

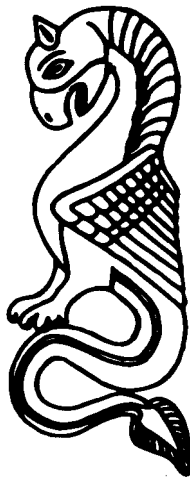
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Anglo-Saxon Poetry in Iceland: The Case of *Brúnaborgar Bardaga Quida*¹

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Though the tale of post-medieval British and North American (re)discovery of Old English and Old Icelandic has been well told in recent times,² that of the equivalent Icelandic exploration of Old English has yet to find a teller.³ A loose quarto leaf included at the end of Lbs. [Landsbókasafn Íslands] MS 800 8vo offers one intriguing grain for truth's pile, from which a more comprehensive narrative might eventually emerge. The manuscript presents the holograph text of *Brúnaborgar Bardaga Quida*, a pioneering Icelandic version of *The Battle of Brunanburh* by Jón Jónsson Espólin (1769-1836), *sýslumaður*, scholar, and saga writer. This text dates from the early nineteenth century, and has never been printed. It is not the only extant Icelandic version of *Brunanburh*, now that Benedikt Gröndal Sveinbjarnarson's incomplete late nineteenth-century text has recently come to light,⁴ but the early date, manuscript environment, and authorial milieu of Jón's version make it worthy of comment.

The principal work in Lbs. MS 800 8vo, written out in Jón Espólin's minute but meticulous hand, is his 404 page Icelandic translation of the poems ascribed to 'Blindr Ossían / Bragsmidr Skota' [Blind Ossian, poet of the Scots].⁵ This remarkable achievement,⁶ its text based almost certainly on the 1807-09 Danish version of Steen Blicher (1782-1848), can be dated to the period between 1810 and Jón's death – a conclusion based partly on internal evidence. With paper always a scarce resource, Jón clearly stored re-usable spare sheets from dated letters received at his various homes (Brekubær, Flugumýri, Viðvík, Frostastaðir), with the first (from 1801) used for fol. 17, and the last (addressed to Frostastaðir, his home from 1822) for fols 365-66. Included with the Ossian manuscript is a separate quarto sheet on which we find the text of Jón's *Brúnaborgar Bardaga Quida*. The document is not a recycled letter, and has no watermarks, but its neat script is identical with (though larger than) that of the

Ossian text. We may reasonably assume that the two translations were done at much the same time.

Jón's primary source for his *Brunanburh* translation was the 'Carmen Anglo-Saxonicum de prælio Brunanburgensi inter Danos et Anglos, Anno 937', as printed (Anglo-Saxon text with parallel Latin translation) in the 1773 second volume of Jacob Langebek's *Scriptores rerum Danicarum mediæ ævi*.⁷ This nine volume compilation, the first seven volumes of which were largely the work of Langebek, was taken over after his death by other accomplished old northern scholars based in Copenhagen, notably Peter Suhm and E. C. Werlauff. Langebek's compendium was an impressive example of the politically-driven, state-sponsored publication of medieval texts relating to Danish history that had begun in the late seventeenth century,⁸ and was to find further expression in the Old Icelandic text series published in Copenhagen from the 1770s under the auspices of the Arnamagnæan Commission. Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín's *Beowulf* text and translation, published in 1815, may be viewed as an integral part of these activities.⁹

As with Jón Espólín's *Brúnaborgar Bardaga Quida*, the Old English text for Benedikt Gröndal Sveinbjarnarson's late nineteenth-century 'Carmen de proelio Brunanburgensi' was also 'ritað eptir Langebek' [copied from Langebek], but Gröndal was aware that his source was 'víða rángt' [in many places incorrect],¹⁰ and he had been able to correct the text from the version established in the first volume of C. W. M. Grein's *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa* (1872-1933).¹¹ There was no such safety net for Jón Espólín earlier in the century: he had been flying blind with only Langebek's problematic primary text and Latin translation(s) to guide him. Jón is most likely to have encountered *Scriptores rerum Danicarum mediæ ævi* during his three years as a student in Copenhagen from May 1789. Unlike his fellow countrymen Grímur Thorkelín, Finnur Magnússon and Þorleifur Repp, he seems to have had no sustained contact with contemporary British scholars and antiquaries, and is thus unlikely to have been aware of the stirrings of interest in *Brunanburh* in England at this time. For instance, Thomas Warton's prose translation had been included in the first edition of his *History of English Poetry* (1774-81),¹² and by the time that Jón was at work on his own version, a revised and generously annotated new edition had appeared (in 1824),¹³ but these versions, along with that by James Ingram (1823; verse),¹⁴ will almost certainly have passed him by.

