Chapter 6
Icelandic Archaeology and the Ambiguities of Colonialism

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Iceland, the Colonial Project and Crypto-Colonialism

Iceland was not directly involved in the colonial project, except on an individual basis as in the example of Jón Ólafsson, a farmer's son from the Westfjords, who joined the Danish East India Company in the early seventeenth century and sailed the world, recording his exploits in a memoir many years later in 1661 (Ólafsson 1908–1909). Nonetheless Iceland did directly benefit from the colonial project through the acquisition of goods produced and traded in the overseas colonies, such as sugar, coffee and tobacco, which entered Iceland in increasing amounts over the eighteenth century (Jónsson 1997). Archaeologically, finds of clay tobacco pipes and new ceramic forms, as well as oriental porcelain, are the most obvious indication of such influences from the colonial enterprise and occur on archaeological sites in Iceland from the seventeenth century onwards, especially on settlements of the elite. The details of this process however remain obscure; that is, quite how this influx of new goods and materials from the colonies effected existing lifeways is unknown although archaeology remains one of the best means for examining such a process.

One of these effects must have been the awareness of a very different cultural aesthetic as exemplified, for example, through Chinese porcelain. The popularity of the Chinese style or chinoiserie in European culture during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, conveyed especially well through ceramics, is not of course about Europeans wanting to imitate or adopt Chinese identity. Rather, it speaks of a more general desire for otherness and novelty, the characteristic hallmarks of a modernist outlook. Yet the significant element here is how China, as the alien or

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Fig. 6.1 Glass bottle for sun tanning lotion found at a farm in southwest Iceland (Photo by Guðrún Gísladóttir)

foreign "other", becomes the *means* of expressing this modernity. We can explore this through an even more recent phenomenon. In 2006, archaeologists working at a site in the southwest of Iceland found a small but complete green glass bottle dating to the 1930s–1940s (Fig. 6.1). Embossed lettering on the bottle indicated that this held a commercial product called Pigmentan, manufactured in Germany, which was used to both tan and protect the skin from the sun (Gísladóttir 2006:22). Skin tanning became in vogue in Europe during the late 1920s, but especially from the 1940s; prior to that, tanned skin was often perceived as a lower- or working-class trait. Indeed the darkness of skin tone in general was used as a material signifier of racial and cultural hierarchy, especially during the late nineteenth century (Young 1995:35). Kristin Loftsdóttir has written much on the ideology of whiteness in Icelandic identity formation, linking it to wider European discourses on race and specifically on how the emergence of nationalism in nineteenth-century Iceland drew on such a colonial discourse to legitimate its claims (Loftsdóttir 2008, 2011; also see Loftsdóttir and Pálsson, this volume). What is interesting about this bottle though is how, like the example of the Chinese porcelain, it testifies to the adoption or *incorporation* of the foreign other—rather than its separation, as a signifier of modernity. Even so, it works in much the same way as Loftsdóttir has suggested about the Icelandic discourse on Africa: it aligns Icelanders with the colonisers rather than the colonised.

However, the connection of Iceland to colonialism is rather more complex than this initial discussion suggests, for two reasons. First, Iceland has only been an independent nation for less than a century; prior to that it was part of the Danish kingdom and scholars have argued over whether Iceland was in fact itself a colony. Second, Iceland was—and arguably still is—a marginal nation in global and European politics and culture and its very ambiguous status as a former colony connects well with Michael Herzfeld's concept of crypto-colonialism (Herzfeld 2002). Crypto-colonialism refers to the effect of colonialism on those regions or countries which were never directly annexed through the colonial project, and thus being neither coloniser nor colonised, fall between the cracks of western discourse. Herzfeld's arguments which focus mainly on Greece apply equally well to Iceland insofar as they display a doubled absence in contemporary discourse. On the one hand, Iceland is conspicuously marginal in broader discussions of European history and archaeology; on the other hand, even when it does receive attention—as in the case of Viking Age—this masks a more furtive absence insofar as the actual contribution of Iceland to European historiography remains rather invisible. Iceland barely registers in histories of archaeology compared to other nations.

