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THE ICELANDIC ENLIGHTENMENT AS AN EXTENDED PHENOMENON

The Enlightenment is a many-sided phenomenon, with different emphases in individual countries, and the period when its influence was greatest differs from country to country. In Icelandic historiography the period traditionally associated with the movement is from c. 1770 to c. 1830. This article examines how the Icelandic Enlightenment can be regarded as an extended phenomenon in that it also exerted considerable influence in the last two-thirds of the 19th century and the early 20th century. The social conditions that contributed to this long period of influence of the movement are dealt with. Among the themes given special attention are the impact of ideas of progress derived from the Enlightenment, the way in which the movement influenced the nationalistic ideas of the Icelanders, and how the emphasis of the champions of the Enlightenment on providing ordinary people with education by means of publication of educational works remained as a guiding principle.

Keywords Enlightenment, Iceland, nationalism, romanticism

Introduction

During the last few decades, there has been a growing tendency in research on the Enlightenment to examine it not only in the 18th century but also in the first few decades of the 19th, and also to consider the characteristics of the movement in individual countries.[1] Thus, a collection of articles, *The Enlightenment in National Context*, edited by Roy Porter and Mikulaš Teich, was published as early as 1981. It has been a matter of debate how to distinguish the influence of the Enlightenment from that of other intellectual currents, such as liberalism and positivism. This matter will be dealt with further below in connection with the notion of progress in Iceland. It is important to note in this connection that while ideas of progress and a belief in the improvement of mankind were by no means totally new in the Enlightenment, the movement continued to influence later ideological currents through its emphasis on these issues. There has also been a growing tendency to investigate the Enlightenment not only in connection with the secular ideological currents to which it is most closely related, but also in a wider context. As an example of such work, an article, 'Romanticism and the Early Aufklārung' by Frederick C. Beisner, can be mentioned.[2]

In Iceland, the traditional view of the Enlightenment as a major source of influence in the first few decades of the 19th century is without doubt due, in part, to the fact that the man who is rightly regarded as its main champion, Magnús Stephensen (1762–1833),

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Chief Justice of the High Court of Iceland, dominated the cultural scene in Iceland during this period. His position was secured through his control over book publishing in the country for more than three decades.[3] Since the middle of the 20th century, the period from the latter half of the 18th century to the early 19th century, or from around 1770 to around 1830, has often been referred to as the Age of Enlightenment, *upplýsingaröld*, in Icelandic history.[4] However, until the last few decades, Icelandic scholars have not given much attention to the connection between the Enlightenment and other international ideological currents that were influential in the 19th century or to its influence after Magnús Stephensen's day. Some scholars, who acknowledge the influence of the Enlightenment to varying extents during the 'Age of Enlightenment' proper, seem to maintain that the Enlightenment more or less petered out in the following decades. At the same time much has been made in Icelandic historiography of the 1830s and 1840s as a period of radical change, partly because of the impact of romanticism and nationalism. This certainly applies to Icelandic politics, but not necessarily to various other fields.

The aim of this article is to examine the impact of the Enlightenment after the period commonly associated with it as a movement – in other words, to consider how the Icelandic Enlightenment can be regarded as an extended phenomenon. The period dealt with in the article is primarily the last two-thirds of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th (referred to below for convenience sake simply as 'the period under review').[5]

In order to throw light on the subject matter of the article, some basic factors relating to the history of Iceland and to the Enlightenment in the country need to be discussed. Moreover, an attempt will be made to explain how conditions in Icelandic society extended the relevance of the ideology of the Enlightenment many decades beyond the time usually defined as the Age of the Enlightenment. Here, as elsewhere in the article, comparisons are made with other countries, and then especially with Denmark and Norway, because of the strong links with these two countries. In order to place the essential subject matter of the article in perspective, attention is given to the history of ideas in Iceland immediately after the end of the period commonly associated with the movement. In this context it is necessary to consider specifically the impact of romanticism in Iceland and the interrelationship between the Enlightenment and the Romantic movement in the country. This interrelationship, which affected the nationalistic views of the Icelanders, is one of the main themes of special importance when the long-term influence of the Enlightenment is examined. In connection with this, consideration is given to the significance of the idea of progress that can be said to be largely derived from the Enlightenment. Special attention is given to other themes of this kind, where continuity is especially strong, such as the publication of educational works for the people of Iceland and the connection between religious ideas linked with the Enlightenment and what has been called the 'new theology'.

On Icelandic terminology relating to the Enlightenment

It is important to consider the use of the Icelandic term for the Enlightenment, *upplýsing*.[6] Unlike the case with some other international ideological currents, Icelanders referred to the Enlightenment as a movement during the period itself which scholars of later generations have associated with it. As is the case with the terms that are used to signify the movement in various languages, the Icelandic word *upplýsing* contains a reference to light, or to 'enlighten'; thus, the word with its two basic elements corresponds to

oplysning in Danish and *upplysning* in Swedish. Before the period known as the Age of Enlightenment, the term *upplýsing* had been used in a different sense in theological tracts.[7] At the end of the 18th century and in the early 19th century, however, it came to be directly associated with the cultural policy of Magnús Stephensen as the name of a movement that was controversial and hotly debated. There are even instances of the term *upplýsing* being used sarcastically with a reference to Magnús Stephensen. Thus, in one poem it is suggested that Magnús Stephensen enjoyed providing 'us bulls' with 'the hay of Enlightenment'.[8] There are also cases of its use in laudatory references to Magnús Stephensen. Two examples of this can be taken. One of the champions of the Enlightenment, the sheriff and historian (and Magnús Stephensen's cousin), Jón Espólín, claims in a poem that Magnús Stephensen 'practices Enlightenment on a large scale'.[9] The well-known poet and translator, Jón Þorláksson, referred to him as the 'director of the Enlightenment' (in a poem written after reconciliation which ended a long-standing dispute between them).[10] After the end of the so-called 'Age of Enlightenment', the Icelanders continued to use the term *upplýsing*, as well as the adjective *upplýstur* ('enlightened'), so one cannot detect a sudden or major break in this respect. Sometimes the term *uppfræðing* is used as more or less synonymously with *upplýsing*. The term *uppfræðing* refers specifically to education, but as the champions of the Enlightenment placed great emphasis on education, there is no fundamental difference between the meanings of the two terms. The late 19th century was a time of strong interest in linguistic purity in Iceland, and thus many wanted to change the term *upplýsing*, which seemed to correspond too closely with the Danish term *oplysning*. As this was regarded as not 'proper' Icelandic, the term *fræðslustefna* (literally it means 'educational movement'), was promoted as the correct term for the Enlightenment. Both these terms were used more or less interchangeably down to the second half of the 20th century, but in the last few decades the word *upplýsing* has gained the upper hand; *fræðslustefna* has all but disappeared from the public and scholarly discourses.

