

Peasants, aristocracy and state power in Iceland 1400-1650

Árni Daníel Júlíusson

How did the introduction of effective central state power in the early modern period affect Icelandic society? Did the position of the peasantry or the aristocracy in Iceland change as a result of this, or the relationship between those groups? In order to answer these and other related questions I will look at the social situation before and after the strengthening of state power in the mid 16th century.

Concepts like peasantry, aristocracy and state power have not been among the prominent subjects of Icelandic historiography of the late middle ages or early modern period, but I think there is a lot to gain from discussing them. I will discuss those and related concepts, like patron-client hierarchies, manors and estates, dues and serfdom. I will also relate them to some extent to the development in Northern Europe. My approach will not be very theoretical, but I hope to be able at some later date to show that the Icelandic case can help to say something in a more general way about the relationship between violence, the stability of authority and the peasantry.

In Iceland there did exist a landed elite, both laymen and clerics. Ownership of almost all land was concentrated in the hands of a few families or the heads of church institutions such as monasteries or bishoprics. These people were the Icelandic aristocracy. In Iceland the strengthening of central power was the result of the reformation. The crown created a vacuum by destroying the Icelandic Catholic Church. This vacuum it entered to build state power. The crown was supported in this by the Icelandic lay aristocracy, who

profited immensely by the reformation. The lay aristocracy became strong enough so that in some ways it hindered further penetration of society by the state in the 17th century.

The Peasantry

What was the social and economic situation of the peasantry? Did it change after the crown strengthened its power in Iceland?

The agricultural system of Iceland was a variant of the infield-outfield system used in Scandinavia, especially Norway, from the second century AD¹. Contrary to common opinion it was not characterized by the difficulty of the environment or lack of resources. All indices show that it developed from a relatively extensive version of the Norwegian system in the high middle ages, to an even more extensive version. This does not indicate problems with land supply or lack of possibilities in agriculture, quite the contrary².

The Icelandic version of the infield-outfield system had a small enclosed infield. In this infield grain (where possible) and hay was produced on a yearly basis. The infield was manured. The outfield produced hay from unmanured fields. The hay was used as fodder for sheep and especially cattle. The proportion between sheep and cows in the period between 1000 and 1400 was approximately 2 to 1, whereas in Norway it was 1 to 1. The cattle and sheep were the mainstays of agriculture, producing milk and meat. Fishing was an important seasonal occupation of most farmers, and dried fish a common meal.

The system changed in the period between 1400 and 1710. In this period three major

epidemics occurred, two plague epidemics in the 15th century and the smallpox epidemic in 1707-1709. After each epidemic the proportion of sheep to cattle changed, so the sheep became more numerous than before and cattle fewer, as sheep were easier to handle than cattle, so in a demographic crisis the proportional number of sheep went up.

Thus the development of the Icelandic agricultural system was the reverse of that in Europe, where agriculture developed from infield-outfield systems to intensive three course rotation, the development powered by population growth³. In Iceland the infield-outfield system developed in an extensive direction until it was almost beyond recognition. The primary reason for this development was the decline in population from a 14th century high to much lower levels after the plagues of the 15th century, and because of that, less need for land or intensive cultivation.

Economically, the Icelandic peasantry was very homogenous. Almost all the peasants had independent family farms and were able to support the family with subsistence production. In the beginning of the 18th century 85% of the households in two typical agrarian communities in 1702-1714, Staðarhreppur and Akrahreppur, had servants in the households, either grown children of the husband and wife, or unrelated servants⁴. The number of sheep and cattle in each household reflected closely the consumption needs of the household, smaller households having smaller numbers of animals. There was no group of lifelong rural proletariat or cottagers, but sometimes in times of population growth there was a small group of fishermen with families living in small fishing villages, until 1860 at most about 5% of the population. There did exist a group of peasants with a socially powerful position, a kind of intermediate position between the aristocracy and the great mass of peasants.

This group could be called lower or parish gentry.

