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ON DANISH BORDERS

Icelandic Sagas in German Occupied Denmark<sup>1</sup>

In the years of 1942 and 1943, a publishing house in Copenhagen, Det tredje Standpunkts forlag, published N.M. Petersen's Danish translations of the Icelandic family sagas in three volumes. Petersen's translations were originally published in four volumes in 1839-44 and appeared in two revised editions before Det tredje Standpunkts forlag adopted them under the collective title *Islændernes færð hjemme og ude*. Unimportant as it may appear, this fourth edition reveals why the significance of the Icelandic sagas can not be determined conclusively. It substantiates that the sagas, despite their age, are texts in motion, driven by variable human desires and influenced by the random course of history. Like other canonised works of literature, they survive because they are constantly being rewritten, most obviously by individual editors, translators, and literary patrons, but furthermore by an alternating cultural context. In this paper, I prefer to read *Islændernes færð*, not as a collection of medieval Icelandic literature, not even as a product of a nineteenth-century translator, but rather as a reflection of the sensitive political situation in Denmark during World War II.

1.

Det tredje Standpunkts forlag shared its identity with the cultural journal *Det tredje Standpunkt*. Both of these ventures were closely related to the Danish political party Dansk Samling, which was founded by writer Arne Sørensen in 1936, somewhat on the basis of a cultural philosophy he had developed in his popular work *Det moderne Menneske*. Sørensen published that book himself in 1936; it was the first title to appear under the imprint of Det tredje Standpunkts forlag.

Being an outspoken critic on Marxist and Fascist theories and societies, Sørensen also expressed concerns about the conditions of Danish pre-war politics. In his view, democracy in Denmark was bound hand and foot by a rigid party system, bureaucracy, and an increasing centralization of power. The mission of Dansk Samling at this juncture was to lead a popular democratic revival, fight unemployment, and respond to a general ideological confusion. Challenging the emphasis Marxists and Fascists laid on the concepts of class and race, Sørensen's main interest was in the *human being* or the *individual* (Menneske), his/her freedom and well being. While calling for radical political changes (it

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was not always clear what these should involve), he was conservative in matters of culture and religion. In these areas, he was inspired by the Danish folk-school movement, which had originated in the nineteenth century ideas of Reverend N.F.S. Grundtvig and his ideal of Denmark, founded on traditional folk-culture and Christian doctrines. This mixture of revolutionary and traditional ideas, Sørensen stressed, defined Dansk Samling's standpoint as the third one (*det tredje standpunkt*), in opposition to both the right and the left wings of the political spectrum (Halvorsen 1982).

Sørensen started the journal *Det tredje Standpunkt* in 1937 in order to further the course of Dansk Samling, and in the following years, several other books by him were published by *Det tredje Standpunkts* forlag. Apart from *Det moderne Menneske*, these ventures were financially unsuccessful. The publications collected debt, and the parliamentary election in 1939 did not return any seats to the party. Ironically, the momentum Arne Sørensen had been waiting for was not created until after the German troops occupied Denmark on April 9, 1940. While the parliamentary parties all agreed to cooperate with the German war council, sustaining some Danish rule over internal affairs, Dansk Samling took a definite stand against the occupation, but saw it at the same time as an effective cause for the advancement of the overdue popular democratic revival. In Sørensen's own words, Dansk Samling had only been a small, ineffective party until that point; now it should become "hele folkets motto" (Halvorsen 1983, 7).

In the months that followed, Arne Sørensen toured Denmark, presenting the policy of Dansk Samling on various occasions. He made important contacts with people who shared his views and in the fall of 1940 he resurrected *Det tredje Standpunkt*, bringing forth in the first issue some of the most vocal and influential adversaries of the German occupation. These included writer Kaj Munk and historian Vilhelm la Cour. This time the Danish readership was receptive. The circulation of *Det tredje Standpunkt* soon reached around 5,000 copies, which was more than any other journal had in Denmark during the war.

Of particular import for our discussion was Arne Sørensen's alliance with Vilhelm la Cour. Although politically conservative, La Cour had been bitterly disappointed with the policy of cooperation which the Danish politicians conducted under the German occupation. In this field, he and Sørensen had a common objective:

at vække en folkelige Forstaaelse af en Modstandskamps tvingende Nødvendighed -- ikke alene af Hensyn til Danmarks Position ved Krigens Afslutning, men først and fremmest af Hensyn til vort Folks Selvrespekt. (La Cour 1959., 9)

This was by no means an easy objective to obtain. The German censor, operating through the Danish ministry of foreign affairs, limited the communication of such messages. Additionally, the thought of taking direct action against the German forces did not have a particular appeal to the Danish people in the early stages of the war. Under these circumstances, various forms of public speaking were the ideal means to avoid censorship and get the audience directly involved. To that category belonged such phenomena as

"Byens højskole", advertised on the back-page of *Det tredje Standpunkt* in the fall of 1940. Denmark was the theme of this two semester-long workshop, but among the lecturers were Vilhelm la Cour, dealing on "Nationalitets-princippet", and Arne Sørensen, speaking on the history of Danish literature and art (*Det tredje Standpunkt* 1940a).

