

Icelandic Demographic Documents from the Turn of the 17th Century

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In 1943 Nobel laureate Halldór Laxness wrote:

“Eina stofnun gætum við íslendingar rekið með meiri árángri en flestar aðrar þjóðir, til að efla þekkingu vora á sjálfum okkur í fortíð og nútíð, en það er mannfræðistofnun, «skrifstofa» sem hefði með höndum skrásetningu allra íslendinga sem heimildir eru um, dauðra og lifandi.”¹

[One institution could we Icelanders run with more success than most other nations, to enrich our knowledge of our selves in past and present, and that is an anthropological institution, a “bureau” which would catalogue every Icelander on whom sources can be found, dead and alive.]

This idea has its roots in two unrelated phenomena. Firstly, the registration of the people living in Iceland began very early. It has even been claimed that the census of 1703 is the earliest example of a census covering an entire nation to be found worldwide². This first census was followed by others in the 18th and through the 20th century, although the tradition has died out in modern Iceland. Secondly, Icelanders have for many generations been avid practitioners of genealogy. This appetite for knowing one’s ancestors generates an interest for research in and accessibility to old documents containing demographic information. The latest genealogical innovation is the online database *Íslendingabók*, the book of Icelanders³. It can be argued that the *Íslendingabók* satisfies Laxness’s idea of a bureau cataloguing every Icelander, for its database compiles data listing “every Icelander on whom sources can be found, dead and alive.” It is of course not in any way perfect or complete, but it allows for a quick reference to check relations and ancestry online. The *Íslendingabók* does of course not substitute further research and publication of demographic documents.

In the National Archives of Iceland there are to be found numerous records

¹ Halldór Laxness, *Mannlíf á spjaldskrá*, in *Sjálfsgæðir hlutir* (2nd ed.), Reykjavík, 1962, p. 155.

² In the period Icelanders were subject to the throne of Denmark, so it is debateable if Icelanders can be regarded as a nation at the time. Cf. Eiríkur G. Guðmundsson & Björk Ingimundardóttir, *Inngangur*, in *Mannlíð 1703 þrjú hundruð ára*, p. 9-30 (9).

³ <http://www.islendingabok.is>. It is unfortunately only available in Icelandic.

describing the demography of the country in the period ca. 1680 to 1712, thereby providing us with the possibility of mapping out a quite exact picture of daily life at the turn of the 17th century.

These documents all stem from the efforts of the Danish government to register the inhabitants of this remote island in the fiscal interest of taxation in mind (Iceland being under Danish rule at the time), and all have historical connections between them. These are the war tax records of 1681, the land register of 1702-1712, the population census of 1703 and the livestock register of 1703.

In this article I shall give an account of these documents, describe their provenience and the information they contain with examples of the content, in the original Icelandic with English translations.

The war tax records of 1681

Following a series of wars with Sweden during the course of the 17th century and as a consequence loss of significant territories, Denmark was faced with great financial difficulties. Therefore, during and after the war over Scania (Skåne) 1675-1679 Christian V collected a series of war taxes in Denmark, the first in 1676, again in 1677 and then half the amount with an order from the king dated January 15th 1678 and again October 28th the same year. The tax was last collected 1679⁴.

The king did not turn his eye to his land in the north until 1679. In an open letter to Icelanders dated May 31st that year he elaborates on the great cost of waging a war, it being feeding and clothing his soldiers, transporting and training them, but he then especially notes the cost of maintaining the Royal navy. The navy, he says, protects the trading routes between Denmark and Iceland to the mutual benefit of Icelanders and the navy, because it ensures import to Iceland, and the stockfish (dried fish), salted meat and wool exported from the island feeds and clothes the sailors. King Christian then points out that until now his loyal subjects in Iceland have been untroubled with extraordinary taxes unlike his subjects nearer to home, despite the Icelanders determination to show their "Velvillighed, Troskab og Iver til Voris Tjeneste" (good-will, loyalty and eagerness to Our service) as he says. He then stresses that the tax should, if possible, be paid with stockfish, but money or other goods (for example fish-oil, wool, butter or meat) where fish is not abundant. The sheriffs of each county were to collect the tax and transport it to the merchants of the Danish monopoly trade, no later than in fall 1680⁵. The sheriffs were to make a report on the collected taxes and, after it being verified by the taxpayers, two copies were to be made, one for the Danish *landfógeti* (next-in-command of the governor) Johann Klein and the other sent with the merchants to Copenhagen. Governor Klein

⁴ Jacob Henric Schou, *Chronologisk Register over de kongelige Forordninger og aabne Breve*, I, Copenhagen, 1795, p. 128-129, 131, 135 and 139.

