

Journey to the Antipodes. Cosmological and Mythological Themes in *Alexanders Saga*

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First a look at evidence for the shape of the world as it was imagined by audiences of *Alexanders saga*, the mid-thirteenth-century account of Alexander the Great which is a translation of Walter of Châtillon's Latin epic, the *Alexandreis*.

Simek (1990, 102-103) has listed a small number of texts which indicate that Old Norse audiences of the thirteenth century, at least in ecclesiastical and courtly circles, were familiar with the belief that the earth is spherical. This idea had been an integral part of scholarly learning in Europe since the Carolingian renaissance of the eighth century, and from the twelfth century it was being taught to most clerics; by the thirteenth century it had found its way into popular literature (Simek 1996, 25). Evidence for the familiarity of this belief at the very start of the thirteenth century in Iceland can be found in a passage from *Elucidarius*, where the teacher explains to his pupil that the head of Man was given a rounded shape in the likeness of the world: *Hofop hans vas bollot ígliking heimballar* (Simek 1990, 401, transcribed from MS AM 674a, 4to, dated ca.1200). Being so brief, the explanation could not have made sense

unless the idea of a spherical world was taken for granted. In mid-thirteenth-century Norway, by contrast, the writer of *Konungs skuggsjá* makes his wise king take the trouble to discuss the shape of the earth at some length, and to clinch his argument with the famous image of an apple hanging next to a candle, where the apple represents the earth and the candle is the sun. The use of this image is rather confused, but the conclusion is perfectly clear: *Nu skal aa þui marka at bollottur er iardar hrijngur* (Kon. sk. 1945, 11).

To these references may be added a passage in *Alexanders saga*, not mentioned by Simek, in which the Persian King Darius sends an insulting letter to the youthful Alexander who has already, at this point, made extensive conquests in Persian territory. Darius' envoys present Alexander with a ball which his letter says is to be understood as a plaything more suitable to Alexander's age than are shields and swords. Alexander replies that he puts a different interpretation on the gift, for the shape of the ball represents the world which he will conquer: *Bollrenn markar með vexte sinom heim þenna er ec man undir mec leggja* (*Alexanders saga* 1925, 19³²⁻³³).¹ This is a close paraphrase of the corresponding lines in the *Alexandreis* (Walter 1978, II.38-39):

Forma rotunda pilae speram speciemque rotundi,
Quem michi subiciam, pulchre determinat orbis.

The story of Alexander's riposte was certainly well-known in thirteenth-century Europe, not only through the *Alexandreis*, which was hugely successful and became a school text, but because it also occurs at paragraph I.38 in sundry versions of the *Alexander Romance*.² Even if the Old Norse audience of *Alexanders saga* did not already know the story, however, it is clear that they were expected to understand its point without difficulty; for it is the translator's habit to explain matters which he thinks might cause difficulty, but here he renders the account pithily and without any comment of his own.

Vestiges of mythological thinking in which the earth seems to be imagined as a flat disk, however, may be found in a passage where the clash of the opposing armies at Gaugamela is said to shake the ground and to make Atlas stagger: *Athals stakraðe við er einn er af þeim er vpp hallda heimenom. sva at hann fek varla staðet vndir byrðe sinne* (Al. Saga 1925, 65²⁵⁻²⁷). Here *heimr* means 'sky', in contrast with the earth on which the titan is standing. The explanation of Atlas as 'one of those who hold up the sky', implying that there are others, is an addition to the Latin text (see Walter 1978, IV.293-296). It would have been comprehensible even to an audience unfamiliar with classical

¹ All quotations from Finnur Jónsson's edition of *Alexanders saga* in this paper coincide with the wording of the late-thirteenth-century MS AM 519a, 4to, published in facsimile by Jón Helgason (*Alexanders saga* 1966).