One could argue that this reflects a real deficit: Iceland simply had/has little to contribute. But as Herzfeld reminds us, the core issue with crypto-colonialism is the distribution of cultural significance and who decides what is of value. This is a theme we will return to at the end of our chapter, but first, we want to unpack the first part of this complex question: was Iceland a colony?

Was Iceland a Colony?

Iceland was settled in the late ninth century by Vikings from Norway and the British Isles and after a brief period of independence became politically united with Norway in 1262. When the Norwegian and Danish crowns united in 1380, Iceland became a part of the Danish kingdom to which it remained connected for the next 5 centuries. Nationalist and independence movements began in the middle of the nineteenth century and through a series of legislations, Iceland became a fully independent nation in 1944 (e.g. see Hálfdanarson 2001). The status of Iceland's relation to Denmark, and particularly its designation as a colony, has been a recurrent theme of heated discussion among Icelandic historians, most recently in a discussion in 2011 on the listserve associated with the website of the Icelandic historical society (http://www.sagnfraedingafelag.net/gammabrekka/). Most historians have tended to reject the idea that Iceland was a colony; one of the first points usually made being is that the word for Iceland's political status was that of a dependency (*hjálenda*) not a colony (*nýlenda*). However, it is no coincidence that the adoption of this word was promoted by the leading figure in the Icelandic nationalist movement in the middle of the nineteenth century as a deliberate strategy in the call for independence (Ellenberger 2009:100). Discussion of the colonial status of Iceland is in fact only obscured by such simple terminology, as a recent review paper by Íris Ellenberger

makes very clear, for there are actually multiple facets to the issue of colonialism and Iceland, including the political, economic and ideological, which do not necessarily paint the same picture (Ellenberger 2009). Indeed, in many ways the debates in Iceland echo similar discussions in Irish history, and while the particular relations between England and Ireland exhibit many differences to Denmark and Iceland (not least the absence of major plantations of Danish settlement), some of the broader themes are very similar (see papers in McDonough 2005; also in relation to archaeology, see especially Horning 2006, 2011).

Those scholars who have seen colonialism as a political phenomenon argue that Iceland did not occupy the same political position as the *de jure* colonies of the Danish monarchy but rather held a special status within the realm. Agnarsdóttir (2008) traces the special status of Iceland within the Danish state in the relative autonomy of the Icelandic officials, the possible economic benefits that emanated from that status and the common heritage that linked Icelanders and Danes alike. Along the same lines, Hálfdanarson had earlier (2001:3) added the dimension of distance as a crucial factor in preventing the construction of a coherent administrative policy for Iceland. It limited the influence of Copenhagen in the Icelandic home affairs and the role that Iceland might have played in the affairs of the Danish state.

It is true that a number of administrative representatives within the Danish realm from the eighteenth century onwards were of Icelandic decent and that the official language of the law courts and the church was Icelandic. The latter carries a further significance at a political level as under the influence of the national revivalists and romantic philosophy, Icelanders based their demands for national emancipation on the claim that they spoke the original language of the Nordic people. An additional cultural capital was also placed in the re-establishment of the ancient assembly of the *Alþingi* in 1845 and its eventual limited legislative authority at the time when Iceland acquired its constitution in 1874. It is argued therefore that Iceland did not share the same position as the other Danish colonies which held no representative positions and were often subjected to civilising missions. On the contrary both the Danes and Icelanders subscribed to a common mythology for achieving their own separate national inspirations. The Danes in this framework viewed the Icelanders as guardians of their common heritage and thus not in the same way as the colonial subjects of Greenland and the West Indies (the Faroe Islands occupying a somewhat more ambiguous status). Arguments against the position of Iceland as a non-colony vary. It is quite usual in this context to refer to the Icelandic officials as a "virtual oligarchy" (Ellenberger 2009:102) who did not fully represent Icelandic interests, while the issue of distance from the metropolis of Copenhagen is often viewed in comparison to the distances that had to be covered by other colonial empires for the tight control of their colonies. Moreover, the fact that Icelanders spoke the language of the Danish ancestors, the eventual appearance of a discourse of the past and the "primitive" Icelandic conditions of living met by Danish officials and European travellers alike (Ísleifsson 1996) reinforced the view of Iceland as static and therefore not adequately fit to be perceived as a progressive, civilised nation.

