History of Parapsychology in Iceland

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Research on paranormal phenomena or the claims thereof started relatively late in Iceland. In 1904 a group of people in Reykjavik, lead by prominent writer and editor Einar Hjorleifsson Kvaran, founded a kind of a sitter group. He had obtained Frederic Myer's *Human Personality and its Survival after Bodily Death* from abroad, only a year after its publication in 1903. Kvaran became inspired to attempt to elicit and investigate some of the phenomena claimed by spiritualism (Niellsson, 1922a, p. 450). Hence Einar Kvaran deserves the honor of having founded psychical research in Iceland.

Until this time psychical research and spiritualism were unknown in Iceland although various paranormal phenomena were deeply entrenched in Icelandic folklore and literature. Accounts of apparitions, hauntings, and poltergeists, for example, can be found in many literary works from the classical period of the Sagas in the 12th and 13th century up to the present time. In the 18th and 19th centuries the authorities investigated some cases of poltergeists which involved serious disturbances (Ola, 1964). A number of folklore collections include numerous accounts of apparent psychic phenomena (Arnason, 1926-1930, 1930-1939). Belief in the genuineness of these phenomena was widespread among the general population at the turn of the century. Recent surveys using representative samples have shown widespread belief in, and reporting of, psychic experiences among Icelanders (Haraldsson, 1985; Haraldsson & Houtkooper, 1991).

The Experimental Society

The first Icelandic group devoted to the study of psychic phenomena made many attempts to produce paranormal and mediumistic phenomena but failed to do so. The group was about to dissolve when a young

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man by the name of Indridi Indridason accidentally attended one of the experimental meetings. Suddenly, the group observed violent movements of the table they were sitting at and other phenomena soon followed. This led to the founding of the Experimental Society in the autumn of 1905 for the purpose of investigating the phenomena associated with Indridi Indridason in a systematic way (E. H. Kvaran, 1934).

This society consisted mostly of prominent academicians in Reykjavik. The leading members were Einar Kvaran, Reverend Haraldur Nielsson (later a professor at the University of Iceland), Indridi Einarsson the playwright, Bjorn Jonsson, a newspaper editor who later became the Prime Minister of Iceland, High Court Judge Pall Einarsson, and Thordur Sveinsson, a psychiatrist. These men seem to have been keenly interested in research, experimenting with Indridason from the beginning of his mediumship in 1905 until he became disabled by a fatal disease in 1909. Indridason is probably unique among the great mediums in the way in which his mediumship was discovered and developed by scholars with whom he stayed until he died in 1912. Sittings were held once or twice a week from September to June and Indridason was paid a fixed yearly salary by the Society. In return he gave no séances without the Society’s permission. In 1907 the Society had become so impressed with Indridason that they built a small house in order to facilitate the study of his abilities, providing him with free lodging so that he could be better observed.

The Experimental Society was not a spiritualistic one in the usual sense of the word, although many of those who regularly took part in the experiments came to favor spiritualistic explanations (Nielsson, 1922a, p. 452). Shortly after the death of Indridason in 1912 the Society dissolved. In 1918 it was resurrected as the Icelandic Society for Psychical Research (ISPR) with Kvaran as its first president and Nielsson as the first vice president. By and large that society has been inactive as far as research is concerned. Since 1920 the ISPR has published the journal Morgun ("Dawn"). Although some of the detailed Minute Books which the Society kept of all experimental meetings and séances have been lost, a substantial number of contemporary reports exist which describe
extensive, and often, carefully controlled investigations of Indridason. Four persons who wrote lengthy reports on their investigations and observations were the following: Gudmundur Hannesson (1866-1946) was a professor of medicine and twice the president of the University of Iceland who published a long account in Icelandic (Hannesson, 1910-1911/1957, 1924a) which later appeared in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* (1924b). Einar Kvaran (1859-1938) published a long account on Indridason in Danish (1910) and several articles in Icelandic (1906a-c, 1912, 1934). Haraldur Nielsson (1868-1928), professor of theology and at one time president of the University of Iceland, published articles in Icelandic (1919a, 1930), in Danish (1922a), and in English. His English contributions appeared in the first two proceedings of the International Congress on Psychical Research (1922b, 1924b), in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* (1924c), in *Light* (1919b, 1923) and in *Psychic Science* (1925). Brynjolfur Thorlaksson (1867-1950), the organist of the Reykjavik Cathedral, played the harmonium at Indridason’s seances. His reminiscences were extensively recorded and corroborated by Thordarson (1942).

**Investigations of Indridi Indridason**

by Haraldur Nielsson and Gudmundur Hannesson

Indridi Indridason was born on October 12th, 1883. He was a farmer’s son who was brought up in a rather remote part of Iceland. At the age of 22, he moved to Reykjavik to become an apprentice printer. He stayed with a relative, Indridi Einarsson, whose wife was interested in Kvaran’s experiments. The mediumistic gifts of Indridason were discovered in the beginning of 1905 when, by coincidence, he was invited by Einarsson’s wife to join the newly-formed circle which was attempting to produce table-tilting. Kvaran (1934) described the first incident as follows:
Indridi had hardly taken his seat, when the table reacted violently and trembled. Indridi became frightened and was going to run out of the house. From that time the experiments with Indridi started. He came to my home and we sat down at a table. The table trembled, shook, and moved violently around the room and nearly broke. Once it was overturned. (p. 291)

This was the beginning of a series of apparent physical effects that continued undiminished for nearly five years. In the summer of 1909 Indridason caught typhoid fever. Later it was discovered that he had also contracted tuberculosis, a condition which ultimately brought him to an untimely death in 1912, when he was only 29 years of age.