In 1941 Sørensen published a number of pamphlets with individual articles by La Cour, which served their common goal. These reached a wide audience, being partially distributed to selected subscribers of the journal. One of these publications, "Ord til os i dag -- noter til øjeblikket", also caught the attention of the censor. In it, La Cour had written about a speech which the German poet Fichte delivered when Germany was occupied by Napoleon in 1807-1808, describing how a nation should behave when it was invaded by foreigners. Despite La Cour's defense, based on the premise that Fichte was indeed highly regarded in contemporary Germany, Sørensen and he were sentenced to several months imprisonment. (La Cour 1945; cf. Von Rosen 1969).

In May of 1941, the censor also warned *Det tredje Standpunkt* for developing "udpræget tysk fjendtlige tendenser" (Halvorsen 1983, 19). This warning was backed up with reference to an article by Kaj Munk, who had described small afflicted birds (i.e. the Danish nation) that were waiting for the victory of the westerly wind (i.e. the Allied Forces). As the journal's editor, Sørensen was reluctant to give in to such a warning, but *Det tredje Standpunkt* was too important for the course of Dansk Samling, both economically and ideologically, to be sacrificed. Sørensen adopted the policy of printing 'unlawful' ideas in other publications, such as the party's newsletter, *Nyt fra Dansk Samling*, and later in various underground pamphlets.

The success of *Det tredje Standpunkt* encouraged Sørensen to try his hand again as a commercial publisher. Here, he was able to benefit from his experience with the journal. The cover of the March edition of *Det tredje Standpunkt* in 1941 was decorated with a photograph of a harmonious family reading in a book. Underneath the text went: "De læser Det tredje Standpunkts Udgave af Saxo". On the inside of the cover readers of the journal found more detailed information. The plan was to publish quality editions of "nogle af vore bedste gamle Ting" and to get the price down by collecting subscribers in advance. The first volume was Saxo Grammaticus's *Danmarks krønike*, originally written in Latin around 1200, but issued to the subscribers in N.F.S. Grundtvig's classic Danish translation from the early nineteenth century. It was also announced that La Cour would write the introduction to this edition (*Det tredje Standpunkt* 1941a).

The Saxo edition was a great success. The first 2,000 volumes soon sold out and another printing of 2,000 went through the press (Halvorsen 1983, 24). During the publication process, Sørensen had been forced by the censor to delete few sentences from La Cour's introduction, such as "under vor nuværende ydmygelse" (*ibid.*, 25). He was, nonetheless, delighted with the reception of Saxo, expressing in one of the journal advertisements the hope that the book would become "ny Inspiration" for its many

subscribers. In the same issue he also announced the next publication in the series: *Islændernes færð hjemme og ude* (*Det tredje Standpunkt* 1941b).

## 2.

The publication of *Islændernes færð* served the publishing agenda of Det tredje Standpunkts forlag and consequently Dansk Samling in various ways. From an economic perspective alone, this was literature which did not demand the payment of any royalties. A second edition of Petersen's translations, revised by Guðbrandur Vigfússon, had been published in 1862-68 and a third edition, revised by Verner Dahlerup and Finnur Jónsson, with the verses redone by Olaf Hansen, had been released in 1901. As this third edition had been reissued by the Gyldendal publishing house in 1923-26, and was probably protected by copyright of Gyldendal or the editors, Arne Sørensen intelligently based his publications on Guðbrandur Vigfússon's edition. Other costs could also be kept to a minimum. *Islændernes færð* was advertised free of charge in *Det tredje Standpunkt* and much of the work at the publishing house was done by volunteers.<sup>2</sup> I have not found any data on the circulation of the edition, but the fact that the third volume was released in 1943, a year later than the first two volumes, suggests that the publication was economically a prosperous affair.

Apparently, the funds of the journal, the publishing business, and Dansk Samling were interconnected. Profits from the production of postcards with "patriotic" themes (verses celebrating Danish nationality, photographs of Danish landscape, etc.) paid, for instance, for trips of party members around Denmark. The official purpose of these trips was to keep contact with other branches of Dansk Samling, but as things developed they served as a cover-up for various illegal activities. In 1942 Arne Sørensen and his collaborators came in contact with British "Special Operation Executives" (SOE), who encouraged organized resistance in the countries occupied by Germany. In the course of time, members of Dansk Samling received weapons from Britain and participated in "special operations". These were some of the first signs of an aggressive Danish resistance under the German occupation (Halvorsen 1983, 28; *Besættelsen* 1979, 342-43).