⁵ Transactions between Denmark and Iceland were only possible twice a year, in the spring the merchant ships came from Denmark and embarked in the fall.

was to sum up the tax-records and report on the income⁶. Kleins records are most likely those that survive today in the National Archives of Iceland, along with his calculations. The tax-records for about three fourths of Iceland have evaded the teeth of time, along with Kleins calculations which cover the whole country⁷. Still, the summary is inconclusive, as the tax was not collected to the satisfaction of the Danish authorities as shall be discussed below.

The king's letter of 1679 was answered in the National assembly (*Alþingi*) the following year with a letter dated July 7th. In it the necessity to pay was acknowledged but because of harsh weather, poverty and general hardship of the people the king was asked to ease his demands. King Christian answered the next year with a letter dated April 17th in which he shows pity on his subjects and reduces the proposed tax by half⁸. The tax collection took place in the summer of 1681 and at the same time the priests in the diocese of Skálholt, under direction from bishop Þórður Þorláksson, discreetly assembled a sum of money, a honorarium, to be given to Johann Klein for his support in having the taxation lightened⁹.

But the story of the war tax does not end there. Debate over unpaid portions of the tax between the Danish and Icelandic officials took place in the National assembly almost every year from 1682 through 1692. The reason for the argument is most likely manifold. The obvious reason is of course that some people tried to evade the tax, which very likely was the case in some instances. But before we leave it at that, the method the Danish *Rentekammer* (government department responsible for affairs of finance and the interior) used for calculating the expected sum must be observed. The taxation was based on old land registers in the *Rentekammer*, so that the tax could be calculated by each farm, rented or owned and rented or owned cattle in these farms, as described in the old land register. The possession of farms, their size and value changes over time so it is certain that the older land register was, at least to some extent, outdated by the time the tax was collected. Based on this it is no wonder that the King deemed it feasible to commission a new and improved land register for later taxation. This newer land register is discussed below¹⁰.

The total amount collected of the Icelanders is uncertain, as the documents are not clear on this point as has been mentioned. It can be roughly estimated at around 6.500 *rigsdaler*, or thaler. This is a very modest sum, compared for example with the just under 30.000 thaler collected in Ribe-county, one of the 44 counties at that time in Denmark, through the 1676 war tax¹¹.

⁶ The letter is printed in *Lovsamling for Island*, I (ed. by Oddgeir Stephensen and Jón Sigurðsson), Copenhagen, 1853, p. 370-372.

⁷ National Archives of Iceland, *Rentekammer* 2,1. Stríðshjálpin 1681.

⁸ *Acta Comitiorum Generalium Islandiæ. Alþingisbækur Íslands*, VII (ed. by Einar Arnórsson), Reykjavík, 1944-1948, p. 484-486 and *Lovsamling for Island*, I, p. 380-381.

⁹ Gunnar Marel Hinriksson, *Um aukaskattheimtu konungs af hans landi Íslandi*. Unpublished BA-thesis in history from the University of Iceland, 2007, p. 33-34. National Archives of Iceland, Bps. A IV 2. *Bréfabók Þórðar Þorlákssonar 1680-1683*, p. 101r-101v.

¹⁰ G. M. Hinriksson, *op. cit.*, p. 40-47. *Alþingisbækur Íslands*, VII, p. 586-588; VIII, p. 45-46, 88-89, 126-129, 143, 157-159, 211-212, 280-281 and 380.

¹¹ Danish State Archives, *Rentekammeret. Skatammeret. Generalbogholderiet. 1676*,

The *jarðabók* or land register of 1702-1714, the *manntal* or census and *kvikfjártal* or livestock register of 1703

In the years 1702-1714 a register was made describing the properties of every farm in Iceland, under a commission led by professor Árni Magnússon and sheriff Páll Vídalín. Magnússon (1663-1730) was an Icelander who settled in Copenhagen to study at the university in 1683. Professor Thomas Bartholin hired him shortly thereafter as an translator and scribe and in 1697 he was appointed archivist in the king's service and professor at the university in 1701¹². Vídalín (1667-1727) became a theologian from the University of Copenhagen in 1688 and served as headmaster of the Latin school of the diocese of Skálholt 1690-1696. In 1697 he was appointed sheriff of Dalasýsla county and later that same year vice 'Lawman' of Southern and Eastern Iceland, or head of the judiciary in the area. The Lawmen were two, one in Southern and Eastern Iceland and the other in the north and west. In 1706 the post of Lawman of south and east was fully appointed to him¹³.

