

Iceland in the Eighteenth Century: An Island Outpost of Europe?

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Only two hundred years ago, Lady Maria Stanley, wrote to her daughter-in-law on the subject of Iceland: ‘The questions asked even in London are curiously ignorant. A gentleman asked Sir John on Sunday if the island [Iceland] had been lately colonised!’¹ Lady Maria was scandalised. She was married to the English baronet Sir John Thomas Stanley, who had explored Iceland in 1789, and since then there had been a great deal of contact between the Stanley household and Iceland.² Why were people so ill-informed about Iceland? Was Iceland a *terra incognita*? To at least one visitor in the 1760s Iceland was a country ‘very little known’.³

Though the quotation at the beginning of this paper may not represent the state of knowledge of the typical English gentleman, little by little as the eighteenth century progressed Europeans learned more and more about Iceland, as both Danes and foreigners began to take a scientific interest in the island and wrote about their findings. The aim of this paper is to define Iceland’s relationship with Europe during the eighteenth century. There is no question that Iceland was remote from the European continent, situated as it is in the mid-Atlantic, but the main thrust of this paper is to demonstrate that Iceland was in most respects an integral part of Europe. First a brief description of Icelandic society in the eighteenth century will be given in a European perspective. Secondly, the state of knowledge about Iceland among the Europeans during this period will be addressed. And finally an attempt will be made to discover how European were the Icelanders?

Iceland in the Eighteenth Century

Iceland was, like the other North Atlantic islands, the Faroes and Greenland, a dependency of the absolute kingdom Denmark-Norway.⁴ At the beginning of the

century, according to the first national census of 1703, Iceland had a population of just over 50,000. At the end, the Icelanders only numbered 47,000, the nadir being reached in 1786 when the population declined to 39,000.⁵ Thus Iceland did not take part in the huge European population explosion of the latter half of the eighteenth century. The reasons are easily explained: disease, the smallpox epidemic of 1701–1709 (*Stórabóla*) in which a third of the population perished and bouts of famine.⁶ Last but certainly not least, natural catastrophes, the Laki eruption of June 1783 being the most devastating eruption in Iceland in historical times, with the greatest lava flow recorded in the world, 565 square kilometres. About 70 per cent of the livestock perished.⁷

Society was made up of a small landowning elite (5 per cent) and a large tenant peasantry (about 95 per cent).⁸ There was no European style aristocracy or nobility in Iceland but, as Harald Gustafsson has pointed out, a quite discernible elite, which like the European nobility did not pay taxes.⁹ In the eighteenth century with only two exceptions the governor was a Danish or Norwegian nobleman, though the district-governors or *antmenn*, who resided in the island, were commoners.¹⁰ The Crown officials were either Danes or, as was more common in the late eighteenth century, recruited from the native upper class forming 'a relatively homogeneous Icelandic elite, whose members were landowners, farmers of crown estates, or royal officials – or all these combined.'¹¹ They also had to have a law degree from the University of Copenhagen and at the end of this period the Icelandic country magistrates 'were probably the best-trained group of local officials in all the Nordic countries'.¹² Moreover, within Denmark-Norway of all the servants of the King of Denmark, the Icelandic officials, living 'at a comfortable distance from the centre of power in Copenhagen, had the strongest position.'¹³ Geographical isolation was not necessarily a bad thing.

It must not be forgotten that all officials (including the district governors) and clergy (including the bishop) were also farmers. Almost all males who did not own or rent a farm were servants (*vinnubjú*), registered annually at a farm.¹⁴ Every Icelander had to be registered. This so-called 'labor bondage' (*vistarband*) was strictly regulated in pre-industrial Iceland in order to control the number of people settling by the coast, both to prevent the drain from agriculture to fisheries and to combat pauperism.¹⁵ Contracts, however, were only valid for a year, so a farm servant disliking his master was free to move on to another farm at the end of his tenure. The household was, as in Europe, the basic unit of production, reproduction and consumption, where the farmer lived with his dependents, including his servants and perhaps a pauper or two. Only those having access to a farm, the means of subsistence, were permitted to marry. The family pattern

in Iceland was the same as in north-western Europe – the nuclear family with late marriage for both men and women.¹⁶ As the number of farms was finite, this meant that many did not marry, many remaining servants all their lives.¹⁷

The farms were isolated and the Icelanders were primarily engaged in animal husbandry: sheepfarming, with some cattle and horses. The climate did not permit agriculture; thus grain was not grown but imported. Fishing, a subsidiary occupation, was carried on in a very primitive manner. There were fishermen *per se*, but the most common practice was for the farmers to send their servants to sea in open rowing-boats. It must not be forgotten that fish products were among the major exports. Iceland was not self-sufficient and the trade had been conducted as a monopoly, as was the European custom regarding colonies and dependencies, since 1602 with Danish merchants sailing to Iceland in the spring, bringing necessities to an island with limited resources. Most merchants resided in Denmark for the best part of the year, employing factors, who were often native Icelanders, to supervise their trade. The Iceland trade was mainly one of barter, as little money was in circulation. It was of significant importance to the Danish economy, the fees for it constituting the King's major source of revenue from the island, and was highly prized by the Copenhagen merchants.¹⁸ Commercial profits were shipped to the Danish capital, with little capital investment in Iceland.

Iceland was not that remote from Europe. It must not be forgotten that the rich fishing grounds around Iceland attracted a great number of foreign fishermen. Near the end of the eighteenth century, Skúli Magnússon (1711–1794) the treasurer (*landfógeti*) of Iceland, wrote that during the century there were between 200 and 300 foreign fishing vessels in Icelandic waters from England, Scotland, France (most from Dunkerque), Holland and Hamburg. In March 1783, 90 hookers were ready to sail from Dunkerque alone.¹⁹ Needless to say these ships would seek shelter from storms and land to obtain fresh water. Sometimes they were forced to stay, for instance in 1705 a French privateer captured two or three Dutch whalers fishing in Greenland waters, casting some of the crew off on the east coast of Iceland – from whence they made their way back to Europe on merchant ships.²⁰ These Dutchmen must have spent some time in Iceland bringing news from Europe with them. And there is more than sufficient evidence to state unreservedly that the Danish trade monopoly did not put an end to the previously favourable trade, though now illicit, with foreigners after 1602.²¹

Perhaps the major difference between Iceland and other European countries was the fact that there were no villages or towns. The largest centres of population were the two bishoprics. According to the 1703 census 85 people were registered at Skálholt in the south and 93 in Hólar in the north, including the

paupers.²² However, it is clear that poor people did gather by the sea where the fishing was good, for instance on the peninsulas in the south and west (Reykjanes and Snæfellsnes), but it is anachronistic to speak of European-style villagers or a ‘middling class’ in Iceland in the eighteenth century.²³

Iceland had more or less been left to its own devices and little effort had been made to change its stagnant economy.²⁴ The King of Denmark was happy while the revenues from trade and taxes continued to roll into his coffers. But then that traditionally dynamic element – a native merchant class – was lacking in Icelandic society. From the 1750s onwards the Danish government, however, invested considerable sums in introducing significant improvements in the economic sphere: in farming, the fisheries the woollen manufacturing. The Icelanders themselves, at the meeting of the *Alþingi* (the Icelandic parliament) in 1751 under the leadership of the energetic treasurer Skúli Magnússon, formed a joint-stock company *Det Privilegerede Islandske Interessentskab*, the primary aims being the promotion of new ways of cultivation and agriculture, Danish and Norwegian farmers being imported for the purpose of instructing the Icelanders, and wool manufacturing as a means of strengthening the basis of the old rural society.²⁵ The proposals were exactly in tune with what the government was promoting elsewhere in the realm. Magnússon was a great advocate for the regeneration of Iceland and for the first time concrete plans were made and put into practice with the help of the reforming Danish government and the good-will of the King, who actually poured more money into Iceland than Magnússon asked for.