The division of labour was organized by the principle of the Western European family type. It can also be called a division of labour determined by age. After childhood and before marrying, most people spent a decade or longer in service. Then most people eventually married and became heads of households on subsistence farms.

As far as can be seen the social history sources from the beginning of the 18th century are typical for what sources in the period 1400-1700 have to tell about the situation of the peasantry.

Almost all peasants lived on a farm rented from the aristocracy. They paid rent on a yearly basis, both from the farm and from rented cattle or sheep. Before the 16th century there was no serfdom or labour duties. In the 15th century the two plague epidemics of 1402-1404 and 1494 led to the desertion of a great number of farms. As a result land rent on the remaining farms fell by half, from 10% to 5% of the value of the farm, and rent remained at 5% for the rest of the 17th and 18th centuries. A rent level of 5% probably meant that between 10 and 20% of the production of each farm went into payments to the aristocracy.

Foreign trade in Iceland seems to have had the basically same structure from the late middle ages up to the 20th century. Both the peasantry and the aristocracy traded directly with foreign markets through merchants from different nationalities: The Norwegians in the 14th century, the English in the 15th, the Germans in the 16th and the Danes in the 17th to 19th centuries. Internal trade was considerable, especially between the seaside and the farming interior.

The strengthening of central power led to some changes in trade already in the middle of the 16th century. After 1547 the Iceland trade was closely controlled by the Danish

king, who allowed the Germans – the Hamburger, Lübeckian and Bremen merchants – to trade in Iceland. They were not allowed to drive independent fishing or stay during the winter, and in 1602 the king decided, in accordance with the emerging mercantilist policies, that the time was ripe for the emerging Danish towns, Copenhagen, Helsingør and Malmø to take over this lucrative trade. Immediately this caused considerable opposition among the Icelanders, especially in south Iceland. The North Iceland peasantry seems to have been less angry, because the monopoly trade meant regulation of shipping there⁵. In some places there hadn't been a single ship in 30 years, but now it was possible to complain to the crown if there was no ship, and this even produced results!

The introduction of monopoly trade in 1602 has been pointed out as the main tool of Danish colonial rule in Iceland. It has been accused of having caused immense suffering, economic stagnation and misery in Iceland. In fact, monopoly trade was from the point of view of both the Icelandic aristocracy and Icelandic peasantry a blessing, because it protected their economic interests. It was not in any way a typical colonial trade, but a kind of trade suited to the needs of the subsistence economy⁶.

The greatest economic expansion in Iceland in the period from 1400-1830 took place in the 17th century, in fact under the monopoly trade⁷. This goes for both mainstays of the economy, agriculture and fishing, with the exception of the manorial farms, which as will be discussed later underwent a rapid decline. It seems that this growth had little to do with any impact of monopoly trade, positive or negative, but much more to do with the expansion of subsistence farming and increase in population.

For the fisheries, which have been said to suffer specially from the effects of the monopoly trade, the 17th century was a golden

age. Fishing villages grew in size in the good times in the 17th century, probably for the first time since the 14th century.

The economic and political situation of the peasantry was closely connected. Before 1550 every peasant was under the protection of the aristocrat who owned the land on which he lived. This protection was very important because of the complete lack of any central authority. The patron-client or protection systems formed hierarchical structures focussing on members of the landowning aristocracy at the top. These hierarchies were essentially, in their social effect, autonomous semi-states or small feudal principalities. In this respect the situation in 1300-1550 was no different from the situation in the Icelandic free state before 1262⁸. This also is reminiscent of the patron-client hierarchies discussed recently by Tore Iversen in the period before the strengthening of royal power in Norway, where Iversen relies partly on Icelandic source material⁹.

