

CHOKING ON A MORSEL: SAGA JÁTVARÐAR KONUNGS HINS HELGA AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY POLITICS OF SAGA

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For a saga so little esteemed or heeded in the twentieth century, Saga Játvarðar konungs hins helga (hereafter referred to as SJ; edited in Jón Sigurðsson and Rafn, 1852, 10-42; Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Dasent, 1887-94, I 388-400; Flateyrbók text in Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger, 1860-8, III, 463-72) appears to have exercised a surprisingly stubborn hold on the attention of earlier generations of Icelandic, Scandinavian and British readers. Pre- and post-Reformation priests, Enlightenment scribes, and Victorian translators seem not to have noticed, accepted or cared that the saga would later be judged 'poor stuff, full of unattractive miracles and improbable history...its style is flat and lifeless...it contains hardly anything original' (Rogers 1957, 249). Finnur Jónsson (1930, [p.6]) attributes the inclusion of the 'very post-classic in language and style' SJ in Flateyrbók to its 'general religious character'; and piety, whether lay or clerical, seems certain to have played a major role in generating many of the dozen and more other extant manuscript texts of the saga (Widding et al, 1963, 308-9), dating from the fourteenth to the early nineteenth century.

In the familiar manner of medieval hagiographic narrative, the saga assembles a vivid if rough hewn sequence of spiritually instructive incident from the exemplary life of the saintly English monarch - 'a marvel of meekness in that age of blows and blood-feuds' (Dasent, 1875, I 201). We learn (Jón Sigurðsson and Rafn, 1852, 14-18; unless otherwise stated, all quotations from and references to SJ are from this edition) of the Jerusalem pilgrim receiving as a gift the king's coronation ring and then vanishing, only to reappear the following night freeing an English prisoner of the Saracens; the English nobleman hastens back to England, returns the ring to the king and identifies the mysterious pilgrim as St John the Evangelist. The saga tells also of Edward's vision that the seven sleepers in Mount Celius, having rested on their right side for two hundred years, had turned onto their left side; a small roll for them but a giant move for mankind, portending as it did eighty four years of assorted pre-apocalyptic natural and political disasters (18-22). There was, too, the cripple cured by the humble king's willingness to carry him to St Peter's church at Westminster (22); and the restoration of sight to the blind by bathing their eyes in water from the monarch's hand-bason (22-24).

Yet, though the saga is filled with the piety of Edward the Confessor, it is framed by the real politik of William the Conqueror; God's world framed by Caesar's. The opening chapter (10-12) tells of William's marriage to Mathtilde, daughter of Baldwin the Good of Flanders - her initial hostility, and the eventual success of his robust courtship. By the end of the first chapter William is securely established in the Normandy from which, in the final chapters of the saga (32-36), the conquest of Britain could be launched. The saga ends with buccaneering English nobles, defeated in the battle for old England, setting off for Constantinople and beyond, there to establish a new England (Shepard, 1974; Ciggaar, 1974), complete with cities called York and London (36-42). This Byzantine coda functions as a bizarre reverse image of the opening section of many an Íslendingasaga - the power of a conquering monarch, dispiriting military defeat, heroic exile, a landnámsöld and new nationhood. Nineteenth-century Icelandic readers of SJ may have contrasted with wry satisfaction the respective fates of the North Sea Iceland and the Mediterranean New England.

It was surely politics rather than piety which underpinned the renewed exposure enjoyed by SJ in the wake of its publication, complete with Danish and (later) English translations, by the Fornfræðafélag in Copenhagen in 1852-3. The saga's first editors note that modern political judgments of King Edward, 'the marvel of meekness', could differ significantly from medieval spiritual ones:

Det et gaet den hellige Edvard saaledes som de fleste andre kronede Helgene, at Dømmene om deres Charakter og Færd i Livet have lydt ganske forskjelligt fra Politikernes og fra de Geistliges Mund. Men 'Kundskab er Magt', og derfor har de Geistliges Stemme oftere og i den længste Tid beholdt Overvægten (Jón Sigurðsson and Rafn, 1852, 3).

