Balancing over the fissure between a state of dependency and the rise of Icelandic self-awareness, the Icelandic historiographer Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648) succeeded in writing a history of Iceland that could hold its ground with contemporary historiographical works. From the tenth until the early thirteenth century, Iceland had known a social-political structure consisting of chieftainries. After a brief period of internal political instability, it became a dependency of Norway, whose governance of Iceland was passed into Danish hands after the Kalmar Union of 1397, a situation that would last until Iceland’s independence in 1944. Following the assumption of control over Iceland in 1262-64 by the Norwegian crown, the output of saga literature – Iceland’s literary pride – dwindled throughout the fourteenth century, and despite the rise of rímur poetry, nothing that could be considered the saga’s equal had emerged. That is, until the second half of the sixteenth century. In a time when European rulers engaged historiographers to write national histories that recorded their realms’ and/or dynastic, if not personal, glory on paper, the opportunity to revive Iceland’s former literary – and historical – glory presented itself. King Christian IV and scholars from Denmark started taking an avid interest in literary sources available only on Iceland, which could corroborate or extend information from their own sources and thereby enable them to record Danish history. For the first time, ideas that accentuated the gap between Iceland and the outside world as described in the Introduction were being conceptualised, ideas on the history of the Danish realm that were paradoxically endorsed by Icelandic sources. How so? The Danes sought the help of an Icelandic scholar, who had brought the existence of such sources to their attention, to make them available and translate them. But in doing so, they inadvertently provided the scholar in question with all the material one could need to write a history of Iceland and to profile his own country on an international stage despite its state of dependency. He was quick to seize the opportunity. Thus,

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2 Although there are many sagas whose earliest extant manuscripts date from the fifteenth century, there is general consensus that no original material was produced after appr. 1400. For rímur poetry, see Jakob Benediktsson (ed.), Ole Worm’s correspondence with Icelanders, Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1948, XXVI.
Icelandic literature and Icelandic history would rise again, be it in Latin, in the only internationally acknowledged form of historiography at that time.

Arngrímur Jónsson was the man who brought this resurgence about. He was not the first Icelandic historiographer, but he was the most significant of his era. He had studied at the University in Copenhagen from 1585 until 1589 and produced a description of Iceland entitled Brevis Commentarius de Islandia in 1593, a defense in Latin against a foreign work that had depicted Iceland negatively. This was the text that aroused the interest of Danish scholars in Icelandic sources and led to Arngrímur’s working together with Denmark’s foremost scholars and royal historiographers. In other words, he had the scholarly credentials and expertise to take on the job, which resulted in his magnum opus Crymogæa sive rerum Islandicarum libri III, published in 1609. Leaning on Jean Bodin’s Methodus ad facilem historiarum descriptionem, published in 1572, he created a contemporary historiographical framework within which he could fit the Icelandic state.

The ensuing narrative was to mark a new phase in awareness of the Icelandic self, and Crymogæa – a Latin name for Iceland invented by Arngrímur, based on the Greek words for ice (κρύμος) and land (γαῖα) – consequently has been interpreted as the text that laid the foundation for Icelandic linguistic purism and nationalism. Arngrímur came to be considered the first Icelandic author to write about a Golden Age in Icelandic history, the age of the so-called republic or commonwealth, during which language, literature and culture had flourished, and he is considered the first to observe that the end of this imagined era coincided with the fall of Iceland’s social-political structure. Generally, it has been accepted that Crymogæa followed a classical path of humanist historiography by applying Bodin’s description of the rise and fall of the Roman republic to the rise and fall of the mediaeval Icelandic free state. Iceland, as Arngrímur seemed to want to impress upon his – foreign – audience, was as much part of global history as any


other country, if not more so than others, and it deserved being placed on the map, both historically and literarily.

Yet there were two factors making the construction of such a fervent account of Icelandic national history anything but the obvious outcome. Firstly, there was the situation of dependency in which the country found itself, and secondly, there was no commission of the work by the head of state, whose main interest was the construction of Danish history and who did not pay Arngrímur to procure sources in order to write a history of Iceland. Arngrímur had to find a way around these obstacles. The question is: how did he do it?

This chapter aims to shed light on how Arngrímur succeeded in mapping Iceland within the boundaries of the Danish realm with the aid of Jean Bodin’s work. I will propose that the general means that Arngrímur used to avoid any conflict with Christian IV in constructing his text was to distinguish the forms of sovereign government that Iceland had known historically and to attribute equal value to them. This framework allowed him to illuminate a past without denouncing the present; on the contrary, he illuminated a past continuing into the present, with a specific focus on the continuous purity of the language. It is my opinion that Arngrímur chose to differ slightly with Bodin on that very topic in order to achieve this focus. I will argue that it is the governmental framework chosen and the difference between the Methodus and Crymogæa on the topic of language – as well as an array of functional manoeuvres – that enabled Arngrímur to compose his work without raising royal Danish eyebrows. Furthermore, I aim to show that, in the long run, the consequence of Arngrímur’s choices was that he unconsciously laid the foundation for the further development of an Icelandic self-awareness mainly focused on language. All of this happened within a political infrastructure in which the theme at hand – Iceland – was profiled separately by the angles chosen, while the author tried to keep up with international thought by making use of what Bodin had written and applying it to Iceland. Finally, with this study I hope to shed light on the stage in which Icelandic self-awareness found itself during early modern times, and to establish a basis for a review of how Arngrímur’s work is regarded in present-day Icelandic research – the perceived application of a historic model ascribed to Bodin to the situation on Iceland as well as a perceived glorification of a past of independence – that will help achieve a full understanding of the significance of Crymogæa.

