

## The lava-fields of Östergötland: identities in Icelandic travel accounts of Sweden

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On 12 July 1772, an Icelandic theologian, Hannes Finnsson, was travelling through the Swedish province of Östergötland. ‘Cliffs, steep hills, and lava-fields there are in abundance’, he observed.<sup>1</sup> Lava-fields are not something one usually associates with Sweden, let alone decidedly non-volcanic Östergötland. Nor are they to be found mentioned in the Swedish edition of Finnsson’s travel book, which translates the Icelandic as ‘cliffs, steep hillsides, and stony fields are numerous’;<sup>2</sup> indeed, the Swedish publisher-cum-translator wrote in his introduction that faced with Icelandic words such as *hraun* (‘lava-field’) he found it ‘warranted to seek to reproduce what the author can be assumed to have meant in Swedish parlance’.<sup>3</sup> This might possibly be justified where a travel account serves as a guide to what it describes, but if we adjust our sights and view travel accounts as sources of the narrators’ own notions and identities, it is interesting that Hannes Finnsson, in order to make Swedish reality intelligible, describes stony ground by using the word *hraun*, lava-field, of which there were plenty on his home island. Östergötland’s lava-fields thus deserve to be rediscovered.

Hannes Finnsson travelled from Copenhagen to Stockholm in 1772, and wrote an account of his journey that was later published in Swedish. The philologist and politician Jón Sigurðsson travelled the same route in 1841, and wrote several letters that have also been published in Swedish, as was a section of the geographer Þorvaldur Thoroddsen’s autobiography that describes a similar journey in 1892 (there is more on these authors and their writings below). I happened to come by these three texts at much the same time, and thought it would be interesting to see what had changed in the way Sweden was experienced over the course of a century or so, but it was not long before I realised that it was the picture of Iceland that had changed the most. When these three men wrote about Sweden, they were also writing about themselves – and expressing their identities.<sup>4</sup>

### On identities and travellers

‘As a historical process, identity is tentative, multiple and contingent’, writes Kathleen Wilson in her inspiring study of British identities in the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> It should not be thought that identity – self-image – is ever wholly complete, a fixed quality possessed by an individual or group; rather it should be seen as a set of ongoing processes. Identities always materialize in a specific context, a context that usually

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<sup>1</sup> ‘En blettur, hellur, brattar bringur og hraun eru hér yfrið mörg’ (Stokkhólmsrella eftir Hannes biskup Finnsson’, *Andvari* 59 (1934), 22 (hereafter ‘Stokkhólmsrella’)).

<sup>2</sup> Hannes Finnsson, *Stockholmsrella*, ed. Arvid Hj. Uggla (Stockholm, 1935), 50 (hereafter *Stockholmsrella*).

<sup>3</sup> Arvid Hj. Uggla, ‘Inledning’, in *ibid.* 11.

<sup>4</sup> I wish to thank Charlotte Tornbjør for her valuable advice on this article, and particularly for her telling criticism of the discussion of the literature and theory.

<sup>5</sup> Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2003), 3.

entails confrontation with someone else. The view that identities are created in the encounter with 'the other' has often been taken to mean, invoking the Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth, that an articulated, negative comparison, preferably with a figurative enemy, is necessary for a group identity to be able to exist.<sup>6</sup> I, however, consider this to be a misinterpretation of Barth's argument, as for him it is rather the need for interaction that is central, given that we create boundaries and categorize 'the other' in order to be able to interact, in order to know who we are dealing with, and to whom we are doing what.<sup>7</sup> Barth is concerned with the encounter between different ethnic groups, but his reasoning can also be applied to social groups or individuals. Identities come into play in encounters of various kinds, for example between subject and ruler, between laypeople and the learned, or between groups of people who conceive of themselves as belonging to different societies and/or cultures. I myself, in a study of how the seventeenth-century peasantry in Skåne were viewed by their new Swedish masters, have called such identities 'encounter identities'.<sup>8</sup>

Travel accounts thus ought to be eminently suitable sources for the study of identities since at heart they are about encounters – with new things, new places, new customs, new people. There is also a growing literature that has made use of such sources, for which Edward Said's book *Orientalism* of 1978 has had something of a paradigmatic effect. Said describes how, in the Western *Weltanschauung*, a discourse of dominance, control, and asymmetrical power relationships has built up over the centuries, by which the very creation of a mental place, 'the Orient', is part of this cultural dominance, and thus of the Western self-image.<sup>9</sup> Following Said's example, the existence of such European discourses of dominance has been proved by a series of historians, chiefly for non-European parts of the world in the colonial era.<sup>10</sup> One work, however, that addresses earlier periods and intra-European conditions is Larry Wolff's study of the Western European view of Eastern Europe. According to Wolff, Europe's north–south mental axis was replaced by a west–east axis over the course of the eighteenth century, impelled by the 'invention' of barbarous Eastern Europe to show civilized Europe to best advantage, even if there was an ambivalence over the extent to which different

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<sup>6</sup> Hence Benny Jacobsson, for example, who suggests that the thesis of 'the other' is disproved by the lack of any explicit distinctions of this kind in the identities found in the Swedish province of Västergötland (Benny Jacobsson, *Den sjunde världsdelen. Västgötar och Västergötland 1646–1771. En identitetshistoria* (Stockholm, 2008), 35, 455. Despite this he offers numerous examples of identity-forming distinctions between student clubs at Swedish universities (ibid. 155–164). All told his is a very interesting study of educated notions of identities at a regional level.

<sup>7</sup> Fredrik Barth, 'Introduction', in id., ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Oslo, 1969).

<sup>8</sup> Harald Gustafsson, 'Att draga till Malmö och skaffa sig rätt. Undersåtar, överhet och identitetsföreställningar i skånska suppliker 1661–1699', in *Öresundsgränser. Rörelser, möten och visioner i tid och rum* (Gothenburg, 2007), 81.

<sup>9</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> On Africa see, for example, Tim Young, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850–1900* (Manchester, 1994); for Latin America, Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992); a Swedish example is Åsa Karlsson, 'Främling eller vän? Svenskar i Turkiet på 1700-talet', in ead. and *Främlingar – ett historiskt perspektiv* (Uppsala, 1998).

regions, primarily Russia, were part of Europe.<sup>11</sup> Russia became a kind of Near Orient, and here too Said proves applicable.

Even if Said's perspective can bring important insights, it has its limitations. If you set out to find a dominant, repressive, and uniform discourse there is a risk you will find it everywhere. It is unfortunate that 'Once we begin to think of Orientalism as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient, we will encounter few surprises', as Said himself wrote.<sup>12</sup> When, in her study of cultural encounters, Kathleen Wilson turns her attention to the Caribbean and Pacific the surprises are all the greater. She demonstrates how both British and local identities were changed by the encounter, and not necessarily in terms of power. When Polynesian women pursued the British sailors of Captain Cook's crew for sex, they were making use of a cultural encounter to gain the advantages of greater status in their own milieu. Teresia Phillips' identity as an ostracized *femme fatale* in London could be transformed into that of socialite, and even public official, in Jamaica. No one is inferior from the outset, and every text can very well contain ambivalence and contingencies. Wilson's work is worth emphasizing for the nuances it brings. She does not write in the Said tradition, but rather is part of the debate over national and pre-national identities, and thus is not impeded by the complications associated with the Orientalism thesis.<sup>13</sup> Yet in fairness it must be noted that even Said-inspired research has recently come to acknowledge the colonial discourse as more 'hybrid and polysemic', as Thomas Betteridge puts it in his survey of the field.<sup>14</sup>

There is thus much to gain in terms of nuance and detail by looking up for multi-faceted notions of identity – expressions of self-image – in travel accounts, as is the case here with three Icelandic visitors to Sweden. Moreover, our interest does not need to be limited to journeys where we might suspect in advance that we will find cultural asymmetry and a desire to dominate. Even when close at hand, the unfamiliar can still generate encounters and self-images, albeit perhaps not so conspicuously. Icelandic travellers in Sweden, far from thinking they were departing for an unfamiliar culture of lower standing, seem to have believed that they were journeying through their own Evangelical Lutheran variant of Western European society. Nor do they seem to have felt inferior: their home island might very well be thought less developed, but Icelanders were Danish subjects, and the educated among them always spent long years studying in Copenhagen. Denmark–Norway and Sweden were then viewed as fierce competitors rather than parties in a hierarchical relationship.