However, the most extraordinary fact when considering Iceland's position within the context of political colonialism is that the arguments of distance, language and

the autonomy of Icelandic officials are used to explain both the submissiveness and eventual national awakening and struggle of independence (see Hálfdanarson 2001). The factor that has driven Icelanders from subjects of an empire to desiring an autonomous status appears to be the appearance of the ideology of nationalism. The failure to grasp the complexities of the national phenomenon and the colonial venture both in the metropolis and the colonies or dependencies for that matter is closely associated with the Danish historical discourse concerning Denmark's status as a proper colonial empire or rather a "conglomerate state" as a subcategory of empire (Gustafsson 1998). Opinions on the issue do vary, yet it is not the scope of this chapter to go into full detail (for details, see Brengsbo and Villads Jensen 2004; Gustafsson 2005) However, it is worth noting that the denial to consider nineteenth-century Denmark as an empire despite the possession of numerous colonies clearly illustrates an unwillingness to equate Denmark with those empires that have been associated with oppression and exploitation of their colonies. However reductionist this form of thinking might be, it clearly manifests the attempt of Scandinavian states to disassociate themselves from the colonial legacies of oppression and racism and be linked to a national mythology that speaks of welfare states, rationality and modernity.

A more pragmatic approach is taken by Icelandic historians such as Gunnar Karlsson and Sigfús Haukur Andrésson who speak of Iceland as a proper colony. For Andrésson (1997, 2001), the trade monopoly of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is a clear example of Danish oppression and describes the eventual abolition of the trade restrictions in 1787 and the succeeding commercial autonomy in 1855 as colonial arrangements (*nýlendufyrirkomulag*). Similarly, Halldór Bjarnason (2001) supports the view that Iceland has been an economic colony since the mid-seventeenth century due to Denmark's dominance over the Icelandic economy and the resulting unequal relations of power prevalent in the contexts of informal imperialism and colonialism. For Bjarnason the entanglement of colonialism and mercantilism is responsible for the poor fate of Iceland's economy and argues that Iceland had been a capitalist colony since 1886 and up to the early twentieth century. Gunnar Karlsson (1995), on the other hand, utilises Hechter's (1975) notion of internal colonialism and speaks of the tensions between metropolitan Copenhagen and peripheral Iceland that stem from their unequal power relations. Within this framework, he argues that the Icelandic nationalist movement was the vehicle upon which an underdeveloped peripheral state expressed its reaction to the economic progress and modernisation of the metropolis.

It is quite clear that the above approaches bound the colonial experience to the very specific spheres of politics and economics. Within this framework, colonialism appears to be treated as a top-down political programme implemented by politicians and intellectuals and executed by the colonial subjects. The colonial experience however is a more complex and dynamic process. It is an ontology that continuously constructs itself and its social agents (Hamilakis 2007), defines people's place in society and guides their social interaction (Anderson 1983/1991; Herzfeld 1992; Gourgouris 1996). Its influence can only be measured partially when dealing with the political and economic contexts alone. Anderson's (1991) statement that nationalism

has to be seen as a cultural system rather than a political programme is therefore applicable to colonialism both by extension and by the fact that colonialism and nationalism have developed in parallel trajectories. Perhaps one of the serious transgressions of the above theories in this context is the failure to recognise the entanglement of colonialism and nationalism which has resulted in the polarisation of such terms as the "nation" and "colony", the "colonised" and "coloniser" and therefore the "self" and "other". For some, the failure to identify the intersection and entanglement of nationalism and colonialism reveals the lasting effects of colonialism in Icelandic academia after the decolonisation of the country, whether this is perceived as economic, political or cultural (Þorgrímsdóttir 2006). In the next section, we explore this entanglement through a consideration of archaeological evidence.