ICELAND, DENMARK AND THE WORLD: MAKING A MARK AT THE BOUNDARIES OF CIVILISATION

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the first humanist accounts by Icelandic authors writing in Latin about Iceland and its history saw the light. Such works

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6 The first is an anonymous history of Iceland called Qualiscunque Descriptio Islandiae, written around 1588-89 and ascribed to Bishop Oddur Einarsson. See Jakob Benediktsson,
represented a landmark in Icelandic literary history, since no attempt to describe the country in a historiographic manner had been made previously. At this time, Iceland had been under foreign rule for three centuries. Ever since the Kalmar Union of 1397, Denmark had been in charge, and by the sixteenth century those on Iceland who sought higher education almost naturally ended up at the University of Copenhagen, where they became acquainted with contemporary thought and writing. It was there that Arngímir Jónsson, a young scholar and clergyman from Iceland, received his education, met and exchanged information with Danish historians, and acquired the examples and the knowledge needed to engage in contemporary historiography. His historical writings would pave the way for Icelandic generations to come.

His first work, *Brevis Commentarius de Islandia*, was a response to a German travel account from 1561 about Iceland that aroused general indignation among Icelanders due to its negative representation of the country. This publication, the poem *Van Ysslandt, Wat vor Egenschop, Wunder und Ardt des Volckes, der Deertte Vögel und Vische, darsülest gefunden werden* by the German merchant Gories Peerse, actually did not give a unreasonable account of the country and its geographic conditions, but it did voice a rather negative one of the island’s people. Peerse wrote that among other things, prostitution and adultery were common among the Icelanders, who, according to him, also saw no harm in conning a German and who cried like animals whilst drinking beer. The account was meant to be entertaining, the country seen through the eyes of a foreigner. Ísleifsson indicates that some have suggested that Peerse’s negative view of the Icelanders probably meant that he had had little to do with the more educated among them. If this were the case, then these would understandably be the ones most displeased by the poem. It was Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson who instigated the writing of a defense, and Arngímir took on the task at his request. The result, *Brevis Commentarius*, was written in 1592 and published in 1593 in Copenhagen.

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9 Sumarliði Ísleifsson, *Ísland framandi land*, Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 1996, 38. He also points out that some have suggested that the poem was meant to retaliate against Icelanders with whom Peerse had done business and had had negative experiences.
10 Jakob Benediktsson (ed.), *Arngrimi Jonae Opera Latine Conscripta* vol. 1 (*Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana* 9), Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1950, 6-7: ‘In lucem exiit circa annum Christi 1561 Hamburgi fætus valde deformis ... Rhythmi videlicet Germanici, omnium qui unquam leguntur spurcissimi et mendacissimi in gentem Islandicam’ [...] Quare hoc tempore author eram honesto studioso, Arngrimo Ionæ F., ut revolutis scriptorium
Arngrímur’s work had aroused great interest among Danish historians during his stay in that city in 1592-93, because it contained information about a shared Nordic past that they had not known existed and therefore had had no access to. Royal Chancellor Arild Huitfeldt employed Arngrímur to translate Icelandic historical sources, and thus he became instrumental in doing similar work for royal historiographers such as Niels Krag. They brought Arngrímur to the attention of King Christian IV and implored the king to commission him to make Icelandic texts available to them for writing the history of Denmark and Greenland. Arngrímur had already dedicated, and sent a copy of, Brevis Commentarius to the king, seeking his patronage, and, with the support of Huitfeldt, he had received thirty daler in return, to be collected at the king’s treasury. Less than three years later, in April of 1596, Christian sent an open letter to his Icelandic subjects in which he urged them to hand over their manuscripts to Arngrímur, so that he could collect information from the sagas relevant to the construction of a Danish history and translate it into Danish. He also sent Arngrímur a private letter reiterating his commission.

Arngrímur set out to accomplish the task at hand and finished it in 1597 by producing one collection of texts concerning Denmark and one concerning Greenland. He did not stick with the original assignment completely, in that he translated the texts into Latin, not into Danish. What’s more: he used the manuscripts at his disposal to construct another, more comprehensive history of Iceland called Crymogæa, something which Christian had not commissioned him to do. There did not seem to have been any desire on the king’s part at that point to map the Icelandic part of his realm within the greater context of a Danish history.

The lack of a royal assignment to write a specific description or history of Iceland, combined with having relevant manuscripts at his disposal, gave Arngrímur a position in which he enjoyed relative authorial freedom, and he used it to compose a history of Iceland that met the international standards of historiography. This freedom was certainly limited, though, because singing the praises of Iceland’s history within the boundaries of a state of dependency posed a problem, as did his monumentis (sic), qui de Islandiâ aliquid scripserunt, errores et mendacia solidis rationibus detegeret’.

11 Benediktsson, Opera vol. 4, 11-14.
12 Carl Pedersen, Afskildinger til Dansk Bog- og Bibliotekshistorie, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1949, 67. Huitfeldt seemed to have been material in this payment. According to Sigurðsson, it was a king’s ransom: worth more than seven cows; see Haraldur Sigurðsson, ‘Arngrímur Jónsson lærði’, Lesbók Morgunblaðsins, 43-42 (1968), 11.
15 Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta and Supplementum Historiæ Norvagicae.
16 This would change later during his reign, vide the work of Stephanius from 1629.
desire to have the work printed in Denmark, which meant there were issues of censorship to be dealt with. In all, he had to take into consideration how to get it accepted by the Danish authorities.

On a practical note, Arngrímur had the experience required to make sure that the book would pass censorship: his Brevis Commentarius had been printed in Copenhagen, which meant it had passed censorship. In Denmark, only printing presses in Copenhagen were acknowledged, and approval for the printing of books at these presses was granted by the University of Copenhagen. Since Arngrímur had studied and acquired contacts at the university, he is likely to have known what sort of text would pass, and he enjoyed the necessary support of Danish scholars, since they were interested in the part of a communal textual past to which Arngrímur had access and they did not. The initial factor in his favour regarding Brevis Commentarius was that his text was in Latin, not in Danish, and therefore it was not likely to corrupt the common man’s way of thinking: it was aimed at a foreign, intellectual elite. Next, he chose an accepted genre: the apologetic. And on top of this, Arngrímur’s dedication of Brevis Commentarius to the king would have helped to get it accepted – a dedication that additionally entailed a financial reward from Christian IV.

