 1*):[15]

Figure 1 - © British Library Board (Royal MS I E VII, 1v).

As can be seen, God takes the upper position, while the earth occupies the lower section of the cosmic circle. The act of creation is a vertical one, as both God and the world take a central position, although on different levels. At the same time, a tendency to spatial polarisation results from verticality. God's mind, in the heavens, represents a positive pole, perfect in itself, whilst Creation is a negative one, where the gradual distance from the Creator is cause of imperfection and evil in mortal societies. Polarisation is then reflected on the surface of the earth, with Jerusalem and other pivotal centres of Christianity becoming positive centres of aggregation in the spatial imagery of medieval men. Medieval *mappae mundi*, such as the Hereford, Ebstorf, and Psalter maps, which are addressed below, are based on the same representational strategies, since they depict God in the top central part of the drawing and Jerusalem at the exact centre of the earth.[16] In the microcosm of medieval villages the local

[15] The codex contains mostly religious texts, such as part of the only surviving copy of the Bible from late Anglo-Saxon England. The image depicts God, who creates the world from above with a compass.
[16] On this aspect, see Woodward 1987, p. 340.

churches fulfilled the same function by polarising the local everyday life because of their sacredness, as highlighted by Lefebvre.[17]

The sacredness of temples, monasteries, and other religious buildings has been addressed by researchers in the history of religions as well, e.g. Mircea Eliade, whose comparative work on holy spaces and symbols has a great anthropological value. In particular, Eliade specialised in recurring patterns which seem to belong to several religions, including Christianity, across the evolution of human societies. In his analysis, he accounts for both the macrocosmic ideas related to the worldview of different religions and the microcosmic symbolism of natural landscapes and places of worship. Eliade too considers the centrality granted to Jerusalem in the medieval image of the world. Inside the city, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was believed to have a circular plan, contained the actual navel of the world (*umbilicus mundi* or *omphalós*) in the form of a stone goblet.[18] Finally, on the surface of the goblet, another stone marks the exact centre of the world (*fig. 25*).[19] Eliade's analysis adds a third defining element to the medieval conception of space, which is a tendency towards condensation or miniaturisation. By constructing a concentric spatial model where polarising centres are encompassed by other centres (the stone encompassed by the goblet, encompassed by the Holy Sepulchre, encompassed by Jerusalem, encompassed by the earth, encompassed by the heavens, encompassed by God), medieval thinkers and architects would produce a series of representational spaces that would mutually recall one another in the framework of God's greater design. From this perspective, the *omphalós* is but a smaller representation of the whole universe, i.e. a microcosm.

Another scholar who has focused on the relationship between microcosms and macrocosms is Gaston Bachelard, whose *La poétique de l'espace* has had a great impact on the spatial discourse of the past decades.[20] While focusing on modern poetry, Bachelard believes that the spatial condensation of microcosms works on the human mind as a trigger for the imaginative vision of immensities. This can be applied to the small objects of the everyday experience (e.g. a stone or a shell) as well as to human artifacts that aim at miniaturisation, such as medieval illuminations.[21] Even more powerful, according to Bachelard, is the structure of a nucleus enclosing other nuclei in a potentially infinite sequence of concentric planes, up to the

[17] Lefebvre 1991, p. 45. On the social space produced by the Catholic Church and the concentric patterns related to it, see also Cohen and Madeline 2014, p. 11.
[18] Eliade, 1968 [1961], pp. 42 ff. For a more detailed analysis of these aspects, see 7.3.2.3.
[19] On the centrality of Jerusalem in medieval spatial thinking, see Kupfer 2014.
[20] Bachelard 1994. For a French edition, see Bachelard 2020 [1957].
[21] Bachelard 1994, p. 159.

point where the miniature reaches the size of the universe itself.[22] This would be the reason for the magnetic power of mandalas, spirals, and *cornucopiae* in art and architecture.[23] Bachelard's theory has a claim of universality as it looks for justification in human psychology and adds nuances to the sacredness of centres endorsed by Eliade. Condensed and concentric miniatures, like the *omphalós*, can be interpreted as representational spaces that help the human eye visualise much larger spaces of representation.

In creating a highly symbolic spatial system based on dichotomies, concentricity and condensation, medieval scholars were supported by the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic system, which was being rediscovered and reinterpreted through Christian lenses in the Late Middle Ages: God is the *primum mobile* that determines not only the existence but also the movement of the heavenly circles and everything below.[24] Guerreau sees a consistent reproduction of this complex spatial system in medieval iconography, art, architecture, cartography, and literature.[25] From this point of view, every aspect of medieval reality might be intended as symbolic, since it bears traces of the divine plan. Adelaide Ricci comments on Guerreau's contribution as follows:

> The infinitely big and the infinitely small cannot share uniform coordinates. Therefore, this is not a question of spaces, but rather of spatial relations which initiate a hierarchical system polarized by opposing couples (*caro–spiritus*, *terra–coelum*, *intus–foris*, and so on) and defined by the idea of diffusion (from perfect to imperfect). Starting from the sixth century, this hierarchical model originates a spatial system which is also concentric. In particular, the antinomian relation high-low constitutes the coordinating axis of Christian space – an axis which is descending into incarnation and ascending into redemption. This idea is not only at the base of the vertical structure of the 'otherworld', but it also explains how the human world – which is intermediary by its own nature – is filled with a complex symbology.[26]

By infinitely big, Ricci refers to God, whilst the infinitely small is the dimension of humans as an imperfect and finite reflection of the divine. Ricci addresses the concentric and

[22] Bachelard 1994, pp. 157–58.
[23] See for instance Purce 1974. On the spiral as the alleged motion of the sun in the Late Middle Ages, see Valleriani 2020.
[24] Simek 1992, pp. 8–10. On the concentric image of the universe in the medieval West, see also Grant 2013.
[25] On medieval theology applied to architecture and artifacts, see Lewis 2017. For a contribution on the concentric architecture of early Byzantine churches in Jerusalem, see Shalev-Hurvitz 2015. On the theological implications of medieval maps, see 2.4.
[26] Ricci 2002, p. 790.

polarising tendency of medieval space as described by Guerreau and the idea of medieval reality as loaded with symbolism. According to St. Augustine, traces and signs around men recall God's plan but are not easily interpreted, as they are partly concealed to the human eye. From the influence of his writings, an idea of geography may be drawn which is strictly connected to exegesis (the study and interpretation of the Scriptures) and history. Therefore, the study of geography is also the study of the History of Salvation. In the course of the Middle Ages, medieval maps became the material representations of this principle. Natalia Lozovsky endorses the pivotal role of Augustine in the development of a Catholic system of knowledge: "Augustine's justification of secular studies influenced the way the medieval system of knowledge was formed and taught in schools, including geographical material".[27]

St. Augustine's idea is to approach geography as a part of *Physica* (i.e. the study of Creation) and a propaedeutic subject to the understanding of the Bible. In most cases, the Scriptures were perceived as both the source and the purpose of knowledge, which means that God's plan was both the starting point and the goal of medieval geographical studies.[28] The exegetical conception of geography inaugurated by St. Augustine was not dismissed but rather further developed in the later Middle Ages, when the cosmographical systems of Aristotle and Ptolemy were integrated in the scientific discourse on the structure of the cosmos.

2.2 The Aristotelian and Ptolemaic Cosmos

The Late Middle Ages saw the rediscovery of Aristotle's cosmogony and Ptolemy's astronomy, which did not take place until the end of the twelfth century.[29] The promotion of their works was encouraged through Latin translations, the chief language of the educated clergy, and the subsequent integration of their systems in clerical schools and universities.[30] These 'new' ideas led to a further development of the principles established by St. Augustine, with a specific focus on the motion of concentric orbs or spheres as supporting structures of the planets. In particular, the idea of moving concentric circles was endorsed by the interpretation of Aristotle's *Physics*. The concept of *primum mobile*, derived from the Aristotelian system, finds correspondence in the idea of God as the One creating and putting the universe to motion.

It should be noted that Aristotle's and Ptolemy's systems differed on some key aspects, although they were both based on a depiction of the cosmos as a series of spherical celestial

[27] Lozovsky 2003 [2000], p. 14.
[28] Lozovsky 2003 [2000], p. 35.
[29] On the rediscovery and transmission of Aristotle in the Middle Ages, see Brams 2003.
[30] On the diffusion of the 'Scholastic Aristoteles', see Pasnau 2012.

bodies moving around the earth with planets attached to them. In particular, Aristotle proposed a perfectly concentric configuration of the spheres, while Ptolemy integrates this structure with Arabic influences, working on a cosmic architecture based on eccentric epicycles that would place the earth not quite at the geometric centre of the universe and accept a simultaneous circular rotation of the planets on themselves.[31] In any case, medieval Scholasticism designed some compromise between the two models, probably with the intent to save the central position of the earth and the overall cosmic concentricity.[32] Late medieval diagrams of the universe accounted for this model, most often described as a structure of seven concentric circles corresponding to the seven known planets, while not losing the Augustinian relevance on verticality and hierarchy.[33] Works like John of Sacrobosco's *Liber de sphaera* (first half of the thirteenth century) were indebted to the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic system and became textbooks in universities, such as Paris.[34] The most important interpreter of the Aristotelian thought from a Christian perspective was Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). His work *Summa Theologiae*, aimed at solving the most evident contradictions between the Christian and the Aristotelian cosmologies, thus, it was widely copied, and it influenced late medieval Scholasticism significantly.[35]

A development of the models presented in this chapter can be found in the fourteenth-century *Divina Commedia* (Divine Comedy) by Dante Alighieri. The three-folded spatial configuration of Alighieri's poem follows his journey through a vertical otherworld where the earth is in an intermediary position between heaven and hell.[36] At the same time, the concentric system of spheres is applied to the whole cosmos on different levels. The three realms of the otherworld, i.e. *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, correspond to the ascending itinerary of redemption and contemplation of the poet. God is portrayed high above the physical dimension, while Hell is in the underground, beneath Jerusalem, in accordance with Augustine.[37] The earth lies in-between. Both Heaven and Hell are made of a series of vertically arranged concentric circles. At the centre and bottom of Hell, which means the farthest point

[31] Their cosmologies are not addressed in more detail in this context, as the objective of the chapter is to prepare the ground for the interpretation of late medieval literary texts. For more information, see Kedwards 2020, p. 77.
[32] Grant 1997, p. 129. See also Simek 1992, pp. 6–23.
[33] Cf. Simek 1992, pp. 9–10, 12. On the evolution of the Augustinian theology and the growing attention to verticality and vertical tropes in late medieval literature, see Rodriguez 2012.
[34] Simek 1992, pp. 16–17.
[35] Cf. Pognon 1984, pp. 335–37.
[36] For an analysis of Dante's cosmology, see Sciuto 1954, pp. 52–56.
[37] St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 21, X.

from God, dwells Lucifer, while God is at the centre and top of Heaven. The *Commedia* ends with the *visio dei* (vision of God), which represents the last step of the poet's spiritual ascension.[38]

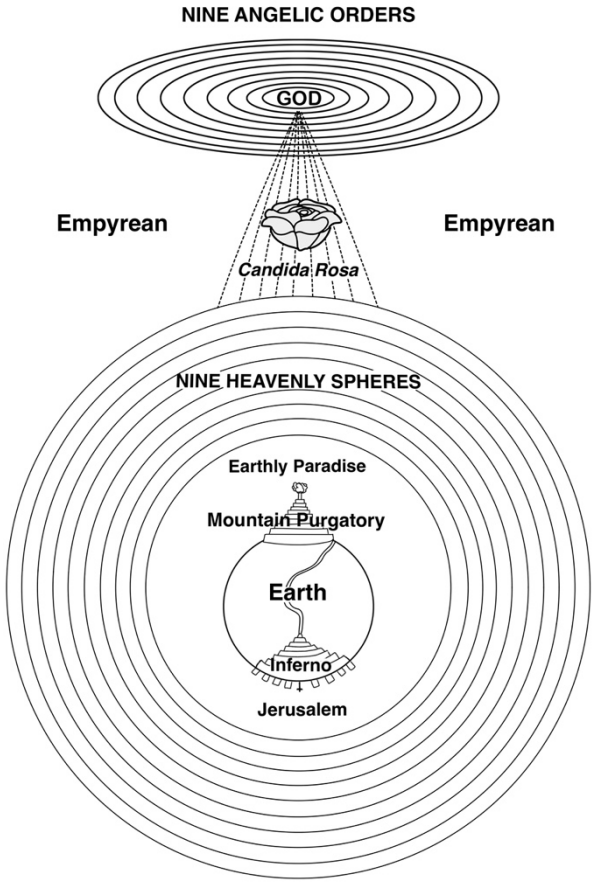

Figure 2 – A simplified calque of Dante Alighieri's cosmology

Dante's vertical and concentric representation does seem to account for the most influential cosmographical works that preceded him. The hierarchical structure of the cosmos polarised between high (God in the heavens) and low (the earth and Hell beneath it), the central position of Jerusalem, and the overall concentric design are important clues about the diffusion of both St. Augustine's ideas and the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic system in the Late Middle Ages. In fact, the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth century represent an important turning point for a "hegemonic diffusion" of Scholasticism that lasted for centuries.[39] In the same timeframe, around 1100, Rome stopped being considered the centre of the known world and was replaced with Jerusalem, while still remaining a pivotal location for the presence of the

[38] The standard Italian edition of the *Commedia* was fashioned by Giorgio Petrocchi in the 1960s. For a widely appreciated English edition, see Sayers 1950–62. Iceland has seen a first complete translation of the work only in 2010 by Erlingur E. Halldórsson.
[39] Marenbon 2003, p. 150.

Pope.[40] It might be argued that these are the years when the late medieval production of space began to develop the fundamental characteristics that were described above, thanks to the flourishing of Scholasticism and the introduction of Aristotle and Ptolemy in the cultural discourse.

Dante's design is but one expression of the patterns that regulated physical and metaphysical space in the Late Middle Ages. As highlighted by Anita Guerreau-Jalabert, the opposition of Creator and Creation did not remain confined to the level of pure theological utopias but, in fact, influenced many other aspects of the medieval life, including the practical organisation of space, that is, the Lefebvrian 'spatial practice'. Derivative of the basic Creator-Creation dichotomy are, for instance, the couples inside-outside, earth-sky (or, more generally, low-high), and flesh-soul.[41] As much as the balance between flesh (*caro*) and soul (*spiritus*) defines the human nature without causing paradox, all other oppositions are complementary and not contradictory in the structure of reality:

> The couple *spiritus-caro* applies to different plans of reality, and it notably plays an essential role in the conception of social relations: relations between men and women, clergy and lay, or kin relations – all organised by *caritas-amor* and their antitheses; however, this also defines another crucial element, a representation of space polarized by the opposition of a positive valence – the inside – and a negative valence – the outside, which is inscribed in men as well, thanks to the promotion of the inner man. These different registers are inherently interconnected by an analogical principle which works in the way of 'everything is within everything reciprocally' (Ph. Descola 2006). This takes all the diversity of the world back to a principle of unity.[42]

The idea of a series of complementary oppositions that analogically refer to each other corresponds to what Guerreau-Jalabert defines as a 'Matrix of General Analogy'. This concept translates the medieval belief that all opposites could recall each other and make sense in the framework of God's inscrutable plan. Every contradictory aspect of the world is destined to ultimately come back to the unity of the Creator's mind. With these premises, analogy is the ideal rhetorical device to address the issue, insofar as it connects elements that are only apparently incompatible. Finally, by underlining the presence of the same oppositions on every

[40] On this matter, see Sverrir Jakobsson 2005.
[41] Guerreau-Jalabert 2015.
[42] Guerreau-Jalabert 2015, p. 462.

level of creation, from the skies down to the inner nature of men, Guerreau-Jalabert also confirms the idea that microcosms could be ontologically connected to macrocosms. The same core patterns that determined the nature of the infinitely big were to be found in the infinitely small, as well. Although the two dimensions cannot share the same coordinates, they are nonetheless related by being essential parts of the same unitary design.

2.3 The Experience of Space as Interpretation

According to St. Augustine, the divine messages wrought in the world are not immediately visible but rather concealed in a pervasive symbolism. Reading the signs of God's plan is a difficult task, only possible to those who establish a privileged relationship with their soul while exercising their intellect to the exegetical method. This is one of the aspects that make Augustine the philosopher of interiority. Achim Wurm addresses the dichotomy of interiority-exteriority, I and Not-I, in St. Augustine's *Confessiones*, and highlights the important repercussions of this couple on the saint's conception of language.[43] As a sign, language takes up the role of mediator in the tension between inside and outside. Augustine sees language as a shell or container for inner thoughts. As the elements of Creation, words may hide deeper meanings that are not immediately understandable. This is especially valid for the language of the Bible, which is the book par excellence.[44] From this perspective, language can be a vehicle for a better understanding of the world or the Scriptures, as much as it can be a container of symbols *per se*. This has an impact on narratives and texts in general, which are believed to convey complex meanings while also interpreting reality. Therefore, the experience of space as an emanation from God is an interpretative and exegetical one that can be expressed with words, as long as they do not betray the allegoric nature of Creation.

If analogy is a way of connecting elements of reality which are only apparently conflicting – flesh and soul, for example – in order to explain a principle or idea, allegory is defined as an object that should not be interpreted according to its literal meaning but rather to the moral or ideological qualities it represents. Unlike metaphor, allegory presents a fully acceptable literal meaning, which may be taken as valid by the unexperienced mind. Allegory is most frequently related to literary or artistic works, but in Augustine's philosophy it is also a general cognitive process related to the understanding of nature. It is the compass for men to

[43] Wurm 2013 [1998], p. 458.
[44] St. Augustine, for one, admits the challenge of interpreting the Scriptures, especially at a young age: "My sharp sight did not pierce the interiority thereof", *Conf.* III, 5.9. For more information on the language of the *Confessiones*, see Burton 2007.

orientate and read reflections of the divine on earth. Both figures of speech are useful to the acquisition of authentic knowledge.

In *De genesis contra Manichaeos*, St. Augustine states: "In fact, God creates the bushes on the fields even now, but [he does it] by making it rain on the earth; this way, he revives the souls through his word, but he irrigates them with the water of clouds, which are the Scriptures of the Prophets and Apostles".[45] Because of Original Sin, the possibility of an immediate vision of God is forbidden to men, who find themselves lost in a universe of signs (compared to rain, *pluendo*), through which the word of God (*verbum*) reveals and conceals itself at the same time, just like a rainy cloud (*nubilus*) that blurs the vision without impeding it. The prophets and the apostles are privileged readers of God's signs on earth, those empowered to a clear vision by their enhanced spirituality. As regards the Scriptures, they are both *velatio* (veil) and *mysterium* (mystery). Both the Bible and the world are embraced by what Augustine defines as the *obscuritate allegoriarum* (obscurity of allegory).[46] The fall of men from Eden explains the human longing for vertical ascension and comprehension, despite the limits of their knowledge.

All of these principles had an impact on both literary production and fruition in the Middle Ages. In fact, Augustine's invitation to continuous interpretation has been accepted in this context as a widespread approach to medieval representations. Much more might be added to the considerations above, but it seems important to leave the realm of theory and examine some artifacts, starting from late medieval *mappae mundi*, in order to appreciate whether and how the defined modes of spatial production find realisation in the extant documents. Finally, it must be determined whether these principles are at least partially shared by the learned Icelanders of the Late Middle Ages.

2.4 Medieval *Mappae Mundi*

Among the documents that constitute valuable evidence of the medieval image of the world, maps are for obvious reasons the first sources to look at. Cartographic studies tend to address medieval maps without further specifications. This is mainly due to two factors. On the one hand, the scarceness of early medieval maps and, on the other, some fundamental features that the majority of the extant maps share.[47] The present chapter is mostly referring to maps dating back to the thirteenth century, in particular the three most emblematic examples of T-O *mappae mundi*, which are the Hereford map, the Ebstorf map, and the Psalter map. Before addressing

[45] St. Aug., *De Gen. contra Manic.*, II, 4.5.
[46] St. Aug., *De Gen. contra Manic.*, II, 4.5.
[47] Woodward 1987, p. 298.

them, a first observation should be made about medieval maps in general and how their function was radically different from that of current maps. As Rudolf Simek puts it:

> Medieval world maps cannot be judged according to our everyday understanding of cartography, as they have little to nothing to do with what we usually refer to as 'map' or 'world map'. These differences from cartography in a contemporary sense exist on all levels: representation techniques, content and function.[48]

Medieval maps are intertwined with encyclopaedic works, as they were often featured in miscellaneous manuscripts with the aim of collecting and condensing the sum of human knowledge into one literary product. This practice was not a medieval invention, even though it enjoyed great popularity in the Middle Ages.[49] Isidore of Seville is unanimously recognized as one of the founders of the medieval encyclopaedia.[50] Still deeply influenced by late antique schools of thought, especially Pliny the Elder, Isidore managed to elaborate pre-existing knowledge and make it accessible to the medieval audience by bending it to a new cultural scenario.[51] In continuity with scholars such as Cassiodorus (ca. 485–ca. 585), Martianus Capella (360–428) and Severinus Boethius (477–524), his *Etymologiae* and *De natura rerum* made him one of the most influential figures throughout the Middle Ages. Such *miscellanea* are proof of the ambition of medieval learned men to bring heterogeneity back to unity in light of a perceived superior design underlying the world and the march of history.

The practice of writing encyclopaedias was carried on over the following centuries by scholars such as Hrabanus Maurus (*De rerum naturis*, ca. 842), Lambertus of St. Omer (*Liber Floridus*, ca. 1120), Honorius of Autun (*Elucidarium*, first half of the twelfth century), Petrus Comestor (*Historia scholastica*, ca. 1173) and Vincent of Beauvais (*Speculum maius*, ca. 1245, ca. 1260),[52] fundamental names that used to circulate also in late medieval Iceland.[53] Around the mid-thirteenth century, Isidore's works were widespread, and his image of the world was one of the most popular and widely copied throughout Europe. The T-O *mappae mundi* are often

[48] Simek 1990, p. 52.
[49] For a history of encyclopaedism, see König and Woolf 2013.
[50] On Isidore's influence throughout medieval Europe, see Henderson 2007.
[51] Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* (first century) is acknowledged by Isidore as one of his main sources (e.g. *Etymologiae* XII, ii, 8).
[52] Cf. Strayer, J. 1989, 447–50.
[53] Some of these names are mentioned in AM 764 4to as sources. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (2000) offers some useful bibliographical references in order to further investigate the transmission of this learned material.

called Isidorian, as they represent a graphic rendition of the author's description of the ecumene, the inhabited parts of the world.[54]

The typical configuration of a T-O map consisted of a circle, representing the spherical shape of the earth, and a T inscribed in it, dividing the inhabited world into three main sections, Asia, Europe and Africa. Conventionally, Asia was set in the upper part of the drawing, occupying the larger area of the circle (two quarters), which corresponded to the space above the upper stroke of the T, parallel to the baseline. On the other hand, Europe and Africa were usually placed respectively on the left and right side of the T's downstroke, perpendicular to the baseline, taking only a quarter of the circle each (*fig. 3*).[55]

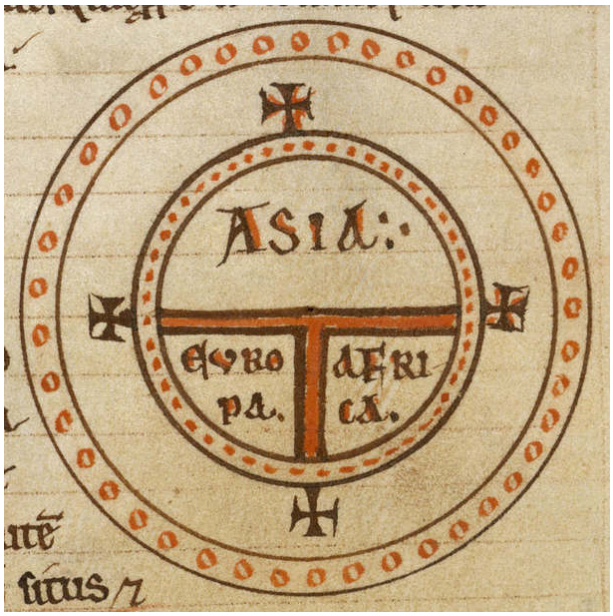

Figure 3- © British Library Board (Royal 12 F.IV, 135v).

In this twelfth-century manuscript of Isidore's *Etymologiae*, the diagrammatic *mappa mundi* shows no further details, except for four crosses placed at the margins of the earth's sphere, corresponding to the cardinal directions, and a larger external concentric circle, representing

[54] For more information on Isidore's geography, see McCready 1996, pp. 118–19.

[55] Isidore (*Etym.* XIV, ii, 1–3) describes this configuration as follows: "The globe derives its name from the roundness of the circle, because it resembles a wheel; […] the Ocean that flows around it on all sides encompasses its furthest reaches in a circle. It is divided into three parts, one of which is called Asia, the second Europe, the third Africa. The ancients did not divide the three parts of the globe equally, for Asia extends from south to north in the east, but Europe from the north to the west, Africa from the west to the south. Whence it is clear that two of them, Europe and Africa, occupy half of the globe, Asia the other half by itself. But the former pair are divided into two regions, because […] the Mediterranean enters in between them and separates them" (transl. by Stephen Barney).

the ocean which was believed to enclose the earth. This highly conceptual configuration is indebted to classical views, as pointed out by Paul Harvey:

> Only in the world maps do surviving examples link medieval maps with the culture of Greece and Rome. Elsewhere, if we are to see any connection at all, we must postulate either the rediscovery of ancient maps, certainly the case with Ptolemy's *Geography* […], or else a tenuous continuity maintained by maps mostly now lost.[56]

Harvey confirms that the Isidorian *mappae mundi* were the main examples of continuity between the classical worldview and the medieval one. This prerogative of world maps is highlighted in opposition to portolan charts and regional/local maps, which had a much more practical purpose and a narrower geographic perspective. As seen above, one of the recurring features of T-O maps was the centrality of the Holy Land, which comes with a tendency towards the idealisation of the east in general as the most important cardinal reference. Three of the most detailed exemplars of *mappae mundi*, the Ebstorf, Hereford, and Psalter maps, comply with this ideological representation of space and deserve more specific observations.

2.4.1 The Hereford Map

The Hereford map (*fig. 4*) is the biggest known example of *mappa mundi*, drawn between ca. 1276 and 1283. The analysis of the map offered by William Bevan and Henry Phillot is still quite remarkable, although it was published over a century ago.[57] The value of their interpretation is confirmed by the more recent considerations of scholars such as Simek,[58] David Woodward,[59] and Naomi Kline.[60] Bevan and Phillot address the medieval tendency of placing Jerusalem at the centre of the world as follows: "It was not unnatural that the Jews, and even more the Christians, should attribute the same property to Jerusalem, which for centuries had been the focus of their aspirations, their anxieties, and their most devoted exertions".[61] Understandably, Bevan and Phillot mainly refer to the Christian engagement in the Crusades and the geopolitical aspirations of the Catholic church over the city.[62] A similar spatial configuration remains successful and widespread at least until Fra Mauro's fifteenth-century *mappa mundi*, which features an expansion of the ecumene eastward, made necessary by

[56] Harvey 1987, pp. 283–84.
[57] Bevan and Phillot 1873.
[58] Simek 1990, p. 60.
[59] Woodward 1987, pp. 288–91.
[60] Kline 2003.
[61] Bevan and Phillot 1873, p. xiii.
[62] For a history of the Crusades, see Riley-Smith 2002 [1999].

technological advancement and successful expeditions such as Marco Polo's. In any case, the most interesting aspect here is an idea of a spatial representation which is more connected to ideology than measurable data. God is depicted high above the physical world, which means that some kind of tridimensional perspective on the whole universe is being given, consistent with the principles of medieval spatiality outlined above.

Recognising a religious influence over cartography does not make it a completely incoherent discipline deliberately based on a conscious alteration of the reality in order to conform it to religious teachings, but rather as the study of a world that is allegoric in itself, due to its nature as the projection of a divine plan. This is an idea of geography not simply in the service of theology but determined by theological convictions at its core. Accordingly, Jerusalem is not the only sacred place marked on T-O maps. Other locations dear to Christianity are usually included, such as Rome, Mount Sinai, and Terrestrial Paradise, which the Hereford map represents as an island in the far east.[63] Here, even Adam and Eve are portrayed, in the act of eating the forbidden fruit. Drawings like this may be accompanied by narrative captions such as 'Expulsio Abe et Eba' for the fall of the first men from Eden. Another example of the narrative function of the Hereford map is the reference to places which no longer existed or belonged to the realm of popular legends, such as Troy and Carthage. An interpretation of pre-Christian history through Christian lenses in order to make all events coherent in the framework of the History of Salvation may justify the presence of these places on medieval maps. Space and time were two complementary aspects of one divine plan for St. Augustine. Therefore, in the framework of the Christian exegesis, it does not come as a surprise to see geographic information and religious narratives combined on the same visual medium. The analysis of other *mappae mundi* should confirm these aspects and the importance of the Hereford map as a typical specimen of medieval cartography.

[63] Rome was almost unanimously considered the centre of the world until 1100, before it was replaced by Jerusalem. It remained an important centre for Christians afterwards, especially because of the presence of the Pope. Cf. Sverrir Jakobsson 2005.

Figure 4 - The Hereford map (Wikimedia Commons, CC-PDM 1.0)

2.4.2 The Ebstorf Map

The Ebstorf map, allegedly created by Gervase of Tilbury (1150–1220) sometime during the thirteenth century, also follows a T-O pattern and places Jerusalem at its centre. It does not avoid descriptions and captions, which occupy a remarkable amount of space, mostly in the outer rim of the earth's circle. There is a rich symbolism in both its structure and its contents.

The world's sphere is encircled within the body of Christ, whose head is shown at the top of the drawing (east). At the same time, places are not simply mentioned and marked but also associated to symbolic images – for instance, Rome is depicted as a lion. The general configuration is consistent with the other ones proposed thus far, inasmuch as God's presence is defined by verticality, and the position of the Holy Land indicates concentricity.

Another interesting feature of the Ebstorf map is its depiction of Gog and Magog, a reference to the Apocalypse and the popular belief related to the appearance of the feral couple right before the end of the world.[64] Their legend varies according to the source, as they are depicted in many more or less monstruous ways, but it is quite consistent in imagining them somehow locked in a remote location, waiting to be set free into the world before the Apocalypse.[65] According to Alessandro Scafi, the occurrence of the figures in maps is proof of "the impending replacement of time by eternity".[66] Scafi reflects on this peculiar way of conceiving space and time, geography and history, as interdependent in the late medieval worldview, indicating *mappae mundi* as one of the major pieces of evidence in this regard.[67]

2.4.3 The Psalter World Map

The last example of *mappa mundi* is the Psalter World Map.[68] The name derives from the collection of psalms which contains it. Compiled around 1260, its manuscript is now preserved at the British Library in London, United Kingdom (BL Add MS 28681, f.). The image of Christ sending his blessing to the world appears at the top of the drawing, oriented to the east, thus expressing verticality once again. Jerusalem is the centre and Rome is located slightly below. Legendary dragon-like creatures occupy the lower part of the map, westward, while Terrestrial Paradise, together with Adam, Eve and the tree, is depicted directly below Christ. Other monstrous creatures take the right-hand margin of the map, corresponding to the African continent, therefore marking the perils that a traveller would have encountered by leaving the

[64] There is a long tradition related to Gog and Magog dating back to the Scriptures which underwent numerous elaborations over the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The figures were also associated with Alexander the Great and his worldwide explorations (e.g. Pseudo-Callisthenes's *Alexander Romance*) as happened to Terrestrial Paradise and other Christian themes (cf. Scafi 2012, p. 400). A popular Latin version of the *Alexander Romance* is the poem by Walter de Châtillon titled *Alexandreis* (twelfth century), which is the model of the Old Norse *Alexanders saga*. By the name of *Meistari* Galterus, Walter is also mentioned in *Ectors saga*. On the reception of Alexander in the Middle Ages, see Caiozzo 2017.

[65] Scafi 2012, pp. 409–10. Pseudo-Methodius's *Apocalypse* (seventh century) describes Gog and Magog as enclosed by a wall made of two mountains which God merged together after hearing a request from Alexander (cf. Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse*, ch. 8).

[66] Scafi 2012, p. 409. For an insight on Gog and Magog in medieval maps, see Pérez 2005.

[67] Scafi 2012, p. 400. On the medieval conception of time with a specific focus on Iceland, see Ceolin 2020.

[68] The map features the legend of Alexander's wall against Gog and Magog.

positive poles of the Christian world.[69] Anxieties and fears were understandably portrayed at the margins of the drawing in the form of monstrous creatures, while places of salvation, such as Terrestrial Paradise, take the map's opposite end. This polarising attitude, together with the obsession for the constant transience of the physical dimension (*memento mori*), is an essential element for interpreting medieval cartography – if the world is the incarnation of God's design, then what should a map be doing rather than telling the viewer a History of Salvation? Medieval cartography is a narrative experience that tries to condense both the physical world and its allegorical meanings within the same medium. To paraphrase Felicitas Schmieder, *mappae mundi* should be defined as "Geographies of Salvation",[70] insofar as geography is intended in exegetical terms.

2.4.4 *Mappa mundi* as Illustrated Romance

The three maps described above feature various figures and locations of the History of Salvation, from Genesis to Apocalypse. This seems to indicate that the perception of space was related to an idea of time that exceeded the boundaries of human perception. In this configuration, the centres of Christianity represent safe ideological strongholds and reference points for the Roman Church. The farther away from these poles, the higher was the chance to meet the unknown, the evil and the monstrous. Pliny the Elder (23/24–79), Isidore, and St. Ambrose (339–397) are among the scholars who accounted for this marginalisation of monstrosity.[71] Following the same hierarchical conception of space, the cardinal directions were also filled with symbolic values responding to both the anxieties and desires of the time. As mentioned above, the east is the chief cardinal point due to the origin of the Christian faith and the *translatio studii et imperii* motif, which gained great popularity in medieval Europe. Hartmut Kugler addresses the relationship between cartography and theology as follows:

> The geographical substratum of world maps is covered by a historical-ideological and a theological dimension. Maps prove themselves to be normative pictures of ideas, they present themselves as 'world images in the mind' (*Weltbilder im Kopf*), a

[69] Tribes' names appear here, neatly listed, with drawings corresponding to the strange creatures who inhabited remote lands. The cartographer's source was most likely Pliny the Elder. In his *Naturalis Historia*, Pliny names the same tribes and describes their uncanny appearances, such as "the Cynamolgi, who have heads like dogs" (*Nat. Hist.*, 6.35).
[70] Schmieder 2018, p. 23.
[71] Wanner 2009a, p. 54. For observations on the relationship between monstrosity and peripheries, see also Lambertus 2013 and Mittman 2006.

> structural model of a medieval educational canon. It is a predominant canon of literary education, nourished more of book lore than experiential knowledge.[72]

The intellectual and representational nature of *mappae mundi* justify the belief that looking for likelihood and reliability in medieval maps means betraying their primary function in their parent culture. As George Kimble puts it: "They would have branded any man a fool who might have supposed that he could determine the distance from London to Jerusalem by putting a ruler across the map".[73] World maps were not conceived as tools for travellers or peregrines. They undoubtedly aimed at representing the truth, but it was a theological truth that did not rely on scale measurements or empiric analysis. This means that the goal of medieval cartography was not only to answer the question of *where*, but also of *how* and of *when*. Captions, symbols, legendary references, they all contributed in reinforcing the idea that any literal interpretation of *mappae mundi* should be rejected. In fact, maps are not the only documents testifying this peculiar understanding of space. Literature, both popular and religious, also has a crucial role to play in this reconstruction. In order to understand why it is so, it is useful to make a few steps back to a definition of *mappa mundi*:

> The medieval designation *mappa mundi* is not limited to the drawn representation of the world, but […] it can also refer to cosmographical as well as geographical-historical writings. […] Therefore, another meaning for *mappa mundi* can be deduced, namely 'a representation of the earth in visual form or preserved in written texts', which had validity from around 1200 at the latest.[74]

As Dale Kedwards points out, medieval thinkers usually referred to maps as *descriptio*, *tabula* or *imago*, terms which were applied equally to cartography and prose descriptions of the world.[75] This definition of *mappa mundi* allows literary critics to look at chivalric romances in a peculiar light, as some of them feature representations of the world with the same claim of exhaustiveness as cartographical products. In many cases, their representation of the world embraces the whole ecumene, and they too feature comments and digressions on universal history. Consequently, questions may arise on whether it is possible to look at romances as some alternative form of world maps. Understandably, incongruences and erroneous geographical information are as part of the romances as they are of maps. However, the demonstrated

[72] Kugler 1987, p. 16.
[73] Kimble 1938, p. 182.
[74] Simek 1990, p. 33.
[75] Kedwards 2020, p. 4.

narrative function of the latter bring them really close to the former. If it is important to look at drawn maps without forgetting the allegorical understanding of space underlying their production, it seems appropriate to analyse written descriptions of the world accordingly. Bevan and Phillot make the equation between *mappa mundi* and romance explicit:

> A map was an "estoire" (to borrow the expression used by the author of the Hereford map) i.e., an illustrated record […]. Let anyone compare the Hereford with the Romance of King Alexander, and he cannot fail to see the close resemblance in the spirit, and even in the special features, of the two documents. In short, a medieval *mappa mundi*, to be duly appreciated, must to a great extent be regarded as an illustrated romance.[76]

Bevan and Phillot's ideas have been corroborated by recent considerations of scholars such as Naomi Kline,[77] and constitute the basis of the work of Robert Rouse on Anglo-Norman romances.[78] Rouse's research focuses on the romances' geographic selectivity as a tool to direct Christian ideology into the texts. Specifically, a certain display of geographic locations and descriptions seems to give the reader suggestions on the ideology behind the text, as this criterium is what makes some contents more relevant than others, and therefore more selectable. An identically conscious process of selection may be observed in most medieval maps due to their tendency to condense universal history.

An overall narrative intent is shown, for instance, in the opening lines of *Kyng Alisaunder*:

> *Whilom clerkes wel ylerde*
> *On þre diȝtten þis middelerde,*
> *And cleped him in her maistrie*
> *Europe, Affryke, and Assye*
> (Kyng Alisaunder, vv. 41–44)

> At one time, highly learned clerks divided this middle earth into three parts, and named them in their learning, Europe, Africa and Asia. (Rouse 2014, p. 22)

[76] Bevan and Phillot 1873, p. 22.
[77] Kline 2003.
[78] The equation of maps and romances is explained by Rouse through the analysis of narrative space in works such as the Anglo-Norman *Guy of Warwick* (Rouse 2011), Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth* (Rouse 2014, pp. 20–21), and *Kyng Alisaunder* (Rouse 2014, p. 22–27).

The vastness of Alexander's terrestrial dominion is probably the factor that determined the success of his figure during the Middle Ages.[79] He was the perfect ruler to comfort at least two fundamental medieval desires, namely a comprehensive vision of the whole world and the validation of the *translatio* motif, which made medieval people look up to the east in search for positive models. Gilbert Hay's *Buik of Alexander* (1499) is another example in this regard, as it evokes the remarkable spatial extension of Alexander's secular dominion:

> *And tauld thame all the maner and þe wise*
> *How he had sene the erde to Paradise,*
> *And all þe regiouns and the wildernis,*
> *The realmis, regiouns, and the gretest place,*
> *And how this erde is bot ane litell thing*
> *[...]*
> *And how the erde is a figure round–*
> *And thus was first payntit þe mappamond*
> (The Buik of Alexander. Vol. 2, vv. 15613–22)

> And told them the manner and the nature / How he had seen the earth as far as Paradise, / And all the regions and the wilderness, / The realms, regions, and the greatest places, / And how this world is just a little thing, […] And this earth was a round figure– / And thus was first painted the map of the world. (Rouse 2014, pp. 13–14)

In this passage, the Macedonian king is appointed as the first man to ever travel as far as Terrestrial Paradise (east) and grasp such a clear image of the world that he commissioned the drawing of the first *mappa mundi*. In other words, his own vision of multiplicity is condensed into one medium, so that the world becomes nothing but a little round thing in his eyes.

The *translatio* motif was a theme of the world-renown French romances of Chrétien de Troyes (ca. 1130–ca. 1190), as well. The first lines of his *Cligès* (ca. 1176) feature a description of the transition of knowledge and power from east to west, through the mediation of the Roman Empire. *Cligès* contains a great number of clichés of the romance genre, from the *translatio* motif to noble lineages, classical references, the transience of things, and the modesty *topos*.[80] Chrétien's geographic digression covers a space and time which brings the highest

[79] On the popularity of Alexander's figure in the Middle Ages from a transcultural perspective, see Stock 2016.
[80] The author mentions his Latin model as if to underline the difficulty of the task. In this case, the source is Ovid and *Ars Amatoria*. The modesty *topos* is often paired with *apologiae* about the contents of the narrative, which might

learning from Greece to France, where it is supposed to be cherished with honour from that moment on. It is interesting to notice that many of the motifs featured in continental romances find their ways into the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, especially via works by Chrétien in their translated versions (translated *riddarasögur*).

In conclusion, although it is true that no society can imagine the world in a completely neutral and culturally detached way, the experience that medieval maps offered was all the more a biased one, with contents that were much closer to the ones of romances and history than geography as intended nowadays. Addressing medieval world maps either as drawings or prose for what they really are is a way to respect the original cultures that produced them and, hopefully, get closer to their worldview. This approach to *mappae mundi* is a useful starting point for a closer look at the Icelandic cartography as well as indigenous *riddarasögur*. It is essential to investigate whether and to what degree the worldview shared by continental Europe in the Late Middle Ages reached Iceland, and whether it is possible to point at any original elaboration of this material.

2.5 Medieval Iceland: Conceiving Space at the Margins

The next two sections present an overview of how space was conceived and represented in medieval Iceland. The first objects of analysis are the extant Icelandic *mappae mundi*, which can tell us a lot about the image of the world of their contemporary society and its relationship with foreign models. The second section focuses on the more abstract and ideological understanding of space that emerges from a few selected texts, especially the cosmographies attributed to Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241). In this analysis, the semantic valences of the cardinal directions and the general attitude of medieval Icelanders towards the mental organization of space will be investigated as well.

2.5.1 Icelandic Cartography

The following analysis is mostly indebted to the research of Rudolf Simek and Dale Kedwards on medieval Icelandic cosmography and cartography.[81] Simek's 1990 *Altnordische Kosmographie* is an exhaustive compendium and a useful compass to orientate within the field of Old Norse-Icelandic cosmography, whilst Kedwards's 2020 *The Mappae Mundi of Medieval Iceland* represents

not appeal to every reader. Professions of modesty and excuses (not necessarily limited to prologues) are featured by Icelandic *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* as well, including *Sigurðar saga þögla, Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, which share the same prologue, *Mágus saga*, and *Ectors saga*. For more information, see O'Connor (2017) and Sverrir Tómasson (1988, pp. 151–55).

[81] Simek 1990; Kedwards 2020.

the most recent point of view on medieval Icelandic cartography. In both cases there is the confirmation of a strong continental influence in the composition of Icelandic maps and cosmographical knowledge. No Icelandic representation of the world can be isolated from the wider tradition of encyclopaedic texts that aim at embracing the entirety of universal knowledge. Not only the ecumene, but also the heavens, the seas, the planets and the stars are under the investigation of this type of texts. In this regard, Iceland is fully compliant with continental cartography. Some of the fundamental texts and authors of the late antiquity and early medieval times were known to Icelandic scholars, who had the opportunity to study them during their educational trips to the continent, if not directly on the island.[82] Simek has demonstrated that some passages of Icelandic encyclopaedic works show a remarkable correspondence to Latin passages by Honorius of Autun (1080–1151), Isidore of Seville, Lambertus of St. Omer (1060–1125) and Bede, among others.[83] Not many Icelandic encyclopaedic materials can be traced back to particular sources nowadays, although the above-mentioned authors' were in all likelihood well known.

There are five extant world maps in a group of three Icelandic manuscripts, which may seem a small number compared to the thousands of manuscripts preserving other kinds of material. In fact, although there are only a few maps extant, the abundance of prose descriptions of the world in sagas and treatises would suggest that medieval Icelanders nevertheless were fascinated with geography and cosmography. It is often easy to forget that the distinction between subjects such as cartography and literature – which is evident in modern times – was in no way as strict in medieval times, assuming there was any. This is also confirmed by the definition of *mappae mundi* provided by Simek and cited above. Icelandic world maps, just like continental ones, are usually inserted in the context of manuscripts containing astronomical, geographic and computational information in prose.

One small ecumenic T-O map, one zonal map[84] and one larger ecumenic map are usually considered the oldest extant exemplars in Iceland, dating back to either the thirteenth century or the first years of the fourteenth century, according to palaeographic research.[85] They are preserved in the manuscript GKS 1812 4to (1182-1400). The remaining two maps are fourteenth-century copies of the same lost original, showing a hemispheric configuration[86]

[82] On this aspect, see 3.1.1.
[83] Simek 1990, p. 26.
[84] Zonal map used to be designed with a different purpose from the T-O ones, which was to emphasise the sphericity of the world and its division into parallel (latitudinal) climatic zones (Woodward 1987, p. 297).
[85] Kedwards 2020, p. 66.
[86] Hemispheric and zonal correspond to the same type of maps, as they simply reflect different taxonomies proposed by different historians (Woodward 1987, p. 296).

inserted within an astronomical representation and followed by a plan of Jerusalem, besides other astronomical-computational notes. They are preserved in the manuscripts AM 736 I 4to (1290–1310) and AM 732 b 4to (1300–1400).[87] All maps seem to follow quite faithfully the conventions that were already established in continental Europe with regard to visual *mappae mundi*. Therefore, it might be hard to speak of an Icelandic cartographical tradition. The adherence to continental standards does not make Icelandic maps less meaningful in the context of their culture. As pointed out in the previous chapter, T-O maps were a particularly fertile ground for configurations of the world that were strictly intertwined with an allegorical understanding of space. Icelandic *mappae mundi* are not exceptional in this regard, which means that this attitude towards space reached Iceland. It should be added that zonal maps tend to be associated to astronomic-computational texts, while T-maps[88] are more usually found within historical and theological ones.[89] This fact enhances the argument for T-maps as an ideal surface for symbolic depictions without any claim of accuracy.

The smallest Icelandic ecumenic map in GKS 1812 4to (6v) (*fig. 5*) serves an iconographic understanding of the world, by highlighting the relevant position of the earth at the centre of the cosmos. It comes with a schematic presentation of astronomical data in Latin, set in concentric circles around a typical Isidorian structure, which merely bear the names Asia, Europa and Africa.[90] The purpose of such a configuration was most likely to place earth in an astronomical context and highlight its centrality in the universe.

The other double-sided ecumenic map preserved in GKS 1812 4to (5v–6r) looks larger but based on a similar sketchy T-O structure. The Mediterranean Sea (*mediterraneum mare*) mark the division of the continents, although there are no clear dividing lines on the parchment, which means that the position and orientation of the Latin words are the main guidelines. The map is simple but rich in toponyms and ethnonyms. Commentaries are present, though not numerous and rather concise. They usually add information about a land or references to biblical material, for instance 'Hebron ibi sepulltus [sic] est Adamus primus', indicating the

[87] GKS 1812 4to presents a great variety of texts, featuring from computational to linguistic materials; AM 736 I 4to contains geographical and cosmographical knowledge; AM 732 b 4to includes astrological, computational and geographical texts.

[88] It is possible to refer to most ecumenic maps simply as 'T-maps', as a few more or less remarkable variations in their design can be found within this category, but the tripartition remains the most recurring trait. A notable variant is the Noachidean type, based the alleged settlements of Noah's sons. They are depicted as Y-like or V-like configurations inserted in a round or a square shape. Cf. Kupfer 2013 and Woodward 1987, pp. 345–47.

[89] Simek 1990, p. 65.

[90] Simek (1990, p. 64) offers a similar example from the thirteenth-century *Annales Colbazenses*, or Lunder Manuscipt (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz: Cod. theol. 149 fol., f. 27r), where the central circle representing the earth is simply marked with the word *Terra*, implying the purely iconographic function of that representation.

place of Adam's burial. Jerusalem is not located at the exact centre of the drawing but lies not far from it, leaning towards the south-est. Next to the Holy Land are other important locations for Christianity, such as Nazareth and Galilee.

There is no comparison between the amount of information or degree of completeness of maps such as Ebstorf and Hereford and the Icelandic T-O maps. However, studying them demonstrates that a general consistency in the representation of the world was achieved throughout Christian Europe.[91] Kedwards claims that it is necessary to look at Icelandic maps from a point of view which is as close as possible to the one of the medieval audience, that is, by loosening "their association with geography in the narrowest sense".[92] He underlines how often the evaluation of Icelandic maps has been influenced by the assumption that they should be reflecting the geographical knowledge of the past or even outline the trajectories of Viking explorations. The question of finding the right approach to medieval spatial representations is tackled by Matthew Boyd Goldie, who states that, in order to respond with sensitivity to the spatial complexities presented by late medieval sources, it is necessary "to look not only *at* the Late Middle Ages through the lenses of current theoretical, philosophical, and literary ideas but also *to* the period's own scientific ways of thinking and its literature".[93]

As regards the one zonal map preserved in GKS 1812 4to (11v), it is followed by a text which openly refers to the work of Bede ("svo segir en helgi Beda…"), which finds parallels in other Icelandic manuscripts (AM 624 4to and AM 415 4to) and seems to be tracing back to Bede's *De rerum natura*.[94] A mixed form of a T-map and a hemispheric map is preserved in AM 736 I 4to, f. (1v) and AM 732 b 4to (3r). In this case, the earth is represented as the centre of a larger astronomical configuration, with information about the zodiac, the sun and the moon, the tides and, most notably, a structure which resembles that of a typical hemispheric map. The central circle, however, is split between a classic T-structure with the names of the three continents and a reference to the *Synri bygd* (southern habitable part of the world), crosscut by the equatorial sea. According to Kedwards, this map is indebted to the *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* by Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius (fl. ca. 400), a commentary on Scipio's vision of

[91] Simek (1990, pp. 72–74) stresses the similarity between the Icelandic maps and other Scandinavian world images within the major framework of a common learned tradition.
[92] Kedwards 2020, p. 6.
[93] Goldie 2019, p. 16.
[94] Simek 1990, p. 66. After a comparative analysis of Bede and the map's contents, Simek comes to the conclusion that the actual primary source of the Icelandic scribe was the *Philosophia mundi* by Wilhelm von Conches († 1154). The Icelandic zonal map might be a direct reproduction of one of the maps belonging to Wilhelm's manuscript tradition.

the universe as recounted in Cicero's *De re publica*, through the filter of Lambertus of St. Omer's elaboration of the episode in *Liber Floridus*.[95]

In conclusion, the extant Icelandic maps are not innovative in comparison to continental ones. This fact does not represent an obstacle for the present research, as any degree of inconsistency and incongruency of Icelandic cartographical practices in comparison to continental ones has never been a founding hypothesis. Moreover, the analysis of a single socio-cultural context in isolation would be neither appropriate nor realistic, especially in a period as dynamic as the Late Middle Ages. A chapter of Kedwards's 2020 work is dedicated to the positioning of Iceland in a European context.[96] In his own words: "The five maps that survive in Icelandic manuscripts are not *sui generis* but represent cartographic genres in pan-European circulation".[97] In other words, the allegoric understanding of space presented by medieval *mappae mundi* had been transmitted to Iceland, where local versions of the T-O ecumene were fashioned starting from pan-European models. The idea of world maps as histories of Salvation and visual narratives with exegetical purposes was preserved and might have encouraged Icelandic scholars to conceive written world descriptions with an equal attention to allegory and symbolism. This may be valid for the descriptive *mappae mundi* of encyclopaedic works as well as those included in late medieval romances.

[95] Kedwards 2020, pp. 25–28.
[96] Kedwards 2020, pp. 119–46.
[97] Kedwards 2020, p. 1.

Figure 5 – Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, GKS 1812 I 4to, 6v, 1315–c. 1400.

2.5.2 Written World Descriptions

Both encyclopaedic and literary texts bear witness of the Icelanders' relationship with space. When it comes to literary works such as the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, where the authors' worldview may be subtly inserted within the lines of otherwise fantastic settings, it is important to look not only at the geographic data but also at the text's overall modes of producing fictional space. The way in which sagas approach spatiality, which means not only the image of the world, but also how the narrative world is factually organised and given meaning, may reveal a lot about the value system and desires of their parent society. In short, it is essential to raise questions on the specific spatial relations constructed within texts.[98] As regards encyclopaedic texts, on the other hand, they are consistent with the world descriptions and maps that are found in continental works of clerical stamp. One example is *Hauksbók* (1302–10), as pointed out by Sverrir Jakobsson:

> The world view manifest in *Hauksbók*, and shared by most Icelandic medieval texts, is representative of the attitudes of the Icelandic literary élite and it is reasonable to suppose that these ideas that were common among the élite were shared by the population in general [...]. The introduction of book culture in Iceland made a crucial difference in the formation of a new world view, akin to that dominant within the literate culture of the Catholic world. A new paradigm or dimension was introduced, that of Biblical history, which formed a grand narrative which all other narratives had to acknowledge.[99]

Therefore, it can be said that learned world descriptions do not present a different compositional attitude than drawn *mappae mundi* and do not require particularly complex interpretations. In fact, the evidence hints at the hegemonic role of the new Catholic worldview also in the case of encyclopaedic texts. Other examples are the translations of passages from Latin works that took place from the twelfth century, such as *Elucidarius*, *Imago mundi*, *Historia scholastica*, and *Speculum historiale*.[100] The circulation of fundamental clerical texts did constitute an important framework for the Icelandic scholars in which to elaborate an image of the world

[98] Simek (1990 analyses not only medieval Icelandic maps but also geography and cosmography. Sections of encyclopaedic treatises are transcribed in the appendix of the work. Some of these texts still have not found a proper critical edition. For a general overview of the medieval Icelandic image of the world and the cardinal directions, see also Jackson 2019 and 2005; Sverrir Jakobsson 2009 and 2007; Lindow 1994; Hastrup 1981.
[99] Sverrir Jakobsson 2007, pp. 33–34.
[100] Sverrir Jakobsson 2007, p. 34.

that would put Iceland within the scope of the Catholic world.[101] At the same time, it is possible that educated laymen attempted to design less orthodox world descriptions that would not deny a Catholic influence while still negotiating the position of marginal countries such as Iceland in the picture. This seems to be the case of texts usually attributed to Snorri Sturluson (*Edda*'s Prologue, *Gylfaginning* and *Ynglinga saga*), which Kevin J. Wanner has analysed in detail by focusing on the semantic valences of the cardinal directions.[102] Snorri's cosmographical discourse shows complexity and originality without losing consistency with continental descriptions and maps. At the same time, Snorri's *Edda* is also the carrier of antiquarian information related to the Old Norse mythology that cannot be disregarded, although it was most likely intertwined with a Christian worldview. This section aims to address both aspects in general terms. First, some considerations on the semantics of cardinal directions in pre-Christian Iceland will be presented with reference to antiquarian works; then, the impact of the Roman Catholic worldview shall be addressed. Snorri's work, or at least what is attributed to him, may be seen as an example of syncretism between elements of the pagan mythology and the Christian geographical and cosmographical conventions. Moreover, this kind of 'mixed culture' may have inspired other authors of other literary genres, especially those that would leave room for literary experimentation, such as the *riddarasögur*. The Icelandic romances are defined by their almost obsessive interest in remote and exotic lands in the far east and south, which makes a study of the semantics of cardinal directions particularly appropriate.

First of all, Wanner notices the predominance of the north and the east in Icelandic antiquarian works, possibly bearing traces of a pagan mythology. Both cardinal directions are depicted with some ambiguity. In Snorri's *Edda* and the Eddic poem *Völuspá*, the north seems to be associated either with giants or the realm of the dead.[103] Giants and trolls lying on the *austrvegr* (eastern way), but also omens of apocalyptic danger (the initiation of Ragnarök, for example), are associated with the east.[104] At the same time, the east is the place of origin of the Æsir, consistent with the *translatio imperii* motif, and the principal direction related to the sun with all its positive connotations.[105] As Wanner points out, there might be a distinction between different layers of the cosmic south, a sort of cosmic stratification, and the same might be said

[101] On this topic, see also Arngrímur Vídalín 2018.
[102] Wanner 2009a.
[103] More on Snorri's *Edda* and poetic *Edda* later in the chapter. Examples from *fornaldarsögur* can be found in DeAngelo (2010), related to the depiction of the Finns, and Wanner (2009a, p. 45), related to the location of Jötunheimar (or Risaland).
[104] For more information on the *austrvegr*, see 4.5.
[105] For the perception of the east in medieval Iceland, see also Sverrir Jakobsson's extensive research on the matter (e.g. Sverrir Jakobsson 2006).

of all cardinal points. This would explain the association of ambiguous, apparently contradictory elements to the same direction. For instance, both Snorri's *Edda* and *Flateyjarbók* connect the south with the elves.[106] At the same time, in stanza 52 of *Edda*'s *Völuspá*, Surtr is said to be bringing the demonic fire that will consume the world during Ragnarök from the south.[107] The western direction is apparently the one that is mentioned least frequently in Old Norse sources.[108] A careful reading of the Eddic poem *Lokasenna* might associate it indirectly to the dwelling site of the Vanir, as opposed to the localisation of Ásgarðr and the Æsir in the east.[109] In the Vinland sagas (*Grænlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, 1220–80) the western territories feature their own 'other' in the form of wild races and monsters.[110]

Another way to solve the apparent contradictions that characterise the depiction of the cardinal directions is proposed by John Lindow, who distinguishes between a mythological space and the actual directions that Icelanders considered for orientation.[111] As mentioned above, the east could carry negative connotations in Old Norse mythology, such as the representation of giants, the targets of Þórr's trips on the *austrvegr*.[112] Still, the mythological east did not necessarily correspond to the east of navigation and everyday spatial thinking. If the formative stages of the Old Norse mythology should be located in Scandinavia before the colonisation of Iceland, or even before the development of the technology that made overseas travels a feasible perspective, then the absence of particular information about the west may be explained. Icelanders, however, colonised their own land by travelling westward, which might have led to a positive re-evaluation of this direction in contrast with the east. The presence of both positive and negative characteristics in the east may also be explained by outlining two different phases in the development of the Old Norse mythology as recorded in Icelandic sources; an older one would still depict the east positively, while a younger one would have shifted the balance towards a more negative view of the east as the abode of evil creatures.[113] As Lindow points out: "because settlement […] travelled from east to west, medieval Icelanders could locate themselves meaningfully in the cosmos, even if this involved some conflict with the mythology they recorded in the thirteenth century".[114]

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[106] Wanner 2009a, p. 46.
[107] *Edda*, *Völuspá*, st. 52.
[108] Wanner 2009a, p. 49.
[109] *Edda*, *Lokasenna*, st. 34. Cf. Wanner 2009a, p. 48. The east is the origin of settlement and civilisation, which is brought by the Æsir to the north in Snorri's *Edda* (cf. Lindow 1994, p. 217).
[110] Arngrímur Vidalín 2018, p. 167.
[111] Lindow 1994, p. 219.
[112] Lindow 1994, p. 219.
[113] Lindow 1994, p. 220.
[114] Lindow 1994, p. 221.

As can be imagined, the semantics of cardinal directions were made even more problematic by the Christianisation of Iceland, since the worldview of the Roman Catholic Church would not always correspond to the one recorded in mythological texts; in fact, the Christian philosophy would add yet another layer to this complex picture. The Catholic east, for instance, was the chief cardinal direction, the origin of the highest knowledge, and the setting of Christ's life. A challenge of Icelandic scholars was to harmonise the affiliation to the Catholic Church with the fact that Iceland – a marginal land – had not always been portrayed favourably by that Latin tradition that served now as cultural reference point.[115] The conundrum of Iceland's position on the world's map is an important question and process that had to do with the Icelanders' perception of themselves and the rest of the world. This relation seems to have been addressed by many Icelandic authors with a certain degree of authorial freedom towards their continental sources. In general, a remarkable creative agency has been noted in Icelandic translations of popular literature.[116]

Post-Conversion Iceland had to realise that what they had established as their north, with a series of semantic valences and psychological projections, might not coincide with the Roman Catholic idea of north. From a continental perspective, the far inhospitable north was Iceland itself, "a region that, following the classical strategy for dealing with terra incognita, was filled with fabulous races and outlandish creatures".[117] St. Augustine contributed to this depiction by associating the south to the warmth of charity and the splendour of truth. The south was also the typical direction of pilgrimages in Christian times, which means that it was associated to Rome and the possibility to atone for one's sins before travelling back north after a spiritual redemption.[118] Consequently, the north would mean a progressive departure from that positive influence.[119] In fact, the authority of Augustine may have caused troubles in the Scandinavian and Icelandic clergy, who had to face the task of placing themselves on the map, either by embracing the patristic teachings blindly, or by trying to convey an alternative but not contradictory image of the north.

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[115] Wanner addresses the view of the north as a negative cardinal reference thoroughly. For other contributions on the imagery related to the north in different cultures, see Sverrir Jakobsson 2009 and Davidson 2005.

[116] Research on this matter has been carried out by Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (2012) and Carolyne Larrington (2015), among the others. Kurt Schier's *Sagaliteratur* also addresses the freedom taken by Icelandic authors in their translations, so that he suggests labelling some translated *riddarasögur*, e.g. *Erex saga*, as 'original' Icelandic ones (Schier 1970, p.106).

[117] Wanner 2009a, p. 54. In fact, this image of the north within the Catholic world did not immediately fade away after the end of the Middle Ages. For instance, in 1555, the exiled archbishop of Sweden, Olaus Magnus describes the north as the source of evil (Johannsen 2010, p. 237). Johannsen's approach, by focusing on the dichotomies inside-outside, centre-margin, highlights the problematic representation of unknown territories as wild and unfamiliar from a Scandinavian and Icelandic viewpoint. On this topic, see also Sumarliði Ísleifsson 2015.

[118] Lindow 1994, p. 215.

[119] St. Aug., *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, 32. See also Lindow 1994, pp. 215–16.

Some of the earliest religious texts do comply with this depiction of the north, while they present a general re-evaluation of the east. Such is the case of the *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* by Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson (twelfth century) and *The Icelandic Homily Book* (around 1200), where it is suggested that one should be reading the Gospel facing north in order to favour the protection of God's words against evil.[120] Scandinavian authors such as Saxo Grammaticus (1150–1220) show no particular issues with describing the north as an unwelcoming land inhabited by supernatural creatures.[121] In other cases, alternative solutions are found in order to attenuate the negative features. One technique consisted of moving the northern borders farther away from the Scandinavian world, hence depicting Scandinavia as the last stronghold of Christianity.[122] This confirms that the north was not necessarily a geographical idea, but often a rather ideological one, that is, a virtually modifiable barrier subject to as many changes as the possible points of view. This process favoured the depiction of neighbouring civilisations, especially the Sámi, as the actual *other*.[123]

The relationship between the Scandinavians and the Sámi is essential, as it embodies the cultural differences between the Germanic and the Finno-Ugric worlds.[124] A useful example in this regard is the figure of Völundr the smith, the protagonist of the Eddic poem *Völundarkviða* and one of the most popular figures of the Germanic mythology overall.[125] Völundr's origins are Sámi, as stated in the eponymous Eddic poem, where he is depicted as the son of the king of the Finnar.[126] He is always depicted as a skilled blacksmith, well-versed in the use of sorcery and not reluctant to use tricks or seek revenge. His controversial figure embodies the alterity and ambiguity of the Sámi otherness from a North Germanic point of view. There is something

[120] For the Icelandic Homily Book, see De Leeuw van Weenen 1993, 55r. For Eysteinn Erlendsson, see Metcalfe 1881, p. 67. As regards the north as evil, Warren (2009, p. 58) draws a T-O map based on the world description of Hugh of Saint-Victor's *De arca Noe mystica*, where Iceland lies in the bottom-left corner as the land of the damned.
[121] The far north is the setting of books XIV and XV of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. Here, the story of the two expeditions ordered by King Gorm to those remote lands is recounted. The episode features dangerous and desolated landscapes, monsters and giants, including Útgarða-Loki (Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* viii, 14.1 ff.). The humiliating end suffered by Útgarða-Loki and the conversion of Þorkil, the expedition's leader, is seen by Friis-Jensen (2015, p. 599) as an allegory for the dying paganism and the advent of Christianity in the north.
[122] The concept of Thule as the ultimate northern horizon, defined more by irrational and ideological reasons than geographic landmarks, is addressed by Kirsten Hastrup (2009, p. 105): "Tracing 'Thule' as a concept for the ultimate North means engaging with particular horizons, notably the boundary between known and unknown worlds".
[123] Saxo Grammaticus describes the Finns as the northernmost of all peoples, living in a scarcely habitable land and devoting themselves to sorcery. (Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* V, 13.3).
[124] On the relationships between the Scandinavian and the Sámi cultures, see also Mundal 2011; Hermann Pálsson 1999; Aalto 2010; DeAngelo 2010.
[125] His story appears in some of the oldest archaeological findings of the Germanic area, such as the Ardre stones (ninth to eleventh century) and the Franks Casket (early eighth century). In the Old Norse context, Völundr appears also in his own *þáttr*, included in *Þiðreks saga,* chs. 57–79, pp. 83–116, a legendary saga focused on the life and deeds of the Germanic hero Theodoric the Great.
[126] It should be noted that the term *finnar* was used in Old Norse sources to designate the Sámi, therefore *finnar* and Sámi are used as synonyms in this context. See Hermann Pálsson 1999, pp. 29–33.

uncanny and mysterious in the neighbouring culture of the Finnar that makes them ideal subjects for the establishment of both a geographic and cultural border.[127] This alterity does not exclude a certain degree of fascination, which is probably what made the blacksmith a popular figure across Germanic societies.[128]

It is natural to project irrational fears and anxieties on locations that are far away from the ease of ideological conformity, especially in a world as polarised as the medieval one. From this perspective, Scandinavia and Iceland tried to depict themselves as the northernmost strongholds of Christianity. As highlighted by Wanner:[129]

> Norse clerical cosmographers continued to participate in a worldview that subordinated north and west to south and east: east was the site of creation, west of last judgement; the wagon of Christ embarked from Paradise, reaching the limits of its circuit in the northwest [...]. Thus, while north and west had parts to play in salvation history, it was as destinations rather than origins, latecomers rather than pioneers, effects rather than causes.[130]

Wanner's analysis presents a world made of polarised axes and a hierarchical understanding of the cardinal directions. Lindow comes to similar conclusions, especially for the axis north-south with south being the positive pole of pilgrimages and redemption. This seems to confirm the idea about the Catholic world as a fundamentally dichotomic one. Wanner, however, believes that educated laymen may have tried to even out the unbalance between the cardinal directions, especially north and south, by paying special attention to the northern hemisphere for a desire of geographical and cultural relevance. He sees in Snorri Sturluson's world descriptions the most remarkable example of 'counter cosmography' in medieval Iceland. The Prologue of Snorri's *Edda* offers a rather worldly description of the earth, where the spiritual elements are mitigated. The geographic set-up of the earth seems to avoid many of the religious references that can be found in most medieval maps. Interestingly, the centre of the world is only mentioned in relation to Troy, rather than Jerusalem or other eastern Christian poles:

[127] On the depiction of the Sámi in medieval Icelandic sources, see also Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2017.
[128] Völundr also appears in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, namely in the eighth-century elegiac poem *Deor* (as Welund), the first fragment of *Waldere* (as Weland, ca. 1000) and in *Beowulf* (as Wayland, eighth century). For a further investigation of his figure, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2021b.
[129] Further investigation on the matter is offered by Søndergaard 2001.
[130] Wanner 2009a, p. 61.