The Archaeology of Danish Presence

The material presence of the Danish state in Iceland is marked in somewhat ambiguous ways, but linked both to Danish administrative functions and the trade monopoly. Architecturally, a number of new building forms appeared in Iceland during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including merchant's timber houses at the trading stations scattered around the island (e.g. at Eyrarbakki, a station on the south coast), and the more grand, stone houses of administrative officials (e.g. Viðeyjarstofa, Nesstofa, both in the environs of Reykjavík, the former being the treasurer's residence, the latter that of the director of public health). The apex of the administrative hierarchy was the colonial governor's residence at Bessastaðir (now the official home of the president of Iceland), which in the seventeenth century was remodelled along the lines of a courtyard complex known as *Konungsgarður* or the King's Manor. Part of this complex was excavated in the 1980s and 1990s revealing a brick and timber structure associated with the seventeenth-century rebuilding (Ólafsson 1991). The uses of dressed stone, timber and brick were all alien building methods to the Icelandic architectural vernacular which used turf or turf and undressed stone as their primary building materials. The internal spatial organisation of these new buildings was also a novelty.

Besides these alien architectural forms, there are imported commodities, which came either as legal trade through Danish merchants, as personal cargo or through illicit trade. Such goods, which included all ceramics, glassware and a great deal of metalware, make up an increasingly large proportion of archaeological assemblages in Iceland between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. However, many of the imported objects were not Danish; German stonewares and Dutch clay pipes are extremely common on Icelandic sites, alongside lesser amounts of oriental porcelain, although it seems likely that most of the more utilitarian red earthenwares were of Danish manufacture, based on compositional analysis (Sveinbjarnardóttir 1996). Similarly, many of the timber houses mentioned above would have been built by German or Norwegian merchants, especially before the trade monopoly was instigated. Nonetheless, even though many such goods and buildings may not have

been manufactured in Denmark or designed/constructed by Danes, the crucial question in this context concerns how they were *perceived*.

Christina Folke Ax (2009) has pointed out that for Icelanders, Danishness was almost synonymous with foreignness insofar as everything that was not Icelandic was often simply called Danish—sometimes pejoratively, sometimes admiringly. However, arguably such an association may have been strongest during the nineteenth century as the nationalist movement took hold, a point well exemplified in the case of alcohol. Alcohol had been consumed in Iceland since the settlement of the island in the ninth century, but at the start of the twentieth century it was frequently referred to as a foreign or Danish vice and a malevolent influence on Icelanders. Although alcohol was produced locally, a great deal was also imported, especially wine, beer and spirits. This "othering" of alcohol—and in particular, associating it with the Danes—linked the temperance movement directly to the nationalist cause (Ísleifsson 2007). In 1915, prohibition went into effect in Iceland and was only partially repealed in 1935 as spirits became exempt; beer however remained illegal until 1989. At least for the early period, prohibition thus became a form of independence by other means, while those who indulged in alcohol consumption were underlining their subservience not only to the bottle, but to Danish culture and the Danish state. To see how such a perception could have been maintained at a very concrete level, let us take an archaeological example.

Recent excavations by one of the authors of this chapter at an early industrial fishing village which was occupied between 1907 and 1943 in the bay of Reykjavík uncovered fragments of an embossed flask which held a blended whisky from a New York distillery called Littlemore operating between 1907 and 1936 (Fig. 6.2). Given these dates, its presence on this site suggests a flouting of the prohibition, an activity that is known to have occurred from contemporary newspaper sources. One story in particular is worth telling because of the explicit associations with nationalism. In 1917, a fishing trawler Þór docked at Viðey and unloaded an illegal cargo of alcohol, which everyone in the village seemed to know about and take advantage of. Despite the villagers keeping quiet about it, the authorities heard of it and impounded what remained of the liquor. One of the few villagers who were against the cargo—a schoolteacher—was later accused of tipping off the authorities. She promptly wrote a letter to the national paper, *Morgunblaðið*, denying this charge but openly confessed her dislike of alcohol in flagrant nationalist terms:

> I find [alcohol] to be a powerful enemy which makes war against my country, and what is more, consider it treason to join up with it, or to tolerate its arrival unhindered as it could do even more harm here than in other places.
>
> I believe it should be the duty of all good men and true Icelanders to fight against it, not the least my duty as a member of the temperance movement.[1]
>
> Morgunblaðið, 22nd March 1917, p. 2, col. 3 (authors' translation).