The timing for those advocating reforms was fortunate. As the Icelandic historian Hrefna Róbertsdóttir has pointed out:

during the 18th century, in common with other dependencies and outlying provinces, Iceland became a participant in the general development of the Danish state. Contemporary economic policy dictated that the provinces should contribute to the general good of the realm as well as strengthening their own economies from within.²⁶

Thus when the Icelanders finally took some direct action, the royal administration was ready. In 1770 the first Royal Commission (*Landsnefndin fyrri*) was sent to gather information on the economic situation in the island and to suggest reforms. In 1784, with a change of government in Denmark, matters improved still further. The regime that came to power in 1784 was enlightened, favouring liberal policies in the spirit of Adam Smith and the physiocrats. In 1785 a second Royal Commission (*Landsnefndin síðari*) was appointed to examine the general state of Iceland. It concluded i.a. that the trade monopoly was damaging to the Icelanders

and successfully proposed the trade be thrown open to most Danish subjects.²⁷ This was of course in tune with the developments already taking place within the Danish Empire. In 1754 the West Indies trade was opened to all Danish subjects there and the same development was taking place in Norway. The subsequent 'free trade' (*fríverslun*) took effect from the beginning of 1788, the major change being that individual independent Danish merchants throughout the kingdom, with the exception of the inhabitants of the Faroes and Greenland, could participate in the Iceland trade. This meant that, finally, the Icelanders could now conduct their own trade. There was, however, a strict ban in force against commercial dealings with 'foreigners' (i.e. those not subjects of the King of Denmark).

By the time the eighteenth century was nearing its end the urbanisation of Iceland had become government policy, hand in hand with the abolition of the monopoly trade. Six Icelandic trading harbours were turned into chartered towns (*kaupstaðir*).²⁸ The only town that met with success was Reykjavík, even though it was not until the turn of the century that Reykjavík began to emerge as the nascent capital, boasting a population of 311 in 1801.²⁹

It should be mentioned that Iceland was completely unfortified (unlike the Faroe Islands with their garrison), its geographical isolation from Europe making this unnecessary.³⁰ The governor had no militia but then, it must be remembered, the Icelanders were free from military conscription, something they did not fail to appreciate. To the foreign travellers however, the poor Icelanders were, 'unfortunate natives, totally bereft of all means of defence'. The Chevalier de la Poix de Fréminville who came to Iceland on the French frigate the *Syrène* in 1806, wrote the islanders had no arms and regarded the guns of the French 'as an object of curiosity, almost as much as with the inhabitants of the South-Sea Islands.'³¹

The level of education was higher in Iceland than in most other European countries at the time. In 1741 the Danish government sent Ludvig Harboe, the Pietist clergyman, to Iceland to investigate the state of Christianity. Harboe's policy was i.a. to promote literacy in Iceland. However, as there were no elementary schools in Iceland, unlike Denmark and Norway, the parents were held responsible for their children's education under the regular supervision of the clergy.³² The result was that literacy became wide-spread, indeed confirmation in the Lutheran church insisted on this.³³ At the two bishoprics, Latin schools had been founded in 1552 to educate future clergymen and university students. Many of the latter, sons of the elite, were subsequently educated at the University of Copenhagen, only to return home as loyal royal officials or to high office within the church.

Thus Iceland in the eighteenth century was not much different from western Europe except mainly for the notable lack of towns and a European-style nobility,

but then Iceland was ‘only’ a Danish dependency, not an independent state. And it might be mentioned that, as a result of the century’s democratic revolutions nobility was becoming a thing of the past. The constitution of the new republic of the United States stipulated quite clearly that titles of nobility would not be granted and the French nobility was abolished on 19 June 1790.³⁴ And as will be seen urbanisation in Iceland was just around the corner. We can now turn to the next question: What was the state of knowledge regarding Iceland in Europe by the end of the eighteenth century?

What Did Europe Know About Iceland? The Dano-Icelandic Contribution

Little reliable information on the island in the north was available in Europe in published form. There were, however, numerous accounts with amazing and fanciful stories to be found, for instance in Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmographia*, first published in 1544, and in Albert Krantz’s *Chronica regnorum aquilonarium Daniae, Suetiae, Norvegiae* in 1546.³⁵ Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson (1541–1627) of Hólar in northern Iceland, famous for translating the Bible into Icelandic in 1584, was incensed by these accounts and commissioned a young clergyman, Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648), to write a treatise refuting the calumnies against Iceland. Jónsson attempted to dispel the travel lies in various works. His *Brevis Commentarius de Islandia*, published in Copenhagen 1593, received the widest circulation. It was the first Icelandic work to be written for foreigners, in Latin of course, and was subsequently published five years later in 1598 both in Latin and in an *English translation* in the second edition of Richard Hakluyt’s *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation*. The fact that it was included can only confirm the importance of the Iceland fisheries for England. However, ignorance at the highest levels was still to be found, and in 1632 Mr Secretary Coke, one of the two secretaries of state of King Charles I, remarked in a memorandum on the fisheries off Iceland: ‘Iceland itself is a great territory, and unknown whether it be a main continent with Newfoundland or no [sic]. Mariners say it is one continent.’³⁶ Cultural contacts, especially among antiquarians, were frequent and it must be mentioned, that the hugely influential Royal Society of London, founded in 1662, was extremely active in collecting news of Iceland and its phenomena right from its year of foundation asking that a ‘set of queries’ be prepared for Iceland. There was in fact quite a lot of correspondence between the Society and learned Icelanders: for example, the Reverend Páll Björnsson (1621–1706) in Selárdalur, a famous witch-hunter who answered some of the queries

in 1671, had a paper on Iceland's nature published in *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* in 1674, translated the following year into French in the *Journal des Savants*.³⁷

In the eighteenth century one of the aspects of the Enlightenment was interest in science and exploration and scientific societies on the English and French models were founded all over western Europe. The Danes were no exception and The Danish Royal Society (*Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab*) was founded in 1742. As the Danish authorities were prepared to finance exploration to exotic places outside the Danish realm, for example Frederick V sent a Danish expedition to Egypt, Arabia and Syria in 1761–1767, the members of which were the first Europeans to map the Red Sea,³⁸ it comes as no surprise that they were prepared to send scientists to Iceland. The first one to go and write a book on Iceland was Niels Horrebow (1712–1760), a Danish jurist, well-versed in astronomy and mathematics. He stayed in Iceland for two years in 1749–1751, his instructions being to make astronomical and meteorological observations, but he did a lot more than that.

In 1746 a book entitled *Nachrichten von Island* had been published in Hamburg by no less a man than the mayor himself, Johann Anderson. The following year it was translated into Danish as *Efterretninger om Island*,³⁹ reprinted the following year, and translated into both Dutch and French in 1750. It was a particularly nasty account of Iceland. Anderson had never visited the island himself and his sources were captains and fishermen familiar with the Iceland waters and harbours. As Arngrímur Jónsson had attacked Münster and Krantz at the end of the sixteenth century so Horrebow now did battle with Anderson.

Horrebow entitled his book *Tilforladelige Efterretninger om Island* (1752), – a play on the Danish title of Anderson's book, with the word *tilforladelig* – reliable or trustworthy – pointedly added. It was extremely comprehensive, treating all imaginable and unimaginable aspects of Iceland in 114 separate chapters. Especially famous is chapter 72 in the English edition, entitled 'Concerning snakes' with its only sentence: 'No snakes of any kind are to be met with throughout the whole island'.⁴⁰ This subjected the book to some ridicule among the literati of Europe. This was, however, the first general account of Iceland and on the whole it was true to its title. At the King's behest it was translated, though often in an abridged version, in German (1753), Dutch (1754), English as *The Natural History of Iceland* (1758) and French (1764).⁴¹ The book was influential and much quoted, as will be seen.

But the political decision-makers in Copenhagen had more ambitious plans for his dependency:

His Danish Majesty being particularly anxious to acquire a proper knowledge of Iceland, one of the most interesting parts of his dominions, lately directed the Academy of Sciences to employ proper persons to travel over that Island, relative to which only vague and imperfect ideas had hitherto prevailed.⁴²

The ‘proper persons’ chosen were two young Icelanders, well-educated at the University of Copenhagen, Eggert Ólafsson (1726–1768), a natural scientist and poet, and Bjarni Pálsson (1719–1779), who had studied both medicine and the natural sciences and would be appointed Iceland’s first state-physician in 1760. Their mission was to travel around Iceland (Horrebow had not travelled much during his stay) and to write ‘a full and authentic account of the civil and natural history of the island’.⁴³ This they did. In 1752–1757 they set off on an official expedition by ‘order of his Danish Majesty’ sponsored by *Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab*. They went all over the country to explore Iceland’s nature in all its aspects.⁴⁴ Their description of Iceland, entitled *Reise igiennem Island* (1772), was published in two large volumes, over 1,100 pages long, with fifty-one engravings and a new map of Iceland.⁴⁵ Translations appeared in German in 1774 and French in 1802. However, in England, where they are known as ‘Messrs. Olafsen & Povelsen’, an abridged version, though with a map and some engravings, was published in 1805.⁴⁶ As with Horrebow the translations were undertaken at the instigation of the Danish king. He was, as quoted above, anxious for Europe to get a reliable picture of his remarkable dependency. Praise has deservedly been heaped on Eggert Ólafsson’s and Bjarni Pálsson’s book. It has been called an ‘extremely accurate and scholarly study’⁴⁷ and ‘definitely one of the most remarkable books ever written on Iceland [...] more or less unique because hardly any other European country possessed such a comprehensive account of its geography, natural features and national life in general’ at the time.⁴⁸