This was certainly the case with Sir George Webbe Dasent, celebrated translator of *Brennu-Njáls saga*, less celebrated translator of *SJ*. He detected a tiresome 'monkish whine' (Dasent, 1873, I 204; unless otherwise indicated, further references in the paragraph are to this source) in the king's early Benedictine chroniclers as they celebrated the saintly monarch and blackened the name of Earl Godwin his devious counsellor. Dasent was an unashamed apologist for the barnstorming entrepreneurial values he identified in a British Empire on which the sun never set; he had, after all, been born into colonial prosperity on the sun-kissed islands of the West Indies. He drew unfavourable comparisons between the 'dash and energy...endurance and perseverance' of the early Viking colonists, and what he judged to be the sluggish, priest-ridden passivity of the Anglo-Saxons. Visiting Iceland in 1861, Dasent had earned the nickname 'Darwin' (Clifford, 1865), and there is in his uncomplicatedly benevolent view of the Vikings a discernible social Darwinist approval of the triumph of the Norse fittest and an equivalent disdain for Celtic and Anglo-Saxon degeneracy. For Dasent, King Edward the Confessor embodied unfitness and enfeeblement; 'priest-ridden' (I 214), 'only strong when he looked up towards heaven; when his eyes were bent on the earth he was as weak as a child' (I 208), 'munificent to a fault' (I 209) to monks and abbots, especially those from abroad who had 'boarded by stealth' (I 222) the native ship of state. King Edward had only one redeeming virtue in common with Beorn the Welshman, Dasent's affectionately drawn bluff old hero (warm of heart and thick of head) in *The Vikings of the Baltic*, his 1875 novelistic adaptation of *Jórnsvikinga saga* - and that was a fondness for hunting and hawking: 'he cared alone of earthly excitements for the excitement of the chase'. Otherwise Dasent's view of the king is relentlessly unsympathetic. Discussing the migration of the ancient tribes of central Asia, Dasent (1903, xxv-xxvii) declares that those going West 'went out and did'; those drawn to the East 'sat down once for all and thought'. It was just such a polarity which lay behind Dasent's response to *SJ* and its eponymous hero; in appearing to mimic the hot-house sterilities of ruminative Eastern passivity, Edward (or his Aryan ancestors) had clearly taken the wrong route. Happily, Earl Godwin was made of sterner and better stuff. Far from sharing the 'inveterate hate' (I 222) for the Earl exhibited by clerical writers, Dasent saw him as the strong and ambitious energising force which the king and country required, and viewed his death, choking on a morsel of food, as a disaster:

Edward was one of those "adjective" characters that cannot stand alone. Godwin had long been his "substantive", but Godwin was now no longer at his side, and the weak king fell entirely into the hands of Archbishop Robert and his Norman priests, who were not slow to work Godwin's ruin (I 233).

Dasent's years as Assistant Editor of the *Times* newspaper (Arthur Irwin Dasent's *Memoir in Dasent*, 1903, 7-9, 21) marked him as a man of strongly developed political instincts, and these invariably colour his writings on Vikings in general and sagas in particular. For Dasent, even as he pondered the life of Edward the Confessor, as he wrote about him in the *Northern Review* in 1864-5 (essays reprinted in Dasent, 1873), and as he worked on his translation of *SJ* (Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Dasent, 1887-94, III), there was unquestionably a politics of Icelandic saga in nineteenth-century Britain; the Anglo-Saxon past, not least as distilled in the Icelandic language which Dasent loved, could illuminate, challenge and legitimise the Victorian present. Dasent, familiar with and honoured amongst the Danish and Icelandic philologists of mid nineteenth-century Copenhagen (Wawn, forthcoming 1991b), knew well that there was also a politics of saga on the Scandinavian side of the North Sea, at the time when *SJ* was first edited and translated. Contemplating pre-conquest Britain from the windswept isolation of Pingeyrar, the medieval creator of *SJ* laments his *fáfræði*, and his *farlægð* (Jón Sigurðsson and Rafn, 1852, 14) from Edward the Confessor's turbulent reign; by contrast, those working on *JS* for the Copenhagen Fornfræðafélag after 1848 found themselves right in the middle of current political turbulence. The publication of the saga needs

to be seen in that context.

