

# Some Onomastic and Toponomastic Aspects of Icelandic Traditionalism

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THE SPECIAL ROLE played by the popularization of foreign names in Icelandic may be understood only against the background of the language's extreme conservatism and the endeavor of Icelanders to preserve this condition at all costs. While the other Scandinavian languages have undergone incisive changes with regard to their inflectional systems and vocabularies (in the latter mainly through borrowings from Middle Low German) since the late Middle Ages, Icelandic still spans the time between the period of its classical literature and the present well enough to enable every Icelandic schoolboy quite fluently to read the ancient prose works from the thirteenth century, provided the spelling in the text has previously been standardized, and also to understand what is read to him from such texts without encountering difficulties other than those caused by the occasional – and rare – obsolescence of words. This phenomenon is all the more surprising since Icelandic has, like any other language in the course of more than seven centuries, undergone very considerable changes in its sound system. The fact that classical texts remain directly accessible to Icelandic readers of today implies that such texts are read aloud as any modern text would be, a procedure which, unlike the reading of Old Icelandic texts by foreign scholars and students, converts what is being read aloud into living language with all the advantages such "animation" can give. The spontaneity and colorfulness of the "modern-style" reading also makes up easily for any metrical inexactitude that may derive from the use of the "modern" sound system when reading Old Icelandic poetry, and the ease with which Icelanders sometimes quote from Eddic and even from Skaldic verse has a natural grace and liveliness only a living tongue can bestow. It goes without saying that this direct approach is, apart from the grammatical conservatism of the language and the wholesale survival of its classical word-stock, due also to a corresponding orthographic conservatism.<sup>1</sup>

Icelanders were already aware at an early time that the unhampered access to the classical prose of their golden age and, for that matter, also

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Halldór Hermannsson, "Modern Icelandic," *Islandica XII* (Ithaca, New York, 1919), pp. 60–63, and Jóhannes L. L. Jóhannesson, *Söguleg Lýsing Íslenzkrar Réttritarar um rúmt hundrað ára síðustu* (Reykjavík, 1922).

to a good deal of the ancient poetry, in particular to Eddic verse, of which a large portion remains immediately open to their understanding, not only constituted a national treasure unique among European nations but amounted also to a matter of national prestige which a nation so small could hardly afford to forfeit. The strictness of later measures to ward off foreign word influence, an attitude eventually hardened into an unparalleled official, government-supported protectionism, bears witness to the fact that Icelanders, in view of the nation's paucity in numbers and her geographical situation, not only consider their language to be the criterion of their national existence to a much higher degree than other nations would theirs, but also deem the preservation of its 700-year-old continuity to be of vital importance.<sup>2</sup> Given the survival of almost all the grammatical characteristics of the classical period, such as gender and inflections, and the observance of spelling rules which deviate from the classical pattern of the thirteenth century only in a few instances, the main peril to the continuity between the "old" language and its modern continuation is held to consist in an unhampered intrusion of foreign words which, especially if admitted in insufficiently modified forms, are feared not only as potentially fatal to the native word-stock but also as hazardous to the inflectional system.<sup>3</sup>

Part of this problem, the role of foreign names as foreign bodies that might eventually prove harmful to the language, did not fail to attract the attention of the traditionalists. Like the bulk of the old native word-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "Modern Icelandic." An exhaustive survey of Icelandic linguistic and literary traditionalism and its development since the sixteenth century can be found in W. H. Wolf-Rottkay, *Das Bewußtsein der undurchbrochenen sprachlichen Überlieferung als Ausdruck isländischen Nationalstolzes* (München, 1943). See also Einar Ól. Sveinsson, "Um íslenzkt þjóðerni," *Skirnir* CXXVII (1953), as a more recent example of the traditionalistic attitude.

<sup>3</sup> As in modern Icelandic all words carry the main stress on the first syllable and pre- and suf-fixless uninflected native simplicia do not consist of more than two syllables (not counting the possible svarabhakti vowel preceding formerly final post-consonantal *r*), foreign loans of additional length create a disturbance in the language as they obstruct its natural rhythm. Things get even worse as soon as the definite article becomes affixed to such words, transforming them into actual monsters. Thorns of this type in the flesh of Icelandic would, if admitted, have been strangers like *electricity* or *machine*. With Danish as the most frequent mediator of foreign word-stock, these two imagined loans would have had five and three syllables respectively. With the definite article added, *electricity*, presumably having had to range under the feminine-gender *ö*-class of Icelandic nouns, would even have become octosyllabic in the genitive ("*elektrishæt-ar-innar*"). As things are, the word has found its already traditional and exclusive correspondence in the extremely handy bisyllabic native compound *raf-magn*, lit. "amber-power," a loan translation from Greek, while the concept "machine" is covered by the equally native *vél* f. (in Old Icelandic "ruse, device, trick," a meaning which is, of course, preserved in modern usage; cf. the similar semantic background in English *device* and *engine, machine*). Cf. also W. H. Wolf-Rottkay, "Monosyllabic Neuters in Icelandic Loan-Word Adaptation and Native Neologies," *Scandinavian Studies*, February 1969.