Ólafsson and Pálsson were scientists *par excellence*. They were the first to climb Hekla and measure the eruptions of the Great Geysir, which would become a common feature of all visits by foreign scientists. As this book deals with much more than natural science, for instance the living conditions of the Icelanders, it is a very valuable source for Iceland in the eighteenth century and no doubt ‘radically changed people’s knowledge of [...] the Iceland of that time [...] based on a sound knowledge of the country and its people and fresh research.’⁴⁹

What Did Europe Know About Iceland? The French Contribution

Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* was published during the years 1751–1772. Subscribers were about 4,000. The *Encyclopédie* was subsequently republished in a cheaper quarto edition in 39 volumes in Switzerland in 1780 and smuggled into France. It sold in 25,000 copies. Obviously this major work of the Enlightenment reached a large audience within the class of literate and enlightened aristocrats and bourgeois, in other words the elite in western Europe.

And of course there is a chapter on Iceland – '*l'Islande*'. The author is unknown but he says that most accounts of Iceland until now '*ont donné des notions très peu exactes*', had not been very accurate.⁵⁰ His main source was Horrebow, and he warned his readers against Anderson. Horrebow's book was the most modern, meaning the most recent, and most correct, pointing out that Horrebow had actually witnessed what he described.⁵¹

The Frenchman begins by explain where Iceland is situated on the globe and the fact that it belongs to the King of Denmark. Apart from Great Britain it is the largest island in Europe. The Icelanders are Lutheran, there are two bishoprics in the island, the major Icelandic exports are enumerated and it is explained that the trade is in the hands of a privileged company. The peculiar fact that there are no towns to be found in Iceland and that Icelanders live on separate and scattered farms is of course pointed out. The author found it remarkable that the Icelanders possessed a written history and he gave a short resumé of it beginning with 'Ingolphe' (Ingólfur Arnarson, traditionally the first settler) fleeing the tyranny of Harold the Hairfair. The Icelanders then established their *république* until they came under the rule of the King of Denmark, or *le gouvernement absolu*. But he emphasizes that the inhabitants of the north had always loved '*la liberté*', these peace-loving Vikings respected women and were far from being '*insensibles à l'amour*'. Thus the author manages to touch upon three of the favourite concepts of the Enlightenment: *république*, *liberté* and a hatred of absolutism.

Most of the article is devoted to the medieval literature, especially the Edda of Sæmundur Sigfússon and *Hávamál*, which is described in some detail. The author was very interested in the mythology of the ancient Scandinavians. The interested reader was referred to further information on Iceland in the encyclopaedia by looking up terms such as *Glacier*, *Hekla*, *Odin*, *Valhalla* and *Runiques*.

In the late 1760s the French government was the first 'foreign' nation to show political interest in Iceland. The French had, like the Dutch and English, long fished in Icelandic waters, most of the fishing vessels sailing from Dunkerque. At the end of the Seven Years' War, the loss of Canada to Britain was a great

disappointment. France was intent on regaining her former colony. One plan was entitled *Memoir secret sur la Louisiane* and *Projet de Cession de la Louisiane au Dannemark en échange de L'Isle d'Islande*. The plan was to exchange the territorially large but unproductive French colony of Louisiana for Iceland, the idea being to establish a French naval station in Iceland from whence ships could be sent to regain Canada. Étienne François de Choiseul, chief minister of Louis XV, received detailed plans to that effect.⁵² As Louisiana was 'the least valuable colony' in the French Empire,⁵³ the plan actually makes a lot of sense. At this point in time (the research is on-going) it is not known whether these plans were in some way connected with the interest the French government now showed in Iceland by sending French frigates to the island for the first time.

At the beginning of 1767 Yves Joseph de Kerguelen-Trémarec (1734–1797), a Breton noble and naval officer was summoned to Versailles to sail off to the North Atlantic ostensibly to protect the French fishing fleet. Kerguelen was sent to Dunkerque to select seamen familiar with Icelandic waters. He was also to explore and make hydrographic observations. He sailed on the frigate *La Folle*, with a crew of 200 and 26 guns. They left Brest at the end of April with sufficient supplies to last six months. The weather was bad and on 12 May he reached Cape Hekla, sailing south and west before anchoring in the harbour of Patreksfjörður in the western Fjords.⁵⁴ He found 80 French ships in Icelandic waters, as well as 200 Dutch ones and he mentions the interesting fact that the Dutch were always trying to entice the Icelanders to join their crews.⁵⁵ The French stayed in Patreksfjörður until mid-June, then sailed on to Norway, returning to the east coast of Iceland in August.

As Kerguelen wrote himself: 'During my stay in Iceland, I neglected nothing in making myself acquainted with what was remarkable in this island, such as the mode of living of its inhabitants, their manners, their religion and government.' Kerguelen's main source was yet again Horrebow 'who was born a Dane, and is best informed' and no less a man than Monsieur Olave or the before-mentioned Eggert Ólafsson who then lived near Patreksfjörður. Kerguelen often met the renowned naturalist and he subsequently corresponded with Monsieur Egerhard Olavius, as he was called by the French.⁵⁶

Kerguelen mentioned the valuable eiderdown, falcons and was very interested in *lignum fossile* (in Icelandic: *surtarbrandur*) fossilised wood, which he described in great detail. He was on the whole fairly impressed by the Icelanders: They were frugal, of medium build, with light hair, having 'fine teeth' and 'enjoying their health admirably' until the age of fifty, when they went into a steady decline. They enjoyed 'a manly education' and had done well at the University of

Copenhagen. He met many who spoke Latin. They knew no dancing, but loved to play chess. They were, however lazy and prone to drink, but he hastened to add that was the fault of the Danish merchants who imported too much alcohol. He added that they were tender parents, and was shocked by the lack of midwives and doctors in Iceland and the ship's surgeon was kept busy helping women giving birth.⁵⁷

This Frenchman was very interested in the cuisine of the Icelanders, but not impressed. Milk was the principal food of the Icelanders, the common people surviving on boiled sheep-heads in winter and cod-heads in summer. What surprised Kerguelen most was the lack of bread, the main staple of the French diet in the eighteenth century, indeed in Europe. Bread 'extremely black' and made of rye was 'very uncommon' even among 'those in easy circumstances' who only consumed it at special occasions.⁵⁸ The following year in 1768 Kerguelen sailed on the *L'Hirondelle* to Patreksfjörður and continued on a similar route as the previous year. His men were kept busy correcting sea charts. On his return he published a book on his 1767–1768 voyage *Relation d'un Voyage dans la Mer du Nord, aux Côtes d'Islande, du Groenland, de Ferro, de Schetiland, des Orcades & de Norwége* (1771).⁵⁹ Though his book is in many ways valuable, especially on the fisheries which he described in some detail, he claimed to have found marble, crystal and mines of copper and iron in Iceland.⁶⁰ These are yet to be discovered.