[1] Mér fanst hann vera öflagur óvinur sem væri að herja á landið mitt, og að það, væru föðurlandssvik að ganga í lið með honum, eða líða honum að komast óhindrað áfram og gera ef til vill enn þá meira ilt af sér annars staðar. Að það væri skylda allra góðra manna og sannra Islendinga að berjá móti honum, og þá ekki sízt skylda min, sem var templari.

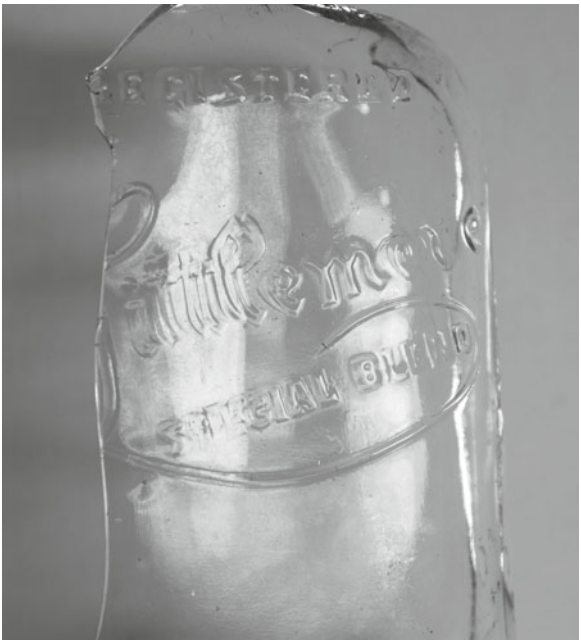

Fig. 6.2 Fragment of a whisky flask found during the excavations on Viðey (Photo by Gavin Lucas)

The quote illustrates the clear links between nationalism and the temperance movement through its language and words used. But what is doubly interesting about this particular case is that the fishing village and associated factory was established by a joint stock company based in Copenhagen and that Danish personnel and companies were a key part of operations, even if most of the workers were Icelandic. Given the close relationship between the Icelanders living in the village and the Danish companies working there, the flouting of prohibition in the village seen both in documentary and archaeological sources would have appeared to the temperance movement as a confirmation of the ideological links between alcohol consumption and political subservience. How the villagers and workers saw it however is another matter.

Nationalism, Colonialism and Archaeology

The entanglement of nationalism and colonialism discussed above needs further elaboration in the context of Iceland. Since the nineteenth century, Iceland has been perceived as a place to escape from the corruption of modernity, with its pristine nature and "simpler" way of life, and as static and primitive. By European standards, it carried both an exoticism and a familiarity. The familiarity was manifested in history, religion and literary tradition, the latter evident in the nineteenth-century

glorification of the sagas, whereas Icelanders were considered the custodians of the Danish national (or even pan-Scandinavian) heritage, linguistic and cultural. At the same time perceptions of Iceland and Icelanders by other Europeans during the nineteenth century were often not very favourable. In stereotypical fashion, Iceland was often portrayed as a backward, uncivilised place by the increasing number of tourists and scientific expeditions who went there from the mid-eighteenth century (Ísleifsson 1996, 2007). At the same time, Icelandic elites and intellectuals tried to distance themselves from this image through participating in the same colonial discourse of non-western peoples. Such a discourse was a deliberate attempt to counter foreign perceptions of Iceland which might have aligned the island with non-European others and instead situate Iceland emphatically within the European core.

Although the colonial project was undoubtedly enfolded in such discourses, one has to bear in mind that this perception of Iceland was not simply about Europeans and others. Within Europe itself, the urban middle classes were increasingly using the same language to describe the European peasantry and working classes as they applied to Africans and other non-European peoples. The nineteenth-century descriptions of Swedish peasantry as backward and uncivilised by the Swedish middle classes are not substantially different to those of Iceland by foreign visitors (Frykman and Löfgren 1987:174–220). Of course there is an inevitable connection between the colonial and class discourses (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Ahmad 1992), but what is especially interesting about Iceland is how it straddles both of these. The European perception of nineteenth-century Iceland as backward was ambiguously both a colonial and a class issue.