The commission led by Magnússon and Vídalín was the result of a plea of help (supplicate) by the inhabitants of Iceland to Frederick IV the king of Denmark because of the lasting famine and cold winters of the previous years. The king gave Magnússon and Vídalín instructions in thirty points regarding their investigation of the country's poor conditions. The first point addressed the need of registration of farms, the land register:

*“Som de hidindtil paa Voris Rente Cammer værende og dennem til deris Effterretning nu tilstillede Jordebøger icke udj saaden een Rigtighed sig befinder, sem det sig velburde; Saa shall nu af dennem een general fuldkommen Jordebog ofver gandshe Landet [...] vorde indrettet [...]”*¹⁴

[As the land registers that now are to be found in Our Rentekammer [government department responsible for affairs of finance and the interior] and are to assist you with your investigation are not as correct as they should be, you must compile a complete land register over the entire land.]

These instructions from the king can be divided into two groups: Firstly Magnússon and Vídalín were to conduct an exhaustive investigation on the

Originalmandater ang. krigsstyren. G. M. Hinriksson, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹² Jón Helgason, *Magnússon, Árni*, in *Dansk biografisk leksikon* (3rd ed.), 9, Copenhagen, 1981, p. 363-365. A biography in Icelandic: Már Jónsson, *Árni Magnússon. Ævisaga*, Reykjavík, 1998. A short biography in English: Hans Bekker-Nielsen & Ole Widding, *Arne Magnússon. The manuscript collector* (transl. by Robert W. Mattila), Odense, 1972.

¹³ Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenskar æviskrár*, IV, Reykjavík, 1951, p. 145-146.

¹⁴ *Jarðabók Arna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*, 13: *Appendices*, Reykjavík, 1990, p. 3.

economical situation, the land register and the census and livestock register that will be dealt with below are part of that, and secondly they should consider everything that could be improved on the island, and make recommendations to make it so¹⁵.

But how did the king know that his registers over Iceland were not up to date? The only recent endeavor on his part that relied on these documents was the collection of the 1681 war tax, as has been discussed above, resulting in a decade of debate over whether it had been fully paid, based on an outdated land register. So it can be claimed that the premise for making the land register was the experience of the 1681 war tax¹⁶.

In a letter to landowners in Iceland read in the Alþingi (National assembly and court, the aforementioned Lawmen were the highest Icelandic officials besides the Danish governor in the Alþingi) on the 19th of June 1702 Magnússon and Vídalín laid out the instructions for registering the farms. The following excerpt illustrates the rules laid out for compiling the register, and it also gives a glimpse into how Magnússon's experience with archival work influenced his orders.

*[...] á meðal annarra erinda, sem hæðstnefnd kóngleg majestat okkur allranáðugast befalað hefur hér í landi að útrétta, er að samantaka eina rigtuga og fullkomna jarðabók yfir allt landið, hvar fyrir og í þeirri kónglegu instruction, sem okkur allranáðugast gefin er, jarðeigendum er befalað okkur að láta til handa koma rigtugar og af þeim undirskrifadar jarðabækur yfir þeirra eignir, so vel sem þau eignarskjöl, er þeir fyrir sérhvörri jörðu hafa. Því tilsegist hér með öllum og sérhvörjum jarðeigendum hér á landi, andlegum og veraldlegum, upp að teikna allar sínar jarðir með þeirra dýrleika, landskuld og kúgildum, item hjáleigur og búðir, þar sem þær eru [...] Þessu jarðaregistri skulu fylgja vottaðar, rétt og læsilega skrifadar útskriftir af öllum eignarskjölum, er eignarmennirnir fyrir þessum jörðum, einnri eður fleirum, hafa, og skulu sömu eignarskjöl, þar sem fleiri en eitt hjá einum manni eru, sérhvört sér í lagi skrifast, en ei öll til samans, upp á það þau þess hæglegar síðan niðurskipast og í vissar classes leggjast kunni.*¹⁷

[...] among other business, which his majesty the king of his grace has bestowed upon us to carry out in this land, is to compile a correct and complete register of the whole land, whereby and in the royal instruction, which gracefully has been given to us, the landowners are ordered to hand to us correct and by them signed registers listing their possessions, as well as the documents of ownership, that they have for each farm. Thereby are all landowners in this land, both of the church and secular, are required to describe their farms with land value, land rent and rented cattle, item cottages rented out, where such are [...]