Indridason was the first medium to appear in Iceland. He was primarily a physical medium, the only such medium Iceland has ever had. According to existing reports, the vigor as well as the variety of Indridason's phenomena developed steadily from 1905 until they were at their height in June 1909 when he was forced to retire due to his illness (Nielsson, 1924c, p. 235).

A number of phenomena were reported to occur with Indridason, some of which occurred in full light. Apart from trance and trance speech, the phenomena included movements and levitations of different large- and small-scale objects, furniture, and of the medium himself, knocks on walls, and clicks in the air. Also various odor- and light-phenomena, materializations of human forms, “invisible” playing of musical instruments which simultaneously moved about, apports, direct voices — sometimes several voices speaking simultaneously — and often singing forcefully aloud, and automatic writing by the medium as well as direct writing with pens. In addition, Indridason’s left arm was reported to have dematerialized on three occasions during séances.

Most of Indridason’s phenomena seem to have occurred while he was in trance during séances of the Experimental Society, although some phenomena, often violent, were reported to have occurred a number of times when he was in a waking state outside of the formal sittings, and under fair light conditions. Thorlaksson (Thordarson, 1942) and Nielsson (1925) reported the following, for example, which took place on the 10th of December in 1907. Indridason had been subject to what appeared to be poltergeist assaults, and Society members took turns guarding him around the clock. On this particular night Thordur Oddgeirsson and Brynjolfur Thorlaksson were on duty. After some alleged disturbances they lit an oil lamp which stood on a chest of drawers between the washing tables in Indridason’s bedroom. They also lit three candles in an adjacent front room. At this point the men had decided to leave the house because of the violence of the phenomena. Thorlaksson was standing in the doorway between the rooms and Oddgeirsson was
sitting on a couch in the front room. Indridason was standing up on his bed and beginning to dress. Thorlaksson was looking at Indridason and saw him suddenly flung down on the bed. Thorlaksson rushed to him but, he reported, at the same time a bowl, which had stood on the chest of drawers in the bedroom, flew towards him. It did not hit him, but according to Thorlaksson's account it went past him, altered its direction and took a direct line to the south-east corner of the outer room where it smashed against a stove which stood there. Then Thorlaksson went into the outer room. According to Nielsson (1925, p. 99):

The medium again started to dress, and having got his trousers on he once more screamed for help. Mr. Thorlaksson had been standing in the outer room, but now rushed to the medium and saw him balancing in the air with his feet towards the window. Mr. Thorlaksson took hold of him, pulled him down onto the bed and held him there. He then felt the medium and himself being lifted up. Mr. Thorlaksson shouted to Mr. Oddgeirsson to help him. Mr. Oddgeirsson went into the bedroom, but a chair was hurled at him and fell beside the stove in the outer room. Mr. Oddgeirsson moved aside to avoid the chair and went on into the bedroom. Mr. Thorlaksson was then lying on the medium's chest. Mr. Oddgeirsson lay down on the knees of the medium, whose whole frame was in motion on the bed. Then a bolster, which was under the medium's pillow, was thrown into the air; it fell on the bedroom floor. Simultaneously the candlesticks which were in the outer room came through the air and were flung down in the bedroom.

We would probably dismiss the reports of Indridason's phenomena as amusing but unsubstantiated stories, had it not been for some thorough and well-documented investigations, conducted mainly by Professor Gudmundur Hannesson. Hannesson was held in the highest regard in Iceland as a scientist. He had conducted medical as well as anthropological research, founded the Icelandic Scientific Society, and was an Honorary Member of both the Icelandic and Danish Medical Associations.

In 1908, Hannesson asked the Society for permission to attend séances in order to investigate Indridason. His request was accepted and he chose as his assistant an ophthalmologic surgeon, Bjorn Olafsson. Although Haraldur Nielsson and Einar Kvaran conducted some investigations into the genuineness of the phenomena, these were not as extensive and tightly controlled as those of Hannesson. Professor Hannesson was regarded by his contemporaries as a man of integrity, impartiality, and skepticism. He appears to have done just about everything he could think of to make sure that he was not being tricked. (For a detailed
account of Hannesson’s methods of investigation see Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1989.)