stock and the early borrowings in their Icelandicized forms, many of the foreign toponymics, already absorbed and assimilated during the classical period, were still known at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and some were still in common use. As early as in 1817 Rasmus Christian Rask, whose role in the foundation of the Icelandic Literary Society was of great importance to the development of linguistic traditionalism in Iceland, suggested that any number of such old place-names should, whenever possible, be revived.<sup>4</sup> Classical adaptations of foreign toponymics still generally known today though not invariably used in conversation are, for instance, *Dyflinn* "Dublin," *Feney* (also used in its plural, *-eyjar*) "Venice,"<sup>5</sup> the hydronymic *Humbra* "Humber," *Jórsalir* "Jerusalem,"<sup>6</sup> *Jórvík* "York,"<sup>7</sup> *Kantaraborg* "Canterbury,"<sup>8</sup> *Katanes* "Caithness," *Mön* (gen. *Manar*) "Isle of Man,"<sup>9</sup> *Rúða* (also *Rúðuborg*) "Rothomagus, Rouen" and *Síkiley* "Sicily."<sup>10</sup> Others are no longer in modern

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Björn M. Ólsen, *Rasmus Kristján Rask* (Reykjavík, 1888), pp. 90–91.

<sup>5</sup> A folk-etymological adaptation, associating the name with the fact that the city was built on water or swamps (= *fen*) and, accordingly, consists of islands.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the old Scandinavian place-name *Uppsälir*. For *Jór*- see the following note.

<sup>7</sup> For OE *Eofofwic*, itself a folk-etymological version (*eofo* "boar" + *wic* "settlement") of Roman-Celtic *Eboracum*. Norse *jór*- as the substitute for the first component of the OE compound may represent a contracted form of the Norse cognate *jǫfur(r)* "prince, leader of warriors" (orig. "boar"). Its occasionally assumed identity with Norse *jó(r)* "horse" by way of a popular etymology (cf. J. de Vries, *Altnord. etym. Wb.*, p. 294) is doubtful as Norse personal names known to contain this element as a first component seem to show the word only without its masculine-gender ending of the nominative (*Jóðis*, *Jófríðr*, *Jógeirr*, *Jógrímr*, *Jókell*, *Jó(-)rekr*, *Jósteinn*). However that may be, OE *-wic* "settlement, -ton" was replaced by the unrelated similar Norse *vik* "bay, estuary," contained in many Norse place-names but here representing a case of "attribution of spurious meaning" as referred to by U. Groenke in the article mentioned under note 10 below.

<sup>8</sup> A folk-etymological version on ON *kantara*- (cf. *kantarakápa* "cappa cantorum"). Though *kantari* is as such found in neither Old nor Modern Icelandic, formations on *-ari*, orig. a loan-suffix from Latin, are frequent enough to provide associative power.

<sup>9</sup> According to J. de Vries, *Altnord. etym. Wb.*, p. 401, a Norse name with the word *mōn* f. "mane" as its identical background. The conceptual basis would then be "projection" similar to that found in geographical terms like *hǫfði*, *nes*, *skagi*, all standing for "head-, foreland, cape" (cf. English *spit*). *Mon* also denotes the Danish island of *Møen* with its famous white cliffs. Also the Isle of Man has a partly steep and rugged coast-line with its highest elevation jutting more than 1,800 ft. out of the Irish Sea. In addition, also the name of the island's highest point, *Snæfell*, is still recognizably Scandinavian (cf. *Snæfell*, lit. "snow mountain," in Iceland).

<sup>10</sup> *Síkiley* may well be a popular etymology, however not quite in the sense attributed to it by U. Groenke (cf. *Skirnir*, CXXXVI [1962], pp. 200–205, and *Names*, 15: 2 [June 1967], p. 119) who interprets *Síkil*- as "sickle" so that *Síkiley* would be "Sickle Island." Actually, Icelandic (Old and Modern) does not show such a word for the tool. English *sickle* is, like Germ. *Sichel*, a loan from Latin while the native Norse for "sickle" is *sigð* f. or *sigðr* m., sure enough a cognate of Latin *secula* and its above-mentioned loan-reflexes in West Germanic (cf. also Danish *segl* "sickle," from German) but closest to OE *sigðe*