It is just possible that during his Copenhagen years Jón may have come across George Hickes's pioneering *Linguarum vett. septentrionalium thesaurus*

grammatico-criticus et archæologicus (1703-05). This massive collection makes available both an Old English text of *Brunanburh* and Henry of Huntingdon's twelfth-century Latin version of the poem.¹⁵ Hickes is also almost certainly the first scholar to draw attention to the metrical and stylistic comparability of Old English alliterative verse and Old Icelandic *fornyrðislag*, by printing on adjacent pages extracts from *The Fight at Finnsburh* and *The Waking of Angantýr* (from *Hervarar saga*). By highlighting similarities of kenning usage within the two traditions, Hickes put down a marker for future exploration of the topic,¹⁶ and his insight eventually caught the eye of Thomas Warton, who notes that *Brunanburh* 'and many other Saxon odes and songs now remaining, are written in a metre much resembling that of the scaldic dialogue at the tomb of Angantýr'.¹⁷

It is likely, however, that Jón Espólin had to reinvent this particular wheel for himself, and we may say that he makes a remarkably resourceful and intelligent job of it. *Brúnaborgar Bardaga Quida* bears ample witness to Jón's philological ingenuity and energy. With the help of Langebek's notes and appendices, he crumbles the Old English text through his fingers, relishing the linguistic challenge it poses and the prosodic continuities it hints at. Jón had known the Eddas and sagas of his native land since he was a child, of course, and draws deftly on his accumulated knowledge when creating his own pastiche sagas such as *Sagan af Hálfðani gamla og sonum hans*. That work's archaised vocabulary and specially-crafted *fornyrðislag* verses may well have been designed to trick or tease the Copenhagen scholarly mafia,¹⁸ and such ventriloquial gifts made Jón the ideal man to exploit the similarities of alliteration, compound vocabulary, formulaic phrase, and narrative motif in the earliest poetic traditions of two North Atlantic islands. Jón duly adopted the Eddic *fornyrðislag*, with its pattern of interlinear alliteration, as the medium best suited for the *Brunanburh* text, as did his contemporaries Jón Þorláksson and Jónas Hallgrímsson when translating English and European poetry.¹⁹

The text presented here is a relatively conservative one that seeks to preserve Jón's spellings, word division, capitalisation, and unstandardised accents; *d* for *ð* is retained throughout, but some clarificatory punctuation has been added. Jón provides occasional annotation, some of which is cited. A relatively unvarnished English translation is provided:

Ræsir herjarla,	Lord of battle-earls,
recka hringiafi,	ring-giver of men,
Harri Adalsteinn	King Athelstan,

hliri með Iatmundi bardist at broddaleiki brondum eggskaurpum, gátu frægd æfilánga gylfar at borg Bruna.	brother alongside Edmund, fought at spear-play, with sharp-edged swords; they won life-long fame, heroes at Brunaburh.	5
Kiaurmegir Iátvards klufu þar brióstvarnir, hiuggu dyra skiauldu, hellz var þeim kynlagit landi vaurn veita fyr víkinga lidi hefd og heimkynni, móti hverjum fianda.	Edward's select band breached breast-defences there, hewed precious shields; it was most in their nature to offer defence to land, against a viking horde, honour and home, against every foe.	10 15
Valr fell þar Skota, víkingar Dana hnigu ²⁰ œrinn var þó fyrstada afl þeim lengi dugdi, hlumdi gaurd harla, hraustir kappar dou, frá því er glófaugr Guds drottins sunna gyltti glæstann dag til þess geck í ægi nidr.	The Scottish slain fell there, Danish vikings fell, though in opposition their strength long sufficed, assaulted the stronghold fiercely; bold heroes died, from when the radiant sun of the Lord God gilded the shining day until it went down into the sea.	20 25
Kappar lágu Skota und kaustum spióta, Skytar og Nordannmenn med skiauldum daudir, elltu Vestr-Saxar alla daglángann rackir at brandslógum reidmenn óvina.	Heroes laid low Scots under the casting of spears – Scots and Norsemen dead among the shields; the West Saxons chased all day long the bold ones at blade-clashes, enemy horsemen.	30
Hiuggu flugargiaurnum hálsa ok baktygi,	They hewed those eager to flee, necks and back-armour,	35

brustu við brynhringar	broke mail-rings,	
búkar rofnudu,	bodies were destroyed;	
skyrir beittu skioldungar	cunning kings wielded	
skorpum kvernbytum,	sharp swords;	40
spordu eigi Merkimenn	the Mercians did not spare	
spíot eða hógg mikil,	spears or mighty blows,	
atgaungr afarlegar,	mighty attacks,	
orku gyldega,	great force	
þeim er með Ólafi	against those who with Óláfr	45
of ægi á sneckjum komu.	came from the sea in ships.	