As an example of Hannesson’s methods of investigation, let us examine one of his sittings with Indridason during the winter of 1908-1909. The séance was to be held in a large hall in the Experimental House. The benches in the hall were in rows (as in a church), with the main door at the rear of the hall. There was an empty space at the front of the hall, and in the middle of the wall was a pulpit-shaped lectern. In the empty space stood a small harmonium, and close to the lectern were two chairs and a table. Trumpets and a musical box were placed on the table. Hannesson separated the empty space from the benches by firmly nailing down a net which draped from the ceiling to the floor and out to the walls on both sides. This net was made of strong yarn and the mesh was so small that it was quite impossible to get a hand through it. It was fastened on all sides with strips of wood, which were threaded through the mesh and screwed firmly into the walls, the ceiling, and the floor. In the middle of the net, down by the floor, a narrow slit provided an entrance for the investigator.

Prior to the séance, Hannesson and Olafsson searched the whole hall carefully, from floor to ceiling. They also searched every article that was in it, benches, tables, and so forth. According to Hannesson, “nothing seemed too trivial to be suspected.” (This routine was repeated after the séance in order to search for something which could suggest any plausible cause of the phenomena.) When Indridason arrived, he was undressed and Hannesson examined his clothes. The door to the hall was locked and sealed. Only five persons were allowed to attend. Hannesson and Olafsson sat outside the empty space, with Kvaran seated between them. Niellson acted as a watchman to keep close guard over Indridason, and both of them sat inside the net on two chairs. Neither singing nor music was allowed so that possible footsteps, opening of shutters, and other movements could be heard more easily.

Once the lights had been put out, Indridason fell into a trance. His control personality remarked that this might be an unusually noisy sitting, because some new and uninvited “visitors” (by which he meant “spirits”) had arrived. Direct voices were then heard swearing. Some moments later, after some objects had been thrown to and fro with great force, the chair was roughly snatched out from under Indridason and thrown into a corner. Niellson got up to support Indridason, and his chair was immediately thrown away. Hannesson reports:

The watchman asks for the chairs to be brought back to him, so that he need not leave hold of the medium. I offer to go in and fetch the chairs, and a match is lit while I slip through the hole in the net. I
can see the two men standing in the center, and every article inside the net. The chair is lying out in a corner. I make for it, and in spite of the dark I find it at once. The very moment that I turn round to take the chair I am struck a heavy blow in the back [Hannesson's emphasis], as it were with a closed fist. Yet a few seconds previously there was nothing to be seen in that corner. I forthwith take the chair to the men and find them standing exactly as before. ...

Some moments later the watchman shouts, saying that things are getting serious, for the medium is now drawn up into the air with his feet turned towards the ceiling and his head downwards; and that he is pulling at both his (the medium's) shoulders. We hear a good deal of struggling going on, the combatants shifting backwards and forwards about the floor. The watchman says that the medium is pulled with such force that he is put to the limit of his strength to keep hold of him.

After a while the pull is slackened, the medium sinks slowly down and the watchman manages to put him on the chair. ... Suddenly the commotion starts afresh and the voices speak again. The chairs under the medium and the watchman are time after time snatched away and finally broken to pieces. The medium is pulled up into the air with so much force that the watchman, as he says, is repeatedly almost lifted off the ground. All this is accompanied by so much scuffling and struggling that apparently it is going to be unavoidable to go to the aid of the watchman, who is exerting himself not to let the medium go up into the air! (1924b, pp. 253-254)

The scuffle is now carried towards the lectern. Suddenly the watchman shouts that things have taken a dangerous turn, for the medium's legs have been quickly pulled down into the lectern while the small of his back is resting on the edge. He fears that the medium will not be able to stand this and that it will result in disaster, for while he is pulling at his shoulders with all his strength "the others" are pulling at his legs.

On some occasions Hannesson himself took the role of the watchman in addition to Nielsson, but that did not alter the expression of the phenomena. Hannesson remarked after continuous attempts to prevent trickery during the sittings during the winter of 1908-1909:

I continued to attend the séances of the Society for a whole winter, and there was hardly one at which I did not try to detect fraud in one way or other. At almost every séance I noticed something which I considered suspicious, sometimes very suspicious, and at the next one I would be specially vigilant on that particular point. But in spite of all, I was never able to ascertain any fraud. On the contrary, the
bulk of the phenomena were, as far as I could judge, quite genuine, whatever their cause may have been. A great many things I had no means of investigating, and so can pass no judgment as to whether they were genuine or not. (1924b, p. 260)

During his mediumistic career Indridi was probably the best-known celebrity in Iceland, becoming a highly disputed figure. To some (most of them never having attended any of his séances) he was an object of scorn and derision, while to others he was a source of the most extraordinary psychokinetic powers. Fierce controversy raged over him in contemporary newspapers, some of which seem to have been determined to expose him as a fraud. However, no one had any success in doing that. Others supported the claims made by members of the Experimental Society about the genuineness of the phenomena. The Society invited highly respected citizens to attend séances and witness the phenomena for themselves, such as the Bishop of Iceland (Hallgrimur Sveinsson), the British Consul (probably Asgeir Sigurdsson), and the magistrate who later became a Supreme Court Judge (probably Pall Einarsson). Those who accepted the invitation, apparently became convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena, although no reports exist regarding these investigations, with the notable exception of that of Professor Gudmundur Hannesson.