The very names - Dorleifur Repp, Jón Sigurðsson, and C.C.Rafn - and temperaments of the Copenhagen-based scholars who collaborated on the 1852-3 edition and translations of *SJ* are sufficient to account for a good deal of the personal turbulence surrounding enterprises with which they became associated. Dorleifur Repp, the saga's first translator into English, was arguably the most powerful philological mind to emerge from Iceland during the *upplýsingaráld* (Wawn, 1991a, 1992 forthcoming); he was also, less happily, the living embodiment of all those qualities which earned his *söguöld* ancestors the saga epithet *óðæll*, 'difficult to have dealings with', as Dasent would have translated it. Repp was difficult as a *Hafnarstúdent* in the 1820's, even more difficult during the 1830's as Assistant Keeper of books at the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, and was by some way the *óðælastur* of those Icelanders actively involved in the *sjálfstæðisbaráttu* over the following two decades up to the time of his death in 1857.

Jón Sigurðsson, known to most as the patriarchal figure of the nineteenth-century Icelandic independence movement, is known to few as an energetic and accomplished philologist. As one of the *SJ* editors, Jón was seventeen years Repp's junior, and much influenced by what Repp ruefully but defiantly called his 'Anglomania'. Repp's English enthusiasms were not calculated to win the hearts and minds of the natives of Copenhagen - memories of the 1807 British bombardment of the Danish capital had lingered long (Wawn, 1987, 23). Rather like the English Guards' officer who was so stupid that even his friends noticed, Repp hated the Danes with a feverish and famed intensity which even his Icelandic friends and colleagues could not wholly share; accordingly his life in Copenhagen was marked by *fátækt* but never *fáfræði*. He was Jón Sigurðsson's first English teacher, and introduced him to Adam Smithian free-market theories through his Danish translations by the influential Scottish economist J.R.McCulloch; he shared many of Jón's political aspirations for Iceland, and not least, this paper seeks to suggest, it was a shared sense of the interconnectedness of philology, politics and patriotism that lay behind their joint involvement with *SJ*. Yet, within a couple of years of its publication, the two men were to become political enemies, with Repp's dying energies devoted to denouncing what he saw as the deviousness of Jón's mid 1850s dealings with the French (Kjartan Ólafsson, 1987).

There is no evidence of significant mid-century political or personal enmity between either Repp or Jón and their Danish collaborator Charles Rafn at the time of the *SJ* edition. Yet Rafn had learnt a generation earlier that in the frenetic atmosphere which had long tended to mark the literary activities of the Copenhagen Icelanders, the preparation and publication of Danish translations of any Icelandic saga could prove deeply controversial. Under the auspices of the *Fornfræðafélag*, Rafn (with Rask's help) had prepared translations of *Jónsvíkinga saga* and *Knýtlinga saga*, both newly edited in the eleventh volume of the prestigious *Formannasögur* series in 1828. These translations were fiercely attacked by an anonymous reviewer in 1830 (my discussion in this paragraph draws on Nanna Ólafsdóttir, 1961, 150-65; Aðalgeir Kristjánsson, 1972, 26-31); the review was magisterially challenged by Rasmus Rask whose defence in turn became a target for the hostility of a group of independent- and independence-minded Icelanders led by the young Baldvin Einarsson. A clash with Baldvin, ideologically if not temperamentally a precursor of Jón Sigurðsson, might superficially have presented itself as a clash of philologists; in reality it was more a clash of the generations; and most of all, it was a clash of nationalities - 'ekki allfáir á báðar hendur gjörðu úr þessu einskona keppni milli Íslendinga og Dana' (Jón Sigurðsson, in *HÍB*, 1867, 36). Repp revered Rask, and was in many respects his protégé; the Danish philologist had wintered in Iceland and mastered its language; his work on Icelandic grammar had been a major contribution to the codification and stabilisation of a vulnerable language. To Baldvin Einarsson, however, Rask's defence of Rafn was simply an emblematic case of Dane backing Dane, whilst in Rask's attack on the young Icander could be heard the twin disagreeable tones of professorial asperity towards an upstart student, and Danish disrespect towards a colonial underling. There were many in the Copenhagen branch of the Icelandic *Bókmenntafélag* who supported Baldvin, and who regarded Rask's resignation from the Presidency of the society as a source of some celebration; others, not least in the Reykjavík

branch of the society, were mortified that so honourable an Íslandsvinur as the Danish philologist could be so dishonoured. When, early in 1832, the frail Rask died, there were those in both Copenhagen and Reykjavík prepared to attribute his death to the accumulated stress of the Jómsvíkinga saga affair. Repp, already no stranger to institutional conflict and with troubles enough of his own, could only sit in Edinburgh, read of the tensions of Copenhagen in letters from Rask, Rafn and Finnur Magnússon, and await the time of his own involvement.

