Fig. 12.1: The opening of *Eiríks saga víðförla*, late fourteenth century. Flateyrbok, GKS 1005, fol. 4v. Reykjavík, Safn Arna Magnússonar.

Stefka G. Eriksen

Chapter 12

Physical and Spiritual Travel across the Christian Storyworld: *Leiðarvísir*, an Old Norse Itinerary to Jerusalem

One of the most detailed descriptions of Jerusalem in a Scandinavian source from the Middle Ages is the text *Leiðarvísir*. This is the oldest Scandinavian pilgrimage itinerary, a travel guide book that describes the route from Iceland, to Norway, further to Rome, and all the way to Jerusalem. It was written by Abbot Nikulás Bergsson, the first appointed abbot at the monastery Munkaþverá in the north of Iceland. Around 1150 he himself travelled to Jerusalem and described his travels in *Leiðarvísir*, which was written around 1155, only a few years before his death in 1159 or 1160.

The oldest preserved version of the text appears in the Icelandic manuscript AM 194 8vo, from 1387. *Leiðarvísir* is preserved in several other medieval fragments, which means that the text was copied and read in various medieval contexts, possibly due to its significance and relevance.¹ In the following, I will present *Leiðarvísir* in its 1150- and 1387-contexts, give a brief account of the topics discussed in recent scholarship on the text, and thereafter investigate whether the travel described in *Leiðarvísir* could have been understood allegorically by reading other contemporary stories thematizing physical and spiritual travels.

Jerusalem, World History, and Norse Legends and Mythology

It is said that it takes seven days to sail around Iceland, with favorable winds, which change as it is necessary, as one cannot use the same wind all the way. It is supposed to be the same distance between Iceland and Norway.²

¹ In 1821, the Old Norse texts got a new revival as they were edited and translated into Latin by Professor Erich Christian Werlauff in Copenhagen, as *Symbolae ad Geographum Medii Aevi ex Monumentis Islandicis*. This elucidates that this medieval pilgrimage and travel narrative to Jerusalem remained significant for various audiences for many centuries after its original composition. Erich C. Werlauff, *Symbolae ad Geographiam Medii Aevi ex Monumentis Islandicis* (Copenhagen, 1821).

² “Sva er [sa]gt, at umhverfis Island se víi [dægra] sigling ath [ra]udum byr, ok skiptiz sva sem [parf, þviat eigi] ma eitt ve[dr] [h]afa. Sva ok meðal Island[s] [ok] No[regs] er kallat iamlangt”

So begins the description of the pilgrim route from Iceland via Rome to Jerusalem in *Leiðarvísir*.³ The text includes descriptions of various routes, places to stop and rest, and the time it takes to get from one place to another. The text also includes information about the most important churches and holy places for a pilgrim. Of greatest importance here is the description of Jerusalem. Like the description of the other cities, it is not very detailed, and I quote *in extenso*:

It is the most splendid of all cities. It is sung about all over the Christian kingdom, because there one can still see evidence of Christ's suffering. There is the church where you find the Lord's grave, and the site where the Lord's cross stood. There one can see Christ's blood on the stone as if it was newly bled. And that is how it will be until Judgement day. There comes light in on Easter night from the heaven above. The church is called the Holy Sepulchre church and there is an opening in the roof above the grave. This is the center of the universe and the sun shines straight down from heaven on the day of Johannes mass. Here is the hostel of John the Baptist, which is the most marvelous in the whole world. Here also is David's tower. In Jerusalem you find *templum domini* and Salomon's temple.⁴

The text continues with a mention of Mount Sion and its significance, namely that the Holy Spirit came over the apostles there and that it is the site where Christ had his last supper on Maundy Thursday.⁵ Bethlehem and Bethany Castle [*Bethania kastala*] are mentioned thereafter.

In addition to such specific information about Jerusalem, the text includes similar types of details about many sites on the route from Iceland to the Holy City. The descriptions of these places are set in a variety of cultural-historical narratives, which are illustrative of the competence of the text's author and of later scribes, as well as of the ambitions these writers had for contextualizing the trip to Jerusalem from Iceland within world history. Nikulás refers, for example, to the history of the Romans, which is known from other Old Norse translations such as *Rómverja saga*, *Trojumannasaga* and *Breta sögur*. Simultaneously, his travel is related to the Norse

Alfraeði Ízlensk: Íslandsk encyclopædisk litteratur, 4 vols, ed. Kristian Kålund, I. Cod. Mbr. AM. 194, 8vo, Copenhagen: S.L. Møllers bogtrykkeri, 1908–1918. The translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

3 Tommaso Marani, “*Leiðarvísir*. Its Genre and Sources, with Particular Reference to the Description of Rome” (Doctoral thesis, University of Durham, 2012,) chapter 2 discusses whether this is an actual account or a guide, see below. For the route and the specific places in the Holy Land listed in the text, see Chapter 11 (Denys Pringle) in this book, 204–6, including Fig. 11.2.

4 “. . . hon er agiëzt borga allra i heimi, of hana er hvervetna sungit um alla kristni, þviat þar ser enn stormerki pislar Cristz. Þar er kirkia su, er gröf drottins er i, ok stadr sa, er cross drottins stod, þar ser glögt blod Christz á steini, sem ny-blëtt sé, ok sva mun æ vera til doms-dags, þar na menn liosi a pascha aptan or himni ofan, hon heitir Pulkro kirkia, hon er opin ofan yfir grofinni. Þar er midr heimr, þar skinn sol iamt or himni ofan of Iohannis messo. Þar er spitali Iohannis baptista, sa er rikaztr i öllum heimi. Þa er Davids tiörn. I Hierusalem er templum domini ok Salomons musteri.” *Alfraeði Ízlensk*, 21–2.

5 The 1387 manuscript has the form *synai*, which is clearly a misunderstanding.

socio-cultural sphere, through references to various Danish and Norwegian kings, and legendary and mythological stories preserved in texts such as the *Poetic Edda*, *Snorra Edda*, and *Völsunga saga*.⁶ The combination and unification of these two storyworlds, in combination with an individual's pilgrimage to Jerusalem, may be seen as the quintessence of Icelanders' spiritual and cultural experience, on social and personal levels, after the internalization of Christianity.⁷ Norse-Icelandic history had to be integrated within the rest of world history, and individual Icelanders could experience this integration through an individual physical and spiritual journey from Iceland to Jerusalem.

Establishing the Link Between Iceland and Jerusalem: The Benedictines of Twelfth-Century Iceland

We do not have the original version* of *Leiðarvísir*. The epilogue tells us, however, that the text was written from the dictation of Abbot Nikulás, identified as Nikulás Bergsson (d. 1159) from the Benedictine monastery Munkaþverá, established in 1155 in the north of Iceland.⁸ Nikulás seems to have been an established writer, as he is also known to have composed a *drápa* about the apostle Johannes (only partially preserved)⁹ and a *drápa* on Christ, combining scenes from the Old and New Testaments.¹⁰ Icelandic

6 See for example Lars Lönnroth, *Two-Norse-Icelandic Studies: Sponsors, Writers and Readers of Early Norse Literature and A Road Paved with Legends* (Gothenburg: Litteraturvetenskapliga institutionen, 1990); F.P. Magoun, "Níkulás Bergsson of Munkaþverá and Germanic Heroic Legend," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 42 (1943). For a discussion of the motif of the legendary hero Sigurðr, see Jesse Byock, "Sigurðr Fáfnisbani: An Eddic Hero on Church Portals," in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: The International Saga Conference, Spoleto, 4–10 September 1988* (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro Studi, 1988). Other heroes mentioned in *Leiðarvísir* include Gunnarr, Ragnarr Loðbrók and Þiðrek.

7 Cf. Kristin B. Aavitsland's introduction to this book, 20–1.

8 There is an extensive discussion of the identity of Nikulás, see Marani 2012, "*Leiðarvísir*:" 12–16 as well as Chapter 11 (Denys Pringle), 204. Further, the exact surname is uncertain and appears as either Bergsson or Bergþórsson in various sources, *Alfraeði Ízlensk*, xix. For a discussion of the historicity of the attribution to Nikulás, see Karl G. Johansson, "Om nordisk och lärt hos de tidiga benediktinarna på Island," in *Tidlige klostre i Norden før 1200. Et symposium*, ed. Lars Bisgaard and Tore Nyberg (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2006).

9 The first three stanzas of the *drápa* are preserved in *Litla-Jóns saga*, *Postola sögur. Legendariske fortællinger om apostlernes liv, deres kamp for kristendommens udbredelse, samt deres martyrdød*, ed. C.R. Unger, Christiania: B.M. Bentzen, 1874.