usage because they lack topicality, such as *Ak(u)rsborg* "Acre" (in Syria),<sup>11</sup> *Anþekja* "Antiochia,"<sup>12</sup> *Bár* "Bari," *Peita* "Poitou,"<sup>13</sup> *Púl n.* or *Púll m.* "Apulia"; the translations *Engilsnes* "Malea, Cape San Angelo" (Greece), *Frakkaskáli* "Villa Franca," and *Hangandaborg* "Aquapendente"; finally the folk-etymological *Friðsæla* "Vercelli," *Kænugarðr* "Kiev"<sup>14</sup> and *Leira* "Loire."<sup>15</sup> While the old popularization *Ermland*, used for "Armenia" but also for "Ermland" (on the Baltic) in the old language, seems to have come out of use, Blöndal, in his Icelandic-Danish dictionary, still has *ermska* for "Armenian language." The author remembers that during World War II the Eddic hydronymic *Danpr* "Dnepr" was occasionally resuscitated, and so might be any other name of the type, provided the place in question develops into a conversational topic again.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the old Icelandicized forms of foreign place-names, new ones were later accepted after their previous modification, ones like the folk-etymological *Bæheimur* "Bohemia,"<sup>17</sup> *Dóná* "Da-

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and its variant *síðe*, from which latter we have the modern *scythe*. ON *Sikiley* for "Sicilia" may owe its first component to an association of the toponymic with *sikill* "shekel," a word which is, however, only attested in modern Icelandic.

<sup>11</sup> An originally Scandinavian toponymic denoting what is now *Akershus* (the old citadel of Oslo).

<sup>12</sup> The name is only partly folk-etymological: *-þekja* "thatch, roof" or, less probable, *þekja* "compensation, indemnity, gratuity"; *þ* stands here for foreign *t* but represents Greek *θ* in mod. Icel. *Aþena* "Athena; Athens" and *aþeisti* "atheist" (cf., however, the neology *guðleysingur* for the latter) in much the same way English *th* does in such loans.

<sup>13</sup> Also *Peituborg*. Cf. *peita* f., a kind of javelin. Southwestern France has, as an early European armory, also produced the *bayonet* (from *Bayonne*).

<sup>14</sup> For the examples from *Anþekja* to *Friðsæla* (= *frið-sæla* "peacefulness") cf. Guðmundur Finnbogason, *Íslendingar* (Reykjavík, 1933), p. 139. *Kænugarðr* seems to associate the foreign name with Norse *kæna*, a kind of boat (German *Kahn*). Cf. also *Garðaríki* "Russia," *gerzkr* "Russian," and *Mikligarðr* "Byzantium."

<sup>15</sup> Like the native Scandinavian hydronymic, this name is identical with *leira* "muddy shore or bank." Cf. *Leirvík*, a reflex of which is seen in the British place-name *Lerwick* (Shetland).

<sup>16</sup> S. Blöndal's Icelandic-Danish dictionary shows *N(j)örvasund* (Old Icel. *N(j)grva-*) for "Straits of Gibraltar," literally "the narrow sound," as an early independent rendering of, possibly, the ancients' *Columnae Herculis*. Cf. also the native Norse *Ngrva* f. as the name of an island, lit. "the narrow one."

Historical reminiscence of this type also shows in the "christening" of one of Iceland's first skymaster-airplanes as *Gullfaxi*, an Eddic name (the horse of *Hrungnir*, lit. "the one with the golden mane") or in the naming of Iceland's recently born volcanic offspring, the little island of *Surtsey* off the south coast. *Surtr*, the fire giant in *Völuspá*, seems to symbolize the volcanic forces in ancient Iceland (cf. also W. Krogmann, "Surtsey: Ein neuer Name aus alter Überlieferung?" *Orbis* 16 [1967], pp. 78–92).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. such native place-names as *Berg-*, *Jötun-*, *Þrándheim(u)r* and the mythical *Muspellsheim(u)r*. Also *Bæ-* in *Bæheimur* contains a folk-etymological association (*bær*, Old Icel. *bær*, "farm; village, settlement").

nube,"<sup>18</sup> *Krít* "Crete,"<sup>19</sup> *Versalir* "Versailles,"<sup>20</sup> the literal translations *Góðrarvonarhöfði* "Cape of Good Hope" (cf. German *Kap der Guten Hoffnung*), *Höfðaborg* "Capetown" (while German was satisfied with *Kapstadt*, *cape* remained, of course, unacceptable in Icelandic), *Nýfundnaland* "Newfoundland" (German *Neufundland* is less explicit). *Öxnaðurða* "Oxford," another of these more recent renderings, shows two different handlings. While the first component of the foreign name was translated, the second, lacking a synonymic cognate in Norse (the word would have been *vað* n.), was camouflaged to *ðurða* f. with the spurious meaning "wonder, miracle" thus bestowed on the name. Apart from these "official" renderings of foreign place-names, individual random translations like *Munkaborg* "Munich" or *Sigurhlið* (both for "Siegestor" in Munich and "Arc de Triomphe") will occasionally be heard as the tendency to popularize foreign names is a truly popular one.<sup>21</sup>