¹⁵ M. Jónsson, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁶ G. M. Hinriksson, *Ætt manntalsins 1703*, "Fréttabréf Ættfræðifélagsins", 2 (2008), p. 8-13.

¹⁷ *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*, p. 11.

This land register must be supplemented with testified, correct and legibly written copies of all documents of ownership, which the landowners, possessing one farm or more, have, and these documents, where there are more than one, each be separately transcribed, but not all together, so that they can be ordered and classified with more ease.

The project was thus clearly outlined before it begun. Still it took Magnússon and Vídalín over ten years to conduct their business because of various difficulties, or, in Magnússon's own words written on August 30th 1703: "*mand kan icke i hast beskrive alle de uleiligheder, som udi dette land møde en, der skal reise om kring at forrette noget.*"¹⁸ Still, the commission finished the census and livestock registers both in the year 1703. It is no wonder that these enterprises were noted by the people of Iceland, as can be read in the Annal of Grímsstaðir for the year 1703:

*"[...] Kölluðu þennan vetur sumir Manntalsvetur. Þá var uppskrifað, eptir auglýstri befallingu þeirra commisario allt mannfólk [...] Í annan máta, að landeigendur allir og ábúendur skyldu gera skýrt registur allra sinna jarða [...] Í þriðja lagi um fardagaleytið var uppskrifað allt kvikfé [...] Þá var pappír dýr í sveitum víða, er öllu þessu var aflokið."*¹⁹

[This winter was by some called the Winter of the Census. Then were registered, by the advertised order of the commissaries, all people [...] Secondly, that all landowners and farmers should make a register of all their farms [...] Thirdly around the quarter day all livestock was registered [...] Paper had become expensive in many places when all this was finished.]

After being sent to the Rentekammer the land register, census and livestock register documents lay effectively unheeded for almost 200 years. They were never translated to Danish as had been planned so they were of little use to the Danish officials. And in 1728 was the great fire in Copenhagen, destroying many private libraries and collections of manuscripts, among them many of Magnússon's Icelandic manuscripts, and a part of the land register documents, i.e. those describing the eastern part of Iceland.

In 1918 Iceland had become independent of Denmark, but nevertheless still part of the Danish monarchy. A republic was founded in Iceland in 1944. The independence movement laid heavy emphasis on reclaiming Icelandic documents and manuscripts residing in Danish archives. The Danish State Archives, Rigsarkivet, returned to the National Archives of Iceland in 1928 around 830 satchels containing documents regarding Icelandic matters, ranging in age from the 16th century up until the mid 19th. Included in these were the war tax documents, land

¹⁸ "It is not possible to describe in a few words all the inconveniences one meets if one intends to travel around this country and get anything done.", cited in M. Jónsson, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁹ *Annales Islandici Posteriorum Saeculorum. Annálar 1400-1800*, III, Reykjavík, 1937, p. 522-532.

register, census papers and livestock register²⁰. The Arnamagnæan Institute (founded to uphold Árni Magnússon's manuscript collection, which he inherited to the University of Copenhagen) delivered around 700 documents and four manuscripts, and both the Royal Library and the University Library in Copenhagen delivered collections of documents²¹.

Of the documents dealt with in this article the land register and census have been published in their entirety. The land register was published in eleven volumes in the years 1913-1943 under the title *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns* by *Hið íslenska fræðafélag í Kaupmannahöfn* (the Icelandic scholarly society in Copenhagen). This publication was reproduced in a facsimile edition in 1980-1990, supplemented with two volumes, a thematic register and an edited volume of related documents. The census of 1703 was published by the Statistical Bureau of Iceland in 1924-1947 under the title *Manntal á Íslandi árið 1703 tekið að tilhlutan Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*. In 1960 the Statistical Bureau published a supplement to the census, containing statistical information extracted from the census and a brief introduction, with summaries in English and Esperanto. It was titled simply *Manntalið 1703*, or the *Population Census 1703*. The 1681 war tax records are not yet published, apart from the county of *Gullbringusýsla*. The livestock register is also unpublished, apart from two *hreppar* (districts), *Seltjarnarneshreppur* (In which the capital of Iceland today, Reykjavík, can be found) and *Stokkseyrarhreppur* (which lies along the southern coastline, about mid-way between the rivers *Ölfusá* and *Þjórsá*)²².