10 This reference appears in *The Third Grammatical Treatise* by Ólafr Þórðarson hvítaskáld, see Björn Magnússon Olsen, *Den tredje og fjærde gramatiske-afhandling i Snorres Edda tilligemed de grammatiske Afhandlingers prolog og to Andre Tillæg, by Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld* (Montana: Kessinger, 2010).

annals mention that Nikulás returned from a journey abroad in 1154, suggesting that he may have written the itinerary shortly after that and before his death in 1159.¹¹ The suggested dating of c.1155 is confirmed by many cultural references in the text. For example, Nikulás seems to have arrived at Jerusalem before the capture of Ascalon in 1153, but after the dedication of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in July 1149.¹² When he comes to Cologne, he mentions nothing specific except for the archbishop's throne in the Church of St. Peter, thus indicating that he had visited the site before 1164 when the relics of the Magi were translated to Cologne from Milan by Rainald of Dassel, an event that made Cologne a major pilgrimage site.¹³ Accordingly, this confirms that at least parts of *Leiðarvísir* date back to c.1155.¹⁴

Abbot Nikulás was the first abbot and a major figure during the establishment of the Benedictine order in Iceland, which was the first order to found monasteries on Iceland. The first monastery was established in 1133 in Þingeyrar in the north of Iceland, Hólar bishopric, with Munkaþverá established a little later in 1155. By the end of the Middle Ages there were nine active Benedictine monasteries in the country.¹⁵

These two Benedictine institutions in the north of Iceland were major scribal and cultural centres. We know of a series of scribes and translators who worked there: in the twelfth century Oddr Snorrason, Gunnlaug Leifsson, and Karl Jónson wrote Latin historiographies of the Norwegian kings, many of which were translated into Old Norse. Gunnlaugr is also known as a translator of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetia Merlini*, as *Melínussþá*.¹⁶ These works again confirm that texts about Roman and world history, as well as Norse history, were part of the cultural and textual capital available at these scribal centres. *Leiðarvísir* may thus be seen as a good representative of the cultural and intellectual environment during the twelfth century. Later, during the 1300s, we know of Bergr Sokkason and Arngrímr Brandsson who wrote saints' lives in the same tradition as Anglo-Saxon Benedictines.¹⁷

¹¹ *Alfræði Ízlensk*, xix.

¹² Joyce Hill, "From Rome to Jerusalem: An Icelandic Itinerary of the Mid-Twelfth Century," *Harvard Theological Review* 76, no. 2 (1983): 176–77. For the dating of Nikulás' pilgrimage, see also Denys Pringle's chapter in this volume, p. 204.

¹³ D.J. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages. Continuity and Change* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1998), 54. See also Marani, "Leiðarvísir," where he discusses possible twelfth-century textual sources for the author of *Leiðarvísir*.

¹⁴ Parts of the text elucidate that the version in AM 194 is, however, a result of a compilation process, including information added after the original twelfth-century context, see *Alfræði Ízlensk*, xx.

¹⁵ For an overview of all monasteries, see Johansson, "Om nordisk och lärt hos de tidiga benediktinerna på Island," 159.

¹⁶ Johansson, "Om nordisk och lärt hos de tidiga benediktinerna på Island," 162.

¹⁷ See Karl G. Johansson, "Texter i rörelse. Översättning, original textproduktion och trädning på norra Island 1150–1400," in *Übersetzen im skandinavischen Mittelalter*, ed. Vera Johanterwage and Stefanie Würth, *Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia* (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2007). On the establishment of the Benedictines in Iceland, see M. M. Larússon, "Kloster," in *KLNM* and Tore Nyberg, "De

The two Benedictine monasteries had a central role not only in text production, but also in forming Icelandic society in general. A manifestation of this role is the link between the Benedictine monasteries and the aristocratic elite in the north of Iceland, including families as the Sturlungar. The two monasteries, Munkaþverá and Þingeyrar, had schools where members of such families received their education, and some of them even became monks there. Although some known Icelandic writers, such as Snorri Sturlason (1179–1241), were not educated in monasteries, their teachers were probably directly influenced by these contexts. The development of historical writing on Iceland, represented by texts such as Snorri's *Heimskringla* and *Egils saga*, may thus be seen as related to the establishment of the Benedictines in Iceland.¹⁸

Leiðarvísir is not the only Old Norse text that mentions travels to Jerusalem. Snorri's *Hemskringla* describes the earliest known journey to Jerusalem from this region, by Thorir Hundr (born c.990).¹⁹ He had led the uprising against King Olav Haraldsson at Stiklestad and had contributed to the king's death in 1030. After the battle, Thorir left Norway and Snorri briefly relates that he went to Jorsal, but did not return. Thorir's story is also told in the skaldic poem *Erfidrápa* by Sigvat skald. In the saga about the sons of Magnus Olavsson, also known as Magnús *berfættir* (Magnus Barefoot, r. 1093–1103), Snorri tells of another Norse traveler to Jerusalem – Sigurðr Jórsalafari, also known as Sigurd the Crusader, king of Norway between 1103–1130. Sigurd led and participated in the Norwegian crusade 1107–1110 and is also mentioned by Nikulás.²⁰

Nikulás' original version of *Leiðarvísir* can thus be seen as part of the established literary and political culture in the north of Iceland. With its content connecting Norse cultural references to sites and symbols central to the whole of medieval Christendom, such as the holy city of Jerusalem, *Leiðarvísir* demonstrates that already in the mid-twelfth century the Benedictines and northern Icelanders saw themselves as part of the Christian universe that revolved around its earthly and heavenly centre Jerusalem.

benediktinske klostergrundlæggelser i Norden,” in *Tidlige Klostre i Norden før 1200. Et symposium*, ed. Lars Bisgaard (Odense: Syddansk Universitets forlag, 2006).

¹⁸ Theodore Andersson, “Snorri Sturluson and the saga school at Munkaþverá,” in *Snorri Sturluson. Kolloquium anlässlich der 750. Widerkehr seines Todestages*, ed. Alois Wolf (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1993).

¹⁹ For Thorir Hundr and his alleged Jerusalem journey, see Chapter 14 (Øystein Ekroll), 275, and Chapter 22 (Margrethe C. Stang), 495–8.

²⁰ Sigurd's crusade is discussed in Chapter 6 (Pål Berg Svenungsen), 114–30, Chapter 8 (Lukas Raupp), 156–65, and Chapter 11 (Denys Pringle), 201–4.

Iceland as Part of Latin Christendom During the Fourteenth Century

The main manuscript of the text – AM 194 8vo from 1387 – is more than two hundred years younger than the presumed original composition. AM 194 is an encyclopaedic manuscript including a great variety of what would have been regarded as scientific texts at that time: treatises on calendars, computistics, medicine, geography, geology, and history.²¹ Further, the manuscript includes information about its scribes, location, and dating, which allows for an accurate contextualization. On fol. 33v, there is a note written in a coded language which, when transcribed, says that a priest named Olav [Olafr], son of Ormr, wrote the book in 1387 on the peninsula of Snæfellsnes in the west of Iceland, at the farm of Geirrauðareyrr close to the Augustinian Helgafell monastery.²² A second scribe, Bryniolfr Steinráðarson, began his work on the next folio, 34r. Kålund suggests that the second scribe may have been a priest as well.²³

As mentioned above, this is an encyclopaedic manuscript covering various sciences.²⁴ It includes a section about the rivers in Paradise (which also appears in *Veraldar saga* in AM 764 4to, and in Hauksbók), and a text about the division of the Earth amongst Noah's sons (also found in Hauksbók and Rímbegla). After *Leiðarvísir*, there follows a description of Rome and other Italian, French and Spanish towns, and a detailed description of relics in Constantinople (which also appears in Hauksbók), as well as Jerusalem and Palestine. The Jerusalem description is more detailed than that in *Leiðarvísir* (see below) and is very similar to the one in AM 736 I and in the Icelandic romance *Kirialax saga*.²⁵ All these texts are collectively called *Landafræði* by Kålund, and are followed by, among others, a list of the five church-centres and biblical world history, as well as notes on the human body, medicine, precious stones, and principles for weather forecasting.²⁶

The description of Jerusalem following *Leiðarvísir* is more detailed, giving the direction of the sites in relationship to each another, and even the number of steps between some of them. It mentions that Church of the Holy Sepulchre is on Golgata, *Calvarie loco*, and that its entrance is on the south side. When you enter, on the right

²¹ The whole manuscript, AM 194 8vo, is ed. Kålund in 1908, as part I of the two-volume *Alfræði Íslensk. Íslandsk Encyclopædisk Litteratur 1908–1918*.

²² *Alfræði Íslensk*, 54. For the monastery and its site, see Chapter 21 (Mikael Males), 468–75, including Fig. 21.2.

²³ *Alfræði Íslensk*, 62.

²⁴ The manuscript belongs to a cluster of encyclopedic texts. Some of them, Hauksbók and AM 736 I, contain schematic city plans of Jerusalem. These are the topic of Chapter 20 (Kristin B. Aavitsland), 424–53.

