

HEAVEN ON EARTH JERUSALEM, TEMPLE, AND THE COSMOGRAPHY OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN

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Thank you very much for inviting me to *Collegium Biblicum*! It is a privilege and an honour to engage the Danish exegetical fellowship in conversation. Since this fellowship holds a number of international members, this presentation will be in English. What I am about to present is an excerpt of my project inside an umbrella project called in Norwegian *Kulturell erinding og sakralisering av sted*, headed by prof. Otto Krogseth, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo.² The umbrella project is again connected to the research program *Religion in pluralistic societies*.³ My part of the umbrella project is going to be on the Garden of Eden – which, if you follow this concept into European Medieval culture, eventually overlaps with ‘Paradise’. Given that this year's convention of the *Collegium Biblicum* would consider temple and research on temple, I have attempted to focus upon issues pertaining to the Garden of Eden, Jerusalem, and the Temple.

Beneath and beyond the following text readings lie other discourses: one of them concerns historical models for reconstructing notions of cosmological transition in the Ancient Levant. Clearly there was an *axis mundi* symbolism that would see the temple as the *centre*, as meeting point of heaven, world, and underworld.⁴ The material to be considered here suggests that an ancient audience would also have imagined the *periphery* as a potential point for cosmological transition. Both the media and the mode of transition seem different in this model than in the one of the *axis mundi*. Another discourse concerns how best to integrate interpretation of ancient myths to knowledge of whatever other material we inherited from the Ancient Levant. It is certainly not my intention to argue for a repetition of the ‘myth and ritual’ controversy in the Scandinavian Old Testament guild. We all agree that a simple alignment of myth and ritual is not feasible. Myth, ritual, architecture, etc. constitute separate fields and must be studied accordingly. Still, at certain points, it would seem possible and even necessary to explore specific links between them. The idea of the Garden of Eden may be one such point. Finally, I should mention that the following presentation depends in particular on a recent contribution I gave in a seminar hosted by Christoph Riedeweg and Konrad Schmid, and further it builds upon my dissertation.⁵

Background Issues

Eden as a Symbolic Topic

First a few issues need to be mentioned on which the following discussion would rely. One is the view that Eden and the Garden of Eden was considered a *topos* of symbolism in ancient Hebrew culture and literature. In order to give a glimpse of verification, consider briefly English translations of the passages that most explicitly employ Eden, its garden, and some events associated to

¹ This is an edited version of the paper that was read before the *Collegium Biblicum* in Aarhus, Monday 26. January 2009. Footnotes were not read out during the presentation.

² See http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/forskning/forskningsprosjekter/otto/endring_og_sakralisering/ (accessed on 6 July 2009).

³ For further information, see <http://www.tf.uio.no/plurel/> (accessed on 6 July 2009).

⁴ This model is documented in biblical literature for instance in Isaiah 6. In addition, see conveniently Job 26:5–13, where heaven and earth and the abyss are all directly visible from God's heaven.

⁵ Stordalen, 2008, 2000.

it as symbolical precursors: Gen 13:10; Isa 51:3; Ezek 31:2.8–9; 36:35; Joel 2:3. Throughout these passages Eden and the Garden of God/YHWH is a particularly blissful place, suitable as a model for happiness and salvation.

'Real Time' and 'Real Places'

Secondly there is the issue of symbolic/mythic vs. realistic time and space. Would an ancient Hebrew audience have conceived of the Garden of Eden (in Genesis 2–3 or in the above five passages) as a 'real' garden, located in historical geography? Most biblical scholars have answered in the positive, claiming that the ancient Hebrew audience *did* see Eden as a "real" place.⁶ This answer implies that ancient readers would have been rather different from modern ones – and possibly also inferior, since we rather see Eden and Paradise as a more lofty, spiritual or utopian phenomenon.

Trying to verify or falsify this scholarly view is a complex affair. First, one should recover the intellectual conditions that sustain our negative or positive answer to this question. Unfortunately, time is not going to allow for much of that here. Secondly, one would need to consider the use of modern concepts of topography when reading ancient texts. It seems clear that present-day concepts of space and time hardly are well suited to portray the ways of thinking inscribed in ancient texts. For now it must suffice simply to state a few positions that I am going to presume in the following:

- 1) Time: Ancient texts reflect a distinction between "regular time" (everyday time) and "cosmic time" (time that exceeds its own moment).
- 2) Space: Similarly, ancient texts reflect a distinction between "regular space" (everyday space) and "cosmic space" (space that exceeds its spatial limits)

For our present purpose, the issue of space is more relevant. One attempt to literally draw out a concept of space as entertained by ancient Hebrew people was recently again made by Othmar Keel. For didactic purposes he has drawn his own synthesis of an ancient Hebrew *Weltbild* as documented in iconography and texts.⁷ Professor Keel is of course aware of the anachronism involved and also of the problem in constructing one image from diverse sources. Still, his sketch is useful as a tool for thinking. In particular, it seems useful for us that this way of imagining the ancient's universe allows for a distinction between everyday space (the surface of the earth and the ocean to the rim of heaven) and cosmic space (space in the depths of the earth, in the ocean, and outside the rim of heaven). I would believe that there should perhaps be a more solid illustration of cosmic transition at the centre of this picture. Furthermore, we should add points of cosmic transition also at the *border* of the land of the living – and that is where I would locate Eden in this mental map.