The fragmented medieval political structure of Iceland affected the peasantry in two ways: on one hand a peasant could always expect to be harassed by roving bands of aristocratic robber barons, or thrown out of their homes if a feud or a court case led to the farm changing ownership¹⁰. On the other hand the peasant could expect active protection by the patron, and it seems that the loyalty of the peasantry was with this lord or protector¹¹. The *Áshildarmýrarsamþykkt* from 1496 however, shows that the peasantry, perhaps especially the higher echelons of the peasant hierarchy, by no means were passive actors in the social interaction. In this document the peasantry demand from the Althingi freedom for the peasantry to choose their protectors, and also a stop to the ceaseless harassment of the peasantry going on in the 15th century¹². In the 15th century and early 16th century there are some cases of conflict between the peasantry and the aristocracy, primarily

concerning the lack of peasant enthusiasm for grazing their lambs in mountain pastures owned by the aristocracy in North Iceland, and transport duties and fishing duties in South Iceland¹³.

Despite this, peasant unrest, like in Denmark and Germany, where the peasants rebelled in the early 16th century against their lords was unthinkable in Iceland. Peasant unrest in Iceland before 1550 was unrest under the leadership of the local aristocracy, against the power of the crown or against the church. In the reformation conflict 1537-1551 the peasants of episcopal estates sided with the Catholic bishops against the lay aristocracy and the crown.

The patron-client bond between the peasantry and the aristocracy was still strong in Iceland in the early 16th century, but the system was showing signs of change in an ominous direction. The feudal patron-client systems of the Icelandic aristocracy survived the plague catastrophes, but after 1494 their development took a new turn. Probably because of labour shortages after the 1494 plague, a new kind of duties or corvee was laid upon the peasants. Their duty was now to row on the landowner's fisherboats and to supply hands for working in the homefields of the manors¹⁴. This was almost unknown before 1494. The patron-client systems were showing signs of developing from a certain type of *grundherrschaft* into a kind of *gutsherrschaft*, with a growth in the power of the aristocracy over the peasants. The presence of many foreign merchants from Germany and England and the lively fishing trade can have played a part in this, the Icelandic aristocracy wanting to keep up their income from the fisheries despite labour shortage.

What happened to the peasantry after the strengthening of state power? In the late 16th and early 17th century the peasantry complained more often about harsh taxation

or heavy duties than before. There exist several supplicatias from the peasantry from this period with complaints ranging from too high a rent on farms, problems with the trade of one sort or another and too low a share in the fisheries¹⁵. Their opposition against fishing corvees finally led to a court decision deciding against the duty of each household to provide two or three men for the fishing boats of the landowner¹⁶. Cases arising because of the refusal of peasants to graze lambs in the mountains also continue to appear. Then there are examples of the Danish crown officials, the representatives of the king, accusing Icelandic aristocracy, especially the clergy, of the ill treatment of peasants¹⁷. The church on the other hand accused the lay aristocracy of exploiting their tenants¹⁸. This is quite different from the situation in the 15th and early 16th centuries: Now the crown seems to be, or at least wants to be, the official patron of the peasantry, whereas earlier it was the church or the local aristocracy itself that wanted to look like protecting patrons, as it probably was.

Østein Rian has described a similar tendency in Norway. He relates this to the situation in the Danish government¹⁹. The high aristocrats of the Rigsråd wanted to ensure the income from the *len*, and so the peasantry was encouraged to complain if they were abused. The positive consequences for the peasantry was unintended, is Rian's opinion. I am not so certain – in the Icelandic documents the Danes express concern for the wellbeing of the peasantry, and it is possible that the idea of the king as a patron for the peasantry played a part in this.

The interpretation of the complaints of the Icelandic peasantry in the late 16th and 17th century is problematic. They certainly had a lot to complain about. But on the other hand the situation of the peasantry had improved in some ways. The state had introduced a monopoly of violence, Iceland became a peaceful country, and this must have been a

relief for the peasantry. The tendency towards the development of *grundherrschaft* seems to have been reversed, but further research is needed to determine exactly what happened.