As early as 1830, then, a Danish translation of an Icelandic saga could prove a convenient detonator for igniting latent political tensions. It could divide generations, families, colonial rulers and ruled, different literary societies; it could even divide different branches of the same literary society. Moreover, animosities were easier to establish than to assuage. In the volatile literary community of Copenhagen it was easy to take seriously the words of Sigmundur Brestisson, a fleeting presence in Rafn's Jómsvíkinga saga version and a central figure in the same scholar's 1832 edition of Færeyinga saga: Sigmundur strengthens the resolve of his friend Beinir, as they stand over the bodies of their slain fathers, by declaring, in Þorleifur Repp's English translation, 'we will not weep cousin but remember' (Wawn, 1991).

By the time of Repp's return to Denmark in 1837 and his subsequent involvement with the publication of the SJ text and translation, the politics of saga in Copenhagen were even more highly charged though much changed since Baldvin Einarsson's clash with Rask and Rafn. Baldvin's dreams of constitutional reform and clear progress towards Icelandic independence were edging toward partial fulfilment (Aðalgeir Kristjánsson, 1972). The accession of the sympathetic King Kristján VIII in 1839 had provided a significant impetus towards the development of consultative machinery based not on a handful of representatives sitting in the Danish parliament, but on the re-established (in 1844) Alþingi, elected and Icelandic speaking; King Friðrik VII's accession in 1848, the convulsive year of European revolution, had led to the creation of a committee for Icelandic Affairs in the Danish government, headed initially by the Icelander Brynjólfur Pétursson. Meetings at Þingvellir in that and subsequent summers generated petitions and proposals for more fundamental reforms in respect of franchise, trade, education; rumours rumbled around the Danish capital that revolution was afoot at 66° N; Danish ministers discussed the possible dispatch of troops or gun-boats; elections to the anticipated 1850 Reykjavík Þjóðfundur took place throughout Iceland; the assembly's first meeting was then delayed; radicals vied with consolidators for influence; pressure groups pondered and plotted; parliament prevaricated.

It was during just this frenzied 1848-54 period of political excitement and instability, that the Fornfræðafélag chose to commission and publish, in successive issues of its annual journal Annaler for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie, newly edited texts and translations of previously neglected medieval Icelandic sagas. These were by no means texts guaranteed to interest native Icelandic subscribers - they cannot have seemed an obvious part of Jónas Hallgrímsson's (1847, 50-52) golden age of famed frjálsræðishefturmar, the world of 'Gissur og Geir / Gunnar og Hjeðinn og Njáll'. The earlier publication of the Fornmannasögur series and of a number of Íslendingasögur texts had helped to reestablish active contact with Iceland's literary fornaldarfræðö. The Brothers Grimm, themselves politicians as well as philologists, had shown, more than a generation earlier, that any aspirant independent nation state needed first to exhume or even to create, and then prestigiously to exhibit a powerful ancient native literary tradition (Zipes, 1988, 1-12); that way lay cultural self-assertion and national self-esteem.

By 1848, however, fresh winds filled the sails of the politicised philologists of the emergent Icelandic nation state. Aspirations and horizons soared under the heady influence of the new age of European Revolution; alongside a celebration of the native roots of saga, there developed an eagerness to highlight Iceland's European cultural affiliations. For a 1930's British Icelandophile like W.H.Auden (1967, 24), his soul in need of a place to 'stretch and spit', it was a relief to travel in the island of Iceland - 'Islands are places apart where Europe is absent'; but to the governing body of the mid nineteenth-century Copenhagen Fornfræðifélag the assertion of a European dimension in medieval Icelandic saga culture had become a

significant priority.