Arngrímur possibly thought that the same approach would work a second time, and after he finished Crymogæa in 1602, he tried to get it printed in Copenhagen. In the dedication, he wrote that in 1603, he had offered the book to the royal historiographer at that time, Jon Jacobsen Venusin, and to the rector of the university, Hans Poulsen Resen. Presumably he did this to find support for the book’s publication, and he implied that both men approved of the work, since he did not offer it to the public eye until after he had communicated the work to them. Given that Venusin was a friend and colleague, and Resen a professor of theology and as such actively involved in censorship, the fact that Arngrímur looked for their support was no coincidence. They are bound to have given permission for publication. But he had no luck getting the book printed in Copenhagen. The reason for this is probably the fact that there were only two printers active there in 1602-03, and their priorities likely did not include another book about Iceland considering the fact that Brevis Commentarius already had been

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19 Pedersen, Afhandlinger, 65; Appel, Læsning, 398-400.
20 Benediktsson, Opera, vol. 2, 5.
21 Appel, Læsning, 403. Venusin himself and Niels Krag had actually informed Arngrímur about Resen’s appointment as a professor of theology in 1597, so Arngrímur would have known that he was the one to turn to; Björn Kornerup, Biskop Hans Poulsen Resen vol. 1, Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1928, 201.
22 Benediktsson, Opera vol. 4, 44.
published. This is a more plausible explanation than the one that Benediktsson provided, when he suggested that Arngrímur could not find a printer because his Danish fellow historiographers had already got what they wanted from him and seemed to have lost interest in the appearance of another history of Iceland: the printers were probably the ones not interested. If the manuscript of 1602, which is no longer extant, included the dedication of the work to the king, this fact did not help him for the same reason; after many mishaps, the book was finally published in 1609 in Hamburg. He did send it to the king after it had been printed, with a dedication, and later he wrote that he was rewarded accordingly. All obstacles seem to have been overcome – or had they?

Humanism on Iceland: Arngrímur and Jean Bodin

There was another obstacle that Arngrímur had to deal with: he needed to come up with a design that would make his writings acceptable. Obviously, it was in his interest to write something that would not be rejected, as he wanted it to be dispersed internationally. It seems that to achieve the goal of acceptance and reception abroad, and most likely also to show that he was a historiographer on a par with his colleagues, he chose to shape his description of the Icelandic state and its past in Crymogæa by using an internationally acknowledged text for the understanding and writing of histories, the aforementioned Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem by Jean Bodin (1529/1530-1596), as a point of reference. Also, as said before, he composed his text in Latin, not Icelandic. So far, so good: the point of reference and language chosen would serve the purpose very well. Yet

24 Benediktsson, Opera vol. 4, 44-45. This would also account for the fact that, in 1606, Arngrímur did not find a printer for his work about Greenland, Gronlandia, a copy of which was sent to Resen as well.
25 In his work Apotribe virulentæ et atrocis calumniæ, Arngrímur mentions having been rewarded by Christian IV for his works that had been 'written for the good of the fatherland' and that had been dedicated to the king; see Jakob Benediktsson (ed.), Arngrimi Jonae Opera Latine Conscripta vol. 3 (Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana 11), Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1952, 58: 'quod opuscula mea, Patriæ bono publicata, Regiae suæ Majestati Sereniss. dicari clementer permiserit ac me munificè ornaverit.' It seems highly plausible that Patriæ refers to Iceland – it is mentioned explicitly elsewhere (vide infra) – and that Jakob Benediktsson was right in suggesting that the remark concerns Brevis Commentarius and Crymogæa; see Benediktsson Opera vol. 4, 182. Arngrímur himself refers to Brevis Commentarius and Crymogæa as opuscula, libella and opella in Crymogæa; see Benediktsson, Opera vol. 2, 5: 'Hoc itaque Opusulum ... sibi dicari permittat ...'; ibid. 8: ‘Edideram ... Libellum pro Patriæ meâ Islandiâ ... De quà Opella nostrâ...’ Interestingly, in the dedication of Crymogæa to King Christian Arngrímur referred to Brevis Commentarius as a payment of ‘small tithes’ and to Crymogæa as a payment of ‘great tithes’, ‘paid’ by him to the king out of respect for the king’s support and patronage of his work. It makes one wonder if, by referring to Crymogæa as ‘great tithes’, he was hoping for a proportionally larger reward!
there was also the subject itself: putting Iceland on the global map as a fully-fledged nation that could boast a serious history. In the first half of the seventeenth century, texts about historical subjects were subject to censorship by definition.\textsuperscript{26} Since Arngrímur’s intention was publication of \textit{Crymogæa} in Denmark, he somehow had to ‘sell’ this subject within the greater realm of Denmark without causing a ripple, and as we saw, he succeeded. Since the king did reward him for dedicating and sending the book to him, and since Arngrímur allegedly had Venusin’s and Resen’s support, there seems to be little reason to assume that the text would have been rejected by the censors on grounds of content six years earlier. Therefore, Arngrímur must have found a solution to overcome the obstacle of his subject matter.