In Denmark and especially Norway the strengthening of central power led to an increase in the tax burden of the peasantry in the 17th century. This did not happen in Iceland. The reason for the increase in tax burden in Norway was, directly or indirectly, the competition for hegemony in Scandinavia between the Swedes and the Oldenburg kingdom. The cost of the upkeep of the military and the fleet had to come from somewhere, and it landed squarely on the shoulders of the peasantry.

In the period between 1610 and 1690 the taxes in Norway grew from 95,000 rd. to 580,000 rd. The number of grown men, who were the ones that paid tax, grew in the meantime from about 75,000 (the total number of Norwegians was 300,000) to about 125,000 (the total being 500,000), so the tax burden pr. person grew from around 1.25 rd in 1610 to around 4.66 rd in the 1690s²⁰.

The total tax the king got from Iceland throughout the whole 17th century, was about 3,200 rd²¹. Some of the tax also landed with the king's representative in Iceland, and on the whole it could have been between 4,000 and 5,000 rd²². The population has been thought to have been around 50,000-55,000 the whole century²³, and if this is right, then the tax burden was about 0.3 rd pr. each grown man. This means that each Icelander had to pay fifteen times less in tax than each Norwegian in the 1690s.

When the king tried to get the Icelanders to pay for some of the cost of participating in the 30 years war in Germany in 1625, they flatly refused. The Icelanders complained about the poverty and bad weather in the country. They seem to have managed to convince the king that it would kill them off totally if they were squeezed, even if this was not entirely the

truth. In fact, I think that they could very well have managed the same taxes as the Norwegians if pressed.

Another reason for the fact that the Icelanders were able to get away without taking a part in paying for the cost of effective central power was probably that they were not threatened militarily by anyone, at least not in the same way as the Norwegians. The Norwegians had the Swedes as neighbours and the Swedes were very threatening in the 17th century. Iceland got away without having to pay too much, but on the other hand enjoyed full naval protection of the Oldenburg monarchy. It is improbable Iceland could have survived independently in the 17th century, with the strong naval powers of England and the Netherlands fighting for hegemony in the Atlantic and elsewhere.

The decisive reason for the remarkable difference in tax burden between the Norwegian and Icelandic peasantry was probably the strength of the Icelandic aristocracy. The sheriffs might have been interested in raising taxes, hoping for a share themselves, but it could be that they were outmanoeuvred at Althingi by the lesser gentry, who were more numerous there and in close contact with ordinary peasants. I will discuss this further below.

The situation of the peasantry: A balance sheet.

To sum up, the economic situation of the Icelandic peasantry was on the whole rather good compared to other peasants in Europe. Most had ample access to land. They controlled their own households to a very large extent. Their farms were parts of estates owned by the aristocracy, but the rent was comparatively low and until the 16th century they didn't have servitude on the manors.

The social situation of the peasantry was more insecure, because it lived in a society with no monopoly on violence by the state, and a fragmented political structure. This

fragmented structure threatened from the beginning of the 16th century to harden into *gutsherrschaft* with serfdom, as the aristocracy introduced daywork duties and servitude on fisherboats. The introduction of central power in the reformation had the effect of reversing the trend towards *gutsherrschaft* and the increased exploitation of the peasantry by the aristocracy.

At the same time, in Denmark, the strengthening of the state did not have the same effect. There the exploitation of the peasantry with increased servitude and other kinds of burdens continued to grow in the 17th century. The increased taxation of the peasantry seen in Norway did not materialize in Iceland. The Icelandic peasantry had every reason to be pleased with the social development in the 17th century. It did not feel the negative effects of the strengthening of central state power, but it did feel the positive effects. It even was allowed to complain to the authorities about its problems.

The aristocracy: Situation and development.

How did the political, social and economic situation of the aristocracy change in the course of the 16th century with the introduction of central state power?

From 1262 until 1550 the crown was a very peripheral entity in Icelandic matters, even if the king of Norway was formally also king in Iceland. The crown was manipulated in many ways by members of the Icelandic aristocracy to their devious ends, but it almost never acted in an independent and positive manner in Icelandic matters²⁴. This situation is a bit peculiar – the king was the only lord, but he was absent to such a degree that the local aristocracy developed strong feudalizing tendencies in fact, if not formally.