Such perceived priorities had already been hinted at; gentle beckonings in this direction can be detected in, for example, Jónas Hallgrímsson's subtly politicised 'Gunnarshólmí' (1838; in Jónas Hallgrímsson, 1847, pp.64-7) - the narrative source quintessentially medieval, the lyric mood unmistakably mid nineteenth-century, and the metre marked by Jónas's Copenhagen-influenced switch from native Eddic to medieval Italian verse forms (RJH, 1989, IV 131). By 1848, however, insinuation gave way to assertion; for the Fornfræðafélag it took the form of the systematic publication of lengthy Icelandic narratives with a demonstrable European dimension, either versions of non-Icelandic medieval romances, or native Icelandic compilations of legendary or hagiographic incident telling of Anglo-Saxon people and places. Noting the persistent engagement of medieval monks at Þingeyrarklaustur with late Anglo-Saxon history, not least through the Þingeyran origins of SJ, Professor Christine Fell plausibly attributes such enthusiasm to an understandable curiosity about 'the centuries of their own Viking Age history in which they were so deeply and personally involved, and in which the history of England and Scandinavia was so closely interwoven' (Fell, 1981, 103). This seems likely still to have been one impetus behind the renewed interest in SJ some five hundred years after its original composition.

The priority given to the publication of this series of 'foreign' texts - 'eitt af ætunarverkum félagsins' (Páll Eggert Ólason, 1929-33, I 309) - at a time of acute financial strain in the Fornfræðafélag, is evidence of the importance attached to the enterprise. The very length of the texts edited suggests that for their editors, one fully and others partially immersed in contemporary political affairs, this major investment of time and intellectual energy was certainly no random and unfocused *jeu d'esprit*: Trójumannasaga and Breta sögur Parts I and II, 1848-9 (Jón Sigurðsson); Saga af Flóres og Blankiflúr, 1850 (Brynjólfur Snorrason); Saga af Tristram og Ísodd, 1851 (Gísli Brynjólfsson); SJ, 1852 (Jón Sigurðsson and C.C.Rafn); SJ, English translation, 1853 (Þorleifur Repp); Saga Ósvalds konungs hins helga, 1854 (Jón Sigurðsson and Þorleifur Repp). The two philologists most prominent in this list were also the two most fully involved in the convulsions of current politics: the inexhaustible Jón Sigurðsson had by now become a dominant figure amongst the radical Copenhagen-based reformers; and the mercurial flautabyrill Þorleifur Repp had sat on committees, drafted documents, stood and been elected by the voters of Árnessýsla to represent them at the Þjóðfundur which eventually assembled in Reykjavík in 1851.

Those amongst Repp's constituents who subscribed to the Fornfræðafélag publications could hardly have been surprised by his choice of Anglo-Saxon-related texts to edit and translate. The opening of his election address, with its heavy freight of Aristotelean quotations and Icelandic archaisms, celebrates the return to Iceland after 600 years of *Frelsi*, the long lost 'höfðingi'. The return of this personified distillation of Jónas's frjálsræðisheiturnar is attributed to 'guðlig forsjón' rather than 'mannlig kráptr' (Repp, 1849a, 1); but Repp's formulaic pieties soon give way to his detailed proposals, full of mannlig kráptr, for securing freedom's permanent return through more fundamental constitutional reform. For too long Iceland had been ruled 'at boði útlendra manna' (ibid), yet Repp is clear that only through adoption of foreign constitutional models can foreign power be repulsed and freedom secured - and the favoured foreign model is 'lög Engla'. Idealised images of English democracy and justice are constantly invoked: there had been reforms in Norway, 'enn mikit skortir á, at þeir hafi enn full not Frelsisins sem Englar' (p.2); the condition of freedom and democracy in France or Germany is brittle; there are telling comparisons to be drawn between the depopulation and economic stagnation of the Danish-ruled Faroes with the bustling entrepreneurial energy and growing population of the Orkneys and Shetlands, 'sföan árit 1603 undir Engla' (ibid). Repp concludes:

nú virðiz mér svo sem at hvern veg sem vèr lítum til annarra þjóða, nema Engla einna, sè þat lífit eða ecki, sem vèr megum af þeim nema i meðferð Frelsisins (ibid).

For Repp England is that happy land (and, one must add, that unrecognisable land) in

which the potency of the laws of property ensures that folk 'má ecki stela eða ræna hundi, eða ketti, eða gaungustaf, eða hrslukvisti, ok sýnir þat sik dagliga á borgarþingum þeirra' (p.3). Convinced that 'Engla lög eru mjök lík vorum lögum enum fornu' (p.2), Repp's central recommendation to his electorate is unequivocal:

Nú vil ek þat þvf til leggja við Íslendfnga, er ek hefi áðr til lagt við Dani, at vèr leggim alla stund á at nema vel lög Íslands, en fornu, en þar at auk lög Engla, sem þeim eru líkust ok upp runnin af sömu rót, ok at vèr semjim vor lög öll sem mest má verða at þeirra dæmum (ibid).