² For examples see *Historia de preliis* (1975) and *Julii Valerii Epitome* (1867).

literature because it takes the Graeco-Roman myth of Atlas, the sole supporter of the heavens, and brings it into line with the Old Norse myth as told by Snorri (1988, 12) in *Gylfaginning*, where it is said that four dwarfs support the sky. The sky itself is conceived, in Snorri's text, as the dome of a giant's skull set up over what is, by implication, a flat earth. By alluding to this idea, the translator of *Alexanders saga* encourages his audience, like that of *Gylfaginning*, to imagine the world as something like a plate with a basin inverted on top of it; and the brevity of the allusion shows that the audience was ready to substitute this image for that of the spherical earth when prompted by a mythological context. It should be mentioned, however, that at least one medieval reader of the saga in the Arna-Magnæan manuscript 519a (see f. 16^v) felt called upon to note that the world is not really covered by a bowl-like sky held up by Atlas *et al.*, for at this point he has written in the margin the words *fabulosum est*, 'this is mythical'.

The themes of the spherical earth and the bowl-shaped sky undergo an interesting development and combination in a passage which paraphrases Walter (1978) VII.393-403. It describes Darius' tomb with its glittering columns and the spectacular dome which displays a map of the world on its inner surface (*Al. Saga* 1925, 112¹²⁻²⁰):

Vppi yvir stolpunum var hvalf sva gagnsétt sem gler. þvilict vaxet sem himinn til at sia. áþvi hvalve var scrifaðr heimrenn allr greindr isina þriðjunga. oc sva hver lond liggia ihveriom þriðjunge [...] oc sva eyiar þér er i hafino liggia. þar var oc markat hversu vthafet gerðer vm oll londin.

Here the expression *heimrinn allr* does not mean the globe but the world in the sense of the three continents inhabited by mankind; it corresponds to Walter's phrase *tripertitus orbis* (1978, VII.397), where *orbis* means 'a rounded surface, disk', or more specifically 'the circle of the world' or simply 'world' (Lewis and Short 1879). It certainly cannot mean 'globe', for no-one ever suggested that the globe was entirely covered by the three known continents. The map omits the possible fourth continent which is mentioned by Isidore (1911), for example, in *Etymologiae* XIV.5.17, and which is occasionally included in world maps from the twelfth century onwards, labelled *terra australis incognita* (Simek 1996, 51). Are Walter and his translator therefore imagining a non-spherical world in this passage, one which has no southern hemisphere? Probably the answer is 'no' because the surface on which the map is drawn is itself hemispherical, as we see from the phrase *vaxit sem himinn*, 'shaped like the sky', which corresponds to Walter's statement (1978, VII.395-396) that the dome is *caelique uolubilis instar, Concaua testudo*, 'an image of the turning sky, a concave shell'. What we seem to have here, then, is a representation of the northern hemisphere drawn inside a hemispherical vault. But in that case we also have here a text in which the northern half of the globe is referred to quite definitely as *heimrinn allr*.

This representation of the world needs to be borne in mind when reading the closing pages of the saga, where Alexander attains the summit of power after reaching the farthest limit of Asia and returning to Babylon via the outer Ocean, conquering any islands in his way. *Nu er aprt at snua til sogunnar*, says the translator after reporting Walter's moralisations on the state of affairs, *oc fra því at segja að en Alexander latiz. at hamingian oc fregðen gerir hann einvallz hofðengia yfir heiminvm* (*Al. saga* 1925, 149³²-150¹). All the nations which remain unconquered are astounded by the news of Alexander's success, and they decide now to surrender rather than to face certain defeat; accordingly they send their emissaries to Babylon, offering tribute and allegiance. To the modern reader this sudden development may seem almost comical, but it needs to be taken quite seriously for we can see that it fulfils the promise which God, in the likeness of the Jewish High Priest and not fully recognised by Alexander, gave to the young king while he was still in Macedonia: *Farðu abraut af fostr lande þino Alexander. þviat ec man allt folk undir þic leggja* (*Al. saga* 1925, 17¹⁷⁻¹⁸), corresponding to Walter 1978, I.532-533).³ In Babylon Alexander takes on his role as world ruler with due solemnity: pious pagan that he is and remains, he thanks the divine powers for the new turn of events, and then assures the emissaries that the peoples who have surrendered to him will be treated with no less mercy than he has already shown to those whom he conquered (*Al. saga* 150²⁵-151³; Walter X.283-298). Once the emissaries have been dismissed, however, he must face up once and for all to a problem which he has already foreseen. Now that he has gained possession of the whole world - that is to say, the northern hemisphere as it was depicted on the dome of Darius' tomb - what will he do with himself and his army? Speaking to his knights, he gives a typically heroic answer (*Al. saga* 151¹³⁻¹⁷):