Contents of the documents, the story of Brynjólfur Hannesson

The narrow timeframe of these demographic documents makes it possible to extract miniature biographies from them, as shall be demonstrated below. The subject I have chosen, more or less arbitrarily, is Brynjólfur Hannesson, *lögréttumaður*, or a member of the National assembly²³.

On July 30th 1681 five *hreppar*, or districts, in the southern part of Árnessýsla County held a meeting to conduct the collection of the war tax. Among

²⁰ Sigfús Haukur Andrésson, *Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands. Ágrip af sögu þess og yfirlit um heimildarsöfn þar* (2nd ed.), Reykjavík, 1982, p. 39.

²¹ Sigrún Davíðsdóttir, *Hándskriftisagans Saga – i politisk belysning* (transl. by Kim Lembek), Odense, 1999, p. 29. Further reading and extensive bibliographies on the “manuscript debate” can be found in Davíðsdóttir's book, and in: Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, *Denmark and Iceland: a tale of tolerant Rule*, in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Historical Perspective* (ed. by Csaba Lévai and Vasile Vese), Pisa, 2003, p. 189-201.

²² The war tax record of *Gullbringusýsla* and the livestock register of *Seltjarnarneshreppur* are published in: G. M. Hinriksson, *Kópavogur í Seltjarnarneshreppi 1681-1729*, in *Ársrit Héraðsskjalasafns Kópavogs 2006-2007* (2008), p. 273-320. The livestock register of *Stokkseyrarhreppur* is published in: Idem, *Kvikfjártalið 1703 í Árnessýslu, “Árnesingur” 7* (2006), p. 147-182.

²³ Incidentally, Brynjólfur is my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, as I found out when I looked him up in *Íslendingabók*.

them was Stokkseyrarhreppur, the district of *Stokkseyri*, a rural community, as all communities were at that time in Iceland, where we find among others Brynjólfur Hannesson, farmer of *Skipar*. The archaic Icelandic spelling has been preserved, as the documents have not yet been published²⁴.

“*Skypar*

Briniolfur Hanneþson l(and)sh(ulld) 1 hndr. 20 al(nir).

L(eigu)k(úgilldi) 3. H(an)s 2. Bet(alar) ½ sliettan Dal. Lofar

sylum(anni) 2½ f(iskum). Bet(alar) i Sm(jöri) og sochum 19 fi(ska).”

[*Skipar*

Brynjólfur Hannesson land rent 1 hundred 20 ells.

Rented cows 3. His own 2. Pays ½ thaler. Promises

the sheriff 2½ fishes. Pays in butter and socks 19 fishes.]

The census of Stokkseyrarhreppur was signed May 22nd 1703 by Brynjólfur himself and 10 other farmers. Brynjólfur has moved since 1681, he now resides with his family in the farm adjacent to *Skipar*, *Baugstaðir*. Brynjólfur was nicknamed *the strong*²⁵. As we can see, he and his wife Vigdís Árnadóttir had seven children alive 1703, perhaps that is why he got the nickname. From the census we also learn that in 1681 when he was a farmer in *Skipar* Brynjólfur must have been 27 years old, and born in 1654. The total population of Iceland according to the census was just over 50.000 people. The Icelandic version of the census text is omitted because of its statistical nature²⁶.

Baugstaðir:

Brynjólfur Hannesson	49 years old
Vigdís Árnadóttir his wife	44 y.o.
Kristín Brynjólfsdóttir their child	17 y.o.
Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir their child	16 y.o.
Gísli Brynjólfsson their child	13 y.o.
Sesselja Brynjólfsdóttir their child	9 y.o.
Bjarni Brynjólfsson their child	8 y.o.
Steinunn Brynjólfsdóttir their child	6 y.o.
Margrjet Brynjólfsdóttir their child	2 y.o.
Kolbeinn Jónsson worker	34 y.o.
Guðrún Jónsdóttir worker	38 y.o.
Freygerður Hannesdóttir ²⁷	60 y.o.