Concurrently, Dansk Samling had expanded its lawful activities. In 1942 Det tredje Standpunkts forlag was allied with Samleren publishing house, which published a respected cultural magazine with the same name. Sørensen became one of two new editors of *Samleren* and in few months its circulation grew tenfold. The new company opened a bookstore, Nordisk boghandel, in Copenhagen, which distributed both the books of Det tredje Standpunkts forlag/Samleren and various illegal publications sponsored by Sørensen

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<sup>2</sup> Dansk Samling had, already in 1937, organised groups of volunteers, mostly young people who participated in various "nationally productive" projects, such as archaeological digging. The extent of this work grew under the German occupation and served in the long run the purpose of forming resistance groups (Halvorsen 1983, 28).

and others. Early in 1943, Dansk Samling also participated in the Danish elections. This time, the party got three representatives elected, one of them being Arne Sørensen. Some of these activities supported the others financially and we can assume, with some certainty, that *Islændernes færd* was one of the monetary sources, rather than a debit, in this complex economy of publishing, politics, and resistance.

However, by the time the final volume of *Islændernes færd* was released, Sørensen had gone underground, resigning (officially at least) both as the editor of the two journals and as the director of the publishing business (Halvorsen 1983, 44ff). That may explain why *Islændernes færd* was not promoted with the same energy that Saxo had been. The last documentation I have come across regarding the publication is an advertisement appearing inside the back cover of the December issue of *Det Tredje Standpunkt* from 1943, in which the complete collection was presented as an ideal Christmas present to the whole family" (*Det tredje Standpunkt* 1943).

### 3.

Apart from being designed as a profit-making phenomenon, N. M. Petersen's translations were made to suit Dansk Samling's political policy. As already noted, the backbone of that policy was to inspire Danish patriotism, to sharpen the nation's sensibility for "Danishness" (danskhed). Contrary to the problems they had with the idea of active resistance, the Danes were receptive to this patriotic message from the very beginning of the war. Symbolic were the Danish "alsangstævner", gatherings of thousands of people who sang national songs together. An influential organisation in this nationalistic awakening was also the association Dansk Ungdomssamvirke, which aimed at minimizing the influence of German and Nazi ideology on Danish youngsters (Wendt 1978, 96-104).

The production of patriotic postcards and the planning of workshops featuring themes such as "Denmark" were only two of the many ways in which Dansk Samling advocated "danskhed". A number of covers for *Det tredje Standpunkt* served the same purpose, so did some of its articles. Typical of the tone and techniques was an article by Steen Steensen Blicher, originally written in 1839, but presented in the second issue of the journal in 1940. The opening paragraph gives an idea of the text that follows: "Dannemænd! -- Ja! endnu har jeg Ret at tiltale Eder med dette Hædersnavn. Endnu have vi vort Danmark -- men har Danmark og sine Mænd?" (*Det tredje Standpunkt* 1940b, 49).

In many respects, the Saxo edition was the epitome of this advancement of "danskhed" in the circle of Dansk Samling. It brought together Danish medieval history and N.F.S. Grundtvig, the founder of the Danish folk-school movement, who was more influential than any other individual in shaping Danish national identity in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1992). This double strength of the volume was underlined by Vilhelm la Cour in the introduction. Moreover, La Cour expanded on Grundtvig's ideas to communicate his own. Many of the terms in the

introduction which did not pass through the censor were actually direct quotations from Grundtvig, one of them even being a reference to the German Anti-Christ (Halvorsen 1983, 25). Despite the revisions, Arne Sørensen could still thank La Cour for writing an introduction which explained why Grundtvig, "I en Nødssituation, der i meget ligner vor egen", took on the task of translating the ancient history of Denmark (Saxo Grammaticus 1941, 5). This state of emergency, La Cour had explained, involved the state's financial crisis after the Napoleon wars, the shattering of the Danish fleet by Britain, and the end of Norway's confederation with Denmark. Napoleon's return to power in France in February of 1815, after the brief exile in Elba, had made the prospects for a peaceful Europe all the worse. In April that year, Grundtvig wrote the article "Europa, Frankrig og Napoleon," reacting not only to the "iron sceptre of an aggressor" (Voldsmands Jernscepter), but to the cultural tyranny which resulted in a persecution of the Christian religion (ibid., 10). Needless to say, La Cour himself was here reflecting on the iron sceptre and the persecution of the German aggressor in his contemporary Denmark. His initial purpose was to call on the Danes to fight for "sand Frihed og Uafhængighed" (ibid., 31).