þviat nu er ner ecke við at briotaz iþessvm heiminum. þat er vaR frami mege vaxa við. en oss hevir eigi at vaR hvatleicr dofne af atferðarleyse. þa gerum sva vel oc leitum þeira er byggva annan heimenn. at var fregð oc kraptr late engis úfreistat þess er til fremðar se. oc ver megem allan alldr lifa íloflegri frasogn þeira. er var stovirki vilia ritat hava.

It is important to note how closely this paraphrases Walter (1978) X.312-317:

Nunc quia nil mundo peragendum restat in isto,
Ne tamen assuetus armorum langueat usus,
Eia, queramus alio sub sole iacentes
Antipodum populos ne gloria nostra relinquat
Vel uirtus quid in expertum quo crescere possit
Vel quo perpetui mereatur carminis odas.⁴

³ It may also be noted that the writer of *Gyðinga saga* (1995, 3), alluding to the *Alexanders saga* account, takes it as sober historical fact that the Macedonian became sole ruler of the world: *Alexandr hinn Ríki ok hinn mikli kongr. þa er hann hafði sigrat ok undir sik lagt allar þiðir iheiminum sem fyrr var Rítat [...] þa skipti hann Ríki sino með sinum monnum xii.*

⁴ 'Nothing now remains to be completed in this world. Come, then, let us seek the peoples of the Antipodes who lie beneath another sun, that your familiarity with the use of arms may not languish, and that our glory and valour may leave nothing untried whereby they can gain increase,

In the text from *Alexanders saga*, the phrase *þessi heimrinn* clearly means the northern world which Alexander has already conquered, in contrast with the southern hemisphere, which is here signified by *annarr heimrinn*. There appears to be no other passage in Old Norse literature which uses the term *annarr heimrinn* in this way, but it is evident that those who dwell in the other *heimr* and whom Alexander means to seek, are the peoples of the Antipodes.

According to widespread medieval views, such people may or may not actually exist beyond the equatorial Torrid Zone, in the southern temperate region of the globe. Being on the other side of the earth, their feet would be planted opposite those of people in the north - hence the Latin name *antipodes*, for which the Old Norse equivalent, *andfætingar*, is recorded in a very few texts. There is evidence that the existence of the *andfætingar* was believed in quite seriously in Iceland, for a twelfth-century homily makes a brief reference to them in order to illustrate the principle that some people are bound to lack a thing while others enjoy it (*Íslensk Hómilíubók* 1993, 180): *Á sólina koma flestir nytjum, og eru þó rændir aðrir andfætingar hennar ljósi, þá er aðrir hafa*. And a diagram of the world in an Icelandic manuscript from the early fourteenth century shows the southern temperate zone and labels it *synnri byggð*, implying that it is habitable and possibly inhabited (Simek 1990, 320, 406 and 409). The early-fourteenth-century Norwegian writer of the first part of *Stjórn*, on the other hand, is quite certain that there can be no human beings in the southern hemisphere, but at the same time he asserts the reality of the fourth, Antipodean, continent; and in stating his theological reasons for denying the existence of *andfætingar* he has left us a neat summary of the whole topic (*Stjórn* 1862, 99-100):

Vmframm þessar .iii. fyrr sagðar haalfur heimsins. sem fyrr nefndir synir Noa ok þeirra ættmenn ok afkemi skiptu meðr ser. liggr hinn fiordi heimsins þatr ok haalfa til sudrs odrum megin hins meira uthafsins. huerr er sakir yfiruættiss solar hita oss er meðr illu ukunnighr. i huerri er heidnir menn sogdu. ok þo meðr falsi ok hegoma. at þar bygdí andfætingar. Hinn heilagi ok hinn mikli Augustinus segir ok sannar sua meðr fulluligri skynsemd i þeirri bok er hann hefir gírt. ok heitir Augustinus de ciuitate dei. at engin iarðneskr madr ma þagat komaz or uarri byggiligri uerolldu sakir solar hita ok margrar annarrar umattuligrar ufæru.