A clue as to how Arngrímur went about making his subject matter acceptable to the Danish palate may be found in the first book of \textit{Crymogæa}, a general encyclopedia on Iceland’s geography, language, people, customs and government. Chapter six, about Iceland’s governmental set-up, opens with a reference to the sixth chapter of the \textit{Methodus}: Arngrímur states that Bodin will answer the question whether Iceland is rightfully called a \textit{res publica} and a \textit{civitas}.\textsuperscript{27} In Arngrímur’s words, Bodin had written that a state consists of a number of \textit{familiae}, consisting of three persons, or \textit{collegia}, consisting of five persons, that fall under the same rule. A state, therefore, is nothing more than a collection of families or guilds subject to common rule, i.e. one ruling all, all ruling individuals, or a few ruling all.\textsuperscript{28} Following this quote from Bodin – a slight misquote at that, for Bodin had written that a \textit{familia} consists of five persons and a \textit{collegium} of three \textsuperscript{29} – Arngrímur concludes that Iceland may be said to have known two types of \textit{res publica}, i.e. of government under common rule: \textit{aristocratia} and \textit{regnum}.\textsuperscript{30} These were two of the three types of sovereign rule that Bodin had identified and established to be legitimate forms later on in the same chapter of the \textit{Methodus}:

\textsuperscript{26} Appel, \textit{Læsning}, 368.
\textsuperscript{28} Benediktsson, \textit{Opera} vol. 2, 54: ‘Familiâ, inquit, tres personas, collegium quinque eodem imperio domestico contentas complectitur. Republca autem ex pluribus conflata familiae (aut collegis) etiamsi locis ac sedibus à se invicem divelluntur, modò sint in unius imperii tutelâ; sive unus imperet omnibus, sive singulis universi, sive pauci universis etc.’ The last sentence is almost a literal reproduction of Bodin; see Mesnard, \textit{Oeuvres Philosophiques}, 169, lines 6-11.
monarchy, the state of optimates and the popular state. More than that, aristocratia and regnum were the terms implying the rule to be virtuous, and Arngrímur chose to use them to prove the point that the country had prospered equally under both forms of rule. This train of thought is in line with what Bodin had written about the construction of states in his Les Six Livres de la République, where he provided similar information and used the same terms to indicate the virtuous kinds of government, not the generic ones. Having thus armed himself with Bodin’s theory, Arngrímur applied it to Iceland’s situation to make it universally intelligible to his foreign audience: the Icelandic state in Crýmogææa was modelled on two types of sovereign government described in the Methodus, one of them in the past, one of them continuing into the present. The format enabled Arngrímur to keep up with internationally accepted historiography and thought, as well as to deal with the paradoxical situation that he found himself in: writing about a partially independent past from a dependent present.

The coast was clear: now Arngrímur could start writing the country’s history without causing offense. The dichotomy between the two types of state that Iceland had known helped him constitute the framework for his description of its history in books two and three, which were dedicated to the eras of aristocratic and royal rule respectively. It also enabled him to make it very clear that both eras were to be treated on a par; specifically, he devoted just as many pages to the ‘lives of assorted famous Icelanders’ in the era before the state of dependency as he did providing ‘a catalogue of kings whose subjects the Icelanders have been’. To emphasise their equality he built a bridge between the ages of aristocracy and monarchy by stating that between the two eras, there had occurred one form of rule that by Bodin’s definition, had not been good: oligarchy. Arngrímur’s calling the aristocracy ‘praiseworthy’ highlighted the fact that, given Bodin’s ideas about

31 Mesnard, Oeuvres Philosophiques, 177: ‘Ex quo etiam planum fit, imperii summi jus in his præcipuē versari. Prius igitur in omni Republica intuendum est, quis imperium magistratibus dare & adimere, quis leges jubere aut abrogare possit. utrum unus, an minor pars civium, an major... Nihil enim quartum esse at ne cogitari quidem potest.’

32 In the Methodus, Bodin had indicated that it would be preferable to use the generic terms to understand types of government, rather than those indicating their being good or bad, such as aristocratia; ibid.: ‘hunc igitur statum optimatum dicemus aut popularem (his verbis utamur, ne specie virtutis ac vitiorum Aristocratiæ, Oligarchiæ, Democratiæ, & Ochlocratiae appellationibus sæpius uti cogamur).’


34 Benediktsson, Opera vol. 2, 98, 161: ‘Aliquot celebrium Islandorum vitas continens’ (98); ‘Regum quibus paruerunt hactenus Islandi catalogum continens, cum aliis nonnullis memorabilibus.’

35 ibid. vol. 2, 164-165: ‘Etenim sub ipsum mutandæ Reipub. tempus laudabilis illa Islandiæ Aristocratia in pessimam Oligarchiam transformari cæpit... Nec enim alia visa est incolis pacandæ Reipub. expeditior, nec magis tuta ratio, quam si tam Magnates quam plebs unius Regis imperio coërcerentur.’
this type of state, the nation had thrived under its rule. It was a safe and modest term to use, for in this context it was redundant to an outsider and no one would take offense at it. The latter is probably the reason why this passage is the only instance where Arngrímur used a qualitative adjective to denote the era that Icelanders from the twentieth century onwards have sometimes referred to as the gullöld Íslendinga, the golden age in the history of Icelanders.\textsuperscript{36} In Crynogæa Arngrímur did not rank it higher than the era of monarchy, certainly not explicitly. His statement that the oligarchy was \textit{pessimam} and that the aristocracy’s demise ultimately left the Icelanders no better or safer way to redeem the situation than by submitting to one king, led readers to draw the same conclusion about Iceland’s position as part of a monarchy as they would about its state under aristocratic rule, because \textit{regnum} was also a good kind of government.

The two-state construction provided room for more statements that categorised Iceland’s past as having been just as good as its present without giving rise to objections. It actually gave Arngrímur the freedom to profile his country positively, in a modest yet clear way. After having explained the origins of \textit{aristocratia} and \textit{regnum} on Iceland in book one, in book two he went on to write about the famous children that the era of the former had produced. He started off by saying that this account would correct the notion that the Icelandic people had consisted of a band of robbers and a bunch of good-for-nothings: not only were they descended from Norwegian kings and nobility, they had also produced kings and nobility.\textsuperscript{37} This statement echoed the tone of his earlier apologetic literature, whose genre and content were known in Denmark; again, a safe remark to make, and having made his point, he went on to back it up with a description of the lives of notable Icelanders. Book three commenced with Arngrímur’s pointing out that the Icelanders had been considered friends and allies by the Norwegian kings during that same era, although there had been kings who had attacked the happiness that came with the Icelanders’ former autonomy.\textsuperscript{38} A glorification of the past, a mourning over the loss of that very autonomy? The intended foreign and learned audience would have regarded the link between \textit{αυτονομίᾳ} and \textit{felicitate} from Bodin’s point of view, the latter a consequence of the former, and would not have considered the statement to be a glorification of times gone by. Once again, we see that Arngrímur must have known very well what he was doing.


