

PART THREE

THE NORSE PERCEPTION OF THE WORLD: MEDIEVAL SPATIALITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Chapter 10

FLORES TRAVELS TO BABYLON: FLORES OCH BLANZEFLORE IN ITS EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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THE TALE ABOUT the two lovers Floire and Blancheflor crossed cultural, historical, and linguistic borders. Many scholars have argued that the tale has its roots in the East.¹ The earliest preserved source is the French verse romance *Le Conte de Floire et Blancheflor*, attributed to Robert d'Orbigny and considered an "idyllic romance."² The *Conte* was written around 1150 and is referred to as the "aristocratic version" of the tale. It should not be confused with the second French version, the "popular version" or the *Roman de Floire et de Blancheflor*, written in the later part of the twelfth century and preserved in one manuscript.³ The French texts were followed by translations and adaptations into other languages: Middle Dutch, Middle High German, Middle Low German, Old West Norse, Old Swedish, Old Danish, Italian, Spanish, Czech, Greek and Yiddish.⁴ The different translations can be divided into different groups. The Middle English, Old West Norse, Old Swedish and Old Danish translations belong to the "insular tradition," together with the Anglo-Norman manuscript of the *Conte*, Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 1971, referred to as V (the latter is preserved only as a fragment, containing 1,247 verses).⁵ The insular tradition is opposed to the "continental tradition," which derives from other manuscripts of the *Conte*. To the continental tradition belong, for example, the French *Roman*, Konrad Fleck's Middle High German version, and Diedrick van Assenede's Middle Dutch adaptation.

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1 See, e.g., Leclanche, "Introduction," xvi.

2 It is the German poet Konrad Fleck who refers to "Ruoprecht von Orbênt" in his version of the tale, *Floris and Blancheflor* (ca. 1200). See Leclanche, "Introduction," xv.

3 For a study of the different French texts and their manuscript contexts, see Obry, "Les versions françaises de Floire et Blancheflor".

4 Together with my colleague Vanessa Obry, I have co-edited an anthology that puts together extracts from the different European versions of the tale; see *Floire et Blancheflor en Europe: Anthologie*.

5 Leclanche, "Introduction," viii. I have compared these texts of the insular tradition in a previous study, which deals with the theme of childhood; see Lodén, *French Romance*, 85–117.

It was not only the tale about Floire and Blanchefflor that crossed various borders but also the lovers themselves, whose travels from the West to the East form an important part of the narrative. To sum up the content of the tale, the two protagonists fall in love with each other in the very beginning of the tale, when they are still children, which upsets their parents. Floire's father, a powerful king, decides that Blanchefflor must be sent away, and she is thus taken to a harbour, where she is sold to merchants. These merchants take her to Babylon, where the emir is struck by her beauty and locks her up in a tower. When Floire learns that she has been sent away, he immediately sets out for her, and his journey becomes a new adventure.

As pointed out by Patricia Grieve, "Geography is a thorny issue in *Floire and Blanchefflor* criticism."⁶ While the geography of the *Conte* has been described as imaginary by some, Grieve argues that its complexity is, rather, due to previous sources. In contrast, she considers the geography of the Spanish version as mostly "logical and faithful to the topography of Spain."⁷ I do not discuss the question of possible sources of the *Conte* here, but the difference that Grieve points to between the geography of the French and Spanish traditions—one more imaginary than the other—is interesting in this context. What can be said about the geography of the Old Swedish translation, *Flores och Blanzefflor*?

In this chapter I argue that the role of travel is crucial in order to understand *Flores och Blanzefflor* and its links to broader European culture, and I do so by exploring the male protagonist's journey to Babylon. I discuss the Old Swedish text in relation to the Old French *Le Conte de Floire et Blanchefflor*, the Middle English *Floris and Blanchefflor*, and the Old West Norse *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*. My starting point is some observations made in the Norse World resource, the infrastructure that uncovers the places abroad referred to in East Norse medieval fiction.⁸ The Norse World makes it possible to compare the spatial references in the Swedish *Flores och Blanzefflor* to references in other texts; I draw parallels to *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie*, the second of the three *Eufemiavisor*. As we shall see, the geography of *Flores och Blanzefflor* highlights the limitations of a purely East Norse perspective in the study of translated romances.