Alexander himself, in his saga and in its Latin source, is not absolutely certain that he will find any Antipodeans; but he insists that there are good authorities - much the same authorities, no doubt, as those so firmly repudiated by the author of *Stjórn* - who tell of other worlds to be conquered: *þat hofum ver leset i fornum bocum. at fleiri se heimar en einn. oc vist uni ec þvi illa er ec scal enn eigi hafa sigrat einn til fullz* (*Al. saga* 1925, 151²⁰⁻²²; corresponding to Walter 1978, X.320-321). Alexander's final reservation, in this remark, turns out to be occasioned by a rebellion which has now been launched by the

Romans, who had previously surrendered. He tells his men that they can easily put down this revolt before setting off south (*Al. saga*, 151²⁵⁻²⁸; Walter X.326-328): *þviat ec vil at fullgort se þat er auke yðra fregð. þa scal nu þessu nest hallda til Rumaborgar. oc briota hana niðr. en heria siðan í annan heim.* At this point, however, he is struck down by a poisoner and so must embark on a journey, one might say, to ‘another world’ different in kind from the one which he meant.

It will already have occurred to the reader that Alexander’s declaration about seeking the people of the other world was ill-omened; for the term *annarr heimr* in Old Norse has another meaning which is well exemplified by the words of Bishop Þorlákr Rúnolfsson in *Sturlunga saga* (1946, I, 40): *Þér mun í öðrum heimi goldit þat, sem nú gerir þú fyrir guðs sakir ok Jóns baptista.* This is a fairly common usage which can be found, as would be expected, in religious writings such as *Stjórn* (1862, 153) and the *Gamla Norsk Homiliebok* (1931, 70), but which also occurs a few times in the family sagas, for example in *Fóstbræðra saga* (*Vestfirðinga sǫgur* 1943, 124-125): *Meir hugðu þeir jafnan at fremð þessa heims lífs en at dýrð annars heims fagnaðar.*⁵ In these texts it properly signifies ‘the next world, the life to come’ in opposition to ‘this present world’ and depends upon the formula ‘in this world and the next’ which occurs in the Vulgate in Eph.1:21, where it is said that Christ is set above all powers, *non solum in hoc saeculo sed et in futuro*, and in Matt.12:32, where it is said that one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, *neque in hoc saeculo neque in futuro* (*Biblia sacra* 1969). The ‘next world’ to which Christian sinners and all pagans were destined to go, of course, was conceived mythologically as a more-or-less physical space located beneath the surface of the earth, irrespective of whether the context of thought was Norse (quasi-)heathen, classical pagan or strictly Christian.⁶ This idea can be well illustrated from *Alexanders saga*, in fact, since there is a passage which describes graphically a descent into Hell: in thoroughly epic mythological fashion, the goddess Natura leaves off her work of moulding raw matter *oc leggr leið sína til helvitis [...] oc nu byðr hon at iorðen scyle opnaz í einhveriom stað. oc þar gengr hon niðr eptir þeim stíg er liggr til myrkra heraðs* (*Al. saga*

⁵ *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders with Lemmatized Concordance* (1998) gives three separate occurrences, and also one occurrence of the phrase *þessa heims og annars*.

⁶ For the quasi-heathen view see Snorri (1988, 9): *Vándir menn fara til Heljar ok þaðan í Niflhel, þat er niðr í inn núnda heim.* An Old Norse view of the situation according to Graeco-Roman mythology is given in *Trójumanna saga* (*Hauksbók* 1892-96, 194), where Saturn distributes the three-tier cosmos between his sons: in descending order, Jupiter gets the sky (*himinn*), Neptune receives the earth (*þessi heimr*), and Pluto becomes the prince of Hell (*hiððingi yfir helvíti*). For an especially interesting account of the subject from a thoroughly Christian perspective, see the passage in *Konungs skuggsiá* (1945, 19-20) which suggests that the place of torment may actually be located in Iceland on account of the great fires ‘in the foundations of the land’ (*j grunduollum landsinz*); it is particularly notable that the treatment of the matter is explicitly both geographical and symbolic, since it is said that the visible fires and ice-fields (on the surface) bear witness to the reality of Hell even if they are not themselves the abode of the damned.

