

Introduction

Since the year 2015 I have been working as editor in chief of *Nordicum-Mediterraneum: Icelandic E-Journal of Nordic and Mediterranean Studies*, published by the University of Akureyri (<<http://nome.unak.is>>). As such, I have received, read, reviewed and released a number of contributions by foreign and, in particular, by Italian scholars, dealing with Iceland under a broad variety of scientific perspectives. Also, especially during and immediately after Iceland’s 2008 financial meltdown, I was contacted and interviewed by a number of media outlets, primarily Italian. Thanks to these experiences, I can contribute to today’s discussion with an eminently personal yet qualitatively rich account of Iceland’s image among Italian and foreign academic circles. Above all, I believe the materials accumulated in the long life of *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* to be a truly interesting source of insight in the academics’ interest points, if not even the educated commonplaces, about Iceland.

Albeit in charge of the journal since its inception, I am not its real father, who is instead a scholar that has been working for many years at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík, Maurizio Tani. Eleven years ago, one year short of the title’s twelve, he approached me with the idea of a scholarly journal devoted to the many and diverse historical exchanges between the North and the South of Europe and, in particular, between Iceland and Italy. Nothing of the sort existed on the academic scene. Needless to say, his suggestion was taken aboard. Then, thanks to the small yet vital financial support of the University of Akureyri, plus the crucial help *qua* webmaster of Mr. Fabrizio Veneziano of Schiller International University in Paris and of Ms. Sigrún Magnúsdóttir *qua* Akureyri-based editorial assistant, the journal was officially born.

Foreign contributions about Iceland: Numbers and titles

A true pioneer in open-access scholarly publishing in Iceland, the journal aimed primarily at serving as a forum and an archive for scholars interested in Nordic and Mediterranean mutual connections. Progressively, pressured by its growing readership, the journal expanded its scope to Nordic and Mediterranean matters at large, rather than remaining confined to the exchanges between the North and the South of Europe. At the same time, the journal continued to publish a variety of other contributions as well, ranging from reviews of recent literature to interviews and personal memoirs. The break-up of the publications listed below does not include the special issues 11(2-3), due this year and already in the pipes, editorially speaking, and reads as follows:

Regular issues: 11 (2006-2016)

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Special issues: 12 (2006-2016 i.e. up to 10(3)/2016)

Of which:

Conference proceedings: 11 (2008-2016)

Other subjects: 1 (2006)

New articles: 42

Reflections on Iceland's economic crisis: 13

Conference proceedings: 102

Conference-related notes: 11

Review essays: 5

Book reviews: 121

Interviews: 6

Memoirs: 6

Translations: 5

Republished books: 2

Degree theses: 1

Other contributions (short notes, reports, surveys, non-peer-reviewed articles, etc.): 19

Total publication: 333

Of all these published materials, 45 contributions can be said to deal with Iceland's image in the eyes of foreign scholars, whether directly or indirectly, e.g. as reported in books reviewed for the journal (in the case of book reviews and review essays, I attribute each entry to either the reviewer's nationality or the book author's nationality, depending on who emphasises Iceland more). Longer pieces (e.g. articles, conference papers) amount to 21, while shorter ones (e.g. book reviews) to 24. Most of them are in legal studies (12), linguistics and/or literature (7) and history (5). Then we have contributions in philosophy

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(4), economics (4), geography (4), politics (3), psychology (2), art history (1) and personal memoirs (3). The countries of relative observation can be listed as follows:

- Argentina: 1
- Faroe Islands: 1
- Finland: 1
- Germany: 3
- Ireland: 2
- Italy: 25
- The People’s Republic of China: 2
- Romania: 1
- Russia: 2
- Scotland: 6
- Spain: 1

True to the original spirit of the journal, publications by Italian scholars on Icelandic or Italian-Icelandic matters stand out as far more numerous than the others. This geographical predominance and the limited overall as well as specific number of published contributions make a quantitative analysis unlikely to provide valuable information. Their qualitative value as academic exploration of Iceland’s heritage and historical experiences persists, however.

