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Three days from civilization: Transnational scientific imagination and nineteenth-century Iceland

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Introduction

An image in the journal *L'Illustration* from 1857 shows a display of artefacts at the Palais-Royal in Paris. The detailed drawing shows collected objects paraded in this distinguished setting on several tables, including rock samples, human skulls, plaster busts and plaster moulds of other body parts, in addition to different material objects usually embraced as ethnographic.[1] The artefacts come from an expedition to the Northern Sea the year before, headed by Prince Jérôme Napoléon, Napoléon Bonaparte's nephew. These objects can be seen as a part of defining the far North as an ideological and geographical space. In sharp contrast to the disembodied body parts, the image shows people who are seemingly moving between the different tables curiously observing the items; these are distinguished men with high hats and women in elegant dresses. These contrasting images of bodies moving and body parts on display clearly demonstrate visually the difference between those who are the objects of science and those who are not (Figure 7.1).

My chapter focuses on how marginal parts of nineteenth-century Europe were incorporated into racial science, as objects of scientific investigation, which was firmly interwoven with imperial desires of resource extraction and colonialism. I position Iceland simultaneously as a place of transnational encounters and of liminality and as such a site of extraction in multiple senses for their imperial European neighbours. I use the plaster busts in Iceland on display at the Palais-Royal as a way to ground my discussion, positioning them as contact points between different subjects in the mid-nineteenth century, which also reveals the different positionality of individual subjects in relation to nineteenth-century imperialism. My past analysis of Iceland within the world of colonialism and imperialism, has mainly focused on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when there were strong claims for independence from Denmark. I have more generally found it useful to think about Iceland's position in the world of colonialism as characterized by a 'dualistic position',[2] that is, a position of ambiguity and of belonging both with the centre and at the margins. I see marginality

as a relational position, and as such it can be shifting and contextual.[3] As explored in this chapter, Iceland was under Danish rule and been perceived as backward, traditional and peculiar by the wider European intellectual and elite communities.[4] In late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Iceland's dualistic position can be seen more clearly playing out in the attempts of intellectuals in Iceland to situate themselves as civilized and modern in opposition to racialized others in claims of full independence. Here the focus is more on the marginal position of Iceland and its perceptions by agents of imperial powers.

My articulation of the concept 'contact points' is based loosely on Jeffrey David Feldman's use of the term for objects in museums that gain meaning due to their contact with real bodies.[5] Plaster busts can be seen as particularly relevant as they were created through a very intimate process where the impression of someone's face becomes the basis for the object created. Feldman is under the influence of Mary Louise Pratt's 'contact zone',[6] where she seeks to capture social spaces where people meet, clash and engage within hierarchal relations of power. Similarly, as the conceptualization of contact zones,[7] contact points have to be seen as involving negotiations and different layers of resistance, while the concept seeks as well to emphasize power relations.

I see 'contact point' as a particularly useful tool of analysis as it can incorporate both mobilities and connections that can take place regardless of specific sites and historical

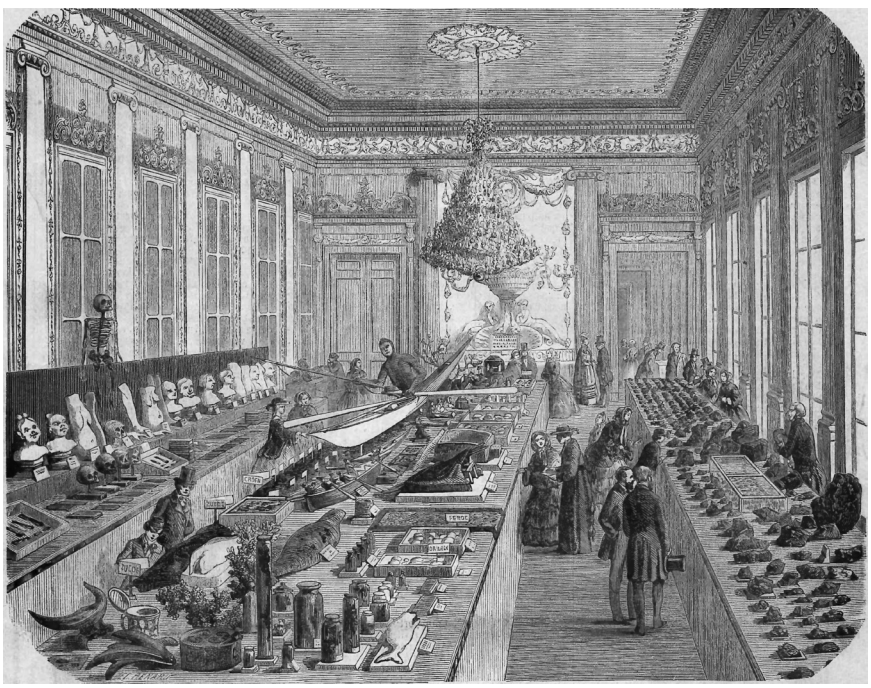

Figure 7.1 A display of artefacts at the Palais-Royal in Paris. From *L'Illustration*, vol. 29 (1857), p. 21.

times. The busts can be seen as contact points in multiple senses, capturing intersecting connections between different actors, but the most important for my discussion here, is how they constituted a part of gluing together a community of scientists through a shared dialogue of racial science, as well as incorporating marginal spaces within imperial and metropolitan Europe. As contact points, the busts can be used to reflect on hierarchical relationships between different Europeans and how European projects of imperialism involved European actors that were differently positioned.[8] Contact points – as I use the concept – can thus simultaneously be used to demonstrate interconnections that are not located in particular spaces but exist across geopolitical boundaries, as well as to tease out hierarchical relationships.