The origins of the feudalized principalities of late medieval Iceland lies in the mist of time, sometimes between the settlement of

Iceland and the 11th century. In the 12th and 13th centuries there existed in Iceland several small chiefdoms, some of them rather stable, some short lived, each headed by one aristocratic family, which supplied them with chieftains. Each family owned several large manors and (probably also) a number of peasant farms.

In the great conflicts of the 12th and 13th centuries every great chief could call upon all the peasantry in the area under his command to assist him in case of conflict. These were called upon in need, as in the Örlygsstaðabardagi or the other famous (in Iceland) battles of the civil war in the 13th century. As that war progressed, there appeared specialized retinues, who followed the main chiefs, a kind of professional armed force²⁵.

This kind of soldiery appears repeatedly in the late medieval sources, and there were rules and regulations on how many each type of authority figure could take with him on his travels in the land. In a decision from 1489 it was ruled that the bishop could take 13, the lawmen and the supreme representative of the king 10 each and *lögréttumenn* (members of the Althingi court) 3 each. But there also appears to have been the older type of soldiery, that of the peasant community in general taking up arms in support of their chieftain. There were armies of 300, 400, and even 1500 opposing each other on various occasions in the late middle ages. Violence seems in many ways to have been normal, even necessary to ensure loyalty and test the strength of it.

In the late middle ages big estates and large manors continued to dominate the landscape in Iceland, both the mental and actual. The number of manors was in the region of 50-100. A large manor had about 50-60 cows and 200 or 300 sheep, and many other animals²⁶. There were about 10-20 manors of this large size at any time. Most were smaller, with 20 cows and 80 sheep or

so. A labour force of 40 or 50 was necessary for the upkeep of such a farm, and it could probably support up to 80 individuals. The residents besides the labour force was probably the retinue and trusted servants of the head of the aristocratic family. Each manor was the centre of an estate comprised of the manor and 5-50 or more peasant farms. Besides the income from the manor and other manorial farms – some families had as many as 15 such farms – the most powerful aristocrats could rely on the income from about 150-400 peasant farms. The clerical institutions were also rich, the richest monasteries owning about 100 farms and the bishoprics more than 300 each²⁷.

The development of Icelandic manors in the late middle ages was quite different from that of the Danish manors, for example, In Denmark a large part of the manors disappeared after 1350, probably under the impact of demographic catastrophe in the plague, but although the demographic catastrophe was no less in Iceland (the plague first came to Iceland ca. 50 years later, in 1402-1404), the manors continue to appear in the sources as if nothing had happened. This indicates major differences in social structure. It is clear that Danish peasant society was more differentiated than the Icelandic peasant society, with several layers of peasantry, some of them were cottagers almost without land and this group worked in servitude on the manors. After the plague, a lot of regular farms became available, and the number of cottagers in servitude diminished greatly. This was among the reasons for the downfall of the Danish manors. The Danish lords lost the working power of the cottager class. The Icelandic manors on the other hand probably had the sons and daughters of nearby peasants as the workforce, who after a time went and started their own households²⁸. In Iceland there was no cottager class working the manors. Thus Icelandic peasants were not in lifelong servitude as the Danish cottagers, and

the plague epidemics did not affect the work force of the manors.

All this changed after 1550. The destruction of the Catholic church also resulted in the destruction of the old Icelandic social order. It was no longer possible for the aristocracy, either of the sword or the cloth, to behave as independent heads of feudal states. The king confiscated the monastic property in land and gave it as fiefs to the Icelandic lay aristocracy. In the course of the 16th century these became de facto hereditary until about 1700, but even so the possibilities of the aristocracy for the kind of independent action the Icelandic aristocracy practiced in the middle ages was severely limited.