\textsuperscript{37}Benediktsson, \textit{Opera} vol. 2, 98: ‘dicendum quos qualesve alumnos tulerit hæc Respublica ... ut vel hinc conticescant, qui gentem nostram Latronum collegium et nebulonum colluviem tantum fuisse calumniari soliti sunt ... Asserimus igitur præcipuos Islandiæ incolas et gentis nostræ conditores ... non solum Regum, Ducum, Baronum et Nobilium sanguine progenitos ac ortos, sed etiam Reges nonnullulos, Duces, Barones, Nobiles eisdem oriundos.’

\textsuperscript{38}Benediktsson, \textit{Opera} vol. 2, 161: ‘à vicinis Norvegiæ Regibus ... ut socii et amici colebantur. Interim tamen horum felicitati in libera illa \textit{αυτονομίᾳ} potissimum sitæ à diversis Norvegiæ Regibus diversis temporibus insidiatum esse depræhendimus.’
After a brief summary of kings’ dealings with Iceland before 1261 and identifying the cause of the era’s end, Arngrímur continued with a description of the legal and governmental aspects of monarchy on Iceland and then embarked upon a chronological summary of kings. The job was done: he had made the situation on Iceland universally intelligible from the past into the present, and he had said what he wanted to say. Both remarks at the beginning of books two and three were minor allusions to a past of great men and to a political state that had been good and had come to an end, in a context within which they could not cause offense: none of it tarnished the image of Iceland under regnum, and the intended foreign – read: Danish – audience was bound to agree. In other words, the political boundaries provided by Bodin offered a certain degree of support for singing Iceland’s praises, boosting its image and improving others’ impression of the country, without overtly doing so.

**THE VOICE OF ICELAND: ARNGRÍMUR VERSUS JEAN BODIN**

Arngrímur’s decision to focus on the continuation of his country’s political past into the present provided him with an angle that made the subject acceptable. This perspective also allowed him to construct a literary and ideological framework within which he could work. With the same notion of a continuous Icelandic legacy, Arngrímur then chose another, more specific angle on the level of ideas to profile his country: language. Only this time, instead of agreeing with Bodin, he allowed himself to take a stand that was slightly different from what Bodin had written about changes of language, in order to achieve a focus that would put Iceland on a par with the rest of the world.

According to Bodin, there were three major factors that have an impact on languages: the passage of time, the merging of peoples, and the geography of the area in which a language is spoken. At the end of the third chapter of book one in *Crymogæa* – about the Icelandic language – Arngrímur took the liberty of writing that in the case of the Icelandic language, an exception might be made for the first of the three causes for changes in language, a cause that was destined by fate or inevitable, as he said. To support this statement, he opened the chapter by stating that Icelanders were the only people still to speak unadulterated Old Norse, which he claimed was derived from Gothic, and he devoted the subsequent paragraphs of the chapter to the origin of the Icelandic language, which led up to the main

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39 Mesnard, *Oeuvres Philosophiques*, 244-245: ‘Sed mutationes linguarum tribus potissimûm de causis ... fieri consueverunt. Una est in ipso decursu temporum, quibus non modo linguae, sed etiam res omnes immutantur, ac tota rerum natura senescit ... Altera causa est in coloniarum ac populorum inter ipsos confusione ... Postrema linguae mutandae causa in ipsa regionis natura versatur.’

40 Benediktsson, *Opera* vol. 2, 30: ‘Porrò eâ lingvâ, olim Danica et Norvegica dicta, solos Islandos uti integrâ dicebam, si primam et fatalem seu necessariam illam mutationis lingvarum causam excipias.’
argument for his assertion: that the Icelanders had not allowed their language to be affected by contact with foreigners, unlike the Danes and the Norwegians. Basically, he used Bodin’s second argument about the change of languages to make an exception for Iceland in terms of Bodin’s first point.41 He concluded by saying that Icelandic had remained intact so far, but could suffer the same fate as Danish and Norwegian, although not to the same extent or at the same rate.42

It was not as if Arngrímur came unprepared to make a case for the purity of Icelandic. As a teacher at the University of Hólar, he was acquainted with mediaeval Icelandic writings about grammar that had been composed between the middle of the twelfth and the fourteenth century: the four Grammatical Treatises. These texts served a practical purpose: instruction on correct writing and use of language. One of the most influential codices containing these treatises, the Ormsbók or Codex Wormianus, was owned by his family: first by Guðbrandur Þorláksson, later on by Arngrímur himself. In the chapter on language, Arngrímur referred to the treatises explicitly, and displayed knowledge of the First and (the first part of) the Third Grammatical Treatise explicitly.43 In other words, he had it on good grounds that historically Icelanders had a grip on their language and had made efforts to maintain it at an early stage, and he had the professional authority to back up the assertion that the Icelandic language may be excused from Bodin’s first argument with the aid of the second.

So Arngrímur begged to differ with Bodin, though rather cautiously and minimally, as he used the potentialis ‘si ... excipias’. This is not nearly as strong as Benediktsson puts it in his Icelandic translation, saying that for Icelandic an exception had to be made.44 Nevertheless, it’s an important difference. Having established Iceland’s position as a fully-fledged part of the modern world – or rather the greater Danish empire – in a political-historical sense, on the one hand, Arngrímur also seemed to want to find a way to distinguish Iceland from that same world, on the other hand, in a way that again would be recognisable to his audience. Language was yet another safe bet: stressing the purity of Icelandic, as

41 *ibid.* vol. 2, 30: ‘Sic Parthos Persicum, Arabes Punicum, ... idia mutasse præter alios etiam Johannes Bodinus affirmat: Meth.hist.’ Arngrímur is referring to a passage in chapter nine of the Methodus, which he had just paraphrased almost literally; Bodin, *Oeuvres*, 245.