Repp's admiration for the ancient and modern English legal traditions 'á þeim eyjum sem oss eru næstar' (p.4) sits easily alongside the many other features of Repp's Anglomania which found expression in his life: notably his fondness for the Anglican liturgy (Repp, 1849b), his wide knowledge of English literature from Shakespeare to Scott, and his vigorous commitment to all aspects of early Anglo-Saxon culture. Whilst still working in Edinburgh this latter interest had led him to address the Society of Antiquaries on two important Anglo-Saxon antiquities, the Hunterston Brooch and its runes, and the (then) still more baffling runes carved on the newly re-erected Ruthwell Cross in Dumfriesshire (Wawn, 1992). In this latter instance, there was to be no correct identification of the lines from the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood*; Repp's decipherings proved to be comically mistaken. Yet it was on his shoulders (and those of Finnur Magnússon) that British scholars such as J.M.Kemble were (none too gratefully) to stand some ten years later as the runes were deciphered successfully. Repp's runological howlers did not compromise his considerable reputation as an historian of pre-conquest Britain; it was, for instance, to Repp that the London-based Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge turned in 1833 when seeking to commission an authoritative article on King Alfred the Great for their *Penny Cyclopædia* (I 318-22). Small wonder, then, that in the years after his return to Copenhagen in 1837 Repp seized every opportunity to maintain his contact with English culture in general and Anglo-Saxon antiquity in particular. The Fornfræðafélag 'foreign texts' initiative after 1848 offered Repp an opportunity to work on *SJ*, at the time of and immediately after his successful political candidacy. As his 1849 election address shows so clearly, to establish continuities and parallels, to define the 'sama rót' from which Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon culture ran, had become for Repp not merely a philological pleasure but also a political imperative.

SJ was a text that had intrigued Repp since his earliest days in Edinburgh after 1826. During ten miserable years at the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, Repp had found much solace from the opportunities to talk, teach or write about Old Norse language and Literature; and there is abundant evidence of willing listeners and pupils and correspondents. Repp eagerly endorsed the proposition advanced by Rask at the end of his 1815 'Boðsbréf til Englendfnga, til að styrkja hið íslenska Bókmentafélag': confusions of his syntax notwithstanding, Rask's identification of the linguistic interconnectedness of Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic culture anticipates the subtextual spirit of Repp's 1849 election address:

But as the Icelandic or old Scandinavian is the source of part of the English and Scottish, and besides the Anglosaxon (the chief-source of both) is so very nearly related to it, and in itself so difficult and confused, owing only to the incessant irruptions of the ancient Scandinavians, that, if I may believe my own experience at the compiling of a new Anglosaxon Grammar, I imagine, it will never be sufficiently extricated but through perpetual succour from the Icelandic: I thought the Britons, the most wealthy of all the gothic nations, ought not to be altogether unconcerned about its conservation. (*HÍB*, 1867, 61-2)

Scottish readers were familiar with the philological proposition that much Scottish dialect derived from the language of invading Norse sea-pirates; this colourful theory had been first advanced in Scotland by the contrasting voices of the phlegmatic Grímur Thorkelín and the splenetic John Pinkerton (Wawn, 1991a), and ultimately embodied in John Jamieson's commanding *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1808). Repp subscribed to

this proposition, but such was the intensity of his Anglophile enthusiasms that he sought to project Anglo-Icelandic literary and linguistic relations in the opposite direction; to the seductive (for many Scots) notion of Norse influence on 'English' in Scotland, was to be added the improbable notion of English influence on Icelandic in Iceland. The crucial text for Repp in this context was SJ.