²⁵ The main manuscript of the saga is AM 589 a 4to (c.1450–1500), ONP 1989:312. *Alfræði Íslensk*, xxi.

²⁶ For a detailed description, see *Alfræði Íslensk*, xix–xxxii.

hand-side is the chapel where the blood ran down from the Lord's cross and where you can still see the blood. There is also a detailed description of the rock on which the cross was placed:

On the east side of the side chapel there is a rock, and to the north of the rock, there is a staircase with nineteen steps to the rock. This is just an arm-length from where the Lord's cross stood, when he suffered. There is a cliff in the rock and the blood ran into the cliff from above. To the south, there is an arm-length to the cliff in the rock which was made when the Lord threw off the cross, on which he was later crucified.²⁷

The description continues:

To the west of the church door, there is another chapel with St Anastasia's hand and body. In the middle is the church of the Holy Sepulchre. This passage also mentions that the roof above this church is open, with the clarification that light [*lios*]²⁸ enters on Easter Eve only if the city is under Christian rule.

After a description of the side chapels in all directions, the text mentions *Templum Domini*, the Mount of Olives and St Michael's church to the east of Jerusalem, where one finds the footprint of Jesus when he ascended to Heaven; the valley of Jehoshaphat with St Mary's church and the house where Jesus was taken by the Jews; and finally, Bethany south of the Mount of Olives, including the church with the grave of St Lazarus. Kålund suggests that this description could be part of an itinerary, similar to *Leiðarvísir*, or from an oral retelling of a pilgrimage.²⁹

Whether a factual itinerary or not, such information is indicative of the knowledge available to the two scribes working in the context where the manuscript was written, near the Augustinian Helgafell monastery.³⁰ The monastery was a major centre of writing and learning, and the manuscripts and texts written there may be seen as a context for the production of AM 194 8vo, and thus of *Leiðarvísir*. By 1397, the Helgafell monastery was known to own almost one hundred Latin books and 35 books in Old Norse.³¹

²⁷ "Austr af stukunni er berg, ok nordan vid bergith er vindr upp ath ganga xix pallar á bergit. Þa er fadms austr fra þar er stóð cross drotins, þa er hann var pindr, þar er rauf aa bergino, ok kom þar ofan blodit i stukuna. Sudr fra þi er fadms til bergrifo þeirar, er sprack bergit fyrir, er drottin skaut af ser cross-trenu því [er] hann var krossfestr [á] sidan." *Alfraeði Ízlensk*, 27. The same kind of text compilations are found in the manuscripts under discussion in Chapter 20 (Kristin B. Aavitsland).

²⁸ This may be a reference to the Eastern rite of the Holy Fire.

²⁹ *Alfraeði Ízlensk*, xxvi.

³⁰ The Augustinians established their first monasteries in the area of Skáholt bishopric, at Þykkvabær in 1168 and Flatey at Breiðafjörður in 1172, see Johansson, "Om nordisk och lärt hos de tidiga benediktinarna på Island," 159.

³¹ DI: IV, 170–171; Lena Liepe, *Studies in Icelandic Fourteenth Century Book Painting* (Reykholt: Snorrastofa, 2009), 118.

Many manuscripts were produced there during the second half of the fourteenth century and are thus contemporary to AM 194 8to.³²

Nikulás Bergsson, author of *Leiðarvísir*, is mentioned explicitly in texts from two of these manuscripts, *Flateyjarbók*, GkS 1005 fol. (1387–1394) and Holm Perg 5 fol. (c.1350–1365). Some of the annals in *Flateyjarbók* refer to Nikulás' death in 1159,³³ while *Guðmundar saga* in Holm Perg 5 fol. discusses the dates of his birth and death.³⁴ Nikulás is thus a known figure in various thematic contexts in fourteenth-century manuscripts. In the case of Holm Perg 5 fol., the context is the bishops' sagas. *Flateyjarbók*, the largest extant medieval Icelandic manuscript (225 leaves) and remarkable for its rich illuminations, contains a collection of various narratives (see Fig. 12.1.). Not only has it sagas of Norwegian kings, starting with the first Christian kings Olav Tryggvason (963–1000) and St Olav Haraldsson (995–1030), but it also contains the only copy of the eddic poems *Hyndluljóð*, a unique set of annals, and many short stories, known as *þáttir*. In addition, it contains *Grænlendinga saga*, *Orkneyinga saga*, *Færeyinga Saga*, and *Eiríks saga víðförla*, which are pertinent to the topics of travel, physical expansion and spiritual development. These topics are a major concern in Nikulás' text.³⁵

Fragments of *Leiðarvísir* also appear in two other manuscripts. The first is AM 47 fol., also called *Eirspennill*, from the first part of the fourteenth century. It contains a compilation of kings' sagas, such as *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga*, and seems to have been owned by the archbishop of Nidaros, Trond Gerdasson (d. 1381).³⁶ The second fragment of *Leiðarvísir* appears in the Icelandic manuscript AM 736 II 4to, dated to c.1400 and containing content similar to AM 194 8vo.³⁷

³² For a list of manuscripts belonging to the so-called Helgafell group, see Liepe, *Studies in Icelandic Fourteenth Century Book Painting*, 24–25. See also Ólafur Halldórsson, *Helgafellsbækur fornar*, Studia Islandica (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóds, 1966).

³³ *Flateyjarbok: En samling af norske Konge-Sagaer med indskudte mindre Fortællinger om Begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt Annaler*, 3 vols, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C.R. Unger, Christiania: Mallings, 1860–1868.

³⁴ *Biskupa sögur*, Kaupmannahöfn Möller: Íslenzka bókmentafélag, 1858–1878.

³⁵ *Flateyjarbók (Codex Flateyensis): MS. No. 1005 fol. in the old royal collection in The Royal Library of Copenhagen*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1930; Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *Cultural Paternity in the Flateyjarbók “Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar”* (Berlin: Alvisssmal, 1998); Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók; Iceland and the Norwegian dynastic crisis of 1389* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005); Liepe, *Studies in Icelandic Fourteenth Century Book Painting*, 123–4 discusses and syncretizes the hypothesis that the provenance of the *Flateyjarbók*-manuscript was in the north of Iceland, and the affiliation of the manuscript with the Helgafell-group, through its second scribe Magnus Þórhallsson.

³⁶ *Katalog over Den arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling udgivet af Kommisionen for det arnamagnæanske legat*, 2 vols, Copenhagen 1889–1894.

³⁷ AM 736 is described as having five parts, the second one being of interest to us. For a description of the content of all five parts, see *Katalog over Den arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, II, 164–6.

While the original version* of *Leiðarvísir* was written in a Benedictine context, which was central for the formation of cultural and political power in the north of Iceland, the oldest preserved version belongs to a long-established and highly productive cultural and intellectual context. We do not know what other texts existed in the original manuscript*, but AM 194 8vo contains texts that complement and add thematically to the description of places given in *Leiðarvísir*, including that of Jerusalem. During Nikulás' lifetime in the twelfth century, Norse culture sought to establish its position in juxtaposition to and within Latin Christian culture. At the end of the fourteenth century, this position was firmly established and internalized within Norse mentality, as testified by the rich amount of encyclopaedic manuscripts and texts, including *Leiðarvísir*.

State of the Art in Research on *Leiðarvísir*

Some of the earliest research done on *Leiðarvísir*, such as the articles by F.P. Magoun (1940, 1944), discusses various details of the itinerary to Rome and Nikulás' stay in Rome.³⁸ The remainder of the itinerary, from Rome to the Holy Land, is discussed by Joyce Hill (1983). These studies include detailed surveys of the place-names and sites referred to in the text and their historical, cultural and religious significations. *Leiðarvísir* is also regarded as a main source in an extensive study of medieval pilgrimages to Rome by Debra J. Birch (1998). She discusses the main aims of a pilgrimage ("white martyrdom").³⁹ Furthermore, she describes the "travel industry" and the economic realities⁴⁰ that developed in relation to pilgrimages, based on various itineraries mentioning alternative routes, places to stay, sites to visit, safety and security on the road, taxes, necessary documents and equipment.⁴¹ She points out that Nikulás' itinerary distinguishes itself from many of the others with regard to various aspects, such as his description of the relics in the Lateran, alongside his interest in various pagan sites, such as the fortification of the *Crescentii* (today known as Castel Sant'Angelo), the Porta Latina, and the baths of Caracalla.⁴² He is also one of the few who mentions a market at St Peter's, even though the meaning of the word he uses, *kauphús*, may be debated.

Recent additions to the scholarship include a comparison of the text to other geographical and cosmological texts by Rudolf Simek (1990, 1996); a discussion of

³⁸ For a more detailed historiographical account, see Marani 2012, "*Leiðarvísir*:" 3–4.

³⁹ Birch 1998, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages*: 3.

⁴⁰ See also E. Cohen, "Road and Pilgrimage. A Study of Economic Interaction," *Studi medievali* 3rd Ser. 21 (1980).