The Middle English, Old West Norse, and Old Swedish Texts

The Middle English translation, written in verse as the *Conte*, was composed around 1250 and is preserved in four medieval manuscripts. It is considerably shorter than the Old French text, at only about a third of its length. The Old West Norse translation *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* was written in prose in the thirteenth century, when many French romances were translated into Old West Norse at the instigation of the Norwegian

⁶ Grieve, *Floire and Blanchefflor*, 46.

⁷ Grieve, *Floire and Blanchefflor*, 49.

⁸ I do not consider the Old Danish translation, since it is posterior to the Swedish text. For a study of the Danish version, see Richter, "La transmission de Floire et Blancheffleur au Danemark."

court.⁹ The saga is preserved in one Norwegian fragment, NRA 65, and in later Icelandic copies. The Swedish translation *Flores och Blanzeflor*, written in verse at the beginning of the fourteenth century, is the third of the co-called *Eufemiavisor*: three translations of foreign romances that were written at the behest of the Norwegian queen Eufemia (queen of Norway from 1299 to 1312), marking the beginnings of Swedish literature. *Flores och Blanzeflor* was likely translated from the Old West Norse saga.¹⁰ Even though the two Nordic texts are generally close to each other, there are differences between them; the most obvious is that one of them is in prose and the other in verse. The Swedish text is interesting for a number of reasons. In previous research, scholars have emphasized its religious focus.¹¹ Virgile Reiter has drawn attention to the role of the Orient and the “Other” in the Swedish text.¹² He shows how the Swedish translator mainly gives a positive description of the Orient and its inhabitants, which, he argues, mirrors a certain anxiety on behalf of the aristocracy “towards a Saracen Other.”¹³

The Norse World Resource

When looking at *Flores och Blanzeflor* in the Norse World resource, with specific filters that categorize the type of places, the work presents 155 attestations of place-names in total, a number that includes all the occurrences in the different manuscripts included in the database. Norse World makes a distinction between real and fictional place-names:

Place names and non-names are sorted under real by default if they do not match the requirements for fictional. [...] Place names and non-names are sorted under fictional when they are impossible to identify or if the actual context of the attestation contradicts the assumed identification of the spatial reference.¹⁴

In the case of *Flores och Blanzeflor*, 110 of the entries are to real places and forty-five to fictional ones. These numbers tell us little in themselves, but are interesting to relate to the second *Eufemiavisa*, *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie*.¹⁵ In Table 10.1 I have listed the number of occurrences of the different types of locality referred to in the three Old Swedish manuscripts that contain both texts: Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, Cod. Holm. D 4 (dated to the first half of the fifteenth century); Stockholm, Kungliga

⁹ For an analysis of the saga, see Barnes, “Some Observations on *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*.”

¹⁰ Even though the hypothesis of the Old West Norse source for the Swedish text is the most common, it has not been proved. Helle Degnbol has raised the possibility that the saga may have been written as a preparation for the Swedish text; see Degnbol, “‘Fair Words,’” 90.

¹¹ See, for example, Bampi, “Translating Courtly Literature.” In a previous study, I have also explored the theme of childhood in a European context; see Lodén, *French Romance*, 85–117.

¹² Reiter, “Flores och Blanzeflor and the Orient.”

¹³ Reiter, “Flores och Blanzeflor and the Orient,” 35.

¹⁴ Norse World, “Editing Principles.”

¹⁵ *Herr Ivan*, the first of the three *Eufemiavisor*, is not yet included in the database, which is why I have not looked at similar occurrences in it.

Table 10.1 Place-names in the three manuscripts that all contain *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* and *Flores och Blanzeflor*.