The crown was quite determined in its peacemaking policy. In 1575 the crown ordered all weapons to be called in and destroyed. This was obeyed. The king also threatened to depose those officials and aristocrats who did not behave according to his program for a peaceful and ordered society. There was a kind of civilizing campaign or propagandizing for decent manners in Iceland. One should obey the results of the judicial system, of the courts, it was said, and it was perhaps this change in respect for the already existing system more than any systemic changes that characterized the period.

The majestic manors of the aristocracy underwent a remarkable development: The number of big farms fell very fast, and the number of animals at each farm, which often had been as much as 50 cows and 200 sheep per farms as mentioned before, fell to a much lower number. Manors of 100 people or more, common before the 17th century, were by 1703 almost unknown outside of the bishoprics²⁹.

The situation of the aristocracy in Iceland after the reformation was in many ways acceptable. Even though it had been forced to give up fighting among itself the Icelandic

aristocracy was still in existence, and with massive local power. In some ways this power had been increased and stabilized by the disappearance of the Catholic Church, and by the introduction of peace. As mentioned before, the leading members of the aristocracy now could rely on hereditary and undividable monastery estates even if 3/5 of the income went to the crown. In addition the bishoprics had not been turned over to the king, they were governed as independent estates by the Lutheran bishops, and the whole of their income stayed in Iceland, even if the episcopal estates were formally state property.

It is also entirely possible that it was the residual strength of the Icelandic aristocracy that hindered the Oldenburg monarchy from taxing the Icelandic peasantry in the 17th century, not because the Icelandic aristocracy loved the peasantry so much, but because it would lessen the possibilities for exploitation of the peasantry by the aristocracy. At least Althingi on some occasions resisted royal power effectively when it demanded higher taxation in Iceland. There does not seem to have been any such group or institution protecting the peasantry in Norway. The state looks as if it had more direct access to the resources of that society than the Icelandic one, but here there is a lack of comparative research.

Conclusion.

The historiography of Iceland has up till now almost in unison described the period between 1550 and 1830 as a dismal period because of Danish colonial rule. This view has to be rejected. The model of the central colonial power and the exploited colony at the periphery does not apply to what happened in Iceland in 1550 or the relationship between Denmark and Iceland, but rather the model of the early modern European conglomerate states like France, Spain and Austria-Hungary. In this model the centre was under

close supervision by central state power, and was severely exploited by it, while the provinces further away were partly or mostly protected by local elites, who hindered exploitation by the central state. This fits perfectly with the Icelandic case, where exploitation of the peasantry seems to have been rather limited compared to both Denmark and Norway.

In a way, the state hindered the aristocracy in exploiting the peasantry excessively, and vice versa, the strong Icelandic aristocracy hindered the state in penetrating society for taxing purposes. A possible interpretation of this is that the peasantry enjoyed a kind of double patronage, both by the state and the aristocracy.

The changes introduced by state power in Iceland in the 16th century were decisive for the development of Iceland. It is here we must look for the origins of state power, the development that finally lead to modern Iceland as we know it, not the independence movement of the 19th century.

¹ Árni Daníel Júlíusson: *Bønder i pestens tid. Landbrug, godsdrift og social konflikt i senmiddelalderens islandske bondesamfund*. Ph.d. afhandling ved Københavns Universitet 1996, pp. 168-216.

² For further reading on this see Axel Kristinsson: "Productivity and Population in Pre-Industrial Iceland." in *Aspects of Arctic and Sub-Arctic History*, Reykjavík 2000, pp. 270-279, and Árni Daníel Júlíusson: "The Environmental Effects of Icelandic Subsistence Farming in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period." *Aspects of Arctic and Sub-Arctic History*, Reykjavík 2000, pp. 279-289.

³ Schlicher van Bath, B.H.: *Agrarian History of Western Europe 500-1800*. London 1963.