²⁴ National Archives of Iceland, Rentukammer 2,1. Stríðshjálpin 1681. Árnæssýsla, p. 143.

²⁵ Guðni Jónsson, *Saga Hraunhverfis á Eyrarbakka*, Reykjavík, 1958, p. 234.

²⁶ *Mannatal á Íslandi 1703 tekið að tilhlutan Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*, Reykjavík, 1924-1947, p. 515.

²⁷ She was Brynjólfur's sister, and described thus in the census: “*Niðursetningur, burðalítill nú orðin.*” That is to say, she could not work and was supported by the community.

Now we know how many people lived in Baugstaðir in early summer 1703, but what about the livestock? June 19th 1703 Brynjólfur and 9 others signed the livestock register for Stokkseyrarhreppur²⁸.

“Baugstaðir, Brynjólfur Hannesson lögréttumaður.

Friður peningur: kýr 10, tvævetrar kvigur 2, ungfálfar 2. Ær 19, gamlir sauðir 2, þrevetir sauðir 4, veturgamlir sauðir 17. Hestur 1, folar tvævetrir 2, foli veturgamall 1, hross 2, annað afgangalt. Hér af takast leigukúgildi 4, sem er kýr 4.

Skuldir Brynjólfs: til íslenskra landskuld 1½ hundrað, hestlán, dagsláttur 15 álnir, enn skuldir með vinnumannskaupi 2 hundruð 19 álnir, til danskra 40 fiskar.”

[Baugstaðir, Brynjólfur Hannesson, member of the National assembly. Livestock: Cows 10, two-year old heifers 2, young calves 2. Ewes 19, old wethers 2, three-year old wethers 4, one-winter old wethers 17. Horse 1, two-year old colts 2, yearling 1, mares 2, one very old. Off this must be taken 4 rented cow-values, which are 4 cows. Brynjólfur's debts: To Icelanders land rent 1½ hundred, horse loan, a days worth of haymaking 15 ells, still debts with the worker's pay 2 hundreds 19 ells, to the Danes 40 fishes.]²⁹

The land register document describing Stokkseyrarhreppur was signed on August 22nd 1708. In it, we find that Brynjólfur still lives in Baugstaðir and a detailed account of his surroundings is given³⁰.

Baugstader.

Jarðardýrleiki óviss, því jörðin tündast öngvum. Hjer er að tala um jarðareyrir slíkt sem áður segir um Hóla.

Eigandi biskupsstóllinn Skálholt.

Ábúandinn lögrjettumaðurinn Brynjólfur Hannesson.

Landskuld 1½ hndr. inn til næstliðinna fardaga, nú 1 hndr. Betalst í landaurum heima á jörðunni, og færir ábúandi síðan í Hrórarsholtsrjett.

Leigukúgildi iiiii inn til næstu fardaga; nú iii. Leigur betalast í smjöri á Eyrarbakka.

Baugstaðir.

Land value uncertain, because the tithe is not paid. Of the welfare can be said the same as is before said of the farm Hólar³¹.

Owner is the diocese of Skálholt.

Leaseholder is Brynjólfur Hannesson, member of the National assembly.

Land rent 1½ hundred until the next quarter-day³², now 1 hundred. To be paid in goods home on the farm, and the leaseholder then donates to the corral in Hrórarsholt.

Rented cows 4 until the next quarter-day, now 3. Rents paid in butter to

²⁸ G. M. Hinriksson, *Kvikfjártalið 1703 í Árnessýslu*, p. 173.

²⁹ All legal trade in Iceland at the time was handled by the Danish monopoly.

³⁰ *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*, II: *Árnessýsla*, p. 42-44.

³¹ The farms owned by the Church did not pay tithe, but instead paid 12 fishes for every farm valued for 1 hundred or more to support poor inhabitants.

³² Near the end of May.

Kvaðir ut supra á Hólum.

Kvikfje ix kýr, i kvíga veturgömul, i naut veturgamalt, ii kálfar, xxi ær mylkar, iii geldar, xiiii sauðir tvævetrir og eldri, x veturgamlir, xx lömb óvís, v hestar, i únghryssa.

Fóðrast kann vi kýr, xx ær, hitt alt sem meira er fóðrast á tilfengnum heyjum, og segist ábúandi þau tilfá, stundum Gaulverjabæ, stundum Hæringsstöðum, stundum Holti, stundum Traðarholti, stundum Tóftum.