In the centring of nineteenth-century racism, I follow scholarly emphasis that sees racism not only as constituting one of the key legacies of colonialism and imperialism in the present, but as fundamental to the project of modernity.[9] Racism has been difficult analytically due to its historical mutations and how it works through the intersection of different categorizations such as sexuality, gender and class.[10] Discussions of racism too often assume that racial theories progressed in a teleological development, but in the nineteenth century there was no single debate regarding race – as phrased by Eigen and Larrimore[11] – with early nineteenth-century racial theories characterized by inconsistency, circling around a variety of subjects, including a sense of objective beauty. Phrenology prompted a massive production of busts and overlaps with the formulation of racial theories. Established as a scientific field in the late eighteenth century, phrenology's scientific popularity became considerably reduced in the mid-nineteenth century while remaining important in the popular imagination throughout the nineteenth century.[12]

Recent discussions on legacies of racism have emphasized the importance of various material objects in empire-making, where these objects have today often become sites of resistance to continued colonial legacies,[13] as well as critical questioning in regard to the acquisition and nature of these objects, and have led many museums to re-evaluate and attempt to decolonize their collections.[14] The most intense debates and criticism probably surround human remains and anatomical collections,[15] but other objects such as plaster or wax casts of human bodies can also be seen as involving intimacies and intersecting with questions of human dignity. I refer to these objects jointly as intimate objects. Different intimate objects, made meaningful within racial science of the time, were important in empire-making and creating different categories of people. Plaster busts within an ideology of racial science, were as skulls supposed to be objective items and not connected to individuals, but the allure of these objects can be seen as resting on how they are intimate objects of real people, as is reflected in plaster busts often serving as inspiration for artists and used to create monuments or realistic representations of racialized others.[16]

In the first part of the paper, I focus on how the bust making itself was entangled in Iceland's geopolitical position, reflected in France's imperial interest to increase its hold on Icelandic territories and gain better access to resources in Iceland, as well as the interest of collecting specimen of human diversity. I contextualize Napoléon's expedition within wider nineteenth-century interest in Iceland's natural resources, coupled with medieval manuscripts and romantic notions of Icelandic nature, where

Iceland was perceived as a frontier to be explored and exploited by greater European powers. The second part focuses on the experiences of the French expedition in Iceland and Iceland's position as space of scientific encounters for imperial parts of Europe. This positioned Iceland itself as a contact point where scholars from different parts of strong imperial countries engaged with each other, referred to each other's works, etc. The third part shows how the busts later constituted contact points for scholars in France and in Spain, another country that in spite of its imperial history was struggling to resurrect its position in a nineteenth-century European context. This part teases out how through circulation of intimate objects, contextualized in racial science, relations of friendship and senses of belonging in an academic community were created. My discussion uses the plaster busts made in 1856, not necessarily as an object of analysis in itself, but more to dwell upon different positionalities within the space of Europe in the mid-nineteenth century and on Iceland's position within these different imperial formations.

The use of the term racial science in this chapter is under the influence of Alice Conklin's distinction between scientific racism and racial science, where the latter designates 'the field of inquiry that developed around the study of race in the nineteenth century', while the former refers more to the efforts of publicizing 'the findings of their science for racist political ends'. Conklin shows that both are racist, but that it is important to distinguish between them to capture the different practices that characterized preoccupation with 'race' as an object of analysis, in addition to understanding why racial science became politicized at particular moments in history.[17] I understand this not as seeking to diminish that the understandings of race were always embedded in the political sphere, but as giving space for more nuances in the collecting and theorizing about perceived human differences.

Iceland: A transimperial site of extraction and contact zone

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the North Atlantic was positioned as a 'frontier' in the wider European imagination.[18] Countries inhabiting the far North such as Iceland and Greenland were partly considered interesting due to their perception as sites of adventure and risks and thus sites of exploration. Regardless, both countries were already in the early nineteenth century sites of extensive transnational connections.[19] Iceland became a target for scientific explorations in the eighteenth century, but the country was also earlier embedded in numerous transnational connections and shaped by events taking place elsewhere in Europe.[20] Iceland lost its full independence to Norway in 1260 and became a subject of the Danish crown in 1397 with the unification of the Danish and Norwegian Kingdoms. Iceland was a Danish dependency until 1944 and thus one part of the Danish Empire that at different times extended to the Caribbean, India and the African continent. Iceland's shores were visited by fishermen from different parts of Europe, such as England, at times so much so that for instance the period from 1400 to 1500 in Iceland is often called the 'English century'. During

that time around a hundred ships sailed to Iceland each year.[21] Additionally, Spanish fishermen from the northern part of Spain were fishing around Iceland and had diverse engagements with people living in Iceland.[22] France had number of vessels that fished in Icelandic waters in the nineteenth century, even though due to the trade monopoly established by the Danish government in 1602, the French were forbidden to work their catch on land and to trade with the Icelanders. In reality, however, the fishermen came ashore for their week off while a big ship sailed with the catch to France and were then able to wash laundry and replenish water supplies. Some business was conducted as well, such as exchange of spirits and mittens. Identification of a sexually transmitted disease with fishermen from France indicates some sexual interactions.[23] The activity of this fishing operation can be seen, among other things, in the number of shipwrecks, as thirty-three French ships were lost in Icelandic waters between 1836 and 1839.[24]