Lágu á vígvelli,	Lay on the battlefield,	
lamdir sverdhoggum	struck down with sword blows,	
ungir jaufrar fimm,	five young kings –	
oc þó allhvassir,	though very fierce;	50
earlar sio samann	seven jarls together,	
þeir er Ólafi fylgdu,	who followed Óláfr;	
hundmaurg þíod skota,	a mighty band of Scots,	
oc af hafi vikingar;	and vikings from the sea;	
hilmir Nordmanna ²¹	a chief of the Northmen,	55
hrauck einn til skeyda,	slunk off to a ship –	
fleytti fálidadr	launched with a few followers	
á flod hid skúmhvíta,	onto the frothy-white flood;	
braugnum var hann horfin	from men did he disappear,	
barg svo lífi sínu.	saved thus his life.	60

Kænn var Constantinus	Canny was Constantine.	
komst hann á flug undann,	He escaped by flight,	
hermadr inn hári	the lofty warrior,	
til heima norðr vinna,	to head home to the north,	
hældit vopnaleiki,	he gloried in weapon-play;	65
hnigi hans frændr allir,	all his kinsfolk fell,	
vinir á vígflautu,	friends on the battle-field,	
og vaskr arfþegi,	and his valiant heir,	
ungr í brynju lá	young in armour, lay	
þar eptir helfærðr.	there, death bound.	70

Kunni né inn bleikhári kæni herjaufr at þat happi hrósa, né Oláfr bardaga, þeir eda herr þeirra þurftut frægd hæla í vopnydiu kappa þars vaullu nár þakti, sverd of hátt glumdu enn saung í spiotflugum oc járnnum skipta skyldi vid látvards erfivaurdu.	The bleached-haired one could not, canny battle-lord, boast of that good luck; nor Óláfr of the battle; (neither) they nor their army needed to boast of glory in armed conflict, where the dead covered the battlefield; swords clashed noisily, still sang in spear-flights, and would have sword-dealings with Edward's heirs.	75 80
Leif styrdi Nordann-manna litud var hún vigblodi, seymdum sneckjum sínum á sæ afardjupann, of vedrmeginn ægis, vegords andvana, allt til Dyflinnar þars Irar bygd halda.	The rest of the Norsemen steered – stained were they with battle-blood – their studded long-ships, out on the deep ocean, to the windy region of the sea, bereft of glory – all the way to Dublin, where the Irish are settled.	85 90
Barmar hvurfu bádir, brondum hulidum Englaver og audlingr ²² endr af heidi nordann heim til Vestr Saxa, hófdu getit ærmann sigr, leifdu val gulum póddum landmyra, vórgum allmorgum er vida til sott.	Both brothers disappeared with hidden brands. The defender of Angles and leader, formerly from the northern heath, home to the West Saxons, had won victory enough; they left the slain to the yellow frogs of the marshes, to the many wolves who ravaged far and wide.	95 100
Hrafn kom þar búgnefr, hinn hási fenja byggvir, fugl inn fótguli, glodi fliugandi,	A bent-nosed raven came there, the hoarse dweller of the fens, the yellow-footed fowl, gleaming in flight;	

glenta kom in grádga, oc inn grábeini ulfr af eydimaurku, átu þar verd mikinn.	came the greedy-mouthed one, and the grey-boned one, a wolf from the marches – they ate there a mighty meal.	105
Ár varat á eyju í inum aldrænum skrám þar skata getit skjómum eggfránum fleiri veginna, sídz foru um haf austann ²³ Saxar oc sudr Englar at sækja land Breta, þá Vali gátu sigra og vaska jarla felldu, Visar inir veggjornu, Vodans attkonir. ²⁴	Not in the early – in the ancient – annals of the isles, is mention made there, with sharp-edged swords, of greater slaughter of men, since from the east went Saxons and South Angles to visit the land of the Britons; then they defeated the Welsh and slew valiant jarls – the leaders eager for glory, the kindred of Woden.	110 115 120

A comparison of ll. 27-36 in Jón's translation with the equivalent passage in the Benedikt Gröndal version (ll. 23-32; quoted with the emended version of Langebek's Old English text from which he worked) helps to identify the different priorities of the two translators.²⁵ First Gröndal:

Skota lýðir ok skip-flotnar feigir féllu fold dunaði seggja sveita síðan sunna upp um morgun tíð mæra túngl leið yfir grundir guðs kyndill bjartr eílifs dróttins unz at hin ágæta aðal skepna seig at setri	Sceotta léoðe and scip-flotan fæge feollon feld dynade (dennede) secga sváté siððan sunne up on morgen tíð mære tungol glað ofer grundas godes condel beorht eces dryhtnes oþ þæt sió æthele gesceaft sah to setle
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These lines bear the mark of a *jeu d'esprit*, as one of nineteenth-century Iceland's most accomplished wordsmiths celebrates the ease with which cognate Icelandic forms can be found to accommodate and mimic the Old English phraseology.²⁶ Translation borders on transliteration, not out of insecurity or lack of imagination, but as a display of linguistic ingenuity. The Espólín version of these same lines presents a different stylistic face to the world:

Valr fell þar Skota,	
víkingar Dana hnigu	
cærin var þó fyrstada	
afl þeim lengi dugdi,	20
hlumdi gaurd harla,	
hraustir kappar dou,	
frá því er glófaugr	
Guds drottins sunna	
gyllti glæstann dag	25
til þess geck í ægi nidr.	