Afrjettur ut supra.

Torfrista og stúnga mjög so þrotin, að í 2 ár segist ábúandi hafa tilkeypt heyturf frá Hólum.

Þángtekja brúkast til eldiviðar og þó meiri partur af peningataði.

Silúngsveiðivon má ekki telja af smámurtum í stöðuvatni.

Eggversvon af æðarfugli í vatnshólma þeim, sem jörðin á til helminga móts við Skipa, og lukkast misjafnt, alltið að nokkru gagni.

Dúntekja af þessum hólma er og oftast að

Eyrarbakki³³.

Duties are the same as in the farm Hólar³⁴. Livestock is 9 cows, 1 heifer one winter old, 1 bull one winter old, 2 calves, 21 ewes that give milk, 4 ewes that do not, 14 wethers two winters old and older, 10 wethers one winter old, 20 lambs uncertain³⁵, 5 horses, 1 young mare.

6 cows, 20 ewes can be foddered, all the other animals must be foddered on bought hay, and the leaseholder says he obtains them sometimes from Gaulverjabær, sometimes from Hæringsstaðir, sometimes from Holt, sometimes from Traðarholt, sometimes from Tóftir.

Highland pasture as above³⁶.

Turf supply so drained, that the leaseholder says he has bought turf from Hólar the past two years.

Seaweed can be used for fire, but manure is more used.

Hope of catching trout in a nearby lake is hardly to be counted on, as there are only small fishes there.

Eggs of the common eider³⁷ can be found in the small island the farm shares with the farm Skipar, with varied results, always of some use.

³³ Marketplace and port where the Danish run monopoly trade had an outpost.

³⁴ Lending of a man to row in the fishing season from Þorlákshöfn, a horse loaned, or 10 ells paid, a man lent for a day in the haymaking season, or five ells paid, both to be paid with the land rent. The duties were collected by the landowner, the church of Skálholt.

³⁵ As this was written in August, the lambs were in the highland pasture far from the farm, and thus it was uncertain if any of them had been killed.

³⁶ It was, and still is, customary for farmers in the rural districts of Iceland to drive their sheep to the highland in the summer. In the case of Stokkseyrarhreppur the pasture is the so called Flóamannaafréttur accessible through the county of Gnúhverjahreppur.

³⁷ *Somateria mollissima*.

³⁸ 1 eyrir (pl. aurar) was equal to 6 ells

³⁹ Skálholt, the owner of the farm.

⁴⁰ *Rhodymenia palmate*.

⁴¹ *Chondrus crispus*.

⁴² *Cyclopterus lumpus*.

⁴³ Described thus at Hólar: "Pastures are not sufficient in winter, because ice swells over most of the land. It is dangerous both for men and livestock to cross the streams surrounding the farmland, and I remember them to have caused loss of both people and sheep. Roads must be built with great effort, if the pastures are to be used in summer or winter."

⁴⁴ A cottage dependent on Baugstaðir.

nokkru gagni, oftast 5 aura verð í hvors hluta.

Selveiðivon hefur að fornu að góðu gagni verið, en í næstu 4 ár ekki lukkast.

Rekavon í meðallagi við þessa sveit að reikna, hefur ábúandi það af reka, sem stóllinn leyfir til húsabótar mönnum.

Sölvafjara bjargleg heimamönnum, og so stundum, að ábúandi selur öðrum sjer til gagns, til hundraðs eður meira. Í ár er þar á misvöxtur, so nú gagnar ekki.

Fjörugrös eru til, en brúkast ei, því mönnum þykir lítt æt, nema húngur gáangi að.

Hrokkelsatekju má ekki til gagns telja.

Sölvatekja í takmörkuðum reit af Skipalandi brúkast frá Baugstöðum, en Skipamenn þar í mót beita Baugstaðaland.

Hvert þessi skifti sju að skyldu eður eftir samningi leiguliða vita menn [ekki]. Það er víst, þau skifti hafa haldist í vinsemi yfir 4 ár eða lengur.

Tún og engjar spillast árlega af sandfjúki að ofan og austan, en sjáfargáangi að framan.

Vetrarhagar sem segir um Hóla.

Ekki er kvikfje óhætt fyrir sjáfarflæðum.