> *Nær miðri veroldunni var gort þat hús ok herbergi er ágætast hefir verit, er kallar Troja. Þat kǫlluðum vér Tyrkland. [...] Þessir hǫfðingjar hafa verit um fram aðra menn þá er verit hafa í veroldu um alla manndómliga hluti.* (Snorri, Edda, ch. 4, p. 4)
>
> Near the middle of the world was constructed that building and dwelling which has been the most splendid ever, which was called Troy. […] The twelve rulers of the kingdoms were superior to other people who have lived in the world in all human qualities. (Faulkes 1995, p. 3)

In the passage, explicit attention is paid to the human qualities that make the Trojan chieftains superior to other men, thus, the omission of religious virtues may not be accidental. Troy is connected to the European continent through the figure of Aeneas. The legend that sees him as the founder of Rome and, consequently, the empire that embraced the Mediterranean, was widespread already in Roman times, especially thanks to Virgil's epic poetry. In fact, the heroes of the Trojan War entered the foundation myths of peoples, reigns, and cities throughout the Middle Ages.[131]

Thus, the world description provided by Snorri's *Edda* might not just be a casual variation on a usual scheme or a residual of the pagan past; in fact, his general familiarity with the formalities of medieval cartography is precisely what stimulates this interpretation. The configuration is still a typical T-O one at the core, with the three continents named and located in their usual positions and the east on top. The location of Troy would not be contradictory, either. Therefore, Snorri's intervention seems to have been rather subtle, determining a shift of perspective rather than a paradigm shift. In other words, the Prologue provides a classic T-O outline scoured of most clerical references, with an inclination towards a more secular vision of the ecumene or simply an attempt to make the north a less problematic direction by downplaying the polarising force of Jerusalem and the east. This type of cosmography might be responding to the peculiar concerns of irrelevance of late medieval Icelanders.[132]

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[131] Paul the Deacon's *Historia Longobardorum* (787–795) (VI, 23) suggests a Trojan origin for the Carolingian dynasty. Around the year 1000, many cities, including Paris, Reims, Tours, and Xanten began to claim the same mythical origin. The popularity of Troy was not only related to an understandable fascination for the ancient past, but it was also the carrier of a whole value system. The warriors who fought there were considered examples of strength, nobility, courage, and cunning, and the subsequent dispersion of them all, from Odysseus to Aeneas, gave medieval thinkers the opportunity to elaborate on the legend and use it as an ideological instrument of ennoblement and legitimation.

[132] The underlying complexity of the Prologue has been addressed by Gunnar Harðarson (2016a), who discusses Snorri's arguments for the existence of God by highlighting his natural inductive and hypothetical reasoning, besides the philosophical and theological implications of the text. On the relationship between Snorri's mythology and the Christian theology, see also van Nahl 2013. On the unorthodox features of Snorri's world description, see also Simek 1990, p. 147.

Even more meaningful in this regard is *Ynglinga saga*, which features a possibly intentional alteration of the most typical cartographic standards of the time. As schematised in *fig. 6*, the saga's incipit seems to suggest a quadripartite design, some sort of X-O pattern where a great relevance is given to *Svíþjóð hin milka eða hin kalda*, literally 'Sweden the Great or the Cold'.

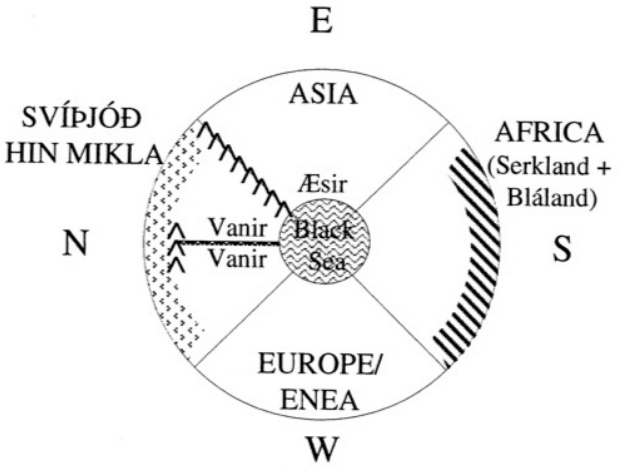

Figure 6 - Wanner's rendition of Ynglinga saga*'s* mappa mundi.

The correspondence between Svíþjóð and Sweden has been debated, suggesting that Snorri might have wanted to refer to ancient Scythia, an undefined land in southern Russia.[133] This point of view is enhanced by the nature of the region, described as full of supernatural beings, thus a great degree of alterity:

> *Í Svíþjóð eru stórheruð mǫrg. Það eru ok margs konar þjóðir ok margar tungur. Þar eru risar, ok þar eru dvergar, þar eru blámenn, ok þar eru margs konar undarligar þjóðir. Þar eru ok dýr ok drekar furðuliga stórir.* (Ynglinga saga, ch. 1, p. 5)

> In Svíþjóð there are many large uninhabited areas. There are also nations of many kinds and many languages. There are giants there and dwarfs, there are black people there, and many kinds of strange nations. There are also amazingly large wild animals and dragons. (Faulkes and Finlay 2011, p. 6)

Regardless of the possible equivalents of Svíþjóð, the simple fact that so much space is given to the description of a northern territory is remarkable. *Ynglinga saga* goes on by providing

[133] For a further analysis of *Svíþjóð hin mikla* and its possible correspondence with Scythia, see Chapter Seven.

more details about Svíþjóð, including purely geographical indications (such as the Tanais river) mixed with references to local mythology (such as the land of Vanir). Then again, except for a quick mention of Palestine, the map sketched by *Ynglinga saga* does not present any clear religious elements. On the contrary, its focus on legendary creatures and pre-Christian mythological figures betrays an antiquarian attitude which might indeed lead back to Snorri Sturluson.[134] The description of Europe and Asia is sacrificed in favour of a detailed account of the northernmost quadrant of the earth, and Africa is not even mentioned, but rather implicitly hinted at through references to Serkland and Bláland.

It may be argued that the antiquarian nature of the above-mentioned works is enough to explain the author distancing himself from a canonical world map. It is also admittedly difficult to speculate on which elements of the texts attributed to Snorri, if any, should be seen as authentic relics of a pagan worldview. However, it should be highlighted that both Snorri's *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga* already reveal the two centuries that had passed from the moment of Iceland's Conversion. For instance, it is clear that the earth is considered to have a circular shape and some kind of basic T-O configuration with minor variations. The statement regarding the circular shape of the earth, in particular, opens *Ynglinga saga* and gives a name to the whole collection, i.e. *Heimskringla*. Although some cosmological ideas, such as the shape of the earth, might have been shared by pre-Christian cultures, it can only be observed that Snorri's cosmography has much in common with well-established medieval customs.

Snorri was a well-educated Icelander, a powerful layman and skilled politician with international experience, whose life was organically connected to the socio-cultural environment he lived in, which was an essentially Christian one. Evidence in this regard comes from his education at the school of Sæmundr *inn fróði* (1056–1133), a priest and trained scholar, up to his role in the establishment of the Viðey monastery in 1225, his relationship with the Norwegian crown, and his activity at Reykholt's ecclesiastical and cultural centre, where he was killed in 1241.[135] It is not too audacious to suggest an intentional elaboration of a well-known cosmographic canon and the desire to find a balance between different cardinal directions on the part of a scholar like Snorri.

A central theme for Icelanders in the Middle Ages seems to have been the pursuit of a legitimate position on a geopolitical framework in which the island was often relegated to a cursed terra incognita. For this reason, the analysis of medieval Icelandic texts, especially those

[134] The incipit also refers to Oðinn, Freyr, Freyja and the other *æsir*.
[135] For an analysis of Snorri's figure and relevance in the Icelandic culture of the time, see Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir and Helgi Þorláksson 2018.

including a vast range of geographic and cosmographic information, should not exclude the possible alteration of the acquired knowledge to personal and alternative set-ups.[136] Incongruence and cultural intermingling may be explained by keeping this critical perspective in mind. The innovations brought about by Snorri would not be limited to his cosmographical counterproposal, as the texts also engage in mixing opposite aspects pertaining to different areas of the world. According to Wanner, his most notable combination between opposite cardinal directions lies in the origin of the Æsir as eastern figures and 'colonisers' of the north.[137] Similarly, Snorri's cosmogony in *Gylfaginning* depicts the birth of Ymir as the result of the interaction between the flames from the southern realm of Múspell and the icy cold rivers of Niflheimr, in the north.[138] This productive interaction between opposite features of different cardinal directions may be Snorri's most important innovation, as it established some sort of *Gemischtkultur* in Iceland, "where elements of the north and west combine with those of the south or east with creative results".[139]

Awareness of the possible complex developments of the late medieval Icelandic worldview is an essential starting point for an analysis of indigenous *riddarasögur*. These texts are full of written *mappae mundi* and digressions on universal history. Additionally, travels to faraway lands act as the driving force of narration. In general, the peculiar design of fictional space in Icelandic *riddarasögur* seems to be as important for the comprehension of the texts as their contents. It would be hard to address their plot without considering their ways of organising space. Talking about spatial representations in the Icelandic *riddarasögur* also means addressing the context in which they were generated from a wider perspective, admitting their relationship with an established socio-cultural framework and its specific idea of spatiality. It means considering late medieval Icelanders' ideological horizon and, in some cases, the role that this society attributed to itself in relation to the outside world and other literary traditions.

2.6 Three Functional Categories of Spatial Analysis

This chapter has focused on the definition of the ways of late medieval thinkers to conceive, organise and represent space as a whole. Starting from Lefebvrian premises, a general logic of

[136] On the Icelandic moral interpretation of the cardinal directions and the existence of a 'counter cosmography' in Iceland, see also Barnes 2014, pp. 31–35.
[137] Particularly interesting is Wanner's analysis of Oðinn's *seiðr* in *Ynglinga saga* and Sibil/Sif's *spádómr* in *Edda*'s as elements which created a mythical bridge between the east, origin of the Æsir, and the north (Wanner 2009a, p. 68).
[138] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, ch. 5, p. 10.
[139] Wanner 2009a, p. 71.

spatial production has been defined, that is, a system of coordinates and conventions used by scholars in order to interpret the world and give meaning to fictional ones. It is a system made of a fundamental hierarchy that causes polarisation on both a macroscopic level – the *axis mundi* that connects Creator and Creation – and a microscopic one – the attractive force of places of worship on earth, which in turn revolved around Jerusalem as *umbilicus mundi*. The search for concealed divine signs, either within reality or literary works, has been explained through the exegetical interpretation of space encouraged by patristic writers, especially St. Augustine, whose thought has been proposed as the core of late medieval spatiality together with Aristotle's and Ptolemy's. World maps, as well as encyclopaedias and literary genres like the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, confirm the attitude of scholars to condense all knowledge into one medium. Those configurations would include not only the known world but also elements of Christian history, such as references to the Genesis, the Apocalypse and the Salvation of humankind, and this may be explained with the significant symbolic potential of microcosmic representations theorised by Eliade and Bachelard. Condensation of space and time is an essential concept to this study, which addresses the solutions found by the *riddarasögur* authors to coherently embrace vast narrative worlds. As stated above, no correspondence should be sought between the actual morphology of the mentioned territories and their representations, which have been defined as ideological and symbolic at their core. The adherence of Icelandic scholars to this conception of space is proven also by the local extant *mappae mundi* and prose descriptions, although with some degree of variation in the latter.

In light of the analysis conducted thus far, I have selected three different approaches to the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, which have to do with polarisation, concentricity, and condensation. Each case study has been analysed through one specific lens, or mode of spatial representation, although all three modes may be detected in each text as the essential elements to understand their representations of space.

- *Polarised space* is the first interpretative approach. It derives from the theological conception of space as hierarchical. Polarisation may be detected both on a macroscopic and microscopic level, as it reflects the fundamental architecture of the cosmos. It is usually made of opposites, with the positive poles symbolizing safety and ideological conformity and the negative ones embodying danger and otherness. Many oppositions derive from the main one, Creator-Creation, such as flesh-soul, inside-outside, or high-low. It is the dominant mode of representation in *Sigurðar saga þögla* (Chapter Five).

- *Concentric space* deals with the tendency of reproducing the concentric configuration of the cosmos on the level of representation (texts, maps, works of art, etc.) in order to convey meanings and specific messages. The most evident example in this regard is the usual depiction of Jerusalem as *umbilicus mundi*, that is, the centre of the world. As God irradiates being all round in his act of creation, so is the Holy City the pivotal point of attraction on the earth. This is the mode that characterises *Ectors saga* the most (Chapter Six).
- *Condensed space* reflects the impulse to spatial condensation as a way to convey higher meanings and reflect God's plan for the world and the humankind. In the Late Middle Ages, it resulted in the condensed geographical and historical learning typical of medieval encyclopaedias, *mappae mundi*, and romances. This mode is dominant in *Nitida saga*'s fictional world (Chapter Seven).

An overview of the manuscript transmission and the plot is also presented at beginning of every chapter.

2.7 Brief Summary

⊕ Every society elaborates ways to conceive, organise, and produce space that result from the negotiation of the individual points of view. Scholars have the greatest influence on this logic of spatial production.

⊕ Henri Lefebvre tried to elaborate a philosophical system that would account for space as a general concept embracing all forms of spatial organisations in a society and their associated meanings.

⊕ The hegemony of the Roman-Catholic Church in the Western Middle Ages is a starting point to investigate the late medieval spatial system.

⊕ St. Augustine may be defined as the founder of medieval spatiality for the implications of his theology, which is indebted to Neoplatonism.

⊕ The thirteenth-century revival of Aristotle's and Ptolemy's cosmologies also had a great impact on late medieval thinkers.

⊕ Late medieval space is both hierarchical and polarised. Everything is emanated from God (high) onto earth (low). God is the main pole in the heavens, Jerusalem the main one on earth. Small village churches have the same polarising function in a microscopic level.

⊕ Although Creation is the reflection of God's design, it is diverse and imperfect, for it lies far away from its source. Like a sun, God irradiates a creative power that gradually fades away the farther it goes. St. Augustine defines evil an absence of good, that is, the farthest point from God.

⊕ The world and the Bible, as productions of God's mind, share the presence of concealed signs of the divinity. Thus, the experience of space is one of interpretation. The study of *Physica* requires exegesis.

⊕ Medieval *mappae mundi* from Iceland and the continent are proof of the ideological understanding of space and the wide diffusion of this approach. They narrate the History of Salvation on a visual medium.

⊕ Written world descriptions, in learned texts or in romances, are equally important instruments to convey religious ideology.

⊕ Iceland follows the same paradigm of spatial production and representation as the rest of Christian Europe, with some interesting variations ('counter-cosmographies') that grant relevance to the northern hemisphere.

⊕ Three interpretative perspectives have been proposed, inspired by medieval spatial thinking and based on the dominant modes of representation shown by each case study: Polarised space, Concentric space, and Condensed space.

3 INDIGENOUS *RIDDARASÖGUR* AS PRODUCTS OF LATE MEDIEVAL ICELAND

"Many men of the past and learned scholars sought in
many ways to compile arts and knowledge for the remembrance
and entertainment of following generations; […] and according
to their narratives, each as one has set down those same
instructive stories in his own tongue"

– *Adonias saga*

3.1 Cultural Exchanges in the Late Middle Ages

As stated in the Introduction, one of the objectives of this work is to anchor indigenous *riddarasögur* to their historical context in order to draw conclusions on both their ways to design fictional space and their function as products of a distinct socio-cultural background. This is all the more important considering the shift in literary taste mentioned by Margaret Schlauch and the central position that the texts acquired in the literary system of late medieval and early modern Iceland. In order to achieve a good degree of completeness of analysis, it is important to address the indigenous *riddarasögur* as products of their time, which means offering also some information on the socio-historical background of Christian Europe overall. Particularly important in this regard are the material and cultural exchanges that took place from the twelfth to the fifteenth century between Iceland, Scandinavia, and the continent. The Icelandic reception of learned literature, on the one hand, and chivalric romances and values, on the other, is strictly intertwined with the great circulation of goods and people that characterised the Late Middle Ages. It is not possible to understand the *riddarasögur* without considering the cultural ferment that involved Western Europe, from the Mediterranean to the north-west. In this framework, an attempt should also be made to trace back the possible contacts between educated Icelanders, who produced and copied *riddarasögur*, and the learning of clerical stamp that founded the medieval worldview and is, according to Geraldine Barnes, one of the defining features of Icelandic romances.[1] Given the size of the topic, references are offered for further examinations of aspects that do not find development in my overview.

3.1.1 Clerical Education in Iceland and Abroad

[1] Barnes 2014, 10–11.

Although the compliance of Icelandic maps with medieval cartographical practices – which means with a production of space that is highly ideological and allegorical – has been addressed, it makes sense to consider the acquaintance of Icelandic authors with patristic writers and the Scholasticism, as well. The diffusion of St. Augustine's thought was a comprehensible process in post-Conversion Iceland, since the ideas of the Church Father had already shaped the religious beliefs and practices in the continent by the eleventh century. It is safe to say that the processes of evangelisation and literacy in early Christianised Iceland must have followed the same fundamental theological principles circulating in Western Europe at that time. The prolific production of clerical texts and translations of saints' lives as the earliest vernacular literature of converted Iceland does not surprise in this regard.[2] Icelanders might have encountered Augustine's thought indirectly, via the works of medieval scholars who were indebted to the saint's theological system. For instance, Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir mentions the encyclopaedic works of Isidore, Bede and Honorius as some of the main vehicles of Augustine's theory of *aetates mundi* into Iceland.[3]

Interestingly, St. Augustine's rule was followed by a number of Icelandic monasteries and clerical houses, such as the one in Þykkvabær, founded in 1159 by Þorlákr Þórhallsson (1133–1193), later known as St. Þorlákr, patron of Iceland.[4] According to Annette Lassen, Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson († 1188) was the most influential promoter of the Augustinian rule, as he wished to reform the Icelandic Church and the lifestyle of the local chieftains.[5] His *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* is one of the most rigorous works to embrace the Augustinian worldview. Other Augustinian houses in Iceland were to be found in Flatey (founded in 1174

[2] Lindow 2001.

[3] Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2008, p. 282. A few hundreds fragmentary witnesses of Latin texts have survived, which complicates a reconstruction of Iceland's cultural inspirations (cf. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2017). An active and passive use of Latin on the part of educated Icelanders is, in fact, endorsed by modern scholars, such as Ryder Patzuk-Russell (2021, p. 7). For a study of the Latin fragments of St. Þorlákr's life, see Gottskálk Jensson 2004.

[4] Lassen 2019, p. 325. Annette Lassen informs about the possibility of St. Þorlákr getting his Augustinian training in Paris (Saint-Victor) together with other Scandinavian clerks. Although this cannot be certain, Saint-Victor was one of the most influential schools at the time, so it is reasonable to think of that as Þorlákr's destination (cf. Gunnar Harðarson 2016b, p. 136). The rise of many Augustinian houses in Scandinavia and Iceland throughout the thirteenth century might be explained by a tight relationship of Scandinavian and Icelandic clerks with Saint-Victor. The Victorine school distinguished itself for a focus on mysticism and the promotion of the liberal arts. Þorlákr also founded the archbishopric of Niðaróss and was bishop of Skálholt, where he remained until his death in 1193. On St. Þorlákr's life and the monastery of Helgafell, see Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2002 and Hermann Pálsson 1967. A saga was written on the saint, i.e. *Þórlaks saga helga*.

[5] Lassen 2019, p. 325. The Augustinian rule was rather strict and more focused on asceticism than the Benedictine one, as its followers based their religious practice on the search for spiritual ascension, charity and poverty, forgiveness of faults and obedience. The Augustinian houses in Iceland, as their continental counterparts, were particularly active in the production of manuscripts and the education of laity, especially after the resolution of the *staðamál* conflicts by the end of the thirteenth century, when the financial resources increased (cf. note 36). Both Benedictine and Augustinian houses were pivotal centres of aggregation in Iceland, as they would rent out land and be responsible for a wide range of manufactured goods and food supplies.

and later moved to Helgafell)[6] and Viðey. The latter, co-founded by Snorri Sturluson himself, has been tentatively connected to GKS 1812 4to, the same manuscript containing three of the five *mappae mundi* preserved in Iceland.[7]

As the centuries went by, the Church realistically exerted more and more influence on the Icelandic society by holding a monopoly on education for aspiring clergy and wealthy laymen. This also increased the relationships between the continent and the island, so that educational or religious trips to the south became a habit. Already in the twelfth century, the Icelandic clergy were hosted by foreign cathedral schools, where Scholastic training was offered. The preferred destinations for Icelanders were Germany, as well as Lincoln in England, and Paris and the abbey of Saint-Victor in France.[8] St. Þorlákr himself got an Augustinian training in Paris. The role of St. Þorlákr in the diffusion of the Augustinian rule and the foundation of clerical houses in Iceland was pivotal, as confirmed by Ásdís Egilsdóttir.[9] His eponymous saga (*Þorláks saga biskups*) seems to be aware of Þorlákr's Augustinian education and to portray the saint's life symbolically, in order to propose him as a carrier of the highest Christian values.[10]

Through the figure of Þorlákr, some of the fundamental concepts of the Augustinian philosophy are exemplified in the text, such as the relevance given to the inner life of men, as opposed to exteriority and appearances.[11] In the case of saints such as Þorlákr, the vicinity of their inner world to God is especially evident, so that a dichotomy between outside and inside, flesh and spirit, is highlighted. From the same principle emerges the idea of saints as 'temples' of God, which means not only protectors but also imitators of Christ's way of life (*imitatores Christi*). This is yet another typical Augustinian idea connected to the saint, so that it is highly plausible that the author of *Þorláks saga* was also an Augustinian monk: "St. Þorlákr was canon, and it is likely that the author of his saga had also been trained in the Augustinian rule".[12] Hermann Pálsson also underlines the connection between the Þykkvabær cloister, where Þorlákr was prior, and the rule of Saint-Victor, assuming that the Icelandic monastery did take

[6] Lassen 2019, p. 325.
[7] The information is provided by Kedwards 2020, p. 65, who dedicates part of his analysis to that connection, which has caused debate within the scholarly community but is based on valid palaeographic observations, i.e. Gjerløw 1980. For a recent analysis of the manuscript GKS 1812 4to, see Gunnar Harðarson et al. 2021.
[8] On the foreign education of Icelanders, see for instance Patzuk-Russell 2021, pp. 125–33; Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2000, p. 82; Kalinke 1983, p. 857. Interestingly, the abbey of Saint-Victor followed the Augustinian rule, as well.
[9] Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2002, p. lxxx.
[10] Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2002, pp. liii, lxii.
[11] Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2002, p. lxii.
[12] Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2002, p. lxx.

up Augustinianism.[13] The analyses offered by Kevin Wanner[14] and Hermann Pálsson seem to point to the idea that learned Icelanders had no less education than their continental peers, and the connection of the country to the mainland was not as limited as it has been pointed out in the past. Thus, patristic literature as elaborated by the Scholastic philosophy did circulate in medieval Iceland to some degree. No less important are direct mentions to Augustine in learned vernacular sources or the eponymous *Ágústínus saga* (thirteenth century). Two mentions are *Stjórn*,[15] and *Hauksbók*. The latter presents a section specifically focused on *Geographia*, *Physica*, *Astronomia*, *Theologia*, and Augustine's sermons.[16] It includes a written description of the world, knowledge about universal history, and a circular map of Jerusalem, "Civitas Hiervsalem Famosissima".[17] Although this kind of encyclopaedic information is present in various Old Icelandic sources, the size and the scope of *Hauksbók* make it especially important for a medieval Icelandic worldview. As Sverrir Jakobsson states:

> *Hauksbók* provides rich insight into the world view of the intellectual élite of medieval Iceland. This was a hegemonic, Catholic world view which bore indelible marks of Iceland's peripheral status in Europe at the time of its composition.[18]

Sverrir refers to the author as "an educated royal official with an aristocratic background"[19] and proposes a long list of possible sources – either explicitly mentioned or simply adopted as models – such as Isidore, Honorius of Autun, Vincent of Beauvais, Venerable Bede, and Ælfric of Eynsham (ca. 955–ca. 1010).[20] Beside St. Augustine, another important authority of medieval Scholasticism who applied a Neoplatonic perspective to a Christian worldview was most likely known by Haukr Erlendsson († 1334), that is Severinus Boethius. His influence on the medieval intellectual discourse was second only to that of St. Augustine himself.[21] The signs of a higher education in *Hauksbók* and other sources dealing with *alfræði* (encyclopaedic learning) support the idea that St. Þorlákr was not an isolated case and other members of the clergy or

[13] Hermann Pálsson 1967, p. 57.
[14] Wanner 2009b.
[15] *Stjórn* I, 11.
[16] AM 544 4to, 1r–14v. The manuscript is one of three composing the *Hauksbók*, which had been divided into three separate parts in the process of collection and archiving. The other ones are AM 371 4to and AM 675 4to. The three witnesses were written in a timespan that goes from 1290 to 1360. The original text (1294–99) is attributed to Haukr Erlendsson.
[17] AM 544 4to, 19r. The world description in the book is titled *Heimlúsing ok helgifræði* (Description of the world and sacred learning), in other words, theology.
[18] Sverrir Jakobsson 2007, p. 23.
[19] Sverrir Jakobsson 2007, p. 23.
[20] Sverrir Jakobsson 2007, p. 25.
[21] Rubenstein 2003, pp. 62–63.

wealthy Icelanders had the chance to travel to the mainland and train on Latin texts. This had an impact on Icelandic Scholasticism, and Skálholt may have been the most prolific diocese in this regard.[22]

Another bishop who had a foreign education was Kygri-Björn († 1238), whose travel to Rome in the early thirteenth century is mentioned by Orri Vesteinsson.[23] Orri speaks of travels abroad as a recurring habit of the Icelandic ecclesiastical élite, when the conditions were appropriate and the service at their home church could still be guaranteed.[24] The thirteenth century, in particular, saw the growth of foreign universities as the main cultural centres along with cathedral schools. Paris's increasing popularity reached a peak in this period, although the University of Bologna also had a primary role, as did the schools of Salerno.[25] During this century, the number of Scandinavians and Icelanders studying on the mainland or departing on pilgrimages increased notably. The sons of Icelandic chieftains who were interested in a religious career were often sent to the continent for training.[26] This flow of travellers and scholars was favoured by a generally favourable situation all over Europe, the 'late medieval Commercial Revolution', which improved the exchange of material and cultural goods.[27]

A bridge between the northern lands and the rest of Europe was represented by the Hanseatic League (or Hanse), whose influence on trade in the Baltic area was attested since the twelfth century and reached its climax in the fourteenth century.[28] In the early thirteenth century, stable Norwegian trade connections included England, Flanders, Holland, and the North German coast.[29] Therefore, the Hanse represented a fruitful vehicle of contacts between Scandinavia and South Germanic areas, to which the linguistic and cultural affinity was greater than to the Mediterranean territories. Still, the movement of Scandinavians and Icelanders was not limited to the Baltic area, France, and England. In fact, Rome, Jerusalem, Bari, Constantinople, and Santiago de Compostela were likely the most frequent choices for religious

[22] Ryan E. Johnson (2014) tackled this topic in his MA thesis, where he also provides a list of the scholastic Fathers of Iceland, that is, those figures that had the greatest impact in the diffusion of this philosophy between the eleventh and the fourteenth century (pp. 89–90).
[23] Orri Vésteinsson 2000.
[24] Orri Vésteinsson 2000, pp. 181, 216.
[25] Etheridge 2018, pp. 75–81.
[26] Gottskálk Jensson 2016, p. 13.
[27] In the thirteenth century the European population nearly doubled, and processes of urbanisation took place. Different parts of Europe became more connected to each other. The process, which was favoured by the growth of Italian merchants' trades in the Mediterranean Sea, naturally led to an expansion of communications that involved the northern countries, as well. Here, the commercial monopoly was in the hands of the Hanseatic League from the twelfth century to the beginning of the modern era, although it did not enjoy the same political independence as the Italian *repubbliche marinare*. On late medieval trade, see Armstrong, Elbl and Elbl 2006, Greif, Milgrom, and Weingast 1994 and Abu-Lughod 1987. On the Hanseatic League, see Harreld 2015.
[28] Etheridge 2018, p. 103.
[29] Harreld 2015, p. 33.

pilgrimages.[30] While travelling, medieval Icelanders got acquainted with both oral and written narratives, as well as learned materials gathered in foreign episcopal sees and libraries.[31] This is proved by the career of Jón Halldórsson, bishop of Skálholt between 1322 and 1339, who grew up in Norway and later moved to Paris and Bologna, where he delighted in hearing and transmitting popular tales along with canonical texts.[32] Despite the mostly didactical purpose of popular stories produced in highly ideological environments, not all of them openly addressed religious matters, as they were often designed as *exempla* that could clarify the meaning of a sermon to the illiterate.[33]

Besides the educational trips to foreign schools and universities, the establishment of local monasteries and schools following the most influential religious orders represented another occasion of contact between Scandinavia, Iceland, and the rest of Europe. In the twelfth century, the Benedictine order had founded seven houses in Norway and three in Iceland.[34] At the same time, the Augustinian order had a pivotal function in educating both laity and clergy. This order was a highly intellectual one, responsible of founding cathedral schools and collegiate churches.[35] From the end of the twelfth century and throughout the thirteenth century, several disputes between the ecclesiastical and the secular authorities took place over the expansion of the Catholic institutions on the Icelandic territory. These issues are generally referred to as the *staðamál* conflicts.[36] By the end of the thirteenth century, however, the disputes were put to rest and the Catholic Church re-gained a central position on the island as well as on the mainland. The link between the Icelandic monasteries and Rome became even stronger, and so did the influence and power of the clergy. From the end of the thirteenth century to the Reformation (mid-sixteenth century) the monastic activities were tightly connected to the Vatican polity.[37] The Catholic philosophy spread widely and shaped every aspect of the clergy's life, the pilgrimages of Icelanders to holy places became more frequent, and most monasteries were considered outposts of the Roman institution.[38]

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[30] For more information on Icelandic pilgrimages, see Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, p. 171 and Togeby 1972, pp. 335–36.

[31] On the Icelanders acquaintance with Latin and the expendability of Latin texts in Iceland, see Patzuk-Russell 2021, pp. 147–211.

[32] On the legacy of Jón Halldórsson and the Dominican rule in Iceland, see Gunnar Harðarson and Karl G. Johansson 2021.

[33] The tension between the medieval concepts of *claritas* and *allegoria*, simple and intelligible language and obscure symbolism, is addressed in further detail in 7.3.2.3.

[34] Etheridge 2018, p. 49. On the history of monasticism in Iceland, see Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir 2017.

[35] Etheridge 2018, p. 50. For more information on this topic, see Patzuk-Russell 2021, pp. 107–25. Another fundamental author translated and studied in Iceland is Gregory the Great (Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2000, pp. 237–38).

[36] On this phase of the history of monasticism in Iceland, see Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir 2017, pp. 299–355.

[37] Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir 2017, pp. 356–417.

[38] Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir 2017, pp. 528–29.

In the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, as the foundation of universities started to take hold, the construction of Augustinian houses in Europe slowly decreased, which does not correspond necessarily to a decrease of Augustinianism's cultural influence in Northern Europe. In fact, there are pseudoscientific manuscripts of the late Middle Ages connected to two Augustinian houses, both of which in Iceland.[39] One of them was the monastery of Viðey, which is also the alleged place of composition of GKS 1812 4to. In the manuscript, the study of *Physica* appears among the branches of the Tree of Philosophy (4v), beside *Logica* and *Dialectica*, as the subject that "docet naturas rerum inq*ui*re" (teaches how to investigate the nature of things). The overall description of *Philosophia*, which takes the top position of the hierarchy as the main source of virtue and wisdom, is "nat*ur*alium i*nqui*sicio díuína*rum* humana*rumque* rer*um* cognício *cum* studío b*en*e uíue*n*di adíuncta" (the study of natural things <and> knowledge of divine and human things combined with the pursuit of a good life). It is therefore plausible that the Augustinian teachings on the nature of the world became part of the education in Iceland and stimulated specific ways to organise intellectual space.

Beside the hierarchical design of the Tree of Philosophy and the above-mentioned *mappae mundi*, GKS 1812 4to features various concentric diagrams for the representation of astronomic knowledge, of which Icelanders seemed to possess particular expertise, as underlined by Simek.[40] Of course, the concentricity of the diagrams often derives from the medieval belief that the earth was in the centre of the universe, which would make a drawing such as the lunar phases concentric (7r); still, it seems important to notice that this view would find an important confirmation in the philosophical discourse of the time, as highlighted in Chapter Two. Hierarchical and concentric spatial patterns might simply have become the best known and most usual ways to organise knowledge about the cosmos and universal history in learned environments by the thirteenth century. In fact, Simek believes that the worldview presented by encyclopaedic texts such as GKS 1812 4to and *Hauksbók* was the expression of "one literary and social élite, interrelated and interacting in life as in literary production",[41] which means rejecting a sharp distinction between two different social groups, monastic-clerical on the one hand, and secular on the other:

> Despite the well-known political clashes between the higher clergy and some secular chieftains in the thirteenth century, the manuscript tradition gives us no clue that

[39] Etheridge 2018, p. 109.
[40] Simek 2009, p. 188.
[41] Simek 2009, p. 196.

> this may have been the case when it came to the actual world view of medieval Icelanders.[42]

Priests and farmers that had daily physical and mental interactions would hardly develop and preserve two differing worldviews. In this social set-up, the laymen that could afford an education increased their participation in the literary production of both learned and unlearned texts, as the activity of figures such as Snorri Sturluson and Haukr Erlendsson may demonstrate.[43]

Finally, the concentric diagrams included in manuscripts such as GKS 1812 4to may also represent a consequence of the twelfth and thirteenth-century rediscovery of Aristotle and Ptolemy. Although it is unlikely that Icelandic scholars had direct access to their systems, it is plausible that the works they accessed already been impacted by this cultural revival. Aristotle's and Ptolemy's cosmographies contributed towards shaping the image of the world in a way that could hardly have been missed by Icelandic scholars, at least indirectly, through Isidore, Sacrobosco, and William of Conches, to mention but a few.[44] The Icelandic *mappae mundi* presented in Chapter Two are proof of the diffusion of a cosmological system based on Aristotelian and Ptolemaic models.

Understanding the involvement of Iceland in the "scholarly Renaissance"[45] and the flourishing of commercial and cultural networks that characterised the Late Middle Ages is a fundamental step in investigating the literature produced at that time. Icelandic *riddarasögur* are the result of that cultural intermingling, as they demonstrate how the contents of a high clerical education could be combined with chivalric culture and local folklore in order to create eclectic though fascinating literary products. While speaking the language of a geographically remote land, Icelandic *riddarasögur* also understood how to fruitfully converse with the rest of late medieval Europe.

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[42] Simek 2009, p. 196.

[43] For more information on Snorri's figure and activity, see 2.5.2. On Haukr's literary activity, see Jón Helgason 1954, pp. xviii–xxii.

[44] Venerable Bede also played an important role as inspiration for later scholars that were known in Iceland, such as Lambertus of St. Omer. Bede's *De natura rerum* (early eighth century) already features a diagram that may be traced back to Ptolemy's cosmology. Simek (1992, pp. 8–10) indicates Ptolemy's model as the most common astronomical illustration in medieval manuscripts in general.

[45] Simek (1992, p. 99) uses this definition to describe the period of great revival of Aristoteles started in the twelfth century with the first translation of his works through the medium of Arabic authors.

3.1.2 The Role of Hákon IV Hákonarsson

In the vibrant landscape of the Late Middle Ages, Norway became the setting of important cultural advancements. In particular, with the aim of enhancing the relevance of his court on an international level, King Hákon IV Hákonarsson (r. 1217–63) promoted an ambitious program of translations and adaptations of continental courtly texts, especially from France and England.[46] Hákon's decision to become a patron of letters and culture in his own land might have been motivated more by political reasons than an exclusive interest in literature, although Henry Goddard Leach describes the king as a highly cultivated man.[47] Regardless of the king's ultimate plans, the fact that his path towards political stability and expansion went through an interest in indigenous literary production is still remarkable. In fact, there is no reason to doubt Hákon's fondness of literature and that some *riddarasögur* were translated during his reign; however, it is currently difficult to determine exactly who took care of the single translations and where. Most translated *riddarasögur* are only preserved in Icelandic manuscripts, and indications of Hákon's patronage, either in prologues or epilogues, are mostly attested in younger copies of medieval texts.[48] The standardised wording in these manuscripts, which corresponds to the court style of thirteenth-century romances, might be nothing but a genre-related *topos*.[49] Similarly, the reference to patronage may be considered as a literary motif, inasmuch as a connection with royalty would enhance the value of a saga.

On these grounds, Sverrir Tómasson has cast doubts on the authenticity of the mentions to the king in prologues, particularly in the manuscripts of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*.[50] The text is an Old Norse translation of Thomas of Britain's *Tristan* (mid-twelfth century) and supposedly the oldest preserved *riddarasaga*. The date of composition, 1226, is attested in two of the later manuscripts where the saga is preserved entirely (AM 543 4to, seventeenth century, and ÍB 51

[46] England is intended as the territory of Anglo-Norman sovereignty from the arrival of William the Conqueror in 1066. Although the last descendant of William, Stephen, died in 1154, the term is often found to refer to a longer period of English history which stretches well into the fourteenth century. The use of the Anglo-Norman language is the defining criterium in this case, as the French dialectic variety adopted by the English rulers and the educated élite remained dominant in written documents for centuries. As Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (2012, p. 4) points out, the terminology may be confusing and volatile in this case, as the broad term 'French' may also refer to the vernacular 'romanz' in all of its forms, including the Anglo-Norman one. For the sake of clarity, a distinction between the two terms is assumed here.

[47] Leach 2013 [1921] dedicates some pages to the analysis of indigenous *riddarasögur*, among all the other literary genres which were inherited from or influenced by Anglo-Norman literature. His description of Hákon IV is far from historically unassailable. Still, the insight he provides on the education and the cultural atmosphere in which the king grew up holds some value for a comprehension of an epoch of impressive literary flourishing.

[48] Sverrir Tómasson 1977, p. 67; Glauser 2007, p. 375.

[49] On the court style, see Jónas Kristjánsson 1985.

[50] Sverrir Tómasson 1977, p. 56.

fol., ca. 1688).[51] Here lies also an explicit reference to the alleged author, a certain brother Róbert, whose biography remains uncertain. Sverrir contemplates the possibility of Róbert being the same abbot whose name appears at the end of *Elís saga ok Rósamundu*, in the Norwegian manuscript De la Gardie no. 4–7 fol. (ca. 1270).[52] In fact, Róbert might have been an English or Orcadian priest, therefore an Anglo-Norman speaker, in contact with the Cistercian monasteries of Lyse Abbey or Hovedøya Abbey, which had close communications with England.[53]

The reconstruction of a textual transmission is particularly difficult for some sagas compared to others. It is the case of *Breta sögur* (around 1200), on which scholarly consensus has been wanting. Some hypotheses would see this translation of *Historia Regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth (ca. 1095–ca. 1155) being made at the court of Hákon,[54] while more recent research has questioned this view in favour of an originally Icelandic translation.[55] Further complications come from the significant differences between the two redactions of *Breta sögur*, the younger of which seems to have undergone a process of 'romanticisation', becoming a hybrid form between romance and chronicle.[56]

Also highly problematic is the transmission of *Erex saga* (translation of Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide*). Information on the paths which brought the French poem to the north is lacking, and the text does not seem to help the investigation, as it is one of the most evident cases of textual reduction and corruption in the corpus of translated romances. According to Kalinke: "A comparison of *Erex saga* with *Erec et Enide* reveals that the saga is the result of a systematic and intentional revision of the structure of the romance, including the interpolation of new episodes and the rearrangement of others".[57] Whether the saga was fashioned in Norway or Iceland, the substance, the style and the structure of Chrétien's original were lost in the process of adaptation. These are two examples of how the textual transmission of translated *riddarasögur* may raise doubts on their precise time and place of composition, as well as the reasons for certain choices on the part of the redactors. As Kalinke points out, it was typical of Icelandic copyists to assert their right of improving and adapting the sources when necessary.[58]

[51] Kalinke 2011, p. 2.
[52] Sverrir Tómasson 1977, p. 49. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2014, p. 119) addresses the theories which see Róbert as the author of the *Strengleikar* (see below), as well. This hypothesis is based on a comparative analysis of the contents, the style and the language of *Strengleikar* and the works explicitly attributed to the priest.
[53] Rivera 1991, p. 56.
[54] See Halvorsen 1959.
[55] Kalinke 2011 and 2015; Gropper 2014. For more information on *Breta sögur*, see 3.1.3.
[56] So much has been argued by Gropper 2014.
[57] Kalinke 2011, p. 35.
[58] Kalinke 2011, p. 35.

This attitude is explicitly stated in some of the works, as a form of apologia from the translator.[59] Therefore, a remarkable degree of freedom may have influenced the final preserved versions of the texts, either in the process of translation – in case they were made in Iceland – or while copying from Norwegian originals.

Beside the Old Norse renditions of the story of Tristan and Isolde and *Erec et Enide*, the other most relevant translated romances are *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* (from *Floire et Blancheflor*), *Partalopa saga* (from *Parténopeus de Blois*), *Bevers saga* (from *Boeve de Hamtoune*), *Ívens saga* (from *Yvain ou Le chevalier au lyon*), *Parceval saga* and *Valvens þáttr* (from *Perceval ou Le Conte du graal*), the last three of which belong to the *matière de Bretagne*, together with Róbert's translation.[60] These romances are examples of instalments of the Arthurian cycle in the north, beside the translations of two *lais*, *Geitarlauf* (from *Lai Chèvrefeuille*) and *Januals ljóð* (from *Lanval*), which belong to the *Strengleikar* collection. The *Strengleikar* – literally 'songs for strings instruments', in relation to the musical accompaniment that must have followed the recitation of the poems – are a group of chivalric romances in prose mainly preserved in one Norwegian manuscript, i.e. De la Gardie 4–7 fol. Most *Strengleikar* are translations of the short narrative poems known as *lais* and written in Old French by Marie de France, an enigmatic poet whose biographical details remain debated. The Old Norse version consists of a prologue and twenty-one texts, eleven of which have been attributed to Marie. There is some question as to whether or not these narratives were known at all in Iceland and, although many scholars have rejected this hypothesis, recent research has tried to offer new perspectives on the matter.[61] The collection might have been commissioned by King Hákon, as indicated in the *Strengleikar*'s prologue.

Apparently, the figure of the Norwegian king was surrounded by an aura of greatness in medieval times; noble sponsor of the arts, generous, and interested in the cultural and economic development of his reign, in alignment with the new standards of European feudal society. Even his life became profitable material for literary works, such as *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, which dates back to the second half of the thirteenth century and is commonly attributed to Snorri Sturluson's nephew, Sturla Þórðarson (1214–1284). The same author is believed to have written the few extant fragments of a saga on the king's son, Magnús, who was hosting Sturla when the news of Hákon's passing was heard. This way, Sturla became the official biographer of Hákon by commission of the king's son. Leach made extensive use of the

[59] Kalinke 2011, p. 36.
[60] A good compendium on the *matière de Bretagne* and the Arthurian literature is offered by Ferlampin-Acher 2020. See also Green 2002, pp. 168–87.
[61] Interesting comparisons between the *lai Jonet* and Icelandic material is offered by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2012 and 2014. Another comparison has been made between the *lai Bisclavret* and *Tiódels saga* (i.e. Kalinke 1981). One of the *lais*, *Gvímars ljóð*, is in fact preserved in a post-medieval Icelandic manuscript (1737).

saga in his attempt to describe Hákon's personality, although the text might not offer a fully unbiased perspective due to Sturla's relationship with the family.

Among the most plausible aspects recounted by Sturla, there is the strong influence of the Anglo-Norman culture on Hákon, not only from a literary point of view, but also in relation to material life. Quoting directly from the saga, Leach recounts the marvellous welcome granted to the cardinal William of Modena on the occasion of the wedding ceremony of Magnús and Ingibjörg in 1261. The pomposity of it may have been exaggerated in order to elevate the nobility of the king, yet the reception was probably a sumptuous one, in opposition to the negative rumours that the cardinal himself had heard before his arrival in Norway. It is therefore possible that Anglo-Norman standards really shaped Hákon's taste and desire for the court to be as well-regarded as other European ones. The monk and historian Matthew Paris (ca. 1200–1259) portrayed King Hákon as *bene litteratus*, surrounded by men of letters and actively occupied with literature.[62] The connection between Norway and England also involved personal relations and fruitful exchanges between rulers. These aspects are emphasised by Sif Ríkharðsdóttir as follows:

> The relationship that was established by the Norwegians with the new Norman rule in England was one of peaceful diplomatic and mercantile exchange. The tradition of diplomatic correspondence and trading with England that had begun during the rule of Sverrir was strengthened by the friendly relationship that developed between King Hákon and the young ruler of England, King Henry III (r. 1216–72). It was during this time that much of the French courtly material was introduced to Norway. Given the close and affable connections between the two monarchs, it is not unlikely that the manuscripts containing the French and Anglo-Norman materials came to Norway via England as part of royal exchange of gifts. This conjecture is supported by the fact that French courtly literature was patronised by the Angevin king and queen and would hence have been readily available and, more importantly, representative of the splendour of the English court at the time.[63]

Whatever evaluation should be made of the authenticity of Hákon's figure as depicted in the sources, it is proof of at least some degree of idealisation surrounding the king, who became a symbol for the twofold nature of the Scandinavian soul, as described by Maurice

[62] According to Paris, Hákon not only favoured the flourishing of local culture, but was also glad to host literate men from abroad, including Paris himself (cf. Kalinke 2011, pp. 5–21)
[63] Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 2012, pp. 17–18.

Gravier.[64] Gravier underlines the coexistence in Scandinavia of a passionate attachment to indigenous traditions and the desire of escaping provincialism by keeping a curious mind on all the influences coming from other lands. The simple fact that the Scandinavian translators decided to bend the French and Anglo-Norman texts to the saga-form is not only a matter of convenience and practicality, but also the sign of a negotiation between local and foreign identities. This is especially valid for Iceland, where a certain independence from the source materials has always been detected and may reflect the very character of the Icelandic people.[65]

Since it is hard to determine the characteristics of King Hákon's cultural agenda in greater detail, it is also difficult to decide whether his action really had an impact on Norwegian society. The transformation promoted with the introduction of chivalric culture via new literary models might have been more superficial than substantial, and the distance between inspirations and reality likely remained significant. This might be due to the absence of a real chivalric tradition in Norway, that is, an ancient group of warriors used to fighting on horseback such as the French one, which laid the groundwork for a distinctive social class with its own values and norms.[66] Chivalry as an actual social construct never really appeared in Norway, which means that the attribution of noble titles like *barún* and *riddari* may be seen as the expression of a fad.

> In the reign of Hákon Hákonarson Norway was not a feudal society, and in the full sense of the term it never became one. But it was moving in that direction, and it was probably King Hákon's aim. Under King Magnús the *lendir menn* became 'barons' and the *skutilsveinar* 'knights'. Against this background we may also be bold enough to see the imported stories of chivalry as a mirror which the king held up to the nobility, presenting them with an ideal which they should live up to.[67]

Kurt Schier expresses the conviction that there must have been more to this process than mere formality and, therefore, that the lexicon and values of translated *riddarasögur* had at

[64] Gravier 1975, pp. 11–16.
[65] Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (2012) addresses the process of translation of French materials carried out in the Old Norse-Icelandic context, often with surprising results as to the degree of elaboration of the translators. On the deconstruction of the feudal features in the translated romances, see also Glauser 2005. It seems important to underline that Hákon's interest in establishing good relationships with other countries did not exclusively involve Anglo-Norman cultures. For instance, Hákon sought an alliance with Spain by marrying his daughter Kristín to the foreign king. Both *Hákonar saga* and *Blómsturvalla saga* recount Kristín's trip to Spain.
[66] On the secular origins of chivalry in Europe, e.g. Keen 1984, pp. 1–43. Specific reflections on the Norwegian situation can be found in Fidjestøl 1997.
[67] Fidjestøl 1997, p. 365.

least some limited influence on Norwegian society.[68] The theory of an effective, carefully constructed, and somewhat propagandistic cultural programme on the part of Hákon IV is supported by Liliane Irlenbusch-Reynard, who pays particular attention to the translated romances as an instrument for a moral elevation of the king.[69] According to several references to Hákon as a positive figure in the sagas, it seems easy to establish the success of this cultural agenda at least for the legitimation of his own power, since the effects of his "civilising and feudalising"[70] effort on the Norwegian society remain debated.[71]

Certainly, the chivalric ideals promoted by the romances were an essential part of the legacy of the French courts to the rest of Europe. The importance of these courts, which King Hákon saw as models for his political ambition, was not only based on secular power but also on cultural stimulus. Even though the social status of a medieval knight may have been much less favourable in the facts than in literary elaborations, chivalry remained a social standard to be sought after for centuries.[72]

3.1.3 Between Norway and Iceland

In the thirteenth century, being a knight was not only a question of physical prowess, but it also meant being protector and promoter of charity and mercy towards the poorest, practicing humility, sacrifice, honour, and courtesy to ladies, as well as defending Christianity and experiencing the fear of God.[73] A connection to Christian values would have proven useful to the Norwegian crown at the time, as the consolidation of Hákon IV's power as an illegitimate heir in a not-so-solid monarchic regime turned out to be quite conflicted, and the favour of the Church could be a precious advantage.[74] Furthermore, the values embodied by French romances had already been exported to other regions of continental Europe, including the German-speaking area. Here, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the production of Arthurian literature had flourished thanks to the works of Hartmann von Aue (ca. 1160–ca. 1210), Wolfram von Eschenbach (ca. 1170–ca. 1220) and Gottfried von Straßburg († 1210),

[68] Schier 1970, p. 79.
[69] Irlenbusch-Reynard 2011.
[70] Glauser 2005, p. 375.
[71] Hákon IV's important attempt of modernisation of his court may be confirmed by the activity of his son, Hákon *ungi* (The Young), who seemingly had the chance to carry on with the translation of foreign literature (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2014, p. 119), despite his short life – he died in 1257, aged 24. Other examples of Hákon IV's legacy may be the translation into Latin of the didactic handbook *Konungs skuggsjá* (*Speculum regale*), written in the fourteenth century for Ingibjörg of Norway, daughter of Hákon V (r. 1299–1319), or the role of her mother Queen Eufemia as influent patron of literature.
[72] Cf. Keen 1984, pp. 28–29.
[73] For an analysis of these aspects in the twelfth and thirteenth century, see Aurell, Mundal, and Johansson 2014.
[74] For an overview of the years that brought to Hákon's rule and the crown's tight relationship with the Roman Church, see Bagge 2010.

members of the *Mittelhochdeutsche Klassik* and adaptors, rather than simple translators, of Chrétien de Troyes's works into Middle High-German.[75]

The Arthurian cycle was the main carrier of the customs of chivalry throughout Europe, as the most widespread legend around which a great number of literary works, as well as translations and rewritings, revolved. Not only the figure of Arthur – example of a great, noble and good-hearted king – but also his valiant followers gained popularity throughout the Continent.[76] Some narrative patterns of Arthurian literature and some key elements of the cycle were adapted to literary works that did not strictly belong to the *matière de Bretagne*, but were still influenced by the cultural scenario that the Arthurian narratives conveyed.[77]

Successful was also the *matière de France*, or Carolingian cycle, that revolved around the figure of Charlemagne as idealised by the late medieval heroic tradition. The cycle was especially well-known via the circulation of *chansons de geste*, such as the *chanson de Roland*. Old Norse versions of the chansons were redacted and collected in a miscellany known by the title *Karlamagnús saga*.[78] The authorship of the text is debated. It might have been redacted in Norway, supposedly in honour of Hákon V, grandson of Hákon IV, but the possibility of it being an originally Icelandic translation has also been contemplated.[79]

Translations into Old Norse also involved pseudo-historical Latin literature, such as *Alexandreis* by Walter of Châtillon (1135–1180) (*Alexanders saga*), and *De excidio Troiae* (*Trójumanna saga*). The Latin works recounting the deeds of Alexander, the Trojans, or Roman and Greek myths, have been labelled as *matière de Rome* and constitute a third source of inspiration for translated *riddarasögur*.[80] It should be noted that *Alexanders saga* and *Gyðinga saga* (a collection of translations from Latin about the history of the Jews) were allegedly translated directly in Iceland by the Augustinian bishop Brandr Jónsson (1129–1264), which hints at a circulation of

[75] Inspired by French courtly literature, the German Hartmann von Aue (*Erec, Iwein)* and the Flemish Hendrik van Veldeke (*Eneasroman*) transposed the genre into Germanic languages. Wolfram von Eschenbach adapted Chrétien's *Perceval* into Middle High German, i.e. *Parzival*, while Gottfried von Straßburg wrote his own *Tristan*.

[76] There are examples of medieval narratives about the figures of Gawain, Lancelot, Perceval, Yvain and other knights of the round table in different areas of Europe. Not only Chrétien de Troyes's romances, but also the Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the above-mentioned adaptations of the *Mittelhochdeutsche Klassik*, or the Welsh *Owain*, to name but a few.

[77] The Arthurian cycle features a wide range of motifs and patterns whose origins are hard to trace back. The first mention to King Arthur is from the ninth century, while works connected to his figure are countless, from the Middle Ages to the contemporary pop-culture. Although more detailed information follows below, it seems important to mention two of the most Arthurian-inspired Old Norse-Icelandic sagas, i.e. *Ectors saga* and *Þiðreks saga af Bern*. Recently, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2020) has demonstrated that Arthurian materials lived on in Iceland also through *rímur*, ballads and folktales.

[78] Budal 2014, p. 133. On *Karlamagnús saga*, see also Kramarz-Bein 2012; Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 2012, pp. 64–70; Beckmann 2008; Hieatt 1975–80; Foote 1959. Other texts belonging to the Carolingian cycle are *Elís saga ok Rósamundu*, *Bevers saga*, *Flóvents saga*, and *Mágus saga jarls* (Eriksen 2017, 60).

[79] Budal 2014, p. 133.

[80] Eriksen 2017, p. 60.

chivalric narratives even before Hákon IV and the Norwegian mediation. Another essential Latin source was Geoffrey's *Historia regum Britanniae*, which is related to the Arthurian cycle rather than *matière de Rome*. The reception of Geoffrey's work is problematic, as its Old Norse version, *Breta sögur* (ca. 1200), has posed several issues to modern literary criticism, starting from its generic hybridity. According to Kalinke, the translation of *Breta sögur* (ca. 1200) may be considered a starting point for the spread of Arthurian motifs and themes in Iceland. Even in its *Hauksbók* redaction, which was much closer to the form of a chronicle compared to the romanticised version of AM 573 4to, it seems as if the transition from historiography to romance had already begun. The same romanticising approach in the translation of Geoffrey's *Historia* was taken by Wace (ca. 1115–ca. 1183) in his *Roman de Brut* (mid-twelfth century), considered by many scholars the real initiator of Arthurian romance in Europe.[81]

Breta sögur may have set the paradigm for the redaction of indigenous *riddarasögur*, inasmuch as they represented the filter through which the flow of translations of romances coming from Norway were interpreted and appreciated. In Kalinke's words: "The Icelandic translation [of Geoffrey's *Historia*] thus laid the groundwork for the importation of the Arthurian narratives from Norway, that is, *Möttuls saga*, *Ívens saga*, *Parcevals saga*, and especially *Tristram saga*".[82] The theory outlined by Kalinke and Stephanie Gropper of an originally Icelandic composition of *Breta sögur* has implications that go beyond the simple reception of translated romances in Iceland. In fact, this hypothesis substantially rewrites the history of romance on the island, since most of the elements imported with the Norwegian texts might have already been known by Icelandic authors for a couple of decades. For instance, a particular scene recounting the equipping of King Arthur, although imitated in a few translated romances, finds its earliest occurrence in *Breta sögur*.[83] Therefore, similar descriptions in indigenous *riddarasögur*, such as *Konráðs saga keisarsonar*, or in younger *Íslendingasögur*, such as *Laxdæla saga*, might have been influenced by *Breta sögur* without the mediation of any Norwegian text.[84] Although the Icelandic translation of Geoffrey's *Historia* was still somehow hanging between the chronicle and the romance, and the earliest actual exemplar of the genre remains *Tristram saga*, some of the motifs introduced in *Breta sögur* can be found in Norway only some twenty years later.[85]

[81] Le Saux and Damian-Grint (2006, 101) consider Wace's work an intermediary between Geoffrey's historical account and courtly romance, although Chrétien de Troyes is usually seen as the real initiator of the genre.
[82] Kalinke 2015, p. 12.
[83] Kalinke 2015, p. 15.
[84] Kalinke 2015, p. 15–16.
[85] Kalinke 2015, p. 21.

New perspectives on *Breta sögur* do not diminish the value of the translated *riddarasögur* and the importance of the Norwegian court as cultural crossroad in the Late Middle Ages. On the contrary, the idea of a complex relationship between the two countries in this phase may lead to a re-evaluation of the cultural ferment in Northern Europe as a whole, making the cultural dialogue between Iceland and the continent more evident, richer and less unilateral. The same conclusions may be drawn from the idea, endorsed by Glauser and Peter Foote, that parts of *Karlamagnús saga* might have been translated in Iceland directly before 1200.[86] Lastly, a confirmation of the island's lively cultural exchanges with the outside world may exorcise the phantom of a passive closure into delusion and escapism which has often clouded the evaluation of late medieval Icelandic literature.

As Anthony Faulkes points out, the engagement of the local authors with a significant quantity of foreign literature "has nothing to do with any supposed degeneration of taste in Iceland: It merely illustrates that Icelandic writers had at all time access to the same common stock of European story material as writers in other countries".[87] Contacts between Iceland and Norway were massive and continuous in the thirteenth century, after all, and became especially intense as the turn of the century approached, although they were not always peaceful.[88] Beside Sturla, Hákon's biographer, whose presence at the Norwegian court has been attested, Snorri Sturluson himself had political interests in Norway and a central role in the historical developments of the early thirteenth century.

Snorri allegedly became retainer of King Hákon IV, even though their relationship began to deteriorate as internal struggles in both countries started to escalate. Norway was affected by a civil war due to Duke Skúli Bárðarson, Hákon's uncle, and his claims to the throne, while the Icelandic chieftains were fighting each other for territorial power in one of the most violent periods of the island's history, the Sturlunga Era. Still, Snorri managed to retain a position of honour at the Norwegian court at least until 1240, when he disobeyed the king and returned to Iceland, after the Battle of Örlygsstaðir.[89] With the end of Snorri's political mediation and his assassination in 1241, and with the increasing bloodshed caused by the conflicts among families, the path towards a formal submission of Iceland to Norway was paved.

On the Norwegian front, Skúli's outburst was sedated, and he was killed in 1240. Besides Snorri's endeavours, Theodore Andersson has pointed out that the presence of

[86] Glauser 2005, p. 375; Foote 1959.
[87] Faulkes 1966, p. 85.
[88] Andersson (1994, p. 56) describes the rising tensions between Iceland and Norway as a 'trade war' that took place between the years 1215 and 1220.
[89] For more information on the battle and the so-called *Sturlungaöld*, see Gunnar Karlsson 2000, pp. 79–86.

Icelanders in Norway (and vice versa) was constant from the settlement down to the thirteenth century.[90] During summers and overwinterings, the exchange of news and information was realistically continuous, so that some of the most important events related to both lands made their way into the sagas. These communications made so much information available that it became possible for Icelanders to write about Norwegian history from the earliest days (e.g. Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*) to the thirteenth century, through *Heimskringla*. In this cultural landscape, the transmission of chivalric literature between Norway and Iceland appears as a coherent tile in a greater mosaic made of common heritage and shared historical experiences. This mosaic in turn seems to fit well into a wider culture of manuscript production, transmission and translation such as the one that flourished throughout late medieval Europe.

3.2 Brief Summary

- ⊕ The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were periods of great cultural exchanges which followed an improvement of cultural and commercial relations throughout Europe.
- ⊕ Norway functioned as fundamental intermediary for the reception of chivalry literature and values in the north, although the actual impact of King Hákon IV's politics may be debated.
- ⊕ Rich Icelanders and members of the clergy visited the most important cultural centres of late medieval Europe and founded clerical schools on the island, seeking cultural uniformity with the rest of Europe.
- ⊕ St. Augustine's rule was well known in Iceland. St. Þorlákr, patron of Iceland, was one of its most important promoters.
- ⊕ Icelandic *riddarasögur* are the result of fruitful exchanges with the rest of Christian Europe rather than the expression of Iceland's geographic and political isolation.

[90] Andersson 2016, p. 22.

4 INDIGENOUS *RIDDARASÖGUR* AS A GENRE

"The *riddarasögur* move beyond the traditional boundaries
of medieval romance into the realm of literary experiment, to
explore the process of composition and the fabric of fiction itself."

– Geraldine Barnes, "Romance in Iceland"

Between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, Icelanders began to write their own versions of chivalric romances, original compositions inspired by the translations of courtly literature from France and England. Despite the conjectures on the mediating role of Norway in the actual diffusion of chivalric literature in Iceland, it is likely that the circulation of translated *riddarasögur* became even more significant at the turn of the century. Not only translated romances but also indigenous *riddarasögur* have been preserved in hundreds of late medieval and post-medieval manuscripts, hinting at a fervent activity of copying and rewriting. As stated in 1.1, despite the complex question of generic definition, some key features usually recognised as typical of indigenous *riddarasögur* must be accepted in order to have a clearer picture of the texts that are the object of this analysis. Moreover, these aspects may be directly related to the popularity of the Icelandic romances in late medieval and early modern times. After proposing a general overview of the typical narrative structure of an indigenous *riddarasaga*, the following thematic perspectives shall be offered: The insertion of encyclopaedic knowledge, the sagas' relationship with classical antiquity, the fascination with the Byzantine Empire and other representations of the east, and the syncretism between local lore and foreign inspirations. Again, a certain degree of approximation must be taken into account.

4.1 Narrative Structure

Astrid van Nahl and Jürg Glauser have concerned themselves with the main patterns and structural characteristics of indigenous *riddarasögur*. Kalinke addressed structural issues as well by giving emphasis on the bridal-quest elements in some selected texts, where the pursuit of a noble and beautiful wife for the male protagonist is a narrative driving force.[1] This aspect was also stressed by van Nahl in her schematisation of the main narrative units which usually compose Icelandic *riddarasögur*, while Glauser focused on slightly different aspects.[2]

[1] Kalinke 1990.
[2] Van Nahl 1981; Glauser 1983.