Something similar was true of the English visitors to Sweden who Mark Davies has studied, even if there was also an element of Nordic exoticism in the picture of a less-developed Sweden. Davis sets out to trace notions of British identity and the British understanding of the world in travel accounts, and draws attention to how the narrators

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<sup>11</sup> Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 95.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the literature, see Harald Gustafsson, 'The Eighth Argument. Identity, Ethnicity and Political Culture in Sixteenth-Century Scandinavia', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 27 (2002), 91–95; and an updated discussion of the same in Jason Nice, *Sacred History and National Identity: Comparisons between Early Modern Wales and Brittany* (London, 2009), 17–22.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Betteridge, 'Introduction: Borders, Travel and Writing', in id., ed., *Borders and Travellers in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2007), 3.

appear in various, sometimes overlapping, capacities: as individuals, as tourists or travellers, as members of a class or status group, as representatives of a nationality, and as authors.<sup>15</sup> Several other studies offer inspiration for how best to bring the narrator into view. In studying Michael Eneman's report on his official mission to Turkey, Egypt, and Palestine, Joachim Östlund is primarily concerned with how Eneman constructed his identity as a scientist in his encounter with the unfamiliar.<sup>16</sup> Arne Mellberg, in his study of modern travel accounts, writes of the various stances adopted by authors – witness, tourist, flâneur, explorer, immigrant.<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly, I wish to identify the self-images that find expression in three Icelandic travellers' encounters with Sweden. In this, my aim is not to arrive at some sort of core identity, but rather to study from various angles the ways in which they voice different self-images and exhibit their identities in the various encounters they experience. The self-images I have found to be most in evidence – and consider here in turn – are those of traveller, tourist, scientist, political being, man, and Icelander. As always in historical research, what can be traced is how each of these self-images manifests itself in the source material, yet I assume that this also reflects the actual experience of identity, and has a certain relevance for the evolution of Icelandic self-image beyond these three individuals. Naturally, this must in turn be seen against the historical context of the three periods in question, for it is in this way we can hope to capture something of what Wilson has called 'the processual, embedded nature of identity'.<sup>18</sup>

### Three learned Icelanders

Hannes Finnsson (1739–1796), author of the text later published in Swedish as *Stockholms-rella*,<sup>19</sup> was son of the bishop of Skálholt, Finnur Jónsson, and would later succeed his father in the post.<sup>20</sup> He had a successful university career in Copenhagen, and though he took a theological degree, he was equally interested in old Icelandic manuscripts and in the applied arts and sciences. In 1772, for example, he published a paper on agriculture in Iceland, and today is probably best known for the major demographic study he wrote after the cataclysmic Skaftá eruption in the 1780s. In 1772 he was made secretary of the commission that had been appointed to get to grips with

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Davies, *A Perambulating Paradox: British Travel Literature and the Image of Sweden c. 1770–1865* (Lund, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Joachim Östlund, 'Ethos i vetenskapen. Vetenskapliga hållningar i Michael Enemans Resa i Orienten 1711–12', in *Förmoderna livshållningar. Dygder, värden och kunskapsvägar från antiken till upplysningen* (Lund, 2008). This does not mean, of course, that Östlund passes over Eneman's negative judgements on the destination, exemplified by his reference to the Egyptian pyramids bearing witness to the lack of freedom that would have been necessary in order to construct buildings of such size (ibid. 272), but, if I understand Östlund correctly, Eneman's notion of freedom is also one with his scientific self-image. See also David Dunér, 'Helvetet på jorden. Resor till Stora Kopparbergets gruva', in Cronberg and Stenqvist, *Förmoderna livshållningar*. While Dunér does not apply an identity perspective as such, he nevertheless demonstrates how the travellers' Christian notions (self-image, one could say) marked their understanding of what they see.

<sup>17</sup> Arne Mellberg, *Resa och skriva. En guide till den moderna reselitteraturen* (Gothenburg, 2006), 27–31.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, *Island Race*, ix.

<sup>19</sup> *Stockholmsrella*.

<sup>20</sup> A useful biographical sketch is provided in the Swedish edition: Jón Helgason, 'Hannes Finnsson, biskop i Skálholt', in *Stockholmsrella*; see also Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenzkar Æviskrár*, ii (Reykjavík, 1949), 308–310.

the collection of manuscripts Árni Magnússon had left to Copenhagen University, and which would form the core of what is still the Arnarnagæan Institute there. It was in this capacity that Finnsson, together with the legal historian Peder Kofod Ancher, travelled to Stockholm the same year to look for primary sources for old Nordic legislation, a journey that is the subject of discussion here.

Finnsson's autograph travel account survives in his '*brev- och minnesbok*' (lit. book of letters and memoirs), the commonplace book in which he collected aide-mémoire and transcripts of his correspondence.<sup>21</sup> Much later it would be published in Icelandic in the periodical *Andvari* in 1934,<sup>22</sup> where the editor noted that Finnsson himself had given it the title *Stokkhólmsrella*, in a joky, self-deprecating vein – in English something along the lines of 'Stockholm chitchat'.<sup>23</sup> It is set out in diary form, and it is obvious from the text that it really was a running record written during the actual journey.<sup>24</sup> In the Swedish translation it runs to forty-seven printed pages, and is the most detailed of the three travel accounts considered here.

The second journey was undertaken by Jón Sigurðsson (1811–1879), the best known of the three men, for he was the big name in the Icelandic nationalist movement. To this day his statue stands in front of the parliament house in Reykjavík.<sup>25</sup> From 1833 he lived in Copenhagen, first as a student and later as a man of letters, where, when he was not working on learned publications of Icelandic sagas, he dedicated himself to the struggle for greater Icelandic independence. In 1841 he was commissioned by Det Nordiske Oldskriftselskab (Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries) to visit Stockholm with Ólafur Pálsson to transcribe Icelandic manuscripts. At that point he was still a relatively young and unknown student, although this was the year he founded a society to publish his new political journal, *Ný félagsrit* ('New Association Writings'), the first issue of which was shipped to Iceland with the spring boats shortly before he departed for Stockholm.<sup>26</sup> With *Ný félagsrit*, he rapidly became a driving force in the national movement.

The surviving material from Swedish visit is relatively limited. 1977 saw the publication in Swedish of four of the letters he wrote during the journey, three in Danish to Oldskriftselskabet's chairman Carl Christian Rafn, and one, translated from the Icelandic, to his old student friend Páll Melsteð, who was then a priest in Iceland.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Landsbókasafn Íslands-Háskólabókasafn, Reykjavík, signum Lbs 258 4to. I am very grateful to Ragnheiður Mósesdóttir of the Arnarnagæan Institute, University of Copenhagen, for this information, and for her generous practical help in the preparation of this article.

<sup>22</sup> 'Stokkhólmsrella', 1–67. The spelling was modernized in this edition.

<sup>23</sup> 'Stokkhólmsrella', 1. The editor is anonymous, but is probably the historian Páll Eggert Ólason, who was chairman of Þjóðvinafélagið (The Patriotic Society) that published *Andvari*. According to information from Landsbókasafn Íslands-Háskólabókasafn the name is not to be found in the manuscript, however. For the choices made in Swedish translation of the word, see the editor's explanation in *Stokkhólmsrella*, 93.

<sup>24</sup> It is evident, for example, in his attitude towards the Swedish constitution and Gustav III that thanks to political developments was to change in due course, as we will see.

<sup>25</sup> For recent work on Jón Sigurðsson see Guðjón Friðriksson, *Jón Sigurðsson* (Ævisaga I–II: Reykjavík, 2002 and 2003).