Three years later in 1771 the French government sent another expedition to the North Atlantic, including Iceland. The leader was Jean René Antoine, Marquis de Verdun de la Crenne (1741–1805) and with him were the mathematician Jean-Charles de Borda and the astronomer Alexandre Guy Pingré as well as other scientists. There were all eminent in their fields of science. They were to correct maps and charts, use new tools and methods, make important scientific experiments and examine anything pertaining to the navigation of these waters e.g. currents, weather, icefloes etc., and take care to find geographical positions by measuring longitude and latitude.⁶¹ In July they anchored in Patreksfjörður, like Kerguelen before them, where they spent a month.⁶² Supplies had been sent from Copenhagen and the local Danish merchant had been ordered by Governor Laurits Andreas Thodal to give them every assistance. They erected an observatory and made various astronomical observations and endless soundings in the sea measuring the depth. Unfortunately, they were not particularly lucky. The nights were too bright and there was a lot of rain and fog which understandably hampered them in their observations. They were hoping to meet Eggert Ólafsson, but he had tragically drowned in 1768. Instead Verdun met the Reverend Björn Halldórsson (1724–1794) in Sauðlauksdal, a renowned Icelander, a man of the

Enlightenment who had written many books and was a pioneer in the planting of potatoes, as they noticed.⁶³

Verdun felt he had little to add to what Kerguelen had written, which he considered the best account so far. His book is therefore somewhat disappointing as regards new knowledge regarding Iceland but his main success lay in correcting the maps and sea-charts, the importance of which should not be underestimated, especially if there were plans afoot in Versailles regarding Iceland.⁶⁴

What Did Europe Know About Iceland? The British Contribution

It was in August 1772, that the first British expedition arrived in Hafnarfjörður in south-west Iceland. It was led by Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), a naturalist and explorer who eventually became the longest-serving president of the Royal Society in London and, incidentally, the protector of Denmark's North-Atlantic dependencies during the Napoleonic Wars.⁶⁵

Not yet thirty Banks was a seasoned explorer having already sailed to Labrador and Newfoundland in 1766 and with Captain Cook on the celebrated expedition on the *Endeavour* to the South Seas in 1768–1771.⁶⁶ The following year he was supposed to go on Cook's second voyage on the *Resolution* in search of the mystic *Terra australis* but, displeased with the shipboard facilities, he withdrew from the voyage. Banks had already gathered a party of twenty men at his own expense, including naturalists, among them the Swedish botanist Daniel Solander, artists, servants who doubled as collectors and hornblowers and a French cook. It was imperative for Banks to employ his men 'in some way to the advancement of science'. Preparations were made in haste and Banks was armed with several books when he left for Iceland, including Anderson, Horrebow and Kerguelen and the recently published *Reise igiennem Island*.⁶⁷ He wrote in his journal:

A voyage of some kind or other I wished to undertake & saw no place at all within the compass of my time so likely to furnish me with an opportunity as Iceland, a country which [...] has been visited but seldom & never at all by any good naturalist to my knowledge. The whole face of the country new to the botanist & zoologist as well as the many Volcanoes with which it is said to abound made it very desirable to explore.⁶⁸

Accordingly, Iceland had the advantages of being comparatively near and, not least, unexplored. Thus Banks set out for Iceland, Hekla being the main attraction. Banks spent six weeks in Iceland, climbing Hekla, wrongly believing himself

to be the first man to do so, boiling ptarmigans in Geysir and visiting Þingvellir and Skálholt. During the stay in Iceland Banks and his party led an active social life, dining with Governor Thodal and other notables. The Icelandic guests were surprised at the variety of wines and the music of the French horns that accompanied these dinners. Afterwards Banks and his men found it 'quite astonishing' to see both men and women fearlessly galloping off over the beds of lava on their sturdy Icelandic ponies.⁶⁹

One who joined the expedition at the last moment was Uno von Troil, later Archbishop of Uppsala. He was interested in the Icelandic language and had recently arrived in London, after visiting France where he had met such luminaries of the Enlightenment as Diderot, Rousseau and d'Alembert and lunching with Benjamin Franklin in London.⁷⁰ No doubt the leading Icelanders were regaled with stories of meetings with these men of the Enlightenment. It was indeed lucky that von Troil had joined the expedition because it was he who would take on the task of publication. His book *Bref rörande en resa til Island MDCCLXXII* was published in Uppsala in 1777, dedicated to the King and Queen of Sweden.⁷¹ It is constructed as a series of letters to celebrated Swedes. To von Troil's credit, he corresponded with three learned Icelanders, bishop Hannes Finnsson, the scholar and Reverend Gunnar Pálsson (1714–1791) and Hálfðán Einarsson (1732–1785), the rector of Hólar Cathedral School to gain further information.⁷² He had also consulted other books on Iceland. In the opinion of one modern expert von Troil's book is one of the best accounts written on Iceland.⁷³ It was promptly translated into German (Leipzig 1779; Nuremberg 1789) and the English translation spawned three editions in London and Dublin in 1780. Von Troil's book was translated into French in 1781 and Dutch 1784. Thus yet another book on Iceland received a wide circulation in Europe. The book wakened 'the curiosity of science to that neglected, but remarkable country', wrote one Scottish baronet who would later travel to Iceland himself.⁷⁴

Unfortunately, the Banks expedition had arrived late in Iceland, at the end of August. Banks himself collected as many mineral samples as he could, had his collectors press the few flowers they found and Solander made long lists of the flora and fauna of Iceland. Manuscripts and printed books were bought which Banks later presented to the British Museum as well as the illustrations made by his artist. Banks wrote in his journal that he realised that 'tho the Season was far advanced yet something might be done, at least hints might be gathered which might promote the farther Examination of it by some others.'⁷⁵

And many other British naturalists did travel to Iceland, following in Banks's footsteps. In 1789 the before-mentioned twenty-two year old John Thomas Stanley, son of one of the wealthiest men in England, set sail for Iceland with a group

of nature-loving friends from the University of Edinburgh. In the tradition of Banks, Stanley visited the geysers and climbed Mount Hekla. Unlike Banks he had the temerity to hoist the British flag.⁷⁶ To Stanley whilst the condition of the Icelanders ‘with respect to all the comforts or necessities of life is rarely superior to the savage state, their moral and intellectual qualities raise them to a level even with the most civilized communities of Europe [...]’. Stanley who had spent six years on his Grand Tour, as was the custom of the sons of the British elite, before coming to Iceland, optimistically felt that the level of education was such that the Icelanders could mix ‘without any fear of inferiority, amongst the informed and well bred of any society in London, Paris or any other capital’.⁷⁷ To him the Icelanders were practically full-blown Europeans, of the better sort!

During the Napoleonic Wars several distinguished Britons were to visit the island, and they all wrote books about their experiences. In 1809 William Jackson Hooker, later director of Kew Gardens, was sent by Banks to collect plants.⁷⁸ The following year it was the turn of the Scottish mineralogist Sir George Steuart Mackenzie, accompanied by the doctors Henry Holland and Richard Bright. His book is unusually impressive with many learned chapters on history, trade, diseases etc.⁷⁹ And in 1814–1815 Ebenezer Henderson was the first Englishman to travel all around the island, distributing an Icelandic translation of the Bible, no less than 5,000 copies printed, from the British and Foreign Bible Society. He was very successful in distributing them and they were received by the literate population ‘with every demonstration of gratitude and joy.’⁸⁰

What is interesting about all these travel books is the fact that the authors point out what they find curious and particular, though in general they looked on ‘the other’ as inferior. To give an example the British travellers enjoyed the hospitality of the leading Icelanders but the *etatsråd* Magnús Stephensen (1762–1833), Chief Justice of Iceland and a member of the most distinguished Icelandic family of the time was ‘not very brilliant in his understanding or acquirements’, while his younger brother Stefán Stephensen (1767–1820), the district-governor of western Iceland, received the most praise as comparable to ‘one of the highest class of farmers in England.’ But then Amtmand Stephenson ‘most resembled an Englishman in his countenance, dress & manners’, that is to say was almost one of them.⁸¹ As well as awakening the European world to the ‘real’ Iceland these travel books are valuable and much-used sources for today’s historians.⁸²

By the end of the Napoleonic Wars readers of English, French, Danish, Swedish, Dutch and German will have had plenty of excellent books by scientific gentlemen to choose from, books that gave reliable and up-to-date accounts of the island of Iceland.

The Icelanders of the Eighteenth Century – Members of the European Community?

The relationship between Icelanders and Europe in the eighteenth century was a close one. We have already seen how for instance Pietism and ‘a mercantilist ideology with a cameralist orientation’ made its mark.⁸³ In this final section, foreign travel, the Enlightenment, the influence of the French Revolution, the Icelanders’ adoption of fashionable European dress and a more varied diet, will be discussed. On all these aspects a lot could be written. Here the aim is a modest overview, but which aims to place the Icelanders firmly in the European world.