In particular, Glauser starts from the definition of 'narrative bricks', or *Erzählschablone*, corresponding to the invariable elements mentioned by Vladimir Propp in his analysis of the folktale, as opposed to the variable ones, such as motifs or subjects.[3] Invariable narrative units are those on which the whole architecture of the narrative is based, and around which the variable factors are defined. Glauser's conviction is that the best way to outline a morphology of Icelandic *riddarasögur* is through the recognition of such fundamental bricks. It must be noted that his research is based on *Märchensagas*, which is an even further delimitation of the Icelandic *riddarasögur* corpus based on their similarities with the traditional folktales. By virtue of these parallelisms, Glauser applied the structural theories established by Propp. Astrid van Nahl, on the other hand, while following a similar formalist approach, opted for *originale Riddarasögur* and a larger corpus of texts. In all fairness, the differences between the two corpora do not seem relevant enough to justify further digression on the matter. The morphological analyses of the two critics do not differ significantly, either.

What van Nahl called *der Auszug der Helden* (Departure of the hero) and Glauser defined as *Heldenjugend* (Hero's youth) correspond to the birth and first years of the knight's life, where his ancestry is established and his training takes place, usually both in intellectual subjects, such as the seven liberal arts, as well as physical training. This is a preparation for his later departure from the court in search of adventure. The hero is usually handsome, talented, and naturally capable of incredible deeds which make him stand out amongst the youngsters at his court. His moral features are also highlighted, as the protagonist is rarely defined by negative traits.[4] In general, the knights of the Icelandic *riddarasögur* align with the principles of balance, justice and generosity established for their continental counterparts.[5] The birth of the hero may even be anticipated by prophetic signs, such as dreams or premonitions.[6]

When the time comes for the protagonist to become a knight, a feast is usually held in his honour. This is the second *Erzählschablone* established by Glauser's schema. Here, Glauser and van Nahl diverge, as the latter emphasises the bridal-quest element, by proposing the love adventure as the second narrative unit. It seems reasonable to think that van Nahl intended the

[3] Glauser 1983, pp. 103–28. For an English edition of Propp's work, see Propp 2009 [1968].
[4] In fact, some male protagonists are introduced with emphasis on their 'imperfect' physical appearance or sick psychological condition. For a few examples, see Bornholdt 2012 and Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2022. The uncanny traits of some *riddarasögur* heroes often seem to enhance the extraordinary features of their character or their unusual strength (e.g. Samson in *Þiðreks saga af Bern*). In other cases, such as *Sigurðar saga þögla*, the mutism of the protagonist is used to underline his ability to subvert the initial status quo in the course of the story.
[5] For further information on chivalric ethics, see Eriksen 2014.
[6] See *Ectors saga*. Here, the hero is named after the famous Trojan warrior, son of King Priamus, who appears to Ector's mother Gelfríðr in a dream. At the age of twelve, Ector is educated in the seven *artes liberales* (*Grammatica*, *Musica*, *Rethorica*, *Dialectica*, *Geometrica*, *Astronomia*, and *Aritmetica*, as listed in *Dínus saga drambláta*, pp. 6–7).

feast as part of the initial section dedicated to the education of the protagonist, as the event is always the culmination of the knight's training and a premise to his departure. The trip outside the court, on which van Nahl insists particularly, is perceived as a way to improve the knight's reputation and abilities, find a bride, gain wealth, or expand the retinue. The dubbing ceremony is not always featured. *Sigurðar saga fóts* dedicates a limited amount of space to the description of the hero's young years, and there is no mention to a dubbing. In *Valdimars saga*, the tournament that Valdimar organises summoning all the young men in Saxland may correspond to the feast unit. There is no mention, however, of his dubbing or the establishment of a retinue, and the supernatural events that lead to the kidnapping of his sister do not actually fit in a typical courtly ceremony. In *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, despite the protagonist's desire to be dubbed knight after proving his strength, he becomes king of England before the expected time, when his father is kidnapped. The same pattern as *Ector saga*'s is offered by *Adonias saga*, where a dubbing ceremony is held, after formal invitations, a celebration, and the handing out of precious gifts. As for wedding feasts and other types of celebration, they appear in all Icelandic *riddarasögur* and are said to be magnificent events with music and other entertainment. However, the description of these moments can be rushed and vaguely outlined.

Van Nahl's *Werbung- und Liebesabenteuer* (Adventures of bridal quest and love) seems like a solid narrative unit in most texts of the main corpus. The vast majority of bridal-quest narratives present a few basic configurations, which are in turn subject to a set of possible variations according to each saga. I propose the following:

a) The bride is convinced by the hero (or his intermediary) with either diplomacy or deceit.
b) The bride falls in love with the knight spontaneously.
c) The matrimony is won through a challenge of sorts (usually, but not always, tournaments or sports).
d) The princess is abducted forcibly by the suitor, who then kills or defeats the other male opponent – usually the father or another knight.

In *Adonias saga*, the betrothal between the protagonist and the daughter of the Roman emperor is arranged rather quickly, after a conversation between Adonias, King Lodovikus, and the emperor himself. In *Ectors saga*, it is Trobil, the princess of Mesopotamia, who falls in love with Ector in the first place. In *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands*, Sigrgarðr has to excel in a tournament and prove his ability with the harp before marrying Florida. Finally, in *Saulus saga*

ok Nikanors, Potentiana is first abducted by a rejected suitor, Matteus, who is then cut in two by Saulus during a field battle. This pattern, which is structurally typical of the folktale, has its most original Icelandic elaboration in the maiden-king motif, stories of despotic female rulers who would reject and humiliate suitors before considering their proposal.[7] Their pride is in most cases 'punished' by the end of the narrative, like in the narrative of Sedentiana in *Sigurðar saga þögla*, and they are forced into marriage.[8]

Glauser's third *Erzählschablone*, the battle (*Schlacht*), covers many different scenarios. Van Nahl's suggestion here is as comprehensive as Glauser's, as she labels this unit *Kampf*. Even though the terms may refer to a great number of episodes, Glauser seems to refer specifically to the great field battles which often appear in the second half of the narratives, which are not always connected to a bridal quest. The other typical conflict is the one at sea.[9] *Sigurðar saga þögla* recounts the battle between the hero's brothers and the viking ships of Garðr *hinn girzki* (the Greek). *Viktors saga ok Blávus* features the harsh conflict between the two foster-brothers and a couple of berserkers, who are also shapeshifters. The protagonist of *Valdimars saga* faces an excruciating battle in Saxland against an army of trolls and giants. The final field battle in Mesopotamia involving Ector and his retinue in *Ectors saga* is likewise majestic, as over fifty thousand knights are counted in Ector's ranks alone.[10] The ritualistic aspects of war – camp, preparation, standards, and sounds of trumpets – appear in the scene. The clash between the army of Lodovikus and Adonias and the one of Constancius in *Adonias saga* also deserves a mention because of the length and accuracy of its description.

After the battle, a happy ending may be indicated as the last *Erzählschablone*, when the aftermath of the main events is recounted, and the hero's enhanced renown and territorial conquests are underlined, together with his eventual marriage and offspring. Some alternative patterns may emerge, such as in *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands*, where the main protagonist Sigrgarðr is brutally killed in his nuptial bed. His namesake son will avenge him and live happily ever after. In *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*, both Jarlmann and Hermann eventually give up their secular power in order to become monks. It is important to notice that, although the conclusion of most Icelandic *riddarasögur* involves the marriage and the establishment of secular power, the

[7] Propp (2009 [1968], pp. 25–65) analyses abduction and its variants as a typical feature of the folktale.
[8] For an analysis of the maiden-king motif in the framework of the bridal-quest romances, see Kalinke 1990, pp. 66–108.
[9] Most indigenous *riddarasögur* feature travels and battles at sea, even when the initial setting is, for instance, France or Hungary. It is frequent to see the protagonists face foreign fleets, but also shapeshifters, berserkers, *blámenn* and trolls.
[10] On the possible ironic aspect of the scene, see Kalinke 2012, p. 86.

sexual aspect of the bridal quest is rarely depicted and, when it is, is still part of a relationship that leads to a marital happy ending.

The bridal quest is the leading force and motivation of many indigenous *riddarasögur*, as Kalinke points out.[11] However, it would be highly limiting to view the sagas as mostly defined by this aspect. Surprisingly, in fact, Icelandic *riddarasögur* are characterized by an overall mitigation of the aspects related to courtly love in comparison to their continental counterparts. A significant reduction of the sentimentality of French courtly material can be assessed in the translated romances as well, as pointed out by Sif Ríkharðsdóttir.[12] The wedding between the hero and a noble lady still remains a constant of Icelandic *riddarasögur*, whether or not it is the main motivation of the knight's departure. Kalinke herself has addressed sagas in which the search for renown or adventure, rather than a noble lady, is the main driving force of the protagonists, starting from *Ectors saga*.

Generally speaking, it seems as if Glauser's and van Nahl's structural models, although embracing the majority of narrative patterns offered by the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, would not entirely fit current approaches, since new contributions tend to look at the sagas for their complexity and heterogeneity, without forcing the material into formalism and excessive categorisation.[13] The kaleidoscopic variety of these texts makes neither configuration fully satisfying. When themes, motifs, and other context-related issues are addressed extensively, both van Nahl and Glauser's works make precious contributions for a better understanding of the genre.

These sagas are the result of the complex relationship between foreign and local literary traditions, learned and popular elements, inspiration and adaptation. Some Icelandic *riddarasögur* are so dissimilar as to cast doubts on their belonging to the same literary genre, and it has been pointed out how thin the line between legendary fiction, translated romances and indigenous romances might be. For instance, a few Icelandic *riddarasögur*, such as *Ectors saga* and *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, show a strong inspiration from translated *riddarasögur* and continental romances;[14] other sagas, such as *Valdimars saga* and *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, show a much closer

[11] Kalinke 1990, p. 11.
[12] Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 2012, pp. 24–52.
[13] Schäfke's research aims to highlight a greater semantic complexity in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, which sometimes puts him in open conflict with Glauser's Propp-oriented analysis, e.g. Schäfke 2009 and 2013.
[14] *Ectors saga* is a remarkable case of original elaboration of typical Arthurian motifs and narrative patterns (Kalinke 2012), while *Rémundar saga* presents one of the few examples of a militant Christian hero (the typical crusader knight) in the corpus (Barnes 2014, pp. 126–45).

bond with folktale motifs and structures;[15] other texts, such as *Viktors saga ok Blávus* and *Nitida saga*, seem to take the typical themes of chivalric literature just to reverse the readers' expectations, sometimes with original outcomes.[16] In conclusion, the variety that defines this corpus invites us to restrict the recurring narrative units of indigenous *riddarasögur* to the following ones:

a) The departure of the hero.
b) The conflict.
c) The bridal quest.
d) The happy ending.

The motivations of a knight's departure may vary significantly, as well as the subsequent events. The comfort of the starting point – usually a rich southern-European court – is not as certain, either. *Sigurðar saga þögla*, for instance, features a protagonist whose court is anything but pleasant because of the mocking he receives from his relatives. The exploration of remote lands, confrontation with the unknown (often coinciding with the paranormal), and some forms of conflict are in all cases the tools for the characters to evolve and complete their narrative arch with a marriage and a kingdom. Any other structural element between these two points can hardly be seen as invariable.

It may be argued that focusing on structural elements is not the ideal way to outline the qualities that distinguish Icelandic *riddarasögur*, as it seems to sacrifice other essential aspects, including the texts' relationship with a learned clerical tradition in Latin. Furthermore, van Nahl's comparative analysis of indigenous *riddarasögur*, translated *riddarasögur*, and *fornaldarsögur* has proven that the structural overlapping between the three genres is remarkable, even confusing if taken as the only compass to navigate the texts.[17] A more fruitful field of investigation is the way in which the Icelandic *riddarasögur* deal with their source materials, whether borrowed or traditional, and their possible function in a society which was notably different from the Norwegian, the French, and the Anglo-Norman ones.

[15] The construction of fantastic space in *Valdimars saga* has been compared to the typical configuration of the fairy tale (Hansen 2009); the protagonist of *Vilmundar saga* has been seen as an Old Norse declination of the Cinderella cycle (Hui 2018).
[16] Viktor and Blávus have been defined as anti-heroes, whose deeds produce mostly comic effects (Barnes 2014, p. 42); Nitida represents an interesting variation on the maiden-king motif, inasmuch as she is always positively depicted, and no negative repercussions follow her rejection of suitors (cf. 7.3.1).
[17] Van Nahl 1981, pp. 89–195.

4.2 Encyclopaedic Learning and Writtenness

In her 2014 work, Geraldine Barnes addressed the fundamental dualism underlying a selected group of Icelandic romances.[18] Elements of traditional lore are intertwined with learned materials of clerical stamp, often drawn from continental sources. Literary motifs from folktales and popular belief find their way into the sagas addressed by Barnes together with encyclopaedic information. This creates a fundamental syncretism between fantastic elements and materials drawn from contemporary encyclopaedic sources on universal history and geography. It might be debated whether the extent of learned information in the Icelandic *riddarasögur* should cast doubts on their perception as purely fictional material in medieval times.[19] Reflections on this matter have been encouraged by the reading of prologues and epilogues and the concern of the sagas' authors on the actual credibility of their own stories, due to the profusion of supernatural and unlikely events.[20] The boundaries between historiography and fiction, not only limited to *riddarasögur* but with regard to all saga genres, represent a complex topic which the scholarly community is still debating.[21] It is therefore arguable whether the pseudoscientific knowledge of the indigenous *riddarasögur* was considered trustworthy from the viewpoint of the contemporary audience. All in all, the preoccupation of the authors with legitimising their products suggests that at least part of the contents might have been perceived as reliable. Another hypothesis is that, although aware of the fantastic character of their narratives, *riddarasögur* authors might have wanted at least the unlearned portion of their audience to believe the truthfulness of the stories for educational or moralising purposes, so as to give credit to the behavioural models presented by the texts.

Setting scholars' conjectures on intentionality and reception aside for the time being, it is undoubted that a wide range of bookish inspiration is a defining trait of most indigenous *riddarasögur*. As Barnes states: "[Indigenous *riddarasögur*] owe a more overtly substantial debt to medieval encyclopaedic and historiographical traditions than their continental counterparts".[22] Salvation history, geography, and cosmography are among the subjects that the authors of Icelandic *riddarasögur* seemed to appreciate the most and be most informed about. In particular,

[18] Barnes 2014.
[19] For a contribution on the dilemma of history vs. fiction, see O'Connor 2017.
[20] The question is addressed in the prologue of *Sigurðar saga þögla*, where many men are considered not so wise (*margir misfroðir*) for not believing anything they have not heard or seen for themselves (*Ssþ*, ch. 1, pp. 95–96). A similar statement is featured in *Þiðreks saga*'s Formáli (p. 7). The epilogue of *Ectors saga* also invites the readers to believe the recounted events (*Es*, ch. 28, p. 185).
[21] O'Connor 2017 mentions the most relevant contributions to this debate. The work of Tulinius (2002) on the rise of fiction in late medieval Iceland is particularly praised.
[22] Barnes 2014, p. 10.

connections with the world descriptions of Isidore of Seville, Vincent of Beauvais, and other popular encyclopaedists have been detected.[23]

Sometimes direct references to intellectual authorities are made, as in *Sigurðar saga þögla*, where Ovid is mentioned, and the symbolism of the lion in Christian doctrine is said to be derived from the work of *meistari* Lucretius. In the epilogue, the author of *Ectors saga* legitimises the truthfulness of his story by citing an important source, namely *meistari* Galterus, who had supposedly collected both *Ectors saga* and *Trójumanna saga* in his own books.[24] Although such references may be seen as literary *topoi* functional to the ennoblement of the work, it is notable that the Icelandic redactors were acquainted with such authoritative sources and might have implied the same familiarity in their readers. Barnes's most recent research is an important testimony of how often encyclopaedic knowledge was added to the texts and how well it was woven into the fabric of the narrative.[25] Although most of the identified references must rely on speculation rather than evidence, the most obvious examples should encourage scholars to continue looking for sources and inspirations.

One instance of implicit reference to a classical work may be offered by *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*. Here, the writer shows off a great deal of knowledge about monstruous creatures, such as a water dragon and a frightening elephant.[26] Vilhjálmr's final destination is the liminal kingdom of Eirs, where the sun is so low on the horizon that it never outshines the stars. Beyond Eirs, another land, this time of eternal sun, awaits Vilhjálmr. There, the light shines in the sky even at midnight.[27] Among the creatures that Vilhjálmr encounters on his trip are two anthropomorphic beings with one eye, one leg, and toes spread round about the foot. A pole helps them walk properly, while they stomp on and destroy everything in their way. The creatures seem to resemble Pliny's sciapods, mentioned in his *Naturalis Historia*, as well as in Isidore's *Etymologiae*, and portrayed in the Hereford map. Both Pliny and Isidore describe them as wonderfully fast, whereas in the saga they help themselves with a pole and rely more on smashing power than swiftness. Furthermore, Isidore does not make any reference to their eyes,

[23] Barnes 2014, p. 11, and Simek 1990, p. 26.
[24] *Es*, ch. 28, p. 185. Master Galterus has been tentatively identified with Walter de Châtillon, since the same name is mentioned in the Old Norse translation of his *Alexandreis*.
[25] Barnes 2014.
[26] Both the sea dragon (*draco marinus*) and the elephant may derive from the reading of Isidore's *Etym.*, XII, ii, 14; XIII, vi, 42.
[27] Interestingly, the description of this far-away land of eternal sun fits the image of India found in medieval encyclopaedias as the closest land to the sun (Akbari 2009, pp. 68–69). In *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, Heliopolis, the city of eternal sun, is located in India. *Vilhjálms saga* does not mention the place name but seems to recall that kind of imagery, even if the protagonist is told to head south and not east. In fact, Galina V. Glazyrina (2003) points out that the Icelandic imagination usually located Heliopolis either in Egypt or Syria, thus making *Vilhjálms saga*'s geographic configuration less surprising.

so there is no certainty whether they might have been imagined as one-eyed. A more evident parallelism emerges from a direct reading of Pliny, who places the creatures in India and calls them both "Sciapodas" and "Monocoli" (literally 'single-eyed').[28] Isidore's account of this species only refers to one of these names and indicates Ethiopia as their habitat. Unfortunately, it is hard to determine what source might have been available to the author of *Vilhjálms saga*, as the work of Pliny used to circulate mostly through the mediation of Isidore, whose impact on Icelandic culture is recognised although hardly traced back in terms of material reception.[29] In any case, the passage is important as it exemplifies the use of learned sources in Icelandic *riddarasögur* and their homogeneous insertion in the plot.[30]

Sometimes the references to the learned Latin culture seem to consist of simple name-droppings. Names such as Florida, Astrinomia, Nitida, Constancius, Apollonius, and Marmoria seem to have no clear function if not for the writer to show off familiarity with Latin or make the tales sound exotic, therefore more captivating. Other instances may suggest a connection with well-known historical figures, such as *Nitida saga*'s Virgilius, guardian of the island of Visio. The alleged inspiration drawn by the saga from the Latin *Eclogues* for the depiction of Visio's natural landscape may explain a reference of that sort.[31] *Meistari* Virgilius is also mentioned in *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* as the finder of the story carved in a city called Licibon, in France.[32]

Work has been done on the possible learned sources of *Kirialax saga*,[33] *Clári saga*,[34] and the other indigenous *riddarasögur* mentioned in the studies of Simek and Barnes.[35] The circulation of encyclopaedic knowledge in medieval Iceland, as shown above, should be a

[28] Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 7.2.

[29] The work of Bergr Sokkason, an Icelandic monk who lived in the first half of the fourteenth century, for the composition of *Nikulás saga erkibyskups* is an interesting field of investigation. He is one of the few authors whose name is mentioned in medieval documents and one of the most prolific recipients of Pliny and Isidore, as demonstrated by Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2000. Despite Sverrir Tómasson's scepticism on Bergr having direct access to Latin texts (1982, p. 31), Svanhildur shows how the textual analysis of his saga speaks in favour of Bergr translating directly from Latin. The description of Asia in *Nikulás saga* is a reduced version of Isidore's *Etym.* XIV, iii. In addition, an almost verbatim parallel of this geographical description is included in AM 764 4to.

[30] Mighty creatures and monsters drawn from learned materials appear in other *riddarasögur*, such as man-dogs (*cynocephaly*) in *Sigurðar saga þögla* and a man-bull (*homocentaurus*) in *Kirialax saga*. Most of these races also appear in translated clerical texts, such as the *Postulasögur*. For more information on this topic, see Arngrímur Vídalín 2017 and Friedman 2000 [1981].

[31] Sheryl McDonald Werronen (2016, pp. 118–22) sees parallels between Virgilius's *Eclogue* 8 and the natural description of Visio.

[32] *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* (ch. 1, p. 3). The discovery of a story carved on stone walls is a recurring *topos* that seems to enhance the value of the story being told, thanks to the *auctoritas* of the sources and the exceptionality of the finding (Barnes 2014, pp. 77–112). Two examples are *Sigurðar saga fóts* and *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, respectively mentioning stone walls in Cologne and Babylon. *Rímur af Mábil sterku*, probably inspired by a lost *riddarasaga*, also features the motif (cf. Hughes 2021).

[33] See Cook 1985 and Divjak 2009.

[34] See Hughes 2008 and Kalinke 2008.

[35] Simek (1990, pp. 331–66) offers an overview of the cosmographical knowledge in the sagas. Barnes (2014) is entirely devoted to the search of learned elements in a group of indigenous *riddarasögur*.

valuable starting point for further analyses in this regard.[36] The two *fabulae* retold by the author of *Adonias saga* from Aesop, the famous Greek fabulist, are signs of a high education. Aesop was well-known in medieval times, as his works were read and commented by authorities such as St. Augustine and Isidore, among others.[37]

The above-mentioned instances, although partial, undoubtedly stimulate thoughts on the degree of 'writtenness' of Icelandic *riddarasögur*. While the debate on the oral transmission of *Íslendingasögur* has led to conflictual opinions in the field, indigenous *riddarasögur* are more unanimously looked at as genuinely written materials, designed with a taste for story-telling that postdates the antiquarian attitude of many family sagas. The birth of the romance and the transmission of the genre took place within the culture of the royal European courts, after all. The experience of the first chivalric texts that reached the north must have been first and foremost a literary one, which did not exclude a subsequent use of the narratives as material for public or private readings.

The fabric of text seems to be more consciously and accurately woven together in late medieval fiction than at the dawn of saga literature. As Glauser points out: "[The new chivalric culture], which was up to then largely unknown, was encountered primarily in the form of ideas and conceptions presented in writing that opened up an imaginary world full of new possibilities and impossibilities".[38] Experimentation in the field of literary composition was therefore accepted in the later Middle Ages and even stimulated, so that the Icelanders' own idea of chivalry could be elaborated and transmitted via new literary forms.

4.3 Classical Antiquity

Related to the interest of late medieval Icelandic authors in learned literature is the richness of references to the classical world. Although the fascination for classical heroes and legendary events such as the Trojan War is not only Icelandic, and the *translatio studii et imperii* motif was widespread throughout Europe, that is undoubtedly a key feature of *riddarasögur*.

Vilhjálms saga sjóðs is, again, a good example of the sagas' use of classical elements. King Ríkharðr, father of Vilhjálmr and ruler of England, is described as a descendant of Eneas the Great of Troy. An eminent and brave leader, Ríkharðr is also the best athlete in the land, and his son inherits all of the positive skills of the noble lineage. Vilhjálmr is handsome and valorous.

[36] On the transmission of scientific knowledge in medieval Scandinavia, see also Etheridge 2021 and 2018.
[37] St. Augustine judges Aesop's *fabulae* positively as they provide instructions and not simple delight by using a similar symbolism to the one in the Scriptures (*Contra mendacium*, 13.28). Isidore provides another positive judgement of Aesop by underlying the moral function of his stories (*Etym.*, I, xl).
[38] Glauser 2005, p. 382.

One day, he enters a forest and meets a giant who challenges him in a board game, which he wins. Thanks to this, he is provided some valuable pieces of equipment, including a preciously decorated helmet. If someone looks at it, they can see the Trojans fighting, and when the sun shines, it is as though the pictures come to life. This piece is said to have belonged to Hercules the Strong. In addition, Vilhjálmr is given a shield, on which the story of the mighty Jason, father of Agamennon, is portrayed. The story of Menelaus and of how he killed Lamidon is also depicted. Moreover, the opening of the saga mentions *meistari* Homer as the one who found the story carved in a stone wall in Babylon. All these classical references seem to have the purpose of legitimising both the quality of the literary work and the value of the protagonist.

The ekphrasis is one of the most usual techniques for the indigenous *riddarasögur* to connect with the ancient world and the deeds of legendary warriors, who become role models for the sagas' knights. The term indicates a detailed description of a work of art in a literary context, frequently related to symbolic meanings, or with a clear narrative function. Its origin dates back to the Book XVIII of the *Iliad* – i.e. the description of Achilles's shield – and started to be associated to the works of art in literary texts as early as the third century. Ekphrases were particularly popular in the Middle Ages.[39] Other compositions prove that this practice had been known for a long time in Iceland, for instance the skaldic 'shield poems', *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Haustlöng* and *Húsdrápa*.[40] The use of ekphrasis itself might be a tribute to classical Greece as the origin of this technique. Symbol of boldness and power, the shield was conceived as one of the most distinctive elements of a warrior's armour. It could tell a lot about someone's deeds, their origins, role models, and social status. In literature, it may have been conceived as an instrument to judge a character's value and learn more about them, or about the text itself and its sources; a canvas on which to paint with words and make references that sometimes only the most experienced readers could decipher.[41] Another example in the Old Norse-Icelandic tradition is the long description of the shields of Þiðrekr and his retainers in *Þiðreks saga*.[42]

Another narrative device useful for establishing a connection with the classical world is the dream or vision. The eponymous hero of *Ectors saga* is named after the famous Trojan warrior who appears to his mother in a dream. Ector is not only the hero's namesake, but he is also a direct descendant of Priamus, as the saga states:

[39] For more detailed studies on ekphrasis, e.g. Becker 1990, Barbetti 2011, and Johnston, Knapp and Rouse 2015.
[40] See Clunies Ross 2007.
[41] A notable example is the description of Gawain's shield in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late fourteenth century); cf. Tolkien and Gordon, 1968 [1949], p. 1.
[42] *Þiðreks saga*, chs. 171–91, pp. 244–61, chs. 200–01, pp. 271–74. As their shields are also described in *Mágus saga jarls*, *Þiðreks saga* may have been an inspiration for the use of this technique.

> *Eftir niðrbrot Trojaborgar […] þá ættir Priamus kongs víða um austrveg reisandi þar margar ok stórar borgir. En saga þessi hefst af einum ágætum kongi hver er var af þeirra kunnmønnum. Sá hét Karnotius.* (Ectors saga, ch. 1, p. 81)
>
> After the fall of Troy […] the kindred of King Priamus dispersed throughout the east, where they built many great cities. One king of this line was called Karnotius.

Here, the legendary figure becomes an active character thanks to his role of supernatural messenger. When Ector grows into a valorous knight, he is given Achilles's shield, whose decorations recall the *Iliad* directly.[43] The Trojan War is important to most Icelandic *riddarasögur*, as it is to medieval romance in general through the *translatio* motif.[44] It represents a turning point in history and an example of the transience of power on earth. The classical past may indeed be used with an evocative or foreshadowing function for the sagas' course of events. It is the case of *Adonias saga*, whose introduction commemorates Troy not only as the subject of heroic epic or the origin of royal dynasties, but also as the key event that led to the establishment of the Macedonian Empire and the rise of the Seleucid dynasty in Syria. The beginning of the saga is an effort to summarise the universal history by inserting another typically medieval motif, that is, the Noachide diaspora.[45] Here, the reign of Antiochus, called *radix peccati*, seems to prefigure the illegitimate reign of the ruthless duke Constancius over Syria.[46] The insertion of Aesop's *fabulae* and this excursus seem to fulfil a prophetic and didactic function, which is to remark that *sic transit gloria mundi* (thus passes the glory of the world). The intellectual stature of the Greek fabulist legitimises the function of his stories as models for the acquirement of a moral behaviour. After all, the example of the great men of the past, according to the *translatio* motif, originates in the east and is later inherited by the Western culture.

4.4 The Byzantine Empire

The previous considerations naturally create the opportunity to investigate another key theme of the indigenous *riddarasögur*, which is the Icelandic image of the east and the Byzantine Empire, of which Icelandic texts have a particularly positive image compared to other Catholic

[43] In Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles's shield depicts the whole *kosmos* as conceived by the Greeks, with the heavenly bodies, waters and seas, the courses of stars, all kinds of animals, and the earth with its plants. A major Icelandic source for the *matière de Rome* is *Trojumanna saga*, a thirteenth-century translation of Dares Phrygius's *De Excidio Troiae Historia*. For an analysis of *Ectors saga*'s "classical guise", see Kalinke 2012.
[44] On this aspect, see Barnes 2016, pp. 77–112. The motif was popular and does not only appear in *riddarasögur*. For instance, chapter three of the Prologue to Snorri's *Edda* mentions the Trojan warriors, as well.
[45] See 2.5.1, note 88.
[46] On these aspects of *Adonias saga*, see also Barnes 2014, pp. 96–111.

countries. Kurt Schier's *Sagaliteratur* indicates the east as the preferred setting of *Märchensagas* in comparison to the texts simply labelled as *Rittersagas*, which are allegedly more focused on western and southern Europe.[47] The distinction seems to overlap the one between indigenous *riddarasögur* and translated ones, although Schier specifies that the term *Märchensagas* is particularly suitable to the later *riddarasögur* which abandoned the courtly environment in order to draw a more extensive inspiration from the folktale. Considering that those sagas correspond for the most part to the ones listed by Loth, we shall continue to refer to the texts as Icelandic (and indigenous) *riddarasögur*.

An important characteristic underlined by Schier is the spatial expansion of the texts, not only in their portrayal of the east, but also in their general attention to geography and world mapping.[48] Not only does the Eastern Roman Empire appear as a setting, but it has also been appointed as the origin of some narrative patterns and motifs, especially by Schlauch.[49] Recurring traits of the Byzantine novel – a purist medieval revival of the Greek romance – may be occasionally detected in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, although their transmission to Iceland has been subject of debate.[50] Among the most typical features of the Byzantine novel are the urban setting (Constantinople) and the aspects related to the life in a great imperial capital, such as hippodrome races, palace scenes and intrigues, but also mystery cults, tormented love and debauchery. To these themes are also related descriptions of splendid architectures and works of art, musical festivities, and opulent processions.[51]

Frederic Amory has rejected the idea of a direct Byzantine influence on the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, proposing French or Latin intermediaries for the alleged parallelisms, or sources which were equally as accessible to Icelanders as to Byzantine writers.[52] Some aspects that may vaguely recall the Byzantine novels can actually be traced back, although with no concrete evidence as to their transmission. In *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*, which is partly set in Constantinople (Old Norse: *Miklagarðr*), the Byzantine *paðreimsleikir* are mentioned. *Paðreimr* is the Icelandic term for the hippodrome of Byzantium, a pivotal sporting and social centre in the capital. The games held there are the occasion for one of the most interesting examples of syncretism between foreign and local materials in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*. In a typically

[47] Schier 1970, p. 106.
[48] A similar point is made by Barnes (2014, pp. 31–52; 147–81) in her chapters dedicated to world mapping, the depiction of the east, and the sagas' image of Byzantium.
[49] Schlauch 1934, pp. 69–94.
[50] On the reception of oriental images in medieval Iceland, see Mundt 1994.
[51] For an overview of the genre, see Goldwyn and Nilsson 2018 and Roilos 2006.
[52] Amory 1984. For a recent contribution on intercultural encounters between Byzantine and French romances, see Cupane 2018.

Oriental setting, traditional Icelandic folkloric elements are inserted, such as trolls, Norns, dwarfs and elves performing all kinds of songs, rituals, and dances. The giantess Þorbjörg the Fat performs a traditional Icelandic dance called *hringbrot* with another giant, causing a powerful earthquake.[53] The whole event is organised by Jarlmann, who is disguised as Austvestan. The name chosen by Jarlmann is interesting, as it is the union of the Old Norse words for east (*austr*) and west (*vestr*). As for the descriptions of sumptuous imperial architecture, *Jarlmanns saga*, *Kirialax saga*, *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, and *Dínus saga drambláta* deserve a mention.[54]

As regards romantic love, the Icelandic *riddarasögur* are known for their tendency not to indulge in sentimental descriptions. The mitigation of sentimentality which began with the translation of French courtly literature continued with the production of indigenous romances, where the bridal quest is mainly depicted as an unemotional Germanic *Brautwerbung*.[55] Actually, some very isolated attempts of sentimental description are made, although an ironic or even parodistic intent cannot be ruled out. In *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands*, the news of Florida, princess of Villusvínaland (Wild-boars' land), being the most beautiful maiden in the world reaches Miklagarðr. Here, Sigrgarðr seems uninterested in the beautiful flower,[56] until the moment when

> *skýtur fagri fuglinn Venus sinni ástar ǫr í hans hjarta at hann unni meyunni þegar af hjartans ást ok staðfesti þat í sínu hjarta at hann skyldi þessa jómfrú fá hvat sem gyldi.* (Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands, ch. 7, p. 132)
>
> Venus, the beautiful bird, shoots her love darts into his heart, so that he falls in love with the young lady at once and resolves in his heart that he should win the maid at any cost.

[53] Earthquake is a popular motif in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, usually related to supernatural creatures, especially giants (F531.3.8.5 and F531.3.8.5.1). It is featured in *Ectors saga* (ch. 19, p. 163), as well. Here, a huge earthquake corresponds to the slaying of a giant snake/dragon. On the *hringbrot*, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2010.

[54] This aspect of *Jarlmanns saga* is addressed below. In *Kirialax saga*, the description of the golden palace of the Byzantine emperor should be mentioned (pp. 86–87); *Rémundar saga* (ch. 5, pp. 170 ff.) offers a vision of the hero's future Indian bride in a splendid dream palace; in *Dínus saga* (pp. 28–29), the majestic architecture designed for Philotemia is remarkable, as well.

[55] Amory 1984, p. 516. On the depiction of emotion in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, see also Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 2017.

[56] Florida's name comes from the Latin word for 'flower'; hence, she is called *þessi fagri blómstur*.

In recent years, Sverrir Jakobsson has written about exchanges between the medieval north and the Byzantine Empire via the experience of the Varangian guard.[57] The oral accounts of soldiers returning from their service in the east might have found their ways into the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, as well as some *fornaldarsögur*. This hypothesis, however, is not based on enough solid evidence to be corroborated and has been called into question. Amory does not believe that the oral accounts of Varangians could have been a sufficient source for the spread of literary motifs and themes. In fact, he questions the very capability of these mercenaries to access the Greek sources and understand the sophisticated language of the Byzantine romances. It is Amory's conviction that the idea of a direct Byzantine influence on Icelandic literature comes from an underestimation of the huge cultural impact that France had in the thirteenth century not only on Scandinavia but also on the Eastern Empire. The French courts, which Amory sees as the central clearinghouses for romantic and exotic materials in the late Middle Ages, may have penetrated the cultural environment of the Empire more than it is usually recognised: "After the shameful sack of Constantinople by the Venetians (1204) […] Byzantine civilisation came under heavy literary and linguistic influence from France and Italy".[58] The same influence that France exerted on Norway in its feudalising process allegedly affected the Byzantine culture, hence the resemblances between *riddarasögur* and the eastern romance. The topicality of late medieval France, from Amory's point of view, managed to reverse the usual flow of highbrow culture from east to west.

Moreover, the positive and admired descriptions of Constantinople in the Icelandic sagas represent a distinctive case in the Western Middle Ages. Whereas Western Roman authorities would provide negative depictions of Byzantium, the northern literary sources would highlight the city's magnificence and the good manners of its inhabitants. This might result from the intense movement of Scandinavians to and from the imperial court, so that there is no reason to question Schlauch when she defines the splendour of Byzantium as a byword in Iceland.[59] Admired stories of the eastern civilisation probably moved together with the warriors who served in Byzantium. Subsequently, they might have been adapted, even idealised, in order to fit in the local literature. After all, Byzantium was the main gateway to the eastern part of the world, and its attractiveness was likely easier to transmit by direct experience than by the reading of Greek romances.[60]

[57] See Sverrir Jakobsson 2016 and 2020. Worthy of a mention is also Androshchuk, Shepard, and White 2018.
[58] Amory 1984, p. 513.
[59] Schlauch 1934, p. 67.
[60] *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* attributes this role to Byzantium, which is the last stop of the protagonist's journey before entering a series of territories with extraordinary features at the edge of the world.

The strategic location of Byzantium caused fascination in the Holy Roman Empire, but that was not sufficient to make its depiction any more positive. In order to fulfil the hegemonic project of the Catholic Church over the other episcopal sees, even before the Great Schism of 1054, Constantinople was described as the house of immorality and corruption. After the Schism, the antagonism became true rivalry, which seemed to be mitigated only in the mid-fifteenth century at the Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence, where the Eastern Empire sought the support of the West in an ever more pressing struggle against the Ottomans. Until then, the Latin West would generally blame Byzantium for religious matters, describing it as a place of heresy and depravity, as in *Historia Ecclesiastica* by Orderic Vitalis (1075–1142).[61]

As Barnes points out, the reason for *Cligès* not being translated into Old Norse, as far as the extant sources are concerned, might be the negative representation of Constantinople provided by the text, hence its poor appeal to the Icelandic audience. In *Cligès*, Barnes recognises the typical "condemnatory fascination with Constantinople which runs through French, Anglo-Norman and English history and romance from the twelfth to the fifteenth century".[62] In most cases, the Constantinople of Old Norse-Icelandic sagas is an undisputed centre of secular and spiritual power and a source of cultural capital.[63]

In *Jarlmanns saga*, the motif of a faraway eastern princess appears in the characters of Ríkilát from Miklagarðr, daughter of the emperor. She is not only beautiful but also skilled in medicine and, therefore, has healing abilities. The woman has a golden cross on her right hand as a birthmark. When Jarlmann reaches Miklagarðr, the saga indulges in a description of the wonders that he sees at the imperial palace, such as "alls konar leikarar með ǫll þau hljóðfæri er menn kunna að nefna",[64] armed men, fifteen monks singing a procession, sixty maidens girt in by twelve stewards, who hold precious velvet tied to standard poles, a phoenix, and many noble matrons.

At the end of the Mass, Ríkilát attends the sick before meeting Jarlmann, who is disguised as a French merchant with a sleeping disorder. This whole episode is emblematic, as it condenses some of the most important aspects of the Icelandic image of Byzantium, starting from the noble princess of whom the protagonist has either heard or dreamed.[65] The court is rich and imposing but not hostile, and the princess is a good Christian, attending the Mass and using her abilities to take care of the sick. The golden cross mark may be a symbol of the balance

[61] Oderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VII, 35.
[62] Barnes 2014, pp. 148–49.
[63] On the image of Byzantium, see also Sverrir Jakobsson 2008.
[64] "All kinds of musicians with every instrument that can be named" (*Jarlmanns saga*, ch. 4, pp. 10–11).
[65] Another example is *Rémundar saga*'s dream vision of the marriage between the hero and the Indian princess Élina.

between her power and her selflessness as a Christian. Ríkilát appears confident and authoritative, especially when she finds out about Jarlmann's disguise, but she eventually comes to an agreement without falling into the cruel maiden-king type.

Another positive aspect of Byzantium is related to its position in the Christian world. Jarlmann is set to face the threat of heathens there and later in Serkland, when he rescues Ríkilát from a pagan king. Interestingly, the positive example that the saga provides in contrast with the heathens is not a Roman Catholic country, but rather the Byzantine Empire, whose rulers become protectors of Christianity beside Jarlmann and Hermann. The final retirement of the main characters to religious contemplation fits in the overall religious atmosphere.

In the corpus of Icelandic *riddarasögur*, it is not unusual to see western rulers making alliances with eastern kings. The plot of *Nitida saga* is related to the idea of aid coming from the Orient, specifically from India, so that the French kingdom can be saved from the Saracen threat.[66] In *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, Vilhjálmr and Reginbald, the emperor's son, defeat vikings together before landing in Miklagarðr and receiving a splendid reception. Vilhjálmr will eventually marry Reginald's sister. Miklagarðr is the homeland of the hero in *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands* and the setting of a few splendid celebrations, such as the christening of Sigrgarðr, his dubbing, and a celebration for his return. Here, Byzantium is again connected to a strong religious spirit and a taste for refined rituals. A procession for the comeback of the emperor from England, with a great number of Greek men singing and bearing relics, is also depicted. Emperor Adrianus builds a splendid tower outside Miklagarðr and Sigrgarðr moves there with his retinue, which echoes the events of *Ectors saga*. Later in *Sigrgarðs saga*, the emperor makes sumptuous preparations for his trip to Villusvínaland, as he gathers together "alla þá hluti sem veröldin mátti veita".[67] The relevance given to the material aspects of the Eastern Empire is consistent with the hedonistic aura that surrounded Byzantium in the West but free of negative implications.

Miklagarðr and Greece may vaguely indicate the same geographic area in some *riddarasögur*, such as *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*. The Ancient Greek culture was generally well perceived in Iceland, and it is reasonable to think that some local writers might have vaguely identified Greece with Byzantium for reasons of linguistic and cultural continuity. The Greek archipelago is even treated as a fixed geographic reference point in some cases, as a sort of dividing line on the horizon, thanks to its role of bridge between north-west and south-east. The sagas are often

[66] See Barnes's contribution on *Nitida saga* (2006), and the one on *Rémundar saga* and the legend of Priester John (2012).
[67] "All those things that the world could offer" (*Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands*, ch.8, p. 136).

formulaic with regard to the Greek islands. *Saulus saga ok Nikanors*, when describing princess Potentiana, reads as follows:

> *Fyrir norðan Girklands haf fæddisk eigi fridari kona en þetta blomstr.* (Saulus saga ok Nikanors, ch. 3, p. 7)
>
> No woman more beautiful than this flower was ever born north of Greece.

In *Sigurðar saga þögla*, one of the troll sisters fought by the hero begs to have her life spared. In return, she promises to give him a compensation so powerful that no other can compare north of Greece.[68] Another instance is *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, precisely when Jónas's treasures are listed. The man is said to own a cloak superior to any other north of the Greek archipelago.[69]

4.5 Other Paths to the East

The east in Old Norse-Icelandic sagas is not only represented by Byzantium and the Balkans. In fact, there are other territories and destinations featured in the travels of the heroes, such as the Baltic area and Russia. Marianne Kalinke points out that the Old Norse *girzka*, used to refer both to the Greek and the Russian languages, confirming the tendency of Icelandic authors towards a generalised perception of the eastern territories.[70] It seems useless to focus the attention on the geographical vagueness and inaccuracy shown by the texts. The focus of this work, as stated above, is the investigation of how medieval Icelanders conceived space from a wider perspective and the possible meanings underlying certain configurations of the world regardless of their verisimilitude. Therefore, the focus of this section should be on the Icelandic image of the east as a destination loaded with ideological implications. As stated by the author of *Ectors saga*, when it is time for the hero to leave his castle in search for adventure, he chooses to ride east, because it is the chief of all cardinal points.[71] The source of information is allegedly the wise *meistari* Galterus.[72] The eastern regions may not always be described as morally superior, but still take a fundamental role in the imagination of the authors, for instance through the *austrvegr*.[73] The idea of the eastern way is rather elusive, but full of implications and

[68] *Sigurðar saga þögla*, ch. 19, p. 150.
[69] *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, ch. 7, p. 63.
[70] Kalinke 1983, p. 858.
[71] *Ectors saga*, ch. 19, p. 152.
[72] *Ectors saga*, ch. 13, p. 134.
[73] On the meanings of *austrvegr*, see Sverrir Jakobsson 2006.

imaginative potential because of its vagueness. It seems to represent the east as a place of fascinating wonders, but also mysteries and perils.

Austrvegr is the preferred destination of many knights, who are in search for chances to prove their skills and earn treasures. There, they often encounter supernatural creatures and are provided with magical objects that will change the course of events and, in most cases, help them on their quest for a bride. *Austrvegr* is the place of the unexpected, the 'out there', as opposite to the often comfortable and usual 'in here' of the courtly world. It represents the breaking of balance, where the knight experiences improvement through conflict and obtains the instruments to build up his skills, wealth, alliances and lineage. This is particularly valid for *Sigurðar saga þögla*, where Sigurðr and Randver sail eastward in order to fight *blámenn* and berserkers in the Eystrasalt. The driving force that pushes the hero is enhanced by Sigurðr's mutism and the subsequent discomfort he feels at his father's court.[74] Sigurðr's travels correspond to the realisation of his potential as a knight and the affirmation of his identity away from mockery. The Eystrasalt corresponds to the Baltic sea, while Bálagarðssíða, which is also mentioned, refers to the area of Helsingfors-Helsinki or the Gulf of Bothnia as a whole. In the Eystrasalt lies also Jamtaland, which corresponds to a region in Sweden, by the Gulf. That is where Sigurðr fights vikings and meet a dwarf. Eystrasalt also appears in *Viktors saga ok Blávus* as the setting of other encounters with vikings and a dwarf. In *Sigrgarðr saga frækna*, the hero sails to Eystrasalt, in order to gain renown. Here, he faces the viking Knútr, whose warriors look particularly odd. One of them is called Jógrímr but is known as Skítr-í-andliti (Dirt in the face), because his nose and cheeks are coal-black, and the rest of his skin is white. Another one is Gráboli, who has cloven feet and a sharp horn on each cheek. The uncanny descriptions, the certainty of conflict, and the usual presence of supernatural elements are consistent aspects of the descriptions of Eystrasalt in all cases.

Finally, the east can correspond to the Russian territories. Indigenous *riddarasögur* mostly refer to Garðar, Garðaríki, and Hólmgarðr to indicate a Scandinavian-Russian kingdom that prospered in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Usually connected to Varangian settlements, these territories are named after the numerous strongholds (*garðar*) erected by the Scandinavians among the Slavonic people. The relevance of these lands in many *riddarasögur* may be seen as proof of a Varangian tradition of oral reports that might have influenced the composition of the texts. Garðar appear in *Vilmundar saga* as Garðaríki and Hólmgarðaríki interchangeably and are described as a land of many wise people, including a powerful seer. The cold climate is

[74] The dumb hero, or silent hero, is a popular literary motif (L124.2), cf. Boberg 1966, p. 189.

hinted at by Vilmundr wearing bearskin and otter skin and being attacked by a polar bear. The overall description of the landscape, however, is idealised and bucolic, corresponding to the general tone of the narrative, whose extreme spatiotemporal abstraction places it close to the folktale. In *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, Vilhjálmr's steel greaves and mail-coat were originally produced by a dwarf for King Heriut of Hólmgarðr. *Sigurðar saga þögla* features the terms Garðaríki and Rucia (Russia). Hólmgarðr appears as the name of the capital city of the area, which is consistent with its usual depiction as a smaller part of the Garðar, together with Kænugarðr and Novgorod. Here, a slightly more realistic description downplays the fantastic elements and may hint at the author's familiarity with the region. When Sigurðr and Ermedon come back to Hólmgarðr, after defeating the Armenians, a great feast is held for them. The richness and splendour of this passage recalls the celebrations of other *riddarasögur*. It surely stands out among the three examples given above and confirms the overall positive view of these Russian settlements in the minds of late medieval Icelanders.

4.6 Local Tradition and Foreign Models

If one side of the syncretism highlighted by Barnes is encyclopaedic learning of ecclesiastical stamp, the other one is Old Norse-Icelandic myth and folklore. As original works, the indigenous *riddarasögur* became the ideal framework for a combination of local lore and imported narrative materials. Figures such as helping dwarfs and trolls are drawn from the local imagery and often depicted in magical/ritualistic contexts.[75] Destructive forces are usually Germanic, as Matyushina points out, including giants, *þursar*, berserkers, and shapeshifters, such as werewolves.[76] Flying monsters such as the griffon and the phoenix are borrowed from foreign traditions, although they might have undergone contaminations. As regards dragons, they seem to originate in Germanic lore, unlike the phoenix, which is Indian.[77] Oriental origins are also attributed to the flying carpet motif, which appears in *Viktors saga ok Blávus* and in *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*. As stated above, *Valdimars saga* is remarkable for its use of folktale elements. The saga's landscape is made of a combination of traditional fairy tale features shared by continental sources and typical Icelandic ones. The protagonist, after dreaming of a mysterious woman, follows the sound of a harp to a high mountain at end of a forest, with steep cliffs

[75] See Matyushina 2006; Ármann Jakobsson 2008 and 2017.
[76] Matyushina 2006, pp. 661–64.
[77] For more information about dragons in Germanic traditions, see Mitchell 2019.

overhanging the sea. The forest and the clearing are the traditional elements here, while the mountain, and especially the sea cliffs, may recall the Icelandic coastal landscape.[78]

The characters' names are usually either classical or genuinely Icelandic, although no indigenous *riddarasaga* is set in Iceland. As mentioned above, Latin and Greek names may appear as the result of random name-dropping; however, they are sometimes carriers of meaning, such as *Adonias saga*'s Remedia (Latin for 'medicine' or 'treatment').[79] The same is valid for Old Norse names, such as Jarlmann and Ríkilát in *Jarlmanns saga*. Here, Jarlmann is informative of the hero being the son of an earl, while Ríkilát probably refers to the boastful character of the princess (Old Norse *ríkilátr*, 'proud'). The fake names picked by the two foster brothers, Austvestan and Norðsunnan, are symbolic of the settings of their expeditions. *Ectors saga* presents a long list of Icelandic names for the horse-boys of the protagonist.

The old gods and heroes rarely appear in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*. When they are mentioned, pagan gods are described either via imitation of earlier sources or diminished in their power, mostly reduced to witchy figures and spirits.[80] In *Sigurðar saga þögla*, Óðinn is a *galdramaðr*, a wizard who used to bring both luck and misfortune to people. The Germanic heroic tradition is also hinted at. In *Adonias saga*, the dubbing of Constantinus features the most splendid equipment, including King Constancius's sword, forged in Borgundia by a dwarf called Nípingr. Borgundia corresponds to the land of the Niflungar, the royal house of the river Rhine which is the centre of the most popular Germanic heroic cycle. The name Nípingr might be a reference to the clan, and the forging of the sword a reminiscence to the weapon offered by the dwarf Reginn to Sigurðr Fáfnisbani.[81] Elements of the Niflung tradition – the South Germanic *Nibelungenstoffe* – are featured throughout Old Norse-Icelandic sources, such as the poetic *Edda*, Snorri's *Edda*, *Völsunga saga* and *Þiðreks saga*. Other *riddarasögur* with such materials are *Mágus saga jarls* and *Blómsturvalla saga*, both possibly influenced by *Þiðreks saga*.[82]

The *riddarasögur* also share important characteristics with folktales and wonder-tales (*ævintýri*). This is not only notable with regard to supernatural figures, but also whole sets of

[78] Propp (2012 [1976]) describes the forest as the liminal space which separates civilisation and the 'nether-world', i.e. the antechamber to the other world. It constitutes an obligatory passage for the initiation of the protagonist, "as if the chivalric champions of the social order must lose themselves *without* in order to find themselves *within*, thereby regenerating the forces that defend the social order" (Harrison 1993, p. 67). Although Harrison refers to Chrétien's *Yvain* and Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, it is safe to say that this function is fulfilled by most forests in Icelandic *riddarasögur*, as well.

[79] Other examples of symbolic Latin names are Nitida (Nitida), Fulgida, Séréna, Alba, Albina, and Luciana, corresponding the Old Norse *birta*, or Florentia, Florida, Rosida, Rosamunda, and Blankiflúr, referring to flowers.

[80] Schlauch 1934, p. 97.

[81] See *Völsunga saga*, ch. 15, p. 59–60.

[82] See Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2015a.

motifs.[83] Some examples stand out as more distinguishable than others, such as the evil stepmother and the transformation spell (*álög*), which were typical of wonder-tales and combined within the same narrative.[84] The stepmother is wicked and connected to obscure arts, trickeries and deception. In the Old Norse-Icelandic tradition, they are usually portrayed as cruel trolls in human disguise and shapeshifters. Their ability to change their appearance is projected onto the objects of their spells, most frequently the hero or characters close to him who are turned into monsters or animals. Interestingly, according to Einar Ól. Sveinsson, the trollish nature of the stepmother should be considered an original Icelandic addition to the stepmother-and-spell motif (*stjúpu- og álagaminnið*), whose origin is hard to trace back.[85] Although the Celtic tradition might have been a source for Icelandic elaborations already in the settlement period, nowhere does the stepmother and *álög* motif appear together as frequently as in the Icelandic narratives.[86] Evidence for the Icelandic circulation of the motif dates back to the thirteenth century, even though a full version of it is only preserved in texts from a century later.[87]

As regards the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, Einar Ól. Sveinsson believes that many wonder-tales are inserted in the sagas. He mentions *Vilmundar saga viðutan* as the first ever appearance of the Cinderella motif in Iceland.[88] A stepmother story is also featured in *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, where Hildr, a king's daughter, is turned into a sow by the stepmother's spell. In *Ectors saga*, one of Ector's knights, called Jamunth, is said to have been chased by his evil stepmother. Here, a digression on Jamunth's early life may be interpreted as an independent stepmother wonder-tale embedded in the narrative. Similarly, *Valdimars saga* features a wonder-tale told by a giant, revolving around a trollish stepmother. The story of the troll-woman Lúpa comes in the form of a story within the story, as well.

Other examples of materials shared by Icelandic *riddarasögur* and folk-stories are the flying cloth (*Viktors saga ok Blávus*), the life-egg (*Sigrgarðs saga frækna*), the hind in the wood (*Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands*), and abducted princesses (*Valdimars saga*). Due to the relatively recent transcription of most Icelandic folk-stories, it is not easy to establish a direct influence of one

[83] For a classification of Icelandic folk-stories, see Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, pp. 16–23.
[84] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, p. 232.
[85] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, pp. 226–64. For a specific insight on the stepmother-and-spell motif, see also Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2021a.
[86] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, p. 236. For another take on this matter, see O'Connor 2000.
[87] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, p. 232.
[88] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, p. 235. For further information on the saga and the motif, see also Werth 2022; Hui 2018.

type of narrative on the other.[89] Certainly, a long oral tradition has preceded the written versions of folktales, and in general, they share roots with other European folktales.[90] The influx of many Irish people to Iceland during the settlement years is highly plausible and would correspond to some kind of integration of Celtic motifs within the folklore materials brought by the Scandinavian settlers.[91]

4.7 Brief Summary

- ⊕ Indigenous *riddarasögur* present a kaleidoscopic variation of themes, plots, characters, and settings which make the definition of the genre challenging.
- ⊕ Jürg Glauser and Astrid van Van Nahl have tackled *riddarasögur* through a set of main narrative units (or *Erzählschablone*) that seem to be recurring.
- ⊕ The main corpus of sagas taken into consideration can be analysed using these models, after the establishment of more general categories, i.e. the departure of the hero, the conflict, the bridal quest, and the happy ending.
- ⊕ Geraldine Barnes detects a fundamental dualism on the level of contents, which combine highbrow and lowbrow, learned and popular, but also local and foreign.
- ⊕ Learned materials are usually connected to the attitude of medieval scholars to condense the whole of Creation and universal history within the same medium.
- ⊕ The classical world is a source of erudite learning in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*. There are many Latinisms and Latin names. The Alexander legend and the Trojan War are mentioned in many texts. Ekphrases may be interpreted as a homage to the classical age.
- ⊕ The charm of the classical world is connected to the *translatio studii et imperii* motif and the supposed supremacy of the east over other cardinal directions. The motif is widely used in *riddarasögur*.

[89] Evidence of folk-stories before the sixteenth century often consists of passages within larger prose narratives such as the *fornaldarsögur* and the *riddarasögur* themselves. The first full-length wonder-tales appear in a written form only around the year 1700 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, pp. 82–83).

[90] Einar Ól. Sveinsson (2003, p. 232) sees a great similarity between the Old Norse *álög* and the Irish *geis* and speculates on a possible Celtic origin of the transformation spell.

[91] "Irish people who came to Iceland during the settlement carried with them stories of Celtic origin, not least those of the Celtic fairies (*side*) who dwelt in the green hummocks and hills of Scotland and Ireland, […]. There were plenty of stories about all this, many of them deeply poetic and very strange in character", Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, p. 174. Several motifs might also derive from the reading of *Strengleikar*, as argued by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2012; 2014.

⊕ Byzantium (*Mikligarðr*) emerges as a place of splendour and magnificence. This might have to do with the Varangian guard and its service for the Eastern Emperor.

⊕ Other locations in the east are India, associated to Terrestrial Paradise, the Balkans, and the viking settlements in Russia (*Hólmgarðr*).

⊕ The *austrvegr* is a privileged destination in Icelandic *riddarasögur*, as it symbolises adventures, challenges, and supernatural encounters.

⊕ Many elements of the local folk-stories are featured in the indigenous *riddarasögur*, including the stepmother-and-spell motif, typical of Icelandic wonder-tales.

5 POLARISED SPACE: *SIGURÐAR SAGA ÞÖGLA*

"Altitude and verticality are often invested with a special significance, and sometimes even with an absolute one (knowledge, authority, duty)."

– Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*

This chapter presents the first case study, *Sigurðar saga þögla*,[1] connected to the mode of spatial representation defined above as polarised space. The relationships between the main characters of *Ssþ* and a moral evaluation of their behaviour seem to be built on strong oppositions, comparisons, and mirror patterns that are achieved through a peculiar spatial design. Before addressing these concepts more in detail, some space is dedicated to the saga's main manuscripts and a summary of the plot.

5.1 The Text

Sigurðar saga þögla (The saga of Sigurðr the Silent) is one of the most interesting and eclectic examples of an Icelandic *riddarasaga*. It is one of the few indigenous *riddarasögur* critically edited in relatively recent times, and one of the richest compendia of both popular motifs and learned materials.[2] The text is preserved in two different redactions, which differ from one another in terms of length, minor details and style.[3] The oldest extant manuscript, AM 596 1-2 4to, is in two parts, with the older one dating back to the second half of the fourteenth century, and the more recent one to the beginning of the fifteenth century or slightly earlier. It is preserved at The Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík and contains the shorter redaction of the saga. Unfortunately, only six single leaves and two bifolia are preserved. The oldest most complete manuscript of *Ssþ* is AM 152 1 fol., which dates back to approximately a century later and

[1] From here on also abbreviated as *Ssþ*.
[2] See Matthew Driscoll's 1992 edition of its shorter redaction.
[3] It should be noted that the passages accounted for in the following pages refer to the longer redaction of the saga, preserved in AM 152 fol., read and analysed via Loth's diplomatic edition. Some of the scenes described below are missing from the shorter redaction of AM 596 4to. The differences between the two redactions, besides the possible reasons for some of the longer redaction's additions, are addressed in 5.4. These aspects are included in a separate chapter for the sake of clarity and intelligibility. The complex structure of the saga's plot and the meaningful implications of AM 152 fol.'s additions have made this choice necessary.

contains the longer redaction of the text.[4] It is preserved at The Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík, as well. Besides these, two vellum fragments have also been preserved from the medieval period, AM 567 4to, XX, α (fifteenth century) and β (early sixteenth century). The rest of the manuscripts containing the saga, which amount to sixty in total, are post-medieval and mostly on paper. Two exceptions are the seventeenth-century GKS 1002 fol. and NKS 1147 fol., which are on vellum and stem back to the longer redaction, as do all paper manuscripts.

Both the shorter and longer redactions have been edited in relatively recent times. More precisely, the longer redaction of AM 152 fol. is the main text followed by Agnete Loth in her 1963 diplomatic edition. Before this, the saga was also published in a nineteenth-century popular edition, *Sagan af Sigurði þögula*, edited by Einar Þórðarson in 1883, based on a seventeenth-century paper manuscript by Magnús Jónsson of Vigur, thus on the longer redaction again. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson's *Riddarasögur* collection (1949–51) also contains *Ssþ* in the same version as its 1883 edition. The shorter redaction of the saga appears in Matthew Driscoll's 1992 *Sigurðar saga þögla*, which primarily follows AM 596 1-2 4to. The publication is accompanied by a critical apparatus and a thorough introduction addressing the manuscript transmission, the main motifs, and the most remarkable differences between the longer and shorter redactions. Loth's edition of the longer redaction is equally important, as it offers some critical information and a list of variant readings which are not available in other popular editions. In particular, Loth draws from AM 152 fol. for the main text, and from both medieval fragments (AM 567 4to, XXα, and XXβ) and AM 596 4to itself for the notes and variants.

For obvious reasons, the present research uses both Loth's and Driscoll's editions as reference points for the analysis of the saga. Both Loth and Driscoll offer convenient indications of variant readings, and Driscoll's introductory analysis of the relation between the two redactions has proven itself to be useful and exhaustive. A comparative study of the longer and shorter redactions of *Ssþ* has brought Driscoll to the conviction that there must have been a shared lost source text for both redactions, rather than the longer one being a direct amplification of the shorter one.[5]

In terms of scribes, Driscoll identifies four hands (Hands A, B, C, and D) in AM 596 1-2 4to and two of them in the α fragment of AM 567 4to.[6] Of the four different hands responsible

[4] The manuscript is preserved in two parts, AM 152 1-2 fol., but both *Ssþ* and *Ectors saga* appear in the first one. The second part consists of only two sheets sewn together, produced by two different hands, and containing homilies. Therefore, the manuscript is here referred to simply as AM 152 fol. For a study of its contents, see Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir 2014.

[5] For an analysis of the manuscript transmission of the saga, see Driscoll 1992, pp. xiii–lxvi.

[6] Pictures of the manuscripts showing the different hands can be found in Driscoll 1992, pp. clx–clxiii.

for the compilation of AM 596 1-2 4to, A and B seem to consistently exhibit older features, specifically of a timespan between the mid-fourteenth century to the early fifteenth century, while C and D cannot securely be dated before the year 1400.[7] Apart from palaeographic observations, which are rarely enough evidence to solve the issue of a precise dating of Icelandic manuscripts, there is no external element which might help scholars narrow down the date or the place of compilation of AM 596 1-2 4to. It is therefore important to trust the previous palaeographic studies dating from the late fourteenth century to the early fifteenth century as the plausible time of composition for the shorter redaction.

As for the manuscript AM 152 fol., containing the longer redaction of the saga, the text is attributed to the hand of Jón Þorgilsson, steward at the bishopric of Hólar and priest at Melstaður, who was active between the end of fifteenth century and the first years of the sixteenth century. The last three quarters of the manuscript have allegedly been compiled by the priest, who took over the endeavour in chapter six of *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra* (51v), for reasons which remain unknown. Jón's contribution goes from 52r to 201v, while *Ssþ* goes precisely from 69v to 88v of the manuscript.[8]

Judging from the great number of younger manuscripts transmitting *Ssþ* on paper, it seems as if its popularity went beyond the late medieval period.[9] Reasons for the success of *Ssþ* may be its explicit intertextual connections with other popular texts of the romance tradition,[10] and its richness in motifs and adventurous episodes.[11] Moreover, I agree with Driscoll's statement on the rich plot and the remarkable degree of irony of the narrative, which might have contributed to its diffusion and appreciation over the centuries: "This extraneous material is for the most part carefully woven in the plot and is seldom perfunctory. Moreover, much of

[7] Driscoll 1992, cxlviii–cli.
[8] Unlike the manuscript containing the shorter redaction of the saga, AM 152 fol. is fully available online at www.handrit.is.
[9] Driscoll 1993, p. 585.
[10] Sedentiana, the maiden-king who appears in the saga, is said to be the daughter of Flóres and Blankiflúr, the protagonists of the translated romance *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, Old Norse translation of the French romance *Floire et Blancheflor*. Van Nahl (1981, pp. 135–37) addresses the direct connections between the two sagas. Other influences on the text may have been *Clári saga*, *Viktors saga ok Blávus* and *Gibbons saga* (Driscoll, 1993, p. 585). In fact, Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1964, p. cxviii) defines the inspiration drawn from *Clári saga* as the most important link between *Viktors saga* and *Sigurðar saga þögla*. Kalinke (2014, p. 276) sees the most evident connections between *Clári saga* and *Ssþ* in the parallelism between the maiden-kings Sedentiana and Séréna, as well as in the treatment they receive when lying with a giant. Sedentiana is also mentioned in terms of emotion representation in Matyushina and New 2020. The violence of the treatment received from Sigurðr and her depiction as a sexual prey is again compared to the contents of *Clári saga* by Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir (2013, p. 127).
[11] Three popular motifs featured by the saga are the unpromising hero (L100), the maiden-king (T311.4), and the grateful lion (B431.2). Sigurðr is the perfect example of the so-called *kolbítur*, i.e. the less auspicious knight at his court, claiming his rightful place throughout the narrative. As Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (2017, pp. 147–48) points out, this motif was familiar to Middle English romances as well, such as *Havelok*.

it is characterised by a humour not found in other sources".[12] Although this affirmation is specifically applied to the shorter redaction of the text, it must be noted that the longer redaction is usually the object of these younger compilations, which means that, despite the problems and occasional incongruencies brought up by later amplifications, the saga remained appealing to Icelandic audiences for a long time.