⁴¹ For a discussion of the pilgrimage token on the pilgrimage to Compostella, see Lars Anderson, "Pilgrimsmärken från Vägarna mot Compost," in *Pilgrimsvägar och vallfartskonst*, ed. Margareta Kempff Östlind (Stockholm: Sällsk. Runica et mediævalia, 2002).

⁴² Birch 1998, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages*: 116.

the influence of Germanic heroic legend on the text by Fabrizio Raschellà (1995); and most recently, the scholarship of Tommaso Marani.⁴³ Some of his articles, as well as his PhD thesis, discuss the genre of the text, the description of Rome in comparison to other medieval descriptions of it, and the process of composition of the text that we have in the main manuscript AM 194 from 1387.

Marani's analysis suggests that the extant text is a complex composition based on written sources, a narrative with a beginning and an end [*Explicit*]. He compares the text to Latin texts such as *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, which is a description of geographical sites and the important functions of Rome, written before 1143, and to *Indulgentia ecclesiarum Urbis Romae* and *Stationes ecclesiarum*, which were very popular in the 1100s. Marani argues that Nikulás' text is based on both personal experiences and other written sources, and therefore should be seen more as a guide and not a travel account. Like other medieval guides, it could provide information for those planning to go to the Holy Land, but it could also serve as a spiritual guide for those who could not engage in an actual pilgrimage.⁴⁴ Such "virtual" pilgrimages were a common practice in the Middle Ages. They could be based on either textual accounts, verbally mapping out the travel to Jerusalem or the city itself, or art representations, which visualized Jesus' passion history, situated in the cityscape of Jerusalem.⁴⁵

However, Marani stops here. Neither he nor anyone else have investigated the value of the text as a spiritual cognitive guide for its readers within the cultural context of its manuscripts. *Leiðarvísir* is a fact-orientated text, and by itself does not invite an allegorical and ethical reading of the journey. Such readings are, however, highly appropriate when approaching some of the other texts, appearing either in the *Leiðarvísir*-manuscripts or in the manuscripts produced in the same contexts.⁴⁶ In the

⁴³ Fabrizio D. Raschellà, "Devozione cristiana e leggenda germanica nell' 'itinerarium' dell'abate Nicola di Munkaþverá," in *L'immaginario nelle letterature germaniche del Medioevo*, ed. Adele Cipolla (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1995); Tommaso Marani, "The Roman Itinerary of Nikulás of Munkaþverá: Between Reality and Imagination," in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature, Sagas and the British Isles, Preprints of the 13th International Saga Conference*, ed. David Ashurst (Durham: Durham Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006); Tommaso Marani, "Contextualizing *Leiðarvísir*: Sant'Agnes, the Catacombs, the Pantheon and the Tiber," *Saga-Book: Viking Society for Northern Research* 33 (2009); Marani 2012, "*Leiðarvísir*"; Tommaso Marani, "The Relics of the Lateran according to *Leiðarvísir*, the *Descriptio Lateranensis ecclesiae* and the Inscription outside the *Sancta Sanctorum*," *Medium Ævum* 81, no. 2 (2012).

⁴⁴ Marani, "*Leiðarvísir*," 99, 110.

⁴⁵ See for example Kathryn M. Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages in the Convent: Imagining Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).

⁴⁶ For an example of such an approach towards another of Nikulás' text, his *drápa* on Christ in *The Third Grammatical Treatise*, see Janus Møller Jensen, "Vejen til Jerusalem: Danmark og pilgrimsvejen til det Hellige Land i det 12. århundre. En islandsk vejviser," in *Ett annat 1100-tal. Individa, kollektiv och kulturella monster i medeltidens Danmark*, ed. Peter Carelli, et al. (Stockholm: Makadam förlag, 2004), who discusses the figurative use of biblical episodes.

Icelandic intellectual contexts that produced *Leiðarvísir* at the end the fourteenth century, there seems to be a tendency to encourage ethical-allegorical dialogic readings of texts about travel, hence linking physical and spiritual dimensions of moving in the Christian storyworld.⁴⁷

On Travelling Souls

Many of the texts that appear in immediate proximity to *Leiðarvísir* – either in the same manuscript or the same cultural context – relate of travels, if not to Jerusalem, to places either characterized explicitly or interpreted allegorically as Paradise. In the following, I will discuss a few examples of how such travels are described, by focusing on the physical and spiritual aspects of the travel as a process, and on the description of the travel destinations themselves. This is not an exhaustive study of the motif of travel, but the aim is to illustrate the horizon of understanding in which *Leiðarvísir* may have been read and comprehended.

The examples below are from (1) *Veraldar saga* and the passage about Paradise and Moses at the beginning of the same manuscript as *Leiðarvísir*. Their content takes us associatively to (2) *Eiríks saga víðförla*, a legendary saga which appears in the *Flateyjarbók* manuscript, among others, probably written in the same context as AM 194 8vo, namely the Helgafell monastery. This saga tells of a journey to the earthly Paradise, a topic also treated in (3) *Kirialax saga*, a bookish Icelandic romance of encyclopaedic nature, that dwells on worldly travels and spiritual realities, among other topics. Finally, we return to the *Flateyjarbók* manuscript, which also includes (4) one of *The Vinland sagas*, that is *The Saga of the Greenlanders*, where the discovered islands may be allegorically interpreted as a thematization of Paradise. The second of the two *Vinlands sagas*, the *Saga of Erik the Red* is preserved in *Hauksbók*, among other manuscripts. This manuscript includes other texts about the link between physical and cognitive travel, as well as a visual representation of Jerusalem.⁴⁸ Our excursus will stop with these texts, even though the topic of spiritual and physical travel can certainly be traced and discussed on the basis of many other texts.

⁴⁷ Most of the scholarship on *Leiðarvísir* discusses the text within its twelfth-century Benedictine context, even when the analyses are based on Kålund's edition which is based on the fourteenth-century manuscript AM 194. The work by Tommaso Marani is an exception, as he argues that the text as we have it in manuscript AM 194 cannot have been written exclusively in the twelfth century and that parts of it are later additions testifying to a complex compilation process. Sometimes, even Werlauff's edition from 1821 is used as a primary text when discussing the twelfth-century context, see Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages*.

⁴⁸ For the representation of Jerusalem in *Hauksbók* and other comparable Icelandic manuscripts, see Chapter 20 (Kristin Aavitsland), 424–53, including Figs 20.1–3.

The links between *Leiðarvísir* and the contextualizing texts and manuscripts are summarized in the table below:

	AM 194 8vo: <i>Leiðarvísir Veraldar saga Landfræði</i>	Flateyjarbók: <i>Eiríks saga viðförla The Saga of the Veraldar Greenlanders</i>	AM 589 a 4to: <i>Kirialax saga</i> (Jerusalem and Paradise, Phoenix)	Hauksbók: <i>The Saga of Erik the Red</i>
AM 194 8vo <i>Leiðarvísir Veraldar saga Landfræði</i> (Phoenix)		Written in the same context; common elements between <i>Veraldar saga</i> and the description of Paradise and Moses	Originally the saga may be connected to Bergr Sökkason and his disciplines, where <i>Leiðarvísir</i> originated. Description of Jerusalem and Paradise	Encyclopaedic manuscripts Map of Jerusalem
Flateyjarbók <i>Eiríks saga viðförla The Saga of the Greenlanders</i>			Description of Paradise in India and beyond	<i>Vinlands sagas</i> Physical and cognitive travels
AM 589 a 4to <i>Kirialax saga</i>				Jerusalem map and Paradise

Veraldar Saga and the Rest of AM 194 8vo

Veraldar saga is a translation of Latin texts connecting world history to Icelandic history by mentioning Gizzur Hallssønn at the end, whose family also is mentioned in *Njáls saga*.⁴⁹ He is considered to be the compiler of *Rómverja saga* and the author of the *First Grammatical Treatise*.⁵⁰ Gizzur may also have been a contributor to the writing of *Veraldar saga*, and is known to have written another description of a journey to southern Europe in 1149–1152, called *Flos Peregrinationis* (The Blossom of Pilgrimage), now lost.

⁴⁹ The saga is preserved in many manuscript fragments, from between c.1200 to 1600–1770, see ONP 1989:407.

⁵⁰ *Veraldar saga*, translated by Rune Kyrkjebø, *Norrøn Verdenshistorie og geografi*, Oslo: Aschehoug, 2012, 19–60.