This ambiguity about how Iceland is viewed in western discourse can be also linked to its perception as a geographical and historical marginal part of Europe and European culture since the late Middle Ages (Durrenberger and Pálsson 1989; Pálsson and Durrenberger 1992; also see Wolff 1994). However, such ambiguity within Iceland itself probably only became manifest in the nineteenth century during the rise of nationalism and demands for independence from Denmark and was especially felt over Iceland's equivocal status as coloniser/colony (Loftsdóttir 2010). That is, the extent to which Iceland identified itself with the European imperial core as opposed to being perceived as a colony of the metropole. Iceland thus presented an anomaly in the dualities inherent in the colonialist, imperialist and nationalist rhetoric which distinguished the civilised from the uncivilised. It occupied an in-between position on the borderland between the civilised and the uncivilised nations of the nineteenth century (Oslund 2011). These politics of simultaneous exclusion and inclusion, the tensions between cultural greatness and savagery, modernity and primitiveness, which ultimately translate into concurrent feelings of cultural superiority and economic and technological inferiority, have had a deep effect in Icelandic society.

This is well illustrated in the World Fair of 1900 in Paris and the Danish colonial exhibition in 1904. The former was organised by one of the famous and still largely quoted antiquarians of the time, Daniel Bruun. The exhibition went by the name "Northern Dwellers" and was held at the Colonial Pavilion. The intention of Daniel

Bruun as an antiquarian and chief curator of the exhibition was to illustrate the cultural connections of the northern colonies/dependencies with Denmark through religion. Even though it was acknowledged that Iceland and the Faeroe Islands were dependencies with political representation within the Danish kingdom, they were placed alongside the colony of Greenland in order to provide a better comparative approach between their material culture and justify cultural connections along the North Atlantic (Mogensen 1997). The classification of Iceland alongside the "primitive" Greenlanders instigated various objections among the Icelandic elites. Similarly, the latter exhibition regarding the Danish colonies in 1904 was strongly opposed by Icelandic students residing in Copenhagen. The protesters considered that the participation of Iceland in the exhibition automatically meant the reduction of Iceland's status to that of a colony. Even though the intention of the exhibition was to focus on Iceland's history and nature, placing Iceland alongside the colonies of Greenland and Africa prompted major reactions and comments declaring that Iceland was "being posed along with uncultured savage ethnicities (*siðlausum villiþjóðum*) […] to disgrace us in the eyes of the cultivated world" (Sveinsson, quoted in Loftsdóttir 2008:183).

The above displays can be taken as evidence of the paternalistic role that the Danes had assumed towards their colonies/dependencies and reflect the implicit responsibility of bringing civilisation to those faraway isolated territories. Iceland in this respect resembled the core of the Danish monarchy through the Christian religion yet not those aspects of modernity so as to be equated with the other civilised nations. Greenland's position, on the other hand, was at the bottom of that hierarchy of civilisation. What is of greater importance however is the fact that both exhibitions clearly show that colonialism and nationalism do not just simply use the same set of criteria for identification but that they fundamentally share the same worldview in matters of civilisation, race, history and the past. The point of departure of nationalism is akin to the colonial discourse.

Postcolonial critique has not only taught us that the "coloniser" and the "colonised" need each other in order to constitute themselves (Bhabha 1994), but also that their relationship involves such heterogeneous networks of power that it becomes impossible to contain them in one uniform and articulate narrative (Spivak 1988). Nationalism as an ontological apparatus and a frame of reference is a hybrid construct that does not connote a culturally bounded whole (Stewart 1999). It stems from a reworking and at times forceful combination of previously existing cultural elements and not from the simple stratified combination of distinct cultural forms (Bhabha 1994). It is a product that is stemming from the ambivalence inherent in colonial situations. For Partha Chatterjee (1986) nationalism is a derivative discourse of colonialism within which anti-colonial sentiments create an illusory antithesis between nationalism and colonialism. National emancipation and resistance to colonial dominion therefore "is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the 'content' of another culture… It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and re-implicate them within the deferential

relations of colonial power—hierarchy, normalization, marginalization and so forth" (Bhabha 1994:110–11).