Although *Islændernes færd* was not a piece of Danish history in the same sense as Saxo, it was presented in much the same way to the Danish readership. The connection between the two editions was firmly confirmed in the first paragraph of Bjarni M. Gíslason's preface to Petersen's volume. There, Bjarni referred to the opening of the introduction to Saxo, in which La Cour had asked why Danish youth has almost ceased to read Saxo. Introducing *Islændernes færd*, Bjarni added, "man derimod fristes til at skrive: Hvorfor læser Islændingene stadig Sagaerne om deres Forfædres Kæmpeliv?" (Bjarni Gíslason 1942a, 5) Answering his own rhetorical question, Bjarni explained that while, for Icelandic adults, the sagas raised the issue of how life's many "Misforhold skal læges og forsones", Icelandic children still modelled their games on the sagas' heroic characterizations. One reason for this devotion was that the Icelanders found something of their original vigour and belief in the sagas, which through the centuries had perpetuated their affection for the constitutional freedom of the Icelandic medieval society -- the oldest republic of Europe:

Her har Skæbnen ogsaa spillet en stor Rolle. Tunge Trængelsaar har bevirket, at man har søgt til dette Folkelighedens Livsvæld for at holde Troen paa Friheden levende og for at styrke Modet og Kraften til at udholde Virkeligheden og bære dens Byrder. (ibid., 5-6)

Bjarni developed this theme of freedom as he continued, suggesting that the sagas exhibited how the freedom of medieval Icelanders was defined by their responsibility for the people of their own kin. This freedom could not be won through "bargaining" (Argumenter), but in the working of "a liberating Power" (forløsende Kraft), which made all visions of the future big and glorious. What counted was, not to live as long as possible, but to live in accordance with "the ideal of freedom" (Frihedsidealet) even if that would demand your life (ibid., 7).

As with so many texts written under the threat of the German censorship, there are several levels to Bjarni's argument. Literally, he was communicating accepted views when he characterized the medieval clannish society in Iceland and discussed the influence of the sagas on the modern Icelanders. On the other hand, his opening reference to La Cour suggested that the sagas *could* have the same good influence on the Danish nation as they had had on the Icelanders. Bjarni's description of a nation who had suffered 'years of severe hardship' and were dealing with the issue of how life's many 'misfortunes could be cured or reconciled' certainly fitted the Danes during World War II. One of the complex reasons leading to an intensified Danish opposition to the German occupation in the years of 1941 and 1942 was of an economic nature; inflation was high and unemployment rose to 24% (Halvorsen 1983, 14). Indeed, it was also important for the Danes to 'keep alive the faith in the freedom and to strengthen the spirit and energy one needs to endure reality and carry its burdens', as Bjarni had put it.

On this level of interpretation, Bjarni's discussion of the medieval concept of freedom followed the policy of Dansk Samling. Writing that the Icelanders of the past had not been able to acquire their freedom through bargaining, he was indirectly challenging the Danish government, which hoped that the co-operation with the Germans would spare Danish lives. Freedom, in Bjarni's definition, was an ideal worth dying for -- the Danes needed to take up active resistance.

When the first volume of *Islændernes færd* was released, *Det tredje Standpunkt* also published a separate article by Bjarni M. Gíslason about the Icelandic sagas. It clearly served the purpose of introducing N. M. Petersen's translations to prospective subscribers (quotations from this article were used in advertisements for the publication in the journal). After a few general remarks on Iceland's literary production in the Middle Ages, Bjarni summarized the plot of some of the texts in *Islændernes færd*. Thematically, his approach to the topic here was more and less identical with that of his preface. The sagas, he claimed, were great literary achievements, which could still "opflamme Aandens Stormænd og faa Drengøjne til at lyse af Vilje og Daad" (Bjarni M. Gíslason 1942b, 170).

In regard of the sagas' good influence on Danish patriotism, Bjarni's summary of *Njáls saga* -- "Hovedværket blandt alle Ættesagaerne" -- is worth quoting at some length:

Forud for Fortællingen om Njal og hans Sønner kommer Skildringen om Helten Gunnar fra Hlidarende, der bor for Enden af Lien. Eggen er frugtbar. Foruden ligger Havet, som aander i uafbrudte Bølger mod Kysten. Gennem det brede Sletteland rinder Markarfloden, under Maanens Lys at se til som en bred Stribe af smeltet Guld. Aaret drejer sit Hjul, og Lien blomstrer. Efter hver Vinter dukker et Foraar frem. Man elsker Landet. Her vokser Opgaven indefra, stejl, maalbevidst. Her er Markene gule, og Tunene slagne. Her bindes man saa stærk af Kærlighed til Jorden, at man vil ingen Steder fare, selv om man bliver jaget i Fredløshed. Man vælger at blive hjemme og tage Kampen op mod Uvennerne, selv om det har Livsfare i Følge. (ibid., 168)