Veraldar saga tells us of Moses' travel in the desert during the third age of humankind. Paraphrasing Exod 13:21, the text relates how Moses' journey was guided by a pillar, which stretched from heaven to earth, having the colour of clouds during the day and the colour of fire at night. The pillar was Moses' guide for forty years on the Israelites' journey from Egypt to Jordan.⁵¹ Later, the text gives allegorical explanations for this and other episodes: the desert symbolizes the difficulties and challenges of the worldly life that people have to live and suffer before they can enter and take their place in Paradise. The pillar that guided Moses on this journey symbolizes Jesus Christ, showing his children the way to Paradise. The pillar's colour at night shows that he is terrifying to evil men, but is as mild as the shining skies to his friends.⁵²

The wider textual context of *Leiðarvisir* in AM 194 8vo, called *Landfræði* by Kålund, starts with Moses' and John's description of the celestial Paradise: it hovers in the air, between the earth and Heaven; there are no mountains or valleys, no cold or ice, there is nothing lacking, and the land is fertile and rich. There lies the well of life [*lifs brunns*]. There is a forest in Paradise which everyone admires, called *Radion saltus* (shining forest) and it never dies. There are all kinds of trees and fruit-trees there, including the one that contained all wisdom of good and evil which was forbidden to Adam and Eve. Even though the journey to this place is not described here, it is explicitly mentioned that the souls of all good people shall travel to Paradise. Here we also find the Phoenix, which is the lord of all birds. It bathes in the well of life and is marvellous, shining, and exceptional in all kinds of ways. John further tells: after the Phoenix had lived 1000 years, it gathered a multitude of birds and with their help collected many twigs in a big pile. With the help of God, the pile took fire because of the strong sun. The Phoenix fell into the middle of the fire and was burned entirely to ashes. After three days, it was resurrected from death and became young again for a second time. It then went to the well of Life and bathed again. And so the cycle of the Phoenix continues every one thousand years. It is also mentioned that Paradise lies in the eastern part of the world, and that is where one finds the Tree of Life.⁵³ The Phoenix is indeed a well-known trope in many cultures. In the Christian tradition it has a range of symbolic meanings: heavenly Paradise, Christ, Mary, virginity, and other aspects of Christian life.⁵⁴

This description of Paradise and Moses' journey through the desert with the guidance of God are the allegorical renderings and the ultimate goal for a physical pilgrimage to the worldly Jerusalem, as described in *Leiðarvisir*. The fact that

⁵¹ *Veraldar saga*, 33.

⁵² *Veraldar saga*, 36.

⁵³ *Landfræði*, translated by Bjørg Dale Spørck, *Norrøn Verdenshistorie og geografi*, Oslo: Aschehoug, 2012, 69–82.

⁵⁴ R. van der Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix According to Classical and Early Christian Tradition* (Boston: Brill, 1972), 9. The Phoenix is mentioned in works by Pope Clement I, Isidore of Seville, and in literature by Dante and Shakespeare, among others.

these texts appear in the same manuscript strengthens the hypothesis that such a dialogic reading of the physical and spiritual journeys was plausible, perhaps even intended.

Eiríks Saga Viðförla

The description of Paradise in *Landfræði* brings to mind another description of Paradise, that in the legendary saga *Eiríks saga Viðförla*. This saga is preserved in, among other manuscripts, the *Flateyjarbók* manuscript, GKS 1005 fol, c.1387–1395.⁵⁵ The manuscript was probably written in the same context as the *Leiðarvísir*-manuscript AM 194 8vo – the Helgafells monastery – and moreover some of the annals in *Flateyjarbók* mention abbot Nikulás. This is the saga about Eiríkr, the son of the first king to rule over Trondheim, who makes a vow one Yule Eve: “at fara um allan heim at leita, ef hann fyndi stað þann, er heiðnir menn kalla Ódáinsakr, en kristnir menn jörð lifandi manna eða Paradísú” [to travel the whole world in search of the place which heathen men call The Deathless Acre and Christians the Land of Living Folk, or Paradise].⁵⁶ On his way to this site, Eiríkr spends some time with the Greek king in Miklagard (Constantinople), where he learns about the Christian God, the Trinity, and Heaven and Hell. Hell is placed under Earth; the sky is above Earth; the Firmament Heaven [*festingarhiminn*], which contains the stars, is above the sky; waters, in the form of clouds, are above the Firmament Heaven; the spiritual Heaven, where the angels live, is above the waters; the Heaven of intellect, which is the heaven of God himself, is above the spiritual Heaven. The vertical positioning of the various Heavens recalls the placement of Paradise on a vertical, albeit less detailed, axis in *Landfræði*, between earth and Heaven. Eiríkr also learns that India-land marks the end of the earth and that the country east of furthest India is what the Christians call Paradise. This was also mentioned in *Landfræði*. A wall of fire before it reaches right up to Heaven. Eiríkr and his men stay with the king for three years and are baptized before they set off on their journey.

When the troop comes to India, they discover a land full of contradictions, including regions drowned in darkness but with the stars shining bright above all the time, rich regions covered with gold and treasures, thick woods and other wonders.

⁵⁵ See ONP: 1989: 241. For a discussion of the variation between the various versions of the saga, see Elise Kleivane, “Reproduksjon av norrøne tekstar i seinmellomalderen. Variasjon i *Eiríks saga viðförla*” (Doctoral Thesis, University of Oslo, 2010).

⁵⁶ For the Old Norse text with English translation, see *The Tale of Eirik the Traveller*, translated by Peter Tunstall 2005, *The Complete Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda in English Translation*, <http://www.germanicmythology.com/FORNALDARSAGAS/EireksSagaVidforlaTunstall.html>.

When it starts to get brighter, they come to a river spanned by a bridge. On the opposite bank they see “land fagrt með miklum blóma ok gnótt hunangs ok kenndu þaðan sætan ilm. Þangan var hjart at líta” [a beautiful country with tall flowers and plenty of honey, and from it they smelt a sweet scent. The direction was bright to look at].⁵⁷ Eiríkr then realizes that this is the river Phison, which runs from Paradise. A terrible dragon lies in front of the bridge and guards it. Eiríkr and some of his men go purposefully inside the mouth of the dragon and when they emerge on the other side, wading through smoke, they find a beautiful land with flowers, honey and sweet scents. Then they see a column [*stöpull*] hanging in the air without any support, which turns out to be a tower hanging in the sky with a ladder on it. In the tower, they find a richly decorated room with satins and velvet, a table with a silver dish containing white sweet-scented bread, a jug set with gold and gemstones, and a goblet full of wine, as well as beds covered with golden and velvet cloths. Eiríkr thinks this is Paradise.⁵⁸ He then falls asleep and an angel comes to him in his sleep, the one who guards the gates of Paradise. He tells him that this place is like “eyðimörk til at jafna við Paradisum” [wilderness compared to Paradise], but that Paradise is close by and that it is the origin of the river. No living man comes to Paradise, where only the righteous souls live, while this place is called the Land of Living Folk. The angel then explains that the tower is held by God’s strength alone and is a sign that God undoubtedly made the world from nothing. Eiríkr then goes back to the North and tells of his adventures, wisdom and learning. When he dies, his friends know that he is taken by the spirit of God.

The narrative of Eiríkr’s trip can be read in various ways. It is a story about a physical journey, but it also includes cognitive experiences, such as Eiríkr’s dream in the tower. The physical journey is, however, full of symbolism and metaphors that open up allegorical interpretation: the trip takes him from darkness to light, and to beauty and sweetness,⁵⁹ which are all signs of God’s presence and omnipotence. The bridge connecting the two worlds is certainly a common symbol of transfer from this world to the other, and such bridges are often guarded by treacherous

⁵⁷ *The Tale of Eirík the Traveller*, ch. 3.

⁵⁸ This recalls an episode in *Elís saga ok Rosamundu*, where a Christian crusader is hurt and seeks help in a tower and a room of a similar kind. There, he is healed by a Saracen princess; in the French version of the *chanson*, she treats him with an ointment made of herbs that have grown at the foot of the Cross, which is the ultimate symbol of regeneration; in the Norse version, the passage is translated with modifications. When healed, the hero exclaims: “this is Paradise.” For a discussion of the connotations of the change of the symbolism, see Stefka G. Eriksen, “Translating Christian Symbolism into Old Norse Mythology in Thirteenth-century Norway,” in *Medieval Translator: Translation and Authority – Authorities in Translation*, ed. Pieter de Leemans and Michele Goyens (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016).

⁵⁹ On the sweetness of God, see Rachel Fulton, “‘Taste and see that the Lord is sweet’ (Ps 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” *The Journal of Religion* 86, no. 2 (2006).

creatures, or test the trespasser's courage and mental strength in other ways.⁶⁰ God's heaven is presented as a physical, spiritual and intellectual universe, suggesting that meeting God demands the involvement of all three of these faculties. Eiríkr's journey involves the three faculties too: he travels physically, and he learns much on his way, including both spiritual and cognitive truths about the sweetness of God. The earthly Paradise is connected to Heaven by a wall of fire, and the column is a sign and proof of God's existence, which is never to be doubted. The column in Paradise in *Eiríks saga* recalls the pillar in *Veraldar saga* (and in Exodus), that functioned as a reminder of God and His guidance.