In addition to these various engagements, nineteenth-century Iceland can be positioned as a site of what Karen Oslund has referred to as 'scientific and literary European tourism'.[25] The renowned explorer Joseph Banks visited Iceland in 1772, incidentally at a similar time as a French expedition led by Jean-René Antoine, Marquis de Verdun de la Crenne, to the western part of Iceland (Patreksfjörður). Banks was followed by and gave advice to a succession of other explorers, that is, Sir John Thomas Stanley in 1789, William Jackson Hooker in 1809 and Sir George Stuart Mackenzie who came a year later in 1810. They were all inspired by the ongoing interest in botany, zoology and geology.[26] Various others followed, including the Austrian explorer Ida Pfeiffer.[27]

In some cases, this interest involved more directly the colonialization of Iceland or possession of its territory or natural resources. In the late 1760s, it had been suggested in France to exchange Iceland for the American colony of Louisiana, as a result of interest in Iceland serving as a naval station to facilitate a regaining of Canada.[28] Several high-ranking British gentlemen – including Joseph Banks – advocated, furthermore, for the annexation of Iceland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[29] The French mineralogist Alfred Louis Legrand Des Cloiseaux made his first trip to Iceland in 1845, sent by the government of France, and again in 1846 due to a volcanic eruption in Hekla during the previous years, where he engaged with scientists from other imperial powers also exploring the eruption.[30] Icelandic crystals were extremely popular in scientific endeavours in Europe in the nineteenth century and were transported from Helgustaðanáma by trading ships, French fishing boats and travellers visiting Iceland. Their exports increased considerably after the mid-nineteenth century.[31]

While conducted under the premises of science, Prince Napoléon's expedition was seen as no accident as it coincided with France's attempts to establish a base in Iceland for their fisheries. The people living at the naval base were intended to be four times the population of Iceland at that time, but in Iceland there were suspicions that this would be the first step toward full colonialization of the country.[32] There were some negotiations of the French with the Danish government which accepted their proposal, according to news reports in France, Germany and Denmark.[33] These stories were not accurate, but they and the attempt itself, show Iceland as a site of prospecting and potential exploitation. This scientific attention to Iceland thus has to be seen, as elsewhere, as entangled with strong interests in resource extraction. Discussions around that time

in Iceland reflect, furthermore, strong anxieties about giving resources to imperial powers, leading to loss of sovereignty for people in Iceland and that these plans would lead to exploitation of other natural resources.[34]

From mid-nineteenth century onwards, travels to Iceland were partly motivated by an interest in the Icelandic sagas. The experience of visiting the sites of the sagas could, however, be disappointing as there were no visible physical remains such as buildings or ruins reflecting events from the Saga period.[35] This probably positioned Iceland even more firmly as a primitive location. The emphasis on Iceland's ancient history is clearly seen by the published account of Napoléon's trip where a long discussion is devoted to the early history of Iceland in the Saga period. In the nineteenth century, however, some foreign travellers even wondered how these primitive-like Icelanders could in the past have produced such culturally valuable medieval manuscripts.[36] Such speculations clearly indicate the marginality of Icelandic subjects and their dualistic position where they were seen as primitive and thus comparable to populations in more distant lands but at the same time a part of a more glorious history of ancient Europe.

The travels in Iceland and writings about travels to Iceland did not only shape how Iceland was perceived by the outside world but also involved negotiations between Icelandic actors and greater imperial powers. The French artist Auguste Mayers did some of the most famous illustrations of Iceland when accompanying the scientist Paul Gaimard in 1836 to Iceland. His paintings creatively emphasized the desolation and the wilderness of the mountains, which probably shaped, in combination with other imaginations of Iceland in textual works, how people living in Iceland perceived nature in their country.[37] Travel books exploring Iceland were read eagerly in Iceland and were reacted to in Iceland while simultaneously shaping how people saw nature and the meaning of being Icelandic.[38] In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Icelandic medieval literature was a focal point of the nationalistic movement or, as phrased by Hálfdanarson and Rastrick, where 'the language and literary heritage became the cornerstones for the political "struggle for independence"'.[39]

Iceland in the context of imperialism and colonialism

The plaster busts produced during Napoléon's expedition in 1856 are one contact point between past and present. At the time of their making, they were most likely of little significance. They are hardly mentioned in the book that narrates the whole expedition, and the same is the case of an unpublished diary written during the expedition. The expedition travelled to the coast of Scotland, Iceland, Greenland, the Shetland Islands and then to Scandinavia. In addition to the six busts made of Icelandic people during the trip, other six were made of Greenlandic people, three of other Nordic populations and three of seamen from India, who were probably part of the working crew. No information exists so far on why the busts were made in these locations and how the people were selected. For the discussion here, the primary focus is on the busts made in Iceland, even though I make some reference to those made in Greenland.

The creation of the busts in Iceland was not the first inclusion of Iceland in bust making in relation to phrenology and race science. Two older busts made after

Icelandic people can be found today in *Musée de l'Homme*. One was made after Bjarni Johnsen, rector of the Learned School in Reykjavík, in Paris in 1855. Bjarni Johnsen held a special position, as he lived in Copenhagen for a large part of his life and was married to a Danish woman. He shaped education in Iceland by emphasizing classical education, which he saw as important for Iceland's identity, in order to position their ancient culture within classical culture.[40] In addition to living in Denmark for a long time, Bjarni also travelled more than most contemporary Icelanders. Bjarni made a total of three trips to France. In the first trip in 1845, he attended lectures at the Sorbonne in Paris. During his trip, he received practical help from Paul Gaimard. Gaimard was well connected in Paris and personally knew the leading scientists of the Museum of Natural History in Paris, in addition to being seen as exceptionally helpful to Icelandic travellers.[41]