Most Icelanders did not travel abroad but that was probably true of most Europeans during the eighteenth century. Those Icelanders who travelled were the students going to study at the University of Copenhagen, as well as others, both men and women, who went to Denmark to learn various crafts such as spinning and weaving. Royal officials, to name one example Skúli Magnússon (1711–1794), the native-born treasurer, repeatedly went to and fro between Iceland and Copenhagen on official business. Prisoners of both sexes ‘enjoyed’ a foreign trip when they were sent to Copenhagen and Finnmark to serve their sentences⁸⁴ and those on the run tried and often succeeded in getting a passage on the fishing vessels from Iceland. Then there were the adventurers. The most celebrated was a seventeenth century traveller Jón Indíafari (John the India-Traveller) who sailed to India, Madagascar and Ceylon, wrote a lengthy travel-account, considered an excellent contemporary source, first translated into English in the early twentieth century.⁸⁵

From the eighteenth century we have two published travel accounts: Árni Magnússon from Geitastekk (1726–c. 1810) who travelled widely during the years 1753–1797 going to Greenland, France, on a Danish merchant-ship to China and to St. Petersburg, swearing allegiance to Catherine the Great, joining her army and fighting the Turks⁸⁶ while his compatriot Eiríkur Björnsson called ‘the much-travelled’ (*viðförli*) (1733–1791) travelled from Iceland to Denmark in 1756, then fought the Russians in 1762 and that same year sailed to China and on to Bengal in 1764 and back to Iceland in 1768.⁸⁷ Both returned to Iceland to write accounts of their adventures. There must have been more Icelanders who went on similar adventures but did not leave accounts of their exploits.

There was a general interest in Iceland regarding what was happening in the world. Though the era of saga-writing was long past many chronicles or annals

were written during the eighteenth century. The annalists were of course the educated: clergy and officials. They diligently recorded everything of significance taking place in Iceland but also took care to note major events abroad that aroused their curiosity. Their manuscripts were copied again and again and read by the farmer in the evenings, while the other members of the household knitted. Thus Icelanders did their best keeping up with events in Europe.

What interested the annalists? Here are a few examples of the early years of the eighteenth century from *Fitjaánnáll*. Wars, of course, as they could be disruptive for the fisheries and trade; the deaths and marriages of kings – not only of Denmark-Norway, but the deaths of the major European monarchs such as the childless Charles II of Spain (1701) and King Louis XIV (1714), the accession and later the death of Queen Anne in England (she was married to Prince George (Jörgen) of Denmark, brother of King Christian V) and events surrounding such exotic figures as the Sultan of Constantinople.⁸⁸

In the chronicle *Hítardalsannáll* there was both a detailed description of the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728 and the anointment of Christian VI and Queen Sophie Magdalene and the subsequent feasting which took place in Copenhagen in 1731. The annalist described the two columns with gilded swans. From one swan nose flowed red wine and white from the other for several hours. The public could eat and drink as they pleased. The annalist was also interested in demography and recorded the number of births and deaths in different countries – London, Vienna and Berlin to name a few examples, obviously the population was everywhere growing except in Iceland.⁸⁹

The Enlightenment arrived rather late in Iceland, but in the words of the Icelandic expert on this subject, Ingi Sigurðsson, the Enlightenment has had ‘great effect in Iceland as elsewhere in the western world’.⁹⁰ Magnús Stephensen, the Chief Justice of Iceland, was the undisputed leader. In 1794 the Icelandic Society for National Enlightenment (*Hið íslenska Landsuppfræðingarfélag*) was founded. This society was the proud possessor of the only printing-press in Iceland and in 1796 published the first periodical in Icelandic, called *Minnisverð Tíðindi* (Memorable News). There in the first volume in pride of place was Magnús Stephensen’s account of the French Revolution, about 120 pages in length. A believer in the didactic view of history, Magnús Stephensen’s aim was to enlighten his fellow Icelanders and inform them of the important events taking place in the outside world. His narrative was dramatic with the occasional quotation in French. On the whole he approved of the revolution, his sympathies lying with the moderate revolutionaries. Stephensen praised Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the *Contrat Social* (1762) which he described as having terrified all tyrants and aroused the French

nation from a slavlike slumber. His Icelandic readers were assured that henceforth only virtue and talent would bring men to power and respect.⁹¹

The journal had over 1,000 subscribers or more than two per cent of the Icelandic population and many others will have borrowed these copies. The Danish merchants trading in Iceland were much afraid that the ideas expressed in the account would have a bad influence on the Icelanders and the merchant Georg Andreas Kyhn even suggested in a pamphlet published in Copenhagen in 1797, that it might lead to a bloody revolution in the island.⁹²

At the same time that Stephensen was writing his account of the French Revolution he was also drafting a petition in the name of the Icelandic nation to the King of Denmark demanding that the Iceland trade be open to all nations. During the Revolutionary Wars the Danish merchants found it more profitable to use their vessels to conduct trade between the belligerents than send their ships north to Iceland. There was a drastic decline in the shipping, by 1794 the navigation was reduced to half of what it was before. The reforms following the abolition of the monopoly trade had proved illusory. Bitter complaints against the Danish merchants were made in this petition. 'The Great Petition' (*Almenna bænarskráin*), as it was called, is probably the most radical document ever sent to the King by his Icelandic subjects and was signed by most of the royal officials in Iceland. The language of the petition was in tune with the ideology of the French Revolution. 'Innate rights of freedom' were mentioned and one sentence read that the terms of trade subjected the Icelanders to 'loss of liberty, tyranny and enslavement'.⁹³ The French word *nation* was used to describe the Icelanders instead of *folk*. As in the *Encyclopédie* the word *république* (or rather *republik* as the petition was in Danish) was used to describe the free commonwealth period in Icelandic history, from the period of settlement to 1262 when Iceland came under the rule of Norway. The clerks in the *Rentekammer* underlined the offensive words in red. Crown Prince Frederik was shocked and furious and the Icelandic officials were severely reprimanded. No changes were made in the conditions of trade.⁹⁴ The petition was published in Copenhagen in 1797, only two years before the abolition of the freedom of the press in Denmark in 1799. Thus the influence of the French Revolution was felt in Iceland.

The male members of the upper class in Iceland were keen followers of European fashion. Sumptuary laws were in force and dress served a useful purpose in indicating the social standing of an individual. Here we see clearly the divide between sexes. It was the men who travelled abroad, they were the royal officials who attended the court in Copenhagen. It was they who had to keep up with fashion.⁹⁵ Eggert Ólafsson remarked in his book *Reise igiennem Island* that both



Pétur Þorsteinsson with his wife Þórunn, sons Guðmundur and Sigurður, daughters Björg and Hólmfríður and six infants that died young. Painted in Copenhagen in 1769, where the male members of the family posed for the artist, who is unknown. Photo: National Museum of Iceland, Þjms. 12044.

the clergy and farmers dressed in clothes of black wool so one could believe they were in constant mourning. However, the upper class (*heldri men*) wore ‘multi-coloured clothes of foreign material [...] silk and velvet.’⁹⁶ He deplored this. Portraits from the eighteenth century show the men beautifully dressed in the latest European (French) fashion while their wife and daughters are dressed in traditional Icelandic dress. Pétur Þorsteinsson, a country magistrate (*sýslumaður*)

– had a memorial tablet painted in Copenhagen in 1769 which is on display in the National Museum in Reykjavík. He and his two surviving sons are in court dress, wearing powdered wigs, the sons with theirs bow-tied. Their respective jackets are green, red and blue, the colour of their breeches match their vests. They wear silk stockings tucked into their breeches and high-heeled shoes with silver buckles.⁹⁷ The wife and two daughters are dressed identically in the traditionally black Icelandic costume, the outer garment which reminded Kerguelen of the habits of the Jesuits.⁹⁸ At their feet lie six swaddled corpses, the children that died, pressing home the reality and ubiquity of infant mortality in the Europe of the eighteenth century. In 1772 when Banks invited the governor and district-governor to dinner he noted in his diary:

The gentlemen wore Danish dresses but the ladies all Icelandic, the chief singularity of which consists in the ornament of the head which is a cone of white cloth about 18 inches high & bending a little forward round the bottom of which a silk handkerchief is tied which completely covers all their hair [--- (here follows a long description)]. Upon the whole the dress, tho certainly not very pleasing to an European eye had some merit only that the hair being hid gave a nakedness to their faces. Very unbecoming.⁹⁹

Magnús Stephensen, who was a comparatively frequent traveller to Copenhagen, considered it his duty to imitate the latest fashions in Copenhagen for the benefit of his compatriots.¹⁰⁰ He, like the foreign visitors, came to find the Icelandic female costume ugly – deforming even the most attractive women. And he challenged upper-class Icelandic women to leave behind centuries of prejudice by wearing such unnatural clothing and to adopt Danish dress by 1 January 1801.¹⁰¹ Three years later Stephensen could report that more than 200 women had taken his advice and were now dressed in the Danish (French) mode this ‘much more natural and beautiful costume.’ Gyða Thorlacius, was the Danish-born wife of a county magistrate, Þórður Thorlacius (1774–1850) in eastern Iceland. During the Napoleonic Wars the couple hazarded a visit to Copenhagen, stopping in Leith, Scotland, on their way back. On their return, in order to make a little money, she was much in demand by the wives and daughters of the clergy and merchants, sewing dresses and making hats in the latest fashion of Denmark and Scotland.¹⁰²

And finally it must be mentioned that there were rapid changes in the cuisine of the Icelanders. Eggert Ólafsson in his famous book wrote that mid-century a big change had taken place on the manner of life of the elite (*beldri men*) especially in the south of Iceland, regarding food, drink and cuisine. Imports of corn, red wine, even white wine, and spirits were on the increase. Moreover, tea and sugar

was now so common that every ‘good’ farmer had a teapot.¹⁰³ And there was no turning back despite devastating natural disasters. In a recent article Hrefna Róbertsdóttir has shown that even in the catastrophic year 1784 spices and fruits had been ordered, indeed luxury items ‘more in line with what was available among the upper classes in Copenhagen than what was common in Iceland.’¹⁰⁴ But food is a huge subject and these examples will have to suffice. Thus it can be said that as in the previous centuries European trends were at work in Iceland and that the Icelanders were eagerly adopting customs current in Europe. They were on their way to becoming members of the European community.