42 *ibid.* vol. 2, 30: ‘Id quod etiam nostræ lingvæ ex parte aliqua accidere posse non imus inficas: sed nequaquam tanto discrimine aut tam paucorum annorum intervallo.’


44 Jakob Benediktsson (trans.), *Crymogæa. Þættir úr sögu Íslands*, Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1985, 104: ‘En um þessa tungu ... verður þó að undanskilja hina fyrstu og lögbundnu eða óhjákvæmilegu orsök allra breytinga tungumála.’
opposed to that of other Scandinavian languages, and its elegance that could be seen in old writings, should suffice to have it considered a classical language by any early-modern scholar – a thought not opposed by Christian IV himself.45 No one among the readers would or actually could argue with Arngrímur there, not least since the intended readership, the Danish elite, was not likely to know the language.46 They were bound to be the target audience, since Iceland was part of the Danish realm, within whose boundaries the country was to be profiled. Other than that, the learned Danish had already become acquainted with the legacy of Icelandic mediaeval literature and with the knowledge of runic script preserved on Iceland through Arngrímur’s translations: they would subscribe to Arngrímur’s statement that the Icelandic language had persisted unchanged to their day, even if they did not understand the language itself; in this respect, one could almost say that Arngrímur was stating the obvious. Nevertheless, once more he had picked a suitable means of making a point to profile Iceland that would hardly be visible to his reading audience.

Whether the readership picked up the glove is a point that I will discuss later on. What is important to realise is that Arngrímur wrote about a linguistic legacy that continued into the present and about old writings that proved that the current quality of Iceland’s language already existed centuries before, and he gave pointers as to how that quality was to be preserved if the Icelandic language were not to suffer the same fate as other languages had. Any comparison of the history of Latin with the history of Icelandic that Arngrímur supposedly implied does not stand, because in his argumentation, Icelandic, unlike Latin, had never deteriorated to a point where it had to be restored.47 Could one then still say, as has been done before, that Arngrímur’s portrayal of the Icelandic language was intended to have it regarded as ‘the Latin of the North’?48 It would be more appropriate to call it a modern classic, one that had stood the test of time given the evidence provided to prove its continuous purity. A daring thought, because it would mean that Arngrímur placed his own language not only above the other Scandinavian languages, but also above Latin, a ‘restored’ language in which he himself wrote.

45 Benediktsson, Opera vol. 2, 30: ‘…in libris manuscriptis, veteris puritatis et elegantiae refertissimis’. In Christian’s letters to Arngrímur and the Icelanders, he refers to the literary ‘antiquities … in our land Iceland’ (‘Antiquiteter … paa wortt land Issland’), and he did not oppose the identification of Icelandic with the language of runic inscriptions as part of a Danish past; see Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, Historiography at the Court of Christian IV, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002, 24.
46 For examples, see a.o. Benediktsson, Opera vol. 4, 73.
48 I need to point out here that the term ‘the Latin of the North’ is a modern invention: Jensson has researched the provenance of the term extensively and dates it as recently as 1961; Gottskáll Pór Jensson, ‘Latína Norðursins’, in Jóhannes B. Sigtrygsson et al. (eds.), Aravisur sungnar Ara Páli Kristjánsyni 28. September 2010, Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarþjóður Mette Magnussen, 2010, 16.
and the other classical languages mentioned by Bodin.\textsuperscript{49} In conclusion, any paradigm of Arngrímur’s for the description of the Icelandic language did not follow what Bodin wrote on the degeneration of Latin.

The notion of continuity enabled Arngrímur to profile Icelandic on a level previously undetected. His approach comprised an appreciation of Icelandic that was not bound to any particular era, from a position of equality or even superiority to other languages. Moreover, the notion of continuity also casts doubt on the thesis that a supposed recognition of Icelandic as a classical language, ‘as seen in old writings’, would imply a glorification by Arngrímur of the culture and society during the era in which they had come into being, as Jensson puts it.\textsuperscript{50} By no means do we see an explicit glorification; an implicit appreciation likely, but again, only on the prerogative that that very culture and society \textit{continued to live on}, which, considering the historical-political context that Arngrímur had drawn with Bodin’s help, he considered to be the case. In fact, Arngrímur never wrote anything that glorified the era in which the old writings had come into existence as opposed to the age in which he lived. At no point did he make mention of a heyday in the history of the Icelandic language or literature, nor for that matter of a heyday in Icelandic society during which the language flourished. Fine writings were produced during that era, and they proved that the language had been already as elegant then as it was in his day. No connection, implicit or explicit, between his remark about the language seen in \textit{libris manuscriptis, veteris puritatis et elegantiae refertissimis} and a glorification of the age of \textit{aristocratia} can be detected.