In this framework, Icelandic and Danish antiquarians participated actively in the production of a colonial-cum-nationalist discourse, although it manifested itself in a rather unusual way. Part of this must relate to the historical role archaeology played—or rather did *not* play in the independence movement in Iceland. Unlike many other countries, the role of archaeology was minimal in nationalist discourse; far more important was the literary and linguistic heritage (Byock 1992; also see Hálfdanarson 2005). Why was this? In part, it relates to the way in which the literary heritage attested to a degree of modernity or civilisation that none of its monuments or ruins could ever do. Iceland's medieval literary heritage was a far more powerful tool in the fight for independence than archaeology because it demonstrated Iceland's right to be counted as a modernising and advanced nation. In contrast, its archaeological remains were often non-descript and certainly unimpressive when compared with the archaeology of Denmark or indeed other European countries. In fact, it was much easier and less contentious to subsume the archaeological record of Iceland within a broader pan-Scandinavian cultural tradition, which is how it was perceived in many ways, by both Icelandic and Danish antiquarians during the late nineteenth century.

Nonetheless, archaeology was conscripted to the nationalist/colonialist cause and was done so by aligning it to the more potent literary heritage which acted to turn such non-descript sites into monuments (Friðriksson 1994). Along these lines, the Icelandic member of the Danish Royal Commission for the Preservation of Antiquities, Finnur Magnússon, undertook a systematic survey of all the visible monuments in Iceland in 1816. His *Udsigt over mærkelige oldsager i Island* (Survey of Remarkable Antiquities in Iceland) was comprised of reports sent by each Icelandic parish and constituted the basis upon which the first preservation order was put in 1817. Similarly, the Icelandic Literary Society attempted to complete a total description of Iceland in the mid-nineteenth century. Part of this project was to locate ancient monuments and involved such figures as poet, natural philosopher and early nationalist, Jónas Hallgrìmsson (1807–1845). On both occasions, ancient ruins were associated to saga events and historic figures. Early antiquarians such as the Danish scholars Kristian Kålund (1844–1919), Daniel Bruun (1856–1931), the Icelandic Sigurður Vigfússon (1828–1892) and Brynjúlfur Jónsson (1838–1914) all contributed in their own ways in recording ancient monuments, legends and folklore, describing landscapes and making literary analogies to the medieval sagas. They were partners in creating the modern structures of professional archaeology as seen in the establishment of the Collection of Icelandic Antiquities in 1863 and the Archaeological Society in 1879.

The search for sites and especially for those types that were believed to be associated with the civilised world, such as temples and law courts, was very much a preoccupation of both the local and foreign early antiquarians in Iceland. Such work turned sites into *monuments*. As Friðriksson comments on the work of Olaf Olsen: "Olsen compared the topographic literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth century and discovered a marked increase in ruins identified as temples in the latter half of

the nineteenth century. While only a few temple ruins are mentioned in the Land Register from 1703 to 1712, and numbered a mere 14 in the parish archaeological reports of 1817–1823, they rise to about 100 at the turn of the century" (Friðriksson 1994:73). Similarly, court circles and law courts also reappear in abundance in the literature of the nineteenth century. Olsen explains the above as a reflection of the growing interest in antiquities inspired by national romanticism in Iceland. However, the conviction that language, race, religion and in our case ancient monuments can measure the civility and cultural superiority of a nation is shared by both the nationalist and colonialist discourse. As fundamental ideologies of western modernity, they create a civilising discourse within which national entities and colonial empires are entangled in a race to top the hierarchy of the civilised, modernised world. The participation of the Icelandic nationalists in this race is clearly illustrated in the words of one of the most influential Icelandic nationalist historians, J.J. Aðils, written at the beginning of the twentieth century: "… Iceland was so rich and beautiful and great that such greatness had not been witnessed before, apart from the Ancient Greeks …at the highest level of maturity … ", Icelanders would "gain excellent fame for courage and deeds, strength and honesty … wealth and prosperity grow at home, fame and reputation abroad" (Aðils 1903:238–9, quoted in Friðriksson 1994:5–6).