1925, 144²⁸-145¹⁰; Walter 1978, X. 15-30). Alexander himself, however, is not referring to this place when he speaks of making war on those who dwell in the other world. This is shown above all by the geographical considerations of the context, but also by the reference to the Antipodes in the Latin version and by Alexander's apparent expectation of his own actual mortality which is implied by his remark that he and his men will live forever in the accounts of those who write of his deeds - a comment which could hardly be appropriate if he meant to conquer the realm of death itself. Nevertheless, the connotations of the phrase *annarr heimrinn* as 'the land of the dead' must have been very strong for the Old Norse audiences of *Alexanders saga*, to the extent that they probably perceived a double meaning in the text: on the one hand Alexander is actually saying that he will lead an expedition against the southern hemisphere; but on the other hand his words, taken out of context, could suggest an assault on Hell, in which case Alexander would be trying to usurp the role of Christ.

The double meaning involved in the phrase *annarr heimrinn* is at its clearest in the passage from *Alexanders saga* which has just been discussed; but Alexander had in fact already used the term at an earlier point in the saga and in a way which occasions a long mythological episode leading directly to his death.

At the end of Book IX of the original epic, Alexander is poised to complete his conquest of Asia and hence of 'this world'. He begins to consider what his subsequent moves should be: first he will subdue the peoples of the Ocean, and then *vill hann eptir leita hvar oen Nil sprettr vpp. er heiðnir menn gatv margs til. en øngir vissv* (*Al. saga* 1925, 142³¹⁻³²; Walter 1978, IX. 507). Although Alexander does not actually say so, the Old Norse audience would probably understand that the army's arrival at the source of the Nile might well lead to an assault on Paradise, since the Nile is one of the four rivers which flow from there.⁷ The Macedonians are dismayed to learn that their king will go on risking his life and their own, even after mastering all known lands; but Alexander soon renews their nerve and enthusiasm with a speech which anticipates his later address to them in Babylon, quoted above. His words are an extraordinary blend of piety, pride, insatiable will to power, and intrepid curiosity (*Al. saga* 144³⁻¹⁰; Walter IX. 562-570):

Ver hofum sigrat Asiam oc ervm nu nalega komnir til heimsenda. Giarna villda ec at guðen reiddiz mer eigi. þott ec mela þat er mer byr íscapi. heimr þesse er allz of þrongr. oc oflitill einom lavarðe. oc þat er upp at kveða er ec hefe raðet fire mer. at íannan heiminn scal heria þa er ec hefi þenna undir mec lagt allan. oc langar mec til at ver megem sia naturv þess heimsens.

This is the first time that the expression *annarr heimrinn* is used in the saga. As

⁷ The other three rivers are the Ganges, the Tigris and the Euphrates. For an example of an account of this in Old Norse, see the short description of the world in AM 736 I, 4to, reproduced by Simek (1990, 430).

in the case of the later speech, the Latin text makes it clear that the other world which Alexander longs to view is in fact the southern hemisphere, for the Antipodes are named in the lines which correspond to the last part of the quotation (Walter IX. 569-570):

Antipodum penetrare sinus aliamque uidere
Naturam accelero.

It is, however, not so immediately obvious from the Old Norse text alone, without reference to the Latin, that Alexander means for certain to attack the southern world rather than the underworld. In this speech, unlike the later one, the audience is not given the cue of any remarks about people who live in the other *heimr* or of Alexander's eternal life in men's songs; but there is, of course, the same context of geographical thought in which 'the other world' contrasts with 'this world' of the conquered northern continents, and this is the decisive factor in determining Alexander's meaning. Nevertheless the connotations of the phrase *annarr heimrinn* as 'the land of the dead' are stronger in this passage than in the later one, and they colour what follows.