Drawing parallels between the history of the Icelandic state in \textit{Crymogæa} and that of the Roman state in the \textit{Methodus} is problematic for the same reason.\textsuperscript{51} Bodin described the changes in the Roman state as a transition from monarchy into tyranny under the Tarquinii, followed by transformations from aristocracy into oligarchy and then from democracy into ochlocracy during the so-called age of the Roman republic, and finally from monarchy under Augustus into a tyranny reaching its nadir under Constantine.\textsuperscript{52} The Roman \textit{res publica} had come to a definite end, quite shortly after Augustus had gained power, so Bodin wrote.\textsuperscript{53} A Bodinian ‘model’ for changes in government, including the rise and fall of the Roman republic, that is suggested to be the model for all Bodin’s descriptions of states and changes in government, however does not apply to Arngrímur’s description of Iceland; what is more, the ‘model’, going from a monarchy to a

\textsuperscript{49} Mesnard, \textit{Oeuvres Philosophiques}, 244-245.
\textsuperscript{51} For this parallel, see Jensson, ‘Latin’, 21.
\textsuperscript{52} Mesnard, \textit{Oeuvres Philosophiques}, 201. By the term ‘Roman republic’, I mean the era between 509 and 27 BC; the word ‘republic’ here is not to be confused with Bodin’s and Arngrímur’s \textit{res publica}.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{ibid.}: ‘hinc varì ab optimis principibus, mox etiam à tyrannis suspepta.’
republic and back to a monarchy, does not exist.\footnote{For this model, see Gottskálk Þór Jensson, ‘Jean Bodin på Island. Humanisten Arngrímur Jónssons brug af Methodus ad Facilem Historiarum Cognitionem (Paris 1566)’, \textit{Renaissanceforum. Tidsskrift for Renæssanceforskning} [online] 1 (2005), 6: http://www.renaissanceforum.dk/1_2005/bodin.pdf (accessed January 5\textsuperscript{th}, 2018); idem, ‘Latin’, 21.} Firstly, Bodin provided generic descriptions of \textit{status rerum publicarum} and of changes within them before launching into specific categorisations of various states, starting with Rome.\footnote{The full description of \textit{status rerum publicarum} is at the beginning of book six of Bodin’s \textit{Methodus}; see Mesnard, \textit{Oeuvres Philosophiques}, 167-177. For the generic description of changes in states: \textit{ibid.} 195-201.} He did not model the description of other states on that of Rome, although he called Rome ‘the most famous of all’.\footnote{Mesnard, \textit{Oeuvres Philosophiques}, 201: ‘Omnium autem clarissima fertur esse Romanorum.’} Secondly, Arngrímur provided an account of the \textit{Forma Reipublicæ Islandorum}, but no overview of \textit{conversiones imperii} that had taken place on Iceland, as Bodin had for Rome.\footnote{Benediktsson, \textit{Opera} vol. 2, 54.} Thirdly, Rome had known two eras and two different types of sovereign rule during the age between the Tarquinii and Augustus, both having taken a turn for the worse, whereas Iceland between 874 and 1261 had known just the one. And last but not least: just as there had been no deterioration on Iceland linguistically, according to Arngrímur, there had been no final demise politically either: having become a part of a \textit{regnum} had given Iceland an ending as happy as could be, unlike the fate that Bodin’s Rome had suffered. Bodin used the term \textit{res publica} in the generic sense to denote the three types of sovereign government, and Arngrímur followed suit. His \textit{res publica Islandorum} referred both to the era of \textit{aristocratia} and to the era of \textit{regnum}, not just to the former, or in other words it did not denote, as has been alleged, a specific type of state.\footnote{Jensson, ‘Jean Bodin på Island’, 6; Árni Daniel Júlíússon, ‘Icelandic sagas around 1600. Reception, interpretation and context’ (2002), 9: https://publikationen.uni-tuebingen.de/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10900/46199/pdf/7_arni~1.pdf (accessed January 5\textsuperscript{th}, 2018).} Arngrímur’s \textit{res publica Islandorum} was still intact: it was no invention of his to denote a state that the country had known in the past, but an invention to point out the continuity of that state, be it with a little dip. Was Arngrímur saying that Iceland had done better than ‘the most famous of all states’ and all the other states whose ultimate fall Bodin had described? Another daring thought. On the practical side of things, he obviously also could not have recounted a fall of the \textit{res publica Islandorum} had he wanted to, not to a Danish audience and not in a book dedicated to their king. If Iceland had done better than Rome or any other state, it was thanks to the – now Danish – monarchy. He could argue that Iceland was better than Rome and all the rest and have his readership take his argumentation at face value, because they would accept it based on Bodin’s theories. In other words, it provided Arngrímur with yet another means to say what he wanted to say without explicitly saying it and without causing a royal stir.
One thing is clear: a comparison by Arngrímur of the course of events in Rome as described by Bodin to those on Iceland between 874 and 1261-63 is not even implicit: it is not there.\textsuperscript{59} Arngrímur had taken Bodin’s pointers about the description of history to heart and used his general ideas about types of and changes in government to construct his story. His description of the situation in Norway at the time of King Haraldur hárfagri in book one, chapter two, leading Ingólfur Arnarson and Hjörleifur Hrðómarsson to flee his rule and go to Iceland, served as a springboard to describe the first half of the two-state construction. His aforementioned one-off mentioning of the \textit{pessimam oligarchiam} at the end of book two, leading to the assumption of power by Norwegian king Hákon Hákonarson in 1261-63, served as the bridge to describing the second half of the construction. There does exist a parallel between Bodin’s description of Rome and Arngrímur’s description of Iceland regarding the cyclical nature of societies moving from one political form into another, as observed by Benediktsson.\textsuperscript{60} Other than that, any resemblance to the events in Rome described by Bodin is coincidental.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{The Aftermath}

Continuity is the key with which Arngrímur unlocked the gateway to having Iceland’s history internationally understood and acknowledged and to profiling the country within contemporary limits. Continuity allowed him to set the Icelandic state and its language apart from the rest of the world, i.e. the Danish realm, whilst staying within the boundaries of that very realm. It leaves little room for upholding the idea that Arngrímur wrote about an imaginary \textit{gullöld} during which Iceland had been a free state and the language and culture had prospered. Not once in \textit{Crymogæa} is a golden age in Icelandic history mentioned as such by Arngrímur, not once does he glorify Iceland’s medieval past: the age of \textit{aristocratia} had been a good one, as was the age of \textit{regnum}, and the reader could fill in the rest, if so desired. We have to conclude that there is no active glorification of ‘the age of independence’ in the Middle Ages: at most there is an implicit appreciation. With uncanny craftsmanship, Arngrímur chose the safe way out on every point that he was trying to convey, or rather: he used Bodin to do so, mostly \textit{ex positivo} and a little \textit{ex negativo}. His craft was that he kept a steady balance between the past and the present: the past was something good, and the present was the best present that could ever be, because it was \textit{just as good}. Across the board, he proved himself

\textsuperscript{59} These dates are the ones that Arngrímur mentions; Benediktsson, \textit{Opera} vol. 2, 169-171. Historically, the period is 1262-64; Gunnar Karlsson, \textit{Iceland’s 1100 years}, London: Hurst & Co., 2000, 83-86.