Transcending the Colonial Dichotomy and Crypto-Colonialism

The ambiguity of the colonial status of Iceland alluded to earlier in this chapter ultimately impacted on the nature of Icelandic nationalism. Insofar as Iceland struggled for independence from Denmark, its shared cultural heritage meant that any such separation was bound to be equivocal—if not politically, at least ideologically. Paraphrasing Herzfeld (2002), one might suggest that for a country like Iceland, the need to establish a nation equal to those of others and the creation of a stable national identity involved a sacrifice. Not so much of economic dependence as Herzfeld argues, but of cultural dependence. Just as nineteenth- and early twentieth-century archaeologists often portrayed Icelandic material remains in terms of a pan-Scandinavian heritage, so a common contemporary refrain in academic discourse is the situating of Iceland within a broader, supra-entity—of yet another imagined community to which Iceland belongs. If not Scandinavia, then the North Atlantic or the Arctic. The parade of invented terms such as "Scandinavian orientalism" (Jóhannsson 2000), "arcticality" (Pálsson 2002) and "borealism" (Schram 2011) even though constructed to counteract the modern essentialist discourses that pervade Icelandic society through tourism, nationalism and discourses of globalisation, only succeed to connote the anxiety to be included within some larger cultural entity or a wider community of the "North" that accepts Iceland as an equal partner and contributor.

We would suggest that while the generation of the above terms is an attempt to transcend the ambivalence of Iceland's former colonial status or indeed the colonialist/nationalist dichotomy, they do so at a cost. This cost is an *accentuation* rather than diminution of anxiety about cultural identity for Icelanders—an anxiety of belonging and a place in the world. On Wednesday, 19th October 2011, *Frettablaðið*, a daily free national newspaper distributed over most of Iceland, reported that Icelandic horses were to be used in shooting the new film *The Hobbit*. Articles of this kind occur regularly in this newspaper and seem to encapsulate this anxiety about national self-identity. On the one hand, they explicitly express a pride in how Iceland and its citizens (human, equine or otherwise) are playing a role in the international arena. On the other hand, the very fact they report on what are often fairly trivial matters is an implicit acknowledgement of a deep fear of the very opposite: how unimportant Iceland is to the world. In searching for a place, for cultural significance in a global arena, the very ambiguity of Iceland's former colonial status still resounds today.

And this brings us back to the point we began and Herzfeld's concept of crypto-colonialism. Iceland may not have been a coloniser and it may not even have been a colony, but it is precisely because it does not neatly fall into these categories that it demands close attention. For, like other crypto-colonies, it raises questions over the distribution of cultural significance and who decides what counts as important. It exposes the prejudices of our terms and the master narratives of colonialism and nationalism—and indeed of modernity itself. In many ways, the issue can be condensed to a spatial one, concerning cores and margins; such a political geography will always create an uneven space and one in which the terms of debate remain the same. Iceland will either be viewed as marginal or it will argue for core status. The only way forward is to neutralise such political geography. One way has been the construction of new supra-entities or regional communities like the North, but we suggest this only creates the possibility of new spatial hierarchies at a higher level. A better solution is to abandon any pretence at a scalar approach to space (regional, national or supranational) and rather consider the situated nature of existence. Space looks different depending on where you are standing. For archaeology, this means attending to the obvious fact that one is always working at a particular site or within a particular landscape; the core is thus wherever you happen to be and the periphery, the limits of your site's network. The problem is archaeologists all too often make the leap from their concrete site to a larger, abstract community (e.g. a cultural region) and in doing so immediately submit their archaeology to a political geography of cores and margins. What if we stay grounded and what if we follow objects and connections between places suggested by objects and in doing so move our perspective with them? This is not about denying the unequal power relations between places or the role that nationalist and colonial ideologies play in this network, but rather about exploring the paths and networks along which these power relations flow. In doing this, questions of cores and margins become more fluid and contingent and the ambiguities of colonialism and nationalism, which before seemed so problematic, now appear quite inevitable.

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