If seen as an architectural element, the column may function as a metaphor for the main pillars of the Christian faith. In the stave church homily in *The Old Norse Homily Book* which is a dedication of a church in terms of Solomon's dedication of the first temple in Jerusalem, columns as such are not specifically mentioned, but the foundation timbers are said to symbolize God's Apostles, as they are the main pillars of the whole of Christendom.⁶¹ In Honorius Augustodunensis' *De gemma animae*, which *The Old Norse Homily Book* strongly alludes to, the columns in a church are said to symbolize the bishops, "who maintain the machinery of church life at a level of high rectitude. The beams that hold the house together are the princes of the world who defend the church in an unbroken state."⁶² What is noteworthy in this allegorical explanation is that while earlier sacred architecture was related to various grades in the ecclesiastical system, Honorius is the first to include the laity in his explanation, which connects the material and spiritual meaning of the buildings even further.

In the thirteenth century, with the increased significance of the vernaculars, the architectural allegorical readings also became gradually translated from religious to secular and rural buildings, such as farmhouses and castles, kitchens and barns.⁶³ The besieged castle is a much-used literary trope for the soul threatened by sin and the devil. The castle of religious virtue, for example the castle of courtly love or the castle of virginity, symbolized the personification of female resistance. Another trope of virginity is the tower, which appears in our text. In various texts, the Virgin Mary is "represented as a fortification" and is sometimes also "invoked as a doorway to eternal life, a temple of mercy for sinners, a strong tower of refuge."⁶⁴ It thus becomes an allegory of the incarnation, the miracle of Christ's entrance into Mary's virginal body.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ See Kleivane, "Reproduksjon av norrøne tekstar i seinmellomalderen," 64–9.

⁶¹ *Gammelnorsk homiliebok*, translated by Astrid Salvesen, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971.

⁶² Cited from and translated by Christiania Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind. A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 49–60 n. 24.

⁶³ Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind*, 88.

⁶⁴ Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind*, 92.

⁶⁵ Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind*, 93.

The last architectural element in the saga that deserves comment is the ladder leading to the tower, which seems to be hanging in the open air. The ladder trope, the prototype of which is Jacob's vision of the celestial ladder in Genesis 28, is used both textually and visually to signify the inner development from vice to virtue and holiness. An example of the allegorical significance of ladders may be found in Hugh of St Victor's *De arca Noa mystica* (*On the mystical interpretation of the arc of Noah*). The ascent into the ship occurs along various ladders: one leads from fear, then to sorrow, then to love; another from knowledge, to meditation, to contemplation; yet another from temperance, to prudence, to fortitude. There are twelve ladders, four around each column on the three decks. Hugh further elaborates the meaning of the separate steps and ladders,⁶⁶ but here it suffices to emphasize the strong allegorical symbolism of the ladder. We see that the column, the tower, and the ladder are infused with stark symbolism of physical travel, symbolizing the earthly life of Christ himself, as well as the spiritual ascension of each and every traveller.

Kirialax Saga

As already mentioned, the descriptions of Jerusalem in AM 194 8vo recall other descriptions of the city, as for example in *Kirialax saga*. This saga dwells on the topics of travel and paradise-like lands and their creatures (the Phoenix, for example), and is therefore another suitable example in our excursus on travelling souls. This is an indigenous Icelandic romance, combining elements of translated crusade stories with encyclopaedic knowledge about world history, and some references to Nordic history, as well as other worldly spaces.⁶⁷ The saga's first part is rich in

⁶⁶ See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 236–7.

⁶⁷ *Kirialax saga* is preserved in three fifteenth-century manuscripts: AM 589a 4to a, from the second part of the fifteenth century; AM 489 4to, from the fifteenth century; AM 567 4to, the first half of the fifteenth century; in addition to later paper manuscripts, see *Kirialax saga*, ed. Kristian Kålund, Copenhagen: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1917; ONP 1989: 312. It has been argued that the saga was written in the fourteenth century and its composition is associated with either Bishop Jón Halldórsson of Skálholt, or Berg Sokkason and his disciples, among others, see Alenka Divjak, *Studies in the Traditions of Kirialax Saga* (Ljubljana: Institut Nove revije, zavod za humanistisko, 2009), 15. The latter of these interpretations places the origin of the saga in the same context as the original composition context of *Leiðarvísir*. The manuscript AM 589 a-f 4to is characterized by Agnete Loth as “ordinary, unremarkable.” It contains fornaldarsagas, late medieval fiction, and examples of post-classical sagas of Icelanders. See Agnete Loth, “Introduction,” in *Fornaldarsagas and Late Medieval Romances*, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1977), 7. AM 489 4to is a similar manuscript, but also includes translations of Old French romances, such as *Ívens saga*, *The Saga of Tristram ok Ísodd*, and *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, see Foster W. Blaisdell, “Introduction,” in *The Sagas of Ywain and Tristan and other tales: AM 489 4to*, ed.

battle descriptions, reminding us of the crusades as described in *chansons de geste*, violent and bloody, but also relatively formulaic and common for these genres. An episode relevant in this context is the description of Kirialax's journey to the sea of Jerusalem [Iorsala háf]⁶⁸ and to Jorsalaborg. The description is detailed, mentioning various sites and their theological significance for the life of Christ and the history of Christianity. The description is relatively list-like, and in this sense, it recalls the description of Jerusalem in *Leiðarvísir*. The sites mentioned are the *Pulchro kirkia* (otherwise the designation of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre), described as a large temple in the middle of the town, built by St Helena, mother of Constantine. There then follow five other churches: Church of the Cross, where the Cross of the Lord stands; another church above the Lord's grave, close to the rock with a large hole in which the Cross stood, and under the rock there is yet another church, where you find the stone that was under the cross, still covered with Christ's blood. Then there are the Church of Simeon and the Church of Holy Caritas. We hear of the rock where one can see Jesus' handprint when he was thrust into the mud. We are told of coloured columns in the Pulchro Church and about the pillar on which Our Lord was whipped, and the candles in marble pillars in the north of the Pulchro Church, which are lit by heavenly fire each year on the Saturday before Easter. We are told of the thirteen seats on which Christ and his apostles sat and how they shine with fire-red gold, as well as the *Ions spitali* (probably the quarters of the Knights Hospitaller) where divine, ancient and Hebrew services are held. And we hear of *templum domini*, in the eastern part of *Jorsala borg*, where the sepulchre of the Virgin Mary stands, and we are told of the Lord's grave and the large stone on the right, which was removed by the angel from the tomb's entrance on His Resurrection day. Subsequently, Kirialax visits the Mount of Olives and the footprint of Christ, where he stepped before he ascended, the castle of Bethany, the town of Jericho, and the river Jordan. It is said that Kirialax and his men swam in the river, which is believed to bring spiritual benefit.⁶⁹

After violent and bloody struggles and his visit to the worldly Jerusalem, Kirialax' journey continue to the southern hemisphere. There he sees two islands in the sea, which radiate brightly at night: one in light colours, the other in red, but the islands cannot be landed on because of steep shores. One of them is full of silver and the other full of gold, which explains their shining. These treasure islands on the way to Paradise are reminiscent of the treasures that Eiríkr víðförla and his men saw and found on their way to Paradise. The names and meaning of the islands are explained through a reference to Isidore of Seville (d. 636), who calls

F.W. Blaisdell (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1980), 9–62. Both of these manuscripts are from the western part of Iceland.

⁶⁸ *Kirialax saga*, 62.

⁶⁹ *Kirialax saga*, 65–7.

them Chriſen and Argiren.⁷⁰ Then the troops sail along the shores of India, which were also vividly bright and very beautiful, with lots of gold, but impossible to land on because of “murderous dragons and fearful griffins.” Here, we do not hear of a bridge guarded by dragons and griffins, but these creatures may be symbolically guarding the land, just like the dragon in *Eiríks saga víðförla*. The saga goes on to tell of the sweet scent coming from the woods, dispersed by the wind. Kirialax and some of his men go ashore, and there they meet the Phoenix bird: “hans fidri allt var miclu framar skinanda en et skiaerazta gull med aullum litum, gulum ok grænum, raudum ok blám”⁷¹ [its feathers were shining more brightly than the purest gold in all colors, gold and green, red and blue].⁷² The meaning of the Phoenix is, once again, explained with a reference to Isidore: there is just one Phoenix and when it gets old, it collects branches of all the most costly and aromatic herbs and piles them up as firewood. When the sun is at its brightest, the bird’s wings become black and it lights the herbs’ twigs on fire, lies down directly in the fire and burns itself to ashes, “en i þeiri ausku kviknar eirn ungi, hvar af Fenix verdr i annann tima endr-geten af sinni eiginligri ausku”⁷³ (and in these ashes is brought again to life a young one, there the Phoenix is regenerated for a second time from its own ashes).⁷⁴ We hear further of sweet scented flowers, honey dew on the grass, cinnamon-birds, Sitacus birds which are born communicative, and many fruit trees, but also griffins and fearful lions that kill their horses and scare them off the land and back to their ships.