The other bust in the museum has the inscription 'Gaimard 1839', which most likely is a reference to the naval surgeon and scientist Paul Gaimard. He was deeply interested in phrenology and possibly instrumental in bringing together the naval officer Dumont d'Urville and the phrenologist Pierre Marie Alexandre Dumoutier who went on expeditions to the Pacific and the South Pole and would later create one of the best-known collections of plaster busts.[42] Gaimard probably gave this nameless bust to the Natural History Museum in Paris from where it later found its way to the *Musée de l'Homme*. The busts made during the expeditions in 1856 were all made by Jean-Benjamin Stahl. Stahl worked in the Museum of National History in Paris, as a specialist in making moulds of animals and people. He was especially talented, having improved the standard methods used when making plaster casts.[43] Stahl had made the bust of Bjarni in the Museum of Natural History in Paris.

The expedition came to Iceland during the summer of 1856, which was then populated by around 65,000 people.[44] In Reykjavík, the capital, the expedition was greeted with honour by different Danish officials, as well as Icelandic people of authority, including Bjarni Johnsen. Bjarni's actual last name was Jónsson, but he used the name Johnsen,[45] possibly to align himself more strongly with European naming traditions. The Austrian explorer Ida Pfeiffer who had visited Iceland a few years earlier, explained that travellers to Iceland were either really rich or naturalists sent by the European courts to survey the potential of the country as sites of extraction, as well as collecting items to display in cabinets of curiosity.[46] Prince Napoléon could probably be categorized in both groups, with an impressive team of scientists accompanying him, geologists, photographer and other distinguished and well-known French intellectuals. These included for example, Louis Felicien de Saulzy, a famous archaeologist and the Polish bilingual writer and poet Karol Edmund Choiecki, who used the pseudonym Charles Edmund in France. Edmund has been seen as the most important Polish traveller in the nineteenth century[47] and was at the time well known by Paris's elites, becoming in 1856 Prince Napoléon's personal secretary. Edmund wrote the results of the expedition, *Voyage dans les mers du Nord à bord de la corvette La Reine Hortense*, which was well received in France.[48] Another esteemed person visiting Iceland at the same time was a British traveller, Lord Dufferin. There were speculations in Iceland that he had been sent by the British to spy on Napoléon's intentions.[49]

Even though much of the travel literature written during this time is not really concerned with the actual inhabitants of the country, they often include remarks on the poverty of the population, the inadequate housing and dullness or passivity of people – with the writings in relation to Napoléon's excursion being no exception. Napoléon's expedition was generally not deeply impressed with Iceland's inhabitants, as seen by their reflections on Reykjavík, described in bleak terms as existing outside history in the published book of the travels.[50] The prince's travel diary gives a similar impression of the country in general, describing it as an impoverished place. The diary remarks that Icelandic people know little about the outside world and expresses shock of Icelanders' low morals, in addition to mentioning that they had heard that in remote districts the locals offer their wives to foreigners.[51] Iceland is referred to in the diary as a 'primitive civilization' with the words that it is strange to see such a primitive civilization only three days away from the most civilized one. It is noted that Icelanders are not 'savages' and are similar to Europe five hundred years ago.[52] These observations further reveal Iceland's liminal position as 'in-between'. The comment that Iceland is 'similar to Europe' interestingly assumes that Iceland is not a part of Europe, but the statement that Iceland is not a savage country does still not place the country in the same category as many colonized people further away.[53] Here again it is useful to remember how conversations about 'race' and 'culture' in the early and mid-nineteenth century with various intersecting concerns – such as relations between beauty and intelligence, moral progress, degeneration, transmutation – were different from the more reified discourse about human's classification into different races at the end of the century. Even at the end of the nineteenth century, race was still not coherently conceptualized but intersected quite a lot with other delimitations, such as based on sexuality and class.[54]

Iceland and Greenland as places of the 'unknown' and as existing outside of Europe are also evident in written reflections when the ship is on its way back to France. The ship sails past the Shetland Islands where they see a lighthouse from a far. That sentiment is described in the following words:

> At 10 am, we see a lighthouse, the first for two months. This emblem of civilization gives us an impression that is difficult to describe: it seems that old Europe is represented as in a magic lantern. This light represents our friends, our parents, the homeland! Those who come from distant journeys, from serious dangers, are the only ones who can understand this impression.[55]

Napoléon travelled in style with a fourteen-person military band that played during meals on the ship and occasionally for the local populations. He held dances in some of the places he visited, including Reykjavík, and took a short tour travelling to the already famous sites Þingvellir and Geysir. A large crowd of people accompanied the prince to these sites, in all fifty officers and twelve servants, in addition to guides. Some of the elite in Iceland took part, including Reykjavík's mayor, the governor of Iceland Count Frederick Christopher Trampe and Bjarni Johnsen. Stahl remained, however, in Reykjavík, along with two officers and he probably made the plaster busts while he was there.[56]