**Agust H. Bjarnason’s Investigation of “Dreaming Joe”**

Agust H. Bjarnason (1875-1932), professor of philosophy and psychology at the University of Iceland and once the president of the University, was originally a critic of the work of the Experimental Society and attacked the spiritualistic interpretation of some of the members of the Society. However, he never attended any session with Indridason.

In 1906 Bjarnason first heard of Johannes Jonsson, nicknamed “Dreaming Joe,” who had obtained a wide reputation in the North and East of Iceland for clairvoyant dreams. Over the years Bjarnason had come to hear many remarkable stories about him, mostly from his students and from a lady who had personally known Jonsson. Bjarnason wrote a preliminary report to the Society for Psychical Research in London who asked him to conduct a detailed investigation. (See editorial comments by Helen de G. Verrall, 1915). Bjarnason agreed and spent a month in the northeast of Iceland in the summer of 1914 collecting and corroborating testimony from many witnesses, and interviewing Joe.

“Dreaming Joe” was born on Langanes peninsula in 1861 and spent his life as a shepherd and a farmer until he died in 1944. He gradually become famous for his ability to dream about lost objects and distant
events. Most of these dreams were of a very practical nature, such as finding lost objects or sheep, or describing the position, and hence the arrival, of ships.

According to "Dreaming Joe," his first experience of clairvoyance in dreams occurred after a serious illness, probably typhoid fever, which he suffered at the age of thirteen. If he wanted to dream about something specific he would simply concentrate on it before going to sleep and try to remember his dream when he woke up. About the time "Dreaming Joe" was twenty, it was found that he could also answer questions put to him during sleep. If he woke up during the questioning, as he often did, he seemed to have partial amnesia of what had been going on. In 1893, at the age of 32, Joe married, whereupon he submitted himself less and less to questioning during his sleep. Objections from his wife and the consequences of the recovery of some stolen objects whose locations he had revealed while asleep, had made him reluctant to nightly questioning.

At the time of Bjarnason's investigation in 1914 "Dreaming Joe" had, for the most part, ceased the nightly activities which had made him nationally famous. He was suffering from rheumatism which made it difficult for him to sleep deeply. It had become difficult to question him without him waking up and he also found it increasingly difficult to remember his dreams. Hence Bjarnason's investigation consisted for the most part of the collection and corroboration of testimony. Most of the 37 cases Bjarnason investigated had occurred when Joe was in his teens and twenties when his abilities seem to have been at their peak. The general impression obtained by the witnesses was that if "Dreaming Joe" had been asked to dream of something, he would concentrate his thoughts on it before going to sleep, and then he would generally be able to obtain the right information. The following is an example, first recorded by Bjarnason in 1906:

Once there was a change of tenants at the farm of Brimnes on the Langanes. O__ was the name of the tenant who surrendered the lease, but his successor was called S___. At the time of the story O. was still at Brimnes, and the two farmers were not on friendly terms. One morning when the people came into the stable, they saw that the tail of S.'s favourite horse had been very closely shaved. S. was very greatly grieved at this offence, and had someone ask Joe for him who had done this. Joe replied that he supposed that O. knew something about [it]. He requested this to be kept secret, for he did not wish O. to hear that he had accused him of doing this. Nevertheless, this soon came to O.'s ears and he was greatly enraged. He even threatened to report Joe to the magistrate for this. Joe then told him to do as he liked about that but he would then tell where
he had hidden the horse-tail. O. never reported the case to the magistrate. But Joe said that he had buried the horse-hair on the beach, and there it was found. (Bjarnason, 1915a, pp. 66-67)

A number of witnesses living on the Langanes confirmed this account to Bjarnason. This case was particularly memorable to Joe because of the fuss that was made about it all over the area. After this case, he was very reluctant to allow people to question him in his sleep unless he could trust their secrecy. A shortened version of Bjarnason’s report was published in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* in 1915 under the title: “An Icelandic Seer: Report on a supposed case of travelling clairvoyance.” The full report was published in Icelandic as a book (Bjarnason, 1915b).

In Bjarnason’s view 13 of the 37 case reports were fully verified as correct, 15 partially so, 3 were found to be incorrect and 6 could neither be verified nor falsified. On three nights Bjarnason attempted some dream experiments with inconclusive results. Joe would wake up when he tried to question him. Professor Bjarnason concludes his report:

For many years, especially between 20 and 30 years of age, he has been gifted with travelling clairvoyance in a high degree, but since his marriage this has gone on decreasing, and at present it is impossible to affirm whether it still exists or not. (1915b, p. 76)

**Icelandic Participation in the International Congresses on Psychical Research**

Between the two World Wars several international congresses on psychical research were held which were the predecessors of the conventions of the Parapsychological Association. The first international congress on psychical research was initiated by the Dane Carl Vett and was held in Copenhagen from August 26th to September 2nd, 1921. Some 40 to 50 leading psychical researchers from Europe and America attended. Four Icelanders were invited, but only Haraldur Nielsson was able to participate. Nielsson read a paper on the Experimental Society’s investigation of Indridason which was later published in the proceedings of the congress (Nielsson, 1922b).