Finally, we are told that Kirialax travels to Africa and Asia, where he visits the Pillars of Hercules, which he defined as the limit of the world [heims enda]: “they stand in the sea and it seems to one who had seen them that human power could hardly have created them.”⁷⁵ Then the saga writer comments:

But about his journeys and deeds I will write no more because of lack of knowledge and for this reason I will swiftly return to this true story which contains some evidence of truth, as old poems relate it and some learned chronicles and other books of wisdom confirm.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ *Kirialax saga*, 67. Chriſen is variously named as Trisen and Trilen in other manuscripts.

⁷¹ *Kirialax saga*, 68.

⁷² Divjak, *Studies in the Traditions of Kirialax Saga*, 334.

⁷³ *Kirialax saga*, 69.

⁷⁴ Divjak, *Studies in the Traditions of Kirialax Saga*, 334. On various representations of the Phoenix in other Old Norse texts, such as *Alfræði íslenzk* and *Stjórn*, see Divjak, *Studies in the Traditions of Kirialax Saga*, 230–1.

⁷⁵ “þeir standa í hafinu, ok þickir svo þeim, er sed hafa, sem varla hafi matt mannligir kraptr því orka.” *Kirialax saga*, 72. English translation by Divjak, *Studies in the Traditions of Kirialax Saga*, 336.

⁷⁶ “En af hans ferdum edr verkum skrifa eg eigi fleira sakir fá-frædis, ok því skuda eg til þeirar frasagnar, sem naukkur sannenda rauk fylgir, eptir því sem form kvædi votta ok en fylgia nœkkut forðir annular ok adrar visenda bækr’.” *Kirialax saga*, 71. English translation by Divjak, *Studies in the Traditions of Kirialax Saga*, 336.

After this textual digression to Paradise, the worldly adventures of Kirialax continue with many references to known lands and kings and praises of various sciences, intellectual skills and virtues.

Many of the elements of this story recall the texts mentioned above. The battle scenes, reminiscent of the historical crusades to the Holy Land, as well as the relatively long and detailed description of the worldly Jerusalem, are directly relevant for the reading of *Leiðarvísir*. The description of Jerusalem, as mentioned above, is very similar to the description of Jerusalem in one of the texts following *Leiðarvísir* in AM 194 8vo. The level of detail deserves comment. Not only are the sites noted, but the direction (left or right, north, south, west or east) and the distance between them is also given, in a similar fashion to the directions and distances between sites in *Leiðarvísir*. Reading this passage is like following in Christ's own footsteps during his passion. The text leads the reader on a mental procession, a cognitive journey through the main moments of the passion narrative. A similar effect could be achieved by visual representations of Christ's passion, where the story is compartmentalized in a chronological presentation of the events.⁷⁷ The various episodes in Christ's passion could be also visualized and structured in the calendars that appear in many liturgical manuscripts, in city plans of Jerusalem, or in other narrative images. Such structured textualizations and visualizations were meant to inspire the reader's mental involvement and contemplation on the sites, which function as mnemonic tags in a "virtual" visit to Jerusalem.

Furthermore, the narrative concludes with a travel to sweet-smelling lands in India, not unlike the ones described in *Eiríks saga*. The sweetness, spread by the winds, the flowers and the herbs, the honey dew, and the Phoenix bird are common paradisiacal tropes in Latin Christianity. Even though the end of the world is placed in different sites in the two texts (beyond India in *Eiríks saga* and by the Pillars of Hercules in Africa in *Kirialax saga*), it is characterized by columns in both texts. As we remember, a guiding column is also mentioned in *Veraldar saga*, a symbol of Christ hanging in the air. In *Kirialax saga*, it is also explicitly noted that it seems impossible for the columns to have been made by men. Finally, the writer's distinction between the truth of the real world, which is to be found in chronicles and books, and the descriptions of these mystical Paradise-like lands suggests that this part of the text signifies something separate. Whether the travels to the Paradise-like south and east were meant to be understood as physical voyages or to provoke intellectual contemplation is unclear. This obscurity may be seen as the main function of this part of the text, namely, to suggest that physical and intellectual/cognitive travelling were connected and complementary aspects of the same process. The

⁷⁷ For a discussion of various art-historical sources that could have had such a function, see Kathryn M. Rudy, "Virtual Pilgrimage Through the Jerusalem Cityscape," in *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem*, ed. Bianca Kühnel, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

structure and progression of the text – the victory over the religious enemy in worldly battles, the visit to the worldly Jerusalem, and finally the discovery of India and the end of the world – further strengthens an allegorical, and even an anagogical reading of the narrative as a whole. The arrival to the heavenly Jerusalem surmounts all the other scenes.

The Vinland Sagas

The characters in *Kirialax saga* did not stop at the two unknown islands passed on the way, but islands are often important elements of the Paradise-like land- and seascape in literature. The passing by, description, and exploration of unknown islands are also found in the narratives of *The Vinland sagas*. They comprise two texts written independently of each other: *The Saga of Erik the Red* [*Eiríks Saga Rauða*] and *The Saga of the Greenlanders* [*Grænlendinga Saga*]. *Grænlendinga Saga* is believed to have been written down sometime in the thirteenth century, but is preserved in the late fourteenth century Icelandic manuscript *Flateyjarbók*. *Eiríks saga* is preserved in two manuscripts: *Hauksbók*, from the fourteenth century and *Skálholtsbók* from the fifteenth century. *Flateyjarbók* also included *Eiríks saga víðförla*, as mentioned above.

In *The Saga of the Greenlanders* Bjarni sets off to Greenland, and he prays God to help him on the trip. The ship is taken by a storm, winds from the North and fog. They sail like this for three days without knowing where they are. They approach a land and see that it is not mountainous, with only small hills covered with forest. They continue and see a second island on the second day, which is also flat and wooded, and is regarded as a resource of timber and water. After three days they reach a third island with high mountains capped by glaciers. After sailing four more days, they reach Greenland.

When Leif, son of Eirik the Red, sails to the islands after he has heard Bjarni's story, we are told that there was no grass on the first island, but glaciers covered with highlands, and the land was like a single slab of rock from the glacier to the sea. They call the land *Helluland* (stone-slab land). The second island is flat and forested, sloping gently towards the sea, with many beaches of white sand – it is called *Markland* (Forest land). On the third island, which lays further north, they find dew on the grass, from which they drank, “and [they] thought they had never tasted anything as sweet.”⁷⁸ With smaller boats they row up a river into a lake and decide to spend the winter there. It is said that they find no lack of salmon in the river and the

78 “ok þóttust ekki jafnsætt kennt hafa sem þat var,” *Grænlendinga saga*, Icelandic Saga Database, http://www.sagadb.org/graelendinga_saga.on. English translation *The Saga of Greenlanders*, translated by Keneva Lunz, *The Vinland sagas*, London: Penguin books, 2008, 1–22.

lake, and the salmon are larger than any they had seen before. The land is described as good, the temperature above freezing, with a better balance between light and darkness compared to Iceland and Greenland. Then we hear of how Tyrkir finds grapevines and grapes. The land is therefore called *Vínland* (Wineland).

Subsequently, Leif's brother Thorvald sails to Vinland. He confirms his impression from the land explained in very specific terms – fine land, forests, beaches, shallow waters, no men or animals, wood, and grains. After they mark *Kjalarnes* (Keel point), they sail eastwards and come to another forested fjord, where they meet native people. Thorvald dies there and is buried under the cross at *Krossanes* (Cross point).

Finally, it is Karlsefni's turn to visit Vinland, and once again the richness of the land is emphasized: natural bounty, including grapes, all sorts of fish and game, and other good things. They encounter the natives and exchange products: the natives get milk and milk products in exchange for their goods, even though they want weapons. The narrative continues with the feuds customary in Icelandic family sagas, instigating women, and mysterious stories of ghost-like figures, and concludes with information about Gudrid who travels south in a pilgrimage from Iceland, and then returns to Glaumbaer, where a church has already been built where she later becomes a nun and anchoress.

Some of the same information is given in *Saga of Eirik the Red*, even though there are discrepancies in the narratives between the two texts. There we hear again of Leif's trip to Greenland, but this time we also read that he is asked by King Olaf Tryggvason to convert Greenland to Christianity. After being caught in a storm and tossed at sea for days, he unexpectedly finds lands with fields of self-sown wheat, vine, and trees. He then accomplishes his mission by converting Greenland to Christianity.