Taking off from Gunnar from Hlíðarendi's renowned speech in *Njáls saga* (ch. 75), Bjarni romanticised here the saga's description of Rangárvellir, much along lines of Jónas Hallgrímsson's well known poem "Gunnarshólmi". But while mountains and glaciers frame the setting in Jónas Hallgrímsson's poem, Bjarni characterized the stage of *Njáls saga* as one of a harmonious agricultural 'plain' (Sletteland). Hence, he enabled his Danish readers to identify the gentle waves, 'the fertile meadows' and 'the yellow fields' which Gunnar had such a strong affection for, with their native Denmark, which is deprived of both mountains and glaciers. In the course of the saga, Bjarni underlined, this harmony was challenged, not dissimilar, we may note, to the way in which the war and the German occupation was affecting Denmark. Bjarni's use of the impersonal pronoun encourages such an interpretation: "Man vælger at blive hjemme og tage Kampen op mod Uvennerne, selv om det har Livsfare i Følge."

#### 4.

The publication of *Islændernes færd*, then, can be seen as an act (however insignificant) of Danish resistance against the German occupation under World War II. It was designed and introduced as a work which would help the Danes to endure and eventually to overcome their alien aggressors. But there were other ideological or political issues at stake. The potential unity of the Scandinavian countries had become highly topical in Denmark during the German occupation and is of consequence for any analysis of *Islændernes færd*. Partially, this emphasis was a response to Nazi ideas about "Germanic" heritage and race; the Danes maintained that they were a "Nordic" nation, culturally distinct from their southern neighbours. Many of them also believed (with both German and British politicians) that Europe, after the war, would consist of a few dominating empires. Denmark's best and even only possibility to maintain its identity and sovereignty was within a political unity of the Scandinavia countries (Gudme 1940, Nielsen 1943). The sources of these ideas included nineteenth-century Romanticism, German philosophy, and developments in Comparative Linguistics. In Denmark they were expounded by people like N.F.S. Grundtvig and N. M. Petersen, and their contemporaries, but such concepts as "Nordic unity" had been developed through the folk-schools and Scandinavian student movements (Engberg 1980).

For decades, the differentiation between the Germanic and the Nordic heritage had been particularly important for the Danes in relation to the controversial borderland of Slesvig (Schleswig), with its mixture of Danish and German speaking inhabitants. For many Danes, these borders were initially the borders between Scandinavia and continental Europe. After two wars between Germany and Denmark, in 1850 and 1864, the duchy was incorporated into the German empire, but at the end of World War I Slesvig was divided between the two nations. The Danish speaking majority of the northern part wanted to unite with Denmark, while the majority of German speaking inhabitants in the

southern part resolved to stay with Germany. With Hitler's rise to power in 1933, German claims for Northern-Slesvig were raised again, heightening the nationalistic tension in the area. Throughout these developments, several Danish movements had fought for the maintenance of Danish/Nordic identity with the people of Slesvig, or Sønderjylland as the Danes customarily referred to it.

In the twenties and thirties, Vilhelm la Cour was an active party in this field, editing the journal *Grønevagten* and writing a voluminous history of Sønderjylland. In the years of 1928-30, he also edited *Edda og Saga*, an anthology of Danish translations from Old Icelandic literature, including abridged versions of Petersen's saga translations. In a brief introduction to the volume, La Cour acknowledged that nobody wanted any longer to deprive the Icelanders and their kinsmen in Norway of the credit for creating this literature, but the Danes were nonetheless grateful for these narratives' portrayal of the Danish national character. Although "the Nordic bond" (Det fællesnordiske) was not the literal unity earlier generations had dreamt of, La Cour asserted, it was still a reality of communal strength -- "vor Rod i et fælles Sprog og en fælles Æt" (La Cour 1928-30, 7-8).

The issue of Slesvig and the theme of Scandinavian heritage was always topical within the folk-school movement. The first Danish folk-school was founded in Rødding in Slesvig in 1844, but moved to Askov, north of the new borders, after Denmark's defeat by Germany in 1864. The rise of National Socialism in Germany in the nineteen-thirties, with its emphasis on "Volk" and the Aryan Germanic heritage, forced the people of the folk-school to make a clear distinction between their own nationalistic agenda and the concept of "folk", and the Nazi ideology. In simplified terms, their definition was that the Nordic identity was one characterised by personal freedom and Christian compassion in contrast to the militant totalitarianism advocated by Hitler and his reign (Nissen 1992).