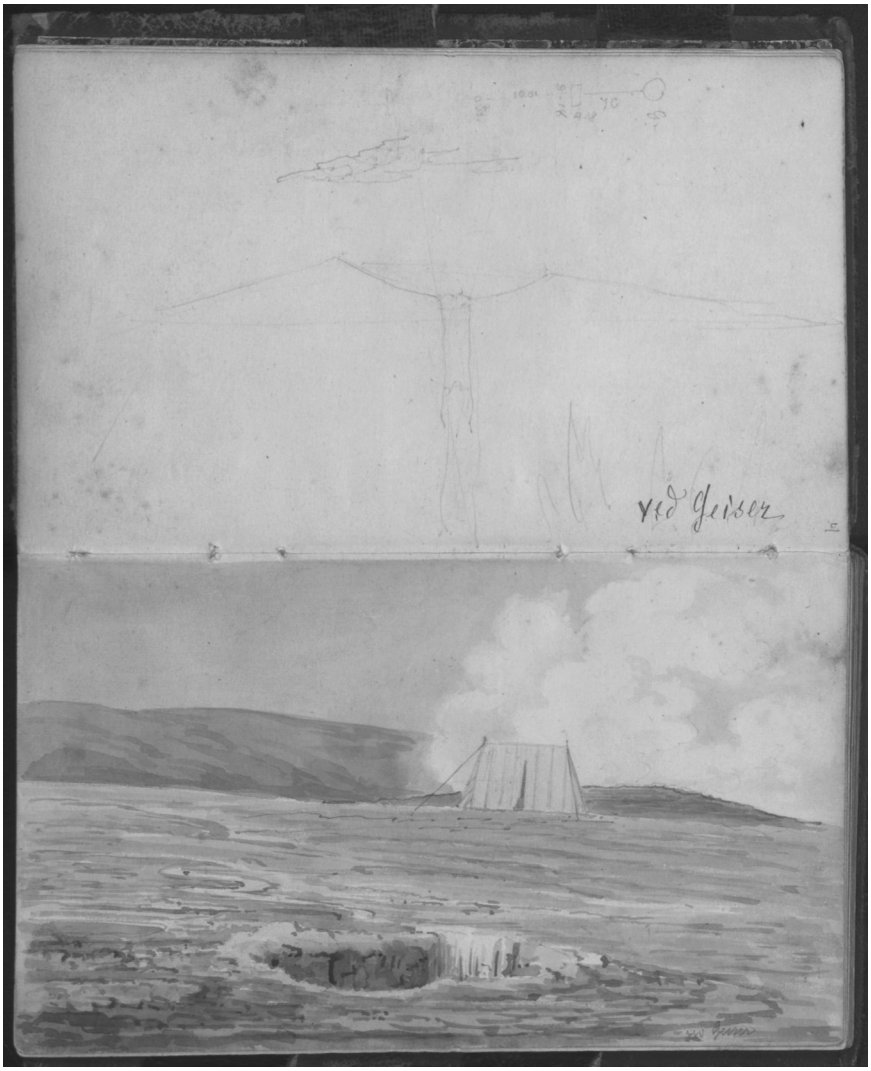

Figure 7.2 Gaimard's tent at Geysir. From Laurits Albert Winstrup's (1815–89) Iceland sketch book (1846). Det Kgl. Bibliotek – Kunstbiblioteket/The Royal Danish Library – Art Library.

Þingvellir and Geysir were a particularly popular destination for foreign tourists. The sites received a steady influx of tourists from the upper classes of Europe, as seen in Ida Pfeiffer's words, when saying that everyone travelling through the area owes a lot to Paul Gaimard because he left two tents, one at Þingvellir and one at Geysir. Pfeiffer explains that a farmer who refers travellers to the hot springs is responsible for setting up the tent for a small fee (Figure 7.2).[57]

The tents were extremely useful as the foreign travellers generally were unable to stay in the majority of the Icelandic houses. Lord Dufferin who was there at the same time as Napoléon's excursion wondered if it would not be more pleasant to stay in the cemetery rather than in the turf houses, as they were dark, damp and cold (Figure 7.3).[58] Many of those travelling in Iceland made a special reference to housing in Iceland, as they were different from housing in Europe.[59] Consequently, for the population living in Iceland, the turf house became a symbol of the country's poverty and humiliation, and as archaeologist Angelos Parigoris notes, the turf house was never emphasized in nationalistic discourse in Iceland which centred strongly on the Icelandic sagas.[60] The images of landscape and huts in the diary written during the expedition, clearly shows the admiration for the landscape while seeing the housing as inadequate:

> The country is very remarkable; beautiful mountains, fairly thick grass; in the midst of all this, we see these miserable Icelandic huts, similar to those of the Savages, dug into the earth.[61]

Napoléon's excursion stopped at Þingvellir and then continued to Geysir, sending tents ahead to make camp before the prince and his troop arrived. On arrival they learned that Lord Dufferin had arrived ahead of them 'with all the enormous baggage of an English tourist'.[62] Napoléon's excursion arrived there at 'full gallop' (Fr. *au grand galop*) with the trumpeter leading, who was one of the musicians from the yacht.[63] At Þingvellir, they met another traveller, a Prussian naturalist studying insects,[64] and then when coming back to Reykjavík, a new ship was in the bay from England that has come to buy horses from Iceland to sell for work in the mines.[65] This description of this short journey, reveals Iceland as a deeply transnational place – a contact point in itself for different scientists and elites from greater European powers and as stated earlier, as a site of exploration and extraction by different parties.