The overall homogeneity of a kaleidoscopic plot, full of events, characters and places, seems to be preserved in the longer redaction. The typical *riddarasögur* mixture of various elements, both popular and learned, local and foreign, is at its peak in *Ssþ*. Its protagonist, despite the different context, seems to carry a vague resemblance to a shared Germanic heritage, starting from his very name, up to his noble character, the submission of a boastful queen, the slaying of a dragon, and a curious connection with the river Rhine.

5.2 The Plot[13]

The text begins with a prologue on saga writing, the same found in two manuscripts of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, i.e. AM 589 f 4to and AM 567 4to, XIβ. The saga is set at the time of Arthur of Britain. King Lodivikus and Queen Eufemia rule over Saxland. Their children are Sigurðr, Vilhjálmr, Hálfdan, and a beautiful maiden called Florentia. Sigurðr is thought a fool and mocked because of his mutism, until Count Lafrans from the city of Lixion decides to invite the kid to be fostered at his court. Queen Sedentiana, daughter of Flóres and Blankiflúr (*Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*) inherits the crown of France and takes on the title of maiden-king (*meykongr*). Sedentiana is beautiful and clever, but also proud and overbearing with her suitors. She has an impregnable fortress built over a narrow arm of the sea which is only accessible from the ships with a rope.

Hálfdan and Vilhjálmr depart for a harrying expedition in the Eystrasalt. After defeating the vikings of Garðr *inn girzki* (the Greek), they sail around the fair and fertile region. One day, Hálfdan walks ashore and follows a stream into a gully down a mountainside, where he sees an ugly dwarf's child. Hálfdan breaks its jawbone with a stone. That night, he dreams of the child's father, who curses him and strikes three blows on his head. Vilhjálmr meets the child as well but gives it a gold ring. In Vilhjálmr's dreams, the dwarf father praises him for the gesture. The two brothers now sail east until their ships are attracted to shore by a cyclops's magic. Vilhjálmr throws a javelin and kills him. At this point, a host of giants rushes down the

[12] Driscoll, 1993, p. 585.
[13] As the rest of the chapter, this section is focused on the longer redaction of *Ssþ*.

mountainside and begin a violent fight. The brothers and their men manage to push the host away, then they sail back home. The following summer, Hálfdan decides to propose to Sedentiana of France. Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan sail into the bay right below her fortress, where they are pulled up with a rope. After the proposal, the queen becomes angry, and they are both tied up and tortured. Their hair is cut off, and tar smeared on their heads. She has them whipped and orders an owl to be carved into their backs. Finally, she has them burnt on their stomach with a red-hot basin. While they are lowered back down, Vilhjálmr kills one of Sedentiana's guards with a spear, while Hálfdan hits Sedentiana in the breast. She lies, apparently dead, for some time. Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan promise each other not to tell anyone about their humiliation. One day, they sail up the river Rhine and see a lake. After some swimming, they sit under a large blossoming oak, where they speak openly about their disgrace. After a while, they hear a voice inside the tree speaking Scottish. When they look up, they see a knight in a splendid attire climbing down. He grabs his horse and rides away. They realise that he was their brother Sigurðr. The next morning, a poisonous dragon attacks them, so the brothers escape and sail back to Saxland.

The saga now follows Sigurðr in Lixion, where he learns all arts and accomplishments. One day, he decides to leave in search of adventures. He arrives at the river Rhine, where the dragon is holding a lion in its claws. Sigurðr remembers that a lion is depicted on his shield, so he jumps forward and cuts the dragon's tail. The creature sinks to the ground and is finally beheaded. The lion's wounds take three days to heal, so the narrator compares the animal to Christ. Sigurðr and his new companion reach the dragon's lair at the top of a high mountain. They kill the dragon's offspring and take the treasure. In Kampania, Sigurðr and the lion are attacked by two troll-sisters named Flegða and Fála. Sigurðr and the lion defend themselves valorously, so the trolls promise him the most precious reward in exchange for their lives. Sigurðr spares them and is invited into their cave inside the Alps. Before leaving, he receives many gifts, including a gold ring that can make every woman fall in love, protect from fire and poison, and make invisible. He is also given a tablet made of four pieces of glass. Depending on which quarter he looks at, the glass will turn him into a handsome man, an ugly troll, a dwarf, or a swineherd. The troll-women promise him support in battle.

Sigurðr returns to Lixion. This time, he speaks fluently and with eloquence. He reveals to Lafrans what he has heard about Sedentiana and his brothers, so the count invites him to avoid the queen. Sigurðr's travels to collect foster-brothers and allies now begin. Randver of Holtsetuland is the first one to enter his company. They sail the *austrvegr* together, where they face two vikings with the help of the dwarf Nípr and the troll-sisters in disguise of two whales.

In Lombardy, they face King Feritas's army and win. Sigurðr spares the king and then helps him defend the kingdom against Ermedon of Bláland. Both Ermedon and Feritas's son eventually become Sigurðr's foster-brothers. At this point, Sigurðr decides to take vengeance on Sedentiana, who foresees their arrival thanks to a magic stone. She orders a secret house to be built and high fortifications erected around Treveris. On the walls of her secret chambers, the deeds of kings of the past are depicted. All around the house is a pleasant garden, surrounded by high walls. A battle begins between the foster-brothers and the French army, but the formers are captured and thrown into snake pit. Sigurðr manages to free himself and the others. The guards are tricked and killed, so they climb their way out with a rope. After reaching their ships, they keep sailing the area for three days. Sigurðr often goes ashore and meditates on their debasement. One night he meets a dwarf and gives him a gold ring. Three days later, the creature brings Sigurðr Sedentiana's magic stone.[14] With this advantage, Sigurðr and Randver sail back to France disguised as Amas and Amelon from Africa. They are welcomed and invited to spend the winter, although Sedentiana decides to remain hidden in her building.

Before leaving, Amas rides to the queen's house and calls for her. He looks at the corner of his tablet that makes him more handsome and raises Flegða's gold ring. Sedentiana is overwhelmed with love and longing, so she runs out in her night dress and starts chasing him. Not able to reach him, the queen rests in despair in the open air. That night, a swineherd comes and swears to help her, if she gives herself to him in return. She is forced to accept. In the morning, the swineherd has disappeared, but she sees Amas again on his horse. This pattern is repeated from three nights, and Sedentiana is raped by Sigurðr as the dwarf and as the giant, too. On the fourth morning, she realizes that she has never moved from her enclosed garden and that it was Sigurðr who lay with her. She is also carrying a child. Sigurðr has gone away and headed to Sicily.

In Sicily, a knight called Herburt enters Sigurðr's company and is offered the hand of Florencia. On this occasion, Sigurðr proves generosity by asking Randver to attend Herburt's wounds first. Tartaria now needs their help, as the king's daughter, Albína, has been kidnapped by a giant. After defeating the creature, Sigurðr is offered the hand of Albína. The knight, however, offers her to Randver. Valteri and Luciana are also set to marry. Florencia also accepts to marry Herburt. In the spring, Sigurðr and his brothers sail back to Sedentiana. She has given birth to the child and named him Flóres. His birth is said to fulfil an ancient prophecy

[14] In all likelihood, the dwarf is Nípr, although he seems to have somehow altered his appearance.

from the time of Emperor Constantine. When Sedentiana hears of the knights' arrival, she organizes a beautiful feast. Two thralls are carried into the room, whipped and tortured in front of everyone as a reminder of Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan's humiliation. After three days, it is a swineherd (Sigurðr) who enters the hall and reveals himself as the queen's lover. The same happens the following nights with the dwarf and the giant. When Sigurðr turns back into himself, he mocks Sedentiana for what happened in her garden. Flóres now enters the hall, looking much older than his age. He will hand over the kingdom to Sigurðr if he acknowledges him as his son. Sigurðr does so and reconciles with Sedentiana, who accepts to marry him. Another trip in Tartaria to free Albína from another giant is recounted at this point, together with Hálfdan's death. One last successful battle awaits the company in Garðaríki, where King Villimot is threatened by an Armenian fleet. Vilhjálmr is allowed to marry the king's daughter Fulvia. Sigurðr and Ermedon take leave and sail to Lombardy, where Ermedon proposes to King Feritas's daughter, Provincia. Sigurðr sails back to France and finally marries Sedentiana. His foster-brothers are all invited, and their friendship is bound to last for the rest of their lives. Flóres takes over the kingdom after his parents and becomes a great ruler.

5.3 Modes of Spatial Representation

Sigurðar saga þögla's fictional world is based on techniques of spatial representation that are consistent with the ones described in Chapter Two. Specifically, a fundamental hierarchisation of space can be detected through the text. Positive and negative poles are defined from the beginning of the story as the main structural elements determining family bonds, power relations, and moral evaluations. The spatial hierarchy works on two levels, a horizontal one, which mainly embraces geopolitical opposites, and a vertical one, which seems to be related to the Christian worship of the altitude as the closest point to God and, therefore, connected to kingship and power and accessible only by those who prove themselves worthy.

5.3.1 Horizontal Polarisation: Opposite Centres and Mirror Structure

Geopolitical polarisation is established in the saga when Sigurðr is sent to be fostered at the court of Count Lafrans in Lixion, while his brothers, Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan, remain in Saxland. Sigurðr's departure has direct implications on the saga's space, since the geographic distance between him and his brothers is the catalyst of two specular adventures that put the characters and their conduct in direct comparison. Sigurðr, as a child who is unable to speak,

is mocked by his father and brothers, who are not capable of helping him express his potential as a knight:

> *[Kóngr ok aðrir menn] virði út í frá hann eitt fól þat er hvorki mundi fá mál né minni* (Ssþ, ch. 2, p. 98)
>
> The king and other men consider him a fool as he would not begin to speak or memorise.

The difference between Saxland as an oppressive centre and Lixion as the place where Sigurðr receives a proper education is enhanced by the positive description of Count Lafrans, a wise and skilled man who can speak many languages and teaches Sigurðr all arts and accomplishments.[15] At eighteen, Sigurðr excels in all fields and is loved by everyone in Lixion, although people are sad about his persistent mutism. In fact, he does seem to speak in his private meetings with Lafrans, but not in public, as if he could not reach a full accomplishment before proving himself in the outside world. When Sigurðr comes back to Lixion after his adventures, things have changed:

> *Nú var eigi sem fyrr at hann þegði er honum var heilsat, heldr fagnadi hann ǫllum með hæveskligum orðum.* (Ssþ, ch. 22, p. 159)
>
> Now it was not as before when he remained silent when greeted, as he rather replied to everyone with polite words.

It may be argued that the initial distancing from Saxland corresponds to both a physical and figurative polarisation between Sigurðr and his brothers. Saxland may be seen as a negative pole or centre (C-) because of the despicable behaviour of Sigurðr's relatives, and Lixion as a positive one (C+) (*fig. 7*).[16] By leaving the comfort of Lafrans's court, Sigurðr has the chance to find his voice. The same path awaits Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan, who set sail in search of adventure with a fleet and weapons provided by their father. The difference between the three brothers is highlighted here too, as Sigurðr does not ask for any material support from either his father or Lafrans:

[15] *Ssþ*, ch.14, p. 135.
[16] Lixion might be a place made up by the author of *Ssþ*, but there is enough evidence to speculate on France as its possible location in the imagination of the author. In *Tómas saga erkibiskups* a city called Lyxion/Luxonion is featured, most likely situated in France. The name of Sigurðr's foster-father may be a reference to France, as well.

En ek hefi fǫðr mínum ok bræðrum til lítils metnaðar um tíma haldinn verit. Heldr hafa þeir virt mik sem eitt fól. Ok því skaltu með engri vegsemd mina ferð búa. (Ssþ, ch. 15, p. 137)

I used to be held a fool with little ambition by my father and brothers. Thus, you should prepare my trip with no honours.

At this point, two separate adventures begin. First, the saga focuses on Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan, then on Sigurðr. Graphically speaking, the two adventures may be depicted as the departures from the two opposite centres towards the peripheral areas of the world (Eystrasalt, Kampania, etc.) where a number of challenges take place.[17] From this point of view, the saga does not betray the fundamental opposition inside and outside, centre and periphery, which has been recognised as the main setting of medieval romances and the evolution of the hero.[18] This work aims at deepening and expanding the analysis of Icelandic *riddarasögur* beyond this simple set of oppositions.

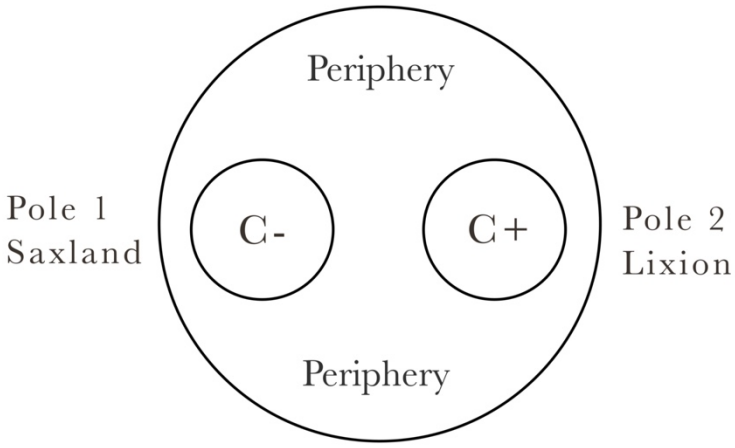

Figure 7 - The geopolitical polarisation of Ssþ*'s fictional world*

The two places are the main centres where the characters aim to return. The brothers' reference point is Saxland, while Sigurðr's one is Lixion. The adventures in the outside world

[17] McDonald Werronen (2016, p. 102) counts a total of forty geographic references in *Ssþ*, which is remarkable even for a *riddarasaga*. From this point of view, the saga does not betray the fundamental opposition inside and outside, centre and periphery, which has been recognised as the core of medieval romances and the evolution of the hero (cf. Van Nahl 1981, Glauser 1983, Barnes 2006, and Schäfke 2013).

[18] Cf. Van Nahl 1981; Glauser 1983; Barnes 2006; Schäfke 2013. Hans Jacob Orning (2017) has concerned himself with the dichotomy centre and periphery in a few manuscripts containing mostly *fornaldarsögur* and indigenous *riddarasögur*. Although the work has received some criticism (Sävborg 2022), his philological approach and some of the evidence he has brought up are worthy of attention. For instance, Orning associates the geographical margins with increasing magical powers, thus, with an enhancement of the supernatural elements and the otherness in the sagas (2017, pp. 96–97, 131).

should be put in dialectic comparison with the civilised environments of the courts. Even Saxland may be seen as a positive pole of attraction from the point of view of Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan. At the same time, the otherness of the margins is the same for both Sigurðr and his brothers, only with Sigurðr being more capable of facing the challenges.

Although the two storylines are told one after the other, their structure is comparable to the point of specularity, since the three brothers face similar, sometimes identical, challenges with opposite outcomes.[19] This means that the initial spatial opposition is the trigger of a mirror structure (*fig. 8*) that glorifies the outcast brother – whenever Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan fail, Sigurðr succeeds. The following quests compose the two specular storylines:

- Defeating vikings.
- Successful interaction with dwarfs and trolls.
- Subduing Sedentiana.
- Killing a dragon.

The fight against vikings is not addressed in detail as it is the least meaningful episode in terms of outcome. Both Sigurðr and his brothers succeed in the naval battle, although Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan face more difficulties since Hálfdan first tries to escape and then gets badly wounded by the enemies' leader.

[19] This pattern respects Axel Olrik's 'Law of the Three' in folk narratives (1965, pp. 133–34), as two brothers set out for adventures and fail, whilst the third one, of a younger age and/or somehow considered inferior, goes on a similar quest but with positive outcomes. On the opposition between Sigurðr and his brothers, see also Glauser 1983, pp. 172–75.

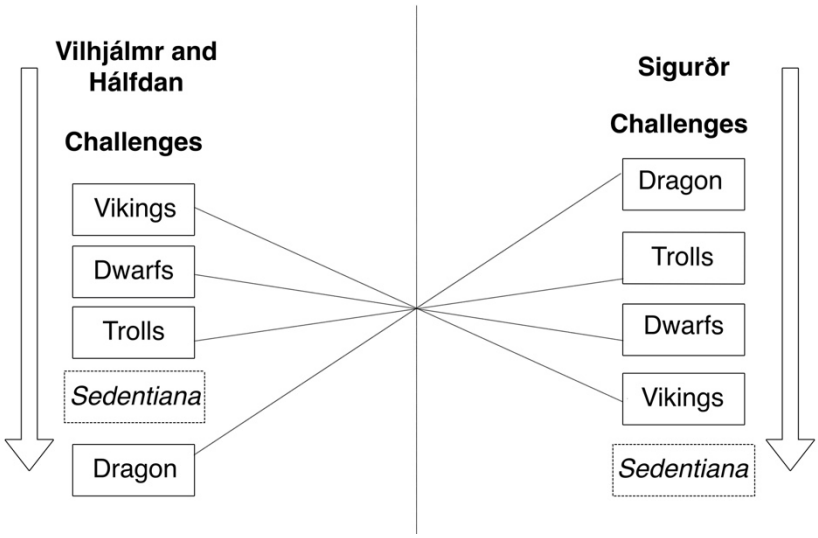

Figure 8 - The specular progression of the two adventures

Two of the quests are identical since the dragon is the same and Sedentiana is confronted by both Sigurðr and his brothers. Still, the two expeditions to France, while being specular in terms of results, are the only ones that do not fit in the mirror structure – therefore, they are italicised. The episodes related to Sedentiana might have constituted the original narrative core of *Sigurðar saga* in its earliest stages. Bridal quests were widely popular both in Iceland and the continent and could form the core conflict around which other material additions were grouped.[20] The existence of two redactions of *Ssþ* is indicative, as the shorter, older one does not feature all the episodes included in the longer, younger text, while both feature the quests for Sedentiana's hand. Extra materials were added at a later stage, by either enlarging the scope of the shorter redaction or working from a common lost source.[21] It is my belief that the new narrative units were deliberately inserted in order to enhance the symmetry of the two storylines, so that the contrast between Sigurðr's prowess and his brothers' inadequacy as knights would more easily catch the eye of an attentive reader.

In both redactions, the two storylines are interlaced at the end of the first one when Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan meet Sigurðr by chance at the river Rhine (*fig. 9*).[22] The dividing line marked by the river corresponds to both a physical and functional border. As a physical border, the Rhine establishes the natural meeting point between Vilhjálmr, Hálfdan, and Sigurðr. As a functional one, the river becomes the central axis of the mirror structure, that is, the interlacing point where the mirroring is initiated. It connects not only two adjacent storylines

[20] Cf. Kalinke 1990.
[21] The latter hypothesis is suggested by Driscoll 1992, pp. cxl–cxli.
[22] *Ssþ*, ch. 12, pp. 132–33.

but also two opposite fields of power made of specific values, obstacles, and character intentions.[23]

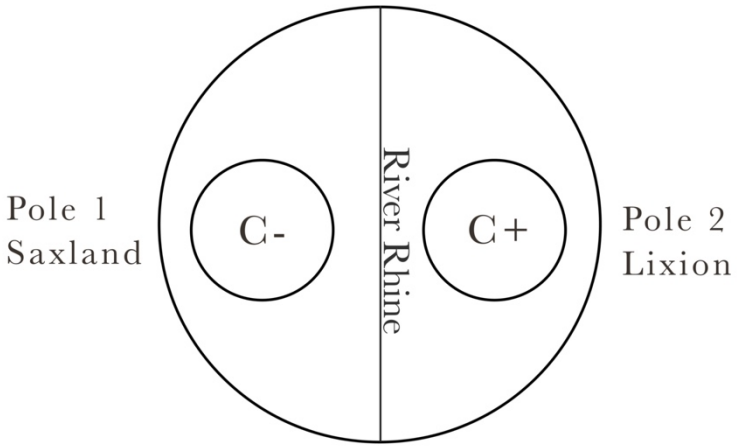

Figure 9 - The river Rhine as the central axis of the mirror structure

The two distinct paths merge only later on, after a reconciliation between the brothers and the acceptance of Sigurðr's leadership. Before that moment, the distance between them may even acquire a cognitive character, since the three knights live their experiences from their own points of view, with their own objectives and reference points. Their meeting at the Rhine is characterized by cognitive factors, as it takes time for Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan to even recognize Sigurðr, who has now become stronger and bigger and has overcome his mutism. This impairment of perception enhances the sense of otherness between the three of them.

5.3.2 Vertical Polarisation: High vs. Low

A process of vertical hierarchisation of space is also at work as a way to refine the characters' mutual relations. Each of the above-mentioned challenges, while occupying a specular position in the plot – as in *fig. 8* – also feature notable attention to verticality and upward motion. In other words, Sigurðr's repeated success is usually accompanied by some kind of physical ascent. The actual climbs performed by the hero become meaningful in the light of the mirror structure, since his brothers are destined to fall or be crushed by the heights whenever Sigurðr rises. Upward movement corresponds to advancements and prizes, while downward movement is associated with failure. To better understand this overall vertical design, the single episodes shall be analysed in greater detail.

[23] Cf. Zoran 1984, p. 319.

5.3.2.1 Dwarfs and Trolls

Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan are sailing somewhere in the Eystrasalt, not far from a land described as fertile and luxuriant, when Hálfdan goes ashore and comes to a point where a stream runs into a gully down a mountainside. Close by, Hálfdan sees a strange little creature, hits it with a stone, and breaks its jaw. Later on, Vilhjálmr shows a more moderate behaviour by avoiding any violence and giving the creature a gold ring, which grants him the support of the child's father. The dwarf appears in Hálfdan's dream in order to curse him and hit him with a club. This moment seems to foreshadow the knight's death in Tartaria. Hálfdan is generally depicted as the more quick-tempered of the three brothers. Right before his death in Tartaria, he is invited by Sigurðr to stay behind and guard the ships, but he refuses to comply, and his impulsiveness leads him to death.

In Sigurðr's adventure, the interaction with dwarf-like figures reaches opposite outcomes. The hero's cunning enables him to understand that, if properly approached, dwarfs can be of great help. Thus, Sigurðr offers Nípr a gold ring in exchange for help. The same is repeated when Sigurðr meets the unnamed dwarf who steals Sedentiana's magic stone. A successful access to the supernatural is thus provided by a firm but generous attitude, and this idea seems to be symbolically projected on the spatial description of the two episodes.[24] In terms of morphology, the space surrounding Hálfdan approaching the inland may be seen as imposing. The river flowing into a gully may evoke narrowness, danger, and difficulty to escape.

> *Nú ber svá til ein dag at Hálfdan hafði á land gengit einn samt ok varð reikat víða. Hann kemr þar sem einn bekkr rann úr fjallinu ofan eftir grǫf einni. Þar var vaxit allskonar grǫsum ilmandi.* (Ssþ, ch. 7, p. 113)
>
> One day, Hálfdan walks ashore alone and wanders around. He comes to a point where a stream runs from the top of the mountain down over a gully. There grew all kinds of sweet-smelling herbs.

[24] Ármann Jakóbsson (2008, p. 200) comments this first part of the saga as follows: "The story exhibits well-recognizable folktale elements. One brother meets an Otherworld creature, treats it badly, and pays dearly. The second (or, more often, third) brother is kind to the creature and is rewarded". Although the dwarf met by Sigurðr is not the same one, there is a clear parallelism between the scenes. Moreover, the blurred line between supernatural creatures, either dwarfs, elves, trolls, or just uncanny figures resembling one of the former, should not surprise. Ármann suggests that this type of motif is mostly centred on the reciprocity between human and liminal creature rather than the actual nature of the latter. For further considerations on this theme in *Ssþ*, see van Nahl (1981, pp. 64–67) and Glauser (1983, pp. 173–75).

Despite the pleasant and stereotypical natural description (the *locus amoenus*),[25] Hálfdan's behaviour seems to compromise and desecrate the place. The opposition between the narrowness and depth of the gully and the pleasantness of the natural landscape may be interpreted as a way to emphasise the impudence of Hálfdan's deed and somehow foreshadow his death. Both the dwarf in his dream and the giant Öskruðr in Tartaria strike three club blows on his head. After the dream, Hálfdan wakes up with a strong headache.[26]

When it comes to Sigurðr's meeting with Nípr, the first scene takes place on a wooded island in the east, where the little man lives alone in a little and humble farmhouse (*lítill ok kyrfiligr bær*). From the description of this passage a rather pleasant landscape emerges, with the positive aspects of unspoiled nature but without the narrowness of the gully. The second meeting between Sigurðr and the dwarf – in all likelihood, the same one as before, as he seems to know him already – is almost a carbon-copy of Hálfdan's episode. One day, while sailing along the French coast, Sigurðr goes ashore alone and meets a dwarf by a stone house. Unlike his brother, he chooses to give the creature a gold ring.

The episode represents the first hint at a hierarchy between the brothers that will be developed in the course of the saga and establish Sigurðr's position on top and Hálfdan's position at the bottom, with Vilhjálmr as a neutral player, not as valuable a knight as Sigurðr but also not as reckless as Hálfdan. The helping dwarfs and their reaction to the knights' approaches are often, in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, a compass for a moral evaluation of the heroes. In general, this aspect seems to be connected to how knights manage to make their way into and through the supernatural space, which is inhabited by different beings and controlled by different rules. Those who know how to keep a proper behaviour – which in most cases implies some degree of respect, without losing determination of intent – make the best out of these encounters.[27]

Sigurðr and the brothers face the threat of violent trolls, as well. As it often happens when approaching the topic of trolls and giants in Icelandic literature and folklore, the boundaries between these supernatural figures may be blurry.[28] Apparently, however, the

[25] On this motif, see also 7.3.2. On the *locus amoenus* as depicted in *Ssþ*, see also van Nahl 1981, pp. 81–83.
[26] The dream that causes wounds with repercussions on real life has at least one other examples in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, i.e. *Ála flekks saga* (ch. 12, pp. 144–46).
[27] One useful example is found in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, which is often associated to *Ssþ* for a series of similarities between the two texts (cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1964; van Nahl 1981; Driscoll 1992, pp. lxxviii, cxliv). Here, the foster-brothers Viktor and Blávus are led to a dwarf called Dímus, who is doubtful about helping the knights on their quest but is eventually convinced with a bag of silver and some persuasion. In *Nitida saga*, the Indian King Liforinus, who needs help in order to outwit the smart and powerful maiden-king of France, offers a golden ring to a dwarf, who then decides to follow him in his expedition and offer help.
[28] Cf. Ármann Jakobsson, 2017.

giants faced by Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan on the one hand, and by Sigurðr, on the other, do share some specific traits. The two brothers meet a cyclops that seems to be pulling their ship to shore with an invisible magic. Vilhjálmr refers to the creature as a kind of troll who likes to eat men:

> *Þess hattar trollakyn er kallat í bókum Ciclopes.* (Ssþ, ch. 8, p. 118)
>
> Trolls of this kind are called Cyclopes in the books.

This sentence, understandably pronounced by the better brother, Vilhjálmr, conveys a few important aspects that should be addressed. Beyond the evident approximation that identifies cyclopes, figures of the Greek mythology, as trolls, there is also a clear understanding of Vilhjálmr's superiority over Hálfdan with regard to education and intellect.[29] The same kind of discrepancy between the two brothers is highlighted through another statement of Vilhjálmr's slightly earlier in the text. In front of the menacing army of Garðr *inn girzki* and Hálfdan's suggestion to run away from the conflict, Vilhjálmr mentions the example of an ancient king whose deeds he has probably read in learned books:

> *Svá mundi þótt hafa hinum ágæta Alexandro af Macedonia er flóttan verði hverjum lasti ljótara.* (Ssþ, ch. 8, p. 117)
>
> In such a way, the great Alexander of Macedonia might have considered the flight as the worst of all faults.

By quoting Alexander the Great, the knight makes clear that he is aware of the hero's deeds and his legacy for medieval chivalry. This is in open contrast with Hálfdan's cowardice. Unfortunately, Vilhjálmr's intentions do not seem to be enough to assure them a full success. After killing the cyclops, a whole host of giants comes running down the mountains as if to make an attempt of revenge for their fallen companion. The two brothers fight the host and manage to make them take flight, but this does not correspond to any physical or figurative advancement for them, who still run back to their ships and set sail to Saxland. Neither of these characters has fulfilled his primary function in a typical *riddarasaga* at this point, which would imply gaining renown, wealth, and a bride. In fact, their adventure ends incomplete, and only

[29] Approximation should not be given any negative meaning here, as the concept of troll contained a diverse set of supernatural figures whose essential features would match the ones of a cyclops. For a further analysis of the scene and other classical allusions in *Ssþ*, see Schlauch 1934, pp. 44–46. The cyclops is listed among the Plinian races (cf. Friedman 2000 [1981], pp. 5–25).

Sigurðr's later intervention will assure some closure to their storylines, namely a wedding for Vilhjálmr and death in battle for Hálfdan. The episode of the cyclops does not really add much to their adventure, and still it highlights the unbalance between their failure and Sigurðr's success.

Sigurðr's encounter with trolls takes place in Kampania, where the troll-sisters Flegða and Fála attempt at feasting on the lion that accompanies him. Again, the trolls' natural element is the mountain, and their intentions are wicked. Instead of killing the trolls, Sigurðr decides to spare their lives and befriend them. By doing this, the knight wins a series of advantages for himself, particularly in terms of powerful objects. He is invited to the sisters' cave in the Alps (*síðan fóru þau ǫll saman upp í fjallið*)[30] where he is offered delicious food, treasure, and some rest. On the one hand, Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan's conduct shows that, by misbehaving around the supernatural, the wrath of powers bigger than oneself might be triggered. On the other hand, Sigurðr's mercy corresponds to an actual advancement on his path.[31] Moreover, both sets of figures approach the humans with harmful intentions – the cyclops is also said to be feeding on human flesh. Despite their wildness, they all seem to be living in an approximation of organised societies.[32]

In the case of Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan, the host of giants running down the slopes to kill them is indicative of their likely connection to the cyclops who got murdered in the first place. The specificity of this relationship remains unknown. In the case of Sigurðr, Flegða and Fála tell him about other trolls inhabiting the Alps, including their late father, who seemed to have a relevant position in the local troll society.

> *Þær segja Sigurði svá at Óskruðr faðir þeirra hafði þenna helli gert til þess at setja þar samdrykkju þá er hann bauð til sín ǫðrum jǫtnum úr fjǫllunum Alpes ok gerði þeim þá stóra veislu.* (Ssþ, ch. 20, p. 152)
>
> They tell Sigurðr that their father Óskruðr [i.e. Öskruðr] had built that cave so that he could set up a drinking feast and invite the other giants of the Alps to great feasts.

[30] *Ssþ*, ch. 20, p. 152.
[31] For a further analysis of Sigurðr's behaviour around supernatural beings in comparison to other *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* heroes, see van Nahl 1981, pp. 115–23.
[32] This aspect is highlighted by Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir, who draws the attention to the difference between the civilised versions of the giantesses featured in *Ssþ* and their savage counterparts in *fornaldarsögur* (2013, pp. 62–65; 2014, p. 117).

Finally, both sets of figures are related to magic. The cyclops pulls Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan's boat towards the coast, whilst the troll-sisters are shapeshifters and offer Sigurðr the magic tablet and the ring, among other extraordinary things.[33] In both cases, the characters have to deal with the ambiguous traits of supernatural space. Especially in the case of Sigurðr, the representation of otherness is conveyed through the fundamental ambivalence of the familiar and the unfamiliar, inasmuch as the troll society appears as a projection of the human one with some uncanny characteristics that stand out. The threshold between worlds seems to be determined more by the looks of their inhabitants rather than two radically different ideas of community. This representation is coherent with that pointed out by Dirk Johannsen about civilised vs. supernatural spaces: "One is the familiar living space of the traditional community [e.g. the court]; the other is qualified *only* by its otherness. It is still a social space, but judged neither good nor bad, and presented highly ambivalently".[34] In short, by winning the trust and respect of the troll-women, the hero manages to gain access not only to their private space but also, more generally, to the altitude as a place of advancement. This physical ascent is mirrored by Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan, whose relationship with the heights is reversed, since the mountains become the source of imposing threats instead of a precious resource.

5.3.2.2 The Dragon

Two moments may be detected in which Sigurðr and his brothers are set to face the exact same antagonists, namely the encounter with the dragon by the river Rhine and the trips to France in order to subdue Sedentiana. Interestingly, the encounter with the dragon represents the end of Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan's adventure and the beginning of Sigurðr's one. The two accounts are placed strategically close to each other, after the three brothers' casual meeting in a forest. Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan are terrified by the dragon, which is decimating their men, and run away. The same outcome that Vilhjálmr reprimands at the beginning, mentioning Alexander of Macedonia, corresponds to the conclusion of their solo adventure. Sigurðr's face-off with the creature takes the opposite turn, as he fights fearlessly, pulls the beast to the ground, kills it, and manages to save the lion. The symbolic value of the scene is revealed by the image on Sigurðr's shield (a lion), which he considers a sign of connection with the animal. This is confirmed by the narrator, who lingers in a short passage about the lion's symbolism:

[33] A similar moment is described in the *fornaldarsaga Örvar-Odds saga* (ch. 5, pp. 37–40) when Finns are said to use magic in order change the weather and draw Oddr's ship to shore.
[34] Johannsen (2010, p. 243) considers this mode of representation as typical of narratives that originate in the oral tradition, especially those involving the so-called Hidden People, which makes a point for the interest of *riddarasögur* authors in mixing up a wide range of sources, including local folktales.

> *Kvenndyrit fæðir dauða sína hvelþa ok svá liggja þeir líflausir þrjá daga ok þrjár nætur, ok síðan kemr til karldyrit ok blæs at hvelpunum þar til þeir lifna. Ok merkir hann í þessu guð sjálfan er sinn sonn reisti af dauða á þríðja degi eftir píning sína.* (Ssþ, ch 17, p. 145)
>
> The female gives birth to dead cubs that lie lifeless for three days and three nights, until the male comes and blows towards the cubs until they come to life. In this the lion symbolises God himself, who brought his son back from the dead on the third day after his passion.

In terms of structure, a digression on the hero's youth is placed between the brothers' escape and Sigurðr's fight, with a function similar to the current 'previously on…' recaps in popular television series. This narrative device, called *entrelacement* and borrowed from Arthurian literature, appeals to the readers in an effort to engage them in the story.[35] Interestingly, this exegetical digression is followed by Sigurðr and the lion climbing a high mountain with a rope. There, they find the dragon's lair and steal as much treasure as possible. Another advancement on Sigurðr's path is depicted here through verticality, while his brothers are once more overwhelmed by the danger coming from above.

A recent study by Karoline Kjesrud has concerned itself with the motif of "a dragon fight in order to free a lion", and its different renditions, as well as its possible function according to specific contexts.[36] Two other *riddarasögur* of the main corpus feature it, although with slightly different outcomes. *Ectors saga* offers the vaguest description of the dragon fight, with a clear enhancement of the knight's reputation but no indication as to how to interpret the passage.[37] *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, on the other hand, features a dragon fight which resembles the one of *Ssþ* in many respects.[38] The motif was directly borrowed from a continental source, as it is featured in *Ívens saga*, translation of Chrétien's *Le Chevalier au Lion*.[39]

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[35] *Entrelacement* (i.e. the interlacing of separate concurring narratives) was most likely inherited via the Old Norse translations of continental romances (cf. Kalinke 2012). The author of *Ssþ* uses it multiple times, for instance by splitting pieces of information on different moments, so to stretch the overall suspense, e.g. the silence kept on Sedentiana's and her child's fate after her humiliation at the hand of Sigurðr, later in the saga. For interlaced episodes in Old Norse-Icelandic literature in general, see Clover 1986.

[36] Kjesrud 2014. See also van Nahl 1983, pp. 171–77.

[37] The fight is performed in the saga by Trancival, one of Ector's knights, and not directly by the protagonist. His achievement is not followed by any explanation or comment.

[38] Besides the core elements of the motif, the friendship between the lion and the knight also appears in *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, as well as the climb to the dragon's lair and the killing of the animal's offspring.

[39] The motif might have been elaborated later on into the form seen in *Ssþ*, for instance. *Ívens saga* features a simpler version of it, where the dragon does not fly, the battle takes place only on the ground, and the knight is not sure that the lion would be grateful for his deed and not hurt him anyway (cf. Kjesrud 2014, p. 243).

Kjesrud's analysis supports the idea that the success of the motif in popular literature[40] does not necessarily imply the absence of allegorical meanings in a religious sense.[41] On the contrary, some fundamental clerical texts do contain references to dragon fights, starting from the Bible.[42] The motif was well-known in learned clerical environments, as the Icelandic version of the Greek *Physiologus* also demonstrates.[43] In other words, the mixed sources that have been preserved over the centuries actually led to a mixed reception of the dragon fight as both a Christian and a secular narrative. Sigurðr Fáfnisbani is the most popular example of a dragon fighter in the Germanic tradition. His figure appears also in contexts which might be detached from Christian ideology, such as stone carvings.[44] Undoubtedly, the name of the hero of *Ssþ* evokes the Germanic legend. The fact that Sigurðr *þögli* is a dragon slayer, finds a treasure close to the river Rhine, and has to deal with a maiden-king might indicate an intentional reference of the author to the most recognisable Germanic heroic cycle.[45]

Although it is not possible to confirm or reject this hypothesis, two mixed receptions of the dragon slayer motif would not have to contradict each other in the text. Iceland, as a liminal land that adopted Christianity relatively late, shows signs of such complex balance between residuals of pre-Christian beliefs and religious teachings.[46] In this framework, it only appears reasonable to think that a diverse mix of elements found their way into *Ssþ*, as in many other *riddarasögur*. Speculating on a mixed reception of this motif means accepting the possibility that Sigurðr's climb to the top of the mountain *also* has ideological implications. The episode by itself might not be enough to make this assumption. However, the fact that Sigurðr's vertical

[40] A total of eight narratives containing the "knight-with-lion" motif is counted by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2017, p. 23).
[41] Kjesrud 2014, p. 244.
[42] *Vulgata*, *Apc*., 12.7–9. Here, the dragon/serpent is depicted as a personification of the devil against Archangel Michael. St George is another notable example from the Bible.
[43] The Latin translation of *Physiologus* used to circulate widely in medieval Europe. An Icelandic version of the text is preserved in the form of two fragments containing animals' descriptions, as well as explanations of their symbolic significance. Here, the lion does not appear, but the panther (*panthera*) is described using similar connotations, including the symbolic association with Christ and the enmity with the dragon (*drekenn*) (*The Icelandic Physiologus*, p. 27). Isidore's description of the lion perfectly matches the information on *panthera* provided by *Physiologus* (*Etym*., XII, ii, 61).
[44] Kjesrud refers to the so-called Sigurd rune-stones, a group of Swedish artifacts picturing the story of Sigurðr the dragon slayer. Some English stone carvings also bear traces of Sigurðr's myth, e.g. *Siguard's Cross* (*Kirk Andreas,* no. 121) from the Isle of Man (late tenth century). On this topic, see for instance Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2021b, pp. 140–41.
[45] In particular, the South Germanic tradition sees Brunhild as an amazon-like maiden-king. The strength of the character is not lost in the Old Norse legend, although Brynhildr is described as a valkyrie instead of a queen (*Völsunga saga,* ch. 19).
[46] For more information on this matter, see Foote 1974. For an analysis of how Christendom is received and depicted in the indigenous *riddarasögur*, see Barnes 2014, pp. 113–45. Generally speaking, Barnes believes that the great influence of the Carolingian *chansons de geste* on the Icelandic *riddarasögur* did not lead to the exhibition of a militant Christianity, even though Christian themes and ideology are still featured in the texts.

motions are constant in the text, with a clear contrast to his brothers' downfalls, makes them a little too suspect not to be investigated.

Moreover, Christian beliefs contemplated verticality through a reverence for mountain peaks. The good Christian is exhorted to elevate above the level of senses and everyday vision, in order to come closer to God.[47] The symbol of a sacred mountain at the centre of the earth was part of the religious imagination, as an access point linking heaven and earth or, in other words, an *axis mundi*.[48] For instance, Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia* features the poet's ascension to Heaven through the climbing of a mountain at the centre of the cosmos. This idea of vertical space as exclusive to those who embody certain spiritual values is addressed by Mary Helms as follows:

> Earthly mountains, standing high, often have been associated either with this central universal point [the cosmic mountain] or at least with its permanence and stability […]. Mountaintops, being the nearest thing to the sky are especially implicated in symbolism of ascent and transcendence.[49]

Ssþ, whose earliest manuscript dates back to the fourteenth century, might have drawn from a view on the altitudes as symbolic spaces that had been established by a long tradition of clerical texts. The saga seems to convey the message that heights cannot be accessed by those who are unsuited to ascend and occupy superior positions. The constant defeat met by Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan in front of the heights, as opposed to Sigurðr's climbs, is remarkable in this regard.[50]

5.3.2.3 Sedentiana

Although Sedentiana is introduced at the beginning of the saga, with an intertextual reference to her 'famous' parents, Flóres and Blankiflúr, the ruler of France makes her first appearance when Hálfdan decides to propose to her. Sedentiana is, like most *meykóngar* in Icelandic

[47] "Flee as a bird to your mountain", recite the Psalms, most likely echoing Isaiah's exhortation: "Get thee up into the high mountain" (*Isaiah* 40.9). The manuscripts AM 194 8vo features a description of Jerusalem which gives relevance to the sacred mountains around the city (see Simek 1990, pp. 491–500).

[48] Typical expressions of the *axis mundi* in late medieval representation are the so-called cosmic trees and mountains, i.e. sacred locations, either real or fictional, that would symbolise a bridge between heaven and earth. In the Old Norse tradition, Yggdrasill is an example of a cosmic tree. In the Judaeo-Christian one, sacred mountains like Sinai are expression of this concept. On this topic, see Helms 2002, pp. 444–48.

[49] Helms 2002, p. 445.

[50] This idea of progressive improvement from an initial condition of disadvantage is consistent with the *kolbítr* motif (cf. Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2005). For a further analysis of this topic with regard to *riddarasögur*, see Schäfke 2013, pp. 196–98. For further considerations on male maturation in Old Norse literature, see Larrington 2008, and for a general reflection on masculinity in late medieval Europe, see Karras 2002.

riddarasögur, the most beautiful woman in the world, although her fame precedes her not only in terms of physical appearance but also of boastfulness and cruelty towards her suitors:

> *Hennar augu váru skínandi sem stjǫrnur í heiðbjǫrtu veðri ok af þeim sýnðusk geislar skína. Hofuðit var bǫllótt sem eyjar þær er gulls lit hafa með skínandi birtu sem logandi eldr eða sólar geislar. Ok með sínu fagra hári mátti hún hylja sinn líkama allan. […]Svá hún forsmáði nálega allar tignar frúr ok tiginna manna sonu svá mjǫk at þann vissi hún engan fæddan í norðrhálfunni veraldarinnar at henni þætti ekki full minnkan í at samtengjask með nokkurri elsku.* (Ssþ, ch. 3, pp. 100–01).
>
> Her eyes were as bright as stars in clear weather, and rays of light seemed to shine out of them. Her head was ball-shaped like those islands with golden sunsets and a light shining like a burning flame or sunbeams. With her beautiful hair she could cover her whole body. […] She disdained almost all noble maidens and young men, so that she did not know anyone born in the northern hemisphere that she would reckon good enough for a marriage with a bit of love.

Despite the woman's reputation, Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan decide to sail to France and try to force her into a marriage with the latter. The two knights drop anchor beneath Sedentiana's high fortress, as there is no way to access it other than being pulled up with a rope:

> *Hann var þar settr sem tvǫ nes gengu fram með hafum hǫmrum. En yfir sundi þessu er hinn skarsk í landit skyldi setja þenna kastala. En gerði hamragjár fyrir ofan svá hávar at þar máttu ǫngvir yfir komask en útan at lopthúsunum þeim er kastalinn var yfir settr mátti at leggja stórum skipum ok vinda upp í kastalann ef vildi bæði skip ok menn. En fyrir utan í sundinu lét hún með stórum stólpum setja járn grindr at eingi mátti með leyniligum prettum komask at kastalanum.* (Ssþ, ch. 3, p. 103)
>
> It [the fortress] was located where two headlands stood out with high cliffs, over a narrow arm of the sea that stretched into land. The ravines above were so high that no one could come up, though it was still possible to dock large ships in the area over which the fortress stood and lift up both boats and men, if so desired. Out by the water, she [Sedentiana] had great pillars built with an iron grating between, so that no one could get to the fortress with any secret tricks.

After a pleasant reception, Sedentiana discovers the real reason for the brothers' arrival and becomes furious. She has their hair cut off and tar smeared on their bald heads. Thereafter,

the brothers are whipped, and the shape of an owl is cut into their backs.[51] Finally, she has them burnt on their stomach with a red-hot basin. After this, Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan are released and lowered down to their ships with a rope. Their physical descent looks like a reflection of their humiliation, which they decide to hide from everyone. In the last attempt at revenge, Hálfdan throws a spear at the queen, which is another example of the man's impulsiveness.

The equation between verticality and inaccessibility – or better, the idea of the heights as a privileged space to be obtained – is made explicit in this episode. Later on, Sedentiana holds on to the altitude again in order to protect herself from the attack of Sigurðr and his army.[52] She orders additional walls to be built around the capital with ramparts and strongholds above them. Hundreds of men are sent there with tar and boiling pitch to pour down on their enemies.[53] During the battle, Sigurðr and his men are taken and thrown into an underground pit with poisonous reptiles. Shortly after, they manage to free themselves of their fetters and take a look around:

> *Eru í þessu vonda díki ormar ok þoddur ok mørg ǫnnur skriðkvikendi er Sigurðr veit at þeim má granda.* (Ssþ, ch. 30, p. 187)
>
> In that horrible ditch are snakes, toads and many other reptiles which Sigurðr knows may harm them.

The snake pit is a folktale motif, probably inserted here to recall Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan's debasement in France and make Sigurðr experience a similar treatment.[54] Moreover, this episode may be invested with ideological meanings through the direct comparison between Sedentiana and a reptile. Specifically, Sedentiana is referred to as a viper by Count Lafrans, who warned Sigurðr about his decision to embark on his first French expedition:

> *Hertoginn bað hann varask hana sem hinn skæðasta høggorm at hann fengi ǫngva svívirðing af hennar tilstilli.* (Ssþ, ch. 22, p. 160).

[51] This passage evokes the Blood-Eagle ritual (S 166.6), although the bird is substituted by an owl. On the topic, see Murphy et al. 2022.
[52] The battle in the French capital, Treverisborg, is an addition of the longer redaction. The episode of Sigurðr's rise with a rope from an underground prison may be used here as a mirroring to his brother's downfall.
[53] *Ssþ*, ch. 29, p. 182.
[54] For a research on the snake pit motif, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2015b.

> The count warns him against her as the most noxious viper that might cause him disgrace.

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, both the serpent and the woman are negatively depicted as the cause of the expulsion from Eden, so much so that portraying the Edenic snake as a maiden became an iconographic and literary tradition in medieval times. This association was endorsed, for instance, by Albertus Magnus (1200–1280), bishop of Regensburg, who makes an analogy between the serpent's poison and menstrual fluid.[55] Examples of snake-women are found in late medieval iconography, as well.[56] In Iceland, the description of women as snakes can be seen, for example, in *Yngvars saga víðförla*.[57] Thus, the comparison made by Lafrans between Sedentiana and a reptile might hint at a connection with the greatest evil, based on her sadistic behaviour.[58] As Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir points out: "Her abuse of the suitor can take strikingly violent forms, and the men are often disgraced and emasculated to the point where the narrative becomes sadistic."[59] Sedentiana's spiteful look at the brothers while they are lowered down with a rope acquires a symbolic value if compared to the specular outcome of Sigurðr's presence in France. Unlike Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan, Sigurðr is no victim, as he climbs up with a rope and runs back to his ships, where he meditates revenge. This mirror structure is another tile to the picture of their family hierarchy. Where his brothers meet failure and downfall, Sigurðr rises:[60]

[55] His work *De secretis mulierum* (late-thirteenth century) was popular throughout the Late Middle Ages (cf. Miller 2010, p. 83).
[56] See Masolino's fresco *Il Peccato Originale* (c. 1420) and Hugo van der Goes's painting *Original Sin* (c. 1470). One of the most famous works that feature this motif is Michelangelo's *Fall and Expulsion of Adam and Eve*, one of the artist's frescoes dating back to 1510, only slightly after the conventional end of the Middle Ages. For a recent add to this topic, see Giallongo 2017.
[57] This aspect is addressed by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2016) in relation to the violence against women as represented in Old Norse texts.
[58] The clean shave of their hair sounds like a particularly degrading punishment and a sign of emasculation, as highlighted by Phelpstead 2013. See also Bagerius 2009, pp. 167–74.
[59] Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir 2013, p. 117.
[60] For a comparative analysis of the brothers' humiliation, see also van Nahl 1981, pp. 40–43.

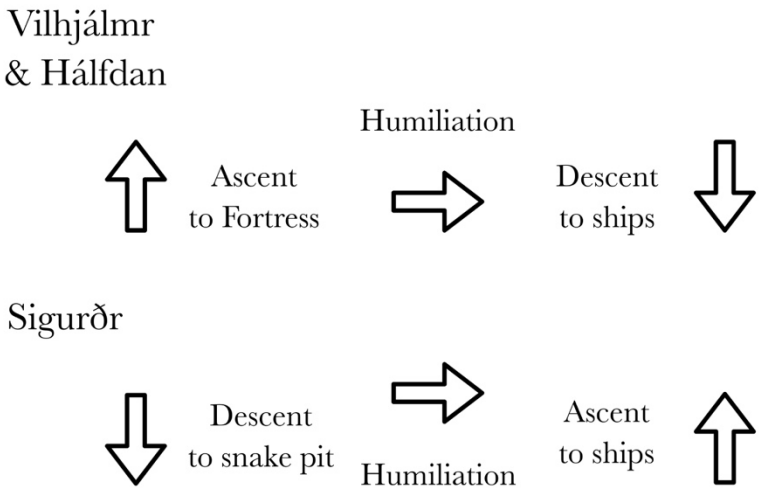

Figure 10 – The specularity of the French expeditions

Defeat in battle and imprisonment represent the kind of debasement and dishonour that Sigurðr experiences in France. The author also makes sure to describe the unpleasant and dangerous conditions of the dungeon. The presence of obnoxious snakes seems to echo the previous depiction of Sedentiana as a viper. The whole association between woman and reptile can be found in religious texts, such as the fourteenth-century translations from Old Testament known as *Stjórn*. A similarity between the words used to describe both the Edenic serpent and the maiden-king Sedentiana can be detected:

> *Høggormrinn var klókastr ok slægastr af øllum kvikendum. […] Þá kom hann til konunnar í þeim einum høggormi sem hann hafði meyjar ásjánu, eftir því sem Beda prestr segir.* (Stjórn, Mosebog I, 11)
>
> The viper is the most clever and cunning of all animals. […] Then he [Lucifer] came to the woman [Eve] as that viper which has the shape of a maiden, so as is told by Bede.

In this passage, not only is the viper indicated as the incarnation of Lucifer in Eden, but it is also explicitly given the shape of a woman. A similar description is found in *Konungs skuggsjá* (*Speculum regale*):[61]

[61] The text used to circulate at the Norwegian court around 1250, before the alleged composition of *Stjórn*. It was originally conceived as a didactic manual for the son of Hákon IV. *Specula* would usually include much of the

Ormr er ǫllum kvikvendum slægri ok mjúklátari. Þá kom hann á þeirri stundu til Evu konu Adams meðr meyligu andliti ok mælti viðr hana mikilli blíðu. (Konungs skuggsjá, ch. 45, p. 189)

The snake is more cunning and sly than any other animal. At that time, he came to Eva, wife of Adam, with the face of a maiden and spoke to her with great affection.

The comparative forms of pejorative adjectives indicating cunning and viciousness are recurring, one might suggest formulaic, with regard to the Edenic viper. Lafrans's words are *hinn skæðasta hǫggorm*, while *Stjórn*'s viper is *klókastr ok slægastr*, and the serpent in *Konungs skuggsjá* is *slægri ok mjúklátari*. The motif might have had a Biblical origin and then have become popular and inserted in the saga. However, the overall complex construction of the saga and the specific addition of this reference in the longer redaction might indicate that the author had a clear understanding of the religious symbolism of the passage. Moreover, the possible allegoric function of the snake pit motif, with Sigurðr as a positive champion against evil, in this case Sedentiana, would be confirmed by this interpretation. Thus, the polarity of high and low works in two ways. One the one hand, Sigurðr's rise from the ditch anticipates the victory of good over evil. On the other hand, the scene mirrors the previous debasement of his brothers and enhances the hierarchy between them.

Sigurðr's second trip to France takes an opposite turn also thanks to the support of Nípr, who steals the magic stone through which Sedentiana can see the world and discover her enemies' plans. By coming in disguise as the merchant Amas, the knight manages to outwit the maiden-king and spend a winter at the French court. During this time, Sedentiana orders for some secret chambers and a secret tower to be built as hiding places to avoid the risk of being attacked or approached by foreign suitors.

Þessi herbergi váru eigi samfast ǫðrum húsum í borginn, váru þau murut sterkliga. Ok á ofanverðum þessum húsum var eitt lopthús prýðiliga innan pentað með vænasta color er var með alldra handa sǫgum af Þiðriki kongi ok Ísungs sonum ok Sigurði sveini, af Hálfi kongi ok hans kǫppum, af Ector ok Troiu barðagi, þar var ok af Alexandro Magno. Sedentiana hafði ok látit gera umhverfis þenna turn einn grasgard með ilmandi grǫsum ok aldintrjám berandi allskyns frykð ok ferskan ávǫxt. (Ssþ, ch. 29, pp. 182–83).

available knowledge in many fields, thanks to the same urge that stimulated the production of encyclopaedias, although in some cases they mostly covered political and moral issues.

> These chambers were not built together with the other buildings of the city and were surrounded by strong walls. In the uppermost part, there was a loft-room finely painted on the inside with beautiful colours and all kinds of stories about King Þiðrik, the sons of Ísungr, Sigurðr (Fáfnisbani), King Hálfr and his champions, Ector and the battle of Troy, and Alexander the Great. Sedentiana ordered for a garden to be built all around that tower with sweet-smelling herbs and trees bearing all kinds of fresh fruit.

While her stronghold represented the idea of the altitude as a space of power to be obtained, her secret chambers and the tower add a concentric architecture and a strong sense of isolation to her private dimension. Sedentiana projects her fear for an intimate violation onto the seclusion of her abodes. Moreover, the enclosed garden (*hortus conclusus*) is a recurring image related to virginity in the Middle Ages. Originally drawn from the *Canticle of Canticles* (also known as *Song of Songs*), the motif became a symbol for Mary's immaculate body in late medieval times.[62] This association might be interpreted either as a way to sweeten the image of the sadistic maiden-king or, on the contrary, underline her unworthiness, since her behaviour does not match the grace attributed to the Virgin. Thus, the *hortus conclusus* motif might highlight a distance between her and the Christian ideal of femininity.[63] It should be added that a concentric design would not only refer to the *hortus* but also, more generally, to the design of Christian sacred spaces and cosmological configurations, as highlighted above.[64] Considering the author's previous references to Christian symbolism,[65] it is possible to read this passage in a religious sense, although Sedentiana's position in the centre of this architecture remains ambiguous (*fig. 11*).[66]

[62] This motif was widely depicted in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. For more information on this topic, see Larson 2013, pp. 303–12.

[63] From the thirteenth century, virginity began to be associated with a set of moral virtues, such as humility, gracefulness, and intellectual stature. See Atkinson 1983.

[64] For a study on the concentric architecture of early Christian churches, see Shalev-Hurvitz, 2015. See also, 7.3.2 and 8.

[65] Not only does the author offer an exegetical interpretation of the lion, but he also makes a significant digression on the trip of Sedentiana's father to Jerusalem in order to study the signs wrought in the world by Christ. The passage, which is not included in the shorter redaction of the saga, is analysed in greater detail in 5.4.

[66] The isolation of the virgin in the tower may recall the well-spread motif ATU 310 and a few specific elements in particular, which are the captivity in the tower (R41.2) and the imprisonment to prevent marriage and impregnation (T381). Moreover, Sedentiana is said to have long hair that could cover her whole body. Apart from these aspects, however, the scene appears as notably different from the Rapunzel motif. There is no witch involved, which means that no child is promised to her by the hero, the hair's ladder is absent, and the male hero is not blinded. The long and beautiful hair – compared to rays of sun – may simply represent a recurring feature of noblewomen that would recall moral rectitude or even sanctity, as for St. Agnes in *Agnesar saga*. This aspect is highlighted in 7.3, through a similar description of the maiden-king Nitida – another example is Áslaug/Kráka in *Ragnar saga loðbrókar*. Unlike Nitida, though, Sedentiana does not seem to live up to the positive premises of her looks, which enhances the ambiguity of her character and complicates a moral assessment of her actions.

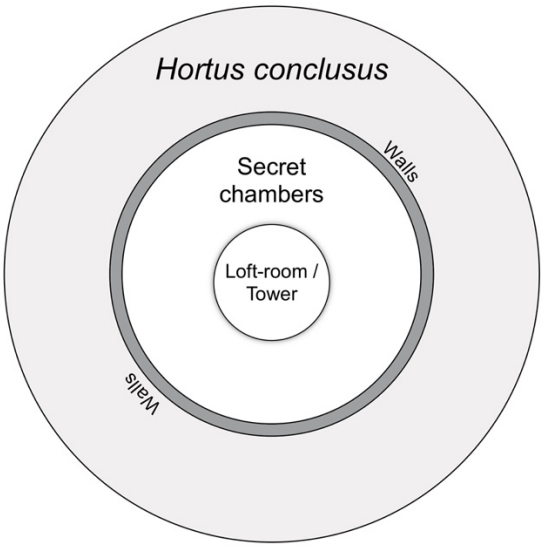

Figure 11 - The plan of Sedentiana's secret abodes

As regards Sigurðr, before leaving the French court as Amas, he finds Sedentiana's secret chambers and enters her garden after enchanting her with the love spell attached to his ring. Sedentiana immediately falls in love with Sigurðr-as-Amas and starts chasing him. While running away from her, Sigurðr always maintains an upper position on his horse, forcing the queen to fall repeatedly and look for shelter in the open air at the end of the day. Sigurðr brings Sedentiana to exhaustion for three days in a row. Each night, he shapeshifts into a different creature with his magic mirror and rapes her once as a swineherd, once as a dwarf, and lastly, as a giant. Sigurðr's invasion of her secluded space is meaningful, inasmuch as it corresponds to the queen losing her virginity and becoming pregnant.[67]

This passage depicts Sedentiana's failure to physically maintain both the altitude as a protected space (the tower) and the centre of her sacred garden. By chasing the heights, the maiden-king also chases a position of power that was not usually granted to women in medieval times, especially if their claim was not followed by a demonstration of moral suitability. This hypothesis may be confirmed by her decision to decorate the walls of her chamber with the deeds of male heroes. This ekphrasis corresponds to a typical theme of romance literature

[67] It should be noted that the symbolism of the garden enclosed by walls was also adopted by the *Roman de la rose*, a popular masterpiece of allegoric symbolism written in France during the thirteenth century. Here, a walled garden of pleasure is presented to a lover in a dream. The place is idyllic, with any sort of plants, trees, flowers, and a source of water. The rose is the symbol of the ideal lady.

especially relevant in Icelandic *riddarasögur*, where it usually functions as legitimation of a hero's value through the contemplation of heroic deeds painted on walls or inherited weapons.[68] Interestingly, the ekphrasis in *Ssþ* is given to a female character. By ordering the paintings to be made, Sedentiana subverts the usual function of ekphrasis as an inspiration for male knights. By contemplating those scenes, she might be accessing an ideological space which is not her own, that is, a whole system of values that should remain restricted to the institution of chivalry. In other words, this passage may be interpreted as the representation of the maiden-king's reluctance to give up a higher position from which she would be otherwise socially banned.[69]

Addressing Sedentiana's space in Lefebvrian terms might clarify this point. Understandably, Lefebvre acknowledges the importance of verticality as a coordinate of medieval spatiality. In particular, he believes that the range of meanings attributed to vertical space by Christianity was wide, stretching from the divinity to the most brutal physical power:

> The verticality and political arrogance of towers, their feudalism, already intimated the coming alliance between Ego and Phallus. [...] The Phallus is seen. The female genital organ, representing the world, remains hidden. [...] This [vertical space] was to be the space of the triune God, the space of kings [...] The space, too, of military violence – and hence a *masculine* space.[70]

Lefebvre associates the altitude with God as a masculine and phallic principle, forcing its way into view and erecting itself with a primeval impulse to impregnation. The world as the object of his fecundation assumes the female feature of receiver and container, thus remaining hidden and secluded. The female is inside, while the masculine stretches to the outside and tries to conquer the altitude. The vertical structure of the cosmos as described in Chapter Two is maintained, but the act of God's creation is interpreted by Lefebvre through the primeval principles of male and female. From this perspective, Sedentiana's high stronghold might recall the "vertical and political arrogance of towers" by translating an impulse to domination that is

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[68] Barnes 2014, pp. 82–84.

[69] Among the examples of maiden-kings offered by the sagas, *Völsunga saga*'s Brynhildr is probably the most famous and emblematic one (Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir 2012, p. 231). As highlighted in 5.3.2.2 (note 46), she presents all the features of a valkyrie, as a result of her likely correspondence with Sigdrífa (*Edda*, *Sigdrífumál*). She follows a warrior (masculine) code of behaviour that turns her into a rather ambiguous character (cf. Sørensen 1983, pp. 22–23). In ch. 25, Brynhildr is in her tower embroidering Sigurðr's adventures on a banner. Shortly after, during her conversation with Guðrún, she invites her to discuss powerful kings and their deeds (*ríka konunga ok þeira stórvirki*). She is even said to be more interested in battles and renown than in the courtship of men (*herskap ok alls konar frægð*). Finally, the tragic development of her story with Sigurðr is consistent with the basic features of maiden-king stories. Thus, it is possible to see the contemplation of male heroes as a sign of the determination of some maiden-kings to take over a masculine ideological position that was not perceived as their own.

[70] Lefebvre 1991, pp. 261–62.

perceived as typically masculine. On the contrary, the enclosed architecture of her secret abode is a closed intimate space reflecting femininity in its purest form (*hortus conclusus*).

However, Sedentiana's retreat into femininity does not correspond to a complete surrender to Sigurðr's imposition. Her tower, the upper loft-room, and the paintings may be read as another illegitimate attempt to hold onto masculine power. This overall conception of the heights seems to be applied throughout the saga, as it characterises the power balance between Sigurðr and the brothers, as well. In this case, the principles of female and male are not related to gender but rather functional to designate two opposite attitudes towards space, a passive or horizontal one exemplified by Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan, which symbolizes submission, and an active or vertical one exemplified by Sigurðr, which indicates domination and potential for violence.[71] It is not to be assumed that the medieval author was aware of such psychological implications, since Lefebvre addresses these ideas as subconscious to the medieval organisation of space. Still, the takeover of verticality as a space of dominance and the tension of all characters towards some kind of ascension is an integral part of the saga.

The risk of a violent degeneration of the power occupying the altitude is represented not only by Sedentiana's sadism but also by Sigurðr's actions. By raping the woman, the protagonist perpetrates extreme brutality, which might lead to an ambiguous evaluation of his otherwise spotless conduct.[72] Although the submission of the maiden-king is the usual way of conflict resolution in *meykóngr* narratives, his deeds might have been hard to justify even from a medieval perspective. The problematic interpretation of his figure may be the sign of a complex authorial work that does not turn to simple solutions for relevant moral issues.[73] In fact, Sigurðr's shapeshifting into 'lower' creatures may be seen as a narrative strategy to 'allow' him

[71] Lefebvre 1991, pp. 236, 298.

[72] Elsewhere in the saga, Sigurðr's generosity and benevolence towards both friends and foes is underlined. Most of his former rivals, such as Ermedon, Valteri, and Herburt, eventually enter his fellowship and are offered protection, land, or a bride, given up by the hero in their favour. Other examples of Sigurðr's chivalric behaviour are giving Herburt King Arthur's chess-set, offering Randver the chance to marry Albína in his place, refusing any treasure from King Feritas in exchange of military support, or refusing to get Randver's care after a duel and asking him to attend his opponent instead. Mercy and generosity are essential in the set of values required from a medieval knight, as stated by Keen (1984, p. 2): "From a very early stage we find the romantic authors habitually associating together […] the classic virtues of good knighthood: *prouesse*, *loyaute*, *largesse* (generosity), *courtoisie*, and *franchise* (the free and frank bearing that is visible testimony to the combination of good birth with virtue). The association of these qualities in chivalry is already established in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes (written c. 1165–c. 1185), and from his time on to the end of the middle ages their combination remains the stereotype of chivalrous distinction".

[73] The most usual characterisation of the hero in *riddarasögur* would not involve strategies such as the use of magic tricks in order to pursue a bride. Moreover, the use of cruelness as a response to cruelness might have caused mixed reactions in the audience. As an aristocratic man, Sigurðr would be called to a full control of his sexual impulses (cf. Bagerius 2009, pp. 155–86).

to commit an act that would normally be intolerable.[74] In any case, those relations of power and moral implications correspond to careful spatial patterns, as analysed above.