Arne Sørensen energetically participated in this discourse, writing as early as 1933: "Vi skal ikke bytte Grundtvig væk for Hitler" (Halvorsen 1982, 74). His work, *Det moderne Menneske*, can be sensed as an extension of that statement and the founding of Dansk Samling as its political realization. Having spent a great deal of time in Sønderjylland and attending even some courses at Askov, Sørensen was sensitive to the situation of the area. The German occupation of Denmark, in his view, initially meant that the whole country had suddenly become subjected to the circumstances which the Danish borderers had suffered for decades: "Vi er alle blevet sønderjyder," Sørensen stated soon after the German invasion in 1940 (Halvorsen 1983, 75). Partially, he blamed the disunity of the Scandinavian countries for this state of affairs -- "staar de nordiske Lande ikke sammen, da bliver de Offer for Stormagts politiken eet for eet," he wrote in a pamphlet published by Det tredje Standpunkts forlag in 1942 (Sørensen 1942, 10). Still, he did not envision the creation of a Scandinavian empire, but a decentralised alliance of independent equals, each country maintaining its cultural and political distinctiveness. Under Sørensen's editorship, *Det tredje Standpunkt* tirelessly advocated the unity of Scandinavia in the first

years of the German occupation. Sørensen's plan to publish N. M. Petersen's translations in 1942 can be conceived as a part of the same engagement.

The previous fall Petersen's one-hundred and fiftieth anniversary had been noted in a number of newspaper articles, many of which characterized this first professor of old Nordic languages and literatures at the University of Copenhagen as "En dansk og nordisk Personlighed," to quote one of the titles (Linneball 1941, Nielsen 1941, Fischer 1941). All of these articles made a special note of Petersen's influential translations of the Icelandic sagas; one of the writers even proposed that a new edition was needed (Frederiksen 1941, 6). It was in the spirit of these jubilee articles and Sørensen's publication agenda, that Bjarni M. Gíslason laid a particular emphasis on the character of Petersen and his ideas about Nordic identity in relation to the publication of *Islændernes færð*. Bjarni's discussion of Petersen also imitated La Cour's approach to Grundtvig in the introduction to Saxo.

In his promotional article in *Det tredje Standpunkt*, Bjarni explained how Petersen -- this "dry" (tørre) scholar and writer -- had been able to produce the saga translations in such a "levende, saftfuldt, blødt og kraftigt Sprog":

Aarsagen til, at den er lykkedes ham saa godt, er sikkert den, at han har været med i det Arbejde med hele sin Sjæl. Danmarks ulykkelige Aar efter Englands Overfald paa København og Landets Fattigdom efter Napoleonskrigene fyldte ham med Smerte og Bekymring. Og denne Smerte omsattes i Kærlighed til den nordiske Middelalder, til alt, hvad der var dansk og nordisk. Ligesom Grundtvig og Ingemann prøvede han at vække Folket ved stadig at holde det dets Fortid for Øje. (Bjarni M. Gíslason 1942b, 165)

Bjarni developed the same argument more effectively in the introduction to *Islændernes færð*, amplifying Petersen's life long endeavour to "vække Kærlighed til Nordens Fortid" (Bjarni M. Gíslason 1942a, 10). In this context he quoted Petersen directly:

Der var hos de nordiske Folk en uudslettelig Bevidsthed af, at de var Nordboere, og at de som saadanne stod i en skarp Modsætning til andre Folk mod Syden og Østen, hvilken Bevidsthed heller ikke endnu den Dag i Dag er blevet helt udslettet. Dette, at der nu kan tænkes paa med Alvor og for Alvor, uagtet alle politiske Afsondringer, kan tænkes at tilvejebringe en nøjere Forening af hele Norden, for saaledes at danne et Bolværk imod fremmed, alt for overvejende Indflydelse, viser jo mere en noget andet, at der maa være noget i Norden, som aldrig har været adspaltet. (ibid., 13-14)

Commenting on this paragraph, Bjarni further echoed Sørensen's writing on the same topic, as he maintained that Petersen's ideal had been "indre forenet, men *stjerfoldigt* Norden" (ibid., 14).

Concerning the distinction between Scandinavia and continental Europe, Bjarni noted with a certain astuteness that Petersen had been opposed to French and German influence on the Danish language. Furthermore, he stressed that cultural affinity could not be constrained by "en ydre, fremmed Verdens Betingelser og Begrænsning" or produced with political alliance. Only "spiritual kinship" (aandelige Fællesminder/Aandsminder) were able to instigate people's volition to live in a companionship (ibid., 14-15). Although the

context of this discussion was the development of Scandinavianism before the twentieth century -- the failure of Scandinavian regal and political powers to unite the Nordic countries, either with force or treaties -- it also communicated something about an alien force which was setting conditions upon Denmark and defining its borders in 1942.