Cosmography of Eden

Genesis 2:10–14

A literal translation of this passage follows below. I am rendering the text in two separate sessions to signal already now that I believe these two sections have distinct modality:

וְנָהָר יֵצֵא מֵעֵדֶן לְהַשְׁקוֹת אֶת־הַגֵּן וּמִשָּׁם יִפְרֹד וְהָיָה לְאַרְבָּעָה רְאשִׁים:
 שָׁם הָאֶחָד פִּישׁוֹן הוּא הַסִּבְבַּ אֶת פְּלִאֲרֵץ הַחַוִּילָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם הַנְּהָב: וְנָהָב הָאֲרֵץ הַהוּא טוֹב
 שָׁם הַבְּדֵלַח וְאָבֶן הַשֵּׁהָם: וְשָׁם־הַנְּהָר הַשְּׁנַי גִּיחוֹן הוּא הַסֹּבֵב אֶת פְּלִאֲרֵץ כּוּשׁ: וְשָׁם הַנְּהָר
 הַשְּׁלִישִׁי חֲדַקְל הוּא הַהֶלֶךְ קְדַמַּת אַשׁוּר וְהַנְּהָר הָרְבִיעִי הוּא פָּרַת:

⁶ Documentation in Stordalen 2008, 28f.

⁷ Keel 2001, no. 13, = Keel and Schroer 2002, no. 85. See also Keel's previous attempt in Keel 1972, p. 47. The latter is available online through Google Books, the first is not. Both are available online – along with several ANE precursors – in pp. 11–13 in a lecture manuscript published electronically by prof. Rüdiger Schmitt, Münster: http://egora.uni-muenster.de/fb1/pubdata/Schmitt_Anthropologie_Materialien.pdf (accessed on 1 August 2009).

A river goes forth from Eden to water the garden. From there it spreads and becomes four heads. The name of the first is Pishon. It surrounds the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. The gold of that land is good, and there is found also bdellium and onyx stones. The name of the second river is Gihon. It surrounds the whole land of Kush. The name of the third river is Tigris. It goes east of Assur. The fourth river, that is Euphrates. (Gen 2:10–14)

The passage has proven difficult to understand, mainly due to its topographic nouns. Some of these are well known to us, others are ambiguous or completely unknown. The ones that are well known, Euphrates and Tigris, constitute perhaps the most severe problem since in the world of the reader they did not emerge from a single source, as is usually taken to be the sense expressed in the text. Another enigma is the nature of gold and gems referred to in v. 12. I am not going to treat these issues extensively here.⁸ The focus is confined to interpreting the overall scheme of the passage.

Ancient Cosmography

What kind of concepts for space, geography, and world might lie behind a passage like Gen 2:10–14? The ancient Hebrews did not think of the world as a globe measurable by geometric co-ordinates. But what, exactly were the cosmographic conventions supporting communication in Genesis 2?

At this point a glance at Medievalist scholarship might prove fruitful. Alessandro Scafi published in 2006 the book *Mapping Paradise*.⁹ This is an investigation of Medieval European *mappae mundi* (world maps). These maps frequently include a position for Paradise somewhere in their easterly regions (which are located at the top of this kind of maps). The background for Scafi's enterprise is the negative evaluation that these maps received by scholars of historical geography in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. Scafi's aim is to reconstruct the intellectual conditions that made this kind of cartography reasonable. That is: he sets out to evaluate the maps not by way of modern geographical measure, but rather to understand the Medieval cosmographs on the original cartographers' own terms. Scafi notes that in Medieval culture maps were generally not used to assist travellers or navigators. There were other means for such purposes (itineraries, landmarks, etc.). Instead maps were *illustrations*. The kind of maps Scafi explores were linked to books and were intended to illustrate historical events, mythology, ideas on distribution of nations or languages in the world, etc.

The *mappae mundi* are not spatially proportionate. Rather they are topologically oriented. The size and location of each topic is defined by its importance and its connection to other topics. They rely on symbolical relations rather than on geographically proportional ones. 'This kind of map was not created to inform the observer of the precise latitude, longitude and size of the Garden of Eden, but to demonstrate its contiguity to the inhabited earth'.¹⁰ Therefore, while readily marking Paradise on a map, the Medieval cartographers did not expect to visit that place. Time and again the texts accompanying the maps describe Paradise as remote and inaccessible: a *terra incognita*. And it seems to me that it is precisely this inaccessibility of the Garden of Eden that renders it suitable to serve as such a pervading paradigm. And yet, if we could have enquired from these cartographers about the location of Paradise, they would probably have answered that it was located 'in the east'. If we were to take such an answer sincerely, we should better not decode it using modern geographical concepts.

What is the point for a biblical scholar in referring to Medieval European material? Well, apart from the obvious heuristic value, there might be a historical connection as well. Roman or earlier sources for the Medieval cosmographs are not known. But according to Scafi, historical

⁸ For an earlier attempt, cf. Stordalen 2000, 273–84.

⁹ Scafi, 2006. For illustrations and a short, but reliable presentation, the reader could go to the English Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mappa_mundi (accessed on 1 August 2009).

¹⁰ Scafi, op. cit., 87.

cartography seriously considers that some original model for medieval world maps would date back to Late Antiquity.¹¹ Several features of the map do seem to invite speculation of even earlier precursors.

One of the typical cosmographs that Scafi explores, is what he calls the T-O type.¹² This is a schematic way of picturing the known world as a circle (O-shape) that is divided by known watercourses that form a T-shape when seen together. Several features here are peculiar: First, the earth is divided by means of well known water courses, but the – presumably commonly known – topographical features of these water courses are bent to accommodate the overall plot. For instance, one would expect that users of these European maps were aware that the Don river does not connect to the Mediterranean Sea. Still, this is precisely what is drawn on such maps – presumably in order to make the T-shape stick. Secondly, the rivers connect to an ocean that surrounds the earth, which must of course be perceived as a product of cosmographical imagination. Finally, the maps are centred around the area that is perceived to carry the largest historical, religious, and hence cosmological significance: Jerusalem.