In general terms, this vertical two-way pattern of rising and falling does not betray the general hierarchical principle described in Chapter Two. The Christian concept of a moral ladder is a useful example in this regard. It was based on the hierarchy of humility of St. Benedict, whose rule was well established in late medieval Iceland, and elaborated by Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153).[75] In Bernard's value system, humility is on top, while pride is at the bottom. Upward movement is considered positive and associated with virtue. Downward movement, on the other hand, is connected with sin. All men climb this ladder according to their relationship with good and evil. These ideas were received by late medieval thinkers and applied to many aspects of everyday life, as pointed out by Joseph Paul Rodriguez:

> The work of religious writers such as Bernard of Clairvaux […] set the stage for an explosion of the vertical imagination, a blossoming of the incredible variety of what could be called 'vertical thought'. Thanks in part to this religious verticality, similar reflections of verticality crept into many areas of secular thought and practice as well and served to broaden the reach of the ideas and concepts of vertical imagination.[76]

According to Lefebvre, even a shepherd would have looked at spatial dichotomies such as high and low not as abstract and absolute ideas, but rather as expressions of precise qualities and relationships.[77] The dialectic between Sigurðr's rise and his brothers' and Sedentiana's falls may be seen as a way to emphasise both Sigurðr's earthly power and his moral calibre from a Christian perspective. One last example of similar meanings built through verticality in the saga is the casual encounter between Vilhjálmr, Hálfdan, and Sigurðr which takes place at the Rhine.

5.3.2.4 The Oak

Interestingly, the moment when Sigurðr meets his brothers in the forest by the Rhine is somehow defined by a vertical configuration of space. In particular, the oak tree scene depicts the hero overhearing Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan's secret from inside the plant, before climbing down from the top of it and walking away.

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[74] On these aspects of the saga, see Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir, 2013, pp. 127–30; 2014, pp. 116–17. The figure of Sedentiana has been compared to the *meykóngr* Séréna in *Clári saga*. The bridal quests scenes in both sagas have been addressed by van Nahl (1981, pp. 144–47).
[75] See Pennington 1974.
[76] Rodriguez 2012, p. 8.
[77] Lefebvre 1991, p. 194.

> Þá heyra þeir upp í þessa stóru eik manns mál. […] Ok nú bregða þeir við skjott ok líta upp yfir sig ok sjá í limunum trésins ein stoltuligan ok stóran riddara at slíkan höfðu þeir engan fyrr séð. (Ssþ, ch. 12, p. 132)
>
> Then they hear a man's voice inside the big oak above them. […] They reacted quickly and looked up over themselves. In the tree's crown they see a proud, great knight as they had never seen before.

No clear explanation is provided as to why Sigurðr should be hiding in the tree or even walk away without saying anything except for a few words in a language that resembles Scottish. A possible explanation of the otherness perceived by Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan might be connected to Sigurðr's multilingualism, as speaking many languages is considered a sign of superior education attributed to many *riddarasögur* heroes.[78] Nonetheless, the reason for him to speak a foreign language in front of his brothers remains unclear. It is possible that Sigurðr makes this decision in order to try and conceal his identity so that his brothers would not realise that he overheard the secret of their humiliation in France. It is also mentioned that Count Lafrans can speak many languages (*margar tungur*), which he has taught Sigurðr in their private meetings.[79] Moreover, the main reason for Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan to consider Sigurðr stupid in the first place was his inability to speak, which is now disproved in front of them. It seems remarkable that it is mainly a linguistic aspect which determines the otherness between them, as if Sigurðr wanted to make a statement of independence from his Saxland family.

As regards the interpretation of the oak as the location of another vertical axis, possibly symbolising Sigurðr's superiority to his brothers, two interpretative perspectives are proposed in this section. On the one hand, the symbolic value of ancient trees, not necessarily oaks, might be related to a remnant of pre-Christian traditions involving Celtic and Old Norse lore. On the other, the Christian worship of trees is considered. As mentioned before, aspects deriving from different traditions do not have to be contradictory to each other, especially in a syncretic context such as the indigenous *riddarasögur*. The overall message that the oak scene seems to convey is that Sigurðr's position in the family is now a privileged one, which might indeed be

[78] For more information of the foreign language requirement in medieval Icelandic romances, see Kalinke 1983.
[79] A *leynilegt herbergi* is mentioned as the place of Sigurðr and Lafrans's meetings: "þeir váru jafnan tveir samt stundum á skogum en stundum heima í kastalanum í leynilegu herbergi" (*Ssþ*, ch. 14, p. 135) (They were usually alone together, sometimes in the woods and sometimes in a secret chamber of the castle). This might cause ambiguity about the relationship between Sigurðr and his mentor. Possible allusions to homoeroticism would not fit in the ideal of masculinity expressed by chivalry, so the secrecy of their relationship does not necessarily imply a socially unacceptable behaviour. For a study on this matter with regard to medieval Iceland, see Sørensen 1983.

related to the symbolism of the oak, or the above-mentioned connection between verticality and authority, or both.

Ancient Celtic belief systems were founded on the worship of natural elements such as trees and forests. The most important religious institution of ancient Celtic society, the Druids, were supposedly named after the oak tree itself, as pointed out by Roman sources.[80] The Druids were a privileged class of ministers and holders of the knowledge of the sacred tree, and their rituals allegedly left a mark on former Celtic settlements even in medieval times, as underlined by Patricia Monaghan: "Belief in the sanctity of the oak survived into the post-Celtic era, when folklore envisioned the oak as a living being".[81]

As far as we know, Old Norse mythology had the idea of a sacred tree at the centre of the universe: the cosmic ash Yggdrasil. Thus, the cult of trees was not new to medieval Icelanders, although there are no elements that might suggest a symbolic association between Yggdrasil and Sigurðr here. Moreover, the Old Norse word *eik*, despite a large semantic spectrum which goes from the oak to any particularly large tree, would not correspond to the ash. A potential connection to the ancient Celtic worship might be more reasonable, although the residuals of Celtic influence in Iceland in the fourteenth century cannot be easily determined.[82] Both in the Celtic and the Old Norse tradition, old oaks were seen as ideal places to rest and give birth. This aspect is featured in Scottish folktales, such as *Wee Short-Hoggers of Whittinghame*, where a pregnant woman gives birth under an old oak, protected by the arching branches of the tree. Similarly, ancient Irish stories feature new-born babies left inside the hollows of old oaks.[83] In Old Norse lore, *Völsunga saga* describes an oak that stood in the middle of the Volsungs' hall and was called *barnstokkr* (children trunk), presumably suggesting that women would give birth under that tree.[84] The oak is also typically connected to Þórr, as in *Gylfaginning*.[85] It is possible that the Old Norse cult of trees was influenced directly by contacts with the Celts in pre-Christian times. A similar scene involving oaks appears in one of the Icelandic folktales collected by Jón Árnason in 1862, namely *Saga af Líneik ok Laufey*. Here, the children of a widowed king, Líneik and Sigurðr, are exhorted by their father to escape the threat

[80] See Pliny, *Nat. hist.*, 16.95. The etymon *druwid*, which has been proposed for Druid with the meaning of 'wise man', or 'prophet', would trace back to the same Indo-European root as *dru*, meaning 'oak', as pointed out by Bronzini (1999, p. 329). Bronzini offers an overview of the symbolic interpretation of trees in various cultures and historical periods.
[81] Monaghan 2008, p. 364.
[82] The question of contacts between the Norse and Gaelic cultures is extensively addressed, beside Einar Ól. Sveinsson, e.g. by Gísli Sigurðsson 2000 and Power 2013.
[83] Cross and Slover 1996 [1936], p. 342.
[84] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 2.
[85] Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning*, ch. 45.

of an evil trollish stepmother by travelling east and hiding in a forest.[86] There, the siblings hide in two large hollow trees. *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, allegedly composed in the thirteenth century, features a large tree as resting place, as well. Þorsteinn is said to sleep on the top of a tree while traversing a forest.[87]

Although it is true that the oak was particularly worshipped as a sacred tree, the fact that *eik* might indicate any kind of large tree in Old Norse does not invalidate the possible symbolism of the scene. The forest, as a liminal space, represents "the border between the world of men and the otherworld"[88] in both Icelandic and continental romances. Although there is no supernatural element about the Rhine episode, the moment is perceived as uncanny by modern readers and there is no reason to doubt that it might have caused surprise in the medieval audience, as well. Sigurðr's behaviour makes the moment rather enigmatic, which fits in the narrative function of the forest. All in all, the knight's presence inside the tree and his descent from the top of it might carry residuals of a pagan association between the oak and a superior wisdom, or a certain purity of mind, due to its connection to childbirth and protection from evil.

A possible Christian interpretation should not be excluded, not only because of the author's interferences on religious symbolism, and the adaptation of the ancient worship of trees in a Christian framework. It has been debated, for instance, whether or not Christian symbolism might have influenced the image of Yggdrasill, the cosmic tree as described in the Eddic sources.[89] Although the idea of Yggdrasill as a primeval concept is widely accepted, it is still reasonable to imagine at least some degree of clerical influence on the Old Norse representation of trees. Particularly relevant in this regard is Mikael Males's study on the use of allegory in Old Norse secular literature.[90] While admitting that the use of this narrative device was less stringent in this context than in sacred literature, Males argues that traces of allegory may be found in secular texts as a natural consequence of the strongly ideological environments where they were produced. From this perspective, the hanging of Óðinn on a tree in *Hávamál* may be seen as a parallel of Christ's crucifixion.[91] Other scholars, such Annette Lassen, have agreed on the presence of religious allegory in this passage of the *Edda*.[92]

[86] Líneik is a compound of *lín* (flax) and *eik* (oak), a poetic word for lady.
[87] This episode of *Þorsteins þáttr* is mentioned by Felix Lummer (2017, p. 49) in his research on Irish influences on the Guðmundr á Glasisvöllum subject matter.
[88] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, p. 297.
[89] Andrén 2014, pp. 73–74.
[90] Males 2013.
[91] Males 2013, p. 107.
[92] Lassen 2009.

Because of the interpretation of the cross as a tree, Christ himself was equated to the cosmic tree, that is, the symbolic tree connecting the heavens and the earth, in accordance with the theological idea of creation as a vertical phenomenon. Methodius of Olympus († 311), like other patristic writers, likened Christ to the Tree of Life as the intercessor between God and men.[93] From a patristic point of view, the widespread branches of the tree represent the extent of Christ's dominion over the universe, while its cycle of flowering and withering through seasons the saviour's promise of eternal life.[94] Moreover, the cosmic tree, as well as the tree of Paradise, is usually inserted in pleasant landscapes with water, the life-giving symbol, in the form of wells, vessels, lakes, or flowing rivers.[95] Rodriguez points out that evergreen trees, such as the holly oak, were especially worshipped in medieval times:

> In the gardens of monastic cloisters, the evergreen tree at the center represented both the Edenic Tree of Life, and the allegorical Tree of Life (i.e., Christ) […]. Then, as now, the birth of Christ, heralding eternal life, was associated with the evergreens still vibrant in midwinter.[96]

At this point, it seems appropriate to read the natural description of this passage of *Ssþ* with these interpretative possibilities in mind:

> *Í rjóðrinu var eitt stórt stǫðuvatn ok þar í margir vænir holmar. Þennan dag var mikill sólar hiti […]. Tóku nú sín sunndklæði ok svimma frá landi ok lǫgðusk í holmana ok fundu þar allskyns alldin, egg ok fugla. En er þeir hǫfðu þar skemt sér sem þeim líkaði svima þeir at landi ok ganga undir stórt tré er stóð með miklum blóma ok dreifðusk lauf ok limar hennar víða.* (Ssþ, ch. 12, pp. 130–31)
>
> In the clearing, they [Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan] saw a big lake and many fair islets in it. That was a sunny and warm day. […] Now they took their bathing dresses and swam to the islands, where they found all kinds of fruit-trees, eggs, and birds. And when they had enjoyed themselves as they wished, they swam back to land and lay under a large tree with many leaves and branches spreading out widely.

[93] Methodius, *Symposium*, IX.3.
[94] "The Word, the tree planted by the water's edge which the Father has begotten without intermediary, laden with fruit, flourishing, tall, fair-branched. Christ is the tree of life", Asterius, *Commentarii*, 1:4–5, cited in Reno 1978, p. 105.
[95] Helms 2002, p. 443. See also Eliade 1958, and 7.3.2.
[96] Rodriguez 2012, p. 29.

The inclination of *Ssþ* towards idealised natural landscapes and the *locus amoenus* motif is confirmed here. Isidore of Seville addressed this particular narrative setting and described it as an idyllic and pleasant natural space away from commercial activities, usually filled with flourishing plants and trees and accompanied by the presence of water.[97] This setting is so distant from the usual frameworks of social exchanges that it becomes an ideal place for men to experience freedom from constrictions and encounter the irrational. This is why Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan finally feel free to discuss their humiliation. As highlighted above, medieval sacred spaces such as Terrestrial Paradise share the main characteristics of *locus amoenus*. In short, the overall sacredness of the natural landscape and the association between Christ and the tree might be determining the symbolism of the Rhine episode. Although Sigurðr's adventure has just begun, the education and treatment received in Lixion have already made him a better knight than his brothers, who are guilty of mocking him and failing on several quests. The scene may thus be a way for the author to emphasise the alienation between Sigurðr and his brothers and the superior position of the latter in terms of moral conduct.

The tree is not the only thing that identifies Sigurðr as a Christian knight. Christ is analogically related to the lion, which lies wounded for three days after Sigurðr's rescue, and the lion itself is an analogy of God for bringing his cubs to life after three days. At the same time, the lion is Sigurðr's animal, depicted on his shield, deeply connected to him by admission of the knight himself.[98] This might make Sigurðr into a champion of Christian values, rightfully occupying the tree's crown, high above his brothers. It should be noted that analogy does not mean identification, as pointed out above.[99] Through the symbol of the lion, Sigurðr is not perceived as some incarnation of God on earth, but rather as a morally elevated being, a champion, and a protector of Christian values.

In conclusion, this section has proved that both local lore and Christian ideology would attribute sacredness to the oak and large trees in general. Whichever interpretation is preferred, Sigurðr's position remains a superior one. He is the better brother; therefore, he takes over the heights.[100] As mentioned above, the Lefebvrian idea of altitude as a symbol of both spiritual and secular 'masculine' imposition seems to fit the character of Sigurðr and his relationship with space. According to Rodriguez's reflection on vertical tropes as essential aspects to late

[97] *Etym.*, XIV, viii, 33.
[98] In *Ívens saga* (ch. 10, pp. 47–48), the knight thanks God for letting him find such a companion as the lion, which means that the religious reference is included.
[99] See 2.3.
[100] Interestingly, Sif Ríkharðsdóttir's (2017, pp. 170–74) analysis of *Ssþ* also reveals the representation of social status and social indicators as central concerns of the saga.

medieval representation, "verticality serves as a framework for specific social preoccupations: religion, familial ties, political power, and social class".[101]

5.4 Missing Pieces: The Additions of AM 152 fol.

It should not be forgotten that much of the analysis carried out thus far was based solely on the longer redaction of *Ssþ*. Although a few key episodes are included also in the shorter version of the text, it is possible that the additions made by the second redactor were done not only for the sake of entertaining the audience with more action but also to provide a narrative structure that would appropriately favour moral interpretations of the texts, especially in the educated readers. Therefore, a comparison between the two redactions shall strengthen this possibility and shed some light on authorship and agency.

The saga as compiled in the manuscript AM 596 4to (short redaction) presents substantial differences from AM 152 fol, not only in terms of length but also because of its fragmentary condition. This issue has been addressed by Matthew Driscoll by comparing AM 596 4to with *Sigurðar rímur þögla*,[102] a group of late medieval *rímur* inspired by the shorter redaction of the saga, not to be confused with post-Reformation *rímur* which reflect the longer redaction.[103] The text of AM 596 4to begins with Sigurðr's departure from Lixion and ends with the wedding between Vilhjálmr and Fluvia. The longer redaction goes on with details of the weddings of Ermedon and Sigurðr and some information on the protagonist's offspring. The list below highlights the narrative units that are missing in the shorter redaction compared to the longer one. The episodes found in *Srþ* are italicised, which means that the non-italicised ones correspond to the actual missing pieces in the shorter redaction.

- Prologue.
- *Introduction of the main characters.*
- *Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan's adventure (dwarfs, Sedentiana, and cyclops).*
- Battle against vikings in Jamtaland.
- Valteri and Ermedon.
- *Sicily and the court of Agapitus.*
- Nípr and his function as supernatural helper.

[101] Rodriguez 2012, p. 19.
[102] Abbreviated as *Srþ* hereinafter.
[103] Driscoll 1992, pp. lxxxi–lxxxviii.

- The battle of Treverisborg.
- Ermedon and Sigurðr's weddings.
- Flóres's life and his offspring.

The introduction of the main characters and the adventures of Sigurðr's brothers are fully retold in the *rímur*, while the Sicilian adventure at the court of Agapitus is lacking in AM 596 4to and is incomplete in the *rímur*. On the other hand, the battle in Jamtaland corresponds to a lacuna in AM 596 4to, while it is not present at all in *Srþ*; Valteri and Ermedon do not appear either in AM 596 4to or the *rímur*, and neither do Nípr, the snake pit, and the expanded ending. As for the prologue on the unplausible contents of ancient stories, it is not part of either AM 596 4to or the *rímur*, where five rather enigmatic stanzas featuring Óðin and his hawks are featured instead.[104] Another relevant part of the longer redaction of the saga is missing in the *rímur* and in all likelihood in the shorter redaction, too. This is the digression on Flóres and Blankiflúr, Sedentiana's parents. This passage, however short and apparently irrelevant, if not from an intertextual perspective, might in fact be essential for the overall comprehension of the longer redaction's ultimate purpose:

> *Þó at hún fæddi þessa mey með heiðnum þjóðum, þá hafði hún þó kent henni kristiliga trú leyniliga. Ok sem þau komu aftur úr Kaldealandi úr hinni miklu Babilon téði Blankiflúr sinum unnasta Flóres margar rǫksemdir kristiligrar trúar ok af hennar áeggjan fór kongrinn Flóres út yfir hafit til Jórsala, ok varð viss sanninda um ǫll þau tákn er vor herra Jesus Christus gjǫrði hér í heimi ok eftir þat fór hann aftur ok tók heilaga trú.* (Ssþ, ch. 3, pp. 101–02)

> Even though she [Blankiflúr's mother] gave birth to the girl among the heathens, she still educated her on the Christian faith in secret. When they came back from Babylon the Great in Kaldealand, Blankiflúr reasoned with her beloved Flóres about many precepts of the Christian belief. Instigated by her, King Flóres sailed to Jerusalem, where he made sure of the truth of all the symbols which our Lord Jesus Christ wrought in the world. After this, he sailed back home and took the Christian faith.

[104] It is usual for the *rímnaskáld* to begin by a sort of prologue (in Icelandic *mansöngr*), where they address Óðinn and the mead of poetry. Here, however, the *ríma* begins with information about a woman shooting an arrow against Óðinn's birds. The passage may be an allegory of his relationship with a certain woman. Another interpretation could see the birds as symbols of poetry and the woman mocking it by shooting an arrow at the animals. Either way, the stanzas have nothing to do with Sigurðr's story.

It is interesting to notice that this passage is only included in the longer redaction, as it is more influenced by Christian ideology than any other passage of the saga. Questions on the function of this digression and the overall agency of the redactor of the longer text will be addressed and tentatively answered later in the chapter.

Generally speaking, the fact that several scenes got added to the saga may imply a scheme or some kind of agenda on the part of the redactor. According to Driscoll, however, the many additions to the plot in the longer text result in a general sense of complication and confusion. His analysis of the linguistic and rhetorical differences between the two redactions seems to dismiss the longer one as the less refined and less valuable.[105] Driscoll claims a lack of depth and refinement in the language, besides some contradictions caused by the added material and a compromised reading flow. Specifically, he labels a number of scenes which resemble other ones which are also present in the short redaction but do not seem to have any function in the story 'reduplications'. Some kind of amplification can also be detected in the shorter text of AM 596 1-2 4to, though only on a rhetorical level. Here, the expansions affect the language rather than the plot, inasmuch as they add specificity and elaboration to certain moments with short linguistic additions.[106] What follows is an analysis of the longer redaction's reduplications, as I believe that they deserve more attention and are, in fact, signs of a careful planning on the part of the author.

The first half of the long redaction's plot is characterised by two specular adventures that glorify the outcast hero. In this case, the most relevant reduplications are related to Sigurðr's first deeds, which means that they contribute specifically to the enhancement of the mirror structure putting the hero and his brothers in contrast:

Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan meet a dwarf
duplicates into → Sigurðr meets a dwarf

Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan are subdued by Sedentiana
duplicates into → Sigurðr is subdued by Sedentiana

To these, the parallels already present in the shorter redaction may be added:

Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan face trolls or giants

[105] Driscoll 1992, pp. lxxi–cxx.
[106] Driscoll 1992, pp. cxx–cxxxiii.

is mirrored by → Sigurðr faces trolls or giants

Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan meet the dragon

is mirrored by → Sigurðr meets the dragon

Although the number of reduplications and additions (or amplifications) of the longer redaction may indeed slow down the flow and complicate the overall understanding of the plot, the present chapter has attempted to suggest specific reasons for each scene to be included in the longer text. For instance, the encounter with Níþr seems to be inserted in order to make Sigurðr face a dwarf himself and facilitate his victory over Sedentiana. The presence of a helping dwarf and a magic stone might also be the result of an intertextual type of amplification, given the popularity of both dwarfs and magic stones in Icelandic *riddarasögur*.[107] A process of reduplication also explains the snake pit scene, since the protagonist himself should undergo an initial submission according to the usual structure of maiden-king narratives. This would also give the plot more symmetry. The specular configuration of the French expeditions in both adventures has been outlined above (*fig. 8*). The involvement of a rope in both Sigurðr's climb and his brothers' downfall is indicative of a pattern, as well. It should also be noted that many other episodes, such as added oaths of brotherhood with Valteri and Ermedon and their related bridal quests, are identical in their structure to materials already present in the narrative. Although they do not seem to convey as specific meaning as other episodes, they do hint at the influence of Arthurian literature on the redactor.

Within this often-complicated net of repetitions and additions, a few aspects are consistent in both redactions, starting from the relevance given to Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan. The comparison between them and Sigurðr is unfortunate, and yet the two of them are given much space in both texts. The same is valid for Sedentiana, whose role as the main antagonist is established and developed by both redactions. The troll-sisters are always present as well because of their fundamental function as helpers. It is easy to detect what might be defined as the saga's motif complex, which means the set of events that probably represented the core of the story as it was originally conceived. This small group of materials does not undergo any particular changes if the two redactions are compared. In fact, they tend to occupy the same position in both texts. This might imply that these elements are also the older ones or, in other words, have been part of the narrative for the longest time. This may be demonstrated by the fact that they also correspond to well-established literary motifs. Therefore, it is possible that

[107] Cf. Matyushina 2006. See also McDonald Werronen (2016, pp. 62–66) and Chapter Seven of this thesis.

the redactor of the longer version could only add so much and only where these founding narrative elements allowed him to. Inserting new pieces of narrative without altering the original structure of the story seems to be the main *modus operandi* of the redactor.[108]

According to Driscoll, however, this remarkable authorial effort in the longer redaction would not correspond to any thoughtful planning: "In tampering with his text, the author of the longer redaction has overreached himself, adding new parts without concern for, because without understanding of, the whole".[109] This rather severe conclusion, although based on some solid observations of both texts, disagrees with the results of the present research. Although it is true, as stated above, that a full appreciation of the longer redaction may be affected by a greater number of digressions and plot complications, a total lack of understanding of the saga as a whole on the part of the author seems too harsh a judgement. Moreover, Driscoll's analysis does not offer any final thoughts on the possible motivations behind such convoluted results in the longer text.

"Why should a scribe consistently shorten his exemplar's text verbally but add dozens of extra episodes?".[110] While suggesting that both redactions originate from a lost original text, Driscoll does not seem to take this final question too seriously. In fact, there might be meanings underlying the plot and spatial design of *Ssþ* which can only emerge after lifting the veil of its adventurous appearance. These meanings can be activated on multiple levels, such as character development, religious ideology, political agenda, or simply improvement of the entertaining qualities of the narrative, a factor which is often disregarded by literary criticism.

As demonstrated in the course of the chapter, the above-listed doubles, besides being strictly connected to the saga's spatial design, seem to serve at least two purposes: a) The establishment of a family hierarchy, and b) The glorification of the hero. Both of these objectives, in turn, serve the presentation of behavioural and interrelational models. Sigurðr's characteristics of courage, cunning, and generosity are related to his relationship with space and improved by the mirror structure achieved by the longer redaction. The duplications of the longer redaction give the first part of the saga an overall sense of symmetry that would not be provided otherwise. William Ryding addresses this aspect of saga writing as "a fundamental impulse on the part of the medieval writer toward increased length, an impulse counterbalanced in part by a concern for symmetry and balance in the diptych narrative,

[108] Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (2017, p. 154) also sees the expansion around fixed narrative threads as a possibility in *Ssþ*, although her analysis suggests unrelated narrative threads to be put together and then expanded around rather than a motif complex altogether.
[109] Driscoll 1992, p. cxx.
[110] Driscoll 1992, pp. cxl–cxli.

controlled and yet furthered by the technique of narrative interlacing, yet fundamentally an impulse to amplify".[111] While complying with this impulse, the author of the longer redaction makes his intervention quite significant. By the end of the longer redaction, the three brothers are the poles of a vertical axis that subverts the initial *status quo* that used to see Sigurðr at the bottom. The fact that the amplifications might not be strictly necessary to this end does not take away their function of making this subversion more evident and meaningful. While complicating the plot, they enhance the value of the saga from an interpretative and semantic perspective. This is evident in the snake pit episode, which is not only a duplication of Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan's submission to Sedentiana, but also an example of allegory created through verticality and biblical references. This addition goes beyond the simple impulse to symmetry, as it also symbolises the success of a Christian champion against evil.

Reassurance about the allegoric nature of the text of AM 152 fol. is offered by the author's attention to symbols in the passage dedicated to the lion and even more in the initial digression on Flóres and Blankiflúr. *Tákn er vor herra Jesus Christus gerði hér í heimi* are the signs and wonders that Flóres has to learn before coming back from Jerusalem and embracing the new religion.[112] Why should an author give this emphasis to religious exegesis and then build a narrative so poorly? This is, in fact, a hint at how the author of the longer redaction must have conceived the nature of the space surrounding him, which is consistent with the most common patristic teachings. According to this passage of *Ssþ*, the divine intervention in the world is something that can be learned, implying that it may not be immediately visible to human eyes. There is no reason to believe that the author of this passages would then avoid filling his own work with symbols and messages to be unveiled by the most attentive readers.

Finally, the application of Christian symbolism to Sedentiana and Sigurðr creates another curious example of mirroring. Whereas Sedentiana's parents are positively depicted as good Christians, Sigurðr's father and brothers are negative characters with no consideration for the younger member of their family. Sedentiana, on the other hand, decides to follow a different path from her parents, as she implicitly refers to herself as a non-Christian after the birth of her son Flóres, despite being raised as one:

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[111] Ryding 2011 [1971], p. 61.

[112] The Old Norse term *tákn* has an interesting semantic spectrum, insofar as it can translate 'token', 'mark', or 'miracle' and 'wonder' in a religious context. Etymologically speaking, the term is a loanword from the Old English *tācen/tācn*, which happens to be used in phrases similar to the one featured in *Ssþ*, e.g. "Þis is þæt forme tácn ðe hé on his menniscnysse openlice geworhte" (Ælfric, *Homilies*, ch. 4) ("This is the first miracle that he [Jesus] openly wrought as a man").

> *"Þó mun hann kristna manna sið fanga um siðir sem haft hefir minn faðir ok móðir þó at þat hafi mjǫk eyzt í þessu landi"* (Ssþ, ch. 43, p. 228)
>
> "He [Flóres] will take the Christian faith at last, so as my parents did, although much of it has got lost in this land"

At the same time, Sigurðr manages to emancipate himself from the oppression of his relatives and become the best example of knight, associated to the lion and its positive meanings from a Christian perspective. Sigurðr ideally inherits an ideology that was attributed to Sedentiana's parents in the first place, while the maiden-king is connected to Sigurðr's relatives by her arrogance. This is another fascinating way for *Ssþ* to subvert and polarise its narrative elements through mirroring.[113]

From the marriage of these conflicting figures emerges a character that inherits the best virtues of both Sedentiana's and Sigurðr's family trees. Flóres, their son, is named after the queen's father, thus associated to the positive aspects of her lineage. His strength and bravery make him equal to Sigurðr, whilst his supernaturally fast growth seems to hint at the paranormal aspects associated with his mother, such as her familiarity with magic objects and foresight. Sedentiana utters a prophecy specifically focused on Flóres becoming some kind of Christian prophet. She believes that he will become Christian and convert the land, and the narrator confirms that this will happen:

> *Svá er sagt at þessi spásaga hafi fram komit á dǫgum Constantini keisara ok Flóvenz er kristnaði Frakkland ok frelsaði undan heiðingja valdi.* (Ssþ, ch. 43, pp. 228–29)
>
> So, it is said that this prophecy was fulfilled in the days of Emperor Constantinus and Flóvent [Flóvents saga], who Christianised France and freed it from the power of the heathens.

Therefore, Flóres may be seen as the personification of France's bright future and the ultimate recipient of the positive values embodied by his ancestors. Although Sigurðr is not openly referred to as a Christian, he may be seen as a precursory figure with a fundamental

[113] This specular structure is remarkable and has been detected in other Icelandic *riddarasögur*, such as *Ectors saga* and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, by Lambertus 2009. Cf. Chapter Six.

role in the eventual conversion of France. In other words, if not a Christian champion, he is at least a champion of Christianity, that is, functional to the diffusion of the faith.[114]

In conclusion, the longer redaction of the saga, despite its structural complexity, betrays the idea of a strong authorial agency. This agency is conveyed in the form of material amplifications that are not inserted for the sake of expansion. On the contrary, they seem to be related to a religious agenda and an ideological conception of what a text should convey. The author seems to be acquainted with Latin authors (e.g. Ovid's *Ars amatoria* and Lucretius), local folklore, saga literature, and Christian exegesis. Sign of a learned author is also the use of Latin proverbs.[115] This makes a point for his high education, which is simply applied to the construction of spatial symbolism rather than the exhibition of extensive geographical knowledge.[116] The shorter redaction shows similar symbolic features, which only get enhanced and not contradicted by the longer one. This improvement is carried out by paying particular attention to the spatial semantics established by the Latin clerical tradition and inherited by late medieval Icelandic authors. For different reasons and through different approaches, the two redactions of *Ssþ* are equally valuable elaborations of Sigurðr's story.

5.5 Brief Summary

- ⊕ *Sigurðar saga þögla* exemplifies the attitude of late medieval authors to represent space as polarised and hierarchical.
- ⊕ Opposite poles guide the design of fictional space. Because of its symbolic value, this configuration is used to express moral evaluations and social issues.
- ⊕ The horizontal geopolitical polarisation between Saxland and Lixion causes specularity in terms of both narrative structure and plot. Sigurðr and his brothers face the same (or similar) challenges with opposite outcomes. Sigurðr is the virtuous model.
- ⊕ Vertically, Sigurðr's path leads to multiple climbs. Whenever the hero rises, his brothers fall or fail to advance. This may be related to Sigurðr's destiny to occupy the highest position in the family hierarchy.

[114] For a more detailed analysis of non-Christian characters as *ante-litteram* incarnations of the Christian values, see 6.4.
[115] Cf. Hermann Pálsson 1985, p. 388
[116] McDonald Werronen (2016, pp. 103–04) suggests that the absence of a clear geographical organisation in *Ssþ* might indicate that its author was not particularly educated or did not understand the medieval order of the world. This idea is the result of a comparison between *Ssþ*, *Nitida saga*, and *Clári saga*, and their respective narrative space. It seems important to point out that the eclecticism of *Ssþ* and its vague geography do not bring to the same conclusions in this context. The fact that a defined T-O structure cannot be drawn with the geographic information of *Ssþ* does not imply a less refined authorial work.

⊕ Vertical motion may also convey the Christian idea of moral ascension. A few authorial digressions on Christian symbolism encourage this interpretation. Sigurðr is the champion of the lion, which is the animal of Christ.

⊕ Sedentiana' progressive closure is also conveyed through horizontal and vertical polarisation.

⊕ The concentric architecture of Sedentiana's secret building symbolises seclusion and protection of virginity (*hortus conclusus*). Vertically, closure is achieved through the impregnable fortress and the many fortifications built around Treverisborg.

⊕ Lefebvre associates medieval vertical architectures with masculine power. Sedentiana's search for higher dominating positions may be read as her attempt to enter a masculine dimension to which she does not belong.

⊕ Joseph Rodriguez sees a remarkable evolution of vertical thought in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This is consistent with the theoretical premises of Chapter Two.

⊕ Horizontal and vertical spatial polarisation is used to convey moral issues and social preoccupations, such as kinship and the power balance between genders.

6 CONCENTRIC SPACE: *ECTORS SAGA*

"The point of view is a means of qualifying the object […].
It selects, excludes, and moves an object closer or farther. It
addresses the object according to cultural models that set our own
self in relation with all the existing"

– Raffaele Milani, *L'arte del paesaggio*

6.1 The Text

Compared to *Sigurðar saga þögla*, the manuscript transmission of *Ectors saga* (The saga of Ector)[1] is less problematic, starting from the fact that only one redaction of the text has survived. Nonetheless, the two sagas are strictly connected by the fact that the oldest witnesses of the longer redaction of *Ssþ* and *Es* are both contained in AM 152 1 fol. and compiled by the same scribe, Jón Þorgilsson, steward at the bishopric of Hólar and priest at Melstaður. The manuscript, whose contents cover a large timespan from the early fourteenth to the early sixteenth century, has been connected to the north-west of Iceland, specifically the powerful and influential Skarðverjar dynasty. In the following chapters, the most relevant aspects of *Es* are set in comparison to those of *Ssþ*, as the two sagas might in fact be sharing aspects that might justify their belonging to the same manuscript context.[2]

The text has been analysed here following the 1960s diplomatic edition by Agnete Loth, who makes primary use of AM 152 1 fol. (from fol.125v, col. 2 to fol. 139v, col. 2).[3] Other late medieval manuscripts containing *Es* are the fifteenth-century AM 579 4to, AM 589 d, 4to, and Stock. Perg. fol. nr 7. The other manuscript featuring the full text, AM 584, 4to, dates back to the first half of the sixteenth century. This manuscript consists of thirty pages and contains solely *Es*. All the above-mentioned manuscripts are preserved in Iceland at The Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík, except for Stock. Perg. fol. nr 7, which is located at the Royal Library in Stockholm, Sweden. All of these were used by Loth beside AM 152 1 fol. as references and sources for variants and the redaction of a critical apparatus.

AM 579 4to contains four *riddarasögur* and one *fornaldarsaga* and may therefore signal some degree of generic awareness on the part of late medieval Icelandic redactors. Here, *Es* is

[1] Also referred to as *Es* hereinafter.
[2] For a further analysis of the manuscript's contents, 6.4.
[3] Loth 1962, p. ix.

preserved in only two not conjoint leaves, fo. 23 and fo. 24. Similarly, AM 589 d 4to features two *riddarasögur* – an original one (*Es*) and a supposedly translated one from a lost Latin original (*Clári saga*) – and a *þáttr* (*Stúfs þáttr*). *Es* begins here on fo. 17v and ends on fo. 48v, with a one-leaf lacuna after fo. 35. Finally, Stock. Perg. fol. nr 7 also contains solely tales of knights, including *Viktors saga ok Blávus* and *Bevers saga*.[4] Here, *Es* is featured from fo. 41ra, and ends on fo. 48v, col. 1. The beginning of the text is missing, and a lacuna can be detected after fo. 43.

The overall variation between the manuscripts is not particularly relevant, as shown by the careful annotations of Loth's diplomatic edition. As it is the case for most Icelandic *riddarasögur*, the post-medieval manuscripts containing *Es* are abundant. Still, the existence of at least one full medieval version of the text has led to the exclusion of all post-medieval materials.

6.2 The Plot

Karnotius, son of Priamus, settles down in Partia after the Trojan War. He marries and has a son called Ector, after the Trojan hero, who appears in a dream to his wife. The hero predicts that the child will distinguish himself in many ways. Ector is baptised and named.[5] He grows quickly into a strong young man educated in the *artes liberales* and all the languages in the world. He is dubbed knight in a great ceremony, during which he received precious gifts, including Hercules's sword and Achilles's shield. A tournament begins, where Ectors meets the knights that will form his retinue, namely Trancival, Aprival, Alanus, Fenacius, Florencius, and Vernacius. They gather at a castle built exclusively for Ector and decide to split up and travel for exactly one year to prove their knightly skills. The individual stories are told one after the other and present more or less the same structure, with a couple of exceptions. All knights ride through a forest, after which comes a short digression or stopover, usually as a farm or a small village. Finally, they are set to face great battles in cities and strongholds, before riding back to

[4] The content of the manuscript may be found in the *Katalog öfver Kongl. Bibliotekkets fornisländska och fornnorska handskrifter*, 1897–1900, 21–24.

[5] This passage is ambiguous for a few reasons. Firstly, the growing anxiety related to the rising Ottoman Empire and the Islamic Middle East led to a negative representation of the Turks in the Late Middle Ages. At the same time, however, Europe knew a learned tradition that gave Turks a Trojan origin. While Trojan heroes were positively perceived as the ancestors of Christian Europe, the representation of the Turks gradually shifted towards otherness and evil together with the perception of Muslims in general. By the sixteenth century, Turks and Trojans were no longer comparable, and the Trojans began to be portrayed more often with the traits of the ancient Roman nobility, especially in visual arts. For an analysis of these aspects, see Harper 2005. The moment when Ector is named and sprinkled with water on his head, which might recall a baptism, is made problematic by this ambivalent view of the Turks. It is possible that the image of Turkey in *Es* is still an ambivalent one, not yet compromised by the late medieval crusading ideology. Ever more plausible is the desire of the author to set the story in an ancient time, hundreds of years before Christ, when the Turkish menace was still not perceived in Europe. The pagan framework would neutralise any ideological contention in this regard. This may be confirmed by the fact that Turkey goes by its ancient name, Partia, in the saga.

Ector's castle. Most knights also find a bride along the way. Only the highlights of each adventure are described below, as a more detailed analysis is offered further on.

Vernacius is the first to leave and reach a clearing. After drinking from a marble goblet that turns water into wine, he is confronted by the owner, the giant King Nocerus. The knight is taken as a prisoner into the king's fortress. A maiden called Almaria helps him escape and kill Nocerus, and the two decide to marry. Florencius follows a request of help from Silvia of Liguria. Her father, King Tirannus, and the realm are threatened by an army from Kaldealand. Florencius reaches the enemies' camp and overturn a figure of Mohammed that stands there. Kaldanus reacts angrily but is challenged by Florencius and eventually killed. Silvia is betrothed to the knight. Fenacius saves a dwarf's daughter from an assault, so he is given precious equipment. He is told the story of King Romulus and his successor Castor. A man called Ingifer threatened their realm and is now hiding with much gold in a cave, after transforming into a dragon. Fenacius rides there and defeats Ingifer, so he may take King Castor's daughter. Alanus, after killing a host of knights in a clearing, reaches a village. He is told the story of that land, called Nafaria. A couple was sent away by the king for performing sacrifices and spells. However, they enchanted a she-wolf that is now responsible for many deaths in the area. After reaching the king's fortress and winning a tournament, Alanus rides out to the forest and kills both the she-wolf and the couple who enchanted her. The knight is praised and offered the king's daughter's hand. Trancival rides to a landscape with a forest on one side and the sea on the other. In the forest, he fights a dragon in order to free a lion. In a clearing, he helps an elf-woman free her son from a giant. After riding along the mountains, he reaches Media, where he kills an impostor called Lutrektor who was trying to subjugate the king and kidnap his daughter, Pruna. Trancival defends the realm and Pruna also from a Lybian army. Although the lion dies in battle, the knight is praised and offered the maiden's hand.

Aprival rides north from Ector's castle, while Ector himself rides east, which is the chief cardinal direction. So, as the north serves the east, Aprival serves Ector. He comes to a district that is threatened by King Arkilanus of *Bláland*. Aprival offers help, and the enemies are defeated. At this point, Aprival hears the story of King Tróílis of Priamus's line, who rules over Mesopotamia, and his two children, Eneas and Trobil. Aprival rides there in disguise. King Tróílis is the most elegant man the knight has ever seen, except for Ector. He is mocked by Aprival for considering his court the greatest in the world. When questioned about it, Aprival narrates Ector's great deeds, but Tróílis grows angry and decides to challenge Ector himself. Aprival suggests for him to test his knight first, so a tournament is held and Aprival fights the

king's men for three days. After being wounded, he is cast into a dungeon for not revealing his true identity. An old man and a maiden come to aid. That is Trobil herself, who wants to learn more about Ector. A bondman is sent into the dungeon to take Aprival's place, while the knight is hidden in Trobil's private rooms. Aprival remains hidden for a long time, so he does not show up at the appointment with Ector.

Ector rides east of his castle. After challenging and defeating a giant called Torqvatus, he meets a man called Jamunth, who becomes his follower. A narrative digression recounts his story. He is the son of King Tholomeus of Egypt. After the death of Jamunth's mother, the king married another woman, who ordered for him to be imprisoned. He ran away and decided to look for Ector, the most valorous man in the east. Jamunth is pleased to have found him. They ride to Siria, ruled by King Apollonius. They stop at a stone bridge, where a dragon protects some gold and keeps the castle from getting essential goods. Ector defeats it alone and splits the gold evenly among everyone at the castle. King Apollonius welcomes Ector gladly and asks for his help against King Marcellus of Antiochia, who is threatening the kingdom. Ector and Jamunth fight against the enemies and prevail, demanding no spoils for themselves, except for Ector's privilege to find a match for Apollonius's daughter. A year has passed, so Ector and Jamunth ride back to the castle.

They all recount their adventures, but soon they decide to leave again and search for Aprival. Ector remembers that the elf-woman met by Trancival was a seer, so he suggests that the knight should go and fetch information. When Trancival comes back and reveals Aprival's location, Ector decides to gather an army and travel to Mesopotamia. Ector strikes camp close to the city and challenges King Tróílis and his son Eneas to battle in seven days' time. Early on the seventh day, King Tróílis's men are led into battle after committing themselves to the protection of Mohammed. King Tróílis's son, Eneas, is wounded and made prisoner by Ector, who takes him back to his camp. The battle quiets down, and princess Trobil decides to go to Ector's camp. She is riding a mule, while four knights hold a canopy over her and many maids with torches and golden stocks follow her. Aprival rides a fine horse beside her.

The parade is so beautiful that Ector and his men think there are two suns in the sky. Ector hears about Aprival's adventure and the help he got from Trobil, so Eneas is set free, with the condition that she should marry Ector. Trobil agrees and a wedding feast is held. Jamunth is made king of Egypt, while Aprival marries Valdre, daughter of King Apollonius, and inherits Siria. Trancival is given Media, after marrying Pruna. Every other comrade also receives a kingdom to rule over. Eneas marries Marmaria, daughter of King Alexander of Greece, and succeeds his father in Mesopotamia. The readers are asked to excuse the author

for having nothing more to tell, except that he found both *Trójumanna saga* and this story in the books of Master Galterus (Walter of Châtillon), who considered Ector equal to Alexander the Great. The battle in Mesopotamia took place on July 1st, 377 years before the Passion of Christ.

6.3 Modes of Spatial Representation

Ectors saga may be considered the most Arthurian of the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, that is, the most influenced by the narrative patterns, tones, and characterisations derived from Arthurian literature as it was transmitted to Iceland in the thirteenth century.[6] In her analysis of the text, Marianne Kalinke defines *Es* "an Arthurian pastiche in classical disguise".[7] The definition is witty, though quite accurate. The work of Kalinke represents a valuable source which successfully summarises the various inspirations that the author of *Es* might have drawn from Arthurian narratives. Especially relevant are the translated romances of Chrétien de Troyes's known as *Ívens saga* and *Erex saga*, but also *Breta sögur*, and *Tristram saga ok Ísöndar*, which were allegedly well-known by the author of *Es*. Typical Arthurian motifs such as the grateful-lion or the magic spring with wine-tasting water are examples of content contamination in *Es*, while the overall tone and the motives driving Ector and his knights (testing their prowess, finding a bride, rescuing a companion, etc.) may be considered Arthurian in their essence.[8]

Oddly enough, the saga never mentions Arthur directly, preferring references to Charlemagne and the *chansons de geste* cycle, the legend of Alexander the Great, or Ancient Greece. Kalinke demonstrates that, despite the appearances, the saga is much more evidently indebted to the *matière de Bretagne* than to any other heroic cycle. Therefore, the classical elements may function simply as a superficial covering, hence Kalinke's "classical guise". In fact, recurring references to the classical world, especially Ancient Greece and the Trojan legend, usually have a function of legitimation and ennoblement in most Icelandic *riddarasögur*, which does not imply a direct borrowing of motifs beyond the simple name-dropping or vague reference. Kalinke's viewpoint is convincing, although the richness, the length, and the unique character of the text may also generate alternative interpretative paths such as the one proposed below.

Although the present research will tackle both *Es*'s classical elements and its idea of chivalry, the main focus shall be on the modes of spatial representation within the text. Through

[6] A first brief analysis to *Es* dates back to the nineteenth century, see Meissner 1894. The saga has also been analysed in comparison to *Samsons saga* by Widding 1960. Schäfke (2013, pp. 157–63) offers a structural analysis of *Es*. For a general overview of the Arthurian echoes in Icelandic sagas, see Kalinke 2011, pp. 145–67.
[7] Kalinke 2012.
[8] Kalinke 2012, pp. 71, 79.

the analysis of *Es*'s fictional space more elements may emerge on how the author deals with both the classical and the courtly materials. Finally, *Sigurðar saga þögla* will be addressed in comparative terms, as the two texts seem to convey a similar image of chivalry through spatial solutions that are different from each other but consistent with the late medieval production of space as previously described.

6.3.1 Interlacing Narratives

At a first glance, it is easy to notice that the spatial representation of *Es* is strictly intertwined with the organisation of the plot. As pointed out by Kalinke, *Es* makes an extensive use of *entrelacement* as a narrative device, by telling the story of each of Ector's knights one after the other while also making clear that all the events take place at the same time, that is, the one year established by Ector.[9] As a narrative technique, *entrelacement* is specifically connected to the authors concerning themselves with the Arthurian cycle in the thirteenth century, such as Chrétien de Troyes (*Conte du Graal*) and those who were inspired by Arthurian romances during the Renaissance, such as the Italian Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533) in his *Orlando Furioso*. This way of configuring the various events by interlacing episodes with one another, often with the enhancement of dramatic suspense, is particularly associated to the Lancelot-Grail, or Vulgata cycle, which served as inspiration for Thomas Malory's *Le morte d'Arthur* (fifteenth century).[10] The basic method for the interlacing of narrative segments is easy to grasp, especially for the modern audience, who have been acquainted with serial tv, movie franchises, and literary sagas for decades. The different characters are set to depart on their own individual adventures, and each one of the narrative units is interlaced with the other thanks to connecting elements. This technique is remarkably successful in the context of Arthurian literature, where the variety of characters revolving around the legendary king may call for some practical solutions and attempts at harmonisation.

The practice of interlacing narratives is not exclusive to *Es* and, in fact, can be traced in many sagas. With reference to the main corpus, *Ssþ* is undoubtedly a good example, as it recounts the adventures of Sigurðr and his brothers in separate segments of the text. It has been demonstrated that the Rhine episode functions as an interlacing point between the two adventures. The retelling of the same episode (facing a dragon) from the perspective of Sigurðr, after the cowardly escape of Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan, represents a particularly effective use of this technique. Another example of *entrelacement* in *Ssþ* is the uncertainty about the destiny of

[9] Kalinke 2012, p. 83.
[10] On the use of this narrative device in the Lancelot-Grail cycle, see Chase 1983.

Sedentiana and her child. The narrator's voice comes back to the maiden-king at a later stage, unveiling the events that followed Sedentiana's humiliation in her garden and the birth of Sigurðr's heir. Similarly, some of Sigurðr's knights are left behind during his travels, in order to be summoned in a later phase, when the necessity arises.[11] It has been demonstrated that the organisation of different episodes throughout *Ssþ* leads not only to symbolic interpretations but also to a remarkable symmetry, a sort of geometrical order due to an impulse towards balance that may be considered typical of medieval authors.[12]

Entrelacement is a fundamental narrative device in *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, as well. Here, the tension about the final outcome of a mountain expedition is built also through the close interlacing of three different storylines and points of views, namely Sigrgarðr, Stígandi, and Hörðr.[13] The simultaneous challenges faced by the three characters are recounted separately and only merge together at the end of Hörðr's episode, when Sigrgarðr and Stígandi suddenly appear from the thick of the forest. *Entrelacement* is also played with in *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, where the long journey of the protagonist to the southern edges of the world is interrupted by the narrator in order to provide information about what happened in Greece while Vilhjálmr was away. The land has been conquered by King Arkistratus of Ninive. The narrative featured at this point is interlaced with the rest of the text starting from a formulaic intervention of the narrator, anticipating the upcoming shift of point of view:

> *Nú tǫkum vér þar til máls hvat til hafði borit í Grikklandi á meðan Vilhjálmr hefir í burt verit.* (Vilhjálms saga sjóðs, ch. 31, p. 76)
>
> We shall now tell of what has happened in Greece while Vilhjálmr has been away.

It ends with the same formula, when Vilhjálmr receives the news of Greece being besieged and decides to summon an army to defend it:

> *Nú tǫkum vér til máls at Vilhjálmr er kominn í Dalmaria ok hans faðir, ok frétta þeir þar þessi tíðindi er nú váru sagt.* (Vilhjálms saga sjóðs, ch. 34, p. 83).[14]

[11] For instance, Randver and Albína are said to remain in Saxland for a while. Randver is summoned again by Sigurðr in the following spring for a harrying expedition in the Eystrasalt.
[12] See 5.3.1.
[13] *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, chs. 12–15, pp. 88–95.
[14] Similar formulas can be found in other *riddarasögur*, such as the above-mentioned *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, where the narratives regarding Stígandi and Hörðr, which are concurrent to the one of Sigrgarðr/Knútr, are introduced as follows: *Nú er at segja frá Stíganda…* (ch. 14, p. 90), and *Nú er at segja frá Hǫrð…* (ch. 15, p. 92).

> We shall now tell that Vilhjálmr has arrived in Dalmaria with his father, where they hear the news that has just been related.

The interweaving of episodes may also be applied to clearly distinguished narrative segments, usually ekphrastic digressions or background stories of secondary characters. The habit of indigenous *riddarasögur* authors to embed independent narratives into the backbone of their main story was mentioned above with regard to the stepmother-and-spell motif.[15] In general, the numerous digressions interpolated in the sagas might slow down the overall reading flow, as might be the case in the longer redaction of *Ssþ*. Still, it is important to register this tendency of many Icelandic *riddarasögur* as a peculiar feature of the genre, one that reaches a remarkable effectiveness in *Es*. That is because the ultimate purpose of such digressions is often to offer background information, suggest interpretations, and shape the overall narrative structure of the saga. It may be argued that the plot of *Es* relies on interlacing narratives more extensively and more neatly than any other saga in the main corpus. Unlike *Ssþ*, *Es* features individual adventures that are all concurrent, from the knights' departure to the final battle in Mesopotamia. The architecture of the plot and the sequence of events are so artificially organised that one might visualise narrative time and story's time graphically, as in *fig. 12* and *13*.

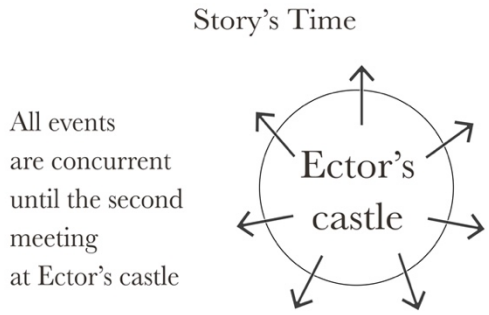

Figure 12

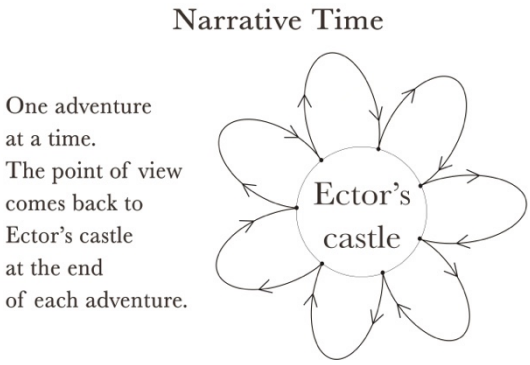

Figure 13

Þiðreks saga, another Old Norse text inspired by the Arthurian cycle, features a heavy use of *entrelacement* by dedicating a major chapter to each member of Þiðrek's retinue, besides various shorter digressions on their equipment, standards, and even their position at Þiðrek's

[15] See 3.6.

table.[16] The ghost of King Arthur and his round table knights lives among Þiðrek's guests, as well as in Ector's castle.[17] The complexity of *Þiðreks saga*'s plot make the interlacing process in the text evident but more confusing and less polished than in *Es*. In *Es*, beside the adventures of the seven knights, some minor digressions also appear, such as the accounts of Atokurs, Claudius, the knights that Trancival meet in the forest, and the messenger sent to King Apollonius during Ector's stay in Syrland. Although in great number, the above-mentioned detours do not seem to slow down the reading flow as much as the long chapters that *Þiðreks saga* dedicates to collateral figures. Moreover, the interlaced passages of *Es* mostly correspond to pieces of background information essential to the comprehension of each adventure.

The long lists of names that *Es* features, especially during battle scenes, such as the list of knights that join the armies in Mesopotamia, may be more difficult to digest for the modern reader. The Icelandic names of Ector's horse-boys and cart drivers are listed in some early manuscripts and in Loth's edition, which made Kalinke believe that they were presumably direct acquaintances of the author that might have appreciated a mention in such epic context.[18]

All in all, it can be stated that *entrelacement*, because of its original function and contexts of use, is a narrative device that has much to do with the way chivalry is envisioned and conceptualised. In particular, by being based on the connection between narrative units, characters, and adventures, it is a perfect instrument for the relationships between knights to emerge, as well as the values and moral codes that regulate them. In other words, *entrelacement* creates a supporting structure not only for the alternation of events, but also for defining mutual relations.[19]

In *Ssþ*, interlacing narratives allow the narrator to create suspense, trigger the reader's curiosity and, most importantly, establish spatial relations that are the reflections of moral values and a hierarchy among the Saxland brothers. In *Es*, this narrative device shapes a structure of interlaced adventures that revolve around Ector, the eponymous hero and real

[16] The number of materials that made their way into *Þiðreks saga* is not always coherently organised by the compiler. One notable example is the death of King Osantrix of Vilkinaland, who unexpectedly reappears in chapter 291 after being murdered by Viðga in ch. 144 (*Þiðreks saga*, pp. 209, 393). In any case, the attention paid to the king's followers is remarkable, starting from the background story of each one of them to the list of guests at Þiðrekr's feast (chs. 169–91, pp. 241–61) and the description of every single duel in Þiðrekr's Bertangaland campaign (ch. 192, pp. 263 ff.).

[17] This assumption is valid for the texts analysed here, as well as other types of texts which will not be addressed extensively in this context, such as translated *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* (e.g. *Karlamagnús saga*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, and *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans*).

[18] Kalinke 2012, p. 86.

[19] An exception to this use of *entrelacement* is *Parcevals saga*, where Valven's adventures are distinct from the ones of Parceval and narrated separately in *Valvens þáttr*, while they are interlaced in Chrétien's and Wolfram von Eschenbach's versions.

centre of the saga. In fact, beside *entrelacement*, it is also possible to talk about a concentric spatial structure at the basis of *Es*. By occupying both a structural and symbolic centrality, Ector is given priority over his companions in terms of both power and morality. More precisely, the structural centre of the plot is Ector's castle, while the symbolic one is the protagonist himself as a leader and role model to whom his knights are leaning not only physically (by promising to come back) but also figuratively. Ector is the east, the chief cardinal point, while the other ones, starting from Aprival, are subordinate to him. In short, *Es* is another example of an Icelandic *riddarasaga* which makes use of spatial constructs not only for the sake of an engaging plot, but also to define relationships and convey meanings.

6.3.2 Concentric Space

Interlacing narrative and concentric space are two sides of the same coin, when it comes to *Es*. The interweaving structure presented above cooperates with a fundamental concentric spatial representation in order to favour specific interpretations of the story and its characters. Concentricity is a typical mode of spatial representation in late medieval times because of its symbolic implications. The frequent representation of concentric patterns on *mappae mundi* and in architecture has been mentioned as part of the evidence for the success of this spatial configuration.[20] As much as cartography, literature in the form of chivalric romances may have contributed to the definition of the image of the world and the semantic values connected to geographic locations, cardinal directions, or even the simple dichotomy of centre and periphery in more abstract terms. This is especially valid for those chivalric romances, including several Icelandic *riddarasögur*, that choose spatio-temporal vagueness, possibly connected to geographic remoteness, as one of their defining traits.

It is certainly the case of *Es*, but also *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*. Through a great spatial vagueness, *Vilhjálms saga* manages to convey messages not only about the lands visited by the hero, but also about the fantasies, fears, and beliefs associated with those lands, in particular the far south. Vilhjálmr reaches the borders of the known world, pushed by a thirst for knowledge and adventure rather than a bridal quest – or the need to rescue his father, in this case. This saga is probably closer to the cliché of Alexander's voyages to the edges of the world, thus to the *matière de Rome*, than the *matière de Bretagne*.[21] Even after his wedding in Ninive, Vilhjálmr feels the urge to leave the achieved happy ending in order to look for more challenges.

[20] See 2.1.
[21] A similar approach to spatial exploration in the Icelandic *riddarasögur* can be found in *Kirialax saga*, whose long and extensive trip is defined by Barnes (2014, p. 70) as a "quest for knowledge of Creation".

This seems to perfectly symbolise the enthusiasm of most *riddarasögur* authors for geographic exhaustiveness and exploration. There is no particular reason for the hero to depart again after his wedding, as weddings represent the usual conclusion for the vast majority of *riddarasögur*. Vilhjálmr's motivations seem to fall into the same *fortvitnisferð* (journey of curiosity, or exploratory trip), mentioned by Barnes in her analysis of *Clári saga* and *Dínus saga drambláta*.[22] Moreover, the farther Vilhjálmr gets from his departure point, the more abstract is the spatial description offered by the saga.

While searching for his lost father, Vilhjámr is given instructions by two women – Astrinomia and Ermlaug – to reach the land where he might be held prisoner. In both cases, the descriptions of the itinerary have an oral character and are extremely vague, yet the knight manages to reach his destination.[23]

> *Astrinomia svarar: "En þat er ráð mitt at þú stefnir héðan til Egiptalands ok þaðan vestr í Affrika, svá til Libialands. […] En er þú kemr út yfir morkina, þá skaltu snúa til útsuðrs […]. Þaðan skultu ríða á fjall þat er meir veit til suðrs. En þá þú hefur ríðit þat þrjá daga, þá muntu koma at dal nǫkkurum. Þar mun skógr mikill ok mun þá liggja af brautinni launstígr nǫkkurr til hægri hendar.* (Vilhjálms saga sjóðs, ch. 20, pp. 41–42)

> Astrinomia replies: "My advice is for you to head to Egypt and from there westwards to Africa, then Lybia. […] When you have come across the woods, then you should turn south-west […]. From there, you will have to ride along the mountain that verges more to the south. After riding there for three days, you will come to a valley. There lies a huge forest with a secret trail off the road on the right.

The geographic knowledge provided by the women is remarkably condensed, so that the space of the saga comes close to the idea of *Weltbild im Kopf* mentioned by Kugler in regard to medieval maps. The space of *Vilhjálms saga* and many other Icelandic *riddarasögur* is abstract and intellectual, resembling a mental map drawn from the point of view of a scholar looking at a *mappa mundi* from above. Astrinomia's description has a narrative purpose and does not aim to carry any practical information.

The space of *Es* is equally intellectual and mentally organised, insofar as the seven adventures are given a concentric structure that does not seem accidental. Although their temporal coordinates are clearly defined as one year, the actual descriptions of the knight's

[22] Barnes 2014, p. 75.
[23] For Ermlaug's itinerary, see *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, ch. 23, pp. 51–52.

movements on the saga's hypothetical world map are sketchy and similar to one another. The swiftness of the characters' trips is not plausible and almost no references to the real world are provided. Thus, the world of *Es* is not the actual world, but rather a miniaturised canvas on which the author has full control and poietic potential.[24]

Reasoning in Lefebvrian categories, the settings of *Es* may be described as the quintessence of representation of space, which means the kind of space produced on a purely intellectual level by the cultural élite of a given society. Further reflections on the identity of this élite in Iceland are addressed below.[25] What is most noteworthy in the case of *Es* is the overall rationalisation of space achieved through both *entrelacement* and concentricity. While the single adventures of Ector's knights are affected by unlikelihood and speediness, the precise arrangement of the single episodes refutes the doubt of a lack of authorial attention to the overall design of fictional space.

Not all knights at Ector's court are set to face the same obstacles, and variation does impact the length of some adventures, with Vernacius's and Aprival's being of markedly different length from the others. Still, a clear spatial organisation emerges, as the path that each knight takes is made of fixed narrative units that may be listed as follows:

Departure → Forest → Short detour → City/Stronghold → Return trip

Whilst the departures and return trips usually occupy the space of a line or two, the other steps of the knights' quests deserve further analysis.

*6.3.2.1 The Forest (*Skógr / Mǫrk*)*

Every knight in Ector's retinue rides through thick forests at first. It must be taken for granted, due to the different characteristics of each trip, that each of them travels in a different direction after the departure. This is implicitly confirmed by the author's comment on the superiority of the east over the north in reference to Aprival's journey.

Despite the different directions, every character has to surpass at least one forest in order to proceed, as they all ride together into the woods beside Ector's castle before taking their separate ways. This landmark defines the first step in the building of the saga's concentric

[24] The prologue of *Vilhjálms saga* may be easily integrated into *Es* as well. Here, the writer seems to admit the alteration of geographical references, claiming that the unlearned audience would not be able to tell the difference, and only a few educated readers might notice the lack of verisimilitude (*Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, ch. 1, pp. 3–4). As the detachment from the real world and the abstraction of the saga's space might be an authorial deliberation in *Vilhjálms saga*, there is no reason to exclude a similar approach in *Es*.
[25] See Conclusions.

model. The outside world is the destination, while Ector's castle remains the reference point and the pole of attraction where all are supposed to return to after a year. A graphic rendition of the amount of spatial information provided so far may be drawn as follows:

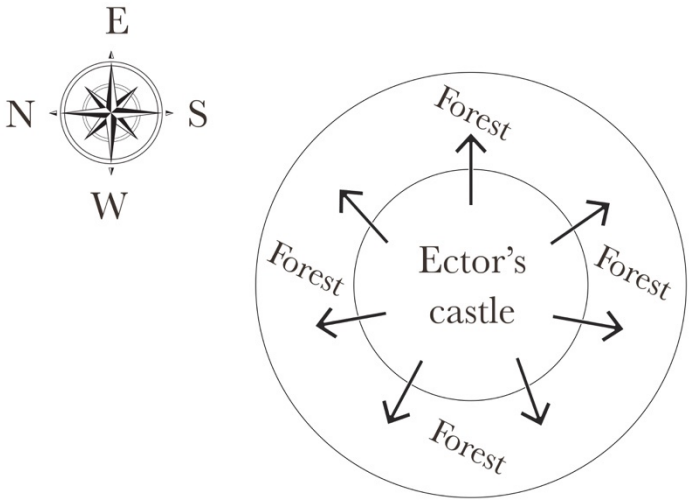

Figure 14 – A forest as the first step of the concentric structure

The arrows represent the seven knights and the possible paths they might have taken from Ector's castle. Only the trips of Aprival and Ector are given precise cardinal directions. The choice of placing the east at the top of the map is coherent with the typical configuration of Isidorian maps and the evaluation offered by the saga itself about this cardinal point.