Though Jón is alert to parallels between Old English and Icelandic vocabulary other priorities are also identifiable. For instance, we may note the pattern of Eddic echo and allusion established here, as where *valr* (l. 27) [those slain in battle] recalls the fateful valkyries at *kiosa val* [selecting the slain]. Jón's response to *feld dynede* involves the rare Eddic verb *hlymja* (l. 31) rather than the more prosaic *dynja*. And Jón's sun sinks with more residual mythological resonance – *geck í ægi nidr* (l. 36) [went down in the sea] – than does Gröndal's, which, in more courtly fashion, *seig at setri* [sank to its setting/abode]. The elaboration of *gyllti glæstann dag* (l. 35) [gilded the shining day] recalls the enamelled diction of skaldic verse, though only by sacrificing the formulaic variation in the Old English 'Godes condel beorht / Eces Dryhtnes', an element eventually restored by Gröndal in 'guðs kyndill bjartir / eilífs dróttins' [bright candle of God, of the Eternal Lord]. Lastly, by generating two verbs, *fell* (l. 27) and *hnigu* (l. 28), to cover OE *feollan*, Jón achieves his own variation, albeit at the loss of the bleak simplicity of *Brunanburh*, where the same verb governs the fate shared by the doomed warriors on both sides.

The stylistic characteristics signalled in these lines are confirmed by Jón's treatment of preceding sixteen lines with which the poem opens. The Icelandic version is accompanied here by Langebek's unamended Old English text:

Ræsir herjarla,	ÆDELSTAN Cyning.	
recca hringiafi,	Eorla Drihten.	
Harri Adalsteinn	Beorna beah-gyfa.	
hlira med Iatmundi	And his brodor eac <i>Eadmund</i> ædeling.	
bardist at broddaleiki	Ealdor langne tyr.	5
bróndum eggskaurpum,	Geslohgon æt secce.	
gátu frægd æfilánga	Sveorda ecgum.	
gylfar at borg Bruna.	Ymbe <i>Brunanburh</i> .	
Kiaurmegir Iátvards	Bord-veal clufan.	
klufu þar brióstvarmir,	Heovan headolinde.	10
hiuggu dyra skiauldu,	Hamora lafan.	
hellz var þeim kynlagit	Afaran EADVEARDES	
landi vaurn veita	Sva him geædele væs.	
fyr víkinga lidi	From cneo-mægum.	
hefd og heimkynni,	Thaer hie æt campe.	15
móti hverjum fianda.	Oft vid ladra gehvæne.	
	Land ealgodon.	
	Hord and hamas hettend crungun.	

The Norsemen may have come second at the real Battle of Brunanburh, but Jón's energies seem devoted here to ensuring that old northern poetic tradition wins the replay nine centuries later. He immediately winches up the stylistic register by deploying medieval poetic vocabulary, as with *ræsir* (l. 1), *harri* (l. 3), *hliri* (l. 4), and *gylfar* (l. 8); and he finds additional metaphoric colour and complexity as *secce* becomes *broddaleiki* (l. 5), and *Sveorda ecgum* re-emerges as *bróndum eggskaurpum* (l. 6). And if *Hamora lafan* proves to be a kenning too far for him, Jón adopts a deft solution – *hellz var þeim kynlagit* (l. 12) – for the potentially tricky *Sva him geædele væs*; he finds a matching triad – *landi* (l. 13) / *hefd* / *heimkynni* (l. 15) – for *land* [. . .] *hord and hamas*; and senses the parallels between *clufan* [. . .] *Heovan* and *klufu* (l. 10) / *hiuggu* (l. 11). As for *hettend*, no English translator of *Brunanburh* during Jón's lifetime used 'viking' as the naturalised English form of Old Icelandic *víkingr*. The word was virtually unknown in Britain until the beginning of the nineteenth century, and took its time thereafter to achieve its full romantic resonance; whereas Jón's *fyr víkinga*

lidi (l. 14) reminds us that *vikingr* had been an integral part of the Icelandic literary word-hoard for a thousand years.