Subsequently, we hear of Karlsefni's trip to Vinland, and how they reach Helluland with the flat slabs of stone; then Markland, a land with forests and many animals (a bear is discovered); and finally another wild land with sand flats. They call the wonderful beaches *Furdurstrandir* (wonder beaches). Amongst his troops, Karlsefni has two Scots, Haki and Hekja, who are great and fast runners. They are sent off to explore the land, and after three days they return with grapes and self-sown wheat. At Straumsfjord they observe many birds, as well as finding all kinds of livestock, pleasant landscape and mountains, and tall grass. However, the winter is harsh and cold, with little food. They pray to God to help them, "but the response was not as quick in coming as their need was urgent."⁷⁹ Then a whale is stranded on the shore, but it turns out that it is because Thorhall has been addressing Thor. Everyone else refuses to eat

⁷⁹ "ok varð eigi við svá skjótt sem þeir þóttust þurfa," *Eiríks saga rauða*, ch. 8, Icelandic Saga Database, http://sagadb.org/eiriks_saga_rauda.on. English translation *Saga of Greenlanders* 2008: 42.

from the meat and “[they throw] themselves on God’s mercy.”⁸⁰ Then the weather improves, and they get plenty of supplies from fishing.

Karlsefni continues up a river into a lake and lagoon, which they call Tidal pool. There again they find low-lying lands, with wheat and vines, lots of fish, and great numbers of deer in the forest. This is followed by some encounters with and attacks by the natives, who are in the end frightened away by Freydis’ demonstration of power, when she frees one of her breasts out of her clothes, and smacks a sword against her naked skin.⁸¹ The saga once again ends with giving the details of Karlsefni and Gudrid’s offspring: Karlsefni’s granddaughter Hallfrid was the mother of Bishop Thorlak Runolfsson (1086–1133); the daughter of their son Thorbjorn, Thorunn, was the mother of Bishop Björn Gilsson of Hólar (d.1162). Bishop Brand Sæmundarson of Hólar (1136–1201) was also the offspring of Snorri Karlsefni.

These sagas are of a different genre than the others described above. Many scholars have discussed the historical facts about the discovery of North America retold in the sagas, and much is confirmed by archaeological excavations in Newfoundland. This does not, however, prevent us from reading them as literary texts.⁸² The description of the travels and the lands may be read as an allegory, as many of the characteristics of these lands have deep metaphorical meanings in the Christian tradition. The sagas operate with some of the same Christian symbols as discussed above: the flat wide fields and the forests are also mentioned in *Kirialax saga* and *Eiríks saga víðförla* and are recurrent symbols of Paradise in Christian literature. The forest motif appears in works of St Augustine, and in many vernacular texts of various languages, such as those by Dante, Chrétien de Troyes, and Wolfram von Eschenbach. Here, the forest is construed as a mysterious and dangerous, yet spiritual location. The forest is a space where human laws and norms no longer apply; it is a prime territory, a liminal space, a utopian and dystopian place.⁸³ The sweet dew on the ground recalls the sweet honey mentioned in the other texts, ultimately pointing back to the heavenly food provided for the Israelites as sweet dew on the ground (Exod 16:13–17). The taste of honey and

⁸⁰ “skutu sínu máli til guðs,” *Eiríks saga rauða*, ch. 8, Icelandic Saga Database, http://sagadb.org/eiriks_saga_rauda.on, chapter 8. English translation *Saga of Greenlanders* 2008: 43.

⁸¹ *Saga of Greenlanders* 2008: 46.

⁸² See Jonathan Grove, “The Place of Greenland in Medieval Icelandic Saga Narrative,” *Journal of the North Atlantic* special volume 2 (2009); Thorunn Sigurdardottir and Andrew Wawn, eds., *Approaches to Vinland: A Conference on the Written and Archaeological Sources for the Norse Settlements in the North-Atlantic Region and Exploration of America* (Reykjavik: Sigurdur Nordal Institute, 2001); Matthias Egeler, *Islands in the West: Classical Myth and the Medieval Norse and Irish Geographical Imagination* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017).

⁸³ Albrecht Classen, “The Role of the Forest in German Literature: From the Medieval Forest to the *Grünes Band*. Motif Studies and Motivational Strategies for the Teaching of the Middle Ages,” *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* 3 (2014).

sweetness are commonly related to God in Christian theology.⁸⁴ The milk given to the natives in *The Saga of the Greenlanders* may be related to the symbolism of milk in Christian theology, as it is often given to the spiritually immature and youthful.⁸⁵ The fish, and sometimes dragons, may be seen as a symbol of Christ and Christianity.⁸⁶ *Saga of Eirik the Red* includes wine and wheat, which together are symbols of God's body and blood which is to be consummated in the Eucharist.⁸⁷ The many birds may also be relatable to the description of the Phoenix bird, as the most superior bird of all and often surrounded by many other birds.⁸⁸ The bounty of the land, the perfect climate and light conditions are all commonly known Christian symbols. The framing of both stories is Christian – the first tour in the saga of the Greenlanders is blessed by means of Christian skaldic verse, and the last tour is a pilgrimage on which Gudrid dedicates her life to God as a nun. *Saga of Eirik the Red* begins with King Olaf Tryggvason's desire to Christianize Greenland and ends with a list of the names and religious roles as bishops of Karlsefni's offspring.

84 Fulton, "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet' (Ps 33:9)."

85 1 Pet. 2:2–3, Vulgate; Fulton 2006, "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet' (Ps 33:9):" 184.

86 See Bo Almqvist, "The Fish of Life and the Salmon of Life: Some Marginal Contributions to Irish-Icelandic Conceptions of Life and Soul," in *Viking Ale: Studies on Folklore Contacts between the Northern and the Western Worlds; Presented to the Author on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Éilís Ní Dhuibhne-Almqvist and Séamas Ó Catháin (Aberystwyth: Boethius Press, 1991).

87 On the symbolism of wine, see Eric Palazzo, "Les fonctions pratiques et symboliques du vin," in *Olie e vino nell'alto medioevo, Spoleto 20–26 aprile 2006*, Atti delle settimane (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Ital. di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2007). Together with wine, wheat is mentioned in the Bible many times and signifies love and charity, the wheat-field is the Church, the wheat-seeds are the good things born from the Christian faith, see for example Jer 12:10, 12–13: "Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot: they have changed my delightful portion into a desolate wilderness. / Spoilers are come upon all the ways of the wilderness, for the sword of the Lord shall devour from one end of the land to the other end thereof: there is no peace for all flesh. They have sown wheat, and have reaped thorns."

88 In the Latin *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, or the Anglo-Norman version of Benedeit, there is a description of the "paradise of birds," an island where the saint and his companions stop to celebrate Easter. There is a spring there, too, next to a wonderful tall tree and many birds sing the service of the divine hour. In patristic commentary, the evergreen tree is associated with the word of God. See Tom Artin, *The Allegory of Adventure. Reading Chrétien's Erec and Yvain* (London: Associated University Press, 1974), 141–162. The landscape of the fountain in Yvain has also been read allegorically as the earthly Paradise. After the storm, birds of all kinds gather from the forest beside the fountain and sing, see Artin, *The Allegory of Adventure*, 166.

Conclusion

This excursus may continue, to include many other texts from the manuscripts already mentioned, or from others produced in the same contexts. I will however stop here, as this suffices to illustrate the literary and intellectual context in which *Leiðarvísir* was read.

The reader may now ask how all this relates to the very prosaic and almost bullet-point listing of places along the pilgrim's route from Iceland to Jerusalem in *Leiðarvísir*. The travels that we have just discussed were known in the same cultural context where *Leiðarvísir* would have been read. They suggest a way of reading, a way of thinking, and possibly a way of living, where the physical, spiritual, and cognitive aspects of a phenomenon are linked. Even though *Leiðarvísir* itself does not respond easily to allegorical interpretations, its list-like character may be seen as an intention for a verbal mapping, the construction of a mnemonic tool, which would have helped its readers – even those who had not travelled to Jerusalem – to imagine the journey. The creation of mental pictures of places and sites and their associations with historical events, the passion of Christ, and the course of salvation history, would inspire the readers of *Leiðarvísir* to contemplate their own individual salvation. Furthermore, the presence of the texts discussed above in immediate proximity to *Leiðarvísir* indicates that its audience would have been accustomed to allegorical thinking, to mental habits of interpreting physical endeavours such as travels and battles, as metaphors for mental, spiritual and cognitive transformations. That this was a way of thinking may be confirmed by the fact that the elements allowing for allegorical interpretations of travel appear in texts of such various literary genres – a saga about world history, a legendary saga, an indigenous Icelandic romance, and an Icelandic family saga. This was a way of thinking and thus of narrating – travel was a metaphor that spoke of a greater narrative of spiritual transformation and movement not only from one physical place to another, but from this universe to Paradise and Heaven. *Leiðarvísir* may thus be seen as a detailed literal description of the route from Iceland to Jerusalem, which could have functioned as an actual or virtual mnemonic guide for fourteenth-century Icelanders. The allegorical and anagogical potential in *Leiðarvísir* comes forth into the light when it is read together with other texts in its immediate proximity, texts that explicitly account for the link between physical and spiritual journeys of the soul from this world to Heavenly Jerusalem and Paradise.