It may be observed that, by making the forest a compulsory stopover in all cases, the knights' adventures not only become concentric with regard to Ector's castle, but they also appear symmetrical with one another. Another element of symmetry is the presence of clearings (*rjóðr*) in the thick of the forests, where the characters are set to face various types of adversaries or helpers. Again, most knights experience the space of the clearing, and even those who do not still maintain this scheme and keep the forest as their first destination. Vernacius is the first knight to depart. He enters a forest and comes to a clearing where a sort of *locus amoenus* welcomes him:

> *Hann reið á <u>þrongvan skóg</u> ok lá úti margar nætur hittandi mǫrg háskasamlig dýr ok vann þau yfir með ágætum drengskap ok í fǫgru veðri einn dag kemr hann í rjóðr eitt. Þar var blómlig jǫrð með ilmandi jurtum en í miðju rjóðrinu stóð berg eitt með hvítum marmara.* (Es, ch. 5, pp. 91–92)

> He rides through a thick forest and lies in the open for many nights, while encountering many dangerous animals that he overcomes with great courage. One day in fine weather he comes to a clearing with fertile land and sweet-smelling herbs. In the middle of the clearing stands a rock wall of white marble.

Here, he gets to enjoy the pleasure of drinking from a vessel of water that tastes like wine. The water has the power of making him feel cheerful but not drunk. His behaviour causes the wrath of the vessel's giant owner. Vernacius is eventually taken as prisoner and thrown into a dungeon at Nocerus's stronghold.

Florencius is said to ride in a forest for three days:

> *Þar er nú til at taka at Florencius ríðr fram á einn skóg myrkvann ok þrongvan. Ríðr hann svá þrjá daga at eigi er getit hans afreka. Þann tíma er dimma tók um kvǫldit hins þriggja dags ok nátta tekr mjǫk stígr hann af hesti sínum ok kippir sǫðli.* (Es, ch. 6, p. 98)

> It is now time to relate that Florencius rides across a thick dark forest. He rides for three days, so that no accomplishment of his is recorded [during this time]. When darkness takes over the evening on the third day, and the night starts to fall, he dismounts from his horse and removes the saddle.

It is not clear whether he has reached a clearing at this point, although it might be the case. The above-suggested pattern does not change, as the clearing is simply not mentioned, though it remains a plausible setting for the knight to find rest.[26] During his sleep, Florencius receives a whalebone from a lady, most likely in a dream vision. Runes are carved in it bearing Silvia's request for help.[27]

Fenacius is the third knight. He rides through a forest for days until he comes to a clearing:

[26] The clearing may have various functions in the corpus of Icelandic *riddarasögur*. It is the space where natural and supernatural usually intersect, although the nature of these encounters may vary. One may face challenges, e.g. the board game of Vilhjálmr against a giant (*Vilhjálms saga*, pp. 11–21), wilderness and violence, especially repressed sexual impulses, e.g. the rape witnessed by Fenacius (*Es*, p. 107), or magic objects, e.g. the vessel found by Vernacius (*Es*, p. 92). The clearing as a resting place is featured also in *Ssþ* and *Valdimars saga* (p. 55). On sexual violence in *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2016. For more information on the clearing as a typical feature of romances, see Saunders 1993, and for a recent geocritical perspective, see Murrieta-Flores and Howell 2017, pp. 45–49.

[27] Interestingly, despite the alleged antiquity of the setting, the indigenous culture of the author finds its way into the narrative in small details such as the magic whalebone.

Fenacius skilr við sína lagsmenn ríðandi svá marga daga um þykkvar merkr ok þrongva skóga þar til sem at kvǫldi eins dags kemr hann fram at einu rjóðri. (Es, ch. 7, p. 107)

Fenacius leaves his companions and rides for many days through large and thick woods until one evening he comes to a clearing.

Here, Fenacius manages to save the daughter of the dwarf Atokurs from an abuser. This will grant Fenacius a precious reward in equipment.

Alanus rides through the forest for seven days. Once he has come to a clearing, he sees a building and twelve knights who threaten him.

Er nú þar til at taka at fram á skóginn ríðr riddari Alanus ríðandi svá sjǫ daga […]. Rétt þar til sem árla um einn morgun kemr hann í eitt rjóðr. Hann sér hvar stendr einn skáli harðla stór ok ramgǫrr ok váru eikr sveigðar saman til hans. Úti fyrir skalanum eru tólf menn. Þeir eru allir gildir ok sterkligir. (Es, ch. 9, pp. 114–15)

The knight Alanus rides through the forest for seven days in a row […]. Early one morning he comes to a clearing, where he sees a huge shed. Large oaks were bended towards it. Outside the building are twelve men, all valiant and strong.

By mid-day, Alanus is said to have slain all of them. Their leader gives him a gold ring before dying.

Trancival is not explicitly placed in a clearing, although he ends up in an open space that may be compared to one, which is a shore by the woods. While riding in this land between the sea and the trees, the knight hears the noise of a fight between a dragon and a lion.

Einn dag kemr hann fram þar er á aðra hlíð er honum sjór en aðra svá þrongr skógr. […] Þá heyrði hann gný ógurligan ok brak mikit í skóginn svá jǫrðin skalf en eikurnar lǫgðusk niðr at jǫrðu. […] Fram af mǫrkinni flýgr einn dreki ógurligr frýsandi eitri svá jǫrðin ok skógrinn sortnaði. (Es, ch. 10, pp. 122–23)

One day he [Trancival] finds himself riding between the sea on one side and a forest on the other. […] At this point, he hears a terrible noise in the forest, so that the earth starts shaking, and the trees fall down to the ground. […] From the woods flies an awful dragon. He is spewing a poison that darkens both the ground and the trees.

Consistent with the motif of the dragon killed to save a lion, the grateful animal will follow Trancival and fight beside him for a while.

As regards Aprival, it is known that he will not return to Ector on time. Still, his trip follows much the same pattern as the others. He decides to ride north, since the protagonist chose the east, and Aprival knows that he is supposed to serve Ector as the north serves the east.[28] He encounters a forest before reaching a great city:

> *Nú forstǫð Aprival at svá sem norðrit þjónar austrinu var hann ok svá Ector á hendr fólginn stefnandi í þá meginnætt ok skildusk með miklum kærleik. Aprival reið nú um þrǫngvar gǫtur ok þykkva skóga ok kom fram í eitt hérað ok sá þar eina borg sterka.* (Es, ch. 13, p. 134)
>
> Now Aprival understands that, so as the north serves the east, he entrusts himself to Ector by taking the northern direction. The two of them say goodbye with great charity. Aprival now rides through narrow paths and thick forests until he reaches a region from where he can see a strong city.

Ector himself rides through the forest for the first part of his trip. No clearing is mentioned, but the action point is still placed right outside the woods.

> *Hér hefr upp hinn sjǫundi atburðr af ferðum herra Ectors sem hann skildisk við sína félaga stefnandi í þá ætt er austr er ríðanda til þess at hann kom fram af skógi í fritt hérað ok fjǫlbygt.* (Es, ch. 19, p. 152)
>
> Here begins the seventh account of the travels of Ector, as he parts from his companions and follows the eastern direction until he comes out of the forest into a peaceful and thickly inhabited land.

6.3.2.2 The Short Detour

At this point of most adventures – in fact, all except Vernacius's – at least one short detour is added, usually in the shape of a small village, a farm, or a castle where the protagonists decide to spend the night or gather support and information. It is clear that whatever building the characters come across, it is not their final destination.

[28] The passage is at the basis of what Schäfke (2013, pp. 149–52) defines *Ost-Nord-Hierarchisierung*, i.e. the hierarchisation of east and north, where Ector takes the dominant position, and one of the topologic macro-structures detected by Schäfke within the saga's world.

In Florencius's adventure, the knight stops at Kaldanus's camp right outside the great stronghold of King Tirannus in Liguria. Here, the knight overturns a statue of Mohammed right outside the enemy's tent. The scene serves as a preparation for the upcoming battle against the Muslim army. It is the most original detour, as it features a military camp, where Florencius does not stay overnight:

> *[Florencius] ríðr sem ákafligast þar til hann kemr burt af skóginum. […] Hann lítr hvar ein borg stendr svá langt ber stærð yfir aðrar. […] Útan um hana var skipat landtjoldum ok váru øll svǫrt at lít. Hann sér hvar stendr eitt tjald þat er øllu var mest. Fyrir dyrum var Mauments líkneski með miklum hagleik smíðat.* (Es, ch. 6, pp. 99–100)
>
> [Florencius] rides at great speed until he comes far from the woods. […] He sees a stronghold bigger than others. […] A camp of black tents is set up all around it, and a skilfully made statue of Mohammed is standing in front of the door of the biggest one.

When Fenacius comes out of the woods, he stops at a small village (*þorp*) from which he can see the city of King Romulus:

> *Léttir eigi fyrr en hann kemr fram af skóginum, sér hann þá upp hefjask eina stóra borg með gyltum hnǫppum ok glæstum turnum. […] Hann ríðr nú at þorpi einu í nánd skóginum.* (Es, ch. 8, p. 112)
>
> [Fenacius] does not stop until he has come out of the forest, when he sees a big city rising with gilded cupolas and shining towers. […] He rides to a small village in the vicinity of the woods.

Here, the knight is welcomed and helped by a man called Platus.

After defeating the twelve knights in the forest, Alanus rides out and sees a humble farmhouse (*lítinn bæ*). From there, the knight can admire great cities in a fair landscape:

> *Um kvǫldit seint kemr hann fram af mǫrkinni. Þá sér hann hvar eru stórar borgir ok væn héruð. Undir skóginum sér hann standa lítinn bæ. Hann ríðr þangat.* (Es, ch. 9, p. 116)
>
> Late in the evening, he comes out of the woods and sees great strongholds on a fine landscape. Right by the forest he sees a small farmhouse, so he rides there.

An old man in a dark cape welcomes Alanus at the farm. His name is Claudius, and he tells Alanus that the kingdom of Nafaria, where they are standing, is in danger.

In the adventure of Trancival, he exits the forest and meets twelve men running out of a great city. Two brothers are leading the group. They tell Trancival the story of how the local king has been usurped by Lutrektor, and how they have decided to leave the king's company. They invite Trancival to their father's castle (*kastali*) close by. Trancival's detour does not involve a *þorp* or *bær*, but it still consists of a place between the forest and a stronghold where he gets rest and support:

> *Nú sér hann ríða af borginni tólf men […]. Annar þeirra svarar blíðliga: "[…] Eftir þessa svívirðing vildum við ekki lengr með kongi vera ok ætlum nú heim at ríða í okkarn kastala. Vil ég nú biðja yðr en góði riddari at þú fylgir okkr heim í kastala ok sitjir þar svá lengi sem þér líkjar".* (Es, ch. 10, pp. 127–28)
>
> He [Trancival] sees twelve men riding out of the city […]. One of them replies cheerfully: "[…] After this disgrace we did not want to stay with the king any longer and are going back home to our castle. I want to ask you, good knight, to follow us to the castle and stay there for as long as you wish".

Aprival also reaches a strong city at the end of his trip, although he decides to take lodging at a village (*þorp*) before searching for adventure:

> *[Hann] kom fram í eitt hérað ok sá þar eina borg sterka ok var þá dagr liðinn. Reið hann þá til þorps eins ok tók sér náttstað.* (Es, ch. 13, p. 134)
>
> By the end of the day, he arrives in a region where he sees a strong city. He rides now to a small village where he takes lodging.

Aprival is given important information by the host about how he can test his knightly skills. He spends a night at the village before riding into the city. In fact, this is not the only detour in Aprival's adventure. After helping Duke Egeas against an army from *Bláland*, the knight is told about King Troilis of Mesopotamia and decides to go there and enter his court in disguise. Before actually meeting Troilis, who lives in a large city with gilded towers, Aprival stops at a village (*þorp*) close by for the night, thus duplicating the previous scene.

Ector's travels northwards continue with the knight coming out of the woods and seeing a farm (*bær*) on a fair and thickly populated landscape:

Einn reisugan bæ sér hann ok átti þar at ráða einn burgeiss. Sá bær stendr undir skóginum. (Es, ch. 19, p. 152)

He [Ector] sees a big farmhouse at the end of the forest, owned by a burgess.

Ector spends the night there, before being told about a place far away where he can distinguish himself.

Since all characters except for Vernacius make a short detour before reaching the stronghold and completing their journey, another level may be added to the concentric configuration presented above (*fig. 15*).

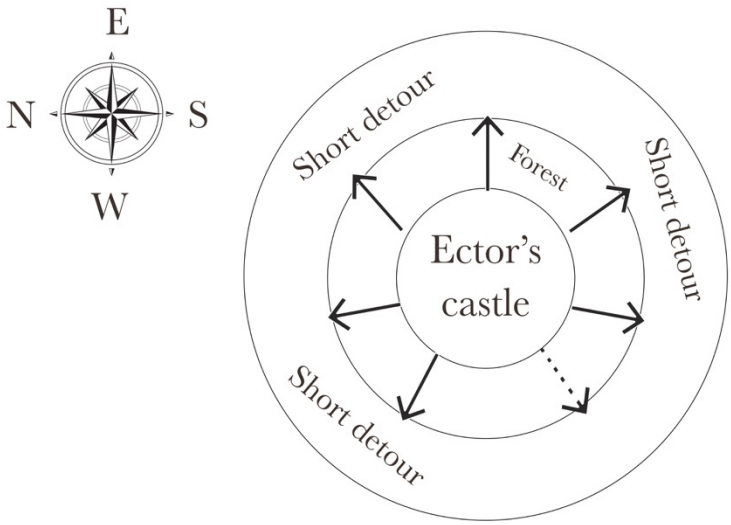

Figure 15 – A short detour as second step of the concentric structure

Here, one of the vectors is dashed, corresponding to Vernacius, who skips a short stop before the stronghold but is still included in the same concentric pattern. Setting Vernacius in the very opposite direction from Ector is a graphic solution that underlines his position in Ector's retinue, that is, the least valuable and farthest knight from the hero, as explicitly stated in the text.[29]

*6.3.2.3 The City / Stronghold (*Borg*)*

The last step of each knight's journey consists of a challenge that takes place in a city (or a fortress or stronghold). The Icelandic word is always *borg*, which would refer to both a

[29] *Es*, ch. 5, p. 91.

large fortified building and a city in medieval times. The recurring idea for both meanings is that of a definite space, clearly enclosed and protected by a wall (*borgarmúr*). *Borgir* are the final destinations of each character since they represent the occasion to face the power of other noble knights and kings. In addition, they can hope to find a bride at those foreign courts.

These fortified environments have already been hinted at before in the text, as they are usually visible from the intermediate places (villages, farms, camps, or castle) that function as preparations for the upcoming challenges. Graphically speaking, the stronghold represents the third and final layer of *Es*'s concentric pattern. After the conclusion of their respective adventures, Ector's knights are expected to come back to the spatial and symbolic centre of the saga, which means reuniting with their leader at the castle.

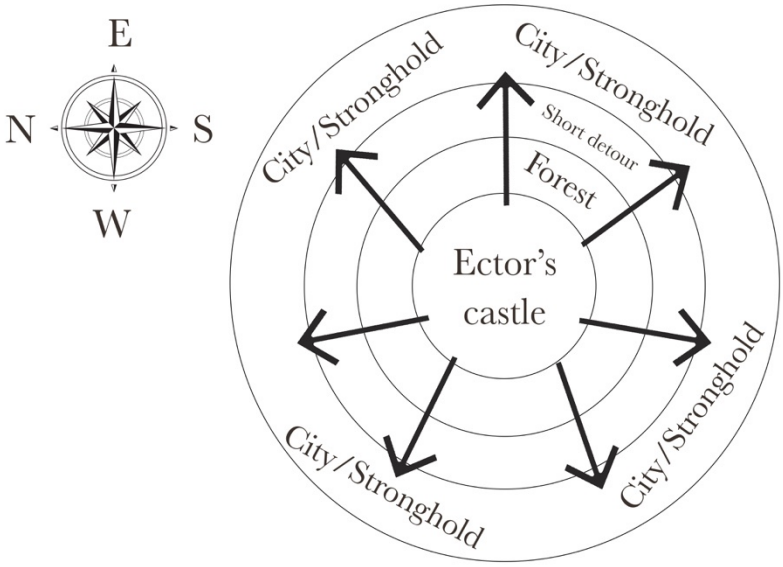

Figure 16 – Borg *as the last step in the concentric structure*

Even if Florencius's episode slightly varies from the other ones, the key elements of the spatial configuration are all featured, namely the forest (*skógr*), the short detour (the camp of *landtjǫld*), the closeness to the final destination – Tirannus's stronghold (*borg*) is clearly visible from the Muslim camp –, and the preparatory function of the events taking place at this point. By damaging the statue, Florencius provokes Kaldanus and somehow openly declares the hostility that will lead to the battle on the morning after. The scene acquires an ironic character in the light of the Islamic prohibition to idolatry (Aniconism), which is generally interpreted as the prohibition to the artistic representation of human figures.

In the case of Fenacius, the stronghold of King Romulus is the target. Here, after defeating the snake, the knight gets to reach the king and marry his daughter Mábil before travelling back to Turkey.

Alanus, after leaving the man with the dark cape, arrives at the king's strongholds (*borgir*), where he wins a tournament and is joined by another knight. With his help, Alanus manages to kill the she-wolf that has been threatening the realm. Her enchanters are also defeated, so that the knight is highly praised and offered the hand of the king's daughter.

Trancival's adventure continues with him finally riding into the city (*borgin*) and defeating the man who has subjugated the king. After a quarrel with the knight, Trancival is offered the position of counsellor. The two of them fight together against King Tírus of Libya. Finally, Trancival asks for the king's daughter's hand instead of gold.

As regards Aprival, since his journey duplicates the village-city narrative, he reaches two cities in the course of his adventure, first the *borg sterk* where Duke Egeas dwells, then the city/stronghold (*borg*) of King Tróílis of Mesopotamia, where he enters in disguise as a merchant called Valentinus. Here, Aprival is welcomed warmly but, as he dares to mock the king, he has to face Tróílis's men in a tournament. After being locked into a dungeon, the knight is set free by the king's daughter Trobil. She replaces him with a thrall, who eventually dies. Aprival remains hidden for so long that he does not show up at the appointment with Ector.

As mentioned above, Vernacius, the first knight who departs from Ector's castle, does not ride along the exact same path as his companions. In fact, Vernacius's adventure does not feature any short detour between the forest (*skógr*) and the stronghold (*borg mjǫk há ok ramlig*), though it is still adaptable to the concentric structure given above. The knight simply misses one step (the village/farmhouse) on an otherwise symmetrical journey. The narrator interferes directly by stating that the knight is considered the lowest among Ector's retinue:

> *Ríðr nú sinn veg hver þeirra. Skulum vér fyrst segja frá þeim er minnst háttaðr er reiknaðr er Vernacius hét.* (Es, ch. 5, p. 91)
>
> Now they all go their own way. We should first tell the story of the knight who is considered the least significant of them. He was called Vernacius.

Could this be the reason why Vernacius's trip was shortened compared to the other six? If the length of the trip could be indicative of the continuous attempt of valorous knights to find challenges and, therefore, test their prowess and skills, it might make sense for the author to

abandon Vernacius's perspective rather quickly.[30] Moreover, he is the only knight who exits the forest as a prisoner and reaches the whereabouts of his main adversary in chains. The intervention of Almaria, who sets Vernacius free and provides him with the sword to kill the giant, seems to foreshadow the similar scene in Aprival's adventure. Unlike Aprival, though, Vernacius is the farthest from Ector's greatness. Although it is true that Aprival also needs help in order to escape, and that he does not make it on time for the meeting, it is also true that his knightly value and his bond with Ector are especially highlighted by the author.

It is interesting to notice the structural unbalance between the farthest and the closest knight from Ector. The former is interrupted in his voyage and does not get to complete the otherwise typical itinerary of Ector's knights. On the other hand, the latter's adventure is affected by the duplication of the village-stronghold/city scene. This might in fact be explained by the desire to underline Aprival's value (he overcomes two challenges) in comparison to Vernacius's mediocrity (he overcomes no challenge). The presence of a helping lady in both adventures only makes this comparison more evident. Finally, Aprival's importance is confirmed by his role of intermediary between Ector and his future bride.

Trobil, the princess of Mesopotamia, daughter of Tróílis and sister of Eneas, was seen as a key figure by Hendrik Lambertus in his analysis of *Es*.[31] Lambertus recognised the recurring bipolar structure of many Icelandic *riddarasögur*. He made a list of oppositional poles, such as inside and outside, self and other, and centre and margin at the bases of the narratives. Despite this recognition, however, Lambertus tried to deconstruct – or better, expand and deepen – this bipolar dialectic by proposing a mirrored structure instead. In this structure, the hero does not only have to face enemies and otherness outside of his court, but he might also end up facing a specular projection of his own self.

Es is taken as example of the hero mirroring himself into the other, specifically the figure of Eneas of Mesopotamia, descendant of Priamus and the Trojan warriors, just like Ector. Eneas and his six followers may represent a symmetrical counterpart to Ector, as "two princes of the same origin face each other as representatives of otherness from each other's point of view".[32] In fact, Eneas is not depicted as a negative figure, although the clash between the two armies seems unavoidable once Ector reaches Mesopotamia. In *fig. 17*, the specular constellations of knights around Eneas and Ector are depicted. In this case, the centres of the

[30] The saga seems to link the value of a knight with the number of adventures he experiences (*freista riddaraskapar*). When Aprival decides to leave the land of Duke Eneas, he is motivated by the desire to test his prowess and collect stories to tell his companions: "Svá at hann mætti fram bera nǫkkur ævintýr þá hann finnr sína félaga" (*Es*, ch. 15, p. 137) (So that he might relate some adventures when he meets his companions).
[31] Lambertus 2009.
[32] Lambertus 2009, p. 555.

spatial polarisations bear the symbol '±' because of the ambivalent evaluation that the knights receive as descendants of the Trojan ancestry.

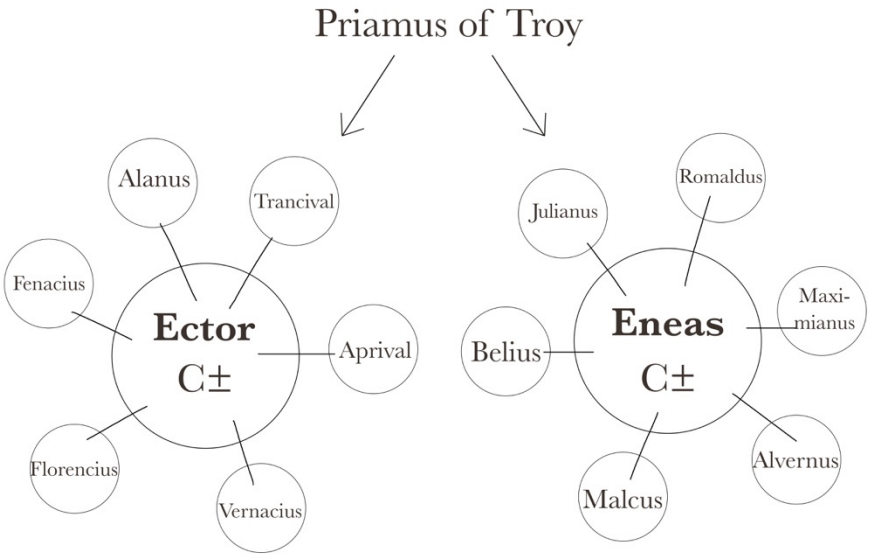

Figure 17 - The polarised constellations of Priamus's descendants and their retinues

Despite the nobility attributed to Eneas, Ector's specular *self* needs to be somehow accepted and integrated in ways other than war for a balance between the poles to be established. The solution of the author is to introduce the mediation of a female figure and, subsequently, a wedding, which is the typical vehicle of conflict resolution and alliance forging in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*. The figure of Trobil enters the scene and reaches Ector in order to negotiate Eneas's liberation. Her arrival is described as such a splendid parade that Ector's men imagine two suns shining in the sky:

> *En er menn Ectors sjá það ætluðu þeir tvær sólir mundu á himnum en eldr logandi mundi úr lopti koma* (Es, ch. 26, p. 182)
>
> But when Ector's men saw that, they reckoned that two suns were in the sky, and that a burning fire would come from the air.

The comparison between Ector and the sun is evident, inasmuch as his knights appear as rays departing from the same source of light (*fig. 12*). It is interesting to notice the author's choice of proposing the image of a doubled sun with regard to Trobil's appearance, as if she functioned as a substitute of Eneas in the polarised constellation of power shown by *fig. 17*.

Trobil takes her brother's place temporarily and, thanks to the grace credited to her figure, manages to solve the conflict. This way, she becomes a second sun in the sky and a second centre of gravity in the spatial organisation of the saga.[33]

In conclusion, Lambertus imagines *Es* as the result of a much more complex spatial architecture than the simple dichotomy of inside and outside. This perspective is endorsed in this chapter. My analysis, while highlighting the concentric structure of the saga rather than its polarisation, still addresses it as a confirmation of *Es*'s multifaceted spatial design. As much as *Ssþ*, the text sets up two conflicting poles which are both geopolitical (Partia vs. Mesopotamia) and defined by family relations (Ector vs. Eneas, both of Trojan ancestry). Each saga gives special emphasis to a different mode of representation which is, however, part of the same symbolic understanding of space. By establishing precise spatial patterns, *Ssþ* and *Es* convey similar ideas on what it takes to make a perfect knight.

6.4 The Spatial Semantics of Chivalry: *Ectors saga* vs. *Sigurðar saga þögla*

With the analysis of the first two case studies, the ways in which the semantics of narrative space can correspond, to a great extent, to the semantics of chivalry and its specific value system, was explored. In order to make their stories meaningful, both *Sigurðar saga þögla* and *Ectors saga* apply modes of spatial representation that are consistent with the code of spatial production shared in late medieval Europe. *Ssþ* mostly relies on spatial polarisation by constructing a notable portion of its plot on a clear set of dichotomies (Lixion and Saxland, Lafrans and Lodivikus, Sigurðr and his brothers, Sedentiana and her suitors, ascension and downfall, etc.). On the other hand, *Es* designs a concentric world in order to glorify its role model. This may reflect the different starting points of the two protagonists. While Ector's value is established ever since the beginning, even before his birth, Sigurðr must face further trials in order to obtain a recognition of his social status by his birth family.

Compared to *Ssþ*, the modes of spatial production in *Es* appear somewhat simpler, though no less significant or useful for the purpose. Here, the knights perform a movement outward in search for adventure, before returning to the starting point. On the other hand, *Ssþ*

[33] From a Christian perspective, the theme of the double-intercession might have played a role of inspiration for this passage of *Es*. The Virgin Mary, of whom Trobil has the beautiful traits, was believed to represent a second step on the intercession between men and God, before Jesus, who was the main intercessor. Mary would occupy an in-between position the Son and the Father as a recipient of the prayers of men, thus, a co-redemptrix. Similarly, the intervention of Trobil may recall the Virgin's function of mediator between the sinners on earth and God, thus committing to the same harmonisation and peace-making that was typical of Mary. The double-intercession theme was known in Iceland as early as 1345, as it is featured in the Marian poem *Lilja*, st. 87. See also Williams 2000.

addresses two principal movements, departing from opposite poles but pointed in the same direction (the periphery), at least initially. In this case, the outside world serves as a spatial common ground for Sigurðr and his brothers to face each the unknown. The presence of similar or identical challenges and locations is indicative.

On the other hand, the common ground of *Es* is represented by Ector's castle, as every knight takes a different direction and does not interfere with the other's endeavours. Although a second pole of attraction may be found in Mesopotamia, the reader never follows the point of view of the six knights around Eneas. In *Ssþ*, on the other hand, Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan are the main points of view for a relevant portion of the narrative. For this reason, the two sagas may be said to portray the institution of chivalry with slightly different strategies. Sigurðr, Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan not only depart from opposite centres, semantically speaking, but they are also put into direct communication during their travels (i.e. at the river Rhine). The paths of Ector's knights only unite in the end, when they come back to the castle and their leader decides to face his enemy and free his best man. Therefore, *Es* presents a spatial structure less linear than *Ssþ*, based on Ector's sole magnetism and leadership, which produce a concentric pattern.

Schäfke's analysis of *Es* takes one step further from these assumptions by proposing a pluri-centric inside vs. outside dichotomy in the text.[34] This idea is based on the fact that every solo adventure culminates in another court besides Ector's one, carrying its own values and characteristics. Schäfke sees these courts as topographical centres of their own, defined by specific features and granted an individual perspective by their nature of civilised poles in contrast with the wilderness of the forest. The Ligurian court of Tirannus or the one of Tróílis in Mesopotamia are useful representations of this pluri-centralised model, inasmuch as they are both described in terms of greatness, beauty, and strength.[35] Schäfke's multifocal perspective is interesting and does not necessarily contradict the proposal of this chapter. Still, it does seem as if the geographic and symbolic centre of the narrative revolves around Ector regardless of other minor poles that might be identified. If other poles should be found in the saga, Mesopotamia is in fact the only relevant one.

Ector and Sigurðr may be dialectically compared at least in another relevant way, as both of them find their future motivation in their young years. Ector is set to become a great

[34] Schäfke 2013, p. 153.

[35] Schäfke 2013, p. 155. On the value system of the knights and their relationship with other foreign noble figures, see Schäfke 2013, pp. 166–76. Glauser (1983, pp. 149–60) offers another analysis of *Es* by highlighting the structural elements which connect the single adventures to the Proppian model of the *Zaubermärchen* or wonder tales.

warrior long before his birth, thanks to the intervention of the Trojan Ector's ghost. *Nomen omen* says the Latin expression, which means that names can be powerful indications of someone's character and destiny. By naming Ector after the Trojan hero, his mother fulfils the prophecy of the ancient Ector about the great deeds of her son. It is the ennoblement given by the dream and the naming process that seals the future destiny of the protagonist. Ector's birth is therefore perceived as a gift, a blessing, so that his youth becomes a constructive place for him, where he can grow stronger and smarter than anyone else. At his dubbing ceremony, guests from the whole realm come to pay their respects, offer their loyalty, and bring marvellous gifts, including some legendary equipment. His retinue comes together on this occasion, made by the knights who have exceeded the others most clearly in the tournament. Finally, Ector is given a castle as a gift from his father even before proving any of his skills in the outside world, as it is normally expected of a *riddarasögur* hero.

The young Sigurðr *þögli*, on the other hand, is destined to a specular course of events, as he finds himself oppressed by the court that is supposed to nourish him in every sense. He is mocked by his relatives and sent away. His real starting point, the comfortable inside to be put in relation with the uncanny outside, is Lixion. Here, Sigurðr is able to grow up and become aware of his potential. Starting from the motif of the unpromising brother, the author of *Ssþ* seems to willingly elaborate a peculiar and original variation on the typical Arthurian structures by which *Es* is more overtly influenced. From these specular initial perspectives, and after developing two different spatial systems, the two sagas seem to be ultimately aiming at similar, if not the same, objectives: the setting of moral examples, the spread of the chivalric ideology, and the expression of actual social issues about kinship, power, and gender.

It should not be forgotten that the longer redaction of *Ssþ* is preserved in the same manuscript as the earliest fully preserved version of *Es*, namely AM 152 1 fol. The codex has been addressed by recent scholarship, including Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir, who pays particular attention to the material aspects of the texts and the implications connected to these sagas' being part of it. Jóhanna reconstructs the story of the Skarðverjar dynasty, the powerful North-western Icelandic family that allegedly commissioned the collection known as AM 152 fol. and possibly contributed to the selection of the sagas. Their influence was huge in the whole Breiðafjörður area for decades, between the end of the fifteenth and the first quarter of the sixteenth century.[36]

[36] On the possible dating of AM 152 fol. to the beginning of the sixteenth century, see Stefán Karlsson 1970.

From an aesthetic point of view, the first part of AM 152 fol. is richly decorated, which is remarkable if we consider that such well-elaborated codices were most frequently reserved to religious literature, laws, or kings' sagas, as far as we know.[37] The material conditions of AM 152 fol. may demonstrate the unusual relevance granted to texts that might be labelled as *riddarasögur*, *fornaldarsögur*, and late *Íslendingasögur*. Jóhanna believes – and convincingly argues – that the manuscript, as a commission from one of the richest and most influential families in Iceland, might have been redacted with precise ideological motivations, from the assessment of moral behaviours to the symbolic representation of personal preoccupations. More precisely, the ideological issues and literary themes presented by the texts can be grouped as follows: Monarchist ideology, Fraternal bonds and virtues, and Humanness and monstrosity.[38]

Monarchist ideology may indeed be found in the proposition of male leading figures who manage to grasp power while being surrounded by a retinue of loyal knights with no ambition to overthrow them. This point is strictly connected to the second one, which regards fraternal bonds and virtues. The loyalty showed by characters such as Ector's companions is remarkable, especially because it may respond to didactic motivations or the projection of personal issues. It is believed that AM 152 fol. was commissioned by Björn Þorleifsson (1480–1548) and his illegitimate brother Þorsteinn Þorleifsson, who supposedly corresponds to the first scribe's hand. The issues related to kinships and loyalty between family members might have appealed to the commissioners, who also faced a twenty-year long dispute about inheritance against their cousin, Björn Guðnason.[39] As members of the wealthiest layers of society, the Skarðverjar might indeed have thought about a saga collection that would both draw the interest of a large audience and also channel personal issues of the family. In the selected sagas, especially those where the fantastic elements are more abundant, the commissioners might have seen the ideal vehicles for the symbolic transmission of their ethics and worldview.

After the analysis of both *Ssþ* and *Es*, not only I agree with Jóhanna's conclusions, but it can also be added that brotherhood and fraternal loyalty are brought to the foreground by careful spatial designs. Equally relevant in the representations of *Ssþ* and *Es* are the themes of centralised power – material and symbolic – and the depiction of positive monarchic figures. Especially in the case of *Ssþ*, the monarchic ideology is accompanied by the idea that "those who keep their place will be rewarded with favour from the ruler".[40] In other words, those who

[37] Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir 2014, p. 93. AM 152 2 fol. is, on the other hand, particularly dark and difficult to read.
[38] These categories are proposed by Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir 2014.
[39] For more information on this family dispute, see Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2012.
[40] Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir 2014, p. 121.

try to break into spaces which they are not allowed to occupy will be punished. Both Sigurðr's brothers and Sedentiana may be interpreted as usurpers of spaces which they do not deserve on moral grounds. It is true that Vilhjálmr is depicted as a rather positive figure compared to Hálfdan, but their place is still behind and below Sigurðr, as symbolically expressed by the oak tree scene. Sedentiana's punishment is part of the same ideological framework. Jóhanna's considerations sound particularly appropriate in the context of *Ssþ*:

> Wisdom, foresight, moderation, loyalty and prudence are juxtaposed against hotheadedness, impulsiveness, impetuousness and lack of responsibility and self-control, personified by pairs of brothers. Thus, physical and mental aptitude do not entail success if one's disposition and behaviour is bad.[41]

Hálfdan is the perfect embodiment of the second list of behaviours. In fact, these lists refer to the entirety of contents of AM 152 fol., since Jóhanna's goal was to prove that there was a rational process behind the selection of the sagas. The sense of devotion and fraternity showed by Ector's knights is unproblematic compared to the family dynamics of *Ssþ*. Nonetheless, they convey values of moderation, wisdom, and prudence that cannot be overlooked, especially in a chivalric environment.

It is impossible to determine whether the Skarðverjar brothers might have found the religious sides of these stories appealing to either their entourage or subordinates, but it seems clear that the moral horizon of the authors of these texts was a Christian one. Although the promotion of Christian values almost never turns into ideological militancy in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, the image of chivalry that emerges is intertwined with religious evaluations. Whilst the possibility of detecting Christian symbols in Sigurðr's adventure has been addressed, *Es* still has something to reveal in this regard. At the beginning of the saga, water is sprinkled on Ector's head while he is given a name, a ritual that might recall the Catholic baptism.[42] A similar scene is described in the *fornaldarsaga Örvar-Odds saga* (late thirteenth century).[43] As pointed out by

[41] Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir 2014, p. 105.
[42] *Es*, p. 83. In fact, the motif of the dragon fighter that frees a lion is shared by *Ssþ* and *Es*. Although the latter does not feature any references to Christ, it may be argued that the motif was generally well-known by *riddarasögur* authors as a Christian symbol. Interestingly, it is not Ector who defeats the dragon in order to free the lion in *Es*, but Trancival. The grateful animal will die in battle before Trancival's return to the castle, most likely as a way for the author not to make Ector look inferior to any of his followers. As mentioned in 5.3.2.2, The Old Norse *Ívens saga* features this motif in a chivalric environment with references to God. In *Þiðreks saga* (chs. 416–18, pp. 560–64), Þiðrekr does not manage to save the animal but prays to God in the moment he attacks the dragon (cf. Kjesrud 2014, p. 244). For the lion and other heroic symbols in Icelandic art, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2017.
[43] *Örvar-Odds saga* (ch. 1, p. 4).

Fulvio Ferrari, water sprinkling was a ritual in several Indo-European cultures which might explain these scenes as memories of a pagan custom.[44] However, it is difficult to imagine that this ancient use of the ritual still had any significance to a fourteenth-century author of *riddarasögur*, who probably received a markedly Christian training, if he were not a member of the clergy himself. Assuming that he was acquainted with the antiquity of the practice, we may still see the use of it in *Es* as a foreshadowing of Christianity and a way to signal the moral value of Ector, despite him being pagan. This hypothesis is strengthened by the final remarks of the author, who states as follows:

> *Megum vér því eigi mistrúa þessu ævintýri um þann mikla bardaga, var hann í fyrsta kalendas júlí mánaðar ok váru þá til píningar heimsins lausnara þrjú hundruð vetra sjǫtíu ok sjǫ vetr ok látum vér nú hér niðr falla þessa arburði.* (Es, ch. 28, pp, 185–86)
>
> We may not therefore doubt the truth of what was told about this great battle. It took place on the first day of July, three hundred and seventy-seven years before the passion of Christ. Now we shall end the recount of these events.

The chronological contradiction is evident, as far as baptism is concerned. This might in fact confirm Ferrari's hypothesis of a pre-Christian residual. Still, I would suggest some further speculations on the matter. The processes of analogy and prefiguration was a technique adopted by literary authorities in order to make sense of pagan traditions and myths in the light of the Christian faith. Figures, places, and events were depicted as anticipations of God's plan or even Christ's life. The value of these figures was not to be put into doubt, as they often represented positive role models, only lacking the awareness that Christ brought about with his incarnation and subsequent revelation. This narrative technique was useful to medieval authors, even in Iceland,[45] since it allowed them to follow the impulse of making sense of reality by bringing contradictions back to unity, hence back to the divine plan.

The Late Middle Ages were a particularly fruitful period for these interpretations of the past, as may also be noticed in Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*. The Italian poet shows great respect for intellectual authorities of the ancient times and positive figures of the pre-Christian world. The most relevant example of this is Virgil himself, who Dante picks as his guide through Hell and Purgatory. The words that the author dedicates to Virgil convey nothing but

[44] Ferrari 1995, p. 150.
[45] Cf. Males 2013.

admiration and esteem for the pagan author.[46] Dante's attitude is indicative of the general reception of Classical authors in late medieval times. Virgil, together with other important figures of the past, did not experience the revelation of Christ and was not baptised, therefore he must be confined to the Limbo, an area of Hell where the punishments are mitigated for all those who did not receive the first sacrament but were still examples of integrity and wisdom. The same area is said to be occupied by the new-borns who were not washed clean of the original sin through baptism.

Therefore, baptism is a first criterium for the establishment of who is worthy to reach Heaven and who is not. Limbo is imagined as an instrument to make sense of the contradictions underlying the existence of such exemplary men in pagan times. The poet seeks a negotiation between the post-Revelation world and the ancient one, which in many senses is seen as the seed of the Christian one. In Canto IV of *Inferno*, the list of Latin and Greek authorities (such as Socrates, Plato, Cicero, and Ovid) or legendary figures (such as Eneas and Hector) confined to the Limbo is long. An anonymous fourteenth-century commentator to Dante's *Commedia* introduces this Canto as follows:

> *Quivi tratta de la pena de' non battezzati e de' valenti uomini, li quali moriron innanzi l'avvenimento di Gesù Cristo e non conobbero debitamente Idio.* (Inferno, IV)[47]
>
> Here, [Dante] addresses the punishment of those who were not baptised and the valiant men who died before the advent of Jesus Christ and, therefore, did not know God properly.

This interpretative technique roots back to 'typology', a theological doctrine that defines the figures or events of the Old Testament as types (or anti-types) of events or aspects related to Christ and the contents of the New Testament in general. This approach started at the dawn of the Catholic doctrine, as it was endorsed by Church Fathers like St. Paul and St. Augustine and was still largely employed in the later Middle Ages.[48] It is safe to say that the success of this interpretative approach had an impact on the reception of Classical antiquity, as well. Moreover, the popularity of typology suggests that it was not a prerogative of Dante's

[46] *Inferno*, I, 85–87.
[47] The passage is included in Giorgio Petrocchi's 1994 edition of the text.
[48] On this doctrine, see Goppelt 1982. For the distinction between allegory and typology, see Martens 2008. Typology and figuration are also addressed by Northrop Frye (1990 [1957]) with regard to both religious and poetic literature.

Commedia.[49] In fact, figurative speech was considered one of the fundamentals of medieval composition (*enarratio*), part of the interpretative aspect of the Latin *Grammatica*, which was a part of the seven liberal arts so often mentioned in indigenous *riddarasögur*.[50]

The necessity and desire to make sense of all history the framework of Christian theology was shared by medieval Icelandic authorities such as Snorri Sturluson.[51] Suggesting traces of a divine plan in a Christian sense in the myths of the past indicates a precise way of conceiving space and time. The concepts of creation and salvation history changed the perspective of medieval men on the progression of time and the spatial configuration of the world. St. Augustine saw some degree of reflection of God's design in every aspect of the space surrounding men. These signs were not always clear or intelligible, especially in pre-Christian times, but they had always been there, as God had always been there since the beginning of time. This allegorical understanding of space did not allow authors such as Snorri to make explicit references to this divine plan in apparently pagan contexts, that is, before the actual revelation. Allegory was not just a way for medieval authors to both create and interpret, but it was also a way to imitate God's act of filling Creation with hidden signs, the same ones mentioned by the author of *Ssþ* with regard to Flóres. Medieval symbolism is legitimated by this 'matrix of general analogy', as defined by Guerreau-Jalabert, according to which everything recalls everything, physics recalls metaphysics, and multiplicity and contradictions recall the unity of God's perfect mind.[52]

In the case of *Es*, it makes sense to suggest the application of these narrative strategies that were most likely well-known to learned Icelanders, as well. The Ector of *Es* is not a historical figure, but neither are some of the names listed by Dante in his Limbo, including the Trojan Hector himself. Ector is a *figura*, a fictional character with a purpose, that is to recall the values of chivalry and, at the same time, demonstrate that God's plan has always been the decisive factor in the human experience, even three hundred years before Christ. Ector, like

[49] Dante's theological discourse is focused on the concept of *figura* (form, shape, or figure), which can be compared to the typological doctrine. For instance, Beatrice, who guides him through the Heavens, has been interpreted as a figuration of Christ by Dante's criticism, e.g. White (1988, p. 269): "Dante used the notion [of *figura*] as a structural principle of his *Commedia*, in which a life lived here on earth is treated as a figure of an immanent 'meaning' finally made manifest only in a future (beyond time and space, after death)". On Dante's figurative language, see also Wiles 2015.

[50] The so-called *figúrur* were transmitted to Iceland as part of the exegesis (e.g. *Málskrúðsfræði* and Fourth Grammatical Treatise), thus within the primary sources of Scholastic education. They are defined as literary representations of vices and virtues that could be found in the Bible. As narrative tools, they are considered important for the training of medieval poets and authors. For more information, see Patzuk-Russell 2021, pp. 4–23.

[51] Scholars such as Jan van Nahl (2013) and Gunnar Harðarson (2016a) should be mentioned for their research on the symbolic and theological implications of Snorri's cosmographies.

[52] Cf. 2.2.

other heroes of the past, may be read as a prefiguration of the moral principles shared by the saga's author and readers, who were probably comforted by this correspondence. For these reasons, the classical world as a reference point for *Es* is not dystonic after all. The legendary Hector of the dream is part of a greater scheme that tries to keep pagan antiquity and Christian present together, and so is the baptism scene.

Lars Lönnroth has defined figures like Ector "Noble Heathens", that is, "a pagan hero […] shown in a situation where he appears to be a sort of precursor, or herald, of Christianity, at the same time retaining enough of the pagan ethics to emphasise the difference between the old and the new religion".[53] Lönnroth believes that this theme reached Iceland quite early through both theological doctrine and literary models.[54] It should be noted that Ector is not explicitly associated with either paganism or Christianity, but the name-giving scene, the final lines, the destruction of Mohammed's statue at Kaldanus's camp, and Trobil's Marian traits[55] take the saga closer to the Christian belief than to any pagan reminiscences. Again, the chronological framework is incorrect since Mohammed was born hundreds of years after Christ. However, the point of the scene – and of the saga – is not verisimilitude but rather placing the characters in a precise ideological framework.[56]

As regards *Ssþ*, Sigurðr reaches the same superior position as Ector more by contrast with the other figures than through centralisation. Here, the polarising forces that form the foundation of the Roman Catholic worldview are combined with elements of the local folklore and concealed beneath an adventurous plot. The saga creates a space made of opposites and dialectic comparisons (high-low, inside-outside) that stimulates a reflection on the moral and social requisites for accessing spaces of power and moral elevation. The study of the longer redaction of *Ssþ* and of *Es* contradicts the usual criticism directed to Icelandic *riddarasögur* by showing a complexity that has little to do with simple escapism. The conclusion achieved by my analysis is that the authors of both *Ssþ* and *Es* made use of spatial patterns and narrative devices that were well-known in their learned environments in order to convey meanings that had to do with religious and social preoccupations, from the moral requirements of the guiding

[53] Lönnroth (1969, p. 2) offers examples of the kind of Catholic re-evaluation of ancient figures such as Virgilius and several other curriculum authors, stating that "patristic literature is full of theological speculation about the Christian implication of works that were originally never intended to be interpreted thusly. And one of the most popular *topoi* among writers throughout the Middle Ages was 'The Book of Nature' in which Christians and Gentiles alike could read the truths laid down for them by God" (p. 7).
[54] Lönnroth 1969, p. 11.
[55] See note 33.
[56] For more information on the attitude of Icelandic *riddarasögur* towards Islam, see Barnes 2014, pp. 113, 130.

élites to the ethics of brotherhood, the power balance between genders, and the idea of a greater plan underlying the march of history.

6.5 Brief Summary

- ⊕ While *Ssþ* addresses chivalry and brotherhood through oppositions, *Ectors saga* chooses concentricity.
- ⊕ Ector is both the real and symbolic centre of the saga. His followers depart from his castle as rays of light irradiated by the sun. Ector is described as the east.
- ⊕ The equidistance of the knights' travels is hinted at by the chronological framework. Everyone has to return to Ector in one year. The adventures are also symmetrically organised, which enhances the concentric structure. Recurring narrative units are Departure, Forest, Short Detour, City/Stronghold, and Return Trip.
- ⊕ Each storyline is connected to the other with *entrelacement*, a device of Arthurian literature that enhances structural clarity and suspense.
- ⊕ Ector's value is expressed through references to classical antiquity, i.e. his genealogy, his mother's dream and the equipment inherited from heroes of the past.
- ⊕ The spatial structure of *Es* does not only glorify Ector but also brings brotherhood and fraternal relationships to the foreground. This may explain the saga's presence in AM 152 fol. besides *Ssþ*, as pointed out by Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir.
- ⊕ Both *Ssþ* and *Es* use spatial representation to address ideological matters. The fact that the narrative worlds are either vague (*Ssþ*) or set in an ancient past (*Es*) does not make the semantics of their space less meaningful.
- ⊕ It was typical of medieval authors to interpret pre-Christian figures as precursors of Christian values. The 'Noble Heathen' type is an example of this practice in Iceland. Ector may have the same function.

7 CONDENSED SPACE: *NITIDA SAGA*

> "The most primitive of the 'sacred places' we know of constituted a microcosm […]: a landscape of stones, water, and trees. […] The 'sacred place' is a microcosm, because it *reproduces* the natural landscape; because it is a reflection of the Whole."
>
> – Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*

7.1 The Text

It is safe to say that *Nitida saga*[1] is one of the most popular indigenous *riddarasögur*, transmitted in a huge number of manuscripts ever since late medieval times. Still, like many other *riddarasögur*, *Ns* was not printed until relatively recent times affirming the generally negative criticism that the whole genre received in post-Reformation Iceland. Besides being in circulation over a long period of time, *Ns* has been one of the most popular Icelandic *riddarasögur* among modern literary critics.[2] A normalized version and translation of the text was fashioned by Sheryl McDonald Werronen in 2009, who has also dedicated her doctoral research and other publications to the saga.[3] McDonald Werronen's work is a precious source for *riddarasögur* scholars because of the exhaustive information provided on the text and its transmission, as well as the useful comparative approach involving other *riddarasögur*, mostly *Sigurðar saga þögla*, *Clári saga*, *Dínus saga drambláta*, and *Nikulás saga leikara*.[4] The edition produced by Agnete Loth is equally important, although far from exhaustive.[5]

As stated above, the objective of this work is to study the literary value and cultural implications of Icelandic *riddarasögur* through their spatial representation. Loth's edition is useful in this regard, as her text is the result of the transcription of the earliest manuscript witnesses, which means primarily AM 529 4to (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, ca. 1500–1600) and AM 537 4to (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, ca. 1600–1700). Although these are

[1] Also referred to as *Ns* hereinafter. An alternative form of the title can be found in some studies, where the protagonist's name has been adapted to the Icelandic spelling, i.e. *Nítíða saga*. However, the name is Latin, meaning clear, gleaming, or pure, and is considered indeclinable.
[2] McDonald Werronen 2009. See also Ármann Jakobsson 2015 [2009], pp. 174–82; Barnes 2006; 2014, pp. 35–40; Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir 2013; Schäfke 2013, pp. 220–25; Guðbjörg Aðalbergsdóttir 1993, pp. 49–55; Glauser 1983, pp. 75, 82–84.
[3] McDonald 2009; McDonald Werronen 2016.
[4] McDonald Werronen 2016, 20.
[5] A whole chapter could be opened on the post-medieval reception of *Ns*, which would, however, be unnecessary for the sake of the present research.

the earliest extant manuscripts of *Ns*, with AM 537 4to being used mostly to fill a lacuna in the last part of AM 529 4to, the saga is believed to have been originally composed in the fourteenth century.[6] Variant readings in Loth's edition are taken from two vellum leaves in AM 567 XVIII 4to (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, sixteenth century), the paper manuscripts AM 568 I-II 4to (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, first half of the seventeenth century), Holm papp 31 4to (Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, second half of the seventeenth century), and on one occasion Rask 32 (Copenhagen, Árnasafn í Kaupmannahöfn, second half of the eighteenth century).

The late medieval context and the unique characteristics that *Ns* bears in terms of spatial representation make it an ideal case study for the present work. Moreover, some of the younger manuscripts containing *Ns* might actually derive from an adaptation of *rímur* which are themselves indebted to the saga in its earlier form.[7] This complex transmission has led to an abundance of different versions of *Ns*, which was copied extensively all over Iceland until the first years of the past century. Therefore, most scholarship has decided to focus on the earliest manuscripts and the first known version of the story.[8] Previous investigations have pointed at north-western Iceland as the most plausible geographic origin of most extant manuscripts.[9] The present analysis was based primarily on Loth's edition of the text, with McDonald's translation and interpretation as the second most important reference point.

7.2 The Plot

The plot of *Ns* is relatively short in comparison to *Es* and relatively uncomplicated in comparison to *Ssþ*. It all starts with a graceful description of the maiden-king Nitida *hin fræga* (the Famous), who is said to rule honourably and peacefully over the kingdom of France. She is beautiful and as intelligent as the wisest scholar.

One day, Nitida sails to Apulia to meet queen Egidía, who fostered her as a kid, and her son Hléskjöldr. Here, Nitida talks to her foster-mother about an island beyond cold Sweden, by the North Pole, called Visio. It is ruled by Earl Virgilius, a wise man skilled in magic. In the middle of Visio lies an islet called Skóga-blómi (Flower of the Woods), where supernatural stones, herbs and fruit can be found. Nitida decides to sail there with Hléskjöldr despite Egidía's worries about the dangers of the trip. The couple reaches Visio and walk to the middle of the

[6] Driscoll 1993, p. 432.
[7] McDonald Werronen 2016, p. 26.
[8] McDonald Werronen (2016, p. 27) counts a total of sixty-five manuscripts of *Ns* containing slightly or remarkably different versions of the story.
[9] McDonald Werronen 2016, p. 33.

island, where they see a lake, and Skóga-blómi in the middle of it. At the centre of the islet, they see a vessel with four corners, full of water and with a stone at every corner. The maiden-king looks into the stones and sees all the regions of the world with their people and rulers, creatures and monsters. She is pleased by the view and decides to take the vessel with her, together with apples and healing herbs. Earl Virgilius notices the robbery and chases them, but he is outrun thanks to the use of the magic stones. Once in Apulia, queen Egidía gives Nitida plenty of precious gifts and agrees to let Hléskjöldur follow her to France.

Kings Hugon of Mikligarðr (Constantinople), King Soldán of Serkland, and King Blebarnius of India and their offspring are then introduced. Hugon's children are Ingi and Listalín; Soldán's ones are Logi, Vélogi and Heiðarlogi; Blebarinius's ones are Liforinus and Sýjalín. Ingi sails to Paris, where he is invited to a feast, as long as he comes in peace. He attempts to woo Nitida, who declines the offer. On its journey back home, Ingi stops on an island and meets a man called Refsteinn (Fox-Stone), skilled in witchcraft and magic. He takes the man to his ships and gives him a gold ring and twenty ells of red scarlet in exchange for help. Fox-Stone gives Ingi favourable wind to sail back to France and an invisibility cloak. Under the cloak, Ingi reaches Nitida's room, kidnaps her and takes her to Constantinople. There, a great feast is held, where the maiden-king is placed onto the highest seat. Nitida asks permission to go out and watch the stars in order to gain knowledge of people's fates, but then she waves a stone above her head and disappears. Nitida reappears in France, where she laughs about what happened with her maidens on the next day. Ingi prepares revenge.

During a plundering, Ingi meets Slægrefur (Sly-Fox), a man who claims to be just as skilled in sorcery as Fox-Stone. Ingi offers him three castles and the position of earl if he brings Nitida in his power. The maiden-king sees the whole world through her stones, including Ingi, so she can predict his coming to France. A humble bondwoman is summoned and asked to take a bath in a tub filled with the magic stones and the apples gathered on Visio. Thanks to this enchantment, she is turned into a perfect doppelganger of queen Nitida. Ingi and his men reach the maiden-king's chamber and kidnap the doppelganger, who is though made unable to speak for a month by the magic bath. After a month in Constantinople, Listalín begins to doubt about the woman's identity and enquires about her feelings after seeing her weep. The woman, who was taken away from her husband and children, revels the truth. The news about Nitida's cunning spreads in every land, and Ingi's anger brews.

At this point, Heiðarlogi and Vélogi prepare an army to sail to France from Serkland. Nitida summons all of her craftsmen and scholars, led by Ypolitus the smith, and asks them to make a glass roof with wheels to place over the main gate of her castle, on which many knights

could stand. Hléskjöldr is sent to the ships to see if the two kings come in peace. They reply that the maiden-king should marry one of them, or her land will be plundered. They are invited to separate private meetings with Nitida. Vélogi and his men go first, but the glass roof is winched over them at the gate. Nitida's men start casting projectiles and kill Vélogi. Heiðarlogi goes next but he falls into another trap. The French army runs out of the castle now, and the Serks retreat because they are without a leader. Nitida's fame grows all over the world.

King Liforinus from India goes out one day and meets a dwarf in a forest clearing. The dwarf tells the king that he should try to outwit Nitida of France and gain great fame. A decision is made that Liforinus will travel to Paris with the dwarf's support. The king gives him a gold ring as a token of gratitude. Nitida foresees Liforinus's arrival through the stones and invites him to a feast. Thanks to a magic ring provided by the dwarf, Liforinus manages to kidnap Nitida. In India, Nitida is welcomed with all ceremony by Liforinus's sister, Sýjalín. One day, while alone with Sýjalín, Nitida waves a stone over their heads and disappears, taking the Indian princess with her. The two women appear in Paris, where they start growing very fond of each other.

In the meantime, King Soldán of Serkland starts recruiting forces in order to avenge his sons. Nitida sees this through the stones and starts gathering every man who can bear arms. Both fleets meet on Kartagia, where they battle against each other until the French army loses half of its men and peace-shields are held up. However, Liforinus has now arrived and enters the battlefield with his army. Soldán and Logi are killed, while Hléskjöldr is wounded. He is taken to India, where his wounds are healed, before being sent back to Nitida.

That summer, Liforinus goes plundering and reaches Småland, where his aunt Queen Alduria reigns. She notices his sadness, so she gives him advice on how to outwit the maiden-king. He should sail to France, disguised as Eskilvarðr, son of the king of Mundia, and spend the winter there. A gold ring will make sure that Liforinus is not recognized by anyone. For the whole winter, Liforinus, as Eskilvarðr, entertains Nitida and Sýjalín with music and stories, so that the maiden-king decides to show him the whole world through the stones. By doing this, the maiden-king realizes that King Liforinus is nowhere to be found and that Eskilvarðr must be him in disguise. Liforinus is now accepted at the court with joy and the marriage agreements are made.

After hearing these tidings, King Ingi grows angrier and decides to attack again. The Byzantine Emperor moves his troops to France, while Liforinus organizes his forces to defend the kingdom. After three days of violent battle for both armies, Liforinus challenges Ingi to a duel. Ingi accepts, but he is eventually defeated. His wounds are healed by Sýjalín, who knows

more than the most excellent doctors. Three marriages are then arranged, between Liforinus and Nitida, Hléskjöldr and Listalín, and Ingi and Sýjalín. A great celebration is held for a month. Nitida and Liforinus have handsome children, including Ríkon, who will rule France with honour.

7.3 Modes of Spatial Representation

While Chapters Five and Six examined spatial representation applied to concepts such as brotherhood, kinship, and chivalry, this third and last contribution will explore space through the eyes of a female protagonist. The particular perspective makes a short premise on her figure essential for the later disclosure of the saga's spatial patterns. Nitida the Famous has much in common with the other queen encountered in the course of this research. Like Sedentiana, Nitida rules over France. Similarly, Nitida is a maiden-king, famous all over the world not only for her beauty but also for the spiteful treatment of suitors. Both Nitida and Sedentiana own magic stones that allow them a view of the whole world.[10] In fact, both characters might have been inspired by the figure that is considered the first example of a maiden-king in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, namely Séréna of *Clári saga*. The first aspect of Nitida that draws the attention is the overall positive description she enjoys compared to other maiden-kings. Since her introduction, physical traits recalling sanctity and purity are associated with her. Moreover, she does not undergo any kind of humiliation or punishment for her boastful rejection of wooers. On the contrary, she seems to find in Liforinus her equal in many respects. She is loved by her people and rules gracefully over her land, as the first lines of the saga point out:

> *Heyrt ungir men eitt ævintýr ok fagra frásaga hinum frægasta meykóngi er verit hefr í norðr hálfu veraldarinnar er hét Nitida hin fræga […]. Hún var bæði vitur ok væn, ljós ok rjóð í andlíti þvílíkast sem hin rauða rósa væri samtemprat vit snjóhvíta lileam, augun svá skær sem karbunkulus, hǫrundit svá hvítt sem fíls bein, hár þvílíkt sem gull, ok féll niðr á jǫrð um hana. Hún átti eitt hǫfuðgull með fjórum stǫplum, en upp af stǫplunum var einn ari markaðr, en upp af aranum stóð einn haukr ger af rauða gulli, breiðandi sína vængi fram yfir hennar skæra ásjónu jungfrúinnar at ei brenndi hana sól. Hún var svá búin at viti sem hinn fróðasti klerkr, ok hinn sterkasta borgarvegg mátti hún gera með sínu viti yfir annara manna vit ok byrgja svá úti annara ráð, ok þar kunni hún tíu ráð er aðrir kunnu eitt. Hún hafði svá fagra raust at hún svæfði fugal ok fiska, dýr ok ǫll jarðlig kvikindi, svá at unat þótti á at heyra. Hennar ríki stóð með friði ok farsæld.* (Ns, ch. 1, pp. 3–4)

[10] On the use of the stones made by Sedentiana, see 7.3.2.2.

> Young people, hear an adventure and a wonderful tale about the most famous maiden-king there has ever been in the northern region of the world. She was called Nitida the Famous […]. She was both wise and fair, her face bright and rosy just as if the red rose had been mingled with a snow-white lily; her eyes were as bright as carbuncle, and her skin as white as ivory; her hair was like gold and hung down to the ground around her. She had a gold head-dress with four pillars, and up on top of the pillars, an eagle was depicted. On top of the eagle stood a hawk made of red gold, spreading its wings forward over the pure face of the young woman so that the sun did not burn her. She was endowed with knowledge as the wisest scholar, and, surpassing other people's intelligence, she could make the strongest castle-wall with her own intellect, and thus outmanoeuvre others' plans; and she knew ten answers when others knew one. She had such a beautiful voice that it made birds, fish, wild animals, and all worldly creatures sleep, so delightful was it to hear. Her kingdom enjoyed peace and prosperity. (McDonald 2009, p. 125)

Marian iconography was often associated with flowers – especially the lily and the rose – as symbols of purity in late medieval times.[11] These symbols were in turn connected to the idea of *hortus conclusus*, the image of the Virgin Mary's body as an immaculate sacred garden.[12] This kind of iconography brought a comparison between female virgins and flowers that were considered particularly gracious and pure, such as the rose and the lily.[13] These flowers are used to describe the gracefulness of Mary in the skaldic poem *Lilja* (Lily), allegedly composed by the monk Eysteinn Ásgrímsson (1310–1360) in the first half of the fourteenth century dense of symbolic meanings and poetic virtuosity.[14] It is an example of the popularity of and fascination with floral symbolism related to the Virgin Mary in late medieval Iceland.[15] Trobil, the princess of Mesopotamia in *Ectors saga*, is also described as a combination of a rose and a lily.[16] Sedentiana is described through a similar imagery, although *Ssþ* does not dedicate as much space to the depiction of the maiden-king as *Ns*.[17] Moreover, the symbolism connected to *Ns* appears somehow richer, starting from the eagle (*ari*) and the hawk (*haukr*).[18]

[11] See 5.3.2.3.
[12] See Larson 2013.
[13] This symbolism is not new to late medieval Iceland, as pointed out by Ármann Jakobsson (2015, p. 166).
[14] Ármann Jakobsson 2015 [2009], pp. 162–63.
[15] Beside Ármann Jakobsson's contribution on the poem, see Chase 2007.
[16] *Es*, ch. 16, p. 138.
[17] *Ssþ*, ch. 3, p. 100.
[18] An eagle is depicted at the top of Yggdrasill in *Edda*, *Grímnismál* (st. 32–34). Generally speaking, in both mythology and religion, the eagle is often seen as a representative of the celestial spheres, therefore of a superior kind of contemplation and knowledge (Schjødt 2008, p. 164). In some cases, the transformation of characters into eagles is performed in order to protect a princess (D 659.4.4), but it may also be seen as an omen of victory

The eagle was associated to a status of extremely profound contemplation in medieval times, as it was perceived as a creature living between heaven and earth.[19] Holy figures of Christian worship were sometimes associated with the eagle, as they were considered capable of ascending to the skies and contemplating the earth, on the one hand, and seeing the heavens and God (*visio Dei*), on the other.[20] The supernatural ability of Nitida not only to gain a panoptic observation of the world from Visio's magic stones but also to spontaneously understand the magic nature of the vessel may justify this comparison. The writings attributed to Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604), who was well known in late medieval Iceland, may have functioned as a source.[21] In his *Moralia in Iob*, Gregory mentions the eagle as a symbol of the superior vision attributed to the saints.[22] Other possible sources are the Bible itself, the iconography of John the Apostle, Isidore, the bestiaries, and Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179). In the book of Psalms, the animal is generally attributed the double vision of both the world and God, such is its proximity to the heavens.[23] In *Ezekiel*, as well as in *The Bestiary of Aberdeen* (twelfth century), the eagle symbolises the insight of the saints and is associated with John the Apostle, who flew high above the earthly dimension to understand the divine mysteries through contemplation.[24] In general, the bestiaries would place the bird so close to the sun that its wings would get burned. Then, the eagle lands towards a source of water in search of relief.[25] The main reference point here is the Greek *Physiologus*, which was largely translated and copied in the Middle Ages.[26] The Old Norse version of the text was fashioned from a Latin source around 1200.[27] Although the Icelandic text is fragmentary, its structural adherence to the Latin versions of the work suggests the diffusion of the eagle's symbolism in Iceland, as well. The *Physiologus* would show the eagle as a symbol of rebirth through the image of sprinkling water on its burning wings.[28]

As for Isidore, his *Etymologiae* offer a description of the animal which is even more connected to extraordinary eyesight: "The eagle (*aquila*) is named from the acuity of its vision (*acumen oculorum*). […] It is said that the eagle does not even avert its gaze from the sun".[29]

(B147.2.1.2). *Rémundar saga* features a great eagle sat on a gold knob at the top of a pillar as one of the images in Rémundr's dream (ch. 5, p. 172). In any case, the bird seems to be mostly associated to male figures in the Old Norse-Icelandic tradition.