Extraction of some sort did not only include natural resources, but was also in regard to the literary culture in the form of acquiring historical manuscripts. Dufferin's statement that 'before coming to Iceland I had read every account that had been written of Thingvalla by any former traveller',[66] exemplifies, furthermore, how a European community of upper class travellers and scientists was also created through engagement with each other's literary works. This literary engagement also took place in relation to the desire to possess Icelandic manuscripts. When coming briefly to Iceland during the second time, that is, after the trip to Greenland, Prince Napoléon received books from Bjarni Johnsen[67] that the prince apparently asked Bjarni to collect for him. The text mentions that this was a collection of Bibles from different eras.[68] Lord Dufferin also indicates his interest in old books, and especially in the medieval manuscripts and how they were also seen as something that should be collected and appropriated. He was not able to acquire medieval manuscripts, however, but still some of the first printed books in Iceland, according to his own words:

> From the Rector of the cathedral church I have received some very curious books – almost the first printed in the island; I have been very anxious to obtain some

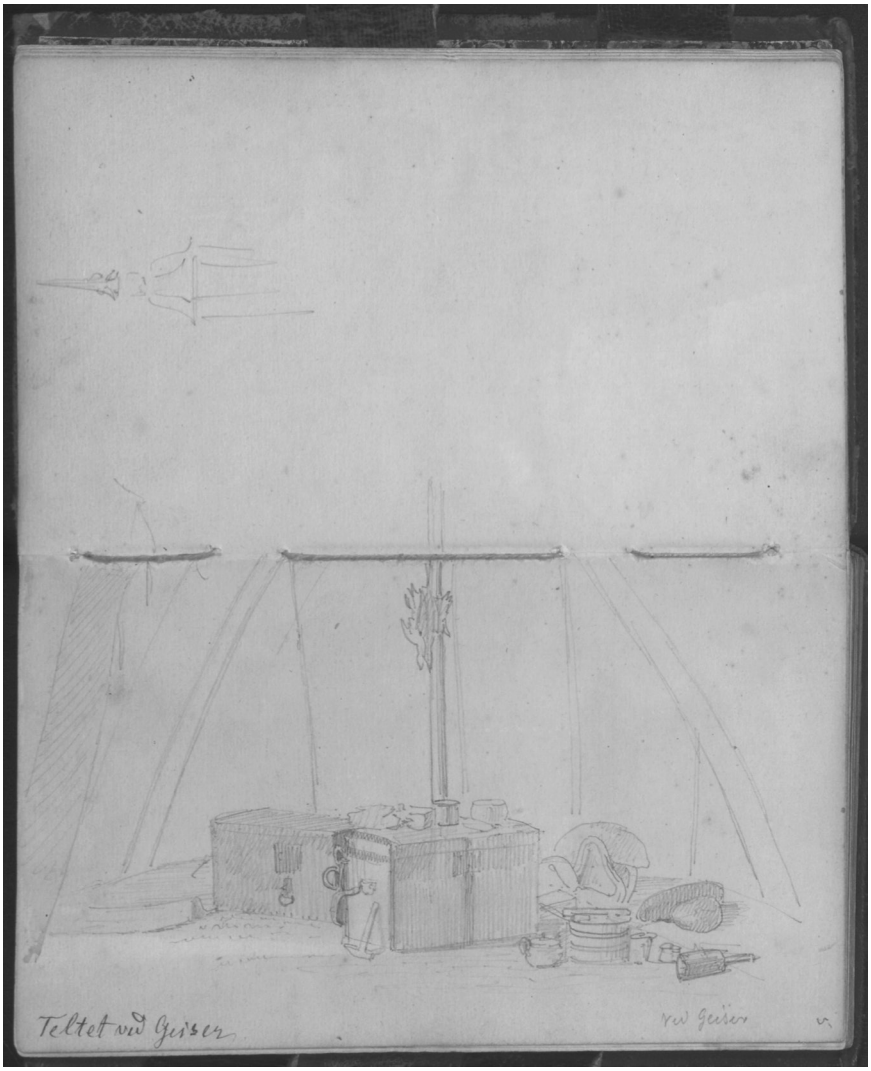

Figure 7.3 View inside the tent at Geysir. From Laurits Albert Winstrup's (1815–89) Iceland sketch book (1846). Det Kgl. Bibliotek – Kunstbiblioteket/The Royal Danish Library – Art Library.

> specimens of ancient Icelandic manuscripts, but the island has long since been ransacked of its literary treasures.[69]

Even though nothing is known regarding the making of the plaster busts in Iceland, the diary mentions that Stahl and two other officials decided to stay in Reykjavík, during the prince's trip to Þingvellir and Geysir. While it is difficult to know why

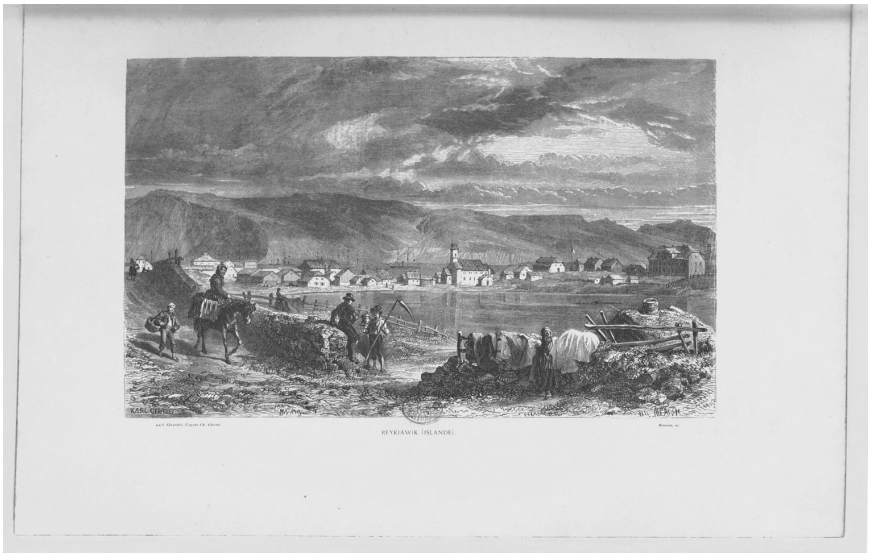

Figure 7.4 View of Reykjavik. From Charles Edmond Chojecki's (1822–99) *Voyage dans les mers du Nord à bord de la corvette la Reine Hortense* (Michel Lévy Frères, 1857), opposite p. 84. Gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque nationale de France.

these individuals were selected, their personal histories show that Stahl was probably approaching those who were part in some sense of the circle of people they engaged with, still careful in having an equal distribution between men and women (Figure 7.4). The names are clearly marked on the busts, as well as identified on a handwritten inventory list kept today at *Musée de l'Homme*. The individuals that busts were made after were Björn Gunnlaugsson, Árni Magnússon, Skafti Skaftason, Ragnheiður Ólafsdóttir, Þóra Árnadóttir and Sigríður Bjarnadóttir.