After this opening flourish the stylistic register is taken down a notch or two, as Jón's translation responds deftly to the rhetorical challenges of the original – the kennings, the litotes, the formulaic motifs, and the concluding authenticating glance towards the *bec* [. . .] / *Ealde udvitan* [books [. . .] aged sagas] of the Langebek Old English original. An occasional error catches the eye, as in Jón's improbable augmentation of the familiar beasts of battle topos.²⁷ As comparison with Campbell's 1938 Old English edition confirms, the Langebek version used by Jón represented quite a challenge to any Enlightenment-Age Anglo-Saxonist, no matter how accomplished:

Lætan him behyndan.
 Hræfn *Bryttian*
 Salu vipadan
 And thone sveartan hrefn.
 Hymned nebban
 And thane hasean padan.
 Earn æftan hvit æses brucan.
 Grædigne gud-hafoc.
 And thæt græ-gedeor wulf on vælde.²⁸ (Langebek)

Letan him behindan *hræ* bryttian
 saluwigpadan, þone sweartan hræfn,
 hymnednebban, and þane *hasupadan*
 earn æftan hwit, æses brucan
 grædigne guðhafoc ond þæt græge deor,
 wulf on wealde.²⁹ (Campbell)
 [They left behind them, corpses to enjoy,
 the dark-plumed one, the black raven,
 horny-beaked, and the dun-plumed one,
 the eagle, white of tail, carrion to enjoy,
 greedy war-bird, and that grey beast,
 wolf in the wood]

Variant readings, both helpful (hasean padan: *hasopadan*) and unhelpful (Hræfn Bryttian: *hrav Bryttigean*), are supplied by the Danish editor, as are two

paraphrastic Latin translations in which ingenuity and inaccuracy vie for supremacy:

Ergo corvus niger ore cornutus, & buffo liuens, aqvila cum milvo, canis, lupusque mixtus colore, his sunt deliciis diu recreati.

[And so the black crow, horned in its mouth/beak, and the dark-coloured toad, and the eagle with the kite, and the dog, and the wolf of mingled colour—by these delicacies were they long refreshed] (Henry of Huntington, twelfth century)

Corvus Britannos esca emunxit, & iste niger corvus, fronte cornutus, lividusque bufo. Aqvila albam escam secuta, milvo usa [sic] voraci intestino, lupusque dominio voracior. [The crow despoiled the Britons with its booty, and it is a black crow, horned in its beak, and the toad too is bluish-black. The eagle is in pursuit of the white tid-bit, and so too is the kite, which uses its voracious stomach, and so too does the wolf, more voracious in its dominion] (Abraham Wheloc, 1644)³⁰

With such uncertain guidance at Jón's disposal, it is hardly surprising that Langebek's 'Lætan him behyndan / Hræfn *Bryttian* / Salu vipadan' unravels into 'leifdu val gulum / poddum landmyra' (ll. 98-99) [they left the slain to the yellow frogs of the marshes]. After all, even Anglo-Saxon scribes had stumbled over *saluwigpadan* and *hasupadan*.³¹ That *gulum poddum* [*pöddum*] could emerge, with no encouragement from the Latin versions, shows that Jón had his eye on the Old English text,³² which could have suggested an Icelandic noun phrase along the lines of *söl padda* [sallow/yellow frog].³³ We might add, however, that it is not clear what sort of creature Jón may have understood by an Icelandic *padda*, for what the famously brief seventy-second chapter in *The Natural History of Iceland* (1758) says of snakes – 'No snakes of any kind are to be met with in the whole of Island'³⁴ – could just as easily have been said of frogs.

To set against Jón's struggle with the beasts of battle, we may note several more positive features. Firstly, in the manuscript Jón favours a stanzaic presentation of the poem (the first line of each new verse is inset slightly) which anticipates the arrangement to be found in Alfred Lord Tennyson's 1880

translation of *Brunanburh*.³⁵ Secondly, the careful treatment of 'Leif styrði Norðann-manna / [. . .] seymdum sneckjum sínum' (ll. 84, 86) [The remnants of the Norsemen steered their studded long-ships] is impressive. This reading accords with Langebek's gloss on *dreorig dara tha laf* (OE *laf* linked with Latin *reliqvīa* and Old Icelandic *leif*)³⁶ and ignores the siren voices of Henry of Huntingdon and Wheloc (both quoted by Langebek) who associate *laf* with a named individual, Anlaf/Anlavus (Óláfr). Thirdly, the battle depiction seems more three-dimensional in Jón's version. At the point where the Old English poet tells how the West Saxons 'Heovon here-flyman / Hindan thearle mecum / Mylen scearpan' [fiercely they hewed down from behind with mill-sharp swords those who fled], Jón's Icelandic (ll. 35-43) projects additional physicality onto the conflict's ebb and flow. Fourthly, in that same passage the transformation of *mecum / Mylen scearpan* into *skorpum kvernbytum* attracts one of the translator's more intriguing marginal notes: 'Þar kenningin er þvilík Engil Saxeyskum; hefi eg leidd mer i hug ad þeir brædr hafi att sverd svo kollud eins og það Adalsteinn gaf Hakoni, sem hafi verid reind í því sama, því traudt muna Engil Saxar k[e]n[n]t hafa vid hans sverd' [here the kenning is similar to the Anglo-Saxon (one). It has occurred to me that the brothers (Athelstan and Edmund) may have had swords with names similar to the one for the sword that Athelstan gave to Hákon, swords which were put to the test in the same (battle), for the Anglo-Saxons will hardly have named their swords after his]. Jón wonders whether *Brunanburh*'s 'mill-sharp swords' expression may derive indirectly from *Kvernbitr*, the name by which the sword given to King Hákon góði Haraldsson by his English foster-father King Athelstan came to be known, after the precocious Hákon had split a mill-stone with it.³⁷ Perhaps the fame of that original weapon and its name encouraged the brothers to create equivalent Old English names for their own swords, with that term eventually finding expression in the Old English poem. And, we may add, perhaps it did not!