<sup>26</sup> [Icelandic journals would long be published only once a year.](#)

<sup>27</sup> Anon., ed., *Två isländska Sverigebesök. Jón Sigurðsson 1841. Þorvaldur Thoroddsen 1892. Tillägnade Kungliga biblioteket 9 november 1977* (Reykjavík 1977) (hereafter *Två isländska Sverigebesök*), 11–23. No editor or translator is given. The preface may have been written by the librarian Finnboði

(although the Swedish edition fails to mention that it has omitted the last portion of this letter).<sup>28</sup> In addition, parts of an unpublished letter to the antiquarian Finnur Magnússon are reproduced in Guðjón Friðriksson's biography of Jón Sigurðsson.<sup>29</sup>

The third traveller was Þorvaldur Thoroddsen (1855–1921), who visited Stockholm with his wife in 1892.<sup>30</sup> He was already an internationally renowned scientist, with numerous studies of Icelandic geography and geology behind him, and his trip was mostly spent in establishing scientific contacts and familiarizing himself with the various research institutes and museums he visited. Since 1882 he had spent each summer conducting field-studies in Iceland, largely financed by various public and private foundations. Until 1895 he would be a senior-school teacher in Reykjavík, after which he lived in Copenhagen as a gentleman scientist (and honorary professor from 1902) until his death. His memoirs were published posthumously in 1922, and they include a ten-page account of his visit to Stockholm,<sup>31</sup> it too translated into Swedish in 1977 in the same edition as Jón Sigurðsson's letters.<sup>32</sup>

Evidently the kinds of text these travellers have left us differ rather. In both Finnsson's and Sigurðsson's case they wrote down their impressions as they travelled. That the same was not true of Thoroddsen's account has some significance for its content, something to which I will return later. None of the texts was published immediately, even if Thoroddsen's manuscript was clearly written with that in mind, and would be published shortly after his death. Yet this was still an age in which people borrowed manuscripts and correspondence from one another, and letters were frequently read aloud to a circle of listeners; Iceland more than most was characterized by this kind of manuscript culture, and much was circulated without having first been printed.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Sigurðsson's letter to Rafn has more than a little of the official report about it. There is reason to view all the texts as semi-public narratives of a kind, and certainly sufficiently similar to be the basis of a comparison. Furthermore, all three were learned men and were travelling for scholarly reasons, while each had a long period of residence in Copenhagen behind them, and seem to have seen themselves as both Icelanders and Danish subjects. The question is whether this two-fold national perspective emerges in their confrontation with things Swedish.

## Travellers

One self-image that is immediately apparent is, of course, that of the traveller. The actual travelling is covered in greatest detail by Finnsson, less by Sigurðsson, and least

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Guðmundsson. The letters to Rafn have not survived, but were prepared for publication from transcriptions held by Det kongelige Bibliotek (ibid. 11, footnote).

<sup>28</sup> The letter has been published in Icelandic (Jón Sigurðsson, *Bréf Jóns Sigurðssonar. Úrval*, ed. anon. (Reykjavík, 1911), 37–41.

<sup>29</sup> Friðriksson, *Sigurðsson*, 230, 233. His less famous travelling companion Ólafur Pálsson kept a diary during the journey (ibid. 227) – the basis for Guðjón Friðriksson's account – which is as yet unpublished.

<sup>30</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenzkar Æviskrár*, v (Reykjavík 1952), 248–9.

<sup>31</sup> Þorvaldur Thoroddsen, *Minningabók I, Safn Fræðafélagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga I* (Kaupmannahöfn, 1922), 70–85.

<sup>32</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 29–38.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Mathew James Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve: the Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland* (Enfield Lock, 1997).

by Thoroddsen, due in no small measure to the tremendous reduction in journey times, so that travelling became more a matter of transportation between two points than a state in itself.<sup>34</sup> The journey took longest for Finnsson, of course, and he travelled by stages and reached Stockholm after nine days. He had plenty of time to make his observations in the true Linnaean spirit. Travel in 1772 clearly demanded that any self-respecting scholar would note down such things as ‘the peasantry in Skåne [Sweden’s southernmost province] for the most part wear round blue caps and blue waistcoats, but blue-grey or light blue coats. Oxen here are yoked to pull plough and sledge. The yoke sits loose on the neck, just before the withers’.<sup>35</sup> Finnsson made numerous notes of this kind throughout his journey. It is clear that he knew his Linnaeus and had read other travel accounts – in which the local economy and customs were the main focus – and he too wished to appear a learned traveller.<sup>36</sup> His journey also gave rise to many encounters, not least during the long, involuntary pauses waiting for fresh horses. In Örkelljunga, Finnsson had to wait ten hours, but notes that he had pleasant company in the shape of one Mr Lövenskiöld.<sup>37</sup> Even the short journey on from Stockholm to Uppsala was broken by a night spent in Rotebro, ‘where I spoke long with a wise and well-disposed district judge from Hälsingland’.<sup>38</sup> This kind of encounter seems to have been part of the self-image of the traveller in the eighteenth century.

By Sigurðsson’s time, 1841, there was no longer the opportunity for many of these encounters and observations, for he travelled by steamer. It is not said how long the journey took him. The only observation on the Swedish landscape came in his letter to Páll Melsteð, in which he jokes that there is many a fine hiding-place for Vikings in the Swedish skerries, but that it is a shame that so-called civilization means that they are no longer used.<sup>39</sup> Presumably, however, he had some exchange with the other passengers, even if he does not mention it. In 1892 Thoroddsen’s journey gave even fewer opportunities for observations or encounters. He took the ferry to Malmö, and from there the night train to Stockholm<sup>40</sup> – very different from Finnsson’s ten hours’ wait in Örkelljunga alone. Uppsala and Stockholm were now closer to each other: Finnsson had had to stay overnight in Rotebro; Sigurðsson’s steamer journey took a day; while Thoroddsen took one hour twenty-five minutes by train.<sup>41</sup> It is typical of Thoroddsen that he says nothing of his actual journeys other than to note the exact time taken, usually to the minute. When travel became largely a question of the rapidity of the transportation from A to B, observations, encounters, and conversations were no longer necessarily part of the image of the traveller. Travel had been transformed from a long-

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<sup>34</sup> For how the experience of travel altered over the nineteenth century, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialisation of Time and Space* (2nd edn., Berkeley 1986 (1977)), especially 33–44 and 73–77. Schivelbusch argues that ‘the space between the points – the traditional traveling space – was destroyed’ (ibid. 38).

<sup>35</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> For eighteenth-century scientific journeys see, for example, Jacob Christensson, *Konsten att resa. Essäer om lärda svenska resenärer* (Stockholm 2001), 32 ff.

<sup>37</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 77.

<sup>39</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 21.

<sup>40</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 22, 35. In his letter to Finnur Magnússon, Sigurðsson paints a vivid picture of how on the narrow River Fyris he felt like Aladdin flying between herbaceous borders (sic) (Friðriksson, *Sigurðsson*, 233).

drawn-out social state to an individual transfer between two places, and this seems to have left its mark on the traveller's self-image.

## Tourists

'Tourist' is a modern word, but as far back as the young noblemen's Grand Tour of the seventeenth century, if not earlier, we find the idea that during a journey travellers should go out of their way to see certain sights.<sup>42</sup> This was evidently true of our three Icelanders. Yet it was not tourist attractions that determined the three's itineraries, but professional considerations. Thus all three made for Stockholm and Uppsala, drawn, naturally enough, by the academic circles there, while Finnsson and Sigurðsson had been specifically commissioned to do research in both seats of learning. Thoroddsen also visited Gothenburg, as there was a university there too (albeit one still 'in its infancy').<sup>43</sup> Yet erudition was not the only attraction. Clearly, throughout the entire period there were fixed notions about what a tourist was expected to seek out. To some degree people experienced what they were *expected* to experience – which while it generally remained the same, also in some respects changed with time.