Type of locality	<i>Hertig Fredrik av Normandie</i>			<i>Flores och Blanzeflor</i>		
	D 4a	D 3	D 4	D 4a	D 3	D 4
Castle	9	6	9	4	4	4
Church	–	–	–	1	–	1
City	3	3	3	13	9	13
Country	36	38	42	11	9	11
Forest	3	–	3	–	–	–
House	–	–	–	–	–	1
Mountain	–	–	–	1	1	1
Region	20	15	20	5	5	6
River	2	1	2	2	2	1
Strait	–	–	–	1	1	1
Tower	–	–	–	1	1	1
Volcano	1	1	1	–	–	–
Total	74	64	80	39	32	40

biblioteket, Cod. Holm. D 4a (dated to ca. 1448); and Stockholm, National Library, D 3 (dated to 1488).¹⁶

Each type of locality would need its own separate analysis. Nevertheless, there are some more general differences that deserve attention without going into a detailed study of each separate occurrence. First, *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* undoubtedly contains more references to named geographical locations than *Flores och Blanzeflor*. Second, one can note that the two works are linked to different geographical contexts; see Figure 10.1.

While *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* contains references to England, France, India, Ireland, Scotland, and Spain (as well as to “Foreign land” and “Other land”), *Flores och Blanzeflor* contains references to Babylonia, France, and the Roman Empire. Babylonia is treated as both a city and a country in the Norse World; I come back to its denotation below. In any case, *Flores och Blanzeflor* not only mentions fewer countries, it also brings in the Eastern context. Finally, even though there are generally more references to geographical places in *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie*, *Flores och Blanzeflor* contains a greater number of references to cities; only two cities are mentioned in *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie*, namely Rome and Verona, whereas eight names of cities, real as well as fictional, appear in *Flores och Blanzeflor*: Apolis

¹⁶ For a detailed presentation and discussion of these different manuscripts, see Lodén, *French Romance*, 17–27.



Figure 10.1. Countries mentioned in *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* and *Flores och Blanzeflor* in D 4a. Darker spots = *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie*. Lighter spots = *Flores och Blanzeflor*. Data and map from Norse World.

(fictional), Babylon, Bandaghha (Baghdad or Alexandria), Gisdon (fictional), Mundin (fictional), Paris, Troy, and Venice. Most of the references are to Babylon (five occurrences in D 4, five in D 4a, and two in D 3). The manuscript D 4a gives a representative picture of the balance between references to countries and cities in the two works; see Figures 10.1 and 10.2.

Why this interest in the city, and in Babylon in particular, in *Flores och Blanzeflor*? The denotation of Babylon is ambiguous. According to Andrew Scheil, “Babylon functions as a metonymic figure for ‘the East’ or ‘the Orient’ ” in the romance tradition.¹⁷ In medieval European literature, “Babylon” may refer to two distinct places: the ancient biblical Babylon of Mesopotamia or Egyptian Cairo.¹⁸ In the early *chanson de geste*, the emir of Babylon represents the “Saracen power” and is clearly linked to Cairo.¹⁹ This use of “Babylon” for Cairo found its way into many other medieval texts, such as *Floire et Blancheflor*.²⁰ The exact geographical denotation of Babylon is difficult to grasp in the medieval genre of romance, however:

In fact, in the world of romance, where all places tend to have a blurry dream-like sense of unreality, one can see the synthesis at work whereby the two Babylons [Babylon

¹⁷ Scheil, *Babylon under Western Eyes*, 251.

¹⁸ Scheil, *Babylon under Western Eyes*, 258.

¹⁹ Scheil, *Babylon under Western Eyes*, 259.

²⁰ Most scholars agree that “Babylon” in the European tradition of *Floire et Blancheflor* refers to Cairo. See, for example, Leclanche’s edition of Robert d’Orbigny, *Le Conte*, 25n1. In a recent article, however, Gilles Polizzi argues that it should be interpreted as Baghdad. See Polizzi, “L’Arbre vermeil,” 299.