If the language and style of *Brúnaborgar Bardaga Quida* have their intriguing features, so does the cultural politics underpinning it. For all his interest in British literature, as confirmed by his translations from the Ossianic corpus and of *Brunanburh*, Jón was certainly not motivated by the pro-English political preoccupations of several of his scholarly fellow countrymen. For Icelanders such as Þorleifur Repp (who lived in Edinburgh 1826-37)³⁸ and Eiríkur Magnússon (in Cambridge from the mid 1860s until his death in 1913),³⁹ the relentless assertion

of medieval cultural affinities between England and Iceland was part of a dedicated strategy to loosen the hold of modern Danish political control over their native land, by drawing attention to alternative cultural-political compatibilities with the British Isles. Thus, for Repp and Eiríkur the identification of linguistic parallels between Icelandic and English medieval literature represents a prelude to political action. Jón Espólín had good reason to see things differently. He was a *sýslumaður*, a regional official in Iceland, responsible to the Danish government for law and order. He was, moreover, a poacher turned game-keeper—the dissolute, debt-ridden, billiard-playing student reprobate who become an energetic functionary of the Danish crown, touring the valleys of north Iceland on horseback, fighting the good fight against drink, debauchery, dodgy dealing, and disputed paternity suits.⁴⁰ Thoughts of devoting his poetical and philological energies to the cause of challenging Danish authority in Iceland will have been far from his mind. Moreover, we may note that the prefatory matter to the second volume (containing *Brúnaborga Bardaga Quida*) of Langebek's *Scriptores rerum Danicarum medii ævi* would have reminded him, had any reminder been needed, of where the loyalties of Icelandic civil servants such as himself should lie. The volume is dedicated to the young Crown Prince Frederik, 'Principi Haeredi Daniaë, Norvegiæ, Vandalorum, Gothorumque, Ducis Slesvici, Holstatiaë, Stormariaë, et Ditmarsiaë, Comiti in Oldenburgo et Delmenhorst' [Heir Apparent to the Danes, Norwegians, Vandals, and Goths; Duke of Slesvic, Holsten, Stormarn, Ditmarsken; Count of Oldenburg and Delmenhorst]. Such ceremonial fanfares recall the warfare by dedication that marked the publications of Swedish and Danish scholars of the old north during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴¹ The Langebek volumes ensured that this loyalist spirit continued to resonate well into the nineteenth century, providing a counterpoint to the emerging pulse of Icelandic romantic nationalism.

Jón's scholarly preoccupation is with history in all its shapes and sizes. As his chronicle-style narratives reveal, no-one knew better than he what was going on in his native Skagafjörður,⁴² and his breezy accounts of national events over several centuries enjoyed widespread popularity.⁴³ Jón's fascination with Ossian and the Langebek *Brúnanburh* may be seen as part of his deep-rooted interest in the re-imagining and re-narration of medieval history, both European and from further afield. Unlike his *Íslands Árbækur í sögu-formi*, which were published in Copenhagen (by Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1821-55), only two of his more specialist historical narratives found a publisher (in Iceland), and that was twenty years after his death.⁴⁴ Ossian's works certainly had their admirers in Iceland,⁴⁵

but Jón's lengthy page translation may have seemed rather too much of a good thing for even the boldest nineteenth-century publisher at sixty-six degrees north. As for *Brúnaborgar Bardaga Quida*, it is not hard to imagine such a work finding a ready readership in journals such as *Skirnir* or *Eimreiðin*, but there is no evidence that Jón ever sought publication. So it is that the poem was left to gather dust and damp among the translator's papers, a silent witness, firstly, to the inquisitive and enterprising spirit of a still under-rated Icelandic writer in whose work Philology and Mercury found a surprisingly happy marriage; and, secondly, to the completion of a virtuous cultural circle, whereby an Old English poem originally influenced by Old Icelandic poetry,⁴⁶ is eventually re-absorbed into Icelandic literary tradition.