[19] Cantone 2009.

[20] Cantone 2009, pp. 14–15.

[21] For more information on Gregory's work in Iceland, see 7.3.2.2.

[22] *Moralia in Iob*, 31, XLVII, 94; see also Wolf, 2001, pp. 255-74.

[23] *Psalms*, 102, 5. In Alighieri's *Commedia*, the eagle is placed in Jupiter's heavenly sphere as an icon of justice (*Paradiso*, XVIII, 106-8).

[24] *Ez*. 1.10; *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, MS 24, 62v.

[25] García Acosta, 2010, p. 237.

[26] Zambon 2018, pp. xii-xiii.

[27] On this translation and other prose texts of religious subject, see Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2005.

[28] Zambon, 2018, p. xii.

[29] *Etym*. XII, vii, 10.

Finally, Hildegard uses the eagle to describe fundamental concepts of her spiritual experience, which was most likely transmitted to Iceland at least indirectly, as pointed out by Árni Einarsson.[30]

As regards the relationship between the eagle and the hawk, the latter might be seen as a symbol for Liforinus, who embodies the noble knight rescuing Nitida and offering her support against the Saracens. This interpretation may be corroborated by the image of the hawk protecting the queen/eagle from sunburns with its shadow, as well as by the lexical choices of the author, which likens the Indian king and the hawk[31] in the following passage:

> *Blebarnius er kóngr nefndr; hann réð fyrir Indíalandi hinu mikla. Hann átti son er Liforinus hét; hann var væn at áliti, ljós ok rjóðr í andliti snareygðr sem valr* (Ns, ch. 2, pp. 8–9)
>
> There was a king named Blebarnius who ruled over the great kingdom of India. He had a son called Liforinus, who was handsome in appearance, his face bright and rosy; he was sharp-eyed as a hawk. (McDonald 2009, p. 127)

To be fair, the depiction of sharp and bright eyes may just be a literary motif expressing courage and nobility (H71.6).[32] Still, it is fascinating to notice this resemblance in *Ns*. Another possible interpretation of Nitida's crown lies in the local mythology, since the eagle and the hawk are mentioned together in Snorri's *Gylfagynning*, as well:

> *Margt er þar af at segja. Qrn einn sitr í limum asksins, ok er hann margs vitandi, en í milli augna honum sitr haukr, sá er heitir Veðurfolnir.* (Gylfaginning, ch. 16, p. 18)
>
> There is a great deal to tell of it. An eagle sits in the branches of the ash [Yggdrasill], and it has knowledge of many things, and between its eyes sits a hawk called Vedrfolnir. (Faulkes, 1995, p. 18)

In this passage of Snorri's *Edda*, the eagle has a characteristic which is also attributed to Nitida, that is, a great knowledge. Interestingly, the presence of a hawk between the eagle's eyes is only described by Snorri, while it is absent in the corresponding passage of the Eddic poem

[30] Árni Einarsson 2001. In Hildegard's letter 103r (Baird and Ehrman 1998, pp. 21–25), the eagle is a metaphor of the wise man who is aware of the dividing line between good and evil and, thus, has knowledge of God Himself (pp. 114–15).
[31] The word used in this context is *valr*, which is a synonym of *haukr*. More precisely, it is believed to be an abbreviation of *val-haukr*.
[32] See, for instance, the description of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani in *Völsunga saga* (ch. 22).

Grímnismál. In any case, the symbolism related to the knowledge and superior vision of the eagle is shared by the Latin tradition and Snorri's mythology, which makes the connection to Nitida reasonable, especially in the light of the powers acquired on Visio.[33] Other symbolic features related to Nitida are pale skin and long hair, covering the entirety of her body. In the larger corpus of Icelandic *riddarasögur*, this aspect is also featured in *Gibbons saga*, as well as in Sedentiana's description in *Ssþ*. The motif (F555.3.3) was most likely a direct borrowing from continental models, as was the lily-mixed-with-rose complexion.[34]

This first detailed description of Nitida already sets the tone of the way in which the maiden-king is depicted throughout the saga. The presentation of physical features that usually indicate virginity and innocence, or even sanctity, should not be indicative of Nitida as a perfect role model. In fact, many of the aforementioned characteristics are literary *topoi* that would quite naturally follow the introduction of a noble female figure in a courtly environment.[35] They do create a positive aura around Nitida that is not abandoned throughout the text, although they do not make her into a perfect earthly double of the Virgin Mary, as McDonald rightfully points out:

> Nitida is certainly no saint. But it is true that unlike in other maiden-king romances […] Nitida is not herself humiliated in the end and agrees to marriage because she has found in Liforinus a man as clever and resourceful as herself, rather than because she is coerced into submission.[36]

Attributing features of religious figures or saints (e.g. The Virgin Mary) to characters that are far from embodying the same kind of devotional behaviour may be a result of the typical syncretism of indigenous *riddarasögur* of both learned and popular elements, lore and ideology. As if the authors were placing the narratives on a thin line between entertainment and moral teachings.[37] The simple use of well-known literary motifs without particular underlying meanings is also a possibility, although it seems more likely in the case of Sedentiana,

[33] Another example of symbolism related to the eagle is found in the manuscript tradition of Joachim of Fiore, in particular its *Liber figurarum*, a collection of *figurae* designed to convey theological principles. Joachim is considered one of the most important thinkers of the whole medieval period (cf. Riedl 2018); thus, it is possible that his influence travelled far and wide during the Middle Ages. For an analysis of the symbol in Germanic cultures, see von Rummel 2012, and in Scandinavia, see Jesch 2002.

[34] Kalinke 1981, pp. 94–95. Long hair is also a well-known symbol of kingship, usually related to noble male rulers, such as Háraldr *hárfagri* and Hrólfr in *Hrólfs saga kraka* (cf. Ármann Jakobsson 1999, p. 154; Phelpstead 2013). Despite the ambiguity created by a few supposedly masculine features, it seems more reasonable to see Nitida's long hair as a sign of female virtues and rectitude rather than kingship.

[35] For an overview of the ideal of feminine beauty in medieval literature, see Brewer 1982.

[36] McDonald 2009, pp. 120–21.

[37] For more speculation on the authors' intentions, see Conclusions.

whose sadism is condemned after all, than of Nitida. In fact, the saga itself may be read as an ironic or even polemical response to other maiden-king narratives, such as *Ssþ* or *Clári saga*.[38] The name Nitida is a derivation from Latin – i.e. *nitidus* (clear, bright), a synonym with *clarus* – as many other character names in *riddarasögur*, some of which have been listed above.[39] Thus, the name Nitida may indicate an intertextual reference to *Clári saga*.[40] *Clári saga*, supposedly a translation of a lost Latin original, might have introduced the maiden-king motif to the Icelandic audience, but while Séréna undergoes the typical humiliation before the end of the narrative, Nitida's character is rather built upon the positive characteristics of Clári.[41] This enhances the ambiguity of the maiden-king with regard to the blurred boundaries between genders and hinders a definite judgment of her behaviour.[42] In many respects, *Ns* offers a subverted or mirrored scheme to the usual maiden-king pattern, which is a unique case in the Icelandic context.

An introduction to Nitida that included the symbols related to her figure seemed essential in order to better understand her relationship with space. More than in other texts of the main corpus, the comprehension of *Ns* is bound to the saga's fictional world and worldview. The text proposes an image of the ecumene that might in fact resemble the flight of an eagle looking at the earth from above. Therefore, the treatment of fictional space is connected to the idea of a higher knowledge and the chance for a female figure to access it almost exclusively.

Finally, whereas McDonald Werronen addresses the spaces of *Ns* by using the categories of Global Space and Social Space, the broader philosophical perspective of this work has encouraged me to establish two slightly different points of view. On the one hand, the chapter on macrocosm aims at highlighting the overall depiction of the ecumene in the saga, which is rich of cultural references and possible meanings related to the author's geopolitical ideas. On the other hand, the section on microcosm investigates the setting of Visio and Skóga-blómi as a vessel of religious symbolism. Both dimensions are intertwined and cooperating to the building of *Ns*'s space, which means that they should be put in relation and analysed in their

[38] McDonald Werronen 2016, p. 67.
[39] See 4.6.
[40] On the comparison between the two sagas, see Bibire 1985, p. 67; McDonald Werronen 2016, pp. 67–76. Another example of intertextual reference lies in the name of Liforinus's alter ego. Both in *Ns* and *Clári saga*, the male hero adopts the false name of Eskilvarðr.
[41] This aspect is confirmed by the correspondence between Nitida and the typical folktale hero as defined by Propp (2009 [1968], p. 50). Cf. McDonald Werronen 2016, pp. 127–69.
[42] Jóhanna K. Friðriksdóttir's (2013, pp. 127–30) definition of *Ns* as an example of proto-feminism might sound a little too daring for the times, although fascinating and based on the evidence of Nitida's all-positive characterisation.

complexity. This should lead to a reflection on the imaginative and cognitive processes presented in the text, as well as the type of femininity it seems to endorse.

7.3.1 Macrocosm: The Ecumene

When Nitida reaches the islet at the centre of Visio, she has a vision of the whole world through the magic stones. The connection between the island's name and this experience is so obvious that it should not deserve any further remarks for the time being. Nitida's epiphanic experience is simultaneous and panoptic, which means that she sees everything and everyone at the same time, at least within the limits of the known world.

> *Meykóngr leit í steinana; hún sá þá um allar hálfar veraldarinnar, þar með kónga ok kónga sonu ok hvat hver hafðisk at, ok allar þjóðir hvers lands ok margar ýmislegar skepnur ok óþjóðir.* (Ns, ch. 1, p. 6)

> The maiden-king looked into the stones: then she saw all the regions of the world, including kings and princes and what each did, and all peoples, of every land, and many diverse creatures and monsters. (McDonald 2009, p. 125)

The geographic and cosmographic information included in the saga has been analysed in previous scholarship, especially by McDonald and Barnes.[43] The configuration of the world resembles the most typical Isidorian one, that is, a T-O map, with some interesting details and additions. First of all, unusual relevance is given by the saga to the northern parts of the world. This aspect has been highlighted by all critical approaches as an almost unique case in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, which are usually projected to the southern and eastern areas of the world, as highlighted in Chapter Four. In *Ns*, not only is the northern hemisphere given emphasis, but there is also the explicit mention of Paris as the throne of the world. Even before the assessment of Nitida's beauty, confidence, and intelligence, the narrator makes a clear geographical statement about the high seat of the world:

> *Þessi meykóngr sat í ǫndvegi heimsins í Frakkalandi hinu góða ok hélt Parissborg.* (Ns, ch. 1, p. 3)

[43] McDonald Werronen 2016, pp. 89–124; Barnes 2014, pp. 35–40; 2006.

> This maiden-king sat on the throne of the world in the good kingdom of France and ruled in Paris. (McDonald 2009, p. 125)

The phrase *ǫndvegi heimsins* is striking for its unorthodoxy with regard to the usual configuration of T-O maps outlined above. *Qndvegi* does not indicate the precise centre of the world, rather the high seat, in the middle of the table, usually reserved to kings. Still, giving so much emphasis to Paris means moving the overall perspective farther north and west compared to Jerusalem, the usual centre of Isidorian maps. In fact, a detailed description of the ecumene as represented in *Ns* is offered towards the end of the story, when Nitida needs to locate the Indian prince Liforinus by looking at her magic stones. Eskilvarðr (Liforinus in disguise) is invited to take part in the panoptic vision produced by the stones, that is, a simultaneous observation of every land and creature on earth:

> *Meykóngr tók upp stein ok bað hann í líta. Hann sá þá yfir allt Frakkland, Provintiam, Ravenam, Spaniam, Hallitiam, Friisland, Flandren, Norðmandiam, Skottland, Grikkland, ok allar þær þjóðir þar byggja. […] Annan dag biðr drottning Eskilvarð til skemmunnar: "þú hefr jafnan skemmt oss í vetr". Drottning bað Eskilvarð enn líta í steininn. Þá sá þau norðr hálfuna alla, Noreg, Ísland, Færeyjar, Suðureyjar, Orkneyjar, Svíþjóð, Danmǫrk, England, Írland, ok mǫrg lǫnd ǫnnur, þau er hann vissi ei skil á. […] Meykóngr vindr upp enn einn stein, sjáandi þá nú austr hálfuna heimsins, Índíaland, Palestinam, Asiam, Serkland, ok ǫll ǫnnur lǫnd heimsins, ok jafnvel um brúnabeltit, þat sem ei er byggt.* (Ns, ch. 5, pp. 30–31)

> The maiden-king took up a stone and asked him to look into it. He then saw over all France, Provence, Ravenna, Spain, Hallitia, Frisia, Flanders, Normandy, Scotland, Greece, and all the people living there. […] Another day the queen asked Eskilvarðr to the chamber: "You have always entertained us during the winter". The queen then asked Eskilvarðr to look into the stone, and they saw all the northern regions: Norway, Iceland, the Faroes, the Hebrides, Orkney, Sweden, Denmark, England, Ireland, and many other lands which he could not distinguish. […] The queen raised up yet another stone and then they saw the eastern regions of the world: India, Palestine, Asia, Serkland, and all the other lands of the world, and even around the burning-belt, which is uninhabited. (McDonald 2009, p. 141)

The amount of geographic information is remarkable even for a *riddarasaga* and represents the perfect example of what the first chapters of this thesis have defined as a written, or prose, *mappa mundi*. To a medieval audience, this description must have been no less valuable

than an actual T-O map, if it were not for the liberties taken by the narrator from the typical outlook of these maps, including the Icelandic ones. As mentioned above, an unusual relevance is given to the northern hemisphere here, whereas Africa, one of the three usual sections of Isidorian maps, is not even mentioned. The eastern regions of the world are included, although only passing reference is made to Asia, which is also unusual. Only inside the larger corpus of *riddarasögur* several other texts present *mappae mundi* that are much more consistent with the usual T-O configuration circulating in clerical environments. One of these sagas is *Dínus saga drambláta*:[44]

> *Svá finnst í fornum fræðibókum skrifað, að heiminum sé skipt í þrjá hluti eða parta, ok heitir hinn fyrsti suðr Asia, enn hinn vestri Africa, en norðr hálfan er kǫlluð Europa. Í Europa eru ágætlig ríki, ok frægðarlig ok því er ǫll frygð ok blómi. Í Asia stendr hit helga Jǫrsalaland, er ǫll hin stæstu stórmerki hafa gørsk í hingað burði vors herra Jesu Christi.* (Dínus saga drambláta, p. 3)

> It is written in the old learned books that the world is divided in three parts. The first one to the south is called Asia, while the western one is Africa, and the northern half is called Europa. In Europa are wonderful and famous realms and all kinds of blossoming plants and flowers. In Asia lies Jerusalem the Holy, where all the greatest miracles have taken place from the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Another example is *Adonias saga*, which also presents the popular medieval motif of the diaspora of Noah's sons to the different corners of the world.[45] The author of this saga also admits an indebtment to learned books (*fræðibækr*) for his proposed mapping of the world. The *mappa mundi* outlined in *Adonias saga* is consistent with the above-mentioned concept of Geography of Salvation, inasmuch as it strictly connects the geographic description to the realisation of God's plan on earth, starting from the Great Flood and the dispersion of Noah's offspring, down to the protagonists of the narrative. Therefore, *Adonias saga* provides an example of *mappa mundi* that is also historical, narrative, and allegorical. Allegory is not only expressed through the realisation of the divine plan in the world. In fact, the events described in the introduction of *Adonias saga* also seem to foreshadow the rise to power of the ruthless Constancius in Syria. In particular, *Adonias saga* describes the distribution of Noah's sons as

[44] On the cosmographic learning in *Dínus saga*, see Simek 1990, pp. 356–58.
[45] On the Noachide dispersion, see Kupfer 2013.

follows: Shem, whose descendants are the Jews (*þat folk guðs*, the people of God), is set to occupy Asia, Japhet takes the north, Ham the west and, later, Africa.[46]

In *Ns*, not only does the narrator present a different set-up with emphasis on the north, but any reference to learned books or any trace of religious determinism are avoided. In fact, it seems as if Nitida's experience of the world is a purely mental one, a visual projection stimulated by the magic nature of the stones rather than knowledge acquired from books. The representation of *Adonias saga* and *Dínus saga* is canonical and refers to the march of history, whilst Nitida's view is simultaneous, firmly adherent to the narrated events, and does not bear any traces of historical progression towards salvation. This does not correspond to the absence of any ideological or political agenda, as highlighted by Geraldine Barnes[47] and later in the chapter.

As often happens in *riddarasögur*, the greatest knowledge seems to be achieved by women in somewhat obscure and inexplicable ways rather than devoted study. This has been hinted at in the previous chapter with regard to the female figures of *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, namely Astrinomia and Ermlaug, and will be addressed in greater detail below. The most important information for the time being is the peculiarity of Nitida's world map in terms of both contents and cognitive process. McDonald Werronen condenses the geographical information of *Ns* as outlined by *fig. 18*:[48]

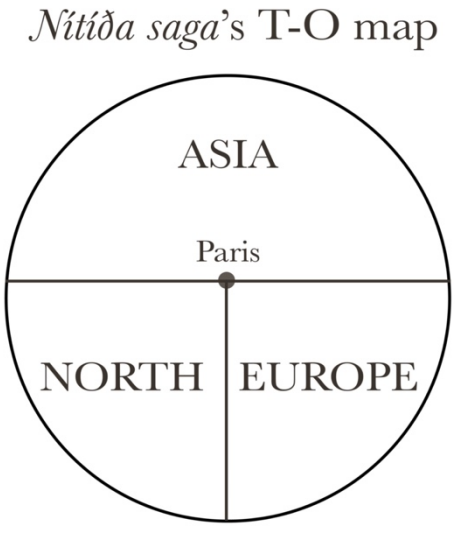

Figure 18 – Nitida saga*'s T-O map according to McDonald Werronen 2016*

[46] *Adonias saga* (ch. 2, pp. 74–75).
[47] Barnes 2016.
[48] Cf. McDonald Werronen 2016, p. 102.

The quarter of the map traditionally occupied by Europe is taken over by a generic northern hemisphere, while Europe has been moved to the bottom right quarter of the circle. Paris occupies the centre of the diagram in the light of the first pieces of information provided by the narrator. This sketch is admittedly vague, but so is Nitida's view when it comes to locating the mentioned lands on the map with more precision than the simple cardinal references.

The saga's inaccurate geography and the overall vagueness of the vision have led to some rather negative evaluations of the text, or at least of the authorial efforts to offer a realistic representation of the ecumene. Ármann Jakobsson, in his analysis of *Ns*, reaches this kind of conclusion, by emphasising the unlikelihood of the saga's world map.[49] Silvia Tomasch is overall sceptical about the possibility of gathering thorough geographical information from medieval romances in general.[50] Finally, McDonald Werronen elaborates on this statement, admitting that the geographies of *riddarasögur* writers must reflect "their own desires and ambitions, whether personal, cultural, nationalistic, or a combination of these" as a way "to assert themselves and their texts within medieval Europe".[51] Therefore, McDonald Werronen – and Barnes before her – have contributed to a re-evaluation of *Ns*'s spatial design by looking underneath its surface of its unreliability.[52] This attitude is essential to our perspective, as well. The highly ideological and culturally elitist framework in which the Icelandic *riddarasögur* were most likely produced have been the motivation for a much closer look at all aspects of them, including geography and cosmography, which take central stage in the narratives. It is thanks to this perspective that Barnes has offered a complex interpretation of *Ns* instead of dismissing it as a case of authorial ineptitude.

In the case of *Ns*, Barnes sees the portrayed ecumene as a projection of the geopolitical desires of the anonymous author. More specifically, it might be intended as an attempt at negotiating the liminal position and political irrelevance of northern and western in the European context.[53] Such negotiation would be intended with regard to the ideological poles of Christianity, such as Rome, Jerusalem, and the east in general as the chief cardinal direction. *Ns* represents one of the rare cases of *riddarasaga* in which Iceland is explicitly mentioned. The emphasis given to *Svíþjóð hin kalda* might also be indicative of some sort of geopolitical plan.

[49] Ármann Jakobsson 2015 [2009], pp. 180–81.
[50] Tomasch 1998, pp. 10–11.
[51] McDonald Werronen 2016, p. 91.
[52] Barnes 2014, pp. 35–40; 2006.
[53] Barnes 2006, p. 111.

McDonald Werronen distinguishes between *Svíþjóð* (Sweden) and *Svíþjóð hin kalda*, which she assimilates to *Svíþjóð hin mikla*, that is, the region west of the Volga chiefly explored by Swedish Vikings.[54] Regardless of the precise location of the two lands, the main reference point is in both cases the northern hemisphere.[55] The island of Visio is situated beyond *Svíþjóð hin kalda*, by the North Pole:

> *"Mér er sagt at fyrir eyju þeirri er Visio heitir ráði jarl sá er Virgilius heitir […]. Þessi ey liggr út unden Svíþjóð hinni kǫldu, út undir heimsskautit, þeirra landa er menn hafa spurn af."* (Ns, ch. 1, p. 5)

> "I have heard that beyond the island which is called Visio rules the earl who is called Virgilius […]. This island lies out beyond cold Sweden, out by the North Pole, the edge of those land of which people have had reports". (McDonald 2009, p. 125)

Skóga-blómi, the islet at the centre of Visio, and the whole island in general have been interpreted by Barnes as some sort of Terrestrial Paradise because of the idyllic natural landscape. This conclusion has been motivated by the presence of balsamic herbs, apples and water, as well as the frequent depiction of Terrestrial Paradise as an island on medieval maps and in Old Norse-Icelandic clerical texts.[56] The possibility of locating such key place in the extreme north, at the edges of the known world, is an original development of *Ns* and a confirmation of its unique spatial representation. In particular, McDonald Werronen talks about the saga's world as an example of 'counter-cosmography', as opposed to the most prevalent standards of medieval cartography.[57] This term has been used above to define the peculiar cosmographical set-ups attributed to Snorri Sturluson, especially in the prologue of *Ynglinga saga*.[58]

Counter-cosmography as a definition of Snorri's world descriptions has been offered by Kevin Wanner in his analysis of the semantics of cardinal directions in Old Norse-Icelandic texts.[59] Specifically, *Ynglinga saga* features both *Svíþjóðs hin mikla* and *hin kalda*, the same land as

[54] For more information on this distinction, see McDonald Werronen 2016, pp. 103, 107; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1964, p. cix; Gahrn 2002, pp. 5–22; Jackson 2012; Simek 1990, pp. 209–10; 1992, pp. 47–67.
[55] In her 2009 translation, McDonald still opts for 'Sweden', since the debate on the actual location of this land has not reached definitive conclusions.
[56] Terrestrial Paradise is portrayed as an island in the Hereford map, as highlighted above. See also *Stjórn* (Mosebog I, 11), *Konungs skuggsjá* (ch. 45, p. 75), and the description of Paradise in AM 194 8vo (quoted in Barnes 2014, p. 37).
[57] McDonald Werronen 2016, p. 108.
[58] See 2.5.2.
[59] Wanner 2009.

in *Ns*, called 'Scythia' by Loth and usually identified with an undetermined area in southern Russia.[60] Snorri's cosmography has been described in 2.5.2 as an attempt to mitigate the clerical elements usually included in traditional world descriptions in order to give more relevance to the northern parts of the ecumene in the framework of Roman Catholic societies. The fact that this particular cosmography is loosely shared by a text like *Ns*, which also highlights *Svíþjóð hin kalda* as a pivotal geographic point, stimulates a re-evaluation of *Ns*'s literary value. These two descriptions might be signs of the successful circulation of an alternative cosmography in learned Icelandic environments between the mid-thirteenth and the mid-fourteenth century, which would move the goals of late medieval authors beyond lavish imitation or even pointless geographical reverie. Absence of realism does in no way indicate absence of meaning.

For this reason, Barnes has explained the northward shift in *Ns* as the Icelandic response to geopolitical marginality as supposed cultural inferiority. In Barnes's own words: "This upending of medieval geographical conventions through the medium of fantasy invites its audience to rethink the implied equation between geographical distance and cultural inferiority".[61] The implied equation mentioned by Barnes is a direct consequence of the polarised world described in Chapter Two, with the margins equated to either danger or subordination. The ability and merit of authors such as Snorri Sturluson or the anonymous redactor of *Ns* lies not only in the ability of integrating foreign models but also in the confidence of questioning and altering them in favour of their own agenda.

While the northern lands generally receive a better treatment in *Ns*, France is specifically depicted as the hub of international power. Interestingly, the same can be said of *Ssþ* and *Gibbons saga*.[62] This aspect demonstrates the great admiration of Icelandic authors for France and the cultural influence it exerted on Norway and Iceland through the import of romances and courtly values. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the geopolitical configurations of these sagas shift the focus from the eastern and southern lands to the northern and western ones. The axis France/Scandinavia/Iceland may be more or less highlighted by the texts, though it is there in all cases. For instance, *Ssþ* does not seem to highlight this connection as much as the other texts, at least not as explicitly. It is also true, however, that a relevant portion of the narrative is set in France, the name of Lafrans sounds like a tribute to the country, and it might be the potential locations of Lixion. Moreover, the intertextual

[60] Loth mentions Scythia in her notes to the description of Visio in *Ns* (ch. 1, p. 5).
[61] Barnes 2014, p. 40.
[62] McDonald Werronen 2016, p. 108.

references to *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* and the Christianisation of France direct the attention even more to this land.

All things considered, it can be argued that *Ns* does not ignore the geopolitical and cultural scenario of late medieval Europe. On the contrary, the saga takes so much of what was inherited from the learned Latin culture and uses it to rethink the isolation of the northern countries, which become new poles of attraction on the map. The fact that *Ns* does not refuse Iceland's belonging to a shared European landscape is demonstrated by its respect for the most usual cartographical conventions of the time, such as the T-O configuration of the ecumene, despite the slight alterations. Another attempt for *Ns* to link itself to the Roman Catholic world is made by connecting the northwest and the southeast through the wedding of Nitida, queen of France, and Liforinus, prince of India. The union of these two characters, together with their battle against Soldán and the Saracens, has been interpreted as a crusading element of the saga.[63] It was a popular crusading fantasy that a leader (usually Prester John) would guide a counter-crusade from the east and rescue the Western world from the Saracen threat.[64] Barnes elaborates on this legend with regard to *Ns*:

> In this secular fantasy of empire, distant India – located in medieval cartography at the easternmost point of Asia – saves the centre of the world from Saracen dominion, and, thanks to Livorius's dynastic networking, revolves lingering tensions between Constantinople and the West in the process.[65]

Therefore, it might be concluded that the alliance between Nitida and Liforinus against the Saracens and the dynastic arrangements outlined at the end constitute another way for *Ns* to align itself with the European clerical culture and, at the same time, exorcise a growing concern for Iceland's cultural marginality.

7.3.2 Microcosm: The Island

The peculiar spatial design related to Visio and Skóga-blómi has been deliberately overlooked in the previous chapter, as it seems to deserve its own space of investigation. The island may be seen as a space itself, a microcosmic environment neither fully nor easily connected to the rest of the saga's world. And yet, it is on Visio that Nitida experiences a first panoptic view of the ecumene. It is clear at this point that no relevant spatial design should be disregarded in the

[63] McDonald Werronen 2016, p. 116; Barnes 2006, p. 108.
[64] Heng 2004, pp. 286, 446.
[65] Barnes 2006, p. 108. The name Livorius is simply a variant of Liforinus.

analysis of the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, especially if it seems to hide deeper meanings that might support the understanding of the text. Again, in the depiction of this liminal landscape, the saga seems to respond to an attempt of combining well-known spatial patterns with original solutions. In particular, the first element that deserves attention is the concentric configuration of Visio's morphology.

7.3.2.1 The Morphology of Visio

Concentric circles have been indicated as the basic architecture supporting *Ectors saga* and conveying meaning about the moral values of the hero and his companions. By analysing Visio and Skóga-blómi as a type of Terrestrial Paradise, Barnes seems to confirm that the application of concentricity is usually related to pivotal moments of the narratives that could not be described through conventional spatial categories. The first words that *Ns* dedicates to Visio already establish the extraordinary character of the island.

First of all, Visio falls in the category of orally transmitted legends. Nitida was told about the place as some remote island beyond cold Sweden, by the North Pole, in the areas of the world of which there are no available reports. The perils of the journey are underlined by Egidía's concerns. This whole conversation between Nitida and the woman anticipates the kind of trip that is going to be described. Nitida's expedition is going to be a movement outside the comfort of civilisation into unknown and unexplored lands. Speaking in the symbolic terms proposed above, it is now the moment for the eagle to take flight and reach the physical *limes* between the earth and the skies. Visio as Terrestrial Paradise would be consistent with this symbolism. The confidence of the eagle gives Nitida enough strength to attempt the journey with some help from the Apulian fleet. More mystery is added to the scene by the writer's admission that nothing has been recounted of the maiden-king's trip or the length of it. The point of view moves from the Apulian court straight to Nitida's landing on the island.

Although it is true that direct interventions of the narrator in Icelandic *riddarasögur* are notably infrequent, they are still remarkable in comparison with other genres, such as the *Íslendingasögur*, and rarely pointless.[66] More often, by explicitly referring to themselves or the readers, the authors intend to give important information, as has been highlighted both for *Ssþ* and *Es*. It may be argued that the vagueness expressed by the narrating voice here is another instrument for *Ns* to create suspense and determine a neat distinction between the courtly world

[66] This stylistic aspect of indigenous *riddarasögur* might be trace of a direct influence from the translated *riddarasögur*, as the intervention of the narrating voice was much more frequent in continental romances. On this topic, see Petterson 2014, Budal 2011, and O'Connor 2005.

and the liminality of Visio. As regards the concentric structure of the island, the saga reads as follows:

> *Einn dag […] ganga síðan upp um eyna þar til er þau finna vatnit. Þau sjá einn bát fljótandi, taka hann ok róa út í hólminn. Þar váru margar eikur með fagri fruckt ok ágætum eplum. Sem þau fram koma í miðjan hólman sjá þau eitt steinker með fjórum hornum. Kerit var fullt af vatni; sinn steinn var í hverju horni kersins.* (Ns, ch. 1, p. 6)

> One day […] they walked up across the land until they found the lake. They saw a boat floating there, took it, and rowed out to the islet, where there were many oaks with beautiful fruits and fine apples. When they came to the middle of the islet, they saw a stone vessel with four corners. The vessel was full of water, and there was a stone in each corner of the vessel. (McDonald 2009, p. 125)

The remote island by the North Pole contains a lake, which contains an islet, which contains a vessel, which is full of water, in which four stones are placed. The concentric structure of the episode is evident, yet it has never been highlighted with particular emphasis in the previous studies on the saga. The text does not immediately reveal the alignment of the vessel's corners and the stones with the cardinal directions, although the association is made evident by the universal perspective of Nitida's vision. Moreover, when Nitida shares the experience with Eskilvarðr, each stone does activate the view of a single cardinal direction, which means a section of the ecumene and a list of lands therein. Thus, a graphic rendition of Visio's morphology may look like *fig. 19* below:

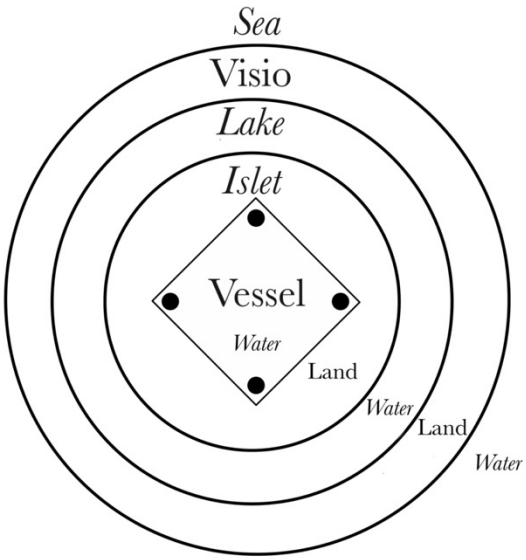

Figure 19 – The concentric structure of Visio

One of the aspects that draw the attention here is the natural description of Skóga-blómi, that is, an extraordinarily rich landscape for a territory by the North Pole. This seems to confirm that the information about the location of Visio was mostly functional to the establishment of a physical limit and express an idea of remoteness and otherness. Once the maiden-king lands on the island, what she finds is a typical *locus amoenus*, which means a land astray and off the map.[67] Water, flowers, oak trees, and stones are all before Nitida's eyes, unspoiled and luxuriant. Wanner has pointed out that the importance of Snorri's cosmography lies also in his ability to combine elements that would typically signify different cardinal directions.[68] Similarly, the island of *Ns* is characterised by a mix of the cold, dangerous and prohibitive features of the north with the pleasant, warm, and inviting features of the east. Moreover, the east (or south-east) is the usual location of Terrestrial Paradise, which Visio might in fact symbolise.[69] The comparison between Visio and Paradise is endorsed by Barnes

[67] For Isidore's description of the motif, see *Etym.*, XIV, viii, 33.
[68] Wanner 2009, p. 68.
[69] Other cases of paradisiacal lands usually situated in the northern hemisphere are represented by the Glasisvellir (Shining plains) and the Ódáinsakr (Deathless acre), as pointed out by Lummer 2017. It should be noted, however, that neither of these territories is clearly described as an island. Their overall description does not quite match the one of Visio, except for the northern location and the idyllic landscape. In *Eiríks saga viðförla* (fourteenth century), the Ódáinsakr is surrounded by the river Phison, one of the four Biblical rivers of Paradise (*Genesis* 2, 11), but the place is situated in the far east, beyond India. As regards Nitida's ability to read the magic stones, this might echo the Avalon motif complex of the Arthurian tradition, insofar as Morgan and other supernatural female figures were depicted as the inhabitants and guardians of liminal landscapes. Moreover, the word Avalon is believed to translate 'Island of the apples', which are a distinctive feature of Skóga-blómi. However, Virgilius is the actual guardian of the island in *Ns*, and he is described as a terrible sorcerer. This makes the depiction of Visio closer to Glasisvellir as a northern and dangerous liminal land (cf. Lummer 2017, p. 21). All in all, neither Avalon nor

through the reading of similar descriptions in the Old Norse-Icelandic tradition, namely the ones of *Konungs skuggsjá*, *Stjórn*, and the geographical treatise in AM 194 8vo.[70] The first two texts have been mentioned before as precious sources of learned material and possible inspirations for the representation of Sedentiana as the Edenic viper in *Ssþ*. They might in fact have been precious sources of encyclopaedic knowledge for many *riddarasögur* authors. Both *Stjórn* and *Konungs skuggsjá* feature a description of Paradise; the former situates a large lake in the middle of it, while the latter highlights the presence of the Tree of Knowledge and the supernatural power of its apples:

> *Paraðisus er einn ágætr staðr í austrhálfu [...], þessi staðr er allskyns viðum ok aldintréum auðgaðr. Hann hefr í sér lífstré. [...] Í miðri paraðis sprettr upp eitt mikit vatn þat sem nogu dǫggvir allan aldinviðinn. En þat sama vatnfall skiptisk þaðan á fjórar hofuðár.* (Stjórn, Mosebog I, 11)
>
> Paradise is a wonderful place in the eastern half of the world [...]. This place is rich of all kinds of woods and fruit trees, including the Tree of Life. [...] In the middle of Paradise lies a large lake that sufficiently dews all the fruit trees. That same lake splits into four great rivers.
>
> *Tré þat hit fagra [...] í miðri Paradiso með girnilegum eplum. Þat heitir vísinda tré. En aldin þat er tré þat ber þá heita þau froðleiks epli.* (Konungs skuggsjá, ch. 45, p. 75)
>
> That beautiful tree [...] in the middle of Paradise with delicious apples. That is called Tree of Knowledge. And the fruit that the tree bears are called apples of knowledge.

As regards the geographical treatise in AM 194 8vo, its description of Terrestrial Paradise comes even closer to what is described in *Ns*, so much so that the name Skóga-blómi might have been inspired by this passage:

Glasisvellir fully convince as possible inspirations for Visio, although it is important to underline that 'otherworldly' islands and paradisiacal lands were a widespread theme both in the Irish and the Old Norse-Icelandic traditions.

[70] Barnes 2006, p. 105; 2014, p. 37. These are not the only texts featuring Terrestrial Paradise in the extant materials, although they are the ones that most evidently refer to the place as an island or in similar terms as *Ns*. Some examples of other paradisiacal descriptions may be found in *Veraldar saga* (ch. 2, pp. 5–8), *The Old Norse Elucidarius* (1.68–1.71a), *Mattheus saga* (ch.3, p. 19), and *Alexanders saga* (ch.10, pp. 146–47). These texts agree with *Ns*'s portrayal of Visio mostly with regard to the idyllic natural landscape and the remoteness of the place, which is, however, located in the east. On paradisiacal descriptions in Old Norse sources, see Ashurst 2006.

> *Þar er einn fagr skógr ok dásamligr […] þar eru hvers kyns tré […] ok bera á sér allskyns blóm ok birti epla ok aldina með mǫrgu móti […] sá skógr er í miðri Paradiso.* (Alfræði Íslenzk I, 4)
>
> There is a beautiful, glorious forest there […] with every kind of tree […] and they bear every kind of flower and produce apples and fruits of many kinds […] that forest is in the middle of Paradise. (Barnes 2014, p. 37)

It is possible to hear an echo of these words in the depiction of Visio, and Skóga-blómi in particular. One of the major differences from the *Stjórn* is the location of the Edenic island in the far north instead of the east. The reasons for this shift have been tentatively explained in the previous section. It should be added that the great symbolic value of the island makes its positioning beyond cold Sweden even more remarkable than it would be if Visio were simply a legendary location with no paradisiac features. In monastic culture, earthly islands, trees, rivers, and other elements of the world were considered reflections of the islands, trees, rivers, etc., that devotees would encounter in the afterlife.[71] In other words, they were *figurae* of the Cosmic Trees, or the actual Heaven that would welcome all souls after the Final Judgement. For this reason, some of the learned sources make a distinction between Terrestrial Paradise and the heavenly one.[72] The fact that *Ns* might have intended Visio as an earthly representation of Heaven makes the author's choice of a concentric spatial structure particularly interesting. Although mentioning a lake in the middle of Paradise, *Stjórn* does not create the same concentric pattern as *Ns*. This might be explained with a stronger influence of the Latin clerical culture on the author of *Ns*. As demonstrated above, a new discourse of space and time was inherited by the Icelandic literates from Latin sources starting from the twelfth century, but it must have taken time and gradual adaptations for it to be fully assimilated.[73] Therefore, it is reasonable to see new spatial descriptions, such as the ones of late medieval *riddarasögur*, as the results of this process. The concentric pattern that is only sketched by *Stjórn* and *Konungs skuggsjá* finds a complete realisation in *Ns*. Moreover, the different nature and purposes of a *riddarasaga* compared to other learned texts, either translated or somehow more indebted to their learned sources, must have granted the authors a certain degree of creative freedom. The freedom taken by *Ns* is expressed by the employment of a clear concentric model for Visio. This is confirmed by looking back at *Ectors saga*. Here, another concentric structure is proposed, and a highly

[71] For an analysis of the symbols related to monastic life, see Helms 2002.
[72] Ashurst 2006, p. 75.
[73] See also Sverrir Jakobsson 2010, p. 9.

accurate one. Both concentric designs manage to convey important though not identical meanings.

While *Es* uses concentric space as a way to endorse the protagonist's prowess and leadership and examine such topics as brotherhood, loyalty, and the Noble Heathen, the structure of Visio does not seem to bear traces of the chivalric value system. The journey of Nitida on the island is closer to a metaphysical experience. The centre of the fictional world of *Es* is Ector himself, while the centre of *Ns* is not Nitida, but rather the ecumene. If the whole spatial design of *Es* relies on concentric circles, *Ns* clearly adopts this structure only once, and this is yet another element that highlights the exceptionality of the experience on Visio. The peculiar space of Visio is an exception in an otherwise tripolar arrangement embodied by Nitida and Liforinus on the one hand, and the Saracens on the other. This is why Visio calls for particular attention. While *Es* features a series of journeys outwards to remote lands, while firmly keeping the same centre as origin and destination of these trips, *Ns* depicts a movement *inward* and *into*. Nitida's journey is not only towards the centre of Visio, as it is also into the vessel, which might be seen as a miniaturised representation of the earth.[74] By looking into the vessel and the stones, Nitida can perform a panoptic observation of the ecumene, which underlines the nature of Visio as a microcosm symbolically connected to the macrocosm.

Mircea Eliade connects the concept of microcosm to the one of sacred space in the history of religions.[75] In *Ns*, both concepts are embodied by Visio. The island is a sacred space inasmuch as it bears a resemblance of Paradise, but it is also a microcosm inasmuch as it reproduces a stereotypical landscape and literally reflects the space of the whole world through the vessel and stones. In addition, Visio is a microcosm because it is designed on a concentric pattern. Concentric circles (or orbs) were at the basis of the Aristotelian and Ptolemaic *cosmos*, as highlighted in Chapter Two. In general, it is likely that the late medieval spatial system described above increased the writers' attention to such structures.[76]

As regards sacred centres and their symbolic power, Eliade refers specifically to the Middle Ages when he addresses the widespread idea of Jerusalem as the polarising centre of the world. According to his theory, from the sacralisation of Jerusalem derives a sacralisation

[74] A long medieval tradition of quadripartite maps might have been the inspiration for the design of the vessel. On this category of medieval maps, see Woodward 1987, pp. 294–99. In fact, even the most typical T-O maps were consistently designed as quadripartite, insofar as they were cut across by the two imaginary lines going from north to south and from west to east, thus splitting up the O in four quarters. This recurring symbolism of the four is addressed in the context of cartography by Dale Kedwards, cf. 7.3.2.3.

[75] Eliade 1958, p. 269.

[76] Similar considerations have been proposed by Rodriguez (2012, p. 18) about the reception of the Augustinian thought in order to explain the development of vertical spatial tropes in late medieval England.

of all symbolic centres of the human production and representation of space, starting from the microcosm of villages:

> The Center is precisely the place where […] space becomes sacred […]. It follows that *every construction or fabrication has the cosmogony as paradigmatic model*. The creation of the world becomes the archetype of every creative human gesture, whatever its plane of reference may be. […] Just as the universe unfolds from a center and stretches out toward the four cardinal points, the village comes into existence around an intersection. […] A square constructed from a central point is an *imago mundi*. The division of the village into four sections […] corresponds to the division of the universe into four horizons.[77]

Eliade's example seems to evoke the triad on which Lefebvre would build his spatial theory a couple of decades later. In this passage, the spatial production is described as a combination of *spatial practice* (the actual building of the village), *representational space* (the symbolic implications of the material space produced), and *representations of space* (the ideological plane that inspired the village's design). Eliade uses this example to underline the sacredness of certain spaces and architectures from a religious perspective. The emphasis on the centre, the geometrical balance, and a quadripartite structure that recalls the four cardinal directions is what gives the village the character of an *imago mundi*. By looking at *Ns* more attentively, it is possible to argue that a similar emphasis accompanies the description of Visio, as well. The central square vessel circumscribed by the islet, the lake, and the outer island is marked in its four corners by the presence of the stones, which are thus equidistant from the vessel's centre. Four sections might be distinguished starting from this basic configuration, as highlighted by *fig. 20*:

[77] Eliade 1968 [1961], p. 45.

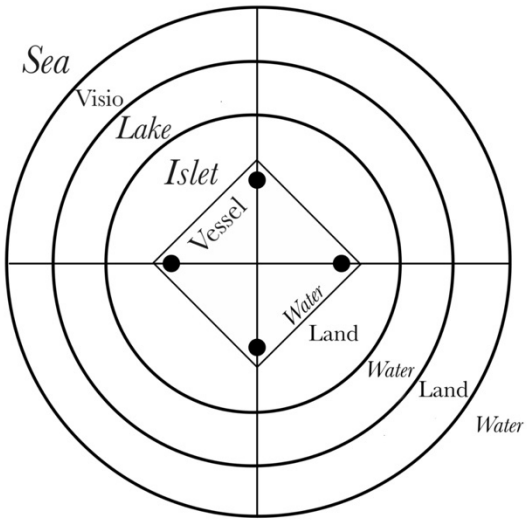

Figure 20 – Visio's quadrate partition established by the alignment of the stones with the cardinal direction

This design quite accurately corresponds to Eliade's model of microcosms as sacred places. However, this model is not limited to medieval villages and other symbolic architectures produced by men; in fact, Eliade describes the main characteristics of natural sacred places, as well. From his point of view, many religions, especially ancient ones, would find sacredness in a set of simple and idyllic elements such as water, trees, and stones (oftentimes in the form of natural altars), beside the already mentioned polarisation around a significant centre.[78] Finally, the microcosmic condensation of an *imago mundi* and the sacredness of the setting altogether are triggering factors of a metaphysical experience, i.e. an insight into the divine that Eliade calls 'hierophany', which means a manifestation of the divine. Again, Visio embodies all these features in the light of its function as both microcosm and sacred space, so much so that Nitida experiences a metaphysical vision once she reaches the centre of the island. The vision of the ecumene is a hierophany because the whole world is sacred as the product of God's creation. Although *Ns*, like most *riddarasögur*, never embraces an explicitly religious perspective, there is no reason to question this basic assumption about the late medieval worldview. The queen's progressive movement towards the centre corresponds to a progressive condensation of space, to the point that the whole world appears before her eyes by looking into the small stones, the final step of this spatial miniaturisation. It is a condensation conveyed through a specific spatial organisation that has a high symbolic potential, just like a medieval *mappa mundi*.

[78] Eliade 1958, pp. 270–71.

Moreover, manifestation of the divine through concentric patterns is a recurring feature of the writings attributed to mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen and Hugh of St. Victor (ca. 1096–1141), both allegedly known in Iceland, as pointed out by Árni Einarsson and further elaborated in Chapter Eight.[79] Concentricity and panoptic or cosmic representation, or mandala-like configurations, are also correlated in the *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* by Macrobius. A few of his extant medieval manuscripts contain drawings of the universe as described in Scipio's dream.[80] Again, all the key aspects of the metaphysical vision included in *Ns* are present here, as well.

The pattern of an islet within an island as a source of magic objects appears also in *Nikulás saga leikara* (*Niks*).[81] The text is an allegedly later *riddarasaga* not as brilliant as *Ns* in terms of literary value but still important for the sake of comparison. The possible inspirations of *Niks* are debated, even though the striking similarities with *Ns* and its presence right next to it in a large number of manuscripts have encouraged a direct connection between the two.[82] Among the many features that the sagas have in common there is the episode of the island.[83] Similar to Nitida, Nikulás travels to a remote island – this time off Britain – and decides to explore the hinterland overnight. He finds a lake in the middle of the island and a small islet in the middle of the lake. There, a golden house is floating in the air, with all kinds of creatures carved on the façade. On the inside, Nikulás finds a tablet or mirror with three parts of three different colours, matching the colours of three stones with different magic properties. From the mirror, he can see the whole world and what each man is doing both on land and at sea. At last, just like in *Ns*, the hero has to face a dangerous guardian on his way back to the ships.[84]

The concentric structure of Visio is replicated in *Niks*, and so is the panoptic vision of the world. It is likely that *Ns* had an impact on other texts, especially in the light of its popularity. It is even more interesting, though, to notice that the concentric structure (sea → island → lake → islet) does not seem to be featured in other texts of the Old Norse-Icelandic tradition, at least not with this defining characteristic.[85] In fact, *Niks* even adds a step to the concentric pattern of

[79] Árni Einarsson 2001.
[80] See for instance MS. Canon. Class. Lat. 257, 1383.
[81] The earliest attestations of the saga only date back to the seventeenth century, even though there is reason to believe that it might have been written in the Late Middle Ages (McDonald Werronen 2016, p. 76). Although the text has not been studied extensively, an English translation and analysis was produced by Keren H. Wick in 1996.
[82] McDonald 2014, p. 14.
[83] The similarities between the two texts are impressive to the point of near-identical phrasing. There is no room for a detailed analysis of them all in this context, but McDonald Werronen (2016, pp. 76–87) has provided with a comprehensive overview in this regard.
[84] *Niks*, pp. 172–73.
[85] Boberg indicates the two texts as the only ones featuring the discovery of magic objects on a faraway island (D849.3).

Ns. The magic mirror, which corresponds to Nitida's vessel as the vehicle of the vision, is placed inside a golden house floating in the air decorated with the images of every creature in the world.[86] The spatial configuration of the saga oddly calls to mind that of a Russian nesting doll (*fig. 21*):

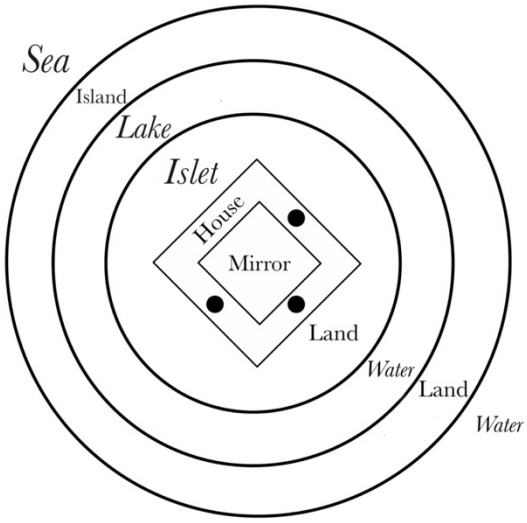

Figure 21 – The morphology of the island in Nikulás saga

These observations enhance the originality of *Ns*'s modes of spatial representation, particularly if the saga should be considered the main inspiration of *Niks*. Geographically speaking, the author of *Niks* plays with the imagery associated to remote islands at the edge of the world. The unnamed island is located here beyond Britain, which seems to recall Venerable Bede's localisation of Ultima Thule, most likely inspired by the reading of Isidore and Pliny.[87] It seems as if *Niks* included only so much of the source material offered by *Ns*. The few differences between the two episodes of *Ns* and *Niks* are evident, although a second passage of Bede might stimulate further speculation on both Visio and Nikulás's island.

Bede quotes directly from Pliny once more to further localise Ultima Thule on the world map: "Hitherto we have recorded the measurements of the ancients. The most assiduous of those who have followed them divide what remains of the earth into three sections, […] the last one [goes through] Scythia from the Riphaean Mountains into Thule where, as we said, there

[86] Nikulás also finds a set of three stones in the house (represented in *fig. 15*), but it is the mirror that triggers his vision. The reflective nature of the mirror and the reflective property of the water in the vessel have justified the correspondence between these two elements.
[87] Venerable Bede, *De ratione temporum*, 31:379; Isidore, *Etym.*, 14, VI, 4.

are alternating periods of continuous day and night".[88] This passage describes the most northerly parallel inscribed on the surface of the earth, which starts from the Riphaean mountain range, through Scythia, and finally reaches Thule.[89] Despite the vagueness of this description, Thule and Scythia are put in direct relation. Therefore, through Pliny's words, Bede depicts Thule not only as an island beyond Britain, but also as the end of a parallel that passes through Scythia and reaches the far north.

Svíþjóð hin kalda/hin mikla has been associated with Scythia by both Loth[90] and McDonald Werronen.[91] Although the location of Great-Sweden has been extensively debated by scholars, including Wanner and Simek,[92] with mixed opinions, the hypothesis of an identification of Scythia with *Svíþjóð hin kalda* or *Svíþjóð hin mikla* may lead to a parallel between Visio and the island of *Niks*, as well. What is known about Visio is that it is located beyond Scythia, but so would be the island of *Niks*, if the influence of Bede's and Pliny's description of Thule is to be assumed, that is, as a place beyond Britain at the end of the northernmost parallel that goes through Scythia. Therefore, both Visio and Nikulás's island might be the result of a late elaboration of the legend of Thule as the most remote land at the northern edge of the world.[93] This interpretation is encouraged by the ideas that circulated about Thule from classical antiquity well into the Middle Ages.[94] Not only was the island alternatively identified with various existing places, including Greenland and Iceland, but it was also surrounded by a legendary aura in the light of its remoteness and inaccessibility. Reconsidering Thule, altering some of the core features of its representation, in order to maintain its exoticness but also blend it with unexpected paradisiacal features, might have been a fascinating challenge for the Icelandic author of *Ns*. Although *Ns* does not mention Britain, it cannot be excluded that the author of *Nikulás saga* might have interpreted Visio as an alternative and original elaboration of Thule, whether the identification between the two islands was intentional or not in *Ns*.

In conclusion, the author of *Ns* might have merged the legendary description of Thule as the extreme northern edge of the world with the most typical descriptions of Paradise featured in learned texts. The reasons for this unusual mixture of opposite and contradictory

[88] Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 6.39. The passage is quoted in Bede, *De ratione temporum*, 33.386.
[89] The Riphaean mountains were supposedly located in an ill-defined remote area of Eurasia.
[90] See 7.3.1.
[91] McDonald Werronen 2016, p. 107.
[92] Wanner 2009; Simek 1990.
[93] It must be noted that the idea of Thule as extreme geographical border on which to project fears and anxieties was originally a Roman one. In medieval times, Thule was often associated to Iceland itself, for instance in *Landnámabók* and *Breta sögur* (cf. Kedwards 2020, p. 226).
[94] Thule represented the northern margin in the imagination of many writers, from Strabo (*Geographica*, V, 5) to the sixteenth-century cartographer Olaus Magnus (*Historia gentibus septentrionalibus*, II, 3).

elements might be found in the desire of *Ns*'s author to propose a counter-cosmography made by the combination of different features from different cardinal directions. The author's alleged concern about a re-evaluation of the far north might have been his primary motivation in the process. McDonald Werronen defines *Ns*'s depiction of the northern hemisphere as an attempt at the "Europeanisation" of the area.[95] Furthermore, Snorri's cosmographies might have represented a prestigious precedent in this regard and an encouragement to apply some degree of creative license to the saga's fictional world.

7.3.2.2 Stones and Epiphanies

The fundamental function of the stones for the realisation of a metaphysical vision in *Ns* has been highlighted above. It has been pointed out how this device of the stones and the vessel might be related to the overall sacredness of the landscape of Visio as a microcosm. As mentioned above, Mircea Eliade's discourse on sacred places and microcosms connects stones to epiphany and vision. This fascinating parallelism between Eliade's theories and the nature of the space designed by *Ns* may be further addressed, starting from Eliade's words:

> The sacred tree, the sacred stone are not adored as stone or tree; they are worshipped precisely because they are *hierophanies*, because they show something that is no longer stone or tree but the *sacred*, the *ganz andere*. It is impossible to overemphasize the paradox represented by every hierophany, even the most elementary. By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain *itself*, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu. A *sacred* stone remains a stone; […] nothing distinguishes it from all other stones. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality.[96]

Although no religious references are made in the description of Nitida's vision, this kind of complete and simultaneous view of the world has the power of stimulating wonder and awe in both Nitida, who is pleased by the vision (*drottning gladdisk nú vit þessa sýn*), and the reader. This might in fact trace back to a motif, the *in ictu oculi* (in the blink of an eye), that used to circulate in religious texts that were also available in Iceland.[97] Gregory the Great, whose *Dialogi* were translated into Old Norse and represented a precious source of teachings and *exempla*, features

[95] McDonald Werronen 2016, p. 88.
[96] Eliade 1968 [1961], p. 12.
[97] The expression comes straight from the Latin translation of the Bible (1 *Corinthians* 15:52) and indicates an indisputable truth acquired through direct and instant vision of an object or a scene.

the motif in his description of St. Benedict's life.[98] By looking at the manuscript AM 677 4to (thirteenth century), one of the main witnesses of Gregory's *Dialogi*, the epiphany of St. Benedict is described as a simultaneous and complete observation of the world from the top of a tower, favoured by a divine light illuminating the night and enabling the saint to perform the vision:

> h*ann* sa al*l*an hei*minn* fur[ir] augo*m* s*inum sua* se*m* und*ir* eino*m* geisla (33v:24).
>
> He saw the whole world before his eyes as if under a beam of sunlight.

It is true that Gregory's life of St. Benedict might represent a parallel tradition rather than a direct interference in *Ns*. The wordings of the two episodes are comparatively different, as well. Still, epiphanic moments like this seem to have enjoyed a certain literary success, as they are reported also in *Benedictus saga* and *Gregorius saga*, both probably inspired directly by the *Dialogi*; the former presents a description of St. Benedict's vision that quotes the one of AM 677 4to almost verbatim; the latter only maintains the nocturnal atmosphere and the descent of the divine light on the protagonist. In *Gregorius saga*, the epiphany is a way for Gregory to envision his future investiture as pope. Therefore, although there is no panoptic view of the ecumene, the *in ictu oculis* still presents a paranormal character with a prophetic function. This type of vision seems to align itself with a long tradition of literary visions and dreams that roots back to classical times – e.g. Scipio's dream in Cicero's *De republica*, commented by Macrobius – and was well known in medieval Iceland, for instance vias *Páls leizla* (*Visio Pauli*). In the quoted passage of AM 677 4to, specific reference is made to the divine light as the catalyst of the panoptic experience:

> þa sa h*ann* lios mikit ko*m*a af hi*minu*m s*ua* at þ*at* rac a b*u*rt o*ll* murkr nętre*nn*ar (33v:22–23)
>
> Then he saw a great light come down from the sky, so that it swept away the darkness of the night.

In this case, it is the secluded and isolated space of the tower that becomes an example of a sacred space. Although there is no *locus amoenus* involved, the overall architecture of the

[98] Traces of Gregory's work in Iceland can be found as early as the twelfth century, although mostly fragmentary (see Boyer 1993, p. 241). For more information on the reception of Gregory in medieval Iceland, see Wolf 2001; Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2000, pp. 89, 196–69; Boyer 1973. The most recent critical edition of the theological texts contained in AM 677 4to was fashioned by Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen in 2018.

scene indicates contemplation and sacredness. It is also interesting to notice that St. Benedict willingly leaves the company of others in order to reach his room where he could pray and contemplate all night, as if solitude were a prerequisite for this type of supernatural experience.

Isolation, contemplation, and verticality are related to panoptic vision in *Ssþ*, as well. Sedentiana's progressive closure from the outside world has been analysed above. It is important to add that, before her magic stone is stolen by the dwarf who helps Sigurðr, the maiden-king manages to use it to foresee the hero's arrival. She is still in possession of it when she has her isolated house built outside Treveris. The saga is not clear about this detail, but it seems as if the stone gets stolen at some point between the snake pit episode and Sigurðr's return to France in disguise of Amas. Here, Sedentiana feels the need to check the stone and see whether Amas and his companion should be trusted. In order to do this, she isolates herself in the upper chamber (here referred to as a tower) of her secret building, where she finds out about the loss of the stone.

> *Enn Sedentiana gekk í sinn turn ok litur í sinn steinn hverir þessir mundu vera er þar váru komnir vit land ok sá nú at hann var allr í burt.* (Ssþ, ch. 32, pp. 194–95)
>
> Sedentiana retires to her tower in order to look into her stone and see who these newcomers are. She realises now that the stone has disappeared.

Although the vision cannot take place, the reader may assume that it was her habit to reach for her secluded building in order to perform it. Moreover, the contemplative function of her room is enhanced by the paintings of noble warriors from the past on the walls. This means that an experience of this kind was not considered suitable to just any environment. It takes a place with a certain degree of sacredness or symbolic potential for the vision to be triggered. The *locus amoenus* represented by Sedentiana's garden only develops the sense of the exclusivity of this experience, besides connecting Sedentiana's and Nitida's spaces directly. Another interesting aspect of Sedentiana's stone, especially in comparison to the *Dialogi*, is the emphasis on the stone's brightness and the rays of light it irradiates, which are said to be seen from a great distance.[99] The involvement of a strong source of light is a feature of the panoptic epiphany in the *Dialogi*. Interestingly, Sedentiana's initial description already features a certain attention of the narrator to the brightness of her eyes, which are as bright as stars in clear weather. The maiden-king's head is also particularly praised, associated to the beauty of those

[99] *Ssþ*, ch. 30, p. 191.

islands with golden sunsets where the light shines as a burning flame.[100] Even though the moral evaluation of Sedentiana differs from that of Nitida, the association between a strong light, similar to sunbeams, and the possibility of performing the vision is defined from a purely aesthetic point of view.

All things considered, seeing the magic stone as a ritualistic element belonging to the clerical tradition seems unrealistic, inasmuch as the magic stone, as well as the magic gold ring, or the magic mirror or tablet, is a typical tool of both *riddarasögur* and folktales that does not only present prophetic or epiphanic features.[101] Magic stones have various purposes in various contexts. For instance, the maiden-king of *Gibbons saga* uses one to gain control over Gibbon,[102] while the one-legged creature of *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* offers the protagonist an invisibility stone in exchange for its life.[103] Moreover, the divine manifestation described in the *Dialogi* and the sagas of St. Benedict and Gregory the Great does not involve any stone. Nonetheless, the panoptic vision of the ecumene as an experience, regardless of its catalyst, might actually be borrowed from the Christian tradition, which in turn was inspired by classical sources (such as Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*). Both the reading of AM 677 4to and Eliade's analysis of holy places seem to point at this direction. This would mark another example of syncretism in Icelandic *riddarasögur*, where a popular element like the magic stone is combined with a religious motif like the *in ictu oculis*, which is triggered by the sacredness of the spatial design. It is certain, in any case, that the motif of the vision in the blink of an eye circulated in late medieval Iceland through the work of Gregory, which increased the chances for the authors of *Ns* and *Ssþ* to be acquainted with it.

7.3.2.3 Le centre qui imagine*: An Aesthetic Interpretation of Visio*

The observations presented in this chapter may encourage to see a correspondence between the panoptic vision of *Ns* and the aesthetic theories on vision, art, and beauty elaborated by Thomas Aquinas, one of the main promoters of the rediscovery of Aristotle in the Late Middle Ages and one of the main intellectual authorities of the time. Aquinas elaborates the concept of *visio aesthetica*, that is, a transcendent and religious definition of beauty, as pointed out by Umberto Eco.[104] The transcendent nature of a *visio* of beauty is in the fact that it symbolises

[100] *Ssþ,* ch. 3, p. 100.
[101] For some examples of the use of magic stones in folktales, see Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, pp. 126, 287, 299, 309. See also Matyushina 2006. These motifs are catalogued by Boberg as D931 (magic rock or stone), D838.2 (magic stones and a mirror), and D1344.1 (magic ring with shapeshifting powers).
[102] *Gibbons saga*, p. 8.
[103] *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, ch. 25, p. 59.
[104] Eco 2016 [2012], pp. 293–312.

and recalls a perfection that is metaphysical and, therefore, coexistent in the dimension of God's mind.[105] The earthly objects are perceived as representations of their perfect celestial equivalents. The earthly *visio*, in order to reach an aesthetic fulfilment, should have three fundamental characteristics, which are *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas*.[106]

Integritas has to do with the physical features of the object observed, as it must be as close as possible to the perfection of God's idea. A stone, for instance, in order to trigger the *visio*, should bear characteristics of beauty, symmetry, roundness, integrity, and any other feature that might bring it closer to the celestial archetype of a stone. Similarly, a large, strong, and flourishing tree was believed to better represent the archetypical features of the plant.[107] *Consonantia* (or *proportio*) has to do with the relationship between the different parts of the object, that is, their proportion, harmony, and their overall geometrical balance. For Aquinas, proportion and balance are two of the most important qualities of an object.[108] Finally, *claritas* connects directly to *consonantia*, in the sense that it constitutes another type of proportion, which is the one between the subject and the object. In other words, *claritas* is the means through which the beauty of an object clearly manifests itself to a subject.[109] Although an object might be naturally inclined to aesthetic beauty, it takes a sensitive subject for these qualities to be recognised.[110] Therefore, a new *consonantia* is required, no longer constrained by the individual parts, but rather between the subject's perception and the object itself. All three levels of perception are active and concurrent in the cognitive process described by Aquinas.

Nitida is appointed as the only interpreter of the stones' properties on Visio. That is because of her incredible knowledge and intelligence: "She was endowed with knowledge as the wisest scholar, and, surpassing other people's intelligence, she could make the strongest castle-wall with her own intellect, […] she knew ten answers when others knew one".[111] Nitida is the only one who can decide whether to share the privilege of grasping universal knowledge with anyone. She does that with Liforinus towards the end of the saga, only when she is sure that the man is worthy of accessing that kind of metaphysical dimension. It is fascinating to detect the connection between Nitida's name, the name of the island, and the aesthetic system created by Aquinas. As pointed out above, Nitida is a Latinism and a synonym for *clara* (bright, splendid, or clear), *visio* is the Latin word for vision, while *claritas* (brightness) is one of the key

[105] Eco 2016 [2012], pp. 295–96.
[106] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, xxxix, 8.
[107] Eco 2016 [2012], pp. 394–99.
[108] Eco 2016 [2012], pp. 374–93.
[109] Eco 2016 [2012], pp. 412–22.
[110] Eco 2016 [2012], pp. 167–69.
[111] McDonald 2009, p. 125.

concepts of Aquinas's *visio aesthetica*, precisely the one that connects an object of beauty to the subject's perception. These aspects might be simple coincidences, although the suspect of a deliberate connection between *Ns* and Aquinas's aesthetics is intriguing, especially considering the widespread circulation of Aquinas's thought in Christian Europe. It is likely that Icelandic scholars came across his work at least indirectly.