The second international congress for psychical research was held at the University of Warsaw from August 29th to September 5th, 1923. It was attended by two Icelanders, Niels P. Dungal, later professor of medicine at the University of Iceland, and Haraldur Nielsson, who read another paper on his and Hannesson’s investigations of Indridason. The Nielsson paper led to the publication of a long report on Indridason in
The Danish Medium Einar Nielsen in Iceland

The Danish physical medium Einar Nielsen came alone to Iceland in 1924 by the invitation of the Icelandic Society for Psychical Research. For about two months, some members conducted a series of 22 controlled experiments on Nielsen’s physical phenomena under the supervision of Einar Kvaran in Kvaran’s home. In addition to Einar Kvaran and Haraldur Nielsson and their wives, a number of other people were involved in a closed circle of sitters throughout the series. Among these were Jakob J. Smari from the University of Iceland, High Court Judge Pall Einarsson, Professor Gudmundur Thoroddsen, and Halldor Hansen of the medical faculty of the University of Iceland, as well as some other prominent persons who attended only occasionally.

During sittings conducted in red light ectoplasm, knocks, and materializations of human beings were reported. Levitations of various objects and of the medium himself took place when the séance room was in darkness. Reports of all twenty-two séances were published in detail in Morgun. Some of them were witnessed by the investigators. Others were accompanied by additional descriptions made by the relevant investigator(s) who took care of such special control conditions as a thorough body search of the medium (Kvaran, 1924a-e). No fraud was detected. Nielsen visited Iceland again in 1931 and in 1947, but his séances then were neither investigated nor controlled for fraud.

In 1922 it was reported that Nielsen had been exposed in Oslo. His mediumship then became a controversial issue. A pamphlet was published in Iceland in 1924 accusing Nielsen of fraud (Ottoson, 1924) and accusing psychical researchers in Iceland of having reached the same conclusion about Nielsen’s phenomena as the Norwegians had but not publishing their findings. Nielsson filed a lawsuit against the author of the pamphlet and the case was taken to court. While the author of the pamphlet could not produce any witness to support his case, Nielsson produced 20 witnesses in favor of his. The investigators of the 1924 experimental series asserted that it had not been possible for Nielsen to produce the phenomena they had seen in Reykjavik by the tricks of which he had been accused (G. Kvaran, 1925). Professor Nielsson won the case.
Lara Agustsdottir Exposed

In the 1930s Mrs. Ingibjorg Lara Agustsdottir had for some time held mediumistic séances, apparently producing both mental and physical phenomena. Reading through files kept by the Society for Psychical Research in London, Haraldsson came across the following records. In 1937 Agustsdottir was investigated at the International Institute for Psychical Research in London, the results of which yielded the following conclusion on October 2nd: “Meeting unanimously found the alleged phenomena to be both fraudulent and farcical.” On October 10th a communiqué of the Council claimed that: “After six séances, the materializations experiments with Fru [Mrs.] Lara Agustsdottir of Iceland have been discontinued, it being the unanimous opinion of the Council that at these sittings no genuine phenomena were produced.”

In Iceland Mrs. Agustsdottir was further exposed in October of 1940. A policeman, Sigurdur Magnusson, held many séances with her until he found a cloth which was used to produce phenomena by trickery. He brought charges against her and the case came to court. During the proceedings she admitted of having faked her phenomena in collusion with three men.

Two Poltergeist Investigations

The Thistilfjordur Case

Two poltergeist cases were investigated in Iceland during the 20th century. The first case involved an 18-year-old girl, Ragnheidur Vigfusdottir, who lived on a farm called Hvammur in Thistilfjordur. In the autumn of 1912 she started sleep-walking, which coincided with the mysterious changing of places or disappearance and sometimes reappearance of various objects. After the landlord started to lock the rooms at night, dishes and cups began to break and other objects vanished or changed places during the daytime. The size of the objects involved continued to increase until a large barrel, filled with liquid, was turned upside down.

The district deputy, Hjortur Thorkelsson, a man known locally for his disbelief in supernatural phenomena and respected for his carefulness, was called in to investigate in February of 1918. Immediately upon his arrival Thorkelsson saw a coffee can thrown from a stove onto the floor without anybody touching it and a dish thrown a distance of 6-8 feet from a table to the floor. Later that evening inexplicable loud clicks
were heard outside the window of a lighted room where Thorkelsson was dining with the family. The window remained intact and outside the window no footprints were found in the snow.

The phenomena were at their peak when Thorkelsson stayed at Hvammur. Spoons were bent, dishes and cups broken, inexplicable clicks and knocks were heard repeatedly, and large pieces of furniture were turned upside down, apparently without anyone touching them. Other people reported having seen objects being thrown. A bottle of wine was even emptied without any marks being visible on its unbroken seal. Thorkelsson noticed that the phenomena did not occur during the night but started immediately in the morning, and that they always seemed to occur in Ragnheidur’s presence. He reported:

I soon observed that the phenomena which occurred, happened mostly in the same room as Ragnheidur, or close by her, and therefore I paid specially close attention to all her movements. ...