The typology, depth and length of these 45 contributions varies enormously. I list them below in chronological order, specifying their category, in accordance with the journal’s internal system of classification. In the pages following the list below, I refer to the underlined authors and the relevant year of publication in the journal; when Icelandic-foreign collaborative projects are included, I underline and count for the country list above only the foreign specialists involved:

1(1)/2006

Article

Antonio Casado da Rocha, “Narrative Ethics and the Ecology of Culture: Notes on New Italian-Icelandic Sagas”

Note on conference proceedings

Maurizio Tani, “Italo Balbo, Iceland and a Short Story by Halldór Laxness. Notes on the Conference ‘La trasvolata Italia-Islanda del 1933’ (Reykjavík, 7 June 2003)”

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Interviews, memoirs and other contributions

Francesco Milazzo, "Teaching Roman Law in Iceland"

1(2)/2006

Translations

Maria Savi Lopez (1848-1940), "Akureyri", *Nei paesi del Nord*, Torino: Paravia, 1893

Italo Balbo (1896-1940), "Nella terra dei Vichinghi", *La centuria alata*, Milano: Mondadori, 1934

3(1)/2008

Articles

Emanuela Finocchietti & Luca Zarrilli, "Paesaggio naturale e politiche di sviluppo territoriale in Islanda"

Conference proceedings

Manuela S. Campanini, "Iceland as a Landscape Investigation Pattern"

Book reviews

By Antonio Calcagno: Paolo Borioni, Cesare Damiano & Tiziano Treu, *Il modello sociale scandinavo. Tra diritti e flessibilità* (Roma: Nuova Iniziativa Editoriale, 2006)

4(1)/2009

Interviews, memoirs and other contributions

Federico Actite, *Ancient Rome and Icelandic Culture - A Brief Overview*

5(1)/2010

Articles

Diego Feroli, "On the Oral-Formulaic Theory and its Application in the Poetic Edda: The Cases of *Alvíssmál* and *Hávamál*"

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Manuela S. Campanini, "Imagine a Collective Landscape"

Viola Miglio, "Old Norse and Old English Language Contact: Scandinavian Legal Terminology in Anglo-Saxon Laws"

Reflections on the economic crisis

Giorgio Baruchello, "Eight Noble Opinions and the Economic Crisis: Four Literary-philosophical Sketches à la Eduardo Galeano"

Maria Pia Paganelli, "Learning from Bjartur About Today's Icelandic Economic Crisis"

Interviews, memoirs and other contributions

Antonio Costanzo, "Fyrirlestur um bókina *Hávamál*. La voce di Odino"

Marinella Lorinczi, "Dracula in Iceland"

6(1)/2011

Article

Adriana Di Stefano, "Northern Steps of EU Enlargement: The Impact of 'Cohesion' Policies on Iceland's Accession Process"

Book reviews

By Rachael Lorna Johnstone: H. Beale et al., *Cases, Materials and Texts on Contract Law*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2010); and T. K. Graziano, *Comparative Contract Law: Cases, Materials and Exercises* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009)

By Rachael Lorna Johnstone, Natalia Loukacheva (ed.), *Polar Law Textbook* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2010)

Dissertation

Fabio Quartino, *La Costituzione Islandese: storia ed evoluzione*

6(2)/2011

Article

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Garrett Barden, "Responses to the contributors"

7(1)/2012

Article

Birgir Guðmundsson & Markus Meckl, "'Karlson' - A Stasi 'Kontakt Person'. An episode of Iceland's Cold War legacy"

Book reviews

By Andrea Hjálmsdóttir: Aðalheiður Ámundadóttir & Rachael Lorna Johnstone, *Mannréttindi í þrengingum: Efnahagsleg og félagsleg réttindi í kreppunni* (Akureyri-Reykjavík: Háskólinn á Akureyri og Mannréttindaskrifstofa Íslands, 2011)

By Anita Einarsdóttir & Tiantian Zhang: Herman Salton, *Arctic Host, Icy Visit: China and Falun Gong Face Off in Iceland* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010)

Interviews, memoirs and other contributions

Jorge Mejía, "Some impressions after a quick visit to Iceland"

8(1)/2013

Articles

Hjálti Ómar Ágústsson & Rachael Lorna Johnstone, "Practising what they Preach: Did the IMF and Iceland Exercise Good Governance in their Relations 2008-2011?"

Irina Zhilina, "The Security Aspects in the Arctic: the Potential Role of NATO"

Review essay

By Carlo Penco: Juha Manninen & Friedrich Stadtler (eds.), *The Vienna Circle and the Nordic Countries. Networks and Transformations of Logical Empiricism* (Vienna: Vienna Circle Institute Yearbook vol.14, Springer, 2010)

Book reviews

By Gísli Aðalsteinsson: Maurizio Tani, *La chiesa di Akureyri: Guida storico-artistica alla parrocchiale luterana della «capitale del nord»* (Grafarvogur: Snorri Sturluson, 2010)

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By Guðmundur Heiðar Frímansson: Brian Lucey, Charles Larkin & Constantin Gurdgiev (eds.), *What if Ireland defaults?* (Dublin: Orpen Press, 2012)

By Herman Salton, “‘Arctic Host, Icy Visit’: A Response” (cf. Tiantian Zhang)