There are some structural similarities between these medieval cosmographs and a map drawn on a Late Sixth century BCE tablet now in British Museum.¹³ The figure is commonly known as the Babylonian world map.¹⁴ A reconstruction, translation, and interpretation of the map was offered by Eckhard Unger in 1931.¹⁵ Here are the surrounding salt sea, the division of the world by stylised river courses (in a T-O shape), schematically located geographical areas, and a focus on a centre of significance – in this case Babylon. To my knowledge, these are the best graphical outlines available when trying to reconstruct the cosmographic concepts behind Genesis 2:10–14.¹⁶ As mentioned above, most scholars read this passage as if it were geography. The material rendered above implies that it should be conceived of as something else: as cosmography. The question remains, of course, precisely what cosmographic perceptions prevail in this text.

יָדַע and מַעַד in Gen 2:8

Like most other names in ancient Hebrew language the name יָדַע has semantic value. The best rendition probably is ‘luxuriance’. Like so many in biblical Hebrew, this noun too has symbolic implication: richness and happiness.¹⁷ Names in Genesis 2–4 are of course symbolic (Adam, Eve, Abel, etc.). The Garden of Eden would according to its name be a rich garden, which is confirmed also in the narrative. Expectedly, the river that emerges literally מַעַד would carry some of these qualities.

The root מַעַד in Semitic languages denotes topographical ‘in front of’, geographical ‘east’, and temporal ‘earlier, past’. In Gen 2:8 the LXX translates a geographical sense (κατὰ

¹¹ Scafi, op. cit., 85.

¹² For a short discussion and illustrations, the reader could also go to Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T_and_O_map (accessed on 1 August 2009).

¹³ Alexander, 1992, 908-12 argues the case.

¹⁴ An up-to-date discussion of the map is found in Horowitz 1998, who also renders an image p. 402.

¹⁵ Unger 1931, *Tafel 3*. For a drawing of the tablet before reconstruction, see Keel 1972, 17. A photo of the tablet and a rendition of Unger’s interpretation is available online from: <http://www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/AncientWebPages/103.html> (accessed on 4 August 2009).

¹⁶ Alexander loc. cit. discusses a ‘lost drawing of the *Jubilees* map’, which in his estimate was connected to European T-O maps, and so would be even closer to Genesis text. Since, however, the *Jubilees* map is not actually extant, what we have, is a reconstruction that could not count as a *graphical* account. Reconstructing the *Jubilees* mental map has its own problematic, into which I do not enter here.

¹⁷ Stordalen 2000, 257–61.

ἀνατολάς), while Vulgate, following the Targums, translates a temporal sense (*in principio*). On a couple of occasions I have argued that the linguistically most reasonable rendition of the ‘absolute’ expression in Genesis 2:8 (no preposition or particle linking מקד to some other denominator) is in fact that of Jerome and the targumists.¹⁸ This translation would locate Eden at the very beginning of time, that is in mythic time, i.e. at the temporal borders of the world.

If, however, a topographical sense is to be preferred, Gen 2:8 still locates Eden in a border area – now a spatial one. In biblical Hebrew, the only directive noun used with מן in a static participative sense and without any topographical locator, is מעל , ‘above’. The only entities located ממעל (in the ‘high’) are the heavens and Eloah.¹⁹ This ממעל names locations outside of regular space. A parallel, ‘absolute’ spatial מקד in Gen 2:8 would locate Eden in the utmost east. This is a numinous location in the biblical universe (cf. Ps 139:9), and clearly beyond human reach: it is mythic space.

Cosmic Rivers and Vases in Ancient Near Eastern Iconography

Given that the scheme announced in Gen 2:10–14 borders on or transmutes into cosmography, it would perhaps be an idea to seek for interpretative aids in other ancient Near Eastern images of the cosmic. Now, the motif of streams from a divine source is well known in ancient Near Eastern iconography. Such rivers frequently flow from one or more vases (Sumerian *hé-gál* or Akkadian *hegallû*) or they sometimes emanate directly from a deity. They may be associated to a number of deities, but sometimes they seem to be the epithet of a specific deity (Ea).²⁰ Quite often there are two rivers.²¹ Another conventional constellation portrays them as four.²² These rivers seem to portray the gifts and blessings of a deity to the universe, and in that sense they elusively connect also to historical rivers.²³ It can be taken for granted that the נהר מעדן in Gen 2:8 is one instance of such a cosmic river bringing blessings from the divine realm.

In the iconographic material, whether as two or as four, these flowing rivers sometimes run into a second set of vases. This particular motif is our present focus. An elaborate example is given in an eighth/seventh Century wall relief from Assur.²⁴ The deity (*en face*) holds a vase flowing with four streams. The tableau follows one of these streams first towards a man in a fish-like costume faced towards the deity (probably a priest for Ea), secondly towards another man in a fish costume facing the other way, and finally to what may be another representation of the deity (in profile). Between each figure is a new vase that the river flows into and out from. In another image – on a Cassite seal from the 14th century – the deity holds one vase in each hand. A river flows from each of these vases down into a new set of vases located on the ground. Keel and Schroer refer to the second set as “the vase[s] of the earth (sources, rivers)”.²⁵ Such sets of

¹⁸ Stordalen 2000, 261–70; Stordalen, 2008, 41–43.

¹⁹ Jer 4:28; Ps 78:23; Job 3:4; 31:2; 31:28.

²⁰ See conveniently Black and Green 2002, 184.

²¹ For gods with two rivers, see for instance Keel and Schroer 2002, nos. 14, 47; Keel 1972, nos. 42, 153, 285, and possibly also 43, Leick 1998, plates 32, 42, 43; Black and Green 2002, nos. 60, 80, 153.