It is Sigurðsson who provides the clearest expression of such expectations. In his letter to Páll Melsteð, he wrote of his return journey via the Göta Canal, along which 'in many places it is extraordinarily beautiful'; he continued that 'I had had such great expectations in advance that they could scarcely be surpassed.' However, he admitted that the system of locks in Trollhättan was 'much larger than I had anticipated'.<sup>44</sup> The Göta Canal had opened only nine years before, and must have been much talked-of, both for its beauty and for its state-of-the-art engineering. Hannes Finnsson, meanwhile, also seems to have had preconceived notions, but his were drawn from academic literature.<sup>45</sup> That he had read at least something of Linnaeus' travel accounts is clear from the manner in which he penned his own observations.

One of the sights they all visited, and remarked on as such, was Uppsala cathedral. Finnsson alone attended a service there – indeed, he was the only one of the three to mention attending church in the course of his journey – yet he also went out of his way to pass an aesthetic judgement, rating it '*augustissima, ast Gothica*' – 'majestic, but Gothic'.<sup>46</sup> In the eighteenth century, before the advent of Romanticism, Gothic was still a pejorative term for something thought truly barbarous, so here Finnsson was making a show of good taste. With the dawning of Romanticism, Gothic became all the rage, so that for Sigurðsson the cathedral was 'the most divine church I have seen'. That his visit came during the halcyon days of National Romanticism is also evident from his crack about Vikings, and the fact that he was the only one of the three to visit Gamla Uppsala, where he 'drank mead on Odinshögen'.<sup>47</sup> Neither Sigurðsson nor Thoroddsen treated

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<sup>42</sup> Christensson, *Konsten att resa*, 21–24.

<sup>43</sup> Thoroddsen, *Minningabók*, 85: 'á æskuskeiði'. The Swedish translation renders it as the more positive 'very young'. *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 69.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 79.

<sup>47</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 22. One of the three large barrows in Gamla Uppsala, Odin's Mound is now generally referred to as the Western Mound.

the cathedral as anything more than one of the sights, a reflection on the march of secularization – and on Finnsson’s theological background, which meant he was inclined to be more interested in its religious significance. Thoroddsen was given an exhaustive tour of the cathedral and its treasures, but there was something approaching a sigh of relief when he wrote that ‘from the church I made my way to the Mineralogical Museum’.<sup>48</sup> Tourism in this sense takes up far less of his account than do academic contacts, even if the two coincided in his museum visits.

There was, though, one kind of tourism that united the three – to borrow a modern catchphrase, celebrity spotting. Travellers of their class were apparently expected to meet, or at least to see, and report on people of note from all walks of life. This was the case with people who could help them in their scholarly endeavours, of course, but it was also true of royalty, whom all three went out of their way to remark on. Finnsson had ample opportunity to reflect on King Gustav III, for he was present during the *coup d’état* on 19 August 1772; he was to waver in his political views on the king, a subject to which we will return below. It is enough to note here that Finnsson was completely captivated when, spectating at a meeting of Vetenskapsakademien (the Royal Academy of Sciences), the king greeted him and they conversed briefly. It ‘gave those present reason to notice me’, and looking back on the favour bestowed on him, he decided the king ‘seems very graceful and wise’.<sup>49</sup> In Södertälje, Finnsson could not resist the opportunity to boast that he had taken his dish of soured milk at the same table where the prince (it is unclear which one) had eaten the previous night, and he noted with pleasure that when he met Prince Fredrick at the town gate, the Prince graciously greeted him.<sup>50</sup>

Sigurðsson, meanwhile, spent his days working in the royal palace, for the Royal Library was then housed in one of the wings overlooking the palace garden. He noted with amusement that the only disturbance came from the royal grandchildren, playing with buckets and spades in the grounds. He mentions this in his otherwise dry reports *Rafn*, so it was obviously important to have seen royalty.<sup>51</sup> To Páll Melsteð, Sigurðsson wrote irreverently of King Karl XIV Johan that ‘the old dodderer has taken to his bed’, though not so much that he has not seen him up and about, and he reports that the king is ‘a little above medium height, with misshapen legs but a quite good figure otherwise’. He also boasted that he had been shown around Prince Oscar’s apartments, and was able to view some of his own paintings.<sup>52</sup>

Royalty and the court were thus much in evidence in both 1772 and 1841, but by 1892, by which time one of the children Sigurðsson had seen playing with a bucket and spade was on the throne, they seem more remote. Even so, Thoroddsen carefully recorded that he found himself at the same dinner as ‘the king’s son, Prince Eugen, Duke of Närke; he is a superior artist, celebrated painter’. He also mentioned how, when visiting the Norwegian Minister’s wife, he met young ladies waiting to be presented at Court.<sup>53</sup> Broadly speaking, the tone of Thoroddsen’s text is that of a scholarly gossip column. He

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 36

<sup>49</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 61.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 53, 85.

<sup>51</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 21.

<sup>53</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 34–35.

and his wife mixed with the cream of society, and were constantly invited to dine with a procession of notables. Together with the likes of the explorer Sven Hedin and the poet Carl Snoilsky they attended the banquet to celebrate the polar explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld's sixtieth birthday. At another social gathering they met Nordenskiöld again, who embarked on an enthusiastic discussion of Iceland's volcanoes with Thoroddsen. They were shown around the Historical Museum by the renowned archaeologist Oscar Montelius. In Uppsala they moved in the best academic circles. Thoroddsen took evident satisfaction in recording the extravagance of the parties, the magnificence of the houses, and the lavishness of the cuisine – he was amazed by 'smörgåsbord, a custom that seems originally to have come here from Russia' – but he also muttered about 'luxury and wastefulness'.<sup>54</sup> He was determined by turns to boast and to make a show of his own unassuming nature.

The future Oscar II with his bucket and spade, Nordenskiöld, and Sven Hedin were all very well, but Hannes Finnsson took the celebrity-spotting prize by visiting Linnaeus' home in Hammarby, taking in not only the garden, but Linnaeus himself. Linnaeus was Sweden's tourist attraction nonpareil, not least for the learned traveller, something that Linnaeus was himself well aware of, as is borne out by the willingness with which he made himself available. Yet Finnsson's reactions to the meeting were largely determined by his scholarly identity, and we will therefore return to Hammarby later.

## Scholars

A professional, scholarly identity is very much on show for all three Icelanders. Unsurprisingly, intellectual pursuits and contacts predominated in Jón Sigurðsson's letters to his employers. He even hurried to excuse himself for not beginning work the day after his arrival in Stockholm by noting that since it was a Sunday 'and people here do not receive on Sundays, we began on Monday morning (the 7th) by presenting our introductions.'<sup>55</sup> Sigurðsson's reports to Rafn were almost wholly concerned with the details of how he had spoken with this or that archivist or professor, that he had gone through a particular collection, that he had transcribed such-and-such a manuscript and his impressions of it. 'We were there from the 10th to the 12th of August, and achieved so much that we got the Snorra Edda code written, with annotations and side-by-side, like the parchment', as he wrote after the Uppsala visit, 'quite a strange old codex from about 1300, not fully used in the published editions'.<sup>56</sup> Here is the scholarly antiquarian hard at work, diligently earning his wage.

Hannes Finnsson also gave over a great deal of space to the manuscripts he had viewed, transcribed, and taken notes on. He too met archivists, librarians, and professors, but unlike Sigurðsson there is no mention letters of introduction when he made contact with them. It is possible his position was rather different, having recently been offered an academic post in Paris, and having been in the running for the post of private tutor at the Danish court.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps he was already known to those interested in Icelandic manuscripts. The difference between the two was even more apparent in their visits to

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 31. Parties are described on every page.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>56</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 16.

<sup>57</sup> Jón Helgason, 'Hannes Finnsson', 28.