The mass of Repp's unpublished papers includes many ambitious philological projects - books, essays, lecture courses which were never completed. One such, to be dated around 1826, was entitled 'The Origins of Icelandic Literature' (Landsbókasafn Íslands, MS Repp Acc. 6.7.1989 fol.). In it Repp ponders the state of learning and literary activity at Þingeyrar, with its evident fascination with Anglo-Saxon antiquity; it was possible, for instance, to associate the monastery with the Icelandic authors of Merlínusþá or Dunstanus saga. The claims for SJ were more striking; Repp's theory of its authorship marked the saga as a 'literary phenomenon' to be 'perhaps reckoned among the Curiosities of Literature'. Not for Repp cautious speculation about the possible literary sources available to an Icelandic monk composing the saga about Edward the Confessor; Repp was eagerly talking about an English author, resident at Þingeyrar, and writing in Icelandic a century before the known literary contacts (Middle English exempla translated into Icelandic) between England and Hólar in the wake of Bishop John Craxton (Einar G. Pétursson, 1976, xciv-xcviii). Repp claims:

It is thus a fact of which England probably little dreams that some [Icelandic] literature for which it professes so much admiration in great measur [sic] owes its origins to England. Not only English monks [were] the teachers of the Saga-writers but some of the sagas themselves bear internal evidence of having been composed by Englishmen...The Saga of Edward the Confessor is one of thos [sic] of whom it is easy to see by what countrymen it is written, for though the language is very respectable Icelandic, it is replete with Anglicisms.

Repp proceeds to cite one such Anglicism, paraphrasing the relevant section in so engaged and animated a fashion as to suggest that the idea of translating the whole saga (fulfilled twenty five years later) was already germinating in his mind. The incident relates the death of Earl Godwin from a point of view which Dasent would have regarded as heavily marked by monkish sanctimony:

Edward the King was one day sitting at table with Eorl Godwin and of course a Bishop or two when a servant entered carrying a dish; he stumbled with one foot but steadied himself by means of the other, whereupon Eorl Godwin said - 'there one brother supported the other!' to which Edward answered, 'so my brother can never do for me'. Now it was generally supposed that Godwin had been instrumental in causing the sudden death of the King's brother by foul means, so he well understood the taunt and therefore said, 'I do not understand why you O King should be always twitting me in this manner, for may this morcel choke me if I had any demand in your brother's death'. The King as he said this put out his hand and grasped the arm of the Bishop who was sitting next him saying - 'Bless thou it'. The Bishop did so but Godwin swallowed the morcel and fell back in his seat dead. This Norman word morcel is used by the writer of the saga and is quite unknown in Icelandic.

Repp's published translation of SJ is preceded by a letter (Repp, 1853, 269-72) he addressed to Rafn, in which is listed further evidence from the work's first two chapters of 'a certain linguistic awkwardness [sic], a certain foreign air as if the author had been imperfectly acquainted with the language in which he was inditing, or perhaps only writing an exercise'. The explanations accompanying the following selected items are Repp's own:

er fyrstr var einn konúgr

an Icelander of the 13th or 14th century would have written aðal konungr

f Englandi

Icelanders write á Englandi; but the English

	idiom requires 'in Engl.'
fátækir ok þurftuger	is certainly not wrong, but it is not either idiomatic Icelandic: poor and needy is idiomatic English.
þeir gjörðu frið sín á millum	an Icelander would have written <u>sáttmál</u> instead of <u>frið</u>
at mínum dómi	is, no doubt, Icelandic, but it happens to be idiomatic English, 'in my judgement', and therefore it got in the more glibly with our author
fáfræði ok fjarlægðar	seems a very natural expression for a man living at a distance from his own country but would have come less naturally from an Icelander
efter réttum gúðs dome	the idea and expression seems more English than Icelandic
svá sem einn pilgrímr	a strange blunder which hardly could have been made by an Icelander
á einni momentu	Engl. 'in a moment'

The most convincing identification of sources for SJ offered recently (Fell, 1972, 1974, 1977) might have been expected to remove all vestigial traces of credibility from Repp's flights of philological intuition. 'Awquardness' and 'a certain foreign air' might reasonably be attributed not to some Icelandophile English monk, but rather to the influence of Latin narrative sources, whether Vincent of Beauvais's Speculum Historiale or Breviary lections for St. Edward the Confessor's day. It is, therefore, particularly striking to find that it was the late thirteenth-century Chronicon Laudunensis (Ciggaar, 1974), long unrecognised as a source of narrative material for medieval writers in Iceland, which seems to have been the source for many of the troublesome (for Repp) expressions. Its author seems to have been a monk at Laon, his nationality English, and his Latin flecked by periodic 'Anglicisms', with the chronicler 'thinking and remembering stories in his native tongue' (Fell, 1977, 235-6). Thus, albeit at one more remove than Repp had imagined, his 'English friar writing sagas at Þingeyrar' theory seems partially and unexpectedly vindicated. As has been unkindly said of Finnur Jónsson, the trouble with Repp is that he was not always wrong.