²² Wall painting in Zimrilim’s palace at Mari (18-17th century BCE), see Keel 1972, no. 191; a roll seal from Ur (2350–2150 BCE) or the relief from a cistern in the Assur temple (1800–1500 BCE), see Keel and Schroer 2002, nos. 11 and 13. An online photo and presentation of a couple of statues from the Nabu temple of Korshabad is available online from the Oriental Institute Museum in Chicago: <http://oi.uchicago.edu/museum/highlights/dieties.html> (accessed 1 August 2009).

²³ Cf. further Fabry 1998, 266f.

²⁴ Keel 1972, no. 185; rendered also in Stordalen 2000, 488 (Fig. 10), available online through GoogleBooks.

²⁵ Keel and Schroer 2002, 48, on fig. no. 14, a Cassite roll seal 14th century BCE.

second vases appear to be conventional and fairly widespread. They occur also in the iconography of ancient Palestine, for instance in a roll seal found in a grave at Jericho (18th century BCE).²⁶ Apparently, such vases are meant to portray a transition of cosmic water or blessing from the mythic to the human realm.

Two representations from the ancient Near East bear specifically on our issue. The first is a well known mid second millennium BCE Assyrian wall carving.²⁷ At the centre is a mountain god with a flowing vase. A stream from the deity splits into four streams that run in the four directions, each towards a corner of the representation. Then, at some distance, each river flows into a vase, in total four vases, one for each corner. It seems likely that water from these vases would pass into the regions of the human world. If so, these vases portray points of transition where cosmic water, life, and blessing permeates from the divine to the human world.

The second image comes from a tenth century BCE Assyrian cylinder seal.²⁸ It portrays a holy tree on a sacred mountain attended by what appear to be a divine figure on the right and a priest on the left. From the winged sun disk hovering above the scene are running two rivers down past the tree and the adorants and into two vases in the lower register of the scene, one on each side of the mountain on which the tree is located. The tree itself grows out of a third, identical vase located on top of the middle mountain. That vase is not graphically depicted as taking part in water from the two streams. However, for conventional reasons the tree must be seen to be supported by that cosmic water running in the other two vases. Hence, the third vase is somehow connected to the other two, and as this connection seems to be graphically constituted simply by the motif of the vase. This image is in fact a picture of the invisible connection between the cosmic streams and the tree in a sacred grove.

Transition at Cosmological Border Points

a) Several biblical Hebrew passages depict the world as having the form of a circular disk, as in Job 26:10f (NRSV):

He has described a circle on the face of the waters,
at the boundary between light and darkness.
The pillars of heaven tremble,
and are astounded at his rebuke.

Several similar descriptions occur in biblical literature.²⁹ At the edge of the circular universe meet 'the ends of the earth' and 'the end of the heaven'.³⁰ These crossroads at the ends of the earth are watery.³¹ These remote areas are often inscribed with a particular quality or character. For instance, the 'ends of the world' (קְצוֹת הָאָרֶץ) and the remote coastland (אֲיִים) mark borders for the universe in Deuteronomy as well as in the Babylonian sections of the book of Isaiah.³² In these remote recesses reside particularly strong nations,³³ and there seem to be particularly harmful flies (Is 7:18) and strong winds (Jer 49:36). Accordingly, being exiled to the ends of the earth

²⁶ Keel and Schroer 2002, no. 12.

²⁷ Keel 1972, no 153a; rendered also in Stordalen 2000, 488 (fig. 9), available online through GoogleBooks.

²⁸ Keel 1972, no. 23; rendered also in Stordalen 2000, 482 (fig. 2), available online through GoogleBooks.

²⁹ See for instance Prov. 8:7; Job 22:7; Isa 40:22. For this and the following see also conveniently Alexander 1992.

³⁰ Cf. Ps 48:11; 65:6; Isa 40:28; Job 28:24.

³¹ Cf. Ps. 65:6; Isa 41:5; and again Job 26:10

³² Deut 13:8; 28:49, 64; Isa 5:26; 24:15; 40:28; 41:1.5, 9; 42:4.10.12.15; 43:6; 48:20; 49:1.6, etc.

³³ See Deut 28:49; Isa 5:26; 13:5; 42:10, etc.

is bad.³⁴ And when YHWH forces even these regions to pay attention, it is considered a sign of particular success.³⁵

This border area is subject to cosmological speculation. Prov 8:27 and Job 26:10f (above) both confirm that God drew a circle on the face of the sea, setting the border between light and darkness. Job 26:11 also says the heaven rests on pillars, presumably connected to the heavens at their “ends”, i.e. precisely at this border location. Usually the image would be that the earth rests on pillars in the void.³⁶ However, a few instances portray the founding of the earth and the stretching out of heaven as connected events.³⁷ Some such cases also seem to imply either that the heavens are founded on the edges of the earth, or that the two were founded simultaneously, presumably on pillars in the void.³⁸ The ends of the earth, a meeting point of heaven and sea, was considered a cosmological *topos*. This is reflected in various texts. According to Psalm 19:7 the sun makes a transition from one end point of the heaven to the other during night. Also, the ends of the world is where meteorological phenomena like rain and wind seem to pass from the divine realm into the world (Jer 10:13; Jer 51:16; Ps 135:7). Clearly, the ancient Hebrews had an awareness of the cosmological border and of transition points along that border.

b) In Akkadian sources, border symbolism is more explicit. The most prominent examples are perhaps the several travels of Gilgamesh. His going to the cedar forest is an evident case.³⁹ Even more explicit is the account of his visit to the flood hero Utnapishtim in Tablet IX of the Neo-Assyrian version of the epic.⁴⁰ Having travelled further than anyone, Gilgamesh reaches the mountain Mashu and its scorpion gatepost. He passes the test and struggles through a fierce tunnel under Mashu – apparently a tunnel comparable to the one through which Shamash makes his nightly transition in Psalm 19. Having done that, Gilgamesh surfaces outside of the regular human realm. From this point in the cosmos he is able to traverse the water of death and eventually visit Utnapishtim to talk to him. The mountain Mashu here clearly makes a point of cosmological transition at the outer border of the world.