In deciding to organise an expedition against the Antipodes, Alexander is embarking on a course of action which is beyond the power of any human being, according to Augustine as cited by the writer of *Stjórn* quoted earlier, for no living man can cross the equatorial zone on account of the tremendous heat of the sun; but it turns out that Alexander is facing more trouble than just that of a quest doomed to failure. Despite Alexander's pious hopes to the contrary, the goddess Natura takes offence at his words; and in fact it is her indignation over this matter which causes her to descend into the infernal regions beneath the earth, as previously mentioned (*Al. saga* 144²¹⁻²⁹; Walter X. 6-15):

íannan stað er fra því at segja. at natturan minniz áþat er henne þiccir Alexander hava svivirt sec oc heimenn þa er hann let at hann vere of þrongr oc oflitill einom herra ivir at vera. oc því er hann etlaðe at rannsaka þa lute er hon vill leynda vera lata. oc þviat henne liggr ímiclv rvme. þesse vanvirðing er Alexander hefir gort til hennar. þa gefr hon vpp alla þa scepno er hon hafðe aðr til teket at semia. oc leggr leið sina til helvitis.

The sudden arrival of this deity in a saga narrative comes as something of a shock for the modern reader, and it is scarcely less of one in the context of the epic *Alexandreis*, which has mostly dealt in historical or quasi-historical fact up to this point; but the saga writer seems to think that Natura needs no special introduction to his audience and no explanations of the sort which were given when he mentioned Bacchus and Venus (*Al. saga* 7⁷⁻⁸) or Jupiter (*Al. saga* 21²⁷⁻²⁸). His precise and discriminating choice of words (*skepna*, *semja*) shows that he was alive to the School-of-Chartres Neoplatonist doctrine of Natura as the shaper of raw matter in the world, rather than as a creatrix *ex nihilo*;⁸ but he

⁸ See, for example, the following lines from *Anticlaudianus* by Walter's contemporary and rival, Alan of Lille (1955, II.72-73): *diuinum creat ex nichilo, Natura caduca | procreat ex aliquo*. In

avoids taxing his audience with Walter's difficult terminology with its reference to *hyle* (X.11). He was alive also to the sexual innuendo in Walter's remark, in line X.9, that Alexander meant to lay bare Natura's secret parts - *Archanasque sui partes aperire parabat*, where *aperire*, meaning both 'to reveal' and 'to open what was closed', is very fairly rendered by the word *rannsaka*. This, the so-called *nuda Natura* topos, is another twelfth-century Neoplatonist theme which is nicely illustrated by the dream poem *Nature talamos intrans reseransque poeta*, dated ca. 1200 and discussed pithily by Peter Dronke (1974, 53 n.1): Natura appears as a naked maiden, trying vainly to cover her pudenda from the dreamer's gaze; she reproaches the dreamer for having debased her secrets and leaves him to be killed by wild animals, at which point he awakes and understands 'that not all things may be told to all'. The idea underlying this poem is that not all men are fit to receive Natura's philosophical mysteries, a notion which descends from the late-fourth-century philosophical commentator Macrobius (1868, I.ii.17), who says that Natura loathes an open, naked exposition of herself, and that this is actually why prudent men discuss her secrets only through the medium of myth. The inclusion of the *nuda Natura* theme in the saga suggests that a Macrobian interpretation of the Natura episode may be appropriate, in which Alexander symbolises the unwise philosopher who blabs arcane truths to vulgar minds; but an allegorical interpretation of this type, if it is valid at all, is surely not the primary meaning of the episode, for the secret parts which Alexander seeks to expose are nothing so vague as high Neoplatonic truths, but are specific geographical locations which Natura has placed out of bounds to mortals. This last notion descends to Walter directly from his main source, the first-century historian Quintus Curtius: in a passage which corresponds to the one in *Alexanders saga* where the king announces for the first time his intention of attacking the southern hemisphere, Curtius (1946, IX.vi.22) makes his Alexander declare that he will grant fame to unknown places and open up to all nations lands which Natura has set apart; and when the army is approaching the Ocean at the edge of the world, Alexander encourages his men by declaring that even though Natura herself could go no farther they will see what was unknown except to the immortals (Curtius 1946, IX.ix.4). Certainly the ideas of disclosure and popularisation figure here, but the concerns are not the theoretical ones of a philosophical demystifier but those of a practical statesman: conquest, colonisation and the exploitation of resources.