During the three days I stayed at Hvammur, I was never able to ascertain that somebody was responsible for the phenomena, with the exception of Ragnheidur as I have mentioned before. I should also mention that I am convinced that the connection between her and the phenomena is unintentional, and I think I am completely sure that she takes this very badly. I noticed that every time that something was thrown, or a loud knock was heard, she was startled and showed a fearful reaction, and I think she is not brave. (Thorkelsson, 1913, pp. 83-84)

Thorkelsson observed that when Ragnheidur went on short visits to other farms the phenomena ceased, and later on, they stopped completely when she left the farm for good. Benjamin Sigvaldason (1939) also reported on the case with an account based on a diary he wrote as the case developed. He included the memoirs of Kjartan Thorgrimsson, who was a farmhand at Hvammur when the events took place.

**The Skaga Case**

On Skaga, a peninsula on the northern coast of Iceland, the family living at a small sheep farm called Saurar was awakened by a sudden noise one early morning in March, 1964. An oval table standing between the beds of the landlord and his wife had apparently moved about three feet into the room. It weighed about 60 pounds. This continued the day after and until the end of April, with movements of tables, and with objects like cups, dishes, and knives falling off shelves and tables onto the floor and breaking into pieces. The kitchen table and the oval table in the main
room were particularly active and repeatedly moved into the middle of the room. When the oval table was tied down, the two parts of the top came off and moved into the room. Pictures fell off the walls or became skewed. Sometimes objects were actually seen in movement, or so it was claimed.

Reverend Sveinn Vikingur went to Saurar with a small group of ISPR members a few days after the phenomena started, but nothing happened during their visit. Two geologists also went to Saurar, one with a seismograph. They dismissed any connection between the movements of the objects and earthquake movements. When the landlady, Mrs. Benediktsdottir, had to go to a hospital for eight days, the movements ceased abruptly reappearing after her return when her daughter came to the farm. By the end of April the phenomena had stopped completely. Reverend Sveinn Vikingur (1964) reported on the case and so did William G. Roll (1972/1976) who visited Iceland about that time. The New York Times also reported on the disturbances (Wiskari, 1964).

The Modern Era of Parapsychological Research in Iceland

In 1974 Erlendur Haraldsson joined the department of psychology at the University of Iceland after obtaining a Ph.D. from the University of Freiburg where he studied under Hans Bender. Haraldsson’s thesis focused on experiments using physiological measures (plethysmographic response) as indicators of extrasensory perception (Haraldsson, 1972, 1980). After a year at the Rhine Research Center in Durham, North Carolina in the United States (then called the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man), he joined Karlis Osis at the American Society for Psychical Research in New York City. They conducted a major study of deathbed-visions in India and the United States that resulted in the book, At the Hour of Death (Osis & Haraldsson, 1977). During one of their research trips to India, Osis and Haraldsson began a study of extraordinary claims of paranormal phenomena in the presence of, and at a distance from, the religious leader Sathya Sai Baba (Haraldsson & Osis, 1977). In 1987, Haraldsson published Miracles Are My Visiting Cards which included the results of his extensive studies of Sai Baba, his personal observations, and the results of inquiries he made among devotees, ex-devotees, and critics. Further studies of Indian psychics were also published, fraud having been witnessed in some of them (Haraldsson & Houtkooper, 1994; Haraldsson & Wiseman, 1995; Wiseman & Haraldsson, 1995).

1. Preliminary work on this project had been completed by Osis while he was on the staff of the Parapsychology Foundation.
The Icelandic mental medium Hafsteinn Bjornsson was the subject in an experiment conducted by Haraldsson and Stevenson (1974). Several experiments followed but initial significant findings were not replicated (Haraldsson, Pratt & Kristjansson, 1978).

In Iceland Haraldsson has conducted surveys of spontaneous psychic experiences (Haraldsson, 1985), of experiences of apparitions of the dead (Haraldsson, 1988-1989), and of mental healers (Haraldsson, 1994a, 1994b). The multinational “Human Values Study” compared experiences of telepathy, clairvoyance, and contact with the dead among most West European countries and the United States. The resulting sample included over 18,607 persons (Haraldsson & Houtkooper, 1991). Results showed a widespread reporting of telepathy (34%), clairvoyance (21%), and contact with the dead (25%) in Europe and even higher figures for the United States. Haraldsson also conducted some of the early studies of psychological and other correlates of belief in psychic phenomena (Haraldsson, 1981; Thalbourne & Haraldsson, 1980).

Also well-known are the series of experiments Haraldsson conducted in cooperation with Martin Johnson that showed a negative relationship between ESP performance and perceptual defensiveness as measured by the Defense Mechanism Test (Haraldsson, 1978; Johnson & Haraldsson, 1984; Haraldsson & Houtkooper, 1995).

In recent years Haraldsson has conducted studies of children who claim memories of a previous life which emphasize their psychological characteristics, an aspect of the phenomena that had previously been neglected. These children were found to differ in several respects from children in general (Haraldsson, 1991, 1997, 2000; Haraldsson & Samararatne, 1999; Haraldsson, Fowler & Periyannanpillai, 2000).