The long-term impact of the Enlightenment in Denmark and Norway

Because of Iceland's close ties with Denmark and Norway, it is necessary to examine how the impact of the Enlightenment manifested itself in these countries in the 19th century in order to understand its development in Iceland.

Scholars have stressed that the influence of national romanticism in Norway, which is so often highlighted in historiography, was tempered by the heritage of the Enlightenment. This is seen in the emphasis on practical matters in Norwegian nationalist literature and on the role of the farmer as a symbol of the nation and the role of parsons in secular affairs.[11] Thus, the poet and playwright, Henrik Wergeland, can be taken as an example of a romantic writer whose ideology was in some ways influenced by the Enlightenment.

It is easy to find various ideas that are in the Enlightenment mould being presented in Denmark during the first half of the 19th century, sometimes in opposition to other ideologies. Three examples of this may be cited. In a speech in 1822, the famous physicist Hans Christian Ørsted praised the possibilities inherent in science and technology in glowing terms, as was common in the Age of Enlightenment.[12] It is also evident from the visitation diaries (*visitatsdagbøger*) of Bishop J. P. Mynster of Zealand, a leading figure within the Danish church, for the years 1835–1853 that a considerable number of the parsons in Zealand held rationalistic views.[13] Finally, in 1840 a teacher, Povl Henrichsen,

put forward in a pamphlet an interpretation of the Old Testament, which was very much in the rationalistic spirit of the Enlightenment and resulted in his coming into conflict with the authorities.[14]

It can hardly be disputed that the long-standing emphasis on *folkeoplysning* (popular education) in Denmark and Norway derives at least partly from the Enlightenment. This emphasis is very evident in the ideology of N. F. S. Grundtvig, a leading figure in the Danish church, scholar, politician, educator and poet.[15]

Note on the Icelandic historical background

Iceland was settled from Norway and, to a lesser extent, from the British Isles in the late 9th and early 10th centuries. The Icelandic Commonwealth was founded in 930. In 1262–1264, the country came under the rule of the Norwegian king, and in 1380 it followed Norway into the Danish kingdom. Absolute monarchy was established in Denmark in 1660 (in Iceland in 1662), and it was abolished in 1848. The old assembly, the Alþingi, came together as a consultative assembly for the first time in 1845, and it received limited authority in Icelandic domestic affairs with the first constitution of Iceland, which came into effect in 1874. In 1904, the first Icelandic minister, living in Reykjavík, came into power, as the Icelanders obtained home rule. In 1918, Iceland became a sovereign state, while the king of Denmark remained king of Iceland in a dual monarchy. Iceland became a republic on 17 June 1944, and thus the political ties with Denmark were formally severed.

The population was very small, numbering only around 53,000 in 1830 and less than 92,000 in 1918.[16] For a long time, Icelandic society was predominantly rural, and fishing played a considerable role in the economy. In 1918, the population of Reykjavík was c. 17,000, and a few other small towns and a number of villages had come into being. Icelanders had a rich literary tradition and their own language, Icelandic. They were one of the smallest nations in Europe to have their own literary language in which books were printed. It is important that until the foundation of the University of Iceland in 1911, almost all Icelanders who went to university studied at the University of Copenhagen and a number of Icelandic scholars settled permanently in the capital line of the monarchy. Therefore, the intellectual life of the Icelanders took to a very significant degree place in Copenhagen. This is a major factor in explaining the continuing strong position of Danish culture among Icelanders. However, the importance of Reykjavík in this respect increased markedly in the second half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries.

The Icelandic Enlightenment c. 1750–1830

The influence of the Enlightenment appeared markedly among the Icelanders first around the middle of the 18th century, and it was strong from the 1770s onwards. Its origins lay in the Enlightenment in Denmark,[17] which in turn was largely derived from the Enlightenment in Protestant Germany.[18] Thus, the Icelandic Enlightenment can be regarded as an offshoot of the German–Danish Enlightenment. The same was true of Norway[19] and the Faroe Islands.[20] In Iceland, the champions of the Enlightenment did not oppose what can be called 'the Establishment'. Rather, they were a part of it, as the leaders of the movement were public officials. The social background of the foremost leaders of the Icelandic Enlightenment is comparable with that of men who played a similar role in Denmark, Norway and Northern Germany. It is notable how many of the

top officials, both secular figures and the bishops of the Lutheran state church, played an important role in the movement. Many other learned men were active in it. Naturally, 'enlightened' Icelanders were well acquainted with the basic tenets of the French Enlightenment, but the Icelandic Enlightenment was by no means radical. While the champions of the Enlightenment wanted ordinary people to become more 'enlightened', they did not wish to see any major change in the structure of Icelandic society.