c) Greek: Rather similar constellations seem to occur in ancient Greek myths from around the same time. More than 20 years ago Holger Thesleff counted several instances of paradisaical places, either surrounded by the ocean or singled off by a river and high mountains to the extent that it would not be possible to go there by ordinary means.⁴¹

d) Latin: An astonishingly large number of the *mappae mundi* printed by Scafi do reflect an idea of Eden/Paradise as an island in a sea that surrounds the terrestrial disc. Other maps depict Paradise as a region immediately next to that circumflexing ocean, isolated from the world by a river and by mountains. Although the argument cannot be developed at length here, it seems quite reasonable to think that the mental maps of paradise portrayed in Medieval *mappae mundi* could be historically related to the mental maps underlying ancient Greek, Assyrian, and Hebrew sources.

³⁴ Deut 28:64; 30:4; Isa 41:9; Ps 61:3

³⁵ Isa 41:5; 42:10; 43:6; 48:20; 49:6; 62:11; Jer 25:31.

³⁶ Ps 75:3; 104:5; Job 9:6; 38:4.

³⁷ Isa 48:13; 51:13.16; Jer 10:12; Zech 12:1.

³⁸ Am 9:6; Ps 78:69; 89:1; 102:25.

³⁹ Stordalen 2000, 146–53.

⁴⁰ For the following cf. Stordalen 2000, 153–55.

⁴¹ See Thesleff 1986.

Eden, the River, and the Four Heads

On this background, let us return to the Hebrew wording of Genesis 2:10–14, and first to v. 10:

וְנָהָר יֵצֵא מֵעֵדֶן לְהַשְׁקוֹת אֶת-הַגָּן וּמִשָּׁם יִפְרָד וְהָיָה לְאַרְבָּעָה רְאשִׁים:

The river that extends from Eden is by all likelihood a cosmological device transmuting benefits from the cosmic sources of richness and blessing. It waters the garden, which of course renders this a happy installation. Somewhere after having left the garden (cf. !משם), it spreads and becomes ‘four heads’.

There have been many attempts to make sense of the relation between the river and these four heads. The etymology as well as the semantics of the word ראש clearly suggest that these are starting points for the rivers, not their outlets (contra Speiser). Aligning these starting points to the vases of ANE cosmographic iconography (above) makes us see them as four points of cosmic transition. The river itself (נהר) is another issue. Passages like Jonah 2:4 indicate that an ancient Hebrew audience recognised a cosmological connection between the ocean and the river: ‘You throw me into the deep, in the heart of the sea, and (the?) river surrounds me’.⁴² So, semantic as well as cosmographic convention invites the assumption that the נהר in Gen 2:8 extended to the cosmic ocean that surrounds the earth *before* spreading and transiting into four new river heads. These heads would be the points known to a human eye, and they would *not* be visibly linked to the same river or source. Rather, their connection would have been of a symbolic or mythological nature. This turns the interpretation of the passage upside down: the river and the four heads are not connected in any geographically realistic sense, and the heads would not be expected to locate in the same area.

Four rivers in Genesis 2:11–14

By the time the reader of Genesis 2 reaches verse 11 narration seems to have made a transition from the mythic space of Eden to the everyday spaces of the universe. We are now in a mode comparable to the one in the medieval T-O maps above. A full discussion cannot be given here. Suffice it to say that the scheme of four invites an apprehension where each river is associated to one of the heavenly directions. I say גִּיחוֹן in 2:13 denotes the Nile, while פִּישוֹן in 2:11 is best seen as the joint Arabian Ocean and the Red Sea. Euphrates and Tigris are of course well known.⁴³

In this vision of the world the four rivers flow from the four corners of the *terra cognita* towards the centre of the biblical world. This centre would be in a triangle between, say, Memphis, Nineveh and Babylon. Roughly speaking, Jerusalem is in the middle. In the spirit of Othmar Keel, we could perhaps have ventured to imagine a mental picture behind Genesis 2:10–14. If so, I would imagine the human and the divine world as two sides of an amulet tablet, picturing v. 10 on the one side and vv. 11 to 14 on the other.⁴⁴ On the obverse, mythic side would be an image something like the Assyrian wall relief, portraying the deity and the four floods. These extend to the four corners of the (mythical) world, where they run into new vases, or ‘heads’. On the reverse side everyday space is schematically represented by a cosmograph in T-O mode drawing four significant river courses of the known world. The point would be in part to picture all significant watercourses as connected to the cosmic river, and in part to draw attention to the centre region where blessings literally run together.

One implication of this imagination would be that Eden and the Garden of Eden were in fact located in the mythic and not the everyday part of the universe. For now, I simply register this as a consequence of the above reading, and shall return to the issue below. This entire way of reading corresponds to what Alessandro Scafi calls a new road to the past. It tries to make use of whatever iconographical and topographical concepts are known to have existed in the the cul-

⁴² Similar implications occur in Isa 19:5; Ezek 32:2; Nah 1:4; Hab 3:8; Ps. 24:2; 66:6.

⁴³ For all this, see Stordalen 2000, 270-86, relying upon McKenzie 1954/63, 158; Raday 1982; Amit 1990.

⁴⁴ My two models for imagining such an amulet are first the Assyrian bronze tablet rendered in Keel 1972, nos. 91–92 (see also Stordalen. 2008, 486), and secondly the so-called Babylonian World Map discussed above.

tural context of Gen 2:10–14, and to employ these in what admittedly has an element of creative reading. When I allow myself just that, it is because I believe such creativity would have been presupposed on part of the reader in the communicative conventions supporting these texts.