Loftur R. Gissurarson obtained his undergraduate degree in psychology from the University of Iceland in 1986 where he studied under Haraldsson, writing his thesis on the phenomena of Indridi Indridason. Gissurarson later obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh under the tutelage of Professor Robert L. Morris, with an experimental project involving computers and psychokinesis. Since then Gissurarson has published many papers, mostly on extrasensory perception, psychokinesis, and volition (Gissurarson, 1992; Gissurarson, 1997a, 1997b; Gissurarson & Morris, 1990), and coauthored two major works on Icelandic spiritualism (Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1989; Swatos & Gissurarson, 1997).

Apart from their joint work on Icelandic spiritualism, the authors of this paper have conducted two ganzfeld experiments, neither of which yielded a significant result but which confirmed an earlier finding of a “perciipient-order-effect” (Haraldsson & Gissurarson, 1985, Houtkooper, Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1988-1989). They have also
made a significant contribution to the study of the effect of geomagnetic activity on experimental ESP (Haraldsson & Gissurarson, 1987).

Concluding Remarks

In the early part of the 20th century parapsychological research in Iceland was sporadic and almost exclusively concerned with three individuals — Indridi Indridason, “Dreaming Joe” and Einar Nielsen — with reports on Indridason and “Dreaming Joe” appearing in international journals in the field. None of the leading researchers in these investigations were professional parapsychologists but the three principal researchers, Bjarnason, Hannesson and Nielsen were, or became, professors at the University of Iceland and were highly regarded in their respective fields.

In the last quarter of the 20th-century and into the 21st, Haraldsson has pursued an active program of research at the University of Iceland which covers widely different areas of investigation. This later period has been only briefly reviewed and is still, in our view, more contemporary than historical. Hence the emphasis in this paper on the earlier period.2

References


2. Further information about current research may be obtained from Haraldsson’s homepage. The url is http://www.hi.is/~erlendur/.


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**Abstract**

In Iceland parapsychological research began in 1905 with investigations of the physical medium Indridi Indridason. Extensive contemporary reports exist on this research, some of which appeared in international journals and was presented at the first two international congresses on psychical research held in 1921 and 1923. During an extended period of controlled sessions, particularly those conducted by Hannesson, the investigators reported observing movements and levitations of furniture and the medium himself, loud raps, various odor- and light-phenomena, remote playing of musical instruments, direct voices, and strong breezes. Other investigations included one on clairvoyant dreams performed on behalf of the Society of Psychical Research (London) by Bjarnason in which the phenomena reported around "Dreaming Joe" was investigated. Other mediumship studies were conducted, including those with Danish medium Einar Nielsen. Two poltergeists cases have also been investigated, one in the early part of the last century, and the other in the 1960s.
Recent research has largely been conducted by the authors and has focused on a variety of topics including death-bed visions, national and international levels of belief in psychic phenomena, experimental work testing the relationship of perceptual defensiveness to ESP, and the psychological characteristics of children who remember previous lives.

Résumé

En Islande la recherche parapsychologique a commencé en 1905 par des investigations sur le medium « physique » Indridi Indridason. Des rapports très étendus ont été écrits à ce propos, dont certains ont paru dans des revues internationales et furent présentés aux deux premiers Congrès Internationaux sur la Recherche Métapsychique de 1921 et 1923. Pendant une longue durée de sessions contrôlées, particulièrement celles qui furent conduites par Hannesson, les enquêteurs ont rapporté qu’ils avaient observé des mouvements et des lévitations de meubles et du médium lui-même, des « raps » très forts, des phénomènes divers d’odeurs et de lumières, des instruments de musique actionnés à distance, des voix et des souffles puissants. D’autres enquêtes dont une notamment sur les rêves de « clairvoyance » (enquête conduite par Bjarnason au nom de la Society of Psychical Research de Londres) dans laquelle furent étudiés les phénomènes rapportés à propos de « Dreaming Joe » (« Joe qui rêve »). D’autres études sur la médiumnité, incluant celles sur le médium danois Einar Nielsen. Deux cas de poltergeists ont aussi fait l’objet d’une investigation, une aux débuts du dernier siècle et l’autre dans les années soixante. Une recherche récente a pour l’essentiel été menée par les auteurs et s’est focalisée sur plusieurs thèmes, tels des visions sur le lit de mort, les niveaux de croyance dans les phénomènes psi, au niveau national et international, un travail expérimental testant la relation entre défensivité perceptive et ESP, et les caractéristiques psychologiques des enfants qui se rappellent leurs vies passées.