The Danish authorities contributed significantly to the early phase of the Icelandic Enlightenment, especially in the 1770s and 1780s, enacting various laws and regulations in the spirit of the movement. In the period from the late 1770s to the 1790s, Icelanders living in Copenhagen played a particularly significant role in the Icelandic Enlightenment, especially through the activities of *Það íslenzka lærdómslistafélag* (the Icelandic Society of the Learned Arts) founded in Copenhagen in 1779. The 1790s form a watershed in the history of the Icelandic Enlightenment. By this time the activities of the Society of the Learned Arts were in decline, and *Hið íslenzka landsuppfræðingarfélag* (the Icelandic Society of the Education of the Nation) was founded in Iceland in 1794. This signified a major change in that the leadership of the Icelandic Enlightenment was now based in the country itself to a greater extent than before. After the death of Bishop Hannes Finnsson of Skálholt in 1796, Magnús Stephensen was indisputably the leader of the movement. At this stage, the Danish government was taking fewer measures relating to Iceland in the spirit of the Enlightenment than it had done earlier on. But efforts to educate the population at large by publishing suitable reading material were particularly important in the Icelandic Enlightenment at the end of the 18th century and in the first three decades of the 19th century.[21]

The conditions for the reception of the ideas of the Enlightenment

When examining the conditions for the reception of ideas connected with the Enlightenment in the period under review, it is necessary for comparison to consider the situation in the period that is commonly referred to as the Age of Enlightenment. Certain conditions in Icelandic society in this period were detrimental to the dissemination of its ideology, although many of the officials who dominated book publishing in the country were indeed champions of the movement. Two of the most important negative factors in this respect were the tragic effects of a gigantic volcanic eruption of 1783–1784, and the dislocation of the Icelandic trade during the Napoleonic wars. One may assume that in this period the Enlightenment affected at least a considerable section of the common people, but because ordinary people (generally speaking) did not leave much material in writing, it is difficult to quantify this.

It can be argued that for many decades after 1830, some of the factors that had hampered the dissemination of the ideas of the Enlightenment were no longer as critical as before. On the whole, the material conditions in Iceland were less adverse than they had been in the late 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th century. Conditions were therefore more conducive to a spirit of optimism. At the same time, however, the changes that took place in Icelandic society did not eradicate the problems that the champions of the Enlightenment had wanted to solve. As a whole, these changes made Icelanders more receptive towards the basic ideology of the Enlightenment than they had been before. Moreover, it was not until the early 20th century, with growing industrialization and urbanization of Icelandic society, that the feeling of historical continuity in Iceland was seriously weakened. Thus, despite some setbacks and mass emigration to

America, the Icelandic economy was growing on the whole, especially from c. 1890 until the First World War. The necessary conditions were therefore finally in place for turning some of the 'enlightened' aims into reality; this was much more the case than it had been in the period traditionally termed *upplýsingaröld*, the Age of the Enlightenment. Generally speaking, with the right to pass their own budget, which Alþingi obtained with the constitution of 1874, the Icelandic authorities were in a better position than before to support various cultural activities in the country, and for that reason the number of cultural institutions in Iceland grew significantly during the last decades of the 19th century. A great increase in the publication of books and periodicals made the dissemination of ideas easier than before.[22] A number of authors, who later wrote autobiographies or memoirs, were of the opinion that the festivities of 1874, when the 1,000th anniversary of the settlement of Iceland was celebrated, had an inspiring effect on many people and contributed to the growing sense optimism in the country.[23]

When the influence of the Enlightenment in Iceland in the last two-thirds of the 19th century is compared with the impact of the movement in Denmark and Norway, it is striking that the changes that had taken place in Icelandic society since the mid-18th century were far less extensive. In this connection the following factors can be pointed out: while the general level of education in Iceland had been raised, the development of formal education for the common people was much slower to emerge in Iceland than in Denmark and Norway; also, the technological development which had taken place in the neighbouring countries, only reached Iceland to a limited extent; and even when the small size of the Icelandic nation is taken into account, there were relatively fewer towns in Iceland than in most other European countries.

What has been described above as a relatively favourable set of conditions for the reception of 'enlightened' ideas in the last two-thirds of the 19th century, and especially in its last three decades, is to a certain extent also applicable to the early 20th century; certainly there was no fundamental break at the turn of the 20th century. Nevertheless, by 1920 or thereabouts, such radical transformation had taken place in Icelandic society since the Age of Enlightenment that the links between the discourses of the champions of the Enlightenment in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and the debates on contemporary affairs had become much weaker than had been the case just a few decades earlier.

Various aspects of the impact of ideas of progress

Icelandic discussions on the notion of progress in the last two-thirds of the 19th century were largely in the same vein as they had been in the period commonly associated with the Enlightenment. At the same time the ideas of progress found in the writings of some authors can be seen as partly or largely derived from international ideological currents other than the Enlightenment.[24]

References to progress occur frequently in those writings of Jón Sigurðsson, the political leader of the Icelanders from the 1840s until his death in 1879, which had a bearing on Icelandic politics and the economy of the country. In 1841, at the beginning of his political career, for instance, he wrote an article considering what form of government was desirable in Iceland, in which progress is a referent.[25] Progress is also a key theme in an introductory chapter to a book on farming, fishing and trade in Iceland that Jón Sigurðsson published in 1861. There he discusses how progress could be achieved and mentions that

some people had argued that progress was not possible.[26] It can be argued that Jón Sigurðsson's ideas of progress were influenced both by the Enlightenment and liberalism.

The Icelandic editor, poet and politician, Jón Ólafsson, translated John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* into Icelandic (1886). His ideas on progress were derived more from Mill than from the champions of the Enlightenment.[27] This can be seen from a rhetorical remark which Jón Ólafsson made in an article published in 1873:

> But what is then the policy of our times? . . . The first thing to be said is: the policy of our times is progress. How does this policy of progress particularly appear? In liberty and justice. Liberty in the way of thinking, justice in action.[28]

Another influence is Auguste Comte's division of the history of mankind into three stages, which is essential to his ideas of progress. A reference to Comte's ideas can be seen in some of the works that Ágúst H. Bjarnason, the first professor of philosophy at the University of Iceland, wrote for the general public in Iceland on what he called 'the history of the human spirit'. Ágúst H. Bjarnason was a former student of Harald Høffding, the leading proponent of positivism in Denmark, at the University of Copenhagen.[29]