Uppsala. Academically, Finnsson felt more than qualified – he had taken his degree back in 1763 – and he was irritated by noisy students who continued to play backgammon when he paid a visit to one of the librarians there: ‘they showed not the least concern or consideration for my or others’ presence.’<sup>58</sup> Sigurðsson, on the other hand, who was still officially a student – in fact, he never took a degree – noted in almost complaining tones that far from meeting students in Uppsala when he was there, he met almost only professors.<sup>59</sup>

Hannes Finnsson was not only a theologian by training; it was undeniably his chosen professional identity. He made careful notes of where he attended divine service every Sunday throughout his journey, and often commented on the preaching in a tone of informed criticism. On 2 August in Riddarholm Church in Stockholm he heard, for example, ‘a learned but not particularly edifying sermon on Matt. 17’.<sup>60</sup> He singled out the sermon he attended in Uppsala cathedral for its ‘unheard of qualities’, but that was because ‘I could not follow it, which was because I sat far from the priest up by the choir’.<sup>61</sup> Finnsson occasionally allowed himself such small Rococo witticisms, which in itself serves to show that church was a fairly natural, everyday place for him.

Þorvaldur Thoroddsen was a well-known scientist, and all doors seem to have been open to him. At the geologist Gerard De Geer’s he learned photographic metrology, and at Gunnar Andersson’s peatland analysis; Dr Lindström showed him the Academy of Sciences’ mineralogical and zoological collections; the meteorologist Hildebrandsson showed him round Uppsala’s meteorological department. It was above all these kinds of scientific contact that he duly recorded. It is striking that there is not a word on Icelandic manuscripts, not even when he was shown round the university library in Uppsala, where he merely remarked on the Silver Bible.<sup>62</sup> Where Finnsson displayed a breadth of interest that included science and economics, by the end of the nineteenth century scholarship had been professionalized, and the scholarly self-image evinced in Thoroddsen’s text was more sharply delimited.

As already noted, Finnsson demonstrated the polymathic interest so typical of the eighteenth century by going on to visit Linnaeus’ farm at Hammarby outside Uppsala. Not only were Linnaeus’ garden and collections on the itinerary, an audience with Linnaeus himself would round off any learned traveller’s visit to Uppsala, and Linnaeus himself happily took on the role of guide and showed off his handiwork. Finnsson was taken round the gardens, was allowed to enter the little pavilion and see the collections, to a running commentary from Linnaeus, who dared to venture that no one else had such fine collections. Even Linnaeus’ daughters were part of the show, and Finnsson permitted himself the little joke that ‘neither are they excluded from *Systema naturæ*’. He characterized Linnaeus as ‘pleasant, but a little stubborn’, and was clearly proud that

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<sup>58</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 84. He believed that he had received a Danish scholarship on account of a positive review of his work in a Swedish journal (*ibid.* 69).

<sup>59</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 22.

<sup>60</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 62.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 81. The pun in the original reads ‘var við eina óheyrilega góða predikun, því ég heyrði ekkert’ (*Stokkhólmsrella*, 56).

<sup>62</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 30, 33, 36–37.

this eminent man wanted to converse with him about Iceland's climate.<sup>63</sup> To have seen and talked with Linnaeus was the true mark of the learned man.

Our three travellers' social positions seem largely to have been linked to their academic positions. Socially all three came from the educated middle classes, and viewed the social elite from a vantage point just below. It seems all three were pleased at their kind treatment at the hands of people who were their superiors in social rank, and at their fleeting contact with the royal family. Any contact they had with the general populace was barely noted, except when Finnsson had a run-in with some drunken soldiers at an inn in Stockholm. They had barged into his room and disturbed him as he sat working on the medieval Laws of Zealand, which was evidently an unpleasant experience.<sup>64</sup> Their slightly elevated social position as scholars was not without its contacts with the great and good, seems to have been an important element in all three travellers' self-images.

### Political beings

One might well ask whether in fact it was inherent to each of the three travellers' self-images to be a political being. After all, they came from a different country and a different political system. One might expect that this would have been particularly evident in the case of Jón Sigurðsson, given that the same year that his journal *Ný félagsrit* was first published he emerged as the champion of Icelandic development and home rule. Yet there are no direct political statements in his correspondence. (Here I do not include those features thought denotive of nationality, which I consider later in the discussion of national identity, and instead use the term politics in its most limited sense.)

As it was, Sigurðsson cannot but have noticed and pondered the Swedish political system. The ceremonial opening of Parliament, which took place during his visit to Stockholm, tempted him and his travelling companion away from their manuscripts for a while to go out to watch the procession from main church in Stockholm to the palace,<sup>65</sup> even if he did not think this worth mentioning in his letters, in which the convening of Parliament was only mentioned to explain why hotel rooms were expensive.<sup>66</sup> That he was indeed aware of politics was demonstrated by his concluding remarks in a letter to Páll Melsteð, omitted from the Swedish edition, where he wrote about the publication of *Ný félagsrit*, and wondered what the reception of the new society would be amongst the Icelanders.<sup>67</sup> His silence was partly because his journey had other purposes, of course, and these particular letters are unlikely to be the best source for his thoughts on the Swedish political system in relation to Danish absolutism and Danish rule in Iceland. Yet it is also a useful corrective to the standard picture of Sigurðsson as entirely given over to the fight for independence from the very first. True, he had recently begun to participate in student debates in Copenhagen over Iceland's future, and had produced the first issue of *Ný félagsrit*, in which he argued eloquently

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<sup>63</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 83.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 74.

<sup>65</sup> Friðriksson, *Sigurðsson*, 233.

<sup>66</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 12.

<sup>67</sup> Sigurðsson, *Bréf*, 40–41.

for greater Icelandic self-government,<sup>68</sup> but he was not yet the out-and-out politician he would become when the collapse of Danish absolutism in 1848 paved the way for wider change. His identity as an antiquarian competed with his political identity – indeed, one could argue that it would continue to do so throughout his life.<sup>69</sup>

Politics was also absent from Þorvaldur Thoroddsen's account, if one does not count a sudden diatribe on how 'socialism and cupidity' had 'wrongly placed all power in society in the hands of the uneducated' in Denmark, while 'the scientific and civil service class' still contrived to hold sway over Swedish society.<sup>70</sup> Such a comment seems more appropriate to the general situation when he was working on his memoirs, shortly after the First World War, than to the beginning of the 1890s. Otherwise, Thoroddsen gives no impression that politics was part of his self-image.

All the more unexpected, then, that politics should be so much in evidence in that bookish theologian Hannes Finnsson. To understand why one must bear in mind the tumultuous political events he witnessed in 1772. At the start of the year, Denmark's de facto ruler, Johan Friedrich Struensee, was overthrown in a palace coup that left a new group at court in control of royal absolutist power, which was formally exercised by the mentally ill Christian VII. Then in Sweden on 19 August, when Finnsson was in Stockholm, Gustav III seized power and ended the Age of Liberty by abolishing parliamentary rule. Finnsson himself drew parallels between the two events the very same day, noting that he had witnessed both.<sup>71</sup> He already had very particular views on Sweden's system of government. Even as he had left Helsingborg on the very first day of his journey he had noted that for the Swedish peasants 'the fact that each and every one believes themselves to have a part in the rule of the country makes them more bold, and at the same time nobler in manner than the repressed Danish peasantry.'<sup>72</sup> This should not necessarily be read as a purely political standpoint, since criticism of the Danish peasants' conditions and the manorial system was common in Denmark,<sup>73</sup> and they were thought of more as social and economic issues than political ones. Yet it is interesting that while Finnsson made a positive connection with the parliamentary representation lacked by all the estates in absolutist Denmark, when he arrived in Linköping, the only place in Sweden to elicit a series of negative remarks (a poor reception at the inn, perhaps), Sweden's then constitution seems to have counted for little with him. In the courtyard of the run-down castle were a hundred or so mileposts carved with the year 1756 still waiting to be erected, which Finnsson saw as 'evidence of a kind that the state was Republican, so that whatever was decided was not immediately put into effect'.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Sigurðsson's political views in the first issue of *Ný félagsrit* are discussed in detail in Jónas Jónsson, *Saga Íslendinga*, vii (Tímabilið, 1830–1874), 374–391.