Zusammenfassung


抄 録

アイスランドの超心理学研究は、物理霊媒イノリディ・インディダソンの研究を嚆矢として、1905年に開始された。その研究については、当時の詳細な報告が残されている。その一部は、国際雑誌に収録されているし、1921年および1923年に開催された心霊研究の最初期の国際会議でも発表されている。その後、特にハンネスンによって、厳密な管理のもとで実験が行われた。当時の研究者たちは、家具および霊媒の体の動きや浮揚、大きな叩音、種々の匂いや光、離れた場所に置かれた楽器が自然に音楽を奏でる現象、直接談話、強風などを目撃し、体験したことを報告した。他にも、心霊研究協会（ロンドン）の代表としてピャルナソンが実施した透視夢に関する研究がある。その研究では、“夢見るジョー”の周辺で報告された現象について調査が行われた。霊媒術の研究としては、他に、デンマークの霊媒アイナー・ニールセンを対象にしたものなどがある。2件のポルターガイスト例も調査された。そのうちの1件は、20世紀初頭に、もう1件は1960年代に発生したものである。最近の研究のほとんどは著者らによるもので、臨時実験の研究、心霊現象の実在を信ずる度合いに関する国内および国外の調査、知覚的防衛とESPとの関係を調べる実験的研究、前世を記憶する子どもたちの心理的特性に関する調査など、さまざまな問題に焦点が当てられている。

Sommario

In Islanda la ricerca parapsicologica è iniziata nel 1905 con le indagini sul medium a effetti fisici Indridi Indridason. Su questa ricerca, presentata ai primi due Congressi internazionali di ricerca psichica tenutisi nel 1921 e nel 1923, esistono ampie rassegne moderne, alcune delle quali sono apparse su riviste internazionali. Nel corso di un esteso periodo di studi controllati, in particolare quelli condotti da Hannesson, i ricercatori hanno riferito di aver osservato movimenti e levitazioni di mobili e del medium stesso, forti raps, vari fenomeni di odorosi e luci, suono a distanza di strumenti musicali, voci dirette, e forti venti. Tra le altre indagini va citata una di Bjarnason sui sogni chiarovaggenti, condotta per conto della Società per la Ricerca Psichica di Londra, nella quale sono stati
studiati gli asseriti fenomeni accaduti in riferimento a "Joe sognante". Sono stati inoltre effettuati altri studi sulla medianità, tra cui quelli con il medium danese Einar Nielsen. Sono stati seguiti anche due casi di poltergeist, uno alla fine del secolo scorso, l'altro negli anni '90. La ricerca più recente è stata in larga misura realizzata dagli autori del presente articolo e si è incentrata su temi quali le visioni al letto di morte, i livelli della credenza nei fenomeni paranormali in ambito sia nazionale che internazionale, il controllo sperimentale del rapporto tra la difesa percettiva e l'ESP, le caratteristiche psicologiche dei bambini che ricordano di aver vissuto vite precedenti.

Resumo

Na Islândia, a pesquisa parapsicológica iniciou-se em 1905, com as investigações do médium de efeitos físicos Indridi Indridason. Existem extensos relatos contemporâneos sobre essa pesquisa, alguns dos quais aparecem em periódicos internacionais e foram apresentados nos dois primeiros congressos internacionais sobre pesquisa psíquica levados a cabo em 1921 e 1923. Durante um longo período de sessões controladas, particularmente aquelas conduzidas por Hannesson, os investigadores relataram ter observado movimentos e levitação de mobília e do próprio médium, sonoros raps, vários fenômenos de luzes e odores, o tocar de instrumentos musicais à distância, vozes diretas e fortes brisas. Outras investigações incluíram uma sobre sonhos clarividentes, conduzida em nome da Sociedade de Pesquisas Psíquicas (Londres) por Bjarnason na qual os fenômenos relatados a respeito de "Joe, o Sonhador" foram investigados. Outros estudos de mediunidade foram conduzidos, incluindo aqueles com o médium dinamarquês Einar Nielsen. Dois casos poltergeist também foram investigados, um na primeira parte do século XX e o outro na década de 1960. Os autores realizaram muitas pesquisas recentes que focalizam vários tópicos, tais como: visões no leito de morte, níveis nacionais e internacionais de crença nos fenômenos psíquicos, experimentos para testar a relação do percentual de defesa psicológica à ESP e as características psicológicas de crianças que se lembram de vidas passadas.

Resumen

En Islandia la investigación parapsicológica comenzó en 1905 con investigaciones del médium de efectos físicos Indridi Indridason. Existen numerosos informes contemporáneos de estas investigaciones, algunas de las cuales aparecieron en revistas internacionales y fueron presentadas en los primeros dos congresos internacionales de investigación psíquica celebrados en 1921 y en 1923. Durante un período extenso de sesiones controladas, especialmente las llevadas a cabo por Hannesson, los investigadores observaron movimientos y levitaciones de objetos, levitación del médium, sonidos, varios olores y luces, sonidos de instrumentos musicales a distancia, voces, y vientos. Otras investigaciones fue una de sueños clarividentes, llevada a cabo nombre de la Sociedad de Investigaciones Psíquicas (Londres) por Bjarnason, en la cual se estudiaron los
fenómenos de "Dreaming Joe." Otros estudios con médiums incluyeron los del médium Danés Einar Nielsen. También se investigaron dos casos poltergeist, uno en la primera parte del siglo 19 y otro en la década de los 1960. Las investigaciones recientes han sido llevadas a cabo mayormente por los autores y han sido sobre una variedad de temas tales como apariciones en el lecho de muerte, grados de creencia en fenómenos psíquicos a nivel nacional e internacional, experimentos de la relación entre las defensas perceptuales y la percepción extrasensorial, y las características psicológicas de niños que recuerdan vidas anteriores.