But while the similarity between the times and the ideas of Petersen and the situation in Denmark during World War II was slightly veiled in Bjarni's argument, his depiction of the sagas as a genre decisively fused past and present. The times in which this literature came into being, Bjarni wrote, were not "mindre fyldt med Konflikter end vor" (ibid., 7). The basic difference between these two periods, he explained, was that while material controversy (politics and economics) characterized the twentieth century, a contest between heathen and Christian beliefs (religion) had characterized the saga epoch. Better than anything else, the sagas' descriptions of this medieval spiritual contest enabled the modern Danes to realize the positive merging of the Nordic and the Southern in their own culture. One could, of course, be Nordic without being Christian and vice versa, but it had been the combination of the two which had transformed "den hedenske, nordiske Leveform fra at være et *Selvformaal* til at være et universelt Livssyn, der byggede paa Medmenneskelighed" (ibid., 9). In these paragraphs, Bjarni M. Gíslason echoed the arguments which people of the folk-schools had been elaborating since 1933. His concept of "Medmenneskelighed" even vibrated with a faint echo from Sørensen's early writings, with their Christian emphasis on '*Menneske*'.

##### 5.

Bjarni M. Gíslason's introduction to *Islændernes færd* has proven to conform with the publishing agenda and the techniques Det tredje Standpunkts forlag developed in response to the German occupation of Denmark during World War II. That agenda, in turn, harmonises with the policy of resistance carried out by Danish Samling (and its underground groups) and with the general view of the folk-school movement towards the borderland in Jylland and the unity of Scandinavia. Nonetheless, additional information regarding Bjarni's own nationality and his borderline status in Denmark allows us to distinguish some ambiguities in his writings.

A native of Iceland, Bjarni had moved to Denmark in 1933, attending courses in several folk-schools in Sønderjylland in the following years. From 1935 to 1937 he was a student at Askov, feeling the pulse of the Danish/Nordic revival in the area and the competing German policy of expansion (Engberg 1978, 7-8). In the folk-school circles, Bjarni met a prevailing appreciation for old Icelandic literature and culture. He responded to that interest with publications and talks on Icelandic topics, advocating the cultural unity and co-operation between the Scandinavian countries while defending Iceland's political separation from Denmark (Bjarni M. Gíslason 1937; 1946; Sigurður Gunnarsson 1988).

When Iceland acquired sovereignty in 1918, after more than five hundred years of Danish rule, Icelanders were granted the right to cancel all ties with Denmark after 1943. According to a federal agreement from 1918 of the two nations continued to have the same king, dual citizenship, and a common foreign policy. As a result of the German occupation of Denmark on April 9, 1940, the Danish King and the Danish Foreign Office were, practically speaking, out of power. The following day, the Icelandic Alþingi resolved that it would appropriate these powers. A year later it concluded that since Denmark had not been able to fulfil its obligations from 1918, the Icelandic government was of the opinion that the federal laws had already been terminated. Consequently, Alþingi founded the office of governor and proclaimed the foundation of the Icelandic republic. Many Danes thought it was unworthy of Icelanders to cancel the ties with Denmark during the German occupation, and that these matters should wait until the war was over. However, one of the reasons for the rush was that the Icelanders feared that a continuing federation with Denmark would sooner or later lead to German intervention in Icelandic matters.

In 1941, Bjarni M. Gíslason wrote a short article in Danish about the military defense of Iceland ("Beskyttelsen af Island") in which he complained that the Danes did not have an understanding of Iceland's development towards full independence. Instead, Bjarni argued, the Danes were contaminated in this matter by "en krænket Rigspatriotisme", as they maintained that the Icelanders were too few and ineffective to take care of their own matters and the country's military defense (Bjarni M. Gíslason 1946, 23). He countered that in reality the Danes had never been able to defend Iceland, due to Iceland's isolation and the Danish authorities' lack of interest. The contemporary "Militær-Romantik" visions of a united Scandinavia did not propose any change in that respect (ibid., 25), Bjarni continued. He suggested that rather than reacting to their own "great humiliation" (store Ydmygelse) by talking shallowly about how few and feeble the Icelanders were, the Danes should unite with the other Nordic nations in a mutual heritage: "Vor Kraft og Moral bygger paa Idealer, der har ført Norden stedse længere bort fra hedensk Despotisme til en medmenneskelig Erkendelse af hinandens Ret. Det er vor Styrke i Dag." (ibid., 26). Indirectly, Bjarni was suggesting that some Danes still thought about Iceland in the way which the Germans thought of occupied Denmark.