In the saga narrative and in the *Alexandreis* (but not in Curtius, who never mentions her again after the references just cited), Natura takes her complaint against Alexander to the Infernal Powers, ethically equivocal as she is, and motivated by wounded pride and the thirst for vengeance. In Walter's poem,

Anticlaudianus we find Natura involved with the Virtues in the creation of the perfect New Man. She has to apply to God for the soul, after which she fashions an appropriate body out of material in the world.

the figure whom she seeks is called Leviathan (Walter 1978, X.75), but he is unmistakably the Satan of Christian myth, the serpent who contrived mankind's expulsion from the Garden of Eden (X.102-103); in the saga, too, there can be no doubt that the un-named *myrkra hífðingi* who comes to meet Natura is the Christian devil and not some safe classical deity of the underworld, for he is shown changing his appearance, like Satan in 2 Cor. 11:14, from a dragon's to that of an angel of light (*Al. saga* 1925, 146¹⁷⁻¹⁹): *leggr [hann] nu niðr dreka hofuð þat et ogorliga er hann bar aðr. en tegr nu vpp þa ena biortv engils ásiانو er naturan hafðe gefit honom*. The last words indicate Natura's role as maker of the devil in his original form; the words in which she now addresses him emphasise her continued involvement with her creature even after he his fall (*Al. saga* 146²⁴⁻²⁷; Walter X.85-87): *þic em ec komin at finna sv sama natura er þer feck þenna myrkrastað til herbergis þviat þu vart nockor at vera þott þv verir utlage goR or himnarike fire þinn ofmetnað*. Such is the basis of Satan's debt of allegiance to Natura, which she does not hesitate to invoke. And here her moral ambiguity can be seen: she is august, powerful and in some sense the vicar of God in the work of creating and regenerating the world, the order and limits of which she upholds; but at the same time she is complicit in the processes of death and disorder which are part of her world - the fallen world whose nature she is. It is to the chief representative of death and disorder in the world that she brings her complaint, rather than taking her prayers to God.

The substance of her complaint is that Alexander has terrified the world of the three northern continents, *oc etlar ef honom byriar at koma þar sem Nil spretr vpp. oc heria siðan íparadisum* (*Al. saga* 146³⁴-147¹; Walter X.95-98). Strictly speaking her statement that Alexander means to make war on Paradise is stretching the facts as they have been narrated, for Alexander has only declared his intention of finding the source of the Nile; but the one thing may be said to imply the other. What Natura says next, however, is a piece of pure manipulation of the truth designed to prompt Satan into taking the action which she desires (*Al. saga* 147¹⁻⁸; Walter X.98-104):

ef þu gelldr eigi varhvga við. þa man hann oc heria á yðr helvitis buana. Oc fire þvi gerðu sva vel fire minar sacir oc þinar. hept hans ofsa oc heginn fyR en siðar. eða hver fregð er þer í at hava komet enom fyrsta manne ábrott ór paradiso enn slegasti ormr ef þu scallt þenna mann lata fa með vallde þann ynniliga stað oc innvirðiliga.

Note that it is merely a *possibility* that Alexander will attack the denizens of the underworld and that Natura does not positively say that Alexander has declared any such intention; but this is enough for her purpose. If her rhetorical method seems a little unscrupulous she can justify herself, at least in the saga account, by referring to the secondary meaning of Alexander's phrase *annarr heimrinn*. Now it can be seen why the Old Norse translator has incorporated into his text a play on words which was scarcely present in the Latin original: it gives Natura a

sort of pretext for her accusation, which in the Latin original looked more like pure fabrication.