The concept of *claritas* was also a key passage of Augustine's discourse on language and one of the principles of *Grammatica*.[112] Generally speaking, it could convey the idea of a simple language, easily understandable and not obscured by excessive symbolism. Clarity of speech was considered a value for helping theological truth to reach the lower layers of society, but Augustine's *obscuritate allegoriarum* was also a principle of medieval rhetoric. Ryder Patzuk-Russell highlights the tension and contradiction between these two principles in the medieval grammatical discourse, further complicated in the bilingual context of late medieval Iceland, where Latin sources circulated and were used to produce an impressive amount of vernacular literature.[113] Sermons and homilies in the vernacular had to reach the majority of the audience, thus they were probably the ideal contexts for the application of *claritas*; on the other hand, more complex intellectual works might have called for an extensive use of metaphors and allegory, as suggested by Augustine himself, or at least a compromise between clarity and obscurity.[114]

It may be concluded that the Visio episode is generally indebted to highly educated sources, i.e. the most typical customs of encyclopaedic world descriptions or drawn *mappae mundi* and the most important principles of *aesthetica* and *Grammatica*. At the same time, the saga seems to look for a compromise between its intellectual character and the possibility of addressing a less educated audience through the typical fantastic features of the genre and the maiden-king motif, however changed it may be. A varied group of recipients would justify the stratification of the text through the use of both popular and learned materials, symbolic imagery and clarity of exposition. The less educated readers would enjoy the adventurous aspects of the story, whilst the more cultivated and attentive ones would detect references and patterns that would deepen their understanding of the text and its messages. In this regard, the balance between clarity and allegory suggested by St. Augustine would be achieved. An allegory, by definition, offers the audience a coherent narrative that would be enjoyable for its own sake, while concealing ideas that may be grasped by more expert readers. Finally, texts like *Ns* and other indigenous

[112] Patzuk-Russell 2021, pp. 254, 266.
[113] Patzuk-Russell 2021, pp. 148 ff.
[114] Patzuk-Russell 2021, p. 266.

riddarasögur might have some degree of didactic intent, which means that their figurative language might have openly challenged scholars to engage in complex textual interpretation, while entertaining and offering moral examples to the unlearned.

It should be noted that Aquinas's philosophy, especially his *Summa Theologiae* (1264–1274), was at the basis of late medieval Scholasticism. As mentioned above, learned Icelanders of the time would have been familiar with his thoughts. This does not automatically connect *Ns* to Aquinas, even though it certainly encourages speculation on the subject.[115] Generally speaking, the idea of Visio as a sacred place, somehow connected to a higher knowledge, would be consistent with Aquinas's *æsthetica*. If the island is considered through the criteria defined above, the clear concentric structure of its geography and the ordered disposition of its elements encourage a positive evaluation of the place in aesthetic terms.

The overall landscape of Visio is geometrically balanced and coherent in all its parts, as suggested by *fig. 20*. Visio naturally conveys ideas of integrity, consonance, and clarity. The centre of the island is even more beautiful and symbolic, inasmuch as the square vessel may be seen as the final step in a progressive condensation of universal space and knowledge. The point of view of *Ns* goes from the vastness of the sea to the island, the lake, the small islet bearing Edenic features, and finally to the vessel representing the whole world. The square is a perfectly balanced and proportionate shape, as is the circle. According to Dale Kedwards, the concentric shape of medieval maps naturally favoured groupings of fours. As shown in *fig. 20*, four radial lines could be traced departing from the centre and passing through the equidistant corners of the vessel and the seeing stones. The symbolism of the number four, tackled by Eliade in his discourse on symbolic religious architecture, was detected by Kedwards in his analysis of the Viðey maps, as well.

> These maps' depictions of the known world are enclosed within cosmological wheels that correlate the four cardinal directions with other natural fours. This conceptual frame conveys the vision of an ordered universe in which both space and time are subject to a fourfold ordering. The correspondences between the four cardinal directions, the four seasons, and the four component stages that measure a human life reveal the order intrinsic to nature.[116]

[115] While focusing on theories of passions and emotions, Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (2017, pp. 5–6) mentions Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* as a possibly known work in late medieval Iceland.
[116] Kedwards 2020, p. 147.

According to Kedwards, these recurring quaternities derived from treatises on natural philosophy permeated by Aristotelian precepts.[117] This exact type of quadripartite architecture has also been applied by Eva Spinazzè to the plan of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.[118] The Church was one of the most important highlights in the Holy Land and a popular pilgrimage destination. A sketchy map of the place circulated throughout the medieval period in the manuscripts of Adomnán of Iona (628–704), an Irish monk who wrote a travel book about his alleged journey to Jerusalem titled *De Locis Sanctis*.[119] Although the Holy Sepulchre underwent various renovations due to damages and fires over the centuries, it is possible that the impact of Adomnán's work influenced the image of the Holy City in Western Europe. According to Adomnán, the Holy Sepulchre was a remarkable example of concentric architecture (*fig. 22*). The building, which is believed to be the burial place of Christ, used to feature a series of circular walls that would culminate in its geometrical centre, where a sacred stone would be standing – the *omphalós*, or navel of the world.

As mentioned in 2.1, the *omphalós* was thought to be the physical centre of the earth, symbolised by a circular stone emerging from the ground. Inside it, a smaller concentric sphere stood out in relief, vertically and horizontally cut through its geometric centre, thus divided into four quarters by a cross. The *omphalós* is still preserved in the church nowadays.[120] Spinazzè draws four imaginary lines departing from this vessel and stretching outwards, each line representing a cardinal direction.[121] This visual reconstruction makes the plan of the building quadripartite in a way that perfectly matches both Kedwards's and Eliade's considerations on the symbolism of the four:

[117] On this topic, see O'Reilly 1998 and Esmeijer 1978.
[118] Spinazzè 2018.
[119] On Adomnán's reception and popularity in the Late Middle Ages, see O'Loughlin 2000. For examples of maps following Admonán's description, see Vienna ÖNB cod. 458, 4v (Salzburg, ninth century) and Karlsrühe BLB Aug. Perg. 129, 10r (Reichenau, tenth century).
[120] Precise information on the dating of the *omphalós* currently preserved in the Holy Sepulchre is lacking. In any case, there are descriptions of the object consistent with its current shape throughout the Middle Ages, e.g. pilgrims' travel books, as pointed out by Paczkowski 2005, p. 195.
[121] Spinazzè 2018, p. 247.

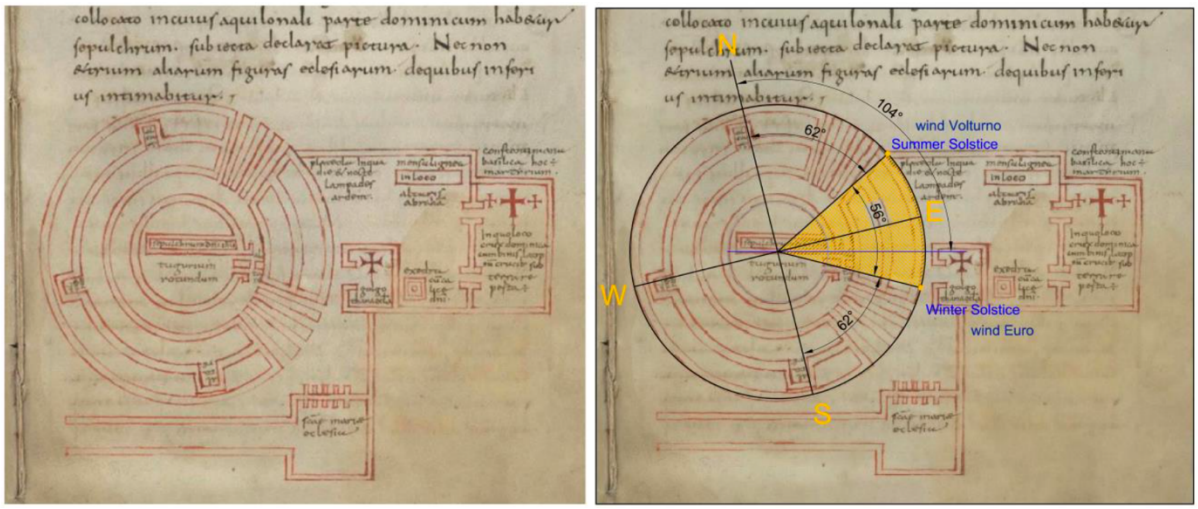

Figure 22 – Adomnán's map in Karlsrühe BLB Aug. Perg. 129, 10r and Spinazzè's reconstruction of the church's quadripartition

It is hard to establish the accuracy of Adomnán's depiction. In fact, his travel account might be seen as an *a posteriori* mental map rather than an accurate reconstruction.[122] Still, the intellectual nature of his work would only enhance its symbolic potential. It should be noted that the sacredness of places such as this church were a byword throughout the Middle Ages, as the obsession for Jerusalem and its holy centres was kept alive by European crusading desires. For instance, a French manuscript dating back to the late fifteenth century conveys a description of the Holy Sepulchre that still matches Adomnán's seventh-century architecture:

> *Vers orient est assise l'église du Saint Sépulcre faute en forme ronde […] Mais depuis qu'ils en eurent sa seigneurie, parce qu'il leur sembla que lieu, place et église de tant grand sainteté était trop petitement ouvrés et fais, ils y firent une nouvelle enceinte et clôture moult belle et moult haute et de très riche et forte ouvre qui enclosent et contiennent dedans sou la première église.* (Paris Français 5594, 87bis r)[123]

> There, too, on the east slope, is situated the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is round in shape […] But after our men assumed the lordship, it seemed to them that the place and the space and the church itself were too mean, having regard to their sanctity, and they raised there a new outer wall and a fine and high enclosure, of most elaborate workmanship, which encompassed and contained the first church. (Mamerot 2016 [2009], pp. 297, 300)

[122] O'Loughlin 1996, p. 101.
[123] The text has been normalised from the digital scan of the manuscript available on www.portail.biblissima.fr.

The work of Sébastien Mamerot (1418–1478) is a demonstration of the lasting popularity of this architecture. The author does not provide any specific source for it. Although Admonán's maps might not have been his direct inspiration, it is indicative that this concentric pattern was still connected to the alleged centre of the world many centuries later. The idea of sanctity as a concept that can be enhanced and ennobled by a concentric spatial design reflects the cosmographical information provided so far, as well as *Ns*'s representation of Visio.

The Holy Sepulchre was a fascinating place in Iceland, as well. The manuscript AM 194 8vo (1387) contains the most complete extant description of the church.[124] Although the passage often diverts from a strictly architectural depiction, the little information provided seems consistent with Adomnán's plans.[125] No reference is made to the concentric structure of the church, still the correspondence of most details may be evidence for AM 194 8vo drawing from the same learned tradition. Furthermore, the clear indication of the church as the centre of the world proves the Icelanders' familiarity with the idea of *umbilicus mundi* as a sacred symbolic location:

> þ*ar* e*r* k*ir*kia su e*r* grof d*ro*ttins e*r* i […] h*on* e*r* opin of*an* yf*ir* g*ro*f*in*ni þ*ar* e*r* midr heimr þ*ar* ski*n*n sol i*am*t or hi*m*ni ofan of Ioh*ann*is m*esso* (15r–15v).
>
> There is the church where our Lord's grave stands […] the church is open above the grave, and that is the centre of the world, where the sun shines directly from the sky on Jónsmessa.

The Holy Sepulchre is even used as a setting in one *riddarasaga*, *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, where the protagonist enters the building and offers a tribute to Christ.[126] The possibility that the author of *Ns* might have read about the original concentric plan of the Holy Sepulchre cannot be excluded, especially if Barnes's interpretation of the saga as a crusading geopolitical fantasy should be taken as valid. The author was probably acquainted with the most popular tales about Jerusalem and, therefore, conscious of the symbolic potential of the concentric architectures. This aspect is addressed by Eliade as an integral part of the sacralisation of Jerusalem and other holy places in the Middle Ages:

---

[124] The passage is transcribed and translated into German by Simek (1990, pp. 491–500).
[125] See the following references: the side altars carved in the temple's wall with directions north, south and west, the Anastasia *rotunda* with the central opening and the sunlight shining through, the temple of Mary, the central aisle with Christ's grave and the golden columns (depicted clearly in Vienna ÖNB cod. 458), the grave's stone with a marble top, and the locations of the church's doors (cf. Simek 1990, pp. 489, 495–96).
[126] *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, ch. 71, p. 335.

> The omphalós was looked upon as the 'navel of the earth', that is as the 'centre of the universe'. The symbolism of the 'centre' embraces a number of different ideas: the point of intersection of the cosmic spheres […]; a place that is hierophanic and therefore *real*, a supremely 'creational' place, because the source of all reality […] is to be found there.[127]

The logic of conceiving space presented by Eliade is consistent with the analysis of Chapter Two and was most likely an integral part of the intellectual training in late medieval times. Most importantly, Eliade underlines that the sacredness of the centre is a catalyst for metaphysical vision. The 'creational' character of the *omphalós* comes from its function of a microcosm representing the whole world in a condensed point. It might be a simple rock, as in the Ancient Greek belief, or a more elaborated object. In any case, it consists of a condensation of the macro in the micro, be it a rock or an opening in the ceiling, as in the Holy Sepulchre. Moreover, Eliade goes beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition, as he sees the sacralisation of spiritual centres as a process common to various religions throughout history, and this might be due to the very cognitive mechanisms of the human mind.

A striking parallelism connects, for instance, *Ns*'s Visio to the Oriental tradition of mandalas, especially to Tibetan Buddhism, which has been analysed by Carl Gustav Jung in his research on the matter.[128] In this context, the drawing of concentric mandalas is usually a woman's business, as if women were considered to have a privileged connection to the symbolism of the picture. The Tibetan mandalas are used as instruments of deep contemplation and connection with the divine as the principle creating the whole world (*fig. 23*). Three circles usually surround a square central area that resembles a courtyard, an idyllic garden, which is in turn provided with four doors aligned with the four cardinal directions. The innermost circle may also consist of a garland of lotus leaves or a lotus flower (*padma*).[129] Finally, the central position is taken by the god Shiva, depicted in the act of emanating the world from himself and embracing his feminine side as the first element that emerges from an initial state of unity. The centre is for Jung the representation of "sacred seclusion and concentration"[130] and takes the observers to a divine state of connection with all creation.

[127] Eliade 1958, p. 377.
[128] Jung 1969 [1959], pp. 355–84. The oldest mandalas were most likely drawn in India as early as the second century BC.
[129] Jung 1969 [1959], p. 356.
[130] Jung 1969 [1959], p. 356.

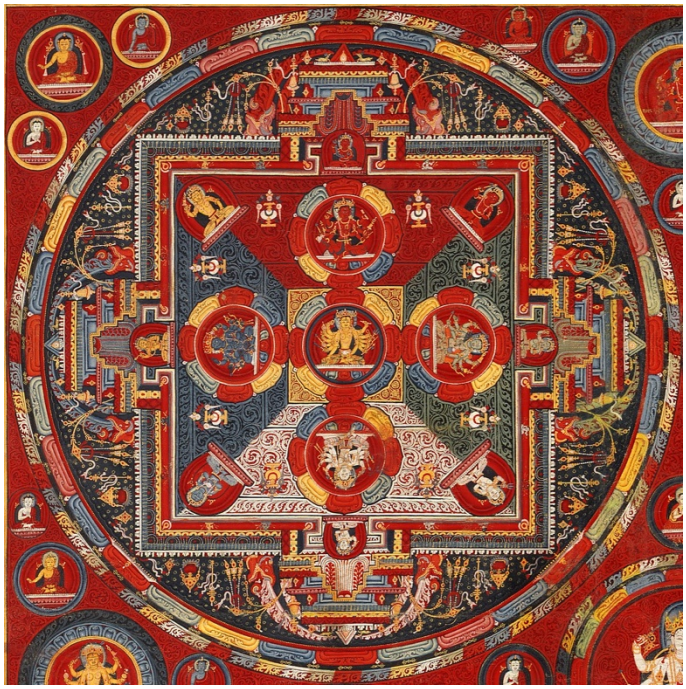

Figure 23 – Example of Mandala. Ngor monastery, Central Tibet (Wikimedia Commons, CC-PD-old-100)

Investigating the primordial origin of this symbolism is not one of this thesis's goals and would most likely leave us puzzled before the impossibility to determine where it comes from or what tradition influenced the other, assuming there is a path to follow for the movements of such ideas from east to west.[131] Still, the recurrence of concentric and circular geometries for sacred spaces and metaphysical visions is impressive, and the *translatio* motif would fit well into this type of progression of ancient knowledge from the Orient to the West via the Greek and Christian mediation, especially Catholic mysticism.[132] Moreover, Visio is not the only example of mandala symbolism in the Old Norse tradition, as the analysis of *Rauðúlfs þáttr* in Chapter Eight will demonstrate. While a direct influence of the eastern tradition on the author of *Ns* is out of the question from my point of view, the contact of Icelanders with the mystical imagery of authors such as Hildegard of Bingen and Hugh of St. Victor is much more plausible.[133] In any case, the symbolism of the lotus – or the rose, which is another typical mandala element – was nothing new to the Western mysticism.[134] Another instance is Dante Alighieri's *Paradiso*,

[131] Jung himself underlines the complexity of this task (1969 [1959], p. 359).
[132] The most evident parallelisms between Tibetan Buddhist mandalas and Visio are the following: The contemplative experience is limited to a wise woman who seems to have a special mindset to welcome the vision; the circles that surround the sacred centre are three (Visio, the lake, and the islet); the innermost islet is called Skóga-blómi (Flower of the woods), while many mandalas depict the lotus flower as the final circle before the centre; the sacred centre is included in a square, which in turn is aligned with the four cardinal directions (four doors / four stones).
[133] See Chapter Eight.
[134] Jung 1969 [1959], pp. 361, 363–64.

which features the concentric image of a rose (*Candida rosa*, White rose) whose petals are occupied by some blessed souls such as St. Augustine and Francis of Assisi. In the centre of the rose, which is located in the Empyrean, sits Virgin Mary. The structure resembles the circles of angelic choirs presented by Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias* (*fig. 27*).

In general, the correlation between symbolic centres and metaphysical vision in different cultures may be explained by the analysis of the cognitive processes that are activated by the human mind in front of this spatial configuration. As explained above, Gaston Bachelard addresses the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm and endorses the idea that the former can trigger imaginative experiences in the light of its spatial condensation.[135] Microcosms, especially concentric ones such as Visio, may be seen as miniaturised forms of entire worlds, therefore liberated from any dimensional constriction: "Every universe is concentrated in a nucleus, a spore, a dynamised centre [...], the centre that imagines. [...] This nucleising nucleus is a world in itself. The miniature deploys to the dimension of a universe. Once more, large is contained in small".[136] As this can be applied to simple objects, the vessel and the stones that Nitida uses to see the whole world may be seen as the last layer of a progressive spatial miniaturisation.[137] According to Bachelard, only the well-disposed mind can use everyday objects as magnifying lenses that open up the viewer's eyes to all sorts of imaginative experiences.[138] Although the 'sacredness' of concentric nuclei is not recognised by Bachelard in religious terms, it still fits the fundamental aspects of medieval spatiality as described so far. Moreover, Bachelard sees the ritualistic side of literature as the means that connects an object of beauty to an imaginative experience that transcends objective reality. Thomas Aquinas would most likely agree with Bachelard's take in this case.

Finally, it is important to stress the difference between imaginative and imaginary experience in this context. Nitida's view of the ecumene is a metaphysical experience that projects her at the top of the world. The world that she observes, though, is not imaginary; it is the same ecumene that she lives in, but it is imaginative in the sense that it unfolds within her mind through a unique cognitive process, triggered by the sacredness of Visio (and Skóga-blómi) as a symbolic microcosm. The Old-Norse tradition did feature the ability of certain figures to see the future or into other realms in the form of divination and clairvoyance, often connected to the ritualistic aspects of *seiðr*, a broad term referring to a great number of practices

[135] Cf. 2.1.
[136] Bachelard 1994, p. 157.
[137] Cf. Bachelard 1994, p. 159. The triggering potential of tiny objects also recalls the analysis of *The Buik of Alexander* in 2.4.4. Alexander is believed to have commissioned the first ever *mappa mundi* in the form of a small stone depicting the whole world.
[138] Bachelard 1994, pp. 155–56.

that has been tentatively associated with shamanism.[139] Nitida, however, finds herself in quite a different position. She is not a *völva* or a *spákona*,[140] as she is capable of seeing and searching all creation simultaneously, above and beyond the limits of simple foretelling, through the medium of learned (Christian) symbols such as Visio's concentric design. In fact, her wisdom is measured in comparison to the one of *hinn fróðasti klerkr* (the wisest scholar). This should confirm the intention of the authors of *riddarasögur* to seek explanations and meanings beyond the traditional lore. The islet and the vessel, with its quadripartite structure, are miniaturisations of the world, reflecting the same spatial logic detected in *mappae mundi* (e.g. *fig. 5*) and representational spaces. At the same time, following Bachelard's discourse, this miniaturisation finds in the small stones the ideal catalyst for Nitida's geographical imagination and her vision of everything, everywhere, all at once.

7.4 Brief Summary

- ⊕ *Nitida saga* features the subversion of the typical *meykongr* motif.
- ⊕ Nitida's physical description is symbolic and seems to hint at her ability to observe the whole ecumene thanks to the magic stones from Visio.
- ⊕ Visio may be associated with Terrestrial Paradise because of its idyllic natural landscape and magic properties.
- ⊕ On a macroscopic level, Visio's location in the far north subverts the image of Terrestrial Paradise in the east. Another example of 'counter-cosmography' is France as the high-seat of the world.
- ⊕ India is another geopolitical pole and Nitida's ally to defeat the Saracens. The axis between east and west may reflect crusading fantasies about Priester John and the eastern army that would save Christendom from the heathens.
- ⊕ The final geopolitical configuration seems to favour the northern hemisphere.
- ⊕ On a microscopic level, Visio presents a concentric morphology (sea → island → lake → islet → vessel → stones). The vessel and the stones add a quadrate partition to the pattern.
- ⊕ Concentricity and quadrate partitions were widespread modes of representation in medieval cartography (e.g. GKS 1812 I 4to, 6v).

[139] On the divinatory aspects of *seiðr*, see Dillmann 2006, 40–42; Dillmann (2006, 269–308) also addresses the question of *seiðr* as a possible shamanic practice.
[140] For an exhaustive definition of the terms, see Dillmann 2006, 29–37.

⊕ Panoptic visions of the world were known from learned texts, e.g. Gregory's *Dialogi* and *Benedictus saga*. Thomas Aquinas's *visio aesthetica* may also have influenced the passage.

⊕ Aquinas describes the vision as a sacred act, which is echoed in the studies of Eliade and Gaston Bachelard.

⊕ Eliade → Microcosms are sacred places in many religions, such as the Eastern ones. They are made of a few simple natural elements (flourishing trees, waters, and stones) and a distinct centre that triggers a vision of the sacred (*hierophany*).

⊕ Bachelard → Small objects (stones, shells, crystals, etc.) and concentric nuclei activate great imaginative power and visions of the infinitely big. The observer is taken from the micro into the macro, which creates an *axis mundi*, a vertical ascension of the mind.

⊕ Bachelard → The privilege of the vision is granted to poets. In in medieval times, it was mostly attributed to prophets, saints, and mystics (e.g. Hildegard of Bingen).

⊕ Nitida not only subverts the maiden-king type but also becomes the privileged recipient of universal knowledge without giving up her authority and agency.

⊕ Through space and spatial imagination, *Ns* offers an insight into the criteria of acceptability of female power in the late medieval discourse.

8 THE SPATIAL PARADIGM OF INDIGENOUS *RIDDARASÖGUR*

"For divinity has the form of a wheel, complete
and whole, without beginning or end; and it is
circumscribed by neither space nor time but contains all
things within itself"

– Hildegard von Bingen, *Liber Divinorum Operum*

When first approaching the corpus of Icelandic *riddarasögur* as defined in the first chapters of this work, the kaleidoscope of their settings, characters, and plots might leave the reader surprised and disordered. The difficulty of making sense of this huge degree of variation within the parameters of one literary genre is noteworthy. The task is made harder still if a comparison is drawn between *riddarasögur* and other saga genres, especially *Íslendingasögur*. And yet, a careful reading of the texts hints at some general coherence on the level of narrative design and treatment of the source materials. According to Geraldine Barnes, a fundamental biculturalism is the most notable defining feature of indigenous *riddarasögur*, expressed through a remarkable balance between the Latin clerical tradition and local lore.[1] The number of bookish materials combined by *riddarasögur* authors with traditional motifs and themes makes a case for the habit of late medieval Icelanders to move back and forth between them in the process of literary creation and fruition. Other monographic studies, such as those of Jürg Glauser and Astrid van Nahl, have focused on narratological and structural aspects which have proven equally important for the disclosure of the sagas' complexity, although they did not seem to fully exhaust the interpretative possibilities offered by the corpus.[2]

This research has aimed to address the main corpus without forgetting the dualism demonstrated by Barnes or the narratological contributions that highlighted the sagas' relationship with traditional folk stories and wonder tales. First and foremost, it was the reading of the texts that stimulated the hypothesis of a specific way of conceiving space common to most *riddarasögur* in the main corpus. The second step was the investigation of the late medieval worldview and the possibility of a shared logic of spatial production that would make sense of the sagas' rich and multifaceted fictional worlds. The task was feasible, despite a necessary degree of approximation, in the light of the cultural hegemony held by the Roman Catholic Church throughout Western Europe until the Reformation. This premise has found

[1] Barnes 2014.
[2] Glauser 1983; van Nahl 1981.

confirmation in the works of Henri Lefebvre and Alain Guerreau, who support the idea of defining a late medieval paradigm of spatial production and representation by considering the theological fundamentals of the Christian worldview. More precisely, late medieval spatial thinking seems to have developed via both the elaboration of Augustinian thought and the rediscovery of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmologies through religious lenses.

What emerged from these observations was a space, allegorical in its essence as a reflection of God's design or, in Neoplatonic terms, the result of divine emanation from a higher dimension. This fundamental dichotomy of Creator and Creation, exemplified by St. Augustine's *Civitas Dei* and *Civitas Homini*, is tridimensional, as it involves both the act of generating the world from above and a polarisation on the level of the earth via pivotal religious centres, chief of these being Jerusalem. Because of these premises, the proposed configuration of the Christian cosmos is also a concentric one, revolving vertically around God and horizontally around earthly sacred centres. This design is reflected in encyclopaedic works, *mappae mundi*, and literary texts across Europe, such as Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*. The intellectual representations of space elaborated by a society's cultural élite – in this case St. Augustine, Vincent de Beauvais, Isidore of Seville, and the other Church Fathers – is considered by Lefebvre the most relevant and influential aspect of spatial production.

The patristic image of the cosmos was featured in Icelandic documents, as well. Not only in T-O maps, but also computational diagrams depicting the lunar phases, tides, and the motion of planets rely on circular concentric models. This highlights a continuity with continental cartography as exemplified by the Hereford, Psalter, and Ebstorf maps and, thus, supports the hypothesis of a widespread logic of spatial production in late medieval Europe, governed by hierarchy, polarisation, and concentricity. Further validation of this thesis comes from the observation of similar spatial patterns in medieval architecture, iconography, and art. This aspect has not been tackled extensively, although some important examples have been provided. The plans of Jerusalem and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are two relevant cases of concentric architecture transmitted in clerical environments for centuries, both on the continent and in Iceland. For instance, AM 194 8vo, which features the Old Norse description of the Holy Sepulchre, also describes Jerusalem's *templum domini* in the same concentric terms. A tendency towards spatial condensation has also been detected as the third defining element of late medieval spatiality and the *omphalós* is a material example of it. This structure was typical of early Byzantine religious buildings, but it seems to have spread throughout the Middle Ages

thanks to its symbolic potential.[3] For instance, the Roman and Gothic styles of church construction make extensive use of concentric patterns, both in their domes and in the typical rose-wheel windows often depicting symbolic or biblical scenes with Christ at the centre.[4]

The late medieval development of vertical thinking has also been supported by literary examples, such as Bernard of Clairvaux's *humilitas* ladder, Rodriguez's study on vertical tropes in Middle English texts, and the importance of concepts such as *axis mundi*, cosmic mountains, and cosmic trees in the Christian symbolism. Lefebvre also addresses the semantics of vertical space multiple times by highlighting the meanings connected to altitudes and imposing feudalistic architecture. Specifically, he talks about three spatial levels: "surface, heights, depths – or, in other words, the earth, as worked and ruled by humanity; the peaks, the heavens; and abysses or gaping holes".[5] As seen above, the heights are associated with a diverse range of concepts, from superior knowledge to divinity, power and authority, up to aggressive imposition and the expression of a masculine impulse to dominate. The theoretical premises illustrated in Chapter Two have finally been summed up into three main modes of approaching space in late medieval times, three functional categories I support for the analysis of the main case studies. These are polarised, concentric, and condensed space. Three case studies have been presented, each corresponding to the one mode of spatial representation that appears as predominant in the text.

Sigurðar saga þögla relies on polarisation to glorify Sigurðr as a knight and a carrier of Christian values. His figure is presented in opposition to his brothers and Sedentiana. Both Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan and Sedentiana are the opposite poles to Sigurðr from a secular and moral point of view, thus, on both a horizontal and vertical plane. The horizontal dichotomy is embodied by the establishment of two geopolitical poles, namely Saxland (C-) and Lixion (C+), in the first part of the saga. This initial dichotomy triggers a mirror plot structure involving the separate adventures of Sigurðr and his brothers that is made of similar when not identical challenges with opposite outcomes. This mirroring is functional to the emergence of a family hierarchy with Sigurðr on top and Vilhjálmr and Hálfdan at the bottom. On a vertical level, it has been highlighted how the saga makes use of typical folktale and romance motifs, such as trolls and mountains, dwarfs and rocks, the dragon and the lion, and the snake pit, and recombines them according to an ideological agenda that would stress Sigurðr's moral value from a Christian perspective. Sigurðr's physical overcoming of obstacles usually corresponds to

[3] Shalev-Hurvitz 2015.
[4] Leyerle 1977.
[5] Lefebvre 1991, p. 236.

his brothers' literal and figurative downfall. The possibility of interpreting these aspects allegorically is enhanced by the narrator's exegetical digressions. Moreover, this meaningful symmetry is the result of the systematic material amplifications made by the author of *Ssþ*'s longer redaction, which was the main object of our attention.

The maiden-king Sedentiana is part of this general logic of spatial representation since she seeks both protection and domination through space. Unlike Sigurðr's brothers, the maiden-king manages to occupy the altitude, that is, a higher position of supremacy and defensiveness. Still, she ends up facing an even more humiliating end as she is raped inside the protected environment of her *hortus conclusus*. Her impregnable fortress is one of the key elements realising the saga's vertical polarity. At the same, the concentric plan of her secret building is remarkable, as it recalls the architecture of holy places while also casting doubts on Sedentiana as the rightful occupant of such space. Her takeover of both high and central positions is not followed by any moral elevation from her part. Her pride and sadism towards suitors persist. This might indicate the author's intention to warn the audience about specific behaviours, or propose valuable moral examples, via a significant spatial design.

A different approach is adopted by the author of *Ectors saga*, who works on the ideal of chivalry starting from concentric space. Ector is the symbolic centre of the saga, while his castle is the physical one. All knights departing from his court take different paths but are set to face roughly the same obstacles and environments, thus virtually creating a series of concentric circles all around their leader. Until about the end of the Mesopotamia's battle, the hero is the one and only positive pole of attraction in the saga. Ector may be compared to the sun, since the individual adventures of his knights are all irradiated from the castle and drawn back to the same point, where they should reunite in a year's time. Ector is the engine that puts every character in motion, the *primum mobile* of the fictional world that triggers the action. This structure seems to be inspired by cosmological symbolism, with the world concentrically generated by and simultaneously attracted to a given centre (God). The narrative time of *Es*, in particular, has been graphically rendered in *fig. 12*, which presents similarities with the typical concentric architecture of medieval rose-wheel windows (*fig. 24*), insofar as the knights' adventures might represent seven concentric petals attached to the same gynoecium.

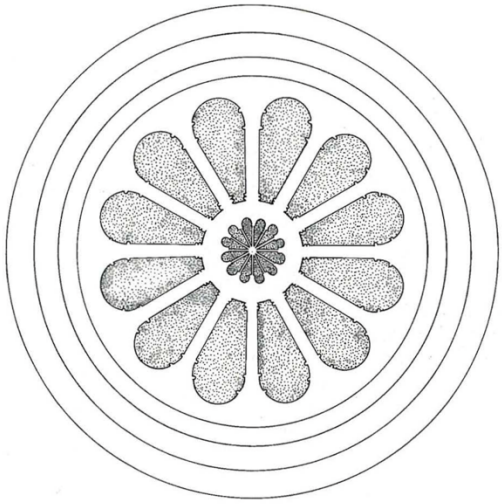

Figure 24 –Drawing of the rose window in the Church of San Zeno, Verona, ca. 1189–1200 (Leyerle 1977, 288)

John Leyerle addresses the presence of similar rose designs in literature, especially Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*, whose cosmic configuration has been addressed in 2.2.[6] The ability of the author of *Es* to play with space emerges also towards the end of the saga, when a process of mirroring and polarisation is at work. Here, Eneas of Mesopotamia, another hero of Trojan lineage, and his six followers are presented as a specular image of Ector and his retinue. Ector is the negative of Eneas, and Eneas the negative of Ector. The intercession of Eneas's sister is essential in order to establish a balance between the two poles of power and end the fight. In fact, Trobil is given features which were usually of Virgin Mary, like a lily-and-rose complexion. Virgin Mary's role as intercessor between men and God may have been in the mind of the author when describing the two suns that shine on the battlefield as Trobil reaches to Ector's camp.[7] Their wedding represents the culmination of this process of mediation. Finally, the careful elaboration of *Es*'s narrative space and plot is combined with the prefiguration of Ector as a Christian hero, or better, a noble heathen. What makes Ector a Christian 'type', beside his *ante-litteram* baptism, is the hostility towards Muslims and the story's chronological framework, which is long before the birth of Christ. This interpretation would further explain the use of concentricity and the association between Ector and the sun.

Finally, *Nitida saga* has been examined as an example of spatial condensation. Here, concentricity is functional to the creation of a sacred space, as defined by Mircea Eliade: a primeval microcosm made of blossoming trees, water, and stones. The Visio episode does not present a simple *locus amoenus* but an actual natural sanctuary empowered by its concentric space

[6] Leyerle 1977, p. 298.
[7] See 6.3.2.3, note 33.

and capable of triggering metaphysical visions. Like other natural sanctuaries, it is charged with symbolic values because of its function as microcosm. According to Eliade, the idea of sacred places as microcosms representing the entirety of Creation is especially dear to the Judeo-Christian tradition, where holy centres functioning as representational spaces were widespread. Again, the Holy Sepulchre, with its concentric plan and the *omphalós* vessel in the middle (the supposed physical centre of the world) is an important example in this regard (*fig. 25*).

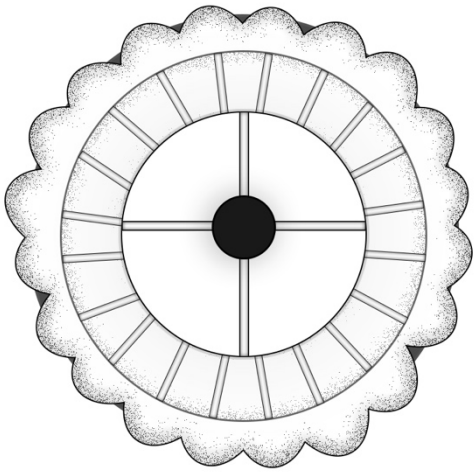

Figure 25 – Stylised drawing of the surface of omphalós's *goblet currently preserved in the Holy Sepulchre*

The analysis of Visio has been supported by the examination of Thomas Aquinas's principles of *visio aesthetica*, as well. Aquinas's theory proposes the concept of *claritas* as a key requirement for the human experience of beauty. It is likely that the author of *Ns* was aware of Aquinas's studies or Augustine's rhetoric, which also addresses the dichotomy of *claritas* (synonym of *nitiditas*) and *obscuritas*, although on the level of language. Both Augustine's rhetoric and Aquinas's aesthetic were important parts of Scholastic teaching in the Late Middle Ages. This does not provide any actual clue about the readings of the author or his intentions, but Aquinas's intellectual calibre does favour at least speculation on the matter.

In any case, the possibility of a philosophical and theological reflection underlying the Visio episode has stimulated a reference to the studies of Gaston Bachelard. If Eliade focuses on the sacredness of centres and microcosms like Skóga-blómi in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Bachelard directs the attention to the imaginative potential of concentric structures and miniatures, thus, on the cognitive aspects of the experience. Following Bachelard's discourse, Visio may be seen as a progressive condensation or miniaturisation of space, a microcosm, from the larger circle of the sea down to the miniature of the ecumene represented

by the vessel and the four stones. A graphic rendition of the episode (*fig. 20*) highlights a quadrate partition of space typical of medieval *mappae mundi*, such as the small Icelandic T-O map in GKS 1812 4to (*fig. 5*), and sacred architectures (*fig. 22*). A notable parallelism has been highlighted also between concentric and quadripartite structures aligned with the cardinal direction and the mandala tradition of Eastern religions, which were used as means of contemplation of the divine creation.

A wide circulation of this spatial configuration in Iceland and awareness of its allegorical function may be demonstrated by the fact that it is adopted in at least another fictional work of clerical stamp. In *Rauðúlfs þáttr* (The Story of Rauð and his Sons), a short story from the twelfth or thirteenth century, St. Ólafr (King Olav Haraldsson II, 995–1030) pays a visit to a man called Rauðúlfr. Ólafr and Rauðúlfr entertain themselves one evening, after which the king is invited to spend the night. Ólafr and his retinue are hosted in a round house with four equidistant doors. Twenty concentric pillars sustain a large dome that portrays scenes from the entire Creation. At the geometrical centre of the house lies King Ólafr's square bed. The four bedposts have gilded spheres on top and projecting bars with tripartite candles. The house is divided into four concentric quarters, most likely separated by four corridors intersecting in the central room where the king's bed is located. The building is also rotating and richly decorated. Thus, the king gets to admire the whole world as a picture in motion from his position. After falling asleep, Ólafr has a dream vision of a huge crucifix. The object is also decorated with many different materials and charged with a complex symbolism.[8] A plan of the building based on the saga's description is attached below (*fig. 26*):

[8] There is no room to describe the symbolism of the crucifix in greater detail here. For further information, see Árni Einarsson 2001, Turville-Petre 1967 and Faulkes 1966.

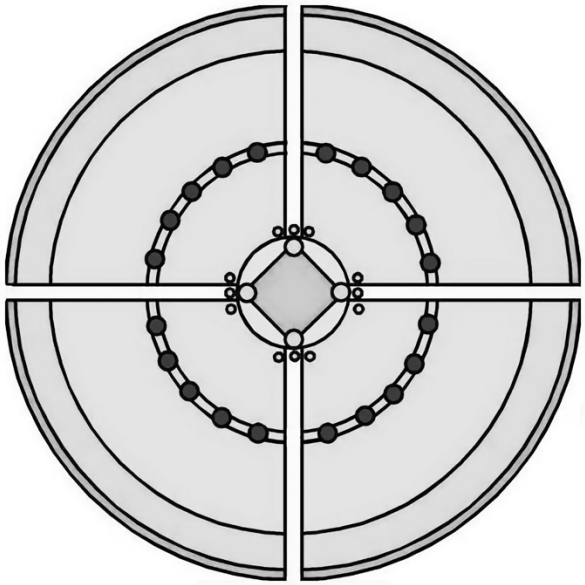

Figure 26 - Plan of Rauðúlfr's rotating house

The striking overlapping between the concentric architecture of the rotating house in *Rauðúlfs þáttr* and the spatial structure of Visio, the island of *Nikulás saga*, the Judeo-Christian *omphalós*, or even the eastern mandalas, is a confirmation of the symbolism of this mode of representation. The use of this pattern is associated with cosmological spatial arrangements, or 'cosmograms', which were believed to reflect the divine plan. Árni Einarsson, who has studied the *þáttr* in detail, believes that this spatial design may serve to underline the holiness of St. Ólafr.[9] He has convincingly connected this type of cosmological imagery to the mysticism of Hildegard von Bingen, especially her *Liber divinorum operum*.[10] Although there is no material evidence of her writings in Iceland, Árni highlights a relevant parallelism between her work and passages of the *Icelandic Homily Book* (1200), stating that the symbolic imagery of the ecclesiastical writings in Iceland is so closely related to the one of Hildegard that "her works can be used to support interpretations of allegorical works here [Iceland]".[11] While an extensive reading of Árni Einarsson demonstrates that the connections between *Rauðúlfs þáttr* and Hildegard go beyond patterns of concentricity, this shall be the main focus here, as it precisely recalls the above-suggested case studies. As mentioned in 7.3.2.3, the work of Hildegard and the recounting of her visions are full of references to concentric mandala-like images, such as the angels' choir in *Scivias* (*fig. 27*):[12]

[9] See Árni Einarsson 2001.
[10] Árni Einarsson 2001, p. 377–78.
[11] Árni Einarsson 2001, p. 400.
[12] *Scivias*, I, 6.

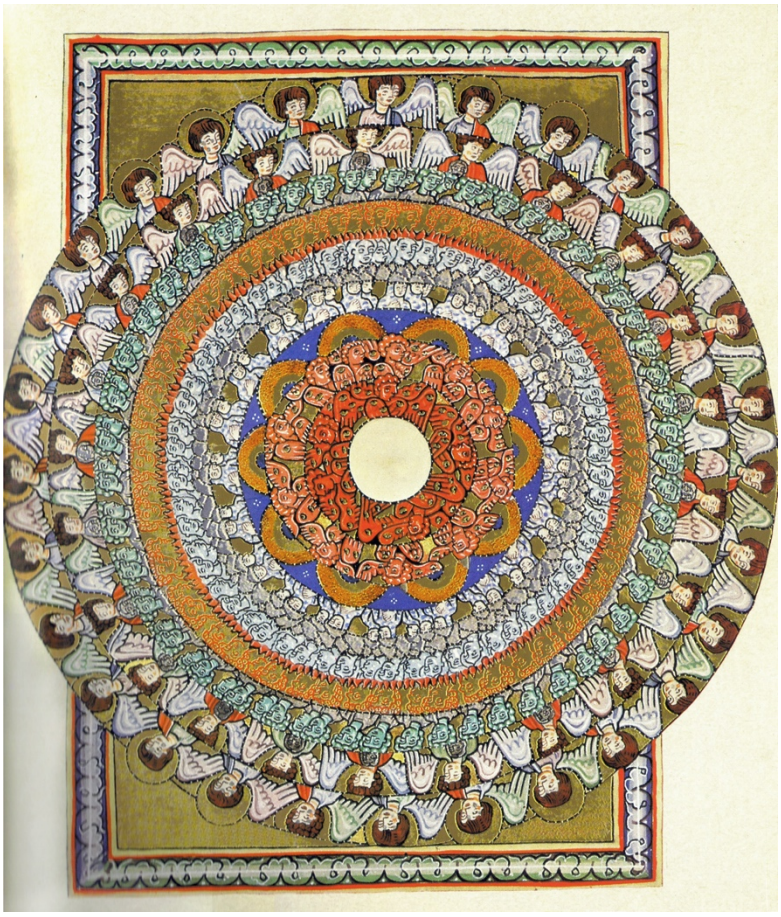

Figure 27 – Scivias*'s angels' choirs, Rupertsberger Riesenkodex, Wiesbaden State Library, late twelfth century (Wikimedia Commons, CC-PD-old-70)*

The same symbolism is discussed by other popular authors such as Hugh of St. Victor in *De arca Noe mystica*[13] and seems to belong to a shared cultural heritage that was likely well-known in Iceland, at least within intellectual circles. The relevance of this tradition does not have to contradict the genuinely Germanic elements featured in stories like *Rauðúlfs þáttr* where, for instance, the crucifix presents scenes from the legend of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani. As Árni points out: "Although there might be a northern tradition behind *Rauðúlfs þáttr* it is evident that its allegory mainly belongs to a widespread Christian tradition with Neoplatonic overtones, a tradition of which Hildegard of Bingen was an indispensable part".[14] Therefore, it is safe to assume the author's acquaintance with this Christian imagery in the analysis of the text. The insertion of such allegories in the stories is a sign of the great level of mastery that the medieval Icelandic authors could achieve. In this type of narratives, the symbolism of buildings was sometimes a key factor, as Árni points out.[15] After the observations of our case studies, it may

[13] Cf. Zinn 1973.
[14] Árni Einarsson 2001, p. 400.
[15] Árni Einarsson 2010, p. 292.

be said that narrative space in general could play an essential role in the construction of religious symbolism.

Quadripartite cosmic wheels with sacred centres aligned with the sun's seasonal movements and/or the cardinal directions have been found in the architecture of ancient churches and sanctuaries, such as the Holy Sepulchre, although they might also have influenced the colonisation of new lands, including Iceland. It was the belief of Einar Pálsson that the Icelandic *landnám* was defined by similar spatial patterns, which means that cosmic wheels might have guided the organisation of space and the foundation of villages and other places of interest in the new territories.[16] A circular and concentric design has emerged, for instance, in the area of Rangárvellir, in Iceland's southern lowlands, according to Einar's field research (*fig. 28*).[17]

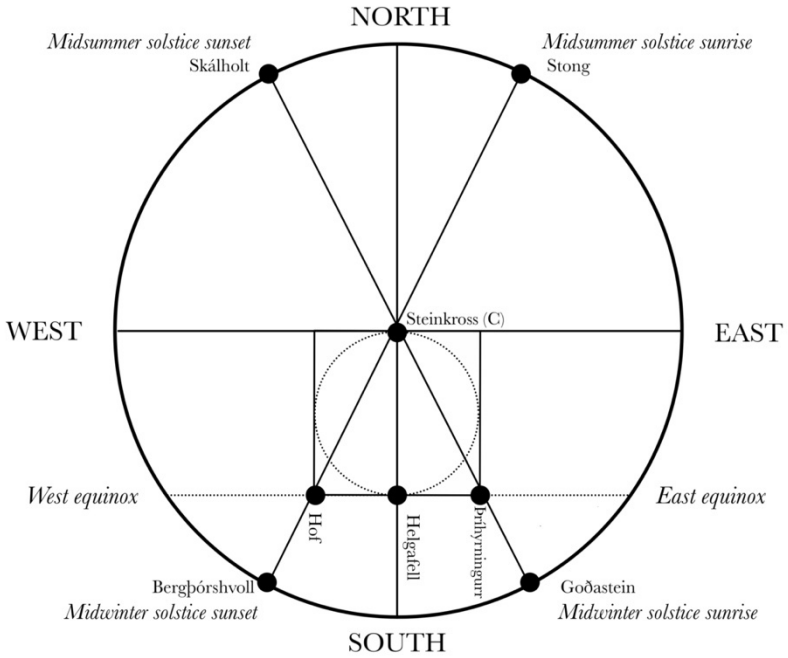

Figure 28 – Simplified Rangárvellir *cosmogram based on Pétur Halldórsson's rendition (2022, p. 27) of Einar's field research*

This spatial configuration had both symbolic and practical functions, as it would mirror the heavens in a microcosmic dimension but also help settlers fix local landmarks and conveniently measure distances and the passing of time. It could be used to assess the position of the sun in the sky as a sort of natural sundial, coherent with the 'abodes of the sun' trope that can be

[16] Cf. Einar Pálsson 1970.

[17] Einar's theories have inspired the work of others in recent years, such as the architect Þórarinn Þórarinsson, who attempted to link the Wheel of Rangá and the position of Þingvellir, Reykjavík and other places in southern Iceland (Gísli Sigurðsson 2022, p. 7). Another development of Einar's ideas has been offered by Pétur Halldórsson in recent years. See for instance Pétur Halldórsson 2022, p. 14.

found, for instance, in the rotating house of *Rauðúlfs þáttr*.[18] Einar affirms that even the *Íslendingasögur* – in particular *Njáls saga* – hint at similar patterns of thought, thus he attempted to trace back the cosmic landscapes defined by the saga through allegory.[19]

Einar Pálsson's work is complex and not easy to substantiate. It would also imply that similar cosmic wheels were well-known and used by the pagan settlers, who have not left as many clues as we would like about their worldview and spatial reasoning. As mentioned above, it is possible to find similar circular/concentric symbols in ancient art and architecture – such as the abodes of the sun god in the Konark Temple in India, the eastern mandalas, the plans ancient Middle Eastern cities, or ancient Roman buildings.[20] At the same time, however fascinating this idea may be, it would require more thorough reconstructions of the possible origins of the symbolism or at least its contextualisation within the culture of the pagan settlers. What they certainly had mastered by the time of the colonisation was the knowledge of the cardinal directions and of quadrate partition as a typical way to represent them. It is a compass rose system that was applied during the initial division of Iceland into quarters, as well.[21] The *Íslendingabók* and the *Landnámabók* carry the memory of how quadripartition was used in the first settlement period – the former presents a chapter titled *Frá fjórðungadeild* (Concerning the division into quarters), while the latter creates a clear correspondence between each quarter and one cardinal direction.[22] This knowledge was likely acquired before the colonisation, as there are traces of this pattern of thought elsewhere in Scandinavia, such as the Trelleborg fortress from Viking age Denmark (*fig. 29*).[23] Here, the quadripartition is evident, and so is the combination of the cardinal directions onto two axes, which are north-south and east-west.

[18] Árni Einarsson 2010, p. 296.
[19] Cf. Einar Pálsson 1998.
[20] The old structure of Baghdad, Iraq, has earned it the title of Round City. The original core, which was built between the eight and the tenth centuries and finally destroyed in 1258, used to have circular concentric plan with the square palace of the caliph at the centre. The myth of *Roma quadrata* as one of the original areas of the ancient city is addressed by Eliade below. Another example is the Teatro Marittimo (Maritime Theatre) in Emperor Hadrian's villa in Rome (second century). The theatre is particularly fascinating, as it consists of a circular quadripartite islet, surrounded by water, encircled by the external walls.
[21] Lindow 1994, p. 209.
[22] Lindow 1994, p. 210.
[23] Lindow 1994, pp. 211–12.

Figure 29 – Trelleborg fortress, Denmark, end of the tenth century (Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA-3.0)

As Gísli Sigurðsson points out, there is probably too little evidence to establish "whether the first inhabitants of Iceland thought in exactly the way Einar Pálsson proposed", and yet some ingenious ways of "linking themselves with the cosmos as it manifested to the naked eye" have always been found by human beings since the dawn of time.[24] Eliade's research has demonstrated that cosmic wheels as microcosms with sacred centres were not invented by Early Christians, although cultural and religious aspects of previous civilisations were assimilated by Catholicism.[25] St. Augustine himself was indebted to the ideas of Plotinus and Neoplatonism, as he adopted them to elaborate a worldview that would become predominant throughout the Catholic world. The writings of Hildegard of Bingen also prove a full integration of cosmic wheels of as forms of Christian mysticism. The most relevant aspect of this spatial configuration is that it seems to have always carried relevant meanings, regardless of its context and transmission. It shows a symbolic potential that made it popular through the centuries, as suggested by Eliade:

> The Roman *mundus* was a circular trench divided into four parts; it was at once the image of the cosmos and the paradigmatic model for the human habitation. It has been rightly proposed that *Roma quadrata* is to be understood not as being square in shape but as being divided into four parts. The *mundus* was clearly assimilated to the *omphalós*, to the navel of the earth; the city (*urbs*) was situated in the middle of the

[24] Gísli Sigurðsson 2022, p. 9.
[25] Elide 1968 (1961), p. 47.

> *orbis terrarum*. Similar ideas have been shown to explain the structure of Germanic villages and towns. In extremely varied cultural contexts, we constantly find the same cosmological schema and the same ritual scenario: settling in a territory is equivalent to founding a world.[26]

Lindow underlines the same pattern in the plan of Jerusalem that used to circulate in medieval Icelandic texts, such as *Hauksbók*. The city is not only circular but also quadripartite.[27] Both Rome and the Holy City took on the role of *caput mundi* and most polarising centres of the world at different times, which makes the use of the cosmological scheme appropriate to their greatness. The cosmic wheel may have been a way to both glorify culturally relevant locations or consecrate new land and devote it to the new settlers. Although it is hard to make the same statement for pre-Christian Iceland, Einar Pálsson's theory remains a fascinating possibility, especially because it suggests that this kind of cosmic symbolism might be hinted at by sagas other than the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, which either preserved a memory of early settlement practices or were already influenced by Christian symbolic space. Undoubtedly, the intellectual character of the *riddarasögur* and their universal scope make them more ideal containers of such symbolism than other types of sagas. Moreover, their spatial patterns are more obviously religious and allegoric, while the same cannot be guaranteed of *Íslendingasögur*, whose relationship with a past oral tradition has been object of debate. This may be an interesting perspective for future research.

As for our case studies, they do show traces of cosmic symbolism. Ector and Nitida undergo a process of glorification thanks to their central position in a concentric cosmological design where the axes of the cardinal directions play a crucial role. Their centrality is noble both in terms of macrocosm and microcosm. In *Es*, it corresponds to the position of Christ/the sun, while *Ns* may be more indebted to a mystical tradition led by Hildegard of Bingen and the representation of Virgin Mary as the gynoecium of the rose or the lotus. In both cases, the symbolism is achieved through concentricity and sacred centres. *Ssþ,* while focusing more on vertical polarisation and mirroring, seems to rely on similar patterns only to subvert them and highlight Sedentiana's failure to maintain her position of power at the centre of the *hortus conclusus*, which is another concentric microcosm associated with femininity. The queen is said to be hiding in the loft-room of her secret abode to observe the world through her magic stone. This is consistent with the idea of microcosmic centres as catalysts of a vision of the macro.

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[26] Elide 1968 (1961), p. 47.
[27] Lindow 1994, p. 212. Simek (1990, pp. 515–17) provides three examples of Jerusalem plans with pictures and quotes from the manuscripts.

The double nature of medieval exegesis, maintaining a subtle balance between *claritas* and *obscuritas*, may be the reason for these mystical patterns to be concealed underneath adventurous tales such as the indigenous *riddarasögur*. As Pseudo-Dionysius (fifth-sixth century) states regarding the two complementary aspects of theological discourse:

> The one [*claritas*] resorts to symbolism and involves initiation. The other [*obscuritas*] is philosophic and employs the method of demonstration. The one […] imposes the truthfulness of what is asserted. The other acts and, by means of a mystery which cannot be taught, it puts souls firmly in the presence of God.[28]

To a different extent, all sagas share a pattern of allegoric spatial representation that roots back in a shared religious tradition of mystical and patristic texts. This tradition may in turn have been influenced by pagan rituals of land consecration and worship of the sun, whose position was later taken up by God, Christ, or by the second intercessor (Virgin Mary) from a Catholic perspective. The famous illustration of Hildegard of Bingen known as 'Universal Man' (*fig. 30*), included in MS 1942 (Biblioteca Statale di Lucca, Italy, 1210-1230) summarises the concentric and vertical logic that regulated her cosmic vision and late medieval spatiality in general, as outlined in Chapter Two.

Figure 30 – Hildegard's Universal Man, MS 1942, 9r (Wikimedia Commons, CC-PD-old-70)

[28] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Epistolae*, 9. Cited by Árni Einarsson 2001, p. 399.

Vertically, God takes the uppermost position, indicating his dominion over the cosmos. Christ is the figure embracing the world on a lower level, then come the earth and the man as the final receptacle of the divine creation. God, Christ, and man are all at the centre of the universe but on different – and gradually smaller – cosmic dimensions, which are vertically arranged. Although it is not indicated in Hildegard's illustration, Mary does come to occupy a central position in the Late Middle Ages, that is, between man and Christ, as a second intercessor and co-redemptrix.[29] Dante Alighieri's *Candida rosa* lies precisely in an intermediate position between God and the lower heavenly circles (*fig. 2*). Dante's cosmology may indicate the reception of this function of the Virgin in his contemporary theological discourse.

Microcosm and macrocosm are in a symbolic relationship of interdependency in a wide range of literary, religious, didactical, and artistic works throughout the Late Middle Ages, including the Icelandic *riddarasögur* analysed here. This enforces the idea of a paradigm of spatial production and representation that was widespread at least among the Western intellectuals that shared a common philosophical training and ideological background. The bookish nature of the indigenous *riddarasögur* justifies the concealed presence of allegorical patterns, since *claritas* and *obscuritas* were essential parts of the rhetorical studies in learned environments. In fact, the late medieval spatial paradigm not only is adopted by the Icelandic *riddarasögur*, but it is also capitalised for the composition of multifaceted narratives with more than one layer of interpretation. This results in both the amusement and the intellectual stimulus of a diverse readership that was prepared to accept the interpretational challenges of the texts.

[29] See Williams 2000.

9 CONCLUSIONS

A Journey back from the Margins

Final remarks should be added about the authors of the indigenous *riddarasögur* and the place that the texts deserve in the history of Icelandic literature. This seems like an appropriate conclusion to this journey 'off the map', since a positive re-evaluation of the Icelandic romances as complex products of their time was one of the fundamental objectives of the dissertation. The high education and Scholastic training of late medieval Icelandic authors have emerged throughout the analysis. The teaching of the seven liberal arts was carried out both on the continent, through educational trips, and on the island, through the establishment of monastic schools. The rich style of indigenous *riddarasögur*, full of Latinisms and French loans, was not only the expression of a fad but rather a hint at the rich cultural background surrounding their authors, who had both the chance and ability to approach not only French originals, but also Latin works. It is also plausible to imagine part of their training taking place in France, Italy, Norway, or England. In fact, as highlighted in 3.1.1, the extant documents confirm the remarkable movement of educated Icelanders in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. At the same time, their acquired knowledge would be passed down by local schools and monasteries, which were the main centres of training and scribal activity in Iceland.

It is a fact that the Catholic cultural hegemony over Western Europe shaped the worldview and world descriptions of the learned groups on the continent as well as in Iceland. The consistency of the cartographical witnesses is remarkable, as well as the recurrence of prose descriptions of the ecumene following the theocentric image of the world established by the Christian patristics. The polarisation and concentricity of the cosmos are recurring features in graphic elaborations, architecture, and narratives that approach universal history and geography with a remarkable miniaturising attitude, often associated with mental maps that would be drawn in absence of a direct experience or the proper instruments to recount travels and pilgrimages on the spot. Moreover, a high education in theology, aesthetics, and rhetoric accustomed the Icelandic clergy to the use of allegory as a representational device. As Eliade points out about the production of space in religious environments: "To organise a space is to repeat the paradigmatic work of the gods".[1]

[1] Eliade 1968 [1961], p. 32.

The three case studies presented were selected as they seem to reflect a logic of conceiving space that is common to many medieval documents and artifacts which have no evident connection to one another except for the clerical environment of their authors. As highlighted by Sverrir Jakobsson, sacred places like sanctuaries and monasteries were not only the cultural and literary centres in medieval Iceland but also the privileged recipients of a whole new mindset coming from the continent as early as the twelfth century:

> Within the safe confines of the literate subculture, a new discourse on space and time was introduced […] based on the international models already prevalent in Latin Christianity. […] New ways of defining space, computing time, writing history, and describing the world went hand in hand with the adoption of ecclesiastical world history. This was the essence of the literary genre known as encyclopaedic literature (*alfræði*).[2]

Therefore, the diffusion of an intellectual kind of space in the indigenous *riddarasögur* may help further describe and differentiate their authors as a rather homogeneous group. It is possible that some authors constituted a network of highly educated scholars and literary enthusiasts occupying important teaching positions in local schools. Their texts show a complex worldview, a good knowledge of Latin and the Bible, as well as expertise in rhetoric and aesthetics and a deep understanding of local folklore. Their authorial work hints at a desire to combine the most diverse elements together in order to create coherent texts with various functions. Beside entertaining their audience, the authors often challenge the reader to more attentive interpretations of indigenous *riddarasögur*, which means that the Augustinian discourse on spatial exegesis had been well assimilated by the fourteenth century. Moreover, a layered and varied audience might correspond to these layered narrative designs.

The more educated circles of Icelandic society would be aware of the allegorical character of the texts since they shared the same cultural horizon as the authors and may have been authors themselves. The less educated groups, on the other hand, would enjoy an adventurous tale full of useful behavioural models and moral examples. By constructing their works this way, the authors of indigenous *riddarasögur* would fulfil two goals at the same time, as they would simultaneously preach to the unlearned and teach the learned, which makes their profile more likely clerical than secular. At the same time, the possibility for educated laymen to take part in the composition of *riddarasögur* cannot be ruled out, especially if the worldview

[2] Sverrir Jakobsson 2010, p. 9.

underlying the texts was shared by all the members of the Icelandic cultural élite, as pointed out by Simek.[3] Finally, the hypothesis of the authors being part of a community with a certain degree of awareness about the potential of their work finds comfort in the numerous intertextual references (e.g *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* in *Ssþ*) and in works like *Ns*, which has been interpreted as a possible direct response to *Clári saga*. This network may have elaborated the new discourse on space and time that had been introduced in the twelfth century even more solidly by the time of composition of the *riddarasögur*; besides, they may have grown a deeper awareness of their possibilities as a literary community.

I believe that the authors of *riddarasögur* were among the most educated figures of their society. They seem to be aware that different types of texts required different styles, contents, and registers. They most likely had learned from their training that certain spatial patterns belonged to certain kinds of products, dealing with universal history, geography, and cosmography, more than others, dealing with different themes and more context-specific narratives. As T-maps bore more allegorical elements than portolan charts and other products with more practical purposes, so would the Icelandic *riddarasögur* be designed starting from ideological principles in the light of their broad intellectual scope. This explanation implies a certain awareness of Icelandic authors about literary 'genres', or at least about different textual typologies.

One last question regarding on the authors' intentionality may be answered at this point since their agency over the texts seems remarkable. Although many indigenous *riddarasögur* have been tackled for their richness in folktale elements, the unconscious application of archetypes and motifs theorised by Claude Lévi-Strauss does not appear to fit the Icelandic romances.[4] The 'primitive mentality' that would trigger the spontaneous and unmediated incorporation of myths and legends in the texts is far from the suggested profile of *riddarasögur* authors.[5] In fact, the indigenous romances represent one of the most elaborated and conscious attempts at literary experimentation in the Icelandic Middle Ages. They look more like a deliberate combination of genres and influences, made with the intent of inventing something that did not quite exist before, at least not in this form. Although the space of Visio has been analysed in terms of a spontaneous imaginative experience activated by certain conditions, it should be

[3] Simek 2009.

[4] Lévi-Strauss 1983 [1969] questions the possibility that structural patterns in myths, fairy-tales, or other genres may be applied intentionally or consciously perceived by the recipients of the narratives. Generally speaking, he believes that the mythical thinking at the basis of archetypical narrative units is not conscious, as stated also by Carl Jung (1969 [1959], p. 154): "the primitive mentality does not *invent* myths, it *experiences* them" (transl. Richard F. C. Hull).

[5] For more information on these aspects of structuralism and folklore, see Dundes 1976.

noted that this kind of epiphany is strictly related to the fictional character, Nitida. My hypothesis is that the author was conscious of the symbolism of concentric circles and microcosms, and the design of the episode was intentionally allegoric. I have also detected a similar awareness in the multifaceted and ideological spatial designs of *Sigurðar saga* and *Ectors saga*.

The above considerations lean towards the conclusion that Iceland was not a country off the maps after all, at least not from the viewpoint of its own inhabitants. Figuratively speaking, the land was well positioned in the landscape of late medieval Europe, a period of constant and fruitful exchanges not only in terms of commercial wealth but also immaterial culture. Icelanders were aware of themselves sharing a worldview with the Roman Catholic world, expressed also through a logic of spatial representation that had an important impact on the literature of the time. Late medieval Icelanders embraced the precepts of Latin Christianity and applied them to their own culture by remaking a popular genre such as chivalric romance on their own terms. This describes a realm of literary experimentation, to quote Barnes, that could only be possible through active communications with the outside world.[6] The late medieval spatial paradigm was not passively imitated and absorbed but rather combined with traditional lore and bent to the needs of Icelandic narratives as a way to assert both local identity and belonging to a larger community.

My dissertation aligns itself with the efforts of other scholars who have worked towards a valorisation of *riddarasögur* and the cultural endeavours of post-Commonwealth Icelanders. Understandably, this process is still ongoing, which means that any contribution only represents a scratch on the surface of the rich and diverse group of texts that we call Icelandic *riddarasögur*. Future research will hopefully make use of these accomplishments to deepen our understanding of the genre beyond its entertaining surface, possibly with an even broader scope that would include other genres, such as the *fornaldarsögur*. There is another remote land to explore beyond the limits of scholarly prejudice and short-sighted disciplinary isolation, a new horizon to disclose through brave, astute and wide-open observations. If the heroes of *riddarasögur* can teach something to modern literary criticism, that is the enthusiastic possibility of expecting the unexpectable just by leaving the comfort of what we think we know about the world.

[6] Barnes 2000, p. 283.

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