It is an important question to what extent references to progress that occur more frequently in the writings of ordinary people from the middle of the 19th century onwards were derived from the writings of Icelandic intellectuals and thus ultimately from the Enlightenment. Obviously, it is impossible to generalize about the sources of influence on the great number of authors who belonged to the common people and who wrote about progress. Certain conclusions can be drawn, however. Much more source material is available regarding the last two-thirds of the 19th century than the preceding period. In most cases the spirit was the same as in the writings of the intellectuals, and the terminology used is of the same kind. Basically the same arguments are used in support of the proclaimed aim that progress should be striven for, often with the same implied goals. It is quite possible that some of the authors who belonged to the ordinary people wrote about progress without being strongly influenced by the intellectuals, but in all likelihood such cases were few. The existing sources can be interpreted, indicating that in a few decades the discussion of progress among the leading figures of the Enlightenment had reached the majority of the people who left writings to any significant effect, and thus the writings of the ordinary people about progress stand as evidence of the late impact of the Enlightenment. At the same time it must be emphasized that it is very unlikely that ideas of progress appealed to many of the large section of ordinary people who were very poor.

Ideas of progress among the ordinary people appeared in various fields, not least in connection with the function of associations of various sorts and publishing activities.[30] Especially as from around 1870 many societies were founded by ordinary people, including farming societies, women's societies, temperance societies and, from 1906, youth societies which were closely related, ideologically, to similar societies in Denmark, Norway and the Faroe Islands. It is remarkable how many of these societies were called 'societies of progress' (*framfarafélög*), the aim of most of which was to work for cultural and material improvements in the countryside. Emphasis on progress is often seen in articles in hand-written periodicals, which were published on a considerable scale in many parts of Iceland, especially in the countryside, from around 1880 onwards.[31] Sometimes discussion about progress and societies was intertwined. A good example of this is in an article in a handwritten periodical in the West of Iceland from 1913, with the following observation:

'Always when we read, think or speak about some of the great instances of progress in the country in the last few decades, we encounter societies'.[32]

Discussion of the possibility of progress in the main branches of the economy, farming and fishing, continued on the same lines in the last two-thirds of the 19th century as before. It is striking in this context that articles on these subjects that appeared in the periodical run by Jón Sigurðsson and his associates, *Ný félagsrit*, in the period 1841–1873, and in the periodical *Andvari,* founded in 1874, during the first few decades of its existence, are generally in the same spirit as articles in the annual of the Icelandic Society of the Learned Arts (*Rit þess konunglega íslenzka lærdómslistafélags*) published in 1781–1796 and in *Klausturpósturinn* (the Cloister Post), published in 1818–1827. Instructive books and pamphlets on these subjects were also written in the same spirit for many decades, as had been the case before 1830.

In the period under review there are very many instances of a belief in progress being expressed in fascination with developments in the fields of science and technology, as had been the case in the period commonly known as the Age of Enlightenment.[33]

The progress factor in the nationalistic views of the Icelanders

To continue from the conclusion that the ideas of progress, which were prominent in the period under review, were largely derived from the Enlightenment, it is important to examine to what extent these progressive ideas affected nationalistic views in Iceland.

The special nature of Icelandic society and the course of its development in the 19th and the early 20th centuries had a great impact on the nationalistic views of the Icelanders.[34] Icelandic nationalism was also under strong influence from the general historical developments in Europe, especially in Denmark.[35] Changes in Danish society and politics, including development towards representative government, increasing democracy and improved public education, were bound to influence the nationalistic views of the Icelanders. The fascination of many Danish intellectuals with Icelandic medieval literature, which was partly inspired by romanticism, no doubt influenced the attitudes of the Danes towards the Icelanders as a nation and made them more positive than otherwise would have been the case towards Icelanders' campaign for a change of their status within the Danish kingdom.

Icelanders' frequent references to examples of progress in Norway constitute an important clue to the political dimension of Icelanders' writings about this issue. Until Norway became an independent state in 1905, it was often mentioned how well Norway – which had more extensive rights of self-governing in its union with Sweden than Iceland had within the Danish monarchy – had fared since the breakup of the Danish-Norwegian monarchy in 1814. The lesson suggested to Icelanders was obvious.[36]

In addition to the changes that took place in the position of Iceland within the Danish monarchy, changes in the Icelandic economy referred to above affected the nationalistic views in Iceland. What was rightly seen as progress in the economy no doubt increased Icelanders' self-confidence and affected their evaluation of what they were capable of, and thus influenced their nationalistic views.[37]

Progress was often referred to in discussions of nationality, the country's position within the Danish kingdom, liberty and popular associations. Thus, it is noteworthy that in a relatively short article on nationality from 1845, published in Sigurðsson's *Ný félagsrit*, the word progress (*framfarir*) and its equivalents occur no less than 15 times.[38]

When the impact of ideas of progress on the nationalistic views of the Icelanders is examined, it is necessary to consider the interrelationship between the Enlightenment and romanticism. In certain ways the influence of romanticism marked a turning point in Iceland. Thus, it is commonly agreed that most of the major lyrical poets in 19th-century Iceland were deeply influenced by romanticism. An example of a change which took place between the period traditionally labelled the Age of Enlightenment and the second half of the 19th century, and which is generally attributed to romanticism, can be seen in the dominating attitudes towards folk tales among intellectuals. As was the case in other countries, some of the main figures of the Icelandic Enlightenment wrote in extremely negative terms about such folk tales and about popular beliefs in general, which they regarded as characterized by superstition. After the mid-19th century, however, very different views emerged in the writings of Icelandic intellectuals, as they became a source of great interest and an extensive project of collecting and publishing these tales was launched. Without doubt romanticism played a significant part in shaping this new attitude. An example can be taken from the writings of Jón Sigurðsson, who can hardly be called a romantic. Nevertheless, he says in a review of a collection of Icelandic folk tales translated into German by the well-known legal scholar Konrad Maurer:

> Let us leave aside that many a belief is superstition; we cannot help finding that this belief is connected with some mental vigour and poetic feeling that is not found among those who regard themselves so enlightened that they do not believe in anything.[39]

It has been shown that the equivalent of the term *romanticism* and the corresponding adjective occur a number of times in texts by Icelanders both in Icelandic and Danish in the first few decades after 1830.[40] However, there was very little discussion among the Icelanders about romanticism until the 1880s.[41] In the second half of the 19th century Icelanders did not refer in as clear a manner to the leading figures of romanticism as they had done earlier to the leading figures of the Enlightenment.