If we review the introduction to *Islændernes færd* from this perspective, it becomes clear that Bjarni's emphasis on the concept of freedom reflects not only on the German occupation of Denmark but also on Icelandic history. The 'years of severe hardship' which, in Bjarni's presentation, had made the Icelanders search back to the sagas, maintaining 'the faith in the freedom', were the centuries of Danish rule in the country. According to Bjarni, it was time for the Danes to turn the tables, to let go of self-serving motives, and comply with the Nordic 'universal principle, based on a human empathy'. The 'united but *diversified* Norden' he anticipated at the end of his introduction was a unity of

independent nations, where Iceland was one among equals. In short, as the Danes felt their own desire for freedom, so should they understand and respect Iceland's.

Bjarni M. Gíslason's summary of *Njáls saga* in the promotional article for *Islændernes færd*, which appeared in *Det tredje Standpunkt*, also acquires a new signification if it is read in view of his position as an Icelander in Denmark. In the discussion above, the decision of Gunnar of Hlíðarendi to stay at home and fight his enemies was interpreted as a Danish model of behaviour under the German occupation. As this summary was originally published under the title "Edda og Saga" in Bjarni's *Glimt fra Nord* in 1937, it must be acknowledged that such a message of resistance may not have been on the author's mind when he wrote the chapter originally (Bjarni M. Gíslason 1937, 131).<sup>3</sup> It is more likely that Bjarni's romanticized description of Gunnar's region incorporated his own contemporary feelings towards Iceland: 'Her bindes man saa stærk af Kærlighed til Jorden, at man vil ingen Steder fare [...] Man vælger at blive hjemme og tage Kampen op mod Uvennerne, selv om det har Livsfare i Følge' The irony is that Bjarni had left his native soil when he wrote these lines, without even being 'exiled'.

But while his identification with Gunnar was contradictory in this respect, Bjarni Gíslason's life-long endeavour to promote the Icelandic perspective among the Danes can be seen as his way of 'fighting the enemies' all the same. (One of the causes Bjarni fought untiringly for was the return of Icelandic manuscripts from Denmark to Iceland; Sigurður Gunnarsson 1988). This is Poul Engberg's view as he recalls how Bjarni annually visited the classes at the Snoghøj folk-school and told the students an Icelandic saga:

Han gjorde det på den samme frie og personlige måde, som saga fortællerne på de islandske gårde benyttede sig af. En af de skønneste ord i sagaerne er Gunnar fra Hlíðarendes ord, da hans venner rådede ham til at flytte fra sin gård for at redde livet fra sine fjenders anslag. Han besluttede sig til at blive trods faren og sagde: "Fager er liden, så den aldrig har syntes mig så skøn, markerne gule og tunene slagne; jeg vil atter ride hjem og ingenstads fare." Selv om Gíslason gennem mange år har levet i Danmark, er hans rodfæstethed til det islandske folk og landskab lige så dyb og urokkelig som Gunnar fra Hlíðarendes." (Engberg 1978, 24)

From Engberg's description we can infer that by recounting the story of Gunnar and other saga heroes, Bjarni matched Gunnar's example of staying at home. The initial moral of the story was not that one should stay at home and fight the enemies, but participate in the maintenance and the continuous dissemination of the saga tradition. In Bjarni's case, narration had replaced action.

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<sup>3</sup> Bjarni may, of course, have seen the paragraph's inspirational potential when he included it in his 1942 article for *Det tredje Standpunkt*. It was, at least, in conformity with the other writings in the journal to perceive Gunnar as a model for Danish resistance.

The present reading of *Islændernes færð* has led us away from saga heroes and 'authors' towards their modern counterparts; men such as Arne Sørensen and Bjarni M. Gíslason. Their history, in my translation, is a saga of literary patronage and hierarchy, constraining textual (re)production in Denmark during World War II. The hierarchy of patrons and textual producers is clearly manifested by *Islændernes færð* since it is represented by three different nationalities, internally involved in political controversies in this period. The German censor constrained the publishing activities of the Danish publisher Arne Sørensen, whose publishing agenda predetermined the promotional writings of Icelander Bjarni M. Gíslason. The publications of Det tredje Standpunkts forlag, including *Islændernes færð*, generally conformed with the constraints of the censor, while concurrently, on a different (disguised) level, they protested the German occupation of Denmark. Moreover, in the writings of Bjarni M. Gíslason, it is possible to detect a third level of signification, relating to the ties between Iceland and Denmark.

In conclusion, *Islændernes færð* brings us to two different fronts of the Danish 'borders' in the nineteen-forties; its geographical borders with Germany and its political borders with Iceland. In fact, this seems to have been a question of 'boundaries' as much as literal borders. What kind of boundaries -- sociological, ideological, economical, and cultural -- should be affirmed internally between the "Nordic" nations of Scandinavia and between them and other "Germanic" nations in Europe. Recent developments and contentions in the European community manifest that this question has not yet been fully answered.

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