We do not know for certain what the medieval Swedish translator implied when he used the name “Babylon,” let alone how this place-name was understood by his audience. But can we understand the translator’s interpretation without the larger European context? In the following, I discuss different foci, internal versus external, in the description of Floire’s travel to Babylon, in order to gain a better understanding of the role of the city and the East in the Swedish text.

The External and Internal Journey

According to Fanny Moghaddassi, who has studied the theme of travel in Middle English literature, Floris’s journey to Babylon in *Floris and Blanchefleur* reflects a progressive transformation of his identity, marking the last part of his childhood. She believes that the theme of travel in medieval literature should more generally be understood as both external—i.e., as a concrete geographical movement—and as internal. She writes: “Parcourir le monde concret, c’est toujours parcourir le monde intérieur. Le miroir de l’âme reflète le monde, comme le miroir du monde reflète l’âme.” [“To travel around the concrete world always implies travelling in the inner world. The mirror of the soul reflects the world, as the mirror of the world reflects the soul.”]²⁵ In most cases, she argues, the medieval literary travel is not about exile but about coming back to the point of departure: the traveller does not primarily lose his roots when he leaves but, rather, strikes deeper roots when he comes back.²⁶

To some extent, this could be applied to the whole tradition of *Floire and Blancheflor*. Floire, on his journey to Babylon, does cross external as well as internal boundaries: he sets out on a search for his beloved Blancheflor and comes back as a man ready to rule a great realm. Nevertheless, depending on the version one looks at, his journey is described as more or less external or internal. While the French *Conte* does, indeed, open up for a reading at both levels, its different versions in other languages seem to change the balance between these two poles. As we shall see, this can be discerned in spatial and chronological references, as well as in meteorological descriptions. Let us look more closely at the different versions of the tale, starting when Floire learns that Blancheflor has been sold to merchants by his parents.

Leaving the City

At this point in the narrative, Floire immediately decides to set out for his beloved and bring her back. When he has said farewell to his parents, we read this in the French text:

Es le vos hors de la cité
o ses somiers bien arrouté.
Il et li cambrelens consellent
et lor jornees apparellent.

²⁵ Moghaddassi, *Géographies du monde*, 394.

²⁶ Moghaddassi, *Géographies du monde*, 395.

Au port voelent primes aler
u Blanceflor entra en mer.²⁷

[He was now outside the city with his quick beasts of burden. He and the steward discussed and planned their travel route. First, they wanted to go to the port where Blancheflor went to sea.]²⁸

The Middle English translation is close to the French, but it does not keep the reference to the city that the young man leaves behind, which makes the border to the new scene less distinct.²⁹

In addition, the Nordic texts omit the reference to the city, at the same time as they make Floire more authoritative; in these versions, the latter does not discuss his route with his counsellor but gives clear orders about it. The Old West Norse text says:

Nú reið Flóres braut ok kallaði til sín herbergissvein þann, er faðir hans fekk honum, ok bað hann ætla dagleiðir þeira til strandar, þar sem Blankiflúr var seld.³⁰

[Now Flóres rode away and called for his groom of the chamber that his father had given him and said that he intended to travel that day to the coast, where Blankiflúr was sold.]

The Swedish text stays close to the saga, but uses direct speech, which is typical of the whole Swedish translation.³¹ It also adds a chronological precision, namely how long it took to arrive at the destination:

Han redh nu thaghar thædhan ij stadh;
sin radhgifuara han kalla badh:
"Nu riidh fore til stranda,
ther Blanzaflor foor fra lande!"
Then fiærdha dagh the komo thære³²

[He immediately rode away and called for his counsellor: "Now ride to the coast, where Blanzaflor left the country!" The fourth day they arrived there.]

The chronological precision adds to the exactitude of the description of Flores's journey and highlights its external rather than internal focus.

On a Ship to Babylon

After having been received by a man who had previously received Blancheflor on her way to Babylon, Floire finally embarks on his ship to Babylon. Verses 1366 to 1398 in the French text first describe how Floire went on board and how he and his crew parted.

²⁷ Robert d'Orbigny, *Le Conte*, vv. 1227–32.

