

# MÁLSTOFA

HRAFN SVEINBJARNARSON

## ON PLAGIARISM IN A Ph.D. DISSERTATION AND SUBSEQUENTLY IN GRIPLA

IN *Gripla* XIV 2003, pp. 7-46 Árni Heimir Ingólfsson publishes the article „The Buchanan Psalter and its Icelandic Transmission“.

In a footnote to the title Ingólfsson says:

This article is based on part of my recently completed Ph.D. dissertation ““These are the Things You Never Forget”: The Written and Oral Traditions of Icelandic *Tvísöngur*” (Harvard University, 2003). Thanks are due in particular to my advisor, Thomas Forrest Kelly, and to Njáll Sigurðsson, who brought the Buchanan psalter to my attention.

I have made a list of about 100 incidents of plagiarism in this Harvard Ph.D. dissertation from my BA-thesis in History, *Latínusöngur og söngmennt við latínuskólana á Íslandi* (Singing in Latin and Music Education at the Latin Schools in Iceland), an unpublished thesis of 90 pages written at the University of Iceland in the spring of 1997. Some of these incidents deal with the Buchanan psalter in Iceland.

All these incidents of plagiarism have been investigated at the University of Iceland by Professor Guðmundur Hálfðanarson at the request of the Rector of the University. His report was sent to the President of Harvard, Lawrence H. Summers, by the Rector of the University of Iceland, Páll Skúlason in a letter of January 28, 2005 saying about Guðmundur Hálfðanarson’s conclusion:

His conclusion is that “Ingólfsson has [...] plagiarized HS [Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson’s BA thesis] extensively in his dissertation, and that is, of course, a serious violation of academic conduct.”

The University of Iceland agrees with this assessment and urges Harvard to investigate this serious matter.

President Summers replied in a letter of February 16, 2005, referring to a letter of formal complaint from Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, received in December 2004:

Upon receipt of this letter the GSAS began a formal investigation which is currently ongoing. Once a decision has been made, the School will be in touch with Mr. Sveinbjarnarson.

My BA-thesis, the first study made on the history of music education in the Latin Schools in Iceland, was only the beginning of a planned work which I have been developing since 1997.

In 1999 Árni Heimir Ingólfsson handed in a dissertation proposal in Harvard where my BA-thesis was mentioned, without my knowledge and permission. This he did knowing that I was rewriting and expanding my BA-thesis. When I knew that he was using my BA-thesis in his dissertation I wrote him a letter, January 13, 2003, reminding him that he had neither asked for nor received my permission to use my unpublished research, and such permission would not be granted. In a responding letter of January 22, 2003, he admitted that he was using my thesis in his doctoral dissertation in Harvard.

My name occurs once in the Harvard dissertation, along with the title of my unpublished BA-thesis, in the bibliography, under the headings “Published Material” and “*Books and Articles*” (p. 375). The BA-thesis is neither published material, a book nor an article. In substantial parts of this Harvard dissertation in the field of Music, the subject, ideas and references of my BA-thesis in the field of History are used. My research is copied, directly and indirectly, and presented by Árni Heimir Ingólfsson in his own name in a published work. The Harvard dissertation was for sale on the Internet, at ProQuest Digital Dissertations, at least for several months.

I wish to emphasize that in 1997, when I gave Árni Heimir Ingólfsson a copy of my BA-thesis, as my friend and schoolmate since early age, he was going to study the 20<sup>th</sup> century Icelandic composer Jón Leifs.

It must be added that Njáll Sigurðsson was another avid reader of my BA-thesis in the University library (access restricted) and had my written permission to quote my thesis, in a limited way, in a book chapter he was preparing.

Árni Heimir Ingólfsson has continued plagiarizing my work, this time in *Gripla*. This is why I have requested that *Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi*

will print this note in the current edition of the periodical, in the same place and language.

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ÁRNI HEIMIR INGÓLFSSON

## A RESPONSE TO HRAFN SVEINBJARNARSON

IN a letter to Garth McCavana (Associate Dean for Student Affairs at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University) dated 17 December 2004, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson alleged that my Ph.D. dissertation, accepted by the Music Department of Harvard University in May 2003, included “extensive plagiarism” of his unpublished BA-thesis of 1997. He has now chosen to repeat these allegations publicly in *Gripla*, even after an extensive investigation by Harvard University has found them to be “utterly without merit.”

The alleged “incidents of plagiarism” in my dissertation have mostly to do with my use of sources that are widely available in print, and knowledge that is in the public domain. This involves citations of standard reference tools in the fields of music and Icelandic history, such as *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, *Analecta Hymnica*, *Diplomatarium Islandicum* and *Kristni á Íslandi*. In other cases the allegations involve citations of ideas that came about through my discussions with other scholars, as I have been able to demonstrate in my response regarding Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson’s allegations to Harvard University.

My study of the Buchanan psalter and its connection to Icelandic *tvisöngur* began in 2000 following an encounter with Njáll Sigurðsson, who placed a large amount of material at my disposal, including his own research and a substantial amount of secondary literature. Among these was an article by the 19th-century German musicologist Benedikt Widmann, which provided the impetus for my future research on the topic.

Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson's discussion of the Buchanan psalter, a total of nine lines in his BA-thesis, was of no influence in my own research. Rather, I shared with him my recently acquired materials and knowledge in a collegial and friendly manner. For instance, I gave him a copy of Widmann's article, and brought to his attention that a copy of the Buchanan psalter is registered in Gegnir, the search engine of the National and University Library of Iceland.

It is quite telling of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson's attitude to scholarship that he should attempt to also implicate Njáll Sigurðsson in plagiarism, suggesting that the incentive behind his „avid“ readership of the BA-thesis was in some way dishonest. These allegations are easily refuted, since Njáll Sigurðsson's research materials prove that he began researching the Buchanan psalter in 1976. Both Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson and I are born in 1973.

Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson's formal complaint to Harvard University was referred to an investigative subcommittee by the University's Administrative Board. This subcommittee presented its findings at a full meeting of the Administrative Board on 10 April 2006. The Board voted to endorse the subcommittee's conclusion that Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson's allegations are “utterly without merit” and that my dissertation “is indeed a scrupulous piece of scholarly work.” The subcommittee

[...] examined every one of Mr. Sveinbjarnarson's 103 allegations, compared in detail the relevant parts of the thesis against the dissertation, and received Dr. Ingólfsson's specific and detailed responses. We found Mr. Sveinbjarnarson's repeated claims of “priority” over historical events, personages, music and other concepts in the public domain to be disingenuous. As stated earlier, Mr. Sveinbjarnarson's allegations of plagiarism with respect to certain common subject materials were wholly unsupported; indeed, to the contrary, we note that the two documents treated these materials in absolutely divergent, non-overlapping ways.

The outcome of Harvard University's investigation is emphatic and unequivocal, and speaks for itself.

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## AN ADDITIONAL NOTE ON PLAGIARISM

MY NOTE on plagiarism was written in October 2005, and was to be published within the end of that year. I see no reason to withdraw it, after reading the letter of April 11, 2006, on the vote of the Administrative Board of Harvard's GSAS, on my charge of the plagiarism of the Harvard Ph.D. Árni Heimir Ingólfsson.

My BA-thesis in history, from 1997, is not and never was in the public domain. Árni Heimir Ingólfsson gave me a photocopy of an article on the Buchanan psalter by Widmann, an article I knew about, listed in the New Grove Dictionary of Music. For the sake of clarity this was on January 13, 2001, and at the time I was grateful for his support. Njáll Sigurðsson has not, to my knowledge, published anything on the Buchanan psalter prior to my BA-thesis.

The decision of the Administrative Board was based on a document by three anonymous persons, called "Investigative Subcommittee." The big words and strong opinions of this document (1<sup>1/2</sup> page in letter-format), not supported with any references or examples, imply that these persons regard themselves of some authority. However they do not in their decision display any familiarity with the unpublished Icelandic manuscripts I use in my thesis, nor any of the other sources that are widely spread and hard to find. The Subcommittee's opinion is based on documentation concealed to me. The letter of January 28, 2005, from the rector of the University of Iceland to the president of Harvard, with the report by professor Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, seems to have been ignored by the Administrative Board. My repeated formal complaints to Harvard since January 13, 2003, until the Ph.D. dissertation's acceptance, are ignored. It is ignored that Ingólfsson was given the opportunity, by Harvard University, to change his dissertation, prior to acceptance, by removing 28 references to my BA-thesis, without removing the corresponding material. This included a table which was dissolved and placed in a footnote. A statement in the document by the "Investigative Subcommittee" can certainly be said to speak for itself: "Intellectual cross-fertilization was entirely possible since the two authors were once classmates and friends, and even attended the same musically related events." A rather curious statement from an Ivy League University, in the context of plagiarism.

*Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson*

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

WITH regard to Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson's foregoing article and the additional note above concerning alleged plagiarism in Árne Heimir Ingólfsson's doctoral thesis and his article in Gripla, the editors of Gripla wish to express the following: 1) Every writer that publishes material in Gripla is responsible for his or her own work. The editors' only responsibility is to ensure that articles published in Gripla are composed according to accepted scholarly methods. 2) Each article that is published in Gripla is read by two specialists and an editor. Árne Heimir Ingólfsson's article was at the request of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson compared to Hrafn's BA thesis – which he himself loaned the editors. The editors concluded that where the material in Árne Heimir Ingólfsson's Gripla article and Hrafn's BA thesis coincided, both authors were relating general knowledge about the history of Icelandic music. 3) Although the writers worked partly with the same material, their approaches were different. 4) The report on Árne Heimir Ingólfsson's alleged plagiarism that Professor Guðmundur Hálfðanarson wrote and sent to Harvard University was not known to the editors of Gripla until after Árne Heimir's article had been printed; this report contradicts Harvard University's conclusions in this matter, as stated by Árne Heimir Ingólfsson in his foregoing response. 5) The editors of Gripla have decided to publish Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson's allegations and Árne's response to them, but otherwise remain neutral in this matter, and will not publish any other material connected with this dispute.