In some ways romanticism served to reinforce views that were already widespread among Icelanders rather than establish new ones. Already for centuries there had been a tradition of admiration for the Middle Ages, at least among a considerable section of the population. This was kindled to a certain extent by the tradition of reading the Old Icelandic sagas aloud at the 'evening wakes' (*kvöldvökur*) which were practised at many farms.[42] Bearing in mind the generally negative attitudes towards the Middle Ages common within the European Enlightenment, it is remarkable that among the Icelandic champions of the movement Magnús Stephensen was the only one who had a strongly critical view of the state of Icelandic medieval society during the Commonwealth period of 930–1262. He regarded this period as characterized by violence and lack of peace. According to him this state of affairs changed after Iceland came under the rule of kings (Norwegian and later Danish).[43] It can be argued that, taken as a whole, the writings of Magnús Stephensen had considerable influence among the Icelanders, but as far as can be discerned his negative views on the Middle Ages apparently had no significant effect on Icelanders.

It is important to note in this respect that although nationalistic views were very strong among Icelanders, they did not write much about the philosophical basis of these views, and seldom referred by name to ideological proponents of nationalism. As far as is known the earliest example of a fairly extensive discussion by an Icelander of the ideology

of nationalism is found in an article which the historian Jón Jónsson Aðils published in an Icelandic periodical in 1902.[44] Jón J. Aðils was closely associated with the Danish folk high school movement, as he had been a teacher at one of its schools (Vallekilde), and was one of the foremost advocates of Grundtvig's ideology among the Icelanders.[45] However, it is hard to find discussions in Iceland about nationalism as a European or international movement. When struggles of individual nations for increased autonomy were mentioned, they were rarely placed in the context of a general ideological current.

The term *þjóðarandi* ('national spirit'), which obviously derives from Herder's *Volksgeist,* with or without the Danish *folkeånd* as an intermediary, occurs frequently in Icelandic writings, but it is rarely placed in a broad theoretical context. A number of Icelanders frequently used terms such as *þjóðrækni* (devotion to one's nation) and *ættjarðarást* (patriotism, translating literally as love of one's country), but it is hard to find examples of these terms being used in a broad theoretical context; they usually refer either to attitudes that were widespread among the nation or to a feeling of nationality.

Generally speaking, Icelanders based their claims in their struggle for increased self-government (and, ultimately, independence) on legal and historical grounds rather than extensive theorizing about nationality. On the other hand, many of them took it for granted that they were a nation and had been a nation since the Middle Ages.

In the middle of the 19th century, following the abolition of the absolute monarchy in Denmark, a campaign was set in motion among Icelanders for increased self-government within the Danish state.[46] Jón Sigurðsson was one of its main instigators, but many others followed in his footsteps. From that time until 1918 there were often heated disagreements between individual groups of Icelanders concerning the policy on the position of the country within the Danish kingdom. This was often the most hotly debated topic at the Alþingi and in Icelandic politics generally. The overwhelming majority of Icelanders agreed, however, on the foundations of their claims for increased self-government within the Danish monarchy (and ultimately independence), which had been laid by Jón Sigurðsson. The essence of this argument, which is clearly connected with ideas that are fundamental in nationalism of the romantic kind, is as follows: the basis was that the Icelanders had been a nation in the Middle Ages and there had been continuity in their history as a nation. Thus, as a result of the abolition of the absolute monarchy in Denmark, the Icelanders should be entitled to be restored to the position they had been in 1262 when they had entered into a personal union with the Norwegian king.

Ideas of progress in Icelandic history are clearly linked with nationalistic views. This is obvious in the use of progress as a yardstick by which the course of history is measured. This characteristic is clearly seen in the writings of the most prominent historians in the 'Age of Enlightenment', including Jón Espólín, Hannes Finnsson and Magnús Stephensen.[47] They all focused on the question of whether progress had taken place in the country or not, a question which was also prominent in the writings of a number of major historians in the last two-thirds of the 19th and the early 20th centuries. As an example, a section in the concluding chapter of the first textbook on Icelandic history, by the parson Þorkell Bjarnason, may be mentioned.[48]

It is interesting in this context to compare Magnús Stephensen's conclusion to a work surveying the 18th century in Icelandic history[49] with the overall estimates of the 19th century by two prominent Icelanders – the natural scientist Þorvaldur Thoroddsen[50] and the philologist and politician Valtýr Guðmundsson[51] – in two articles published at the turn of the 20th century. All three authors deal with the question of whether Iceland had

progressed in certain fields during the respective centuries they dealt with. Both Þorvaldur Thoroddsen and Valtýr Guðmundsson saw progress in the 19th century, while Magnús Stephensen's view of the 18th century was both positive and negative. Thus, Magnús Stephensen did not see progress in the economy, while he was of the opinion that there had been improvement in the culture and general manners of the people.

Grundtvig's ideology influenced Icelanders greatly. It is well known that he was affected both by the Enlightenment and romanticism.[52] Emphasis on progress, which can be traced to the Enlightenment, is an element in the nationalistic views found in works on the history of Iceland written by several authors who were influenced by Grundtvig in the early 20th century. These authors demonstrate a noticeable change from earlier times in their mode of expression, as they often expressed themselves in high-flown language and in an emotional way. Two examples can be taken from the works of influential historians.