²⁸ All translations into modern English in this chapter are my own.

²⁹ See vv. 385–89 in *Floris and Blancheflour*, <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/kooper-sentimental-and-humorous-romances-floris-and-blancheflour> (accessed June 1, 2021).

³⁰ *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, 31.

³¹ Bampi, "Translating Courtly Literature," 6–7.

³² *Flores och Blanzefflor*, vv. 587–91.

We then learn that Floire had heard that the emir of Babylon would hold a feast in a month's time and that Floire wished to turn up at this feast and sell merchandise. The narrator also tells us that weather conditions on the sea were good and that Floire and his crew could navigate with ease during eight days; thanks to the wind, they could hoist all their sails on high. Then, on the ninth day, they arrived in "Baudas la cité" (v. 1394), which is said to have been situated on the top of a cliff, from where one could see a hundred leagues on sea. "Baudas" is considered as the French form for "Baghdad," but, in this context, scholars have argued that it must refer to Alexandria, considering its geographical closeness to Babylon (Cairo), the fact that one could see far from there (which may allude to the Lighthouse of Alexandria), and, finally, the role of specific customs procedures (see "Arriving in 'Paradise'" section).³³ The use of the name "Baudas" could be seen as an example of the vague and ambiguous geography of the French text.³⁴

The Middle English romance shortens the passage considerably, by omitting the verses about the feast held by the emir, the hissing of the sail, and the chronological references, as well as what is said about the visibility on the water:

Amorewe, whan hit was dailight,
He dide him in the salte flod,
Wind and weder he hadde ful god.
To the marinere he gaf largeliche
That broughten him over bletheliche
To the londe thar he wold lende,
For thai founden him so hende.³⁵

[In the morning, when it was daylight, he set out in the salty sea. He had quite favourable wind and weather. He gave generously to the sailors, who brought him across happily to the land where he wanted to go, because they found him so gentle.]

The Old West Norse saga presents a more detailed translation than the Middle English one, which retains the reference to the emir's assembling and the number of days at sea:

Þá fór hann til skips, ok þá bað hann stýrimann stefna þann veg til hafnar, sem skemstr væri til Babilónar, fyrir því, segir hann, "at á VIII mánaða fresti er mér sagt, at konungr af Babilón skal eiga stefnu við sína undirkonunga ok alla ríkismenn á sínu landi. En ef ek mætta þá þar koma, þá mundi minn varningr þar rífr vera, þvíat gjarna vil ek mitt fé til gefa." Stýrimaðr játar því. Síðan gerði enn bezta byr ok skírt veðr, ok sigldu öll skip or höfnum; var stýrimaðr ok allir hans menn á kosti Flóres. VII dægr váru þeir í hafi, svá at þeir sá ekki land; en á átta dægri kómu þeir til borgar einnar, er Beludátor hét.³⁶

[Then he went on the ship and asked the captain to take the direction to the harbour that was closest to Babylon, because, he said, "I am told that in eight months the king

33 See, for example, Leclanche's edition of Robert d'Orbigny, *Le Conte*, 69n1.

34 See Leclanche's edition of Robert d'Orbigny, *Le Conte*, 69n1.

35 *Floris and Blancheflour*, vv. 436–42.

36 *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, 34–35.

of Babylon had summoned a meeting with his tributary kings and all the nobility of his country. And if I were there at that moment, then my goods could be turned over because I would gladly give them away." The captain accepted. Then there was the best wind and clear weather, and they sailed the ship out of the harbour. The expenses for the captain and all his men were paid for by Flóres. They were at sea seven days and did not see land, but on the eighth day they came to a city, called Beludátor.]