NOTES

¹ I am grateful to Jim Binns, Robert Cook, Magnús Fjalldal, Tom Shippey and Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson for commenting helpfully on parts of this paper; and to Sjöfn Kristjánsdóttir and Aðalgeir Kristjánsson in the Handritadeild of Landsbókasafn Íslands for deciphering several problematic manuscript readings. Responsibility for errors that remain is mine alone.

² See, for example, Timothy Graham, *The Recovery of Old English: Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2000); *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, ed. by Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997); Roberta Frank, 'The Battle of Maldon: Its Reception, 1726-1906', in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.*, ed. by Helen Damico and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1993), pp. 29-46; Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000).

³ Though a good start has been made by Magnús Fjalldal, *Anglo-Saxon England in Icelandic Medieval Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

⁴ Sverrir Tómasson, "'Iarlar árhvatir / Iörð um gátu": Þýðingar Benedikts Gröndals Sveinbjarnarsonar úr fornensku', in *Skorrdæla: Gefin út í minningu Sveins Skorra Höskuldssonar*, ed. by Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir and Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2003), pp. 179-86.

⁵ Finnur Magnússon's phrase in his *Minnis-Ljóð um Jón Milton ok Jón Þorláksson til Herra Jóns Heaths M.A., frá Íslendingum* (København: [n. pub.], 1829), p. 3.

⁶ Discussed in Andrew Wawn, 'Óðinn, Ossian and Iceland', in *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni: sjötugum 10. apríl 1994*, ed. by Gísli Sigurðsson, Guðrún Kvaran and Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, 2 vols (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1994), II, 829-40.

⁷ *Scriptores rerum Danicarum medii ævi*, ed. by Jakob Langebek and others (Copenhagen: Joh. Phil. Bockenhoffer, 1772-1878).

⁸ The political rivalry between Denmark and Sweden found expression in feverish philological activity in both countries: see Mats Malm, 'Áhugi á íslenskum handritum á Norðurlöndum', in *Handritin: Ritgerðir um íslensk miðaldahandrit, sögu þeirra og áhrif*, ed. by Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2002), pp. 101-08.

⁹ *De Danorum rebus gestis secul. III & IV. Poëma danicum dialecto anglosaxonica* (Copenhagen: Th. E. Rangel, 1815).

¹⁰ Sverrir Tómasson, in *Skorrdæla*, p. 181.

¹¹ Sverrir Tómasson, in *Skorrdæla*, p. 183.

¹² Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century*, 3 vols (London: Dodsley, 1774-81), I, Sig. e3^v-e4^v.

¹³ Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century*, 4 vols (London: Tegg, 1824), I, pp. lxxxvii-cii.

¹⁴ In James Ingram, *The Saxon Chronicle: With an English Translation, and Notes, Critical and Explanatory* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1823), pp. 141-45.

¹⁵ George Hickes, *Linguarum vet. septentrionalium thesaurus grammatico-criticus et archæologicus*, 2 vols (Oxford: Theatro Sheldoniano, 1703-05), I, 181-82 (Old English version), pp. xiv-xv (Henry of Huntingdon version).

¹⁶ Hickes, *Thesaurus*, I, 192-93. See Christine Fell, 'The First Publication of Old Norse Literature in England and its Relation to its Sources', in *The Waking of Angantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture*, ed. by Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, Acta Jutlandica LXXI: I, Humanities Series, 70 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), pp. 27-57.

¹⁷ Warton, *History* (1774-81), I, Sig. e4^v.

¹⁸ Olai Skulerud, *Catalogue of Norse Manuscripts in Edinburgh, Dublin and Manchester* (Kristiania: Moestues, 1918), p. 14; P. E. Muller, *Sagabibliothek*, 3 vols (København: Schultz, 1817-20), II, 672-75.

¹⁹ See Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, *Arfur og umbylting: Rannsókn á íslenskri rómantik* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag og ReykjavíkurAkademían, 1999), pp. 315-25.

²⁰ Jón notes: 'Olafur Skota Konungur var Danskr, at móderni frá Ragnari Lodbrok; hans er því eins getid í Egils sögu, enn Constantinus Skota Konungur veitti honum lid, og Vikingar ad auki' [Óláfr, King of the Scots, was Danish on his mother's side, from Ragnarr loðbrók; he is referred to as such in *Egils saga*; and Constantine, King of the Scots, offered him support, as did vikings].

²¹ Jón's note: 'annadhvort herkongr einhverr eda Olafur sialfr, sem eins og Danskur, kann hafa verid kalladr Nordmadr af Engli Soxum, enn Egils saga segir hann hafi fallid' [either some warrior king or Óláfr, King of the Scots, himself, who, as a Dane, could have been called a Norseman by the Anglo-Saxons – but *Egils saga* says that he fell (in the battle)].