Concluding Remarks

Iceland, a Nordic country, a dependency of Denmark-Norway but a separate people with its own language and law, was always an integral part of western Europe. Its geographic situation in the middle of the North Atlantic might have led to an isolated existence, but Iceland’s history mirrors that of western Europe. Christianity, Catholicism and Reformation, mercantilism and absolutism, Pietism and the Enlightenment, in all these significant trends Iceland firmly belonged to western European civilization. Nor did the Icelanders escape some of the negative episodes inflicted on their fellow-Europeans during the Early Modern Age: the witch-craze had its impact after King Christian IV’s regulations regarding the punishment for witchcraft became law in 1630. Bizarrely, just over twenty men were put to the stake but only two women. And in 1627 the Barbary corsairs raided the island, killing and enslaving about 400 Icelanders, just as they terrorised the rest of Europe.¹⁰⁵

There was usually a slight time-span for European developments to cross the Atlantic to Iceland. For example the Reformation had taken place in Denmark in 1536 while Iceland did not formally become Lutheran in both bishoprics (Skálholt 1541) until 1550, not least because of the intransigence of the last Catholic bishop of Hólar, Jón Arason (1484–1550), whose opposition only ended with his decapitation and absolutism for instance was introduced in Denmark in 1660, in Iceland two years later.

Familiar themes in historical surveys of eighteenth century Europe – such as ‘An Age of Aristocracy’, ‘The Rise of the Bourgeoisie’, the growth of armies and navies do not apply to Iceland. What did develop differently was the social structure of the country hand-in-hand with the non-existence of towns. Thus Icelandic society did not entirely conform to the social structure of the Ancien Régime, lacking both a bourgeoisie and a European style nobility. However, in

Iceland as almost everywhere in Europe farming of some kind was the chief mode of employment. As both historians Harald Gustafsson and Einar Hreinsson have shown the, albeit, small elite in Iceland was very much conscious of its special status. It was this elite that ensured that towns would not develop on the coast. They were landowners and farmers and nothing must threaten their labour force. At the end of this period, in 1820, Magnús Stephensen could write, without blushing, that the independent Icelandic farmer was one of the freest men who inhabited this earth.¹⁰⁶

By the early 1800s Reykjavík, a farmstead in 1700, an incipient manufacturing village in the 1750s and one of the first chartered towns in the 1780s, was now the capital and the centre of administration in Iceland. Besides being the principal mercantile station on the island and the seat of the High Court of Justice, both the governor and bishop resided there, with the promise of an emergent Icelandic bourgeoisie on the European model not far off.

Notes

1. Lady Stanley to Mrs. E. Stanley [Henrietta, daughter of Viscount Dillon], 23 May 1812, in Jane H. Adeane, *The Early Married Life of Maria Josepha Lady Stanley* (London: Longman's Green, & Co., 1899), p. 335.
2. Including visitors: See the above-mentioned volume; Anna Agnarsdóttir, 'Hundadagadrottningin heldur út í heim', in *Kvennaslóðir: Rit til heiðurs Sigríði Th. Erlendsdóttur sagnfræðingi*, ed. by Anna Agnarsdóttir et al. (Reykjavík: Kvennasögusafn Íslands, 2001), pp. 132–137; Andrew Wawn, 'Hundadagadrottningin: Bréf frá Íslandi. Guðrún Johnsen og Stanleyfjölskyldan frá Cheshire, 1814–16', *Saga*, XXIII (1985), pp. 99–133.
3. Yves Joseph de Kerguelen-Trémarec, *Relation d'un Voyage dans la Mer du Nord, aux Côtes d'Islande, du Groenland, de Ferro, de Schettland, des Orcades & de Norwège; Fait en 1767 et 1768* (Paris: Rue Dauphine; Chez Claude-Antoine Jombert, 1771). Part of this book, including the chapter on Iceland, was translated into English and published by John Pinkerton in *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in all Parts of the World* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, Paternoster Row, 1808), pp. 735–775. The English translation is used here. The quotation is on p. 734.
4. Absolutism was introduced in Iceland in 1662.
5. *Hagskinna: Sögulegar þagðölur um Ísland. Icelandic Historical Statistics*, ed. by Guðmundur Jónsson & Magnús S. Magnússon (Reykjavík: Hagstofa Íslands, 1997), p. 52.
6. Árni Daníel Júlíusson has written an interesting article on the impact of disease on population increase: 'Áhrif fólksfjöldaþróunar á atvinnuhætti gamla samfélagsins', *Saga*, XXVIII (1990), pp. 149–156.

7. There is an excellent collection of essays and primary sources regarding this eruption, *Skaftháreldar 1783–1784*, ed. by Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson et al. (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1984).

8. For an analysis of 19th century society (which could be applied to the 18th century) see Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson, *Family and Household in Iceland 1801–1930* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988), pp. 33–34.

9. Einar Hreinsson has in his doctoral thesis *Nätverk och nepotism: Den regionala förvaltningen på Island 1770–1870* (Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2003) suggested (p. 256) that the ‘introduction of the “rangadeln”, the *noblesse de robe*, into the Danish monarchy created a new symbol of identity for the Icelandic officials.’ There is no room to discuss this here and though some of the Icelandic officials formed an elite and progressed from justitsråd to etatsråd etc. they do not compare to the European nobility. This author agrees with Harald Gustafsson who wrote: ‘In Iceland there was no nobility at all’, *Political Interaction in the Old Regime: Central Power and Local Society in the Eighteenth-Century Nordic States* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1994), p. 39.

10. Laurits Andreas Thodal, a Norwegian who was *stiftamtmaður* (governor) in 1770–1785 and Ólafur Stephensen, an Icelander, who served in the same position in 1790–1806. Thodal is considered to have been one of the best governors. See Magnús Ketilsson, *Stiftamtmennt og amtmenn á Íslandi 1750–1800* (Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja, 1948), pp. 21–32, especially p. 23.

11. Harald Gustafsson, *Mellan kung och allmoge – ämbetsmän, beslutsprocess och inflytande på 1700-talets Island* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 1985), p. 311.

12. Gustafsson, *Political integration*, p. 128.

13. *Ibid.* p. 99.

14. This was a practice dating from medieval times, but the regulations were spelled out clearly in the regulation on domestic discipline (*Húsaगतilskipun*) of 1746. Servants did not regain full legal status until 1863.

15. Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, *The A to Z of Iceland* (Lanham MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), pp. 125–126.

16. Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, ‘Íslenskar fjölskyldur undir lok 18. aldar’, *Menntaspor* (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 2008). This is an article comparing the Icelandic household to an English one as postulated by Petter Laslett.

17. *Manntalið 1703: Population Census 1703* (Reykjavík: Hagstofa Íslands, 1960); Hálfðanarson, ‘Íslenskar fjölskyldur’, pp. 277–279.

18. See Gísli Gunnarsson, whose doctoral thesis *Monopoly Trade and Economic Stagnation: Studies in the Foreign Trade of Iceland 1602–1787* (Lund: Ekonomisk-Historiska Föreningen i Lund, 1983) is still the most recent analysis of the Iceland trade. He wrote: ‘The direct profits made by the monopoly merchants from the Icelandic trade reveal only a part of the benefits this trade brought to the citizens of Copenhagen.’ Gunnarsson also discusses the Crown income, the importance of the Iceland trade to Copenhagen

shipping and 'above all' the general linkage effects of the trade, which he discusses in detail (see e.g. p. 160).