The Swedish text is, once again, more detailed than the saga, containing a number of points made in the French *Conte* that are absent in the saga:

Tha til skipith komin var han,
han badh sik kallæ then styre man:
"Thu skal thet gøra iak bidher hæræ.
Styr til the hampn thu veet næst væra!
Iak hafuer forstandith sannelika,
at konunga ok andre herra rikæ,
vnder konungin ij Babilonia bo,
hafua thet alle lofuat a tro,
tha aatta mandha lidne æræ,
tha skulu alle saman kompne væra;
æn iak vilde gerna koma braat,
før æn the herra skilias aat,
ok mina værning ther at sælia,
slikt them lyster aff ath wælia.
Iak vil thik gifua goz ther til,
thet thu mik føre thiit iak vil."
"Jak wil gerna, æn jak maa,
idher føra, æn wi bør ffaa."
Gudh gaff them bør ok blidhan sio,
swo at the thørffto ekki ro.
Hwat the matte ij aatta dagha
vndan ga for vind ok vagha,
then nionda komo the for een vagh
fore een stadh, ther heet Bondagh.
Swa høggt stadhin ouer vatnith la,
thet man gørla aff honum sa
vt ij hafuith margha mila,
huru skippin matte skridha.³⁷

[When he had arrived at the ship, he summoned the captain: "You shall do what I ask you. Steer to the harbour that you know is the closest. I have understood that kings and other rich men who live under the king in Babylon have all promised on their honour that when eight months have passed they should get together. But I would like to arrive there soon, before these men separate and sell my goods there, as much as they would like to buy. I want to give you goods as well, so that you take me where I want." "I will gladly, if I may, lead you there, if we get tailwind." God gave them tailwind and a favourable sea, so that they did not need to row. During eight days they were exposed to wind and waves; the ninth day they arrived in a bay, outside a city that was called Bondag. The city was so high up over the water that one could see it clearly over the sea from many kilometres, where the ship travelled.]

³⁷ *Flores och Blanzeflor*, vv. 661–88.

The Old West Norse place-name “Beludátor” becomes “Bondag” in the Old Swedish text.³⁸ In the Norse World resource, “Bondag” is treated as a fictional place-name. Even though the presumed link to Baghdad in the French tradition is pointed out, the Swedish name is once again considered independently from the tale’s larger European context.³⁹ One can also note that the time at sea is one day longer in the Swedish version. More interestingly, though, the Swedish translator adds a reference to the waves on the sea and the fact that they did not need to row, as well as the description of how the city is located high up—a description that we also find in the French text. Once again, the Swedish translator chooses to give more exact descriptions, which could be linked to an interest in the more external aspects of the journey.

Arriving in “Paradise”

When Floire gets off the boat, the French *Conte* describes how Floire pays his captain with twenty gold marks and twenty silver marks, which has been considered as an allusion to customs procedures in Alexandria.⁴⁰ He pays gladly, since it feels as though he has arrived in Paradise, having set foot in the same country as his beloved: “li fist doner joiousement, / car vis li est k'en Paradis.”⁴¹

The Middle English translation transmits the reference to Paradise, which stresses the internal part of Floris’s journey:

Sone so Florice com to londe,
Wel yerne he thankede Godes sonde
To the lond ther his lemman is;
Him thoughte he was in paradis.⁴²

[As soon as Floris came to land, he thanked God eagerly for sending him to the land where his sweetheart is. He thought he was in Paradise.]

There is no similar reference to Paradise in the corresponding passages in the Nordic texts. Instead, they focus on Flores’s payment for the boat trip.⁴³

Lenfer Becomes Fær

Three days later in the French *Conte*, Floire arrives in “Lenfer”:

Au tierç jor, devant l’avesprer,
parvinrent a un braç de mer;
Lenfer le noment el país.
De l’autre part fu Monfelis,

³⁸ The name “Bondag” appears only in D 4.

³⁹ Norse World, “Bandagha.”

⁴⁰ See Leclanche’s edition of Robert d’Orbigny, *Le Conte*, 69n1.

⁴¹ Robert d’Orbigny, *Le Conte*, vv. 1410–11.

⁴² *Floris and Blancheflour*, vv. 443–46.