<sup>69</sup> His entire working life was spent in preparing learned publications, for example a series of Icelandic sagas and the monumental *Lovsamling for Island*.

<sup>70</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 31.

<sup>71</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 70.

<sup>72</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 46.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Ole Feldbæk, *Danmarks historie*, iv: *Tiden 1730–1814* (Copenhagen, 1982), 154–158.

<sup>74</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 51. It is interesting that Finnsson turned to Danish or Latin words for such political phenomena; he writes in the original that the state was '*republicanskur*' ('*Stokkhólmsrella*', 23).

On 19 August Finnsson found himself in a tight corner: ‘As soon as the Council of the Realm had been arrested, the king’s absolute rule was proclaimed in the streets, and all the soldiery stood at the ready in Norrmalmstorg with rifles and cannons.’<sup>75</sup> It is a sign of his political insight that he immediately understood that it was a question of royal absolutism – a phrase that Gustav III understandably avoided in his official proclamations. Finnsson’s immediate reaction seems to have been to bewail the downfall of parliamentary rule. He thought the coup an outrage. ‘Oh! Such a terrible sight,’ he exclaimed, ‘to see a citizen, a brother, in a supposed time of peace take up arms.’ When the next day he made his way to his manuscripts at the Antikvitetskollegium (Board of Antiquities) in the royal palace, he was forced to ‘weave through cartridges, ramrods, and slow matches, and push my way past soldiers’. He wrote of an old man in one of the squares crying like a child as others cheered for the king, and he remarked that while many wore white armbands to show their support for the king, it was possible ‘that the heart does not always follow the armband’. His first reaction to the *coup d’état* thus seems to have been unequivocally negative.

Within a few days Finnsson seems to have performed a volte-face. He now wrote of the former regime’s ‘lawless effrontery’, of just how low the entire populace had sunk, and above all of his outrage that members of parliament ‘had let themselves be bought’. He made particular mention how the Caps had had their own treasurer to buy votes to the tune of 20,000 *daler* or more. It is obvious that Gustav III’s propaganda against the Age of Liberty’s political party system had reached Finnsson and made him change his mind. He now viewed the coup in positive terms, exclaiming that ‘however strongly the edifice of injustice seems walled about and founded, so in the fullness of time it will be swept away as chaff before the wind’.<sup>78</sup> It is as if he now saw God’s hand in Gustav III’s actions. Even if Finnsson initially felt a degree of sympathy for the Swedish parliamentary regime, he seems, like so many others, to have been swept along by enthusiasm for Gustav III, convinced by his propaganda; after all, having earlier seen the king in person at the meeting at the Academy of Sciences he had gone into raptures. What is interesting here is not the change of heart, but rather that fact that such political reflections were part of the self-image he chose to project. To be a subject in an absolutist state in no way excluded the possibility of holding political opinions; on the contrary, it seems to have been as much a part of an enlightened man’s repertoire as observations on how peasants harnessed their draught animals or aesthetic opinions on churches.

If anything certain can be said of Finnsson’s political identity, it is that it tended strongly to civism. His encounters with the armed forces mobilized on the streets of Stockholm after the royal coup were depicted in very negative terms. On several occasions he was startled by gun salutes celebrating the political revolution. Further, in reacting to the *coup d’état*, it was the threat of violence between citizens that held the greatest horror for him. It is almost symbolic of his position that, despite his fears, he made his way past the cannons and the soldiers to reach his beloved manuscripts. The pen was mightier than the sword for Hannes Finnsson.

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<sup>75</sup> Norrmalmstorg is one of the main squares in Stockholm.

<sup>76</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 70–1.

<sup>77</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 70–73.

<sup>78</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 75.

## Men

The travellers also had a gender identity, of course. This was particularly evident in Finnsson and Sigurðsson, who were travelling without wives – they had not yet married, and even if they had it was not then customary to take wives on that kind of journey. The contacts Sigurðsson mentions are exclusively with men, while Finnsson was much the same, although he very occasionally remarked on meeting prominent men's daughters or wives, whom he did not take with any great seriousness. Finnsson was also the one to be irritated when women encroached on the wrong milieu. In the vestibule of the Academy of Sciences there was a stall that sold 'women's gloves and women's hats, lace etc.', and even worse, 'strange as it seemed to me, within the very palace, where there is public way, there stands blazoned in letters of gold over a handsome glass door: Millinery.'<sup>79</sup> Jón Sigurðsson does not mention any women at all. He and his fellow traveller had heard Jenny Lind sing,<sup>80</sup> but characteristically Sigurðsson does not write of it in his letters. This is in stark contrast to all the men who figure with both name and rank in his reports to Rafn. The various antiquarian subjects attracted a wholly unisexual community of scholars in this period, which is hardly a surprise.

Come the 1890s and the scholarly world was still emphatically masculine, but women were more visible all the same. Travel had become easier, perhaps family life was more greatly valued, and it was becoming *comme il faut* for wives to accompany their husbands when they travelled. Thus Thoroddsen was accompanied by his wife Þóra, daughter of Iceland's then bishop, Pétur Pétursson. She had relatives in Stockholm whom they naturally visited, but apparently she also had her own interests. She was shown round Handarbetets vänner (the Association of Friends of the Textile Arts) and various institutes of housekeeping. She was on visiting terms with the Stockholm professors' wives, and 'was invited to a great many women's associations'.<sup>81</sup> Þóra seems to have been interested in the nascent middle-class women's movement, and she and Thoroddsen attended dinners both at the Monteliuses and the Retziuses, where the ladies of the house were known suffragettes – something Thoroddsen himself noted of Mrs Retzius. Þóra was also taken to Nya Idun, 'a society for art and science' specifically for women.<sup>82</sup>

It is interesting that Thoroddsen found it important to note these activities; he seems to have sympathized with the middle-class women's movement. At the same time it underlines his own masculine, scientific, professional identity. He noted that his wife visited weaving schools and housekeeping institutes 'in order that she always had sufficient to do while I was busy about one thing or another to do with geology or measurements.'<sup>83</sup> Perhaps one should say that his and his wife reinforced their mutual gender self-images. At the same time, he demonstrated himself to be an attentive husband; when he was not able to entertain his wife himself, he knew that she was being entertained by others. That said, it should be noted that the original wording runs 'so

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<sup>79</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 63. He gives it in Swedish – '*Galanteribod*' – in the original ('Stokkhólmsrella', 37).

<sup>80</sup> Friðriksson, *Sigurðsson*, 233–4.

<sup>81</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 33.

<sup>82</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 30, 33.

<sup>83</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 33.

that she always had sufficient to *starfa* [work on].<sup>84</sup> Admittedly, the word can mean ‘to be occupied with’ in a general sense, but it still conveys a greater sense of respect for her interests than is apparent from the Swedish, or indeed English, translation.

The masculine identity of the travellers was thus strongly connected to the scientific identity that was denied to women, although a small change should be noted. The vestibule of the Academy of Sciences was the last place for women to make their presence felt in 1772, even if to Finnsson’s horror there they were, hats and all, but in 1892 women were at least permitted their own ‘society for art and science’.

### **Icelanders – Danish and un-Danish**

Which notions of identity dependent on nation and nationality did our three travellers display? First and foremost it is their Icelandic identity that stands out, not least in how they chose their comparisons. Hannes Finnsson referred frequently to Icelandic conditions, which he assumed were both known and natural, and to which he contrasted differing Swedish conditions. In the northern parts of the province of Småland he noted: ‘Haycocks are the usage here, as in Iceland, but not stacks, however. ... The black moss on top is like that in Lyngdalsheiði.’<sup>85</sup> He snorted at the River Lagan, which was no wider than Ytri Rangá, and barely came to his knees.<sup>86</sup> And he used the expression *hraun*, lava-field, for rocky ground, the word his Swedish translator would fail to render accurately.