By Rachael Lorna Johnstone: Jesús Ballesteros, Encarnación Fernández Ruiz-Gálvez & Pedro Talavera (eds.), *Globalization and Human Rights: Challenges and Answers from a European Perspective* (Ius Gentium: Comparative Perspectives of Law and Justice, Vol. 13, Leiden: Springer, 2012)

By Rachael Lorna Johnstone: T. Kue Young (senior ed.), Rajiv Rawat, Winifred Dallmann, Susan Chatwood & Peter Bjerregaard (eds.), *Circumpolar Health Atlas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012)

By Tero Mustonen, C. Raudvere & J.P. Schjöldt (eds.), *More Than Mythology – Narratives, Ritual Practices and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012)

Translation

Luana Giampiccolo, “Leiðarvísir, an Old Norse itinerarium: a proposal for a new partial translation and some notes about the place-names”

9(1)/2014

Article

Matteo Tarsi, “On Loanwords of Latin Origin in Contemporary Icelandic”

Book reviews

By Federica Scarpa: Natalia Loukacheva (ed.), *Polar Law Textbook II* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2013)

By Giorgio Baruchello: Þorlákur Axel Jónsson, *Dagur Austan. Ævintýramaðurinn Vernharður Eggertsson* (Akureyri: Völuspá, 2009)

Interviews, memoirs and other contributions

Birgir Guðmundsson & Markus Meckl, “Regaining Iceland for the Catholic Church in the

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mid-19th Century”

9(2)/2014

Conference proceeding

Giorgio Baruchello, “The Picture—Small and Big: Iceland and the Crises”

10(1)/2015

Conference proceeding

Thomas Hören, “IMMI and Whistleblowing in Iceland - the new regulatory framework”

Book reviews

By Giorgio Baruchello: Sven-Olof Olsson (ed.), *Managing Crises and De-globalization. Nordic foreign trade and exchange 1919-39* (New York: Routledge, 2014 pbk.)

By Giorgio Baruchello: Gaetano Roberto Buccola, *Forme del centro. Percorsi analitici dal “Viaggio al centro della Terra” al nucleo dell’uomo* (Palermo: Nuova Ipsa, 2013)

By Rachael Lorna Johnstone: Kári á Rógvi, *West-Nordic Constitutional Judicial Review: A Comparative Study of Scandinavian Judicial Review and Judicial Reasoning* (Copenhagen: Djøf Publishing, 2013)

Interviews, memoirs and other contributions

Roberto Buccola, “The Unconscious and the Island: Fragments of Research on the Self”

10(2)/2015

Conference proceeding

Giorgio Baruchello, “Enemies of Interculturalism: The Economic Crisis in Light of Xenophobia, Liberal Cruelties and Human Rights”

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Foreign contributions about Iceland: Recurring themes

What sort of recurring themes can be found in this collection of diverse scholarly and scientific texts? I have identified four.

1. Iceland as “the land of the Vikings”

This is the title given by the aviator Italo Balbo (2006) to the chapter on Iceland in his 1933 memoirs, who also recalls how the Vikings discovered America before Columbus himself. Spanish-Portuguese philosopher Casado da Rocha (2006) mentions too the Vikings’ “stories of warriors and wise men, poets and politicians of the golden age of settlement and commonwealth.” The marauding hordes, their adventures and their legacy are very much a focus-point for many commentators. They are a reason for distinctiveness, if not distinction. For instance, law professor Milazzo’s (2006) account of his teaching experience emphasises how Iceland is not as much part of the legal tradition based on Roman Law as most other European countries. Legal scholar Johnstone too, in her 2011 review essay on comparative law, mentions the enduring island-centric character of mainstream legal education in Iceland. This is not to say that classical culture did not reach or influence Iceland’s cultural development. Quite the opposite, Actite’s 2009 text offers a concise account of the deep, extensive and sometimes surprising impact of the Latin tradition on this island: “For instance, the Latin phrase *Rustycus es, Corydon* gave origin to the Icelandic words *rusti* [farmer] and *dóni* [rude people]”. Tarsi (2014) offers an even longer account. Even some elements of the later Catholic *Christianitas* endure, as noticed by Cardinal Mejía (2012) and Tani (2013). Still, the land of the Vikings is distinct and original, which is shown by the interest of foreign scholars, and Italian ones in particular, in the history, development and influence of Old Norse or ancient Icelandic, and its literary accomplishments in the Edda and the Sagas, e.g. Ferioli (2010), Miglio (2010), Costanzo (2010), Lorinczi (2010), Tani (2006), Barden (2011), Mustonen (2013), Giampiccolo (2013),