19. Skúli Magnússon, *Forsög til en kort beskrivelse af Island (1786)*, ed. by Jón Helgason (Copenhagen: Bibliotheca Arnemagnæana, 1944), V, p. 51.

20. 'Fitjannáll', *Annálar 1400–1800* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1927–1932), II, p. 358.

21. See e.g. Jón J. Aðils, *Einokunarverslun Dana á Íslandi 1602–1787* (Reykjavík: Verzlunarráð Íslands, 1919), pp. 573–616.

22. *Mannal á Íslandi árið 1703*, ed. by Þorsteinn Þorsteinsson (Reykjavík: Hagstofa Íslands, 1923–1947), pp. 297–298, 542–543.

23. See further: Anna Agnarsdóttir, 'The urbanization of Iceland in the 18th and early 19th centuries', in *Urbanization in the Oldenburg Monarchy 1500–1800*, ed. by Thomas Riis (Kiel: Verlag Ludwig, 2012), pp. 115–140.

24. Gustafsson, *Political interaction*, p. 43.

25. Workshops for spinning and weaving wool had been established on the farmstead Reykjavík in the 1750s. By 1759 there were 16 houses forming a street there. In 1764 some of them burned down and by 1768 the woollen production had decreased by half. In 1772 about 40 people were still employed who lived with their families on small farms in the surroundings. See further Hrefna Róbertsdóttir, 'Áætlun um allsherjarviðreisn Íslands 1751–52', *Landnám Ingólfs*, 5 (1996), pp. 29–88, and Lýður Björnsson, 'Undir einveldi', in *Saga Íslands*, ed. by Sigurður Línal (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska Bókmenntafélag, 2006), VIII, pp. 130–138.

26. Hrefna Róbertsdóttir, *Wool and Society: Manufacturing Policy, Economic Thought and Local Production in 18th-century Iceland* (Göteborg: Makadam publishers, 2008), abstract (quotation), see also pp. 174–175.

27. See: 'Plakat ang. den kongelige Monopolhandels Ophævelse paa Island', 18 August 1786, *Lovsamling for Island*, V, pp. 317–338.

28. 'Anordning ang. Kjøbstæderne paa Island', 17 November 1786, *Lovsamling for Island*, ed. by Oddgeir Stephensen & Jón Sigurðsson (Copenhagen: Andr. Fred. Höst, 1855), V, pp. 343–352.

29. *Mannal á Íslandi 1801, Suðuramt* (Reykjavík: Ættfræðafélagið, 1978), pp. 339–340.

30. Þór Whitehead, *Ófriður í aðsigi* (Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1980), p. 16.

31. Christophe Paulin, Chevalier de la Poix de Fréminville, 'Voyage to the North Pole in the Frigate *Syrène*', in Pinkerton, *New Voyages and Travels*, vol. 2 (1820), p. 90.

32. In the first decade of the 19th century the only school in Iceland was at Bessastaðir, preparing Icelandic boys or young men for the clergy or university education.

33. See further: Gunnar Karlsson on Pietism, *Iceland's 1100 Years: History of a Marginal Society* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), pp. 169–171.

34. *The French Revolution Sourcebook*, ed. by John Hardman (London: Arnold, 1999), p. 113.

35. Around 40 editions of Münster's *Cosmographia* were published between the years 1544 and 1628. On the subject of travels lies about Iceland in general see Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, *Ísland framandi land* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1996).
36. Quoted by Ethel Seaton, *Literary Relations of England and Scandinavia in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 221 (from State Papers, Domestic).
37. Páll Björnsson 22 February 1674/1675, no. 111. See extensively on this in Seaton, *Literary Relations of England and Scandinavia*, chapter V; Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenzkar æviskrár* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1951), IV, pp. 111–112.
38. See *Den Arabiske Rejse 1761–1767 – en dansk ekspedition set i videnskabshistorisk perspektiv*, ed. by Stig T. Rasmussen (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1990).
39. Johann Anderson, *Efterretninger om Island, Grønland og Strat Davis* (Copenhagen: Gabriel Christian Rothe, 1747).
40. This has led to the expression 'snakes in Iceland', which according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is 'something posited only to be dismissed as non-existent'. This is somewhat unfair. In the original Danish edition there is a whole paragraph, which is shortened in the English edition and footnoted: 'Mr. Anderson says, it is owing to the excessive cold that no snakes are found in Iceland.' However, what is missing is Horrebow's reason for this chapter because he disagrees with Anderson. As there were snakes in Denmark, Horrebow believed snakes could survive in southern Iceland where the climate was similar, and commented that since serpents 'had not come to Iceland it is well, for no one is likely to trouble himself to transplant them thither.' (p. 91).
41. Ísleifsson, *Ísland framandi land*, pp. 99–100; Þorvaldur Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga Íslands* (Reykjavík: Ormstunga, 2005), 2nd ed. (used here), the first edition was published in Copenhagen 1900–1902, II, pp. 238–246.
42. Niels Horrebow, *The Natural History of Iceland* (London: printed for A. Linde, 1758), preface.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
44. As the sub-title reads: Containing Observations on the manners and customs of the inhabitants, a description of the lakes, rivers, glaciers, hot springs and volcanoes; of the various kinds of earths, stones fossils and petrifications; as well as of the animals, insects, fishes &c. And they were true to their word.
45. Eggert Ólafsson & Bjarni Pálsson, *Reise igiennem Island* (Sorøe: Trykt hos Jonas Lindgrens Enke, 1772).
46. Eggert Ólafsson & Bjarni Pálsson, *Travels in Iceland Performed by Order of His Danish Majesty by Messrs. Olafsen & Povelsen* (London, n.a, 1805). The book first appeared in Icelandic in 1943: *Ferðabók Eggerts Ólafssonar og Bjarna Pálssonar um ferðir þeirra á Íslandi árin 1752–1757*, ed. by Steindór Steindórsson (Reykjavík: Haraldur Sigurðsson og Helgi Hálfðanarson, 1943). A second edition was published in Reykjavík in 1975 by Örn and Örlýgur entitled: *Travels in Iceland by Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson 1752–1757*. See further: Ísleifsson, *Ísland framandi land*, pp. 100–103, and Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga Íslands*, III, pp. 18–29, 37–38.

47. Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years*, p. 115.
48. Steindór Steindórsson, 'Introduction', in *Travels in Iceland by Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson*, pp. 1–2 (unnumbered).
49. Ibid.
50. *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* (Lausanne and Berne: Chez les Sociétés Typographiques, 1780), vol. IX, pp. 106–112. Quotation on p. 106.
51. The French text is as follows, p. 107: 'la description la plus moderne & la plus exacte, est celle qui a été publiée à Coppenhague en 1752, par M. Horrebow islandois de nation, & témoin oculaire de tout ce qu'il rapporte.' The author was mistaken. Horrebow was not an Icelander but a Dane.
52. The documents are preserved in the archives of the Ministère de la Défense at the Château de Vincennes.
53. Alan Taylor, *American Colonies* (New York: Viking, 2001), p. 386.
54. Kerguelen, *Relation d'un voyage*, p. 735–743; Ísleifsson, *Ísland framandi land*, p. 104; Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga*, III, pp. 74–75.
55. Kerguelen, *Relation d'un voyage*, pp. 750, 753.
56. Kerguelen, *Relation d'un voyage*, p. 744.
57. His description of Iceland is in the Second Part, pp. 744–754.
58. Kerguelen, *Relation d'un voyage*, p. 751.
59. See footnote 3.
60. Kerguelen, *Relation d'un voyage*, p. 745.
61. Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga*, III, pp. 76–77.
62. In a new article by Hrefna Róbertsdóttir, she points out the fact that the special orders of food imported in 1784, especially by the people of Patreksfjörður, was 'quite different from what was customary among common people.' French influence? See: 'Munaðarvara og matarmening: Pöntunarvara árið 1784', *Saga*, L:2 (2012), pp. 70–111.
63. Jean René Antoine, Marquis de Verdun de la Crenne, Jean-Charles Chevalier de Borda & Alexandre Guy Pingré, *Voyage fait par ordre du roi en 1771–1772, en diverses parties de l'Europe, de l'Afrique et de l'Amérique...* (Paris: L'Imprimerie Royale, 1778), 2 volumes, Iceland is in the second, pp. 245–254, 262–269.
64. I would like to remind the reader that this research is on-going.
65. Anna Agnarsdóttir, 'Sir Joseph Banks and the Exploration of Iceland', in *Sir Joseph Banks: A Global Perspective*, ed. by R.E.R. Banks et al. (London: the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 1994), pp. 31–48.
66. Joseph Banks, *Joseph Banks in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1766: His Diary, Manuscripts and Collections*, ed. by Averil M. Lysaght (London: Faber & Faber, 1971).
67. There is a list extant of the books Banks took with him to Iceland, printed in Harold B. Carter, *Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820): A guide to biographical and bibliographical sources* (London: British Museum (Natural History), 1987), pp. 235–237. The *Reise igiennem Island* is

on the list. It still awaited translation (an abridged version was published in 1805) but Solander and von Troil would have been able to make sense of it.