Finnsson’s Icelandic identity becomes even clearer whenever he felt called upon to defend Iceland. Clearly there was widespread derision that Icelanders lived in underground huts – which was undeniably one interpretation of their turf houses – which caused him to note on two separate occasions, in Småland and Uppsala, the existence of grass on the roofs of houses there as a sign that whatever the case may be, it was not only the Icelanders who lived underground.<sup>87</sup> In Uppsala he was drawn into an altercation with a bookseller who had read a travel account by Anderson, a Dutchman, that Icelanders viewed as a misleading and disparaging; Finnsson was ‘forced to engage in a *collegium politicum* against Anderson on Iceland, and it was I who emerged victorious from this battle royal.’<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, his pride over the Icelandic manuscripts in Sweden, and concern about their future – ‘*fata literaturæ Islandicæ in Svecia*’ – is further proof of his willingness to be seen to be Icelandic.<sup>89</sup>

For the future nationalist leader Jón Sigurðsson, on the other hand, there were few such contrasts to be made. The only time he drew a direct comparison with Icelandic conditions was in his letter to Páll Melsteð about the locks on the Göta Canal at Trollhättan, which, he noted, stretched further than ‘from Brekka southwards to Garðar’.<sup>90</sup> Even so, he was quite clearly an Icelander when he asks Rafn to forward any

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<sup>84</sup> Thoroddsen, *Minningabók*, 78.

<sup>85</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 49.

<sup>86</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 48. It may also refer to Eystri Rangá (for which see comments at *ibid.* 95).

<sup>87</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 48, 79.

<sup>88</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 81.

<sup>89</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 65.

<sup>90</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 22. It may be unexpected that he uses places in the relatively flat Álfтанes, but that was because Páll was priest there.

letters to him from his '*Landsmænd*' (compatriots), by which he meant Icelanders and not Danes.<sup>91</sup>

Just as conspicuous, however, were all the comparisons between Danish and Swedish conditions. References to Denmark sprang naturally to mind, as if self-evident both to the writers and their intended readers. 'Large and splendid buildings are more numerous here than in Copenhagen,' Finnsson announced, 'but none that can be compared with the new Frederick Town.'<sup>92</sup> The royal palace in Stockholm was larger than Christiansborg, wrote Sigurðsson; the palace of Drottningholm was like Frederiksberg, but bigger. Even the mine in Dannemora, where Sigurðsson was winched down in an early form of adventure tourism, was compared with Danish conditions: it was as wide as Gammeltorv, one of Copenhagen's squares, he wrote to his friend in Iceland.<sup>93</sup> Finnsson also made frequent references to Danish agricultural conditions, so that the soil around the city of Norrköping was said to be like that in Danish Zealand, and in the province of Östergötland there were large clearings in the woods – for a Dane perhaps the entire Östergötland plain might have appeared to be little more than 'clearings'.<sup>94</sup>

Both Finnsson and Sigurðsson evince a clear sense of affinity with the Danish state. Finnsson visited the Danish minister in Stockholm, Christian F. Güldenchrone, at his country seat at Steninge, and mentioned in passing that they were second cousins.<sup>95</sup> Sigurðsson wrote loyally to Rafn that he paid his first call to the Danish envoy in Stockholm, Christoffer Moltke.<sup>96</sup> In Finnsson's reactions to Gustav III's assumption of power, Danish–Norwegian considerations weighed heavily. He hoped the political revolution would be 'fortunate for the Swedes and not injurious to the Danes' – here using 'Danes' in a patently political sense to mean the Danish king's subjects, among whom he numbered himself. But Iceland was not Denmark, it was under Danish dominion: 'God save Denmark! God bless Iceland!' he exclaimed in the same context.<sup>97</sup>

A sense of community with the whole of Denmark–Norway can also be seen in the way, once in Stockholm, Finnsson sought out the company of the Anker brothers from Kristiania (now Oslo). The Ankers were one of the richest bourgeois families in Norway, and Carsten Anker would later maintain secret ties with Gustav III when a Norway under Swedish protection seemed possible; ultimately in 1814 he was the host of the constitutional assembly at his country house at Eidsvoll in Norway. Finnsson characterized Carsten Anker as 'a birch-bark sort', possibly using the reference to the *Birkebein* party of the thirteenth-century Norwegian civil war to indicate the nature of Carsten's political ambitions.<sup>98</sup> As early as 1772 there were rumours in Stockholm that Carsten Anker was in negotiations with Gustav III, which Finnsson may very well have heard about, but carefully avoided committing to paper with more than the barest of

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<sup>91</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 12.

<sup>92</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 57. Finnsson is referring to the district of Copenhagen then under construction, which became known as Frederiksstad.

<sup>93</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 21–2.

<sup>94</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 50–1.

<sup>95</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 77–2.

<sup>96</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 11.

<sup>97</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 82, 85. The latter outburst was in response to the rumours of 'mouvements' from Copenhagen, probably of a possible war to be waged by the neighbouring powers to prevent the establishment of stronger royal power in Sweden.

<sup>98</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 58–60.

hints.<sup>99</sup> In Uppsala, Finnsson met one Martin Vahl, a Norwegian who was studying with Linnaeus: ‘the only one from the Danish monarchy who is studying here now. ... We conversed at length, for it was a novelty for us both to meet one who was half a fellow countryman.’<sup>100</sup>

In Hannes Finnsson we thus meet a loyal and patriotic Danish subject, one who identified with the Danish conglomerate state of which he and his Icelandic countrymen were a part, as were the Norwegians. As for Jón Sigurðsson, he too appears a proper Danish subject, but none the less in his private correspondence there were glimpses of the future nationalist. On the way north to Stockholm he passed the naval base at Karlskrona, with its ‘fort in the bay with four hundred gun-barrels; a grand set of teeth bared at the Danes!’<sup>101</sup> Even if he was being jocular, it is at any rate clear that himself did not feel that he could be categorized as Danish.

Þorvaldur Þoroddsen lived through what was a more decidedly nationalist era, and for his part we find a very negative view of all things Danish when compared to Sweden. He even believed the winter weather to be better in Stockholm than in Copenhagen.<sup>102</sup> But, as ever, it was science that held his attention. Swedish scientists were more esteemed than their Danish colleagues, he declared. They had better salaries, and greater standing in public life. The Copenhagen public were only interested in the theatre and circuses, sport and fashionable literature; his certainty that cultural life in Copenhagen had been destroyed by the Socialists and materialism has already been mentioned.<sup>103</sup> We should also note that Þoroddsen, unlike Finnsson and Jón Sigurðsson, never mentioned the Danish ambassador in Stockholm, and probably never called on him. Considering the delight he took in moving in society, it is improbable that he would have omitted such a visit from his text.

The really interesting fact is that Þoroddsen was the only one of the three to cast Iceland in a negative light. There was not going to be much in the way of research, he wrote, ‘when one struggles on alone in a large country, almost without money and without the least assistance, with no means to acquire the essential instruments, no hope of printing maps and pictures,’ and where the response that met a scientist in intellectually lethargic Reykjavík was anything but sympathetic. ‘It is quite different in civilized countries,’ where there were institutions, equipment, and research communities.<sup>104</sup> Þoroddsen’s repudiation of Denmark – where, however, he had long been resident when he wrote his text – and his critical attitude towards Iceland accorded with a new Icelandic self-image, created by nationalism and the political movement that was calling for home rule and eventually independence. More specifically it reflected the time when he was writing, the 1910s,<sup>105</sup> more than the time of his actual visit to Stockholm. An increasingly heated national struggle had led, for example, to the foundation of a small university in 1911, and culminated in 1918 when Iceland became

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<sup>99</sup> Ole Feldbæk, *Danmark-Norge 1380–1814*, iv: *Nærhed og adskillelse* (Oslo, 1998), 196.

<sup>100</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 80; ‘Stokkhólmsrella’, 55.

<sup>101</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 21. In Icelandic he called the state ‘*Danaveldi*’ (‘Stokkhólmsrella’, 55).

<sup>102</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 32. Of course, he has a point.

<sup>103</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 30–1.

<sup>104</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 30.