Bogi Th. Melsteð, who had extensive connections with the folk high school movement, wrote the following in a textbook on the history of Iceland for 'beginners':

> After the middle of the eighteenth century the history of the country begins again to become a little more beautiful. A few Icelanders who go to other countries notice that their countrymen are behind other nations. . . . With them the love of their country awakens together with the desire to drive their nation forward. They begin to fight for the progress of their country and try to awaken the nation from slumber. Gradually more people wake up.[53]

The last chapter in the book is titled 'Framfarir og horfur' ('Progress and Prospects'). There Bogi Th. Melsteð argues that in the last few years the Icelanders have made considerable progress in many fields.[54]

In a series of lectures for ordinary people that was later published in an influential book written in a nationalistic vein, Jón J. Aðils outlines his basic argument that progress had started in Iceland around the middle of 18th century, after a long dark period in Icelandic history, and it had picked up speed as the country had gained more autonomy.[55]

All things considered, it can be maintained that in the period under review ideas connected with the Enlightenment and ideas connected with romanticism intertwined to form one general current in the ideology of many Icelanders and that this was reflected in their nationalistic attitudes. There was, therefore, not necessarily a dichotomy between the Enlightenment and romanticism in their world of ideas.[56] It should be noted in this context that some of the major romantic poets expressed themselves in positive terms about the Enlightenment, or specifically about its main champion in Iceland, Magnús Stephensen. A few examples can be taken. The poet and teacher Steingrímur Thorsteinsson published an article in 1865 in which he praised the Enlightenment and discussed what it had accomplished.[57] It should be noted, however, that his attitudes towards the movement became more negative later on, as can be seen in an article from 1896.[58] In 1870, another Icelandic intellectual, Benedikt Sveinbjarnarson Gröndal, wrote in very laudatory terms about Magnús Stephensen and his publishing activities.[59] The poet Grímur Thomsen was one of three men who published an appeal to the nation to collect money for a memorial to Magnús Stephensen where gratitude for his work for the benefit and the progress of the country is mentioned.[60] Finally, the parson Matthías Jochumsson published a poem on the occasion of this collection in which he also praised Magnús Stephensen.[61]

The publication of educational works for the people

With regard to popular education, it is of importance that while various schools and other educational institutions were founded in the country in the last few decades of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th, an organized system of primary schools was established late in Iceland, at least when compared with most European countries. The first laws on compulsory schooling in Iceland were enacted in 1907. It was probably for this reason that many influential Icelanders stressed, to a much greater extent than their colleagues in the neighbouring countries, the importance of the reading of educational books as a means for ordinary people to gain an education. They were of the opinion that in the absence of an established school system, the education of the general public was best provided by the means of publication of educational works. This was very much in the spirit of the Enlightenment.

Some of the ideas concerning popular education which the champions of the Enlightenment propounded did not materialize in their lifetime, but did so, at least to a certain extent, much later, especially in the last few decades of the 19th century. In 1794, Stefán Þórarinsson, the district governor (*amtmand*) of the northeastern district of Iceland, published an article in the annual of the Society of the Learned Arts on matters relating to popular education. In it he proposed the establishment of libraries for the common people in each county (*sýsla*) and he also proposed the publication of a one-volume encyclopaedia.[62] Another champion of the Enlightenment, the parson Tómas Sæmundsson, put forward related ideas in 1832, regarding the publication of a brief encyclopaedia and the establishment of libraries for the common people in every parish under the guidance of parsons.[63] In 1874 an Icelandic parson, Þórarinn Böðvarsson, published a book, based to a considerable extent on a Danish one, which bears a resemblance to small encyclopaedia.[64] This work became immensely popular in Iceland.[65]

Contrary to the situation in Denmark and Norway, no reading societies especially for ordinary people were founded in Iceland during the period commonly known as the Age of Enlightenment, although there was some discussion on the idea at the time. But around 1870, societies of this type, which had been founded in some districts in Iceland since the 1830s and had built up a few small libraries, began to proliferate. The various parish pastors played a significant role in this development.[66]

To a certain extent publishing activity of the Icelanders during the Age of Enlightenment was looked upon as a model in the period under review. The efforts of the Enlightenment leaders to educate the general public were mentioned in laudatory terms and were presented as paradigms to contemporaries. The ideology behind this activity was very much in the spirit of the Enlightenment. The title of the annual *Ný félagsrit*, which Jón Sigurðsson and his associates founded in 1841, refers directly to the title of the annual of the Icelandic Society of the Learned Arts. In 1880, when the Icelandic Literary Society launched an annual which was to publish educational articles of various kinds, the model was also said to be the annual of the Society of the Learned Arts.[67]

In the 1830s and 1840s there was a temporary lull in the publication of educational works in Icelandic, but especially from c. 1870 there was a very marked increase in publishing activities of this kind. There has been an unbroken tradition of the publication of educational works for ordinary people in Iceland since the Age of Enlightenment.[68] Among the prominent topics are farming, fishing, the natural sciences, history and matters relating to public health. These subjects were discussed in very much the same

vein as during the Age of Enlightenment, and the declared aims of the publications were basically the same. In a sense, there is a general European pattern in this; thus, there were some similarities in this field in Denmark and Norway. In Iceland, however, owing to the structure of society, the continuity is stronger than in many countries.

A few examples can be taken to illustrate how important people felt that these educational works were for the common people.

In 1884 Jónas Jónassen, the Surgeon General of Iceland, wrote in a preface to a popular book on medicine:

> In other countries, where everywhere it is possible to visit a doctor, many popular books on medicine are available. Probably there is nowhere a greater need for a popular book on medicine than in this country, where the population is so scattered and in most places it is so difficult, and involves such great distances, to go a doctor.

Jónas Jónassen adds that because the common people in Iceland were eager to obtain knowledge, books of this kind should be of more use there than in most other countries.[69]

In 1895 Sigfús Eymundsson, a prominent book publisher, bookseller and photographer, wrote when he launched a series of instructive books for the common people:

> If works of this kind are useful elsewhere and the use that can be made of them is regarded as invaluable, it goes without saying that in this country, where poverty makes the establishment of schools difficult, and the small size of the population makes it difficult to employ good teachers, and the spread of the population over large areas and the lack of means prevents most people from using the few and imperfect schools that exist, the necessity for such a series becomes a thousand times as great, and its *usefulness* should become *invaluable*.[70]

A proposal concerning a change in the Icelandic Literary Society's publication policy in 1904 contained the following comment about the role the society's periodical, *Skírnir*, should have:

> It should publish clearly written articles on matters of progress for the nation, in particular those which relate to improvements in education and individual branches of the economy and look out for the opinions of those who have the greatest and best knowledge in each field.