Popularizations of foreign ethnic names were, of course, as welcome as those of toponymics already in early times. The classical name *gyðing(u)r* "Jew," a popular etymology connecting the concept with the word *guð* "god,"<sup>22</sup> superseded the likewise classical *júði*. With the help of the suffix *-verji* (Old Icel. *-veri*, pl. *-verjar*), found in names like *áveri* "river-dweller" (now apparently extinct), *Rómverjar* "Romans," *skipverjar* "crewmen," *víkverjar* "creek-dwellers," and *þjóðverjar* "Germans,"<sup>23</sup> new names were formed in more recent times such as *Indverji* "inhabitant of India," *Kínverji* "Chinese,"<sup>24</sup> *Pólverji* "Pole," or *Ungverji* "Hungarian," with the suffix *-versk(u)r* denoting the adjective and *-verska* standing for females of the nationality or for the language (*tunga* f.).<sup>25</sup> A neology of the type, but coined rather for scholarly purposes, was *Latverjar* "inhab-

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *á* "river," pronounced a+u: German *Donau*.

<sup>19</sup> Possibly in association with *krít* "chalk."

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the above *Jórsalir* "Jerusalem" (note 7). *Ver-* connects the name with the native *ver(r)* "man," now only in poetic use but known to be contained in *veröld* "world." Cf. *Versalasalmingurinn* "the Treaty of Versailles."

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the translation of the German place-name *Obersalzberg*, note 38, an equally telling example of unofficial anabaptism.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *gyðja* "goddess" and *goði* "(heathen) priest," early derivatives from the Gmc. word for "god."

<sup>23</sup> A name of more recent origin in which the etymological background of the German original (Icel. *þjóð* "people; nation") is taken into account. Cf., however, the old forms *þjóðverskir* (also etymologized to *þýverskir*, cf. *þý* f. "female slave, servant") or *þýskir menn* "Germans" (if without allusion to *þý* also *þýzkir*). See *-verskr* below.

<sup>24</sup> Somewhat older also *Sinlendingur*, formed after *Sinland*. In the first syllable of Greek *sinai* "Chinese" a welcome opportunity appears to have been seen to form a genuinely Icelandic-sounding first component of the neology. Cf. the native reflexive *sin* "oneself," etc., also contained in such native compounds as *singirnd* "egotism," *singirningur* "egotist," *singjarn* "self-centered, egotistic."

<sup>25</sup> Cf. also *japverskur* which, though quite Icelandic in its form, could not replace the much more foreign-sounding *japanskur*.

itants of Latium.”<sup>26</sup> In imitation of old ethnic denominations like the native *Dani* “Dane,” *Svíi* “Swede” or the adapted foreign *Breti* “Briton,” *Frakki* “Frank, Franconian” (now mainly used for “Frenchman”)<sup>27</sup> and the above *Júði*, the native suffix *-i* contributed to the formation of new names like *Grikkí* (old *Grikkir*),<sup>28</sup> *Itali* “Italian,” *Japani* “Japanese” (also shortened to the quite Icelandic-sounding *Japi*), *Rússi* “Russian.” A popular etymology which followed the Danish *Musselmand* “Moslem, Muslim” (Danish *mand* “man;” cf. Engl. *Musselman* and German *Muselman*, the latter for *Muselman*) is seen in *Múselmaður*. Like Danish *Musselmænd* (pl.), the Icelandic neology carries the popular etymology also into the plural (*-menn* “-men”).

Some neologies of this later time remained, however, mere attempts like the folk-etymological *Góðvík* for “Bombay”<sup>29</sup> and *Lithaugaland* for “Lithuania” (with German, Danish *Lithauen* for its model),<sup>30</sup> the etymo-

<sup>26</sup> To replace *latniskur* “Latin,” a direct reflex of Danish *latinsk* with the background of Germ. *lateinisch*, an adj. *latneskur* was formed with the help of a suffix that had already given the language names like *eistnesk(u)r* “Estonian,” *gotnesk(u)r* “Gothic” (in the old language only “pertaining to the island of Gotland”), *peitneskr* “pertaining to Poitou,” *rómnesk(u)r* “Roman” (in modern usage replaced by *rómverskur*, already a classical variant of the former), *saxnesk(u)r* “Saxon,” *serkneskr* “Saracenic” (cf. *Serkland* “land of the Saracens” and *serkir* “Saracens,” all in probable imitation of Norse *serk(u)r*, a long shirt or blouse), *sýrneskr* “Syrian” (cf. *Sýrland* “Syria,” also listed by Blöndal, which seems to connect the foreign name with either *sýr* “sow” (animal) or *sýra* “sour whey; acid”). Like the adjective, *latneska* f. replaced the old term *latína* “Latin language” with its foreign ending (cf. A. Jóhannesson, *Die Suffixe im Isländischen* [Reykjavík, 1927], p. 38).