⁴³ *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, 35; *Flores och Blanzeflor*, vv. 695–98.

castiaus rices u cil manoient
 qui la gent outre conduisoient.
 Il n'i avoit planke ne pont,
 car trop erent li gué parfont,
 mais au rivage un cor avoit
 qui a un pel pendus estoit;
 li venant a celui cornoient
 qui le notonier apeloient.⁴⁴

[On the third day, before the evening, they came to a sound, which was called Lenfer. On the other side was Monfelis, a rich castle people travelled to. There was no plank or bridge, because the ford was too deep. But, on the shore, there hung a horn on a stake. The boatman came to the person who blew in it.]

Scholars have previously discussed whether the name “Lenfer” should be considered as referring to a real place-name or whether it should, rather, be read as *L'enfer* (“the Hell”).⁴⁵ Neither the reference to “Lenfer” nor that to “Monfelis” is present in the Middle English translation, while the Old Norse saga transmits an adapted form of “Monfelis”:

Því næst kómu þeir at sundi einu; en ǫðru megin sundsins var fjall eitt, er Felis hét. Í fjallinu stendr einn ríkr kastali; en yfir sundit var engi brú, þvíat þat var djúpt ok svá streymt. Á ströndinni hekk horn eitt, ok skyldu þeir, er yfir vildu, blása í hornit.⁴⁶

[Next they arrived in a sound, and on the other side of the sound there was a mountain that was called Felis. On the mountain was a magnificent castle, and over the sound, which was deep and with a strong current, there was no bridge. On the shore there was a horn, in which those who desired to cross the water should blow.]

The Swedish text uses the same form as the Old West Norse translator and also presents an equivalent to “Lenfer”:

Then thrídhia dagh han komin ær
 til eet sund, ther heter Fær.
 Annan væghin la eet bergh heet Fælis,
 ther a eet hus var bykt meðh priis.
 Thet vatn var diwp meðh strøma swo,
 at ther matte vara ængin bro.
 A the strand ther stodh een steen,
 ther var ij læst eet horn aff been,
 at huar then ther vilde ouer fara,
 han skulde thet blæsa ok føgghiande vara.⁴⁷

[The third day he arrived in a sound, which was called Fær. On the other side, there was a mountain called Fælis, on which a house was built with splendour. The water was so deep and had such currents that there could be no bridge. On the shore there stood a stone, onto which was locked a horn of bone, and the one who wanted to cross the water had to blow in it and then wait.]

⁴⁴ Robert d'Orbigny, *Le Conte*, vv. 1509–20.

⁴⁵ See Leclanche's edition of Robert d'Orbigny, *Le Conte*, 75n1.

⁴⁶ *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, 38.

⁴⁷ *Flores och Blanzefflor*, vv. 745–54.

In the Norse World resource, “Fær” and “Fælis” are considered as fictional place-names (one hydronym and one oronym), each one “located in the Middle East because the context of the text places it there.”⁴⁸ The fact that the text contains both names, and not just one of them, as in the saga, highlights the importance of geographical references in the text, even though they are fictional. The external journey of the Swedish Flores takes place in a fictional East.

Conclusion

When comparing the descriptions of Floire’s itinerary in the French, English, West Norse, and Swedish versions of *Floire et Blancheflor*, one can observe a dividing line between the English translation and the two Nordic texts. Whereas the English translation tends to omit precise spatial and chronological references, the Nordic texts mostly transmit them, and, in the case of the Swedish text, some new references are added as well.

As already noted, the English translation as a whole is a much-condensed form of the *Conte*. It is not only the spatial and chronological references that have been omitted but other parts as well. Nevertheless, the omission of precise spatial references shifts the focus of the travel to a more internal one: the narrator does not seem interested in the countries and cities through which Floris travels, but his focus is on the transformation that Floris undergoes as a character. The fact that the reference to “Paradise” is transmitted in the English translation while the more realistic ones are omitted is revealing.

The omission of “Paradise” in both Nordic versions, together with their transmission of the more geographical references, reflect the Nordic texts’ stronger focus on the external travel than the internal one. By relating the Nordic translations to the Middle English version, the complexity of the French *Conte* stands out, in which Floire’s itinerary is as much internal as external.