The Temple of Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden

Having established a cosmographic vision of Genesis 2:10–14 and the Garden of Eden, we move to material that connects this garden to the temple in Jerusalem. A few introductory points are in place:

a) It is certainly not original to claim a connection between the Garden of Eden and the Temple of Jerusalem. Contributions to this effect have been offered by Walter Andrae, Wolfgang Fauth, Gordon Wenham, David P. Wright, and others.⁴⁵ What follows is not an attempt to identify all instances and implications of such symbolic mappings. Rather, the idea is to explore a few specific examples and attempt to understand this cosmological symbolism.

b) Eden symbolism in biblical literature applies to more than Jerusalem and its temple. To mention only a few explicit cases, Jordan as well as Egypt are compared to Eden in Gen 13:10 and Egypt also in Ezekiel 31. In that same passage Eden is further compared to Assyria. In Ezekiel 28:11–19 (to be considered shortly) the same comparison goes to Tyre. Tyre, Assyria, Egypt, and other places are what I see as echoes of Eden. There are such echoes also in other ancient Hebrew shrines or groves. The following consideration of how biblical literature designates Jerusalem and the temple ‘as Eden’ is not to be understood as any kind of exclusive symbolism. Rather, for historical reasons the temple of ancient Jerusalem is simply the best documented example of a general form of symbolism. This, it seems to me, distinguishes Eden symbolism from other biblical temple ideology which is influenced by monolatric – and eventually even monotheistic – theology and by the Deuteronomic theology of “the chosen place”. Much needs to be done in order to interpret the nature and significance of these differences. One obvious first prism for viewing the material, is to say that the cosmology of the Eden narrative is distinct from that prevailing in, say, Deuteronomic literature.⁴⁶ This, however, does not close the issue, which nevertheless has to be left unconsidered here.

An Explicit Case: Ezekiel 28:11–19

One view of the Temple in Jerusalem as Eden is found in Ezekiel 28:11–19* – although it takes some effort to appreciate just that. There are complex problems in this text, problems that I can not discuss in depth here.⁴⁷ First, the textual history of this passage is complicated. There are however reasons to say that the LXX renders the older text (both in ch. 28 and in Ezekiel in general). Secondly, there is the puzzle that the passage rebukes a *pagan* ruler (the king of Tyre) for having defiled his sanctuaries according to Yahwistic measure. A Yahwistic prophet would presumably have little interest in protecting the cult of foreign gods. The enigma is enriched by the list of precious stones of the priestly protagonist. These are identical to that of the robe of the Hebrew high priest.⁴⁸ So, the description of this pagan ruler rebukes him for violating Yahwistic laws and portrays him like a high priest in Jerusalem. A fair solution was presented by Pierre Bogaert.⁴⁹ He argued that this is an example of a *redirectioned* oracle – a phenomenon not uncommon in the prophetic books. The original oracle addressed a high priest in Jerusalem. It

⁴⁵ For discussion and bibliography on these and further scholars, see Stordalen 2000, 309–12.

⁴⁶ Further on this issue, see Stordalen 2010 (forthcoming).

⁴⁷ For such a discussion, see Stordalen 2000, 332–56.

⁴⁸ Exod 28:17–20 and 39:10–13 (MT).

⁴⁹ Bogaert 1983, cf. Bogaert 1991.

was redirected, most likely with slight alterations, to the king of Tyre. If so, Ezekiel 28:12b–15* originally was an oracle addressing a Hebrew priest in about this fashion:

You were a seal of perfection, perfect in beauty.
 In Eden, the Garden of God, you were,
 covering yourself with precious stones:
 sardius, topaz, emerald; carbuncle, sapphire, jasper;
 and silver and gold,
 ligure, agate and amethyst; chrysolite, beryl and onyx.
 The handwork on your tambourines were gold,
 and your larger drums (?) were with you.
 On the day you were born, I placed you with the cherub.
 You were on the Holy mountain of God, walking among fire stones.
 You were blameless in your ways from the day you were born
 until there was found iniquity in you.⁵⁰

The expression ‘Holy mountain of God’ (הַר קָדֵשׁ אֱלֹהִים) would then refer to Zion and the temple – as it usually does – and not to the assumed cosmic abode of God. The high priest in the Temple of Jerusalem in this address is portrayed as much like Adam in Eden. This is the most explicit example of the Temple in Jerusalem symbolically aligned to Eden, the Garden of God. It gives a basis for assuming that such symbolism was part of the textual competence that formed the historical communicative background for biblical texts. In other words, there would have been a conventional metaphor “Temple-Is-Eden”. Ezekiel 28 also gives one example of the story of Genesis 2–3 (or a very similar story) being used to interpret the rise and fall of one specific historical figure.

Rivers from the Temple (Ezekiel 47:1–12, etc.)

In Ezekiel 47:1–12 a fantastic, life-supporting river goes forth from under the House (מִתַּחַת מִקְדָּשׁוֹ, v. 1).⁵¹ The temple literally sits on top of the source. For the topographically and textually competent it seems clear that the river emanates in the vicinity of the historical spring Gihon – a homonym of one of the four rivers in Gen 2:11–14 (cf. above). While topographically associated to everyday space, the river in Ezekiel 47 still belongs also to the mythic world. Trees along the shores are every bit as luxurious as the trees in גֵּן בְּעֵדֵן מִקְדֵם, and their leaves provide healing – not unlike the fruit of עֵץ חַיִּים in Eden (since it could apparently make humans live forever). The fresh water of the Ezekiel flood generates a good fishing and heals the contaminated water of the Dead Sea. The situation in *this* Jerusalem compares to that of mythic Eden.