<sup>27</sup> Old Icelandic has *danr*, also used as a personal name (cf. Halfdan(r)), with the plural on *-ir* (like mod. Icel. *Dani* “Dane”). Most other names of this type are pluraliatantum in the old language, like *svíar* “Swedes,” *bretar* “Britons” or *frakkar* “Franks.” The adjectives show *-sk(u)r*, a native suffix: *dansk(u)r*, *svenskr* or *scenskr* (modern *sænskur* only), *brezk(u)r*. In the case of “Frankish, Franconian” or “French” the suffix *-nesk(u)r* (see note 26 above) was again employed (*frakknesc(u)r*, but modern Icel. has more often *franskur* cf. Danish *fransk*) which, like certain other loans, has the to Icelandic ears endearing quality that it can take the mutation to *ö* (f. sg. and n. pl. *frönsk*; cf. the biblical name *Anna* and its obl. cases *Önnu*, or *pör*, nom. acc. pl. of *par* n. “pair, couple”). Old Icelandic also shows a variant *frankneskr*, presumably a loan from East Norse like *Frankaríki* “Franconia, France” (cf. Danish *Frankrig*) for which the modern language has *Frakkland* (“France”), the old West Norse form of the name. A choice similar to that apparent in modern Icel. *Frakkland* (instead of *Frankaríki*) may be seen in *Svíþjóð* “Sweden” which, in the modern language ousted the likewise old *Svíaríki* (cf. Danish *Sverrig*, Swedish *Sverige*, older *Svearíke*).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Old Icel. *danr*, modern *Dani*. The name of the country is, both old and modern, *Grikkland*, the adjective showing the form *grikkiskr*, in the modern language replaced by *grikkneskur* (for the ending *-nesk(u)r* see notes 26 and 27 above) and *grísk(u)r* (cf. Danish *græsk* “Greek”).

<sup>29</sup> On the (intentionally wrong) supposition that the foreign name was made up of (French) *bon* and (English) *bay*.

<sup>30</sup> A nonsensical rendering, resulting in “color-heap land.” Here, popular etymology has become a bad habit.

logical rendering of "Poland" as *Sléttumannaland*,<sup>31</sup> or such Icelandic-sounding names as *Miklibotn* and *Svartá* for two geographical concepts as remote from Iceland as the *Bengal Bay* and the river *Indus* respectively.<sup>32</sup>

There is little reason to believe that a nation whose toponomastic acquisitiveness stretches as far as India should previously have allowed to slip from her that which in olden times had been coined in place-names within the language's own precincts, though outside the country itself. As Icelanders had, through the centuries, faithfully preserved the old Nordicized forms of extra-Scandinavian place-names, their national zeal jealously guarded also what had found its way to Iceland of Old Scandinavian toponymics during the earliest centuries of the nation's history. *Björgvin* (Bergen), *Borgundarhólmur* (Bornholm), *Eystrasalt* (the Baltic), *Fjón* (Fyn), *Gautelfur* (Göta-Älv), *Hlésey* (Læsø), *Jamtaland* (Jämtland), *Jótland* (Jylland, Jutland), *Mön* (gen. *Manar*) for Danish *Møen*, *Níðarós* (Trondheim, Nidaros), *Óðinsvé* (Odense), *Sámsey* (Samsø), *Sjálaland* (Sjælland), *Skáney* (Skåne, Scania), *þelamörk* (gen. *-merkur*) for Norwegian *Telemark*, *þrændalög* (pl.) for Norwegian *Trøndelag* are names of this type which are still in constant use. Naturally, also *Danmörk* (gen. *-merkur*) and *Svíþjóð*, both feminine-gender words, have held their ground against any influence that might have come from Danish (*Danmark*, *Sverrig*) though in the latter case Old Icelandic also possesses the synonymic *Sviaríki* whose Old Swedish variant developed into modern Swedish *Sverige*.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, many of the Old Norse names are still remembered and in many cases used exclusively where localities in the British Isles are under discussion. Such usage implies that in addition to the above-mentioned early Norse adaptations of such names as *Caithness* (*Katanes*), *Canterbury* (*Kantaraborg*), *Man* (*Mön*), and *York* (*Jórvík*), Shetland and the Hebrides will invariably be referred to as *Hjaltland* and *Suðureyjar*. It goes without saying that, like the Faroe Islands (*Færeyjar*), also the Orkney Archipelago has retained its genuinely Norse name (*Orkneyjar*). In addition to such faithful custodianship, Icelanders' untiring alertness to whatever abroad might prove adaptable to or possibly even derived from Norse has had no difficulty in discovering the Norse background of such British place-names as *Lerwick* (Shetland) and *Grimsbý* which, re-modified, become *Leirvík* (also found in Iceland) and *Grimsbær*. Especially the latter is in common use.