The possibility of a Macedonian attack on Hell is hardened into supposed fact in the final episode to be discussed here, when Satan, the Father of Lies, addresses his peers in a hastily convened council of devils. What Natura had suggested as a hypothetical risk, Satan now puts forward as an immediate threat; and in explaining the threat he develops the secondary meaning of the phrase *annarr heimrinn* in terms which carry Alexander and the audience to the centre of the Christian myth of redemption (*Al. saga* 147²⁷-148⁵; Walter X.131-142):

Ecke kviðe ec því en heyrð heve ec at hann ætla ianvel at koma áhendr oss. oc heria heðan salur þær er ver hofvm vndir oss dregit veit ec þo þat er meir bitr á mic at feðaz mon á iarðriki nockoR maðr vndarligar getinn oc vndarligar borenn en ec mega scilia. Þesse man briota þessa ena sterkv borg. oc eyða vart riki með einv tre því er of mikill timi man fylgia. oc þvíat þessi maðr man vera sterkvm sterkare þa varir mec at hann mone mikitt herfang draga or hondum oss. En þat er nu til at sinne at þér dauðans drotnar gefit gaum at eigi gangi þessi maðr yvir yðr. raðet honom bana rað at eigi sigri hann oss þott einnhverR scyli sa verða.

Here we see that, through the innuendo present in Alexander's declaration that he will attack the other world, the Old Norse translator has prepared the way, more deftly than Walter did, for this development of the theme of Alexander as a forerunner of both Christ and Antichrist. As king of Babylon and as the strong man who rules the secular world, Alexander is a type of the Antichrist even though he rules mercifully and does not demand worship; but if he had genuinely intended to capture the souls of the dead as plunder, as Satan asserts, then he would have been usurping the role of Christ in the Harrowing of Hell, and would have been Antichrist indeed. As it is, the secondary meaning of his words shows him functioning as an unwitting type or precursor of Christ, that is to say a pagan who knows not what he does but who foreshadows the actual Christ. By saying that he will attack the other world the pagan Alexander means simply that he will attack the Antipodes, but by saying it he also foreshadows the work of redemption.

After Satan's speech the infernal conspiracy to do away with Alexander moves swiftly to its conclusion when one of the devils, the allegorical Proditio (Treason), offers to make her human *fóstri* poison the king. Her plan is adopted without delay, and Alexander's death follows as the direct consequence of Satan's accusations. Alexander is murdered, therefore, on account of a threat against Hell which he did not actually make: to be precise, in the Latin version he did not make the threat at all, and in the Old Norse version he did not intend it even though it fell from his lips in a play on words.

To sum up: the *double entendre* in the phrase *annarr heimrinn* depends for its effect on the fact that the audience was fully conversant with the idea of a spherical world with the Antipodes on the far side of it; otherwise the ambiguity

collapses into the simple statement that Alexander wanted to attack the underworld, which would represent a drastic change to Walter's poem of the sort not found anywhere else in the saga. Accepting the *double entendre*, we can see that the Old Norse translator is engaged in a sophisticated manipulation of the mythological episode which he inherited from the Latin text: at a stroke he prepares for the passage which presents Alexander as a type of Christ or as a possible Antichrist, but he protects him from the sin of actually usurping Christ's role in the myth of redemption; and he gives a mythological explanation of his hero's early death, in terms which put the blame largely on the Satanic powers, making Alexander seem innocent of the specific intention for which he is killed and yet not utterly without responsibility. At the same time the translator does full justice to the myth of Natura's revenge on Alexander for his real threat to attack the Antipodes and hence to transgress the boundaries which Natura has imposed. There is a kind of ambiguity even in this, however, because the heroic zest of Alexander's words remains impressive and alluring even though the official significance of the myth is probably the one suggested to Alexander by the emissary of the ascetic Scythians (*Al. saga* 1925, 126³³-127⁸; Walter 1978, VIII.409-415): We live in simplicity, says the emissary,

oc latom oss þorð vinna þat er natturan sialf en fyrsta moðer vár vill hafa gefet [...] Enn ef þu konungr gengr nockor framaR. þa gengr þu yvir þat marc. er natturan hefir sett þér oc oðrom er alla gerer at sonno sela. þa er hennar raðe vilia fylgia.

The Scythian's advice would no doubt be welcomed by those of a prudent clerical bent; but others in the Old Norse audience would surely rise to the image of Alexander as the representative of that less docile type of man, gloriously and yet sinfully driven always to transcend his world - and this is the heart of the Alexander myth itself, which has proved so potent and so adaptable, like all true myths, for so many generations.

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