On the subjects to be covered in the periodical, the proposal contains the following:

> It should publish news concerning important innovations in science which contribute in some way to alleviating the struggle for existence and expanding the horizon of the human spirit.[71]

The long-term impact of the Enlightenment in other fields

The long-term influence of the Enlightenment was evident in various areas other than those mentioned above. Here examples will be taken from two fields: theology and penal law.

'New' theology or 'liberal' theology was developed from the theories of some German Protestant theologians in the 19th century, among whom Otto Pfleiderer was prominent, but it was to a certain extent derived from the rationalistic theology of the Enlightenment. Briefly, the main characteristics of the new theology were as follows: emphasis was laid on historical and critical studies of the Bible, the aim being to adapt theology to the world of ideas of a new age. This was a reaction to what was called the 'new orthodoxy'. There were hard-fought disputes in Iceland, as in Denmark and Norway, between adherents of the new theology and those who had more orthodox views. The new theology was also, in a sense, a reaction to the criticism of Christianity, reflecting a belief in the power of science and the growing influence of positivism after 1870. In a way, the proponents of the new theology made an attempt to reconcile religion and science. Many influential men within the Icelandic church were affected by the new theology. Among them were the bishops Þórhallur Bjarnarson and Jón Helgason, and the theology professors at the University of Iceland, Haraldur Níelsson and Sigurður Sívertsen. Jón Helgason, who had studied theology in Copenhagen and Tübingen and later became a professor of theology, can be regarded as the main advocate of the new theology in Iceland. He began to write about it before the turn of the 20th century, and was active in theological disputes, though his attitudes towards the new theology seem to have cooled after he became Bishop of Iceland in 1916. In a series of articles that he wrote in 1913 and which were subsequently collected in a book, he discussed the relationship between 18th-century theology and the new theology. He emphasized that the new theology was a wide-ranging concept and that it did not in every way correspond to 18th-century rationalism; conversely, he introduced the new theology as a movement that had to a great extent been moulded by the Enlightenment. It is clear that Jón Helgason regarded himself and the other 'new theologians' as the successors of the theologians of the Enlightenment. Thus, he says:

> As is well known, the 18th century brought forth a total revolution in all fields of spiritual life. . . . The motto of the century became freedom of thought (*libertas philosophandi)* and education (*Aufklärung*). . . . it can truthfully be said of this revolution that it brought about an absolute turning point in the history of the spirit of man. . . . This is the background to the emergence of the new investigative theology.[72]

With regard to penal law, certain attitudes that can be associated with the humanitarian ideology of the Enlightenment gained prominence over time within the Danish kingdom, including Iceland, as in many other states. This was manifested in penal legislation that came into force in Iceland in 1869. The heritage of the Enlightenment has been of importance in this sphere of society down to the present day.[73]

Conclusion

The tradition in Icelandic historiography is to regard the time around 1830 as the terminal date for the Icelandic Enlightenment. Its influences lasted long beyond that time, as is demonstrated in this article, and it can therefore be called an extended phenomenon. To be sure, a major change took place in Icelandic politics from the 1830s and onwards, but in various ways there was clear continuity. This

can partly be explained by the fact that changes in Icelandic society were generally rather slow, at least when they are compared with many other countries. Various solutions, associated with the ideology of the Enlightenment, to the problems that afflicted Icelandic society continued therefore to be relevant long after the alleged end of the movement. The emphasis on progress, connected with the Enlightenment, remained unabated. Moreover, the influence of the Enlightenment and that of the ideas of romanticism merged to some extent in the nationalistic views of the Icelanders. Finally, the Enlightenment lived on in the continuing emphasis on the importance of popular education through the publication of educational works. Some of the relatively strong links with the ideology of the Enlightenment lasted until the radical transformation of Icelandic society in the early 20th century.

Notes

1 On trends in research on the Enlightenment, see, for example, Outram, *The Enlightenment*.
2 Beiser, 'Early Romanticism and the Aufklärung'.
3 The ideology of Magnús Stephensen is dealt with in Sigurðsson, *Hugmyndaheimur Magnúsar Stephensens*.
4 A volume, by Þorkell Jóhannesson, which spans the period 1770–1830, in a series on the history of Iceland, *Saga Íslendinga,* was given this sub-title. This is the earliest instance of the term *upplýsingaröld* being used in print to be found in the data bank of the dictionary of the University of Iceland.
5 The long-term influence of the Enlightenment in Iceland has been dealt with in Sigurðsson, *Erlendir straumar*, especially 25–70.
6 The use of the term *upplýsing* is discussed in Sigurðsson, 'Upplýsingin og áhrif hennar', 30–5; Sigurðsson, *Erlendir straumar*, 33–8.
7 The oldest instance of the use of the term in print found in the data bank of the dictionary of the University of Iceland is from 1575.
8 Jónsson, 'Ljóðabrjef', 101.
9 Espólín, 'Til Útgéfara Gamans og alvøru', printed on the cover of the volume.
10 Þorláksson, *Íslenzk ljóðabók*, vol. 2, 605.
11 See Sørensen, *Norsk idéhistorie*, vol. 3, 18–21; Sørensen and Stråth, 'Introduction: The Cultural Construction of Norden'; Witoszek, 'Fugitives from Utopia'; Witoszek, *Norske naturmytologier*, especially 23–66.
12 Kragh, *Dansk naturvidenskabs historie*, vol. 3, 280.
13 Mynster, *J. P. Mynsters visitatsdagbøger 1835–1853*, vol. 1, 46, 57, 103–4, 176, 245; vol. 2, 36, 96, 118, 145, 228.
14 Jørgensen, 'En oplysningsmand'.
15 On popular education in Denmark, see Korsgaard, *Kampen om lyset*. Informal popular education in Norway is discussed in Nettum et al., *Folkelig kulturarbeid*.
16 *Historical Statistics of Iceland*, 56–60.
17 On the Danish Enlightenment in the period commonly associated with the movement, see Bredsdorff, *Den brogede oplysning*.
18 On the German Enlightenment, see, for example, Pütz, *Die Aufklärung in Deutschland*. The Enlightenment in Protestant Germany is dealt specifically with in Whaley, 'The Protestant Enlightenment in Germany'.