Vatnsból erfitt um vetur fyrir fannlögum síðan sandfjúk eyddi vatnsbóli því, sem hjer var áður til peninganautnar á vetur.

Baugstaða hiáleiga, bygð fyrst nær 30 árum, þar sem aldrei hafði fyrri bygð verið, en hefur í auðn verið næstu 7 ár.

Landskuld var ekki hærri en xx álnir þa menn vita, ætla þó nokkru meiri fyrr verið hafa. Galdst í landaurum til heimabónða.

Kúgildi var 1, og guldust leigur í smjöri til heimabónða.

Eider down can be harvested on the small island, normally worth 30 ells³⁸ for each farm.

Seal has been hunted in earlier times with good results, but without success the last four years.

Driftwood is average for these parts, the leaseholder obtains that which the diocese³⁹ allows to mend the houses.

Foraging for dulse⁴⁰ is of use for the people, and so good sometimes, that the leaseholder sells to others to his use, for one hundred or more. This year the harvest has failed, so that it is of no use.

Carrageen moss⁴¹ can be found, but is not used, because the people find it barely edible, unless famine is at hand.

Fishing for lumpsucker⁴² is of no use.

Dulse can be foraged in a specified spot belonging to the farm Skipar by the people of Baugstaðir, in return the people of Skipar may let their livestock graze in the fields of Baugstaðir.

Weather this trade is by duty or contract between the leaseholders is not known. It is certain, that the trade has been upheld in friendship for four years or more.

The fields and pastures are damaged each year by sand blown from north and east, and the sea from the south.

Winter pastures are as is described in Hólar⁴³.

The sea poses a threat to the livestock.

Obtaining water can be hard in the winter because of snow since sand destroyed the water-hole that the livestock used to use during winter.

Baugstaðahjáleiga⁴⁴, first built close to 30 years ago, where there had not been any settlement before, but it has been abandoned the last seven years.

Land rent was not higher than 20 ells but is thought to have been higher when the cottage was new. It was paid in goods to the leaseholder of Baugstaðir proper.

One rented cow came with the farm, and was paid for in butter to the leaseholder of

Þetta býli er nú eytt fyrir sandi og sjáfargáangi, og örvænt aftur að byggja.

Formu Baugstaðir heitir hjer í landinu þar sem enn nú sjást girðingaleifar, so segja munnmæli þar hafi til forna jörðin Baugstaðir verið, og fyrir sjáfarháskan þaðan færð þángað sem nú stendur bærinn. Er þetta pláts jarðarinnar átölulaus eign, en alls ómögulegt aftur að byggja.

NB. Það er kvörtun ábúandans á Baugstöðum, að hann af austanfólki, sem sækir til Eyrarbakka kaupstaðar, líði óþolanlegan ágang á högum sínum, sem árlega fari í vöxt, síðan menn lögði í venju að taka sér hjer áfangastað, sem hann segir innan 30 ára fyrst hafa brúkast og aukist síðan.

Baugstaðir proper.

This farm is now abandoned because of sand and the turbulent sea, and it is hopeless that it will be restored.

Ancient Baugstaðir is the ruin called where there can still be seen rests of fences, old sayings suggest that in earlier times the farm of Baugstaðir was situated there, and because of the aggression of the sea the farm was moved to where it is now. This part of the land is an unaccounted possession, but impossible to repopulate.

Nota bene. The leaseholder of Baugstaðir complains that he suffers unbearable traffic from people of the East traveling to the merchants in Eyrarbakki, and this increases every year, since they began to use his pastures as a resting place, which he claims to have begun less than 30 years ago and increases every year since.

Conclusion

Brynjólfur Hannesson and his family were in the upper strata of Icelandic society. Poorer farming families leased small corners of larger farms and supported their families with a few sheep, one or two cows and perhaps one horse. But many people did not have families of their own, a prerequisite to marriage was access to land, owned or leased. Thus, workmen and women in farms were not able to start families of their own if they could not manage to get hold of a bit of land and a little livestock, but land was not readily available unless after outbreaks of disease or famine. The window these documents open for us now in later centuries is one I find fascinating. The manifold possibilities for statistical calculations, the opportunity to follow the lives of every inhabitant, regardless of status, and the genealogical implications all allow interesting questions to be asked and answered and a very complete picture of daily life of the just over fifty thousand people living on this island in the north around the year 1700 to be drawn.