<sup>31</sup> Slavic *pol* "earth, ground, field, plain": Icelandic *slétta*, a plain. The country's name in Icelandic is *Pólland*, occasionally, and derived from *Pólverji* "Pole," also *Pólverjaland*.

<sup>32</sup> Both names are independent coinages like *Mikligarðr* for "Byzantium." As to *Svartá*, cf. this name as a native hydronymic. See also "Modern Icelandic," p. 40.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. note 27 above. The tendency revealed is that of avoiding anything suspected of being a loan from Danish.

Like the handling of foreign place-names, that of foreign personal names shows all the characteristics of a conscious effort to adapt the foreign forms to Icelandic tastes and needs. In the classical literature we find such modifications as *Aðalsteinn* for Old English *Æþelstān*, or *Hróðbjartr* and *Ríkarðr* (modern Icelandic also shows the etymologically clearer form *Ríkharðr*) for the foreign names *Robert* (cf. Old High German *Hruodperahht*) and *Richard* (cf. Old High German *Richhart*), all adapted in conformity with their original etymological elements. The attempt to preserve the etymologies of the model names was less successful in the renderings of three other Old English names whose first components escaped the grip of the early etymologist. Here, Icelandic *ját*-<sup>34</sup> was substituted for Old English *ēad*- as in *Eadgār*, *Eadmund* and *Eadweard* which became *Játgeirr*, *Játmundr* and *Játvarðr*, though etymological counterparts exist at least in the case of *Eadgār* and *Eadmund*, which could have been rendered "correctly" by *Auðgeirr* and *Auðmundr* respectively.<sup>35</sup> It goes without saying that such early modifications were eagerly seized upon when linguistic protectionism became a public institution. As a consequence, also the "Edwards" of our times are, according to the circumstances that accompany them, subjected to either colloquial or both colloquial and official "naturalization" in Icelandic: notables among them invariably suffer the latter treatment. Thus King Edward VII became, of course, *Játvarður konungur* like his medieval namesakes and predecessors, while Eddie Brown from Birmingham or Boston is Icelandized by his Icelandic cronies only, who will, however, not hesitate also to re-christen any foreign *Paul* and *Peter*, any Swedish-Norwegian *Åke* or Danish *Aage*, as well as any Danish-Norwegian-Swedish *Torsten*, to *Páll*,<sup>36</sup> *Pétur*,<sup>37</sup> *Áki* and *þorsteinn*, respectively.<sup>38</sup> An eccentric example

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *játa* "confirm, admit, confess." In *Der übersetzte Eigennamen* (Munich, 1963), H. Rheinfelder deals with related problems in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin.

<sup>35</sup> A later adaption is *Lúðvík* for Germ. *Ludwig*. If the etymological method had, as in *Aðalsteinn*, *Hróðbjartr*, and *Rík(h)arð(u)r*, been applied here, Norse *Hlǫðver* (-*vér*) as the probable counterpart would have presented a satisfactory solution, although this name in Old Icelandic is also possibly a loan from West Germanic (cf. J. de Vries, *Altnord. etym. Wb.*, p. 239).

<sup>36</sup> As in *Páll*, the ending *-l* of the nom. sg. of many native masculine nouns with their roots ending on *-l* has of old been used to camouflage loans such as *fill* "elephant," *páll* "spade," *páll* "willow," *stíll* "style," *víll* "veil." Cf. also modern neologies, adapted from foreign words, like *berkill* "tubercle," *bill* "automobile," *nikill* or *nikull* "nickel," *nípill* (techn.) "nipple," etc. It goes without saying that the procedure was also widely adopted to create native neologies by amplifying available roots. Cf. such examples as *gerill* "bacterium, microbe," *rafjall* "electric generator" (cf. *rafmagn* "electricity," note 3 above), *sýkill* "disease-causing microbe," etc. The above examples of *-all*, *-íll*, and *-ull* also stand for the use of the native suffixes *-al-*, *-íl-*, and *-ul-* in such "genderization." Cf. also note 37 below.

<sup>37</sup> Unlike *Pét(u)r* with its root *-r*, the name *Christ* received final *-r* in adaptation to strong native masculine nouns and names: *Krist(u)r*, obl. cases *Krist-* (while *Pét(u)r*, like



of such puristic zeal is the pseudo-etymological translation of *Ivanhoe* as *Ívar Hlújárn* in which the Scottish name is handled like a compound (Ivan + Hoe) on the mock-supposition that *Ivan* stands for a first name and *Hoe* is identical with the English name of the tool. Though, in its absurdity, the translation resembles the interpretation of *Bombay* and *Lithuania* as “Good Bay” and “Land of Color Heaps,” *Ívar Hlújárn* became, unlike the two former, the exclusive version of the foreign name. It is, indeed, the correct title of Sir Walter’s famous novel in its translation into Icelandic.