2. Iceland as a Nordic State

Former Italian governmental ministers Damiano and Treu, together with the historian Borioni (2008), lump Iceland together with the other Scandinavian countries, as though Iceland had as strong a social-democratic tradition as Sweden, Denmark or Norway. However, Iceland does not have it. It was never a welfare State, in the sense and to the extent these other countries have historically exemplified. The right-wing Independence Party has marked its history much more than the various incarnations of democratic socialism in Iceland (cf. also Meckl’s 2012 article on Iceland’s Cold-War history and Baruchello’s 2014 book review), as also reflected by the largely unnoticed repression of Falun Gong demonstrators in Iceland in 2002 (cf. Tiantian Zhang, 2012 & 2013). Difference does not mean intransigence, however. Thus, Hören (2015) and Johnstone (2013a) reveal

significant changes in a more Nordic direction led by the historically weaker left-wing forces of the country, in freedom of the press and in human rights provisions respectively. Perhaps, the most obvious manifestation of the “un-Nordicness” of Iceland was the neoliberal boom-and-bust hot-money cycle that led to the notorious *kreppa* of 2008, about which a number of contributions have been published, i.e. Baruchello (2010), Paganelli (2010), Johnstone (2013), Lucey, Larkin & Gurdgiev (2013), Johnstone (2013a & b), Baruchello (2014 & 2015b). Penco (2013) adds another layer of “un-Nordicness” by noticing how Iceland’s philosophical tradition owes more to Anglophone and Dutch academic traditions and establishments than to Scandinavian ones. Still, there exist clear connections with Scandinavian political experience, notably the Danish roots of Iceland’s constitution (cf. Quartino, 2011). In fact, in addition to its linguistic-literary roots and heritage, the legal tradition of Iceland seems to be, at large, the most Nordic feature of Iceland’s culture, at least according to Kári á Rógvi (2015). Baruchello (2015) adds another line of continuity, i.e. the cartelisation of strategic industries during the 1930s.

3. Iceland as an Arctic State

Less controversial is this third commonplace notion. Iceland is located in the North Atlantic, after all, which is cold, dangerous to navigate upon, remote. This is the tone of the account by Savi-Lopez (2006), who pioneered the study and dissemination of Icelandic literature in Italy in the first half of the 20th century. As to later accounts, it would appear that being located in the North Atlantic is strategic. It is so for NATO (cf. Zhilina, 2013), for the EU (cf. Di Stefano, 2011), but above all for the Arctic nations and the governance of the region, as emphasised by Loukacheva (2011), Johnstone (2013c) and Scarpa (2014). Indeed, Meckl’s 2014 studies on the Catholic Arctic mission of the 19th century show the Catholic Church being the first international institution to conceive of the Arctic as a geographically, politically and culturally strategic region of the World. The number of submissions and publications pertaining to this third notion have been growingly steadily over the years, reflecting Iceland’s own growing institutional and intellectual self-characterisation as an Arctic State, not least as manifested by the developments within the University of Akureyri, which is part of the University of the Arctic consortium and hosts a most successful Master’s programme in Polar Law.

4. Iceland as a dimension of the spirit

Iceland’s unique landscape, the result of equally unique and rather extreme geographic, geological and climatic conditions, lead to awe and deep existential reflection. Scientific observations are the beginning of more profound considerations about the relationship between humanity and the natural environment, the struggle for survival that we have

fought throughout our journey on this planet, and the most disturbing question of all: why do we keep fighting? More or less explicitly, this is the tone of the contributions by literary scholar Finocchietti (2008) as well as geographers Zarrilli (2008) and Campanini (2008 & 2010). The same applies to those of Jungian psychologist Buccola (2015a & b). Numerically, we are not talking of a large number of contributions. However, and here the qualitative character of the present account comes to the forefront, the number of authors that have been interested in Iceland because of its mystique is conspicuous. Methodologically unlikely to reflect upon and disclose the motives for their own research, scholars and scientists have often discussed them with me *qua* editor and a southern European expatriate in the far north. The fascination with Iceland's lunar vistas and its seemingly prohibitive inhospitality, combined with the sense of authenticity that such conditions inspire, are a frequent reason for Mediterranean minds to develop an interest in Nordic matters, even if these may have little to do with the island's vistas, inhospitality or authenticity.

Concluding remarks

The literature by foreign experts published over the years in *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* pertains to many different disciplines. Prominent are literary, linguistic and legal studies. These disciplinary areas of emphasis are the result of many factors, not least the network of scholars and researchers who have found the journal a suitable venue for their work and that of experts willing to review the books that we receive from publishers. It is difficult, if not impossible, to gauge with certainty how representative they are of the stereotypes of, and commonplace conceptions about, Iceland. Nonetheless, I believe that they do offer considerable food for thought, which is an adequate and relevant aim for the present contribution.

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