19 The Norwegian Enlightenment in the period commonly associated with the movement is, *inter alia*, dealt with in Nettum, 'Opplysningstiden'.
20 On the Faroese Enlightenment, see Jacobsen, 'Jens Chr. Svabo'.
21 See a survey article on the Icelandic Enlightenment, Sigurðsson, 'Upplýsingin og áhrif hennar'. The other nine articles in the book, in which the above-mentioned article appeared, study individual aspects of the Icelandic Enlightenment. The publication of educational works in the period is discussed in Sigurðsson, 'The Publication of Educational Works'.
22 The increase in the publication of books and periodicals is dealt with in Guttormsson, 'Framleiðsla og dreifing'.
23 Cf. Einarsson, *Sjeð og lifað*, 228.
24 The history of the idea of progress, including its manifestation in international ideological currents, is surveyed in Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*; see also Vierhaus, 'Progress'.
25 Sigurðsson, 'Um alþing á Íslandi'.
26 Ibid., *Lítil varníngsbók*, 3–15.
27 The influence of liberalism on Jón Ólafsson and his ideas of progress are dealt with in Sigurðsson, *Erlendir straumar*, especially 37, 46, 50–3, 83, 89.
28 Ólafsson, 'Stefna þessara tíma', 33–4.
29 The influence of positivism on Ágúst H. Bjarnason is dealt with in Sigurðsson, *Erlendir straumar*, 51, 118, 283, 286–8, 290.
30 Such associations in 19th-century Iceland are analyzed in Róbertsdóttir, 'Icelandic Societies'.
31 The publication of handwritten periodicals is dealt with in Þormóðsson, 'Handskrifuð blöð'.
32 Jónasson, 'Félagsskapur og framfarir', 9–10.
33 See Sigurðsson, *Erlendir straumar*, 51–3.
34 Among the many works on Icelandic nationalism that have been published in the last few decades the following may be mentioned: Hálfdanarson, *Íslenska þjóðríkið;* Hermannsson, *Understanding Nationalism*; Karlsson, 'The Emergence of Nationalism in Iceland'; Sigurðsson, *Erlendir straumar*, 122–56.
35 General trends in research on nationalism are, *inter alia*, dealt with in Lawrence, *Nationalism*.
36 Sigurðsson, 'Islendingenes holdninger', 270–3.
37 Cf. Jónsson, 'Þjóðernisstefna, hagþróun og sjálfstæðisbarátta'.
38 Melsteð, 'Um þjóðerni'.
39 Sigurðsson, 'Álit um ritgjörðir', 191–2.
40 Óskarsson, 'Hugtakið rómantík'.
41 Sigurðsson, *Erlendir straumar*, 114–16
42 Cf. Gíslason, *Kvällsvaka*.
43 Stephensen, 'Ræda'.
44 Aðils, 'Alþýðuháskólar', 6–24.
45 The impact of Grundtvig's idelogy on the Icelanders is dealt with in Sigurðsson, 'Áhrif hugmyndafræði'.
46 Jón Sigurðsson's basic views on this subject appear, *inter alia*, in 'Hugvekja til Íslendinga' and, in a more extensive work, *Om Islands statsretlige Forhold*.
47 Sigurðsson, 'Sagnfræði', 252–3.
48 Bjarnason, *Agrip af sögu Íslands*,132–3.
49 Stephensen, *Eptirmæli Átjándu Aldar,* 798–829.

50 Thoroddsen, 'Hugleiðingar um aldamótin'.
51 Guðmundsson, 'Framfarir Íslands'.
52 Grundtvig's ideology is surveyed in Lundgreen-Nielsen, 'Grundtvig og danskhed'.
53 Melsteð, *Stutt kenslubók*, 42.
54 Ibid., 113–14.
55 Aðils, *Íslenzkt þjóðerni*.
56 For an article where there appears a view that is different from that taken in this article on the interrelationship between the Enlightenment and romanticism in Iceland with regard to nationalistic attitudes, see Hálfdanarson, 'From Enlightened Patriotism'.
57 Thorsteinsson, 'Ástand heimsins nú og fyrrum'.
58 Ibid., 'Goethe og Schiller', 200.
59 Gröndal, [Aðfaraorð], 2.
60 Pálmason, *Magnús Stephensen*, 51–2.
61 Jochumsson, *Ljóðmæli*, vol. 3, 48.
62 Þórarinsson, 'Hugleidíngar', 237–8.
63 Sæmundsson, *Island fra den intellectuelle Side Betragtet*, 10, 15.
64 Böðvarsson, *Lestrarbók handa alþýðu á Íslandi*.
65 On the reception of the work, see Sigurðsson, *Erlendir straumar*, 58–60.
66 On reading societies see, Jónsson, 'Lestrarfélög fyrir almenning'.
67 'Formáli', 3.
68 The continuity in the publication of educational works for the people is discussed in Sigurðsson, 'Arfleifð upplýsingarinnar og útgáfa fræðslurita á íslenzku'. On the dissemination and reception of such works, see Sigurðsson, 'Útbreiðsla og viðtökur'.
69 Jónassen, *Lækningabók handa alþýðu,* iii.
70 Eymundsson, 'Sjálfsfræðarinn', 76.
71 'Tímaritið Skírnir', 204–5.
72 Helgason, *Grundvöllurinn er Kristur*, 37–8.
73 On the history of jurisprudence in Denmark, see Tamm, *Dansk retshistorie*. Certain conclusions regarding the development in the field of penal law can be drawn from judgements passed by the High Court of Iceland (*Landsyfirdómur*), see Þórðarson, *Landsyfirdómurinn*.

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