Repp's 1853 discussion of SJ also draws attention to the inclusion (in Chapter 2) of a legend in which King Edward, celebrating the feast of Pentecost at Westminster, suddenly burst out laughing at the elevation of the host. He explained to the bewildered onlookers that he had seen a gratifying vision of the Danish King who, having prepared a vast invasion force against Britain, drowned whilst boarding his ship. Messengers were dispatched to Denmark and returned with the still more bewildering intelligence that King Edward's vision had been correct. Repp, the personification of anti-Danish patriotic feeling, approves of the saga author's selection of this incident and appears to recognise a fellow spirit - 'The legend it self is expressive of the patriotic feeling of an English friar' (Repp, 1853, 271).

The development of Repp's interest in SJ over more than a quarter of a century from 1826 can thus be seen as the marriage of Philology not to Mercury but rather to Frelsi and the politics of nationalism. Firstly there was the figure of King Edward. As Knyttlinga saga puts it (in the controversial 1828 edition with triggered the Rask and Baldvin Einarsson clash), 'Þá var Játvarðr Aðalráðsson til konungs tekinn yfir Englandi, var hann þar lengi konúgr, ok eignuðust Danakonúngar aldregi England sðan' (F.s., XI 206). Whilst Repp harboured no

personal animosity to the modern Danish monarchy - he was well known to Queen Caroline Amalia, having taught her English in the 1820's - his uncompromising support for the modern Icelandic struggle for independence may have led to a measure of empathetic approval of an English monarch whose reign had marked the end of Danish power in pre-conquest Britain. For Repp, Jón Sigurðsson and other politicised Icelandic philologists, such a condition was devoutly to be wished for nineteenth-century Iceland.

Secondly, by seeking to identify English influence on medieval Icelandic saga, Repp may have felt such claims helped to legitimise his desire to achieve a more fundamental English influence over Icelandic law and constitutional reform.

Lastly, even the laconically proverbial if not proverbial exchange between King Edward and Earl Godwin on the tensely charged theme of brother helping brother may have a political dimension, albeit an ironic one, in the revolutionary age of liberty, equality and fraternity. Confronted by the moment in *SJ* when 'Guðine jarll tók til orða ok mælti: hlífðe þar nú bróþer bróður; konúngur svarar: eigi hlífir minn bróðer mér svá' (p.26), some mid nineteenth-century readers may have been reminded of similar taut exchanges on a similar theme elsewhere in Old Icelandic Edda and saga, whether in the bleak *Hamðismál* discussions between Hamðir, Söri and Erpr, or with *Njála's* *berr er hverr á baki nema sér bróður eigi*, gnomic wisdom of sufficient potency for Sir George Dasent to have had his English translation of the phrase ('Bare is the back without brother') embossed on the lavish cover design of his 1861 *The Story of Burnt Njal* translation. Other readers of *SJ* may rather have been struck by the all too frequent failure of brother to help brother amongst the warring factions of Copenhagen Icelanders as they jockeyed for influence and position in the 1850's: there was, for instance, the breakdown of fraternity over Grínur Thomsen's Pan-Scandinavian contacts (Andrés Björnsson, 1990), and, ironically, the breakdown of fraternity between two philological and political colleagues who had worked on *SJ* for the Fornfræðafélag. By 1856 Repp and Jón Sigurðsson were estranged over revelations about Jón's eagerness to sell family land at Dýrafjörður to the predatory Prince Louis Napoleon and his representatives, with every likelihood of its subsequent use as a French naval base (Kjartan Ólafsson, 1987). New editions of sagas based on French medieval romances were to be welcomed; modern manifestations of more invasive Franco-Icelandic cooperation were to be deplored. Repp's mischievous pleasure on hearing that Geysir stubbornly refused to spout in the presence of an increasingly impatient Louis Napoleon in 1856 finds colourful expression in the last book review he ever wrote (on Lord Dufferin's *Letters from High Latitudes*; Landsbókasafn Íslands MS IB 88b fol.). If mid century Icelandic nationalism could even politicise the geothermal wonders of Haukadalur, its capacity to politicise *SJ* should not be doubted.

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