<sup>105</sup> According to the editor, Bogi Th. Melsteð, they were largely written 1914–1918, with a number of additions until 1920 (Þoroddsen, *Minningabók*, unpaginated).

a sovereign state in a loose personal union with Denmark. Anti-Danish sentiment was widespread, and above all it was now possible to measure Iceland against ‘the civilized world’. A hundred or even fifty years earlier it would have been completely unrealistic to hope for scientific institutions and research milieus in Iceland, but now it was reasonable to complain that they had not yet been established.

Thoroddsen is here part of the formulation of a new Icelandic self-image. It was an optimistic time, a time for building the new, independent – and anything but Danish – nation.<sup>106</sup> Despite his age, one can sense in Thoroddsen the same ambitious plans and pioneering spirit as in any number of young men such as Halldór Laxness in literature, Guðjón Samúelsson in architecture, or Jón Leifs in music. The latter wrote from Leipzig to his parents in 1917, ‘I hate everything Danish. ... I hate the Danes even more having noticed that everyone here believes that we belong to Denmark (!!!).’<sup>107</sup>

This difference in their sense of identity vis-à-vis Danish identity is very clear if we compare the concluding passages of Finnsson’s and Thoroddsen’s travel accounts. Finnsson noted approvingly how ‘magnificence increases as one approaches Denmark’. In Helsingør he was evidently acquainted with the mayor, with whom he stayed, and the next day he arrived ‘happy and healthy in Copenhagen after a journey well done’. In finishing his account he could exclaim: ‘God be praised, Who now and always during this sojourn abroad has brought me safely through many dangers.’<sup>108</sup> Thoroddsen, on the other hand, gives no sense of having returned from a foreign journey when he simply stated that he and his wife arrived at Copenhagen at 6.16 in the afternoon. In his closing remarks he limited himself to the personal benefits of his ‘stay in Stockholm and Uppsala, since in both of these cities scientific life flourished and the intellectual vitality was altogether much greater than in Copenhagen, and took very different forms.’ Finnsson was arriving home when he reached Denmark; Thoroddsen was returning to a place he disliked. In this way the two travellers reflect 150 years’ evolution in Icelandic identity.

### **Encounters, diverse identities, and a remarkable light-weight sledge**

It was in their encounters along the way with things new and different that the three travellers formulated their self-images, more specifically in the process of writing down their impressions and relating them to others. Yet it was not necessarily a matter of one single identity, nor yet of a consistent and coherent way of experiencing oneself and all that was foreign. Doubtless it would be possible to find certain recurring patterns, and perhaps a larger number of sources would make it possible to chart a ‘Suecia-ism’ of sorts in Icelandic views on Sweden, similar to the Orientalism in European views on Asia. Yet in this study I have instead chosen to demonstrate how a close reading of a limited number of sources lends itself to a focus on the ‘tentative, multiple and

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<sup>106</sup> See, for example, Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, *Ísland á 20. Öld* (Reykjavík, 2003), 81–85, for how the Parliament’s jubilee in 1930 elicited a particular rhetoric and retrospective of the recent decades, which were thought to have witnessed an immense changes in the nation.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Carl-Gunnar Åhlén, *Jón Leifs. Kompositör i motvind* (Stockholm, 2002), 72, translated from the German by Åhlén.

<sup>108</sup> *Stockholmsrella*, 89–91.

<sup>109</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 38.

contingent' nature of identity, as Wilson would have it. Like Mellberg's and Davies's travellers, these three Icelanders appear in various, partly overlapping guises. They were all to a greater or lesser extent travellers, tourists, scientists, political beings, gendered beings, Danish subjects, and Icelanders. Certain self-images impinged on one another, as when Hannes Finnsson during his journey through Sweden made a number of learned observations, or when Þorvaldur Thoroddsen's sightseeing was limited to taking in the museums he had a research interest in visiting. And to be a scholar was largely to be a man; indeed, when it came to Jón Sigurðsson the masculinity of it all is so total that not a single woman is mentioned in any of his letters.

Other self-images were more discrete. What could be called ethnic identity as an Icelander or political identity as a Danish subject did not necessarily have much to do with being a scientist or a man. Yet it was not completely ruled out, as when, for example, political observations were framed in terms of national affiliation: coming from an absolutist state meant for Finnsson that he viewed parliamentary representation as something noteworthy. Neither did the self-images have to be consistent. This was at its clearest in Hannes Finnsson, since he made his notes as he went, and because he experienced the dramatic close of the Age of Liberty, when his own opinions changed in the course of events; yet perhaps one can also make out an anomaly in the picture of Jón Sigurðsson, who in the standard histories is always presented as a thorough-going politician, but here primarily appears as a learned antiquarian. Of course, it is not news that he had such interests – he later put them to considerable use in the service of the nationalist struggle – but perhaps one ought to place greater weight on the fact that he long had the prospect of a scholarly career.

This assortment of individual self-images can also, when set in a historical context, say something about the evolution of Icelandic identity in general. That Finnsson and Sigurðsson express identities both as Icelanders and Danish subjects is not inconsistent. To have one specific ethnic identity while being a subject in a state dominated by another ethnic identity was more the rule than the exception in conglomerate-state Europe. It was rarely a source of difficulty before the rise of modern nationalism, and likewise in Finnsson is held to be something completely natural. Here again it is striking that Sigurðsson, the future nationalist leader, does not display anything more than the faintest signs of a distinction between Danish and Icelandic identity.

Things were very different for Þorvaldur Thoroddsen. Icelandic nationalism had gained momentum and was making political headway by his time. His encounter with Sweden elicited frequently negative comparisons with Denmark. But it also led him to criticize Iceland. In this respect I would argue that his views rather reflect conditions when he was writing his memoirs, at the time of the realization of Icelandic independence in 1918, rather than the early 1890s. It was then, and only then, that it was possible to write critically of the lack of scholarly institutions; only then that there was an element of realism in the hope they would soon be established. It has thus proved fruitful to study identities in the not-so-very foreign encounters described in these travel accounts, to see these identities as multi-faceted and changeable, and to view them in a specific context. I put it that it is possible to capture some of what Wilson calls 'the processual, embedded nature of identity'

Its 'embeddedness' is evident here not least in the way the three men travelled with their preconceived ideas as Icelanders, tourists, scientists, and so on, seeing pretty much what

they expected to see, or distorting what they saw so that it fitted in their frames of reference. This is the very reason we can use their texts as a source for their self-images. And this is why there is good reason to let the lava-fields – *hraunin* – of Östergötland alone, and not insist on calling them ‘stony ground’.

Yet sometimes the encounters were so confusing that there were no words to describe them in their own tongue. This is how Þorvaldur Thoroddsen described a wintry Stockholm: ‘The children amused themselves with tobogganing and throwing snowballs; some had odd, narrow sledges with runners that projected far behind, the boy standing on the one runner and pushing along on the snow with the other foot, and in this way attaining considerable speeds.’<sup>110</sup> This ‘*einkennilegur ljettsleði*’<sup>111</sup> (‘remarkable light-weight sledge’) was of course nothing more than a common or garden Swedish *sparkstötting* or kick-sledge. The scientist in him demanded that he summon himself to an exact description that would convey the full strangeness of the object to his intended readers. To be an Icelander was to be ignorant of what a kick-sledge was.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> *Två isländska Sverigebesök*, 32.

<sup>111</sup> Thoroddsen, *Minningabók*, 76.

<sup>112</sup> Having written this I happened to see a picture by the American photographer Samuel Kadorian, who travelled in Iceland during the Second World War – a photograph that shows children in Reykjavík on kick-sledges (published in Þórarinn Guðnason, ‘Stríðsárin í myndum. Samuel Kadorian og ljósmyndir hans frá Íslandi’, *Saga* 46:2 (2008), 228). Apparently kick-sledges had been introduced to Iceland at some point between the early twentieth century and the Second World War, and had acquired what they had lacked in Þorvaldur Thoroddsen’s time, an Icelandic name: *skíðasleði*. Whether this had repercussions for Icelandic identity remains an open question.