It hardly surprises anybody that a language community so intent on availing itself of every opportunity to calque, folk-etymologize or otherwise adapt foreign words and names alike should, as it had done before in the case of foreign words, decide to leave the problem in the hands of the government.<sup>39</sup> In 1913 the Icelandic Diet dealt with foreign personal

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the masculine *haf(u)r* “he-goat,” *jöf(u)r* “prince,” *lúð(u)r* “horn, trumpet,” *vet(u)r* “winter,” etc., retains *-r* during its inflection). A case of early genderization of this type is also seen in *Marteinn* (obl. cases *Martein-*) “Martin.” Observe the popularization *-ei-* which gives “a second component” *-teinn* (: *teinn* “twig,” as in *mistilteinn* “mistletoe”) linked to the genuinely Norse-sounding first, *mar-* (: *mar* “sea”). Native speakers’ thoughts will hardly dwell on etymological speculations of the type but in its perfect morphological camouflage the name represents a well-nigh ideal case of loan-word or -name adaption: the form will neither offend Icelandic eyes nor jar on native ears.

<sup>38</sup> In much the same way the author’s first name, *Wolf*, used to be translated as *Úlfur* during his stay in Iceland some 30 years ago, while his father’s first name, *Edgar*, was converted to *Játgeir* (cf. p. 236) and jestingly, but nevertheless persistently, lengthened to the patronymic *Játgeirsson*. Professor Kenneth Chapman of UCLA tells the author of a similar experience in Iceland many years later. Here, the family-name *Chapman* was — correctly — etymologized to *kaupmaður*. The author furthermore remembers that before and during World War II Icelandic residents in Germany often nicknamed the German dictator as *Hjalti*, a Norse name faintly reminiscent of *Hitler*, so that in phrases like *hann Hjalti er á Efra-Saltfjalli núna* “Hitler is on the Obersalzberg right now” or in remarks of a more critical nature the ominous name would pass unnoticed even by ill disposed listeners.

<sup>39</sup> Cf., among others, Pétur Guðmundsson, “Um lagfæringu á sjómanna máli,” *Norðan-jari*, November 2, 1877; Valtýr Guðmundsson, in his review of S. Egilsson’s “Leiðarvísir í Sjómensku,” in *Eimreiðin* (1907); Halldór Hermannsson, “Modern Icelandic,” pp. 16–17, 22, 24–33, 39, 48–49, 53; Guðmundur Finnbogason, “Móðurmálið,” *Ísafold* (March 21, 1908). In this latter article, the author, director of the National Library and a prominent traditionalist, suggests the setting-up of special committees for the study of word-stock problems. This idea later materialized in the form of the so-called *Orðabókarnefnd Háskólans*, an official body working under the patronage of the Department of Education (called *Menntumálaráðuneytið*, itself a puristic neology). Cf. also Halldór Halldórsson, “Orðanefnd Verkfræðingafélags,” a report on the work of one of the subcommittees (that of engineers), in *Skírnir* (1954), and “Kring spráklíga nybldningar í ísländskan,” *Studia Islandica* (Uppsala, 1962), pp. 3–24. As important results of the work of the neologists, four volumes of *Nýyrði* (neologies) were published between 1952 and 1956 under the auspices of the Ministry.

names and their use in Iceland for the first time. The small number of family names which had either been imported from without or coined in imitation of foreign habits<sup>40</sup> were still left, if not undiscussed, yet untouched by the new legal measures. The legislators reserved to themselves the right, however, to supervise the future choice of such names. They limited considerably the scope of eligibility, prohibiting the readoption of family names already in use in the country. According to the new regulation, wives were permitted to adopt the family names possibly held by their husbands, but were otherwise free to use their own patronymics (-*dóttir*) as before. As to first names, their choice was restricted to a list of eligibles drawn up in accordance with traditionalistic viewpoints.<sup>41</sup> In 1925 the Parliament decided to take measures to protect the use of patronymics by prohibiting the future adoption of family names. Though bearers of such names adopted at an earlier date remained entitled to their use, the new law stipulated that the existing family names should expire at the death of their bearers.<sup>42</sup> The scope of choice with regard to first names was additionally narrowed and eligibles limited to Norse names,<sup>43</sup> certain biblical names that had been in use in Iceland for a long time, and a small number of other names of foreign extraction.<sup>44</sup>

In 1960 the Government decided that aliens applying for Icelandic citizenship should, before their naturalization, adopt both Icelandic first and last names, i. e., first names plus patronymics.<sup>45</sup> It stands to reason that such drastic measures as the ones adopted since 1925 did not pass

<sup>40</sup> Cf. "Modern Icelandic," pp. 63–64. A few more examples may be added to the ones given there (*Hjaltalín, Thorlacius, Vídalín; Stephensen, Thórarensen*): *Thóróddsen, Thorsteinsson; Eldjárn, Gröndal, Hafstein, Laxness, Nordal, Smári*; or *Kvaran* (Old Icel. also *Kváran*, the Gaelic surname of an Irish-Norse ruler) and the imitations *Kamban, Markan*.