The ways in which the Nordic texts transmit the studied passages are typical of their general character: even though the saga remains relatively close to the French, the Swedish text contains a number of points absent in the saga. If the Swedish text was really translated from the Old West Norse, some of these additions could give a hint about what the original version of the saga looked like. It cannot be ruled out, however, that the Swedish translator had access to a French version as well.⁴⁹ When related to other Swedish translations of courtly literature, it seems likely that many additions were made by the Swedish translator, as a means to insist on certain aspects, such as the external journey and the inclusion of the East.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Norse World, “Fær.”

⁴⁹ In my doctoral dissertation, I argue that the first of the three *Eufemiavisor*, *Herr Ivan*, goes back to two sources: one in Old French and one in Old Norse. See Lodén, “Le chevalier courtois.”

⁵⁰ For a study of several Swedish translations, see Lodén, *French Romance*.

I have previously described the main function of the Old Swedish translations of courtly literature as a project of Europeanization: a means to bring European elements into Swedish literature, and thus connect to a larger cultural context.⁵¹ The interest in travels and the East fits particularly well into this: the external world outside medieval Sweden was probably an important motivation behind these translations—rather than the exploration of the human mind and development. Even though the great number of references to countries and regions in *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* reflects a high interest in the world beyond medieval Sweden, the central role of the city, fictional as well as real, in *Flores och Blanzeflor* is of a somewhat different kind. The geography of *Flores och Blanzeflor* brings its readers on a great adventure far away. The place-names that figure in the text are often difficult to trace back to real places. These names reinforce the change of scenery. The mix of real and fictional places reflects the exotic character of the Eastern setting in the eyes of the Swedish translator. Even though the names of the different cities contribute to the description of a concrete and external journey, this journey takes place in a distant and fictional East. The different place-names that the translator refers to may give us a hint about how little he probably knew about the “real” geography of the East.

The Old West Norse saga does not, as the Swedish text does, mark the beginning of a new literary tradition but, rather, belongs to an already existing literary tradition. Even though the saga, too, focuses more on the external journey than the internal, one could imagine that this emphasis was more important for the Swedish translator. At the same time, as the medieval literary travel would not be primarily about exile but, rather, about coming back as a more complete character (as argued by Moghaddassi; see above), we may also consider the description of the external journey as a means to construct a Swedish literary identity. By bringing in the Eastern context through Flores, who travels to Babylon, the translator includes a more global perspective in the *Eufemiavisor*—texts that were not only the result of a Europeanization process but also the beginning of a new literary tradition in Sweden.

The Norse World resource opens up new ways of studying East Norse medieval literature and casts new light on how Scandinavia viewed the outside world in the Middle Ages. The next step would be to link the East Norse texts to their foreign relatives—direct sources as well as related versions. The textual transmission of *Floire et Blancheflor* in medieval Europe was complex, and the different individual versions need to be understood in relation to one another.

Even though we cannot be certain of what the Swedish translator understood by “Babylon”—whether he considered it as the biblical city of Mesopotamia or Egyptian Cairo—the five occurrences of the place-name in D 4 and 4a are inevitably linked to a larger European context. Considering the focus on the external journey in the Swedish text, it seems unlikely that the Swedish translator was unaware that “Babylon” generally referred to Cairo in related foreign literature.

51 Lodén, *French Romance*.

The importance of what “Babylon” actually refers to must not be exaggerated, however. Babylon is both fictional and real: a metonymic figure of the exotic East in medieval European culture. This is also how we must understand most spatial references in *Flores och Blanzeflor*. As noted in the introduction to Edward Said’s famous work on orientalism, “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.”⁵² The central position of Babylon and the East in *Floire et Blancheflor* might indeed have been an important motivation behind the choice to translate this specific text—and the result, *Flores och Blanzeflor*, can be seen as an early Swedish example of the interest in the “Orient,” fictional and real at the same time.

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52 Said, *Orientalism*, 1.

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