Sigríður Bjarnadóttir was twenty-four years old and worked for Niels A. S. Randrup, pharmacist in Iceland who was made France's first consul in 1856[70] and was also one of those receiving gifts from Prince Napoléon,[71] which indicates his utility to the expedition. Þórunn Árnadóttir lived in Reykjavík as well and was also twenty-four. She was a hired hand in a turf-cottage on the outskirts of Reykjavík.[72] Ragnheiður Ólafsdóttir lived on a small farm (Icelandic: *hjáleiga*), not far from Reykjavík, and she was related to Bjarni Johnsen, as her mother was probably his sister. Her father, Ólafur Gíslason, had died in 1854 at sea, along with twenty-six other seamen due to adverse weather conditions,[73] making the remaining family precarious.

Björn Gunnlaugsson, born in 1788, was a teacher at Lærði skólinn, mathematician and cartographer, who had received an education in Denmark.[74] He was also a part of Bjarni Johnsen's family relations.[75] The two other men did not hold equal positions of privilege, but Árni Magnússon, born in 1804, had a farm and held at one time governmental position (is. *hreppstjóri*). He was actually not living in Reykjavík but one can imagine that he was there on a visit as he had family relations there. Skapti

Skaptason was a well-known healer living in Reykjavík, but also fished and worked as blacksmith.[76]

What characterized these individuals in a general sense is that the men are most older and all in position of some authority, while the women are much younger and all in relatively vulnerable positions. As Icelandic newspapers show, people in Iceland were quite impressed by Prince Napoléon's arrival so they felt possibly honoured or had difficulties saying no when asked to become models. The bust making was an especially uncomfortable process. For those who had not travelled outside of Iceland, it must have been hard to imagine the end result and how carefully the plaster copies their face and personal characteristics. We know from a brief description from the bust making in Greenland that Stahl used the stem of a feather to allow his subjects to breathe during the time that the plaster fully covered their face. During the stay, Stahl also made moulds in Iceland of hands, feet and chests, and for some reason he did not always use the same individuals as those who were the models for the busts.

The contact points in Napoléon's expedition were multiple as shown here, with the busts only constituting one part. Other contact points were created through engagement with literature of other travellers, through visits to popular sites such as Geysir and contact with elite members of Icelandic society.

The transnational collection

The busts constituted contact points between France and other parts of Europe as well. Two museums in Spain, one in Gran Canaria and the other in Madrid, bought in 1888 replicas of the busts, as a part of a larger collection of plaster busts from all over the world. The context of these two museums was quite different; one located in the capital of Spain and the other in its periphery. The purchase of the plaster busts clearly shows the imperial entanglement between different places in Europe, the role of intimate and scientific objects in cementing these relations, in addition to the hierarchical positioning of different European countries within Europe in the late nineteenth century.

These two museums selected the busts from Napoléon's excursion, in addition to Bjarni Johnsen's bust – excluding the nameless bust given by Gaimard – all becoming a part of a large collection of busts of people from different parts of the world that were supposed to show different types of races of mankind.[77] The initiator of these two purchases and the person who probably selected which ones to buy was Diego Ripoche y Torrens, a Canarian of French descent. His grandfather had been taken as a prisoner of war and sent to the Canary Islands, where he married and settled.[78] Leading French scholars engaging in racial science, such as Théodore Hamy and Paul Broca, had extensive interest in the Canary Islands after the discovery of Cro-Magnon remains in 1868 in France. This was due to similarities that they perceived between the Cro-Magnon skulls and the indigenous population of the Canary Islands. René Verneau, professor at the National Museum of Natural History, was commissioned to conduct an investigation in the Canary Islands and collect remains and artefacts of the indigenous population of the islands for comparison with the Cro-Magnon.[79] During

Verneau's first trip to the Canaries in 1876, Ripoche – who spoke French – assisted him in various ways, which was the beginning of a long-lasting relationship.[80] As the archaeologist Farrujia de la Rosa has discussed, the attempt to establish a link between prehistoric humans found in northern France with indigenous people the Canary Islands cannot be separated from French imperial interest at the time where claims that the ancestors of the so-called Gallic nation had inhabited large areas reaching far beyond present French territories worked toward 'defending French imperial interest in Africa'.[81] This close contact with French scholars, meant furthermore that in the Canary Islands racial science was adopted as a key frame of analysis.[82]

Another context of these purchases were the growing concerns in continental Spain and in the Canary Islands with plundering of archaeological artefacts and human remains within Spanish territories, in addition to historical artefacts taken out of Spain. These were exported by leading imperial powers such as Germany and France to be displayed in museums there.[83] As Guiral has discussed, this emphasis was interwoven with nationalistic sentiments characterizing Europe, while also revolving around membership in a wider creation of a European community of scholars exchanging ideas and artefacts.[84] Ripoche y Torrens was part of a group initiating the establishment of El Museo Canario in 1879, in Gran Canaria, under the leadership of Gregorio Chil y Naranjo. The establishment of the museum was in conjunction with various other advancements such as establishment of a periodical and library.[85] While the museum's establishment was important to avoid the exportation of indigenous artefacts – human remains were especially sought after – those who established the museum, had important connections to France. Chil y Naranjo was himself educated in Paris, being in contact with some of the leading French scholars in racial science.[86] Ripoche always referred to Verneau as his 'teacher',[87] which could be seen as one indication of the hierarchical relationship between the French and Spanish scholars.