This spring and brook Gihon played a role in Jerusalem coronation ritual – certainly in theological afterthought and possibly also in historical situations.⁵² The archaeological record shows that the brook and its water played a strategic role in military defence of the city during siege.⁵³ This and possibly other use led to the brook taking a place in Jerusalem mythology.⁵⁴ Simultaneously, Gihon of Jerusalem is connected to the Gihon-Nile (through a word pun, no less!). How to understand all this cosmographically? In view of the vase symbolism the Gihon river of Hebrew mythology would seem to have made yet another non-realistic leap, leaping from the Nile delta and resurfacing downhill from Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 47 displays what it would signify to see the Temple as Eden. The cosmic, life sup-

⁵⁰ This is a reconstructed text. It is based on the Hebrew text wherever this text is either extant or obvious, but the overall layout of the passage is rendered according to LXX. See again Stordalen 2000, 355 and surrounding pages.

⁵¹ For the following, see Stordalen 2000, 363–68.

⁵² 1 Kgs 2:33f.38f, cf. Ps 110:7.

⁵³ For references, see Stordalen 2000, 357–58.

⁵⁴ Ps 46:5; perhaps also in Isa 33:21.

porting water extends blessings and marvels from YHWH to ארץ־ישראל. These blessings are present throughout the cosmos, although they occur in more densely fashion in the paradisaical rivers. The effect is a surplus of life and happiness. By way of the qualities of that cosmic water, the Temple in Jerusalem is located on top of a local ‘source of Eden’. And from the temple and its brook flow the powers of blessing and life, healing the land and feeding the inhabitants. This is by no means an isolated or random view of Jerusalem as Eden. Other versions of the same vision are explicit in Zech 14:8–11 and Joel 4:18. Terminological indications confirm that these passages do allude to the Eden complex. It seems to me that this vision lies at the heart of several biblical passages celebrating God’s blessing of the earth. In my dissertation I identified for instance Psalms 36:8.10 and Sirach 39:22 as rather clearly connected to the Eden river motif,⁵⁵ and I do believe the list could be substantially expanded. The panorama sketched above certainly gives a new dimension to expressions like those in Psalm 65:10:

You visit the earth and make it overflow,
 you abundantly enrich her.
 The stream of God (פֶּלַג אֱלֹהִים) is full of water.
 You set forth grain, for thus you have made it. (Ps 65:10)

Spiritual Rivers (Sirach 24:25–27; Isaiah 2:2–4, etc.)

a) The topic is large but time does not allow elaboration. One explicit example is found in Sirach 24, probably from the late third century. This passage extends symbolism of Eden not only to Jerusalem, but also to what in Sirach is the central feature of Yahwism: the law itself. The preceding verses sketch the route of Wisdom from creation, through the world, and ending up taking root in Jerusalem and finding expression in the Law of Moses:

All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God,
 the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob.
 It overflows (πιμπλων), like the Pishon, with wisdom,
 and like the Tigris at the time of the first fruits.
 It runs over (ἀναπληρων), like the Euphrates, with understanding,
 and like the Jordan at harvest time.
 It pours forth (ἐκφαίνων) instruction like the Nile,
 like the Gihon at the time of vintage. (Sir 24:25–27, NRSV⁵⁶)

The four rivers of Eden have become the six rivers of the law (in the textually mended LXX*). But the initial four are still named in the original fashion, and there is a reason for the embellishment: Gihon and the Nile are apparently conceived of as associated in Gen 2:10–14 (cf. above), and an association between Gihon and Jordan is found in *Life of Adam and Eve* 18. Therefore, all three final rivers in Sirach 24 seem to represent one and the same river: Gihon. This renders the fourth river as a sort of poetic coda in the passage. (Do note that the sequence has been altered as compared to Gen 2:10–14 in order to allow for precisely this coda composition.) The rearrangement makes sense: Gihon of Egypt and Jerusalem would of course be the one of the four that was most relevant for a poet situated in Egypt and focusing upon Jerusalem.

The passage merges language from two distinct domains. Terms like wisdom, understanding, and instructions are associated to the law (cf. for instance Psalm 119). In Sirach 24 such terms have been ‘imported’ into the grammar of Eden symbolism: law and wisdom are now ‘flowing’, ‘running’ and ‘pouring’ like rivers. In the eye of Sirach, law and instruction are the most salient features of the priestly activity in the Temple. And, perhaps since temple-is-Eden, he merges the two domains. Another potential link may have been the Tree of Wisdom, from which Adam ate to become wise, according to early Jewish theology.⁵⁷ In any event, through this move the symbol ‘Eden’ became even richer, even more religiously dense.

⁵⁵ Stordalen 2000, 418–22.

⁵⁶ NRSV relies in its translation upon a text conjecture that involves the last of the Greek verses rendered above.

⁵⁷ 1 Enoch 42:6.

Had the passage not named the rivers, we would probably not have identified it as taking part in Eden symbolism. The textual competence of a modern European reader would rather allow wisdom that flows and instruction that gushes forth to be seen as *unqualified* metaphorical language. Given the elaboration in Sirach, it is evident that for an ancient Hebrew reader such metaphors could invite symbolic extension towards the Eden complex. We should possibly go further and say that when such an ancient reader found such metaphorical language, her or his communicative competence effectuated an association to see the Temple in Jerusalem as Eden. If so, the range of potential “echoes of Eden” would expand considerably. It would for instance potentially change our reading of passages like Jer 2:13; 17:13; Psalm 87:7.⁵⁸

b) Next, let us briefly consider a well known twin-passage vaguely mirroring the symbolism of Sirach 24, namely Micah 4:1–5 and Isa 2:2–4. These might be anything between two and five centuries earlier than Sirach. Do register the portrayal of people as “flowing (נהרו)” towards the Temple and also the Torah “springing (יצא)” from Zion. There is no naming of rivers, but the metaphorical language is similar to that in Sirach 24. Why, in the imagination of the author, do these people stream to the Temple? Is it because they wish to take part of the blessings extended by Torah and the word of the Lord? If one assumes a knowledge of local waterways like those underpinning Ezekiel 47 (above), the probability of a metaphor Temple-Is-Eden seems fair.