68. The Banks journal, edited by this author is now in press for The Hakluyt Society (to be published by Ashgate). Banks's spelling has here been modernised.

69. The Banks journal, see footnote 69.

70. Ejner Fors Bergström, 'Indledning', in Uno von Troil, *Brev om Island* (Stockholm: Samfundet Sverige-Island, 1933), pp. 10–11.

71. The first accounts of the Iceland expedition were actually published in the Uppsala newspapers in 1773 (footnote in von Troil, *Letters from Iceland* (1780), p. 1) but this was the first edition of the book.

72. Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga*, III, p. 107.

73. Haraldur Sigurðsson, 'Inngangur', *Bréffrá Íslandi* (Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður, 1961), p. 30.

74. Sir George Steuart Mackenzie, *Travels in the Island of Iceland during the Summer of 1810* (Edinburgh: Arch. Constable & Co., 1811), p. vii.

75. See footnote 69.

76. *The Journals of the Stanley Expedition to the Faroe Islands and Iceland in 1789*, ed. by John F. West (Torshavn: Føroya Fróðskaparfelag, 1970–1976), 3 volumes, I, p. 208.

77. Ibid.

78. William Jackson Hooker, *Journal of a Tour in Iceland in the Summer of 1809* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1813), I–II. It was first published privately in Yarmouth in 1811.

79. Mackenzie, *Travels in Iceland in 1810*. His travel companions both contributed to the book.

80. Ebenezer Henderson, *Iceland or the Journal of a Residence in that Island during the years 1814 and 1815* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Waugh and Innes, 1818). See especially pp. 494–495.

81. Henry Holland, *The Iceland Journal of Henry Holland 1810*, ed. Andrew Wawn (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1987), pp. 156, 216.

82. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson is now completing a doctoral thesis which analyses the image of Iceland throughout the ages. Among his sources is some of the travel literature mentioned here. See also: Karen Oslund, *Iceland Imagined: Nature, Culture, and Storytelling in the North Atlantic* (Seattle WA: University of Washington Press, 2011), and Anna Agnarsdóttir, 'In Search of a "Distinct and Peculiar race of People": the Mackenzie Expedition to Iceland, 1810', *Global Encounters: European Identities* (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2010), pp. 235–246.

83. Gustafsson, *Political interaction*, p. 44.

84. Among them were seventeen women sent to *Spunahúsið* or to Finnmark. See Sigríður H. Jörundsdóttir, 'Þjófar og annað ógæfufólk í þrælakistum Kaupmannahafnar 1736–1830', unprinted BA dissertation in history, University of Iceland (Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands-Háskólabókasafn, 1995), pp. 42–43.

85. Jón Ólafsson, *Reisubók Jóns Ólafssonar Indíafara samin af honum sjálfum (1661)*, ed. by Völundur Óskarsson (Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 1992). Translated into English by Bertha S. Phillpott as *The Life of the Icelander Jón Ólafsson Traveller to India written by himself* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1923). In 1998 another edition was translated and edited by Inger Barnes (Cambridge: Babraham, 1998).
86. Árni Magnússon, *Ferðasaga Árna Magnússonar frá Geitastekk 1753–1797*, ed. by Björn K. Þórólfsson (Reykjavík: Heimdallur, 1945). Translated into Danish by Páll Eggert Ólason, 'En islandsk Eventyrer Árne Magnussons Optegnelser', *Memoirer og Breve*, ed. by Julius Clausen & P. Fr. Rist (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske boghandel, 1918), IV.
87. 'Journal eður víðferlissaga Eiríks Björnssonar', *Upplýsingaröldin: Úrval úr bókmenntum 18. aldar*, ed. by Víkingur Kristjánsson & Þorfinnur Skúlason (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 431–466.
88. 'Fitjaannáll', *Annálar*, II, pp. 346, 349.
89. 'Hítardalsannáll', *Annálar*, II, pp. 591, 647–649.
90. Ingi Sigurðsson, *Hugmyndabeimur Magnúsar Stephensen* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1996), p. 182.
91. See further: Anna Agnarsdóttir, 'The Historiography of the French Revolution in Iceland', in *La Storia della Storiografia Europea sulla Rivoluzione Francese*, ed. by Armando Saitto (Rome: Associazione degli Storici Europei, 1990), II, pp. 353–364.
92. Georg Andreas Kyhn, *Nödvarge imod den i Island regierende Övrigbed* (Copenhagen: n.a., 1797), pp. 256–257; Sigfús Haukur Andrésson, *Verslunarsaga Íslands 1774–1807: Upphaf fríböndlunar og almenna bænarskráin* (Reykjavík: Verzlunarráð Íslands, 1988), II, pp. 778–779.
93. *Íslands almindelige Ansøgning til Kongen om udvidede Handels-Fribede m. v.* (Copenhagen: Gyldendals Forlag, 1797), p. 8. The Danish words are *ufrie, undertrykkende og slavisk*.
94. See Sigfús Haukur Andrésson, 'Almenna bænarskráin, tveggja alda minning', *Ný Saga*, 7 (1995), pp. 73–82.
95. *Minnisverð tíðindi*, II, pp. 474–475. See further Jón Espólín, *Íslands Árbækur í sögu-formi* (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1843), XI, p. 125.
96. Ólafsson, *Ferðabók*, pp. 221–222 in the second Icelandic edition.
97. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, *Klæðaburður íslenskra karla á. 16. 17 og 18. öld* (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1985), pp. 54–56. On p. 55 there is an illustration (unfortunately not in colour) of this memorial tablet.
98. Kerguelen, *Relation d'un voyage*, p. 752.
99. The Banks journal, see footnote 67.
100. Magnús Stephensen, *Eptirmali Átjándu Aaldar* (Leirárgörðum: Forlag Íslands opinberu Vísinda Stiptunar, 1806), p. 816.
101. Magnús Stephensen, *Margvíslegt gaman og alvara* (Leirárgörðum: Beitistöðum, 1798), I, pp. 162–167.

102. Gyða Thorlacius, *Endurminningar frá Gyðu Thorlacius frá dvöl hennar á Íslandi 1801–1815* (Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja, 1947), p. 147. See further Anna Agnarsdóttir, 'Aldahvörf og umbrotatímar', in *Saga Íslands*, ed. by Sigurður Línal & Pétur H. Árnason (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska Bókmenntafélag, 2011), pp. 120–122.

103. Eggert Ólafsson, *Ferðabók*, II, pp. 220–221.

104. Hrefna Róbertsdóttir, 'Munaðarvara og matarmenning', p. 111.

105. Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years*, pp. 143–146.

106. Magnús Stephensen, *Ræður Hjálmars á Bjargi*, ed. by Örn Hrafnkelsson (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun, 1999), pp. 14–15. First published in 1820.

Summary:

Iceland in the Eighteenth Century: An Island Outpost of Europe?

The aim is to define Iceland's relationship with Europe during the eighteenth century. Though Iceland, an island in the mid-Atlantic, was geographically isolated from the European continent, it was in most respects an integral part of Europe. Iceland was not much different from western Europe except for the notable lack of towns and a European-style nobility. However, there was a clearly – defined elite and by the end of the eighteenth century urbanisation had become government policy. Iceland was also remote in the sense that the state of knowledge among the Europeans was slight and unreliable. However, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, Danish and French expeditions were sent to Iceland while British scientists began exploring the island with the result that by the early nineteenth century an excellent choice of books was available in the major European languages giving up-to-date accounts of Iceland. On the other hand the Icelanders were growing ever closer to Europe, by the end of the century for instance adopting fashionable European dress. Iceland's history always followed western trends, its history more or less mirroring that of western Europe.

Keywords: Icelandic history, Europe, travel literature, eighteenth century, Icelandic society, urbanisation, exploration, scientific expeditions, the Enlightenment