The buying of the busts by these two museums represents the importance of mobility of racial objects – human remains, models and busts – for European racial science, through buying and gift giving, that took place across different national boundaries.[88] The idea of buying the busts for these two museums, seems to have come from Ripoche, who was living in France at the time. The busts, then owned by the Trocadéro museum in Paris, which was established as an ethnographic museum in 1882.[89] Ripoche proposed the acquisition of the busts to the museum's management. It seems to have been well received, however, the project soon found itself in financial difficulties as Ripoche felt that a considerable number of busts were necessary. He himself contributed money and also got Verneau to sponsor the project financially, as well as asking for funding from other sources. Among those from whom he asked for a donation was the musician Camille Saint-Saëns, during his stay in France.[90]

In Madrid, the busts were bought by *Museo Antropológico*, which later became *Museo Nacional de Antropología*. The museum was established in 1875 by Pedro Gonzáles Velasco, who was in charge of the anatomical museum in Universidad Central in Madrid. In the years before building the museum, Velasco had travelled around Europe, studying hospital layouts and wondered how he was going to set up his own museum. During these trips, he also met leading scientists who followed Broca's racial sciences, and he was possibly a participant in the first meeting of the French

Anthropological Society in Paris in 1859, again showing these strong interconnections across national boundaries. Velasco himself was also in contact with Broca in regard to skulls that the latter was hoping to get his hands on.[91] After Velasco's death in 1882, the museum was sold and became between 1890 and 1940 a section of the Museum of the Natural Science,[92] with Manuel Antón becoming the first director of the renovated museum. He had stayed in Paris as well and was familiar with theories there in terms of racial science.[93] The busts Antón bought for the museum from Ripoche most likely went straight into a warehouse, which is not surprising given that no one seemed to know what to do with most of the collectables already in the museum's possession.[94] During the time of Velasco, the museum became, in the words of Sánchez Gómez a kind of 'Noah's Ark'.[95] Prior to the purchase of busts from the Trocadéro museum, the Anthropological Museum in Madrid already owned some of the busts.[96]

The busts from Iceland did not necessarily hold a specific significance for these two museums but were rather positioned by Ripoche in his overview of the busts in the Canary Islands as interesting due to their placement as a part of the white race.[97] As such, they were a part of a collection he hoped would demonstrate different races of mankind, showing clearly the position of plaster busts as a part of racial science of the time, but also indicates a more privileged position of Icelandic people within more reified racist categories of people. During the first years of the Canary Museum, all the busts bought by Ripoche, probably eighty-four in total, were displayed in the museum, alongside skulls of the indigenous population, thus allowing for a particular framing of these human remains.

Concluding remarks

Using the idea of contact points – basing partly on Feldman's introduction of this term[98] – my discussion shows the various ways that Iceland was integrated into diverse imperial desires in the nineteenth century. The 1856 plaster busts of Icelandic people are one example of contact points, and as material objects they provide contact between past and present, as well as being created through contact between those Icelandic people who were casted and those who did the casting. The imagination and the physical location of Iceland can, furthermore, be seen as contact point between different larger empirical powers, through engagements of individuals in different contact zones.[99] The collections of busts served as a contact point between France and other European imperial powers, where museums and individuals associated with them bought and traded intimate objects which were perceived as parts of racial science. Certain scientists from strong imperial powers in Europe also visited the same places, engaged with each other there, thus creating a shared community of scholars and elites, which must have strengthened the sense of being part of greater European powers that other parts of Europe could aspire to. For whom was the display of Napoléon's troop arriving with a storm to Geysir intended?

However, Iceland as a contact point for greater European imperial powers was not only through physical meetings or engagements in Iceland, but also through reading

and analysing Iceland as an object of interest. Within such shared scientific discussions of greater imperial powers, revolving around the prospecting and gathering of disparate scientific information about other people and places, stronger European powers set the tone for other parts of Europe to aspire to. The writings published on the exploration of greater imperial powers, were read and reacted to in Iceland. This engagement can clearly be seen in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Iceland, when intellectual discourse there had become characterized by a strong desire to be acknowledged as belonging with those European powers seen as more significant,[100] but also through Iceland's positioning as belonging with a reified white race at the end of the nineteenth century. In the atmosphere of the mid-nineteenth century, however, Icelandic people were seen as primitive and a part of Europe's past, while simultaneously perceived as closer to the civilized part of Europe and thus ranked higher in some sense than people in more distant parts of the world were. Here again it is important to remember how different early and mid-nineteenth-century discourses of racial differences – the whole language of race – was from the more reified biological theories at the end of the century, even though race continued to converge with, draw meaning from and give meaning to discourses of class, gender and sexuality. Iceland in connection to imperial Europe was thus one place of collecting objects to further understanding of differences and the meaning of being European, which imperial powers like France saw themselves as the highest form of.

Acknowledgements

This chapter was written in the context of CERM (Creating Europe through Racialized Mobilities), a project supported by the Icelandic Research Fund (grant no. 207062-051).

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