²² Jón's note identifies this figure as 'Íátmundur' [Edmund].

²³ Jón's note offers 'síðann' [later] as an alternative.

²⁴ Jón's note: 'Saxa Odins afkomendr, Engil Saxa konungur sem þeir kolludu Vodan' [Descendants of Óðinn of the Saxons, the Anglo-Saxon king whom they called Woden].

²⁵ Sverrir Tómasson, in *Skorrdæla*, p. 181; *Scriptores rerum Danicarum medii ævi*, II, 414.

²⁶ Gröndal's literary milieu is discussed illuminatingly in Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, *Arfur og umbylting*, pp. 176-205.

²⁷ See M. S. Griffith, 'Convention and Originality in the Old English "Beasts of Battle" Typescene', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 22 (1992), 179-99. On the distinction between Old English elegiac and Old Icelandic triumphalist deployment of this topos, see Judith Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves: Beasts of Battle, Symbols of Victory and Death', in *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century*, ed. by Judith Jesch (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), pp. 251-80. Jón Espólin's fondness for Ossianic melancholy as well as for *fornaldarsögur* bravado will have enabled him to accommodate both traditions.

²⁸ *Scriptores rerum Danicarum medii ævi*, II, 418-49.

²⁹ *The Battle of Brunaburh*, ed. by Alistair Campbell (London: Heinemann, 1938), p. 94.

³⁰ *Scriptores rerum Danicarum medii ævi*, II, 421.

³¹ On these problematic readings, see *Brunaburh*, ed. by Campbell, pp. 90-91, 135, 142; *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. by Elliott van Kirk Dobbie (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), p. 19; and Peter Orton, *The Transmission of Old English Poetry* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 89, 105.

³² At l. 51 we even find him accidentally writing *eorlas* for **iarlas*.

³³ A similarly associative moment seems to have produced Thomas Warton's 'hoarse toad' for *hasupadan*, though his 'dark-blue toad' for *saluwigpadan* indicates dependence on Wheloc's Latin.

³⁴ Niels Horrebøw, *A Natural History of Iceland* (London: Linde, 1758), translated from the 1752 Danish original. Quoting the chapter in its entirety was a favourite 'party piece' of Dr Samuel Johnson.

³⁵ Discussed in Edward B. Irving, 'The Charge of the Saxon Brigade: Tennyson's *Battle of Brunanburh*', in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons*, ed. by Donald G. Scragg and Carole Weinburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 174-93.

³⁶ *Scriptores rerum Danicarum medii ævi*, II, 418.

³⁷ *Flateyjarbók*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal, 4 vols (Reykjavík: Prentverk Akraness, 1944), I, 48.

³⁸ Andrew Wawn, *The Anglo-Man: Þorleifur Repp, Philology and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Reykjavík: Bókautgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1991), pp. 105-32, 203-12.

³⁹ Andrew Wawn, 'Fast er drukkið og fátt lært': *Eiríkur Magnússon, Old Northern Philology and Victorian Cambridge* (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, 2001), pp. 12-20.

⁴⁰ On Jón, see Ingi Sigurðsson, *The Historical Works of Jón Espólin and His Contemporaries* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1972); also 'Jón Espólin: eftir sjálfan hann', in *Merkir Íslendingar*, ed. by Þorkell Jóhannesson, 5 vols (Reykjavík: Bókfellsútgáfan, 1947-57), V, 126-292.

⁴¹ The prefatory material accompanying Jakob Reenhielm's edition of *Thorstens Viikings-sons Saga på gammal Göthska* (Upsala: Curio, 1680) is a good case in point.

⁴² Jón Espólín and Einar Bjarnarson, *Saga frá Skagfirðingum, 1685-1847*, ed. by Kristmundur Bjarnason, Hannes Pétursson and Ögmundur Helgason, 4 vols (Reykjavík: Íðunn, 1976-79).

⁴³ Jón Espólín, *Íslands Árbækur í sögu-formi*, 12 vols (Kaupmannahöfn: Hið Íslenska Bókmentafélag, 1821-55).

⁴⁴ *Sögur Sólonns hins spaka og Platons heimspekings* (Akureyri: Jón Borgfirðingur, 1858); *Langbarða sögur, Gota ok Húna* (Akureyri: Prentsmiðja Norðr- og Austr-umdæmisins, 1859).

⁴⁵ Helgi Þórláksson, 'Ossian, Jónas, and Grímur', *Mimir*, 14 (1969), 22-33; Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, *Arfur og umbylting*, p. 324.

⁴⁶ The case is argued in John D. Niles, 'Skaldic Technique in *Brunanburh*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 59 (1987), 356-66; see also Roberta Frank, 'Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences Have a Skaldic Tooth?', *Scandinavian Studies*, 59 (1987), 338-55.