People as Eden Trees (Ezekiel 31; Psalm 52:8; 92:11–13, etc.)

Biblical literature displays a conventional metaphor of seeing people as trees (or other plants). The prophetic allegory in Ezekiel 31 portrays Pharaoh as a tree located simultaneously “on Lebanon” and “in Eden”. This tree excels in stature and beauty due to its being supported by deep sources (not unlike the sacred tree in the tenth century Assyrian roll seal above).

While Ezekiel 31 may seem to describe a mythically coloured situation, a close mirroring of the event seems to be imagined in the cultic domain in Psalm 92:13–15:

The righteous sprouts like a palm tree, like a cedar on Lebanon he grows.
They are planted in the House of YHWH, in the courts of our Lord they flourish.
Even by grey hair they produce fruit, they remain juicy and green.

A notion of people growing strong from their being supported by particularly strong sources, is common in biblical metaphorical language. Quite often this too would be perceived of as rather unqualified metaphorism. However, the metaphor Temple-is-Eden seems to provide new and deeper resonance for, say, Psalm 52:10 and 92:13–15. Clearly, the founding metaphorical or symbolical impetus is ‘luxuriance’. And like the rivers in Sirach 24, this ‘luxuriance’ is spiritualised in Psalm 92 and elsewhere. If trees in Eden grew large (like Pharaoh!), then adorants in Temple-is-Eden must of course grow large as well.

Architectural Underpinnings (1 Kings 6–7; Ezekiel 40–41)

Time is out and I can only in the briefest manner point to the probability that there was architectural underpinning in the temple for connecting the temple to cosmic watercourses, and to the Garden of Eden.

As for the cosmic watercourses, one associates to the “molten sea” and the bronze basins reported in 1 Kgs 7:23–39. Much erudition has been spent trying to grasp the historicity of these installations and to interpret their symbolic value. It still seems reasonable to conclude with Busink: on the one hand, they had some practical cultic purpose and on the other they simultaneously symbolised the subterranean sweet water (תהום) or what Busink names *der Himmelozean*.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ For these and other passages, cf. Stordalen 2000, Chapter 15.

⁵⁹ Busink 1970, 326–36.

Either – or, indeed: both! – could constitute an echo of Eden topography in the temple: an installation connected to the cosmic salt water ocean *and* the cosmic sweet water streams.

As for the temple as a replica of the Garden of Eden – not just in the mythic future, as in Ezekiel 47, but already in everyday time – we rely on the building report of the temple in 1 Kings 6–7 and the vision in Ezekiel 40–43. The ‘trees in the courts of our Lord’ (Psalm 92) find a rich context in the adornment of cherubs and plants reported both in 1 Kgs 6:29.32.35; 7:36 and in Ezekiel’s vision of the Temple, 40:16.31.37; 41:16–20. Indeed the description in Ezekiel 41:18 closely resembles the constellation in Gen 3:24: *והמקרה בין־כְּרֻבִים לְכְרֻב* “a palm tree between two cherubs”.

Much more could and should be said about these architectural features, and also about their context in the architecture of ancient temples.⁶⁰ However, we need to come to an end, so I’ll try to conclude:

Temple-Is-Eden: Cosmography, Myth, Religious Practice, Architecture, Ritual, Spirituality

Threads of evidence from dissimilar source domains could at certain points be woven together. We have reviewed myth and cosmography in Genesis 2; myth, ritual, and political history in Ezekiel 28 and 31; Torah piety in Sirach 24 and in Isaiah 2; spiritual metaphors in Psalm 92; and architectural underpinning in 1 Kings 6–7 and Ezekiel 40–41. None of this could have been taken *a priori* to relate to each other. I have tried to argue that it is nevertheless historically probable that there were people actually making each of these connections, and possibly several of them at a given time. In tracking down these connections that are criss-crossing the biblical universe, we have started building what I call a communicative competence: a historically defined competence for perceiving symbolic communication. For modern readers such competence can only be built through elaborate, probably clumsy interpretations, and it will always remain incomplete. If the implied audience of these texts in the Hebrew Bible could have listened in, they might well have laughed at our somewhat childish attempts to reformulate their ideas. Still, this is all we can do if we wish to render ourselves a little more competent in apprehending biblical symbolism.

The fragment of such symbolism considered here says that Eden, located at the very fringe of the ancient Hebrew mental universe, was not at all peripheral to Old Testament religion. Indeed, as a point located on the mythical periphery, it was associated to the Temple as well as to the Torah. It is not that the Temple is *identical* to Eden, nor, of course, is the Torah identical to the waters of Gihon. But the Temple in Jerusalem was a receiver and distributor of gifts from above, a point in the everyday universe given to transmit blessings that had entered from the mythic world at the fringes of the universe, near the Garden of Eden. Therefore, in the Temple one could interact with fractions of the qualities that defined the luxuriant and happy Garden of Eden – its corporeal as well as its spiritual blessings. This explains why Psalm 1:3 – the very program from *Tehillim* – renders the ideal man (*אִישׁ יְהוָה*) very much like an Adam that has not violated divine law:

He is like a tree planted along streams of water,
giving its fruit in due time, without their leaves ever withering.
Everything he undertakes shall succeed.

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⁶⁰ Wightman 2006, 908f recently again is able to summarise an astonishingly wide array of comparative material for the idea of the temple as a replica of the Garden of Eden.

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