⁴ The source material is the *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalín, fimmta bindi*,

- Hnappadals- og Snæfellssýsla*. Reykjavík 1982, pp. 85-140, and *núnda bindi, Skagafjörður*. Reykjavík 1982, pp. 150-198. This source material is analysed in Árni Daníel Júlíusson: *Bønder i pestens tid*. København 1996, pp. 216-233.
- ⁵ *Alþingisbækur* 1612 p. 189.
- ⁶ Gísli Gunnarsson: *Upp er boðið Ísaland*. Reykjavík 1987
- ⁷ Helgi Þorláksson: *Sautjándá öldin*. Reykjavík 1976.
- ⁸ Árni Daníel Júlíusson: *Bønder i pestens tid*. København 1996, pp. 313-379.
- ⁹ Iversen, Tore: "Fremveksten av det norske leilendingvesenet i middelalderen – en forklaringskisse." *Heimen* 32 1995, same: "Jordleie, patroner og klienter før høymiddelalderens leilendingveseni i Norge." *Heimen* 33 1996.
- ¹⁰ *Diplomatarium Islandicum* V p. 689, IV pp. 514-515, VIII p. 247. Árni Daníel Júlíusson: *Bønder i pestens tid*. København 1996, pp. 324-337.
- ¹¹ *Diplomatarium Islandicum* VII p. 338, X p. 715.
- ¹² *Diplomatarium Islandicum* VII pp. 321-323.
- ¹³ *Diplomatarium Islandicum* VII pp. 152-153, 559-560, VIII p. 215, X pp. 72, 342, 362.
- ¹⁴ *Diplomatarium Islandicum* VII p. 415, VIII p. 362.
- ¹⁵ *Alþingisbækur* 1583 p. 32, 1612 p. 189.
- ¹⁶ *Alþingisbækur* 1598 pp. 148-151.
- ¹⁷ *Alþingisbækur* 1593 p. 381, 1611 p. 168.
- ¹⁸ *Alþingisbækur* 1602 p. 223.
- ¹⁹ Rian, Øystein: "Grunntrekk ved det danske adelsveldie i Norge 1536-1625." *Hamarspor. Festschrift til Lars Hamre*. Oslo 1982.
- ²⁰ Rian, Øystein: "Den frie og stolte norske bonden." *Lokalsamfunn og øvrighet i Norden ca. 1550-1750*. Red. Harald Winge. Oslo 1992.
- ²¹ Including tax per head of those peasants rich enough to pay tax according to the old Icelandic law in *Jónsbók*, the king's part of the tithe and some other smaller posts. See Páll Eggert Ólason: *Menn og menntir III*. Reykjavík 1919.
- ²² Páll Eggert Ólason: *Seyjándá öld*. Rv. 1952, p. 25.
- ²³ Helgi Skúli Kjartansson: "Spáð í mannfjöldapýramýða." *Afmælisrit Björns Sigfússonar*. Reykjavík 1975. But there are indications that this is not the case. The number of farmers in two counties in North Iceland was around 600 in 1612, see *Alþingisbækur* 1612 p. 189, and about 900 in 1703 (*Manntal á Íslandi 1703*). This fits roughly with documentation about a large number of new farms being built in the 17th century. If these numbers are used as a basis for the whole country they indicate a population at about 35,000-40,000 in 1612. On the other hand we know that the population was about 55,000 in the 1690s.
- ²⁴ See e.g. the case of Möðruvellir, described in Arnór Sigurjónsson: *Ásverja saga*. Reykjavík 1967, pp. 143-169.
- ²⁵ Axel Kristinsson: "Hverjir tóku þátt í hernaði Sturlungaaldar?" *Sagnir* 1986.
- ²⁶ Árni Daníel Júlíusson: *Bønder i pestens tid*. København 1996, pp. 249-255.
- ²⁷ Árni Daníel Júlíusson: *Bønder i pestens tid*. København 1996, pp. 264-277.
- ²⁸ *Det danske landbrugs historie*. Bd. 1. København 1988.
- ²⁹ Árni Daníel Júlíusson: *Bønder i pestens tid*. København 1996, pp. 250-260.