\textsuperscript{60} Benediktsson, \textit{Opera} vol. 4, 54.

\textsuperscript{61} Interestingly, Arngrímur wrote about Haraldur hárfagri that his violence was commonly not condemned by historians, as it had put an end to two forms of negative government, oligarchy and ochlocracy. Benediktsson, \textit{Opera} vol. 2, 21.
to be a worthy representative of early-modern historiography and early-modern thought: his work professed an early-modern kind of self-awareness, and a very strong one at that, which proved itself by being universally recognisable, yet specifically Icelandic in the one respect in which it could be: language. And this was all because it suited the political situation so very well.

In doing so, Arngrímur succeeded in sketching a history that placed Iceland on the map of global history with the aid of Bodin, though not following the route modern academics have generally believed him to take. In *Brevis Commentarius*, the aim of writing the work had been that of a polemic, a defense, and there does not seem to have been any need to choose one specific perspective – the focus certainly was not on language. *Crymogæa*, however, was a national historiography meant to hold its ground with foreign historiographical works, written in the exceptional circumstance of a state of dependency, and it required more specific angles to procure its publication and its reception by an audience situated on the other side of the governmental infrastructure. The angles chosen, the historical-political perspective in general and language in particular, were not only very functional ones on multiple levels, as we have seen, they would also turn out to be important ones with long-lasting effect, not least because they continued to provide Icelandic historiographers with a framework with which to establish a profile for the country and its history – as well as for themselves – for years to come, even if they needed a little time to discover the text.62 One could say that Arngrímur’s approach might qualify as more than just early modern, i.e. as modern *avant la lettre*: he succeeded in simultaneously constructing an ideal past and present that he legitimised with the help of Bodin’s ideas on state and language. No wonder, then, that this text would provide the springboard for the first move into the true cultivation of Icelandic culture in the following century.63

Now the question remains: did the Danish accede to it? The answer is yes. Since its publication in 1609, *Crymogæa* has enjoyed a favourable reception. It provided foreign authors with information about Iceland that they could use and reproduce.64 The Danes Ole Worm and Stephanus Johannis Stephanius gratefully used Arngrímur’s work to support their own. The interest of Worm was in documenting Norse antiquities to uncover the roots of Danish culture, and *Crymogæa* provided him with information about runes that he used for his first

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62 These were Þórður Þorláksson (1666), Þormóður Torfason (1711) and Finnur Jónsson (1772-78); see Svavarsson, ‘Greatness Revived’, 553-562.
63 See Chapter 3.
64 A concise reproduction of book one of *Crymogæa* was also presented in Samuel Purchas’ work *Haklytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, Londen: H. Fetherstone, 1625, part 3, Ch. 3, 654-668. Purchas’ work was a collection of travel stories and descriptions of countries and their inhabitants. It belongs to the genre of early-modern travel literature and therefore bears no relevance to Iceland’s position in the Danish realm, but still it is interesting to see that *Crymogæa* was also received in England as early as 1625. Also, Arngrímur as an Icelandic historian was mentioned in the famous encyclopedia of Diderot and d’Alembert: *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* vol. 8, Neufchatel: Faulche, 1765, 916.
book about runes, *Fasti Danici*, written in 1626. Stephanius, who later became royal historiographer, set out to describe the Danish realm in its entirety and reproduced book one of *Crymogæa* integrally in his work *De Regno Daniæ et Norvegiæ insulisque adjacentibus juxta ac de Holsatia, ducatu Sleswicensi et finitimis provinciis tractatus varii* of 1629, which consisted of eight treatises describing the realm. Neither knew Icelandic, and Arngrímur’s work provided them with material they needed in Latin: information about the runes and Icelandic sources supplementing the work of Saxo Grammaticus. Both started corresponding with Arngrímur after their books had been published, and what ensued was mutual appreciation and support of each other’s work until the end of Arngrímur’s life. His knowledge was valued, and his work had achieved its goal: Iceland had been put on the map of the greater Danish realm, his work had in no way been detrimental to the notion of that realm, and a peaceful coexistence – at least on paper – with the learned Danish was the consequence. This coexistence would last until the early nineteenth century, when the renowned Danish philologist Rasmus Christian Rask used Arngrímr’s description of the origin and the original state of the Icelandic language in his *Undersøgelse om det gamle Nordiske eller Islandske Sprogs Oprindelse* of 1818, defining the concept of Icelandic as a classical language more explicitly than Arngrímur himself had ever done. Rask’s recognition of Arngrímur’s work was the ultimate proof that Arngrímur had accomplished his goal among the Danish, and he had done it by constituting a linguistic self-awareness for Iceland that no one could deny. The cherry on the cake must have been the fact that the Danish king had facilitated and paid for it.

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66 Stephanus Johannis Stephanius, *De Regno Daniæ et Norvegiæ insulisque adjacentibus juxta ac de Holsatia, ducatu Sleswicensi et finitimis provinciis tractatus varii*, Leiden: Elzevier, 1629. The treatise about Iceland is called ‘De Islandicae gentis primordiis et veteri respublica’.

67 They supported Arngrímur in a dispute with royal historian Johannes Pontanus about the refutation in *Crymogæa* that Iceland was to be identified with Thule; see Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historiography*, 58-59.

FINNUS IOHANNAUS
Symb. Fide justus salvatur.