<sup>41</sup> *Lög um mannanöfn* 41 (November 10, 1913).

<sup>42</sup> *Lög um mannanöfn* 54 (June 27, 1925).

<sup>43</sup> The revival of Norse names is dealt with by Ól. Lárússon in *Nöfn Íslendinga árið 1703, Safn til Sögu Íslands og Íslenzkra Bókmennta, annar flokkur, II, 2, Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag* (Reykjavík, 1960) p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Apart from others still in current use, *Jón, Jóhannes, Páll, and Pétur* appear to be the most popular of biblical men's names in Iceland. Other foreign names in current use are, for instance, *Alexander* and *Benedikt*. A particularly large group seems to consist of originally German names like *Bernharður, Engilbert* (also *-brekt* or *-brikt*), *Friðrik, Gottskálk, Hannes, Hans, Henrik* (*Hinrik*), *Hermann, Karl, Konráð, Kristján, Láðvík, Ottó, Rík(h)arður*. With the exception of the last (cf. p. 236) these names of German extraction were borrowed during the post-classical centuries, most presumably through Danish. The choice of first names around the middle of the last and the beginning of our own century can be seen from Sigurður Hansen, "Um Mannæiti á Íslandi árið 1855," *Skýrslur um Landshagi I* (1858), and from *Íslensk Mannanöfn samkvæmt Manntalinu 1. Des. 1910* (gefið út af Hagstofu Íslands, Reykjavík, 1915, Hagskýrslur Íslands, 5).

<sup>45</sup> Law of May 9, 1960, concerning the naturalization of 42 aliens. Cf. also the author's personal experience, note 38, above.

undisputed and uncontradicted, but Halldór Hermannsson's prediction that the disappearance of the traditional patronymics in Iceland was but a matter of time, that these names were doomed and would soon be abolished as they had been much earlier in the other Scandinavian countries, that it was, therefore, of little use "to kick against the prick,"<sup>46</sup> still stands unfulfilled to this day, half a century later.

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<sup>46</sup> "Modern Icelandic," p. 64.

#### A NOTE ON CALIFORNIA LICENSE PLATES

Prior to 1970, private automobiles in California were assigned a license identification (front and rear plates) as determined solely by personnel of the Department of Motor Vehicles. In 1970, however, to raise funds for needed research on pollution controls, the Department initiated a program whereby any motorist who is willing to pay \$ 25 for the service can obtain a unique personalized automobile license plate, chosen by the applicant and restricted only in that (1) it must be limited to no more than six letter/digit combinations, (2) it must not be in the same arrangement as on nonpersonalized license plates, i. e., digit-digit-digit-letter-letter-letter, and (3) it must not contain words or phrases which are deemed offensive by personnel of the Department.

In the first six months of this program, there have been 25,291 personalized plates issued.<sup>1</sup> The author has evaluated a comprehensive list of these 25,291 choices and has found 60 different major categories to which the arrangements selected for public display can be assigned. Among these numerous clusters are five whose contents are considered proper names and which may be of interest to onomatologists.

##### 1. *Consumer Products:*

ARCO, BAYER, CLOROX, ELGIN, IBM, KODAK, MAYTAG, MOBIL, NORGE, PARKER, RCA, REXALL, SCHICK, SQUIBB, TEXACO, VEL, ZENITH and ZIGZAG.

##### 2. *Consumer Foods:*

BUSCH, COKE, COLT 45, CRISCO, GERBER, HEINZ, LIBBYS, PEPSI, PURINA, SANKA, SPRITE and TUACA.

##### 3. *Conveyances:*

AMX, AVANTI, BUICK, CAMARO, COBRA, COUGAR, DATSUN, DE SOTO, DODGE, EDSEL, FALCON, FORD, GHIA, HONDA, IMPALA, JAGUAR, JEEP, KAISER NASH, OLDS, OPEL, PINTO, SIMCA, STUTZ, TOYOTA, VESPA, VOLKS, and YAMAHA.

##### 4. *Commercial Organizations:*

AAMCO, ABC, AETNA, ALLIED, AMICA, CBS, GMAC, HILTON, MGM, NBC, TWA, UNIVAC, and XEROX.

##### 5. *Affiliative Organizations:*

AMVETS, BPOE, NBA, NFL, PGA, ROTARY, UAW, USAF, USN, USO, WAC, WAF, and YMCA.

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication to the author by Mr. Gene Carroll, Director of Staff Services Department of Motor Vehicles, Sacramento, California, March 1, 1971.