A Life in Stones

The Material Biography of a 17th Century Peasant from the Southern Highlands of Iceland

Kristján Mímisson

Dissertation towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2020

UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

A Life in Stones

The Material Biography of a 17th Century Peasant from the Southern Highlands of Iceland

Kristján Mímisson

Ritgerð lögð fram til doktorsprófs

University of Iceland
School of Humanities
Department of History and Philosophy
March 2020

Sagnfræði og heimspekideild Háskóla Íslands
hefur metið ritgerð þessa hæfa til varnar
við doktorspróf í fornleifafræði

Reykjavík, 13. desember 2019

Sverrir Jakobsson
varadeildarforseti

Department of History and Philosophy
at the University of Iceland
has declared this dissertation eligible for a defence
leading to a Ph.D. degree in Archaeology

Doctoral Committee:
Gavin Lucas, supervisor
Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon
Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir

A Life in Stones: The Material Biography of a 17th Century Peasant from the Southern Highlands of Iceland

ISBN 978-9935-9491-6-5

Printing: Háskólaprent

To my children, Stella, Símon and Karen, who endured

Abstract

Every person's life can be approached from various angles. Biographies are thus never complete narratives that tell entirely of a person's life—all the events occurred, all the relations entered, all the emotions sensed, or all the opinions uttered—but are very fragmentary and selective, always incomplete and partial.

Biography, as an analytical concept, has found its way into the academic discourse of various disciplines and it has as well entered the scope of archaeology and material culture studies. There it has become accustomed to deal with material biographies or the biographies of objects in terms of their processual career, i.e. the journey of things through their lifetime, from creation to desolation and often back to a new life through research and conservation. Such material biographies, that often draw upon Kopytoff's notion of the *Cultural Biography of Things*, tend to focus on the multiple meanings of things and their temporality, their standing and esteem and how all this may change through time. Hence, these studies have preferred to discuss things in terms of their meaning, or how we can approach the essence of human thought and actions through the analyses of the everchanging meaning of things. The preference given to mind over matter has led to a call for a less anthropocentric view on the bonds between humans and things arguing that the relations are of an equal standing where both humans and things make a contribution to the emergence of societies, events, actions and persons alike.

This dissertation aims at locating biography within such a network of humans and things. In it I argue for a biography in terms of a re-membering of biographical presences which are the surviving residues of the past assemblages that built the persona. The persona is thus a multi-temporal being whose composite elements are not only human including cognition, consciousness, self-awareness, intuition and intention, but also material, as all aspects of the persona, not only its individual body, but also its actions, practices and identities are materially constituted. In this sense biography is not merely a narrative created *a posteriori* but in fact the very essence of the persona and its existence, evoked by its material relations. Thus, biographies are not something we create on top of the sources but emerge out of the biographical presences at hand. Hence, biographies describe the process of the re-membering of assemblages, that built the persona.

In this thesis I introduce a theoretical approach to material assemblages that I call *Singularized Archaeology*. It draws in particular upon a microhistorical framework termed *The Singularization of History*. It is a critique on the academic condition that has been guided by grand narratives, leading the questions posed, the methods applied and the outcomes alike. Moreover, Singularized Archaeology leans towards ideas about the partibility of the persona

and its material circulation that have found resonance within archaeology. But in particular, it relies on approaches such as Actor-Network-Theory and Object-Oriented-Ontology that have had an essential influence on the recent turn to things and the notion of the "new social".

The empirical part of this work is based on the results from an archaeological excavation at Búðarárbakki in the district of Hrunamannahreppur in Southern Iceland. The excavation revealed a house of a very small passageway type. The place is mentioned in the Land Register from 1703 where it is stated that an old and quirky man by the name of Þorkell lived there for a decade in the later 17th century. I argue that he lived there only seasonally earning revenues by producing perforated stone tools, in particular stone hammers. The archaeological assemblage together with the scanty historical sources are the biographical presences of this particular peasant. They build up the persona and construct its identities together with the materiality of the archaeological research process itself. The material from Búðarárbakki is in most aspects small, ordinary and unimpressive. It fits perfectly into the larger scheme of grand narratives of the 17th century society in Iceland, for example about the architectural development, subsistence and social structure. A singularized perspective on the material at hand and detailed analyses of the practices and relations the material brought by, reveals however an alternative view on the assemblages including the material relations of the persona.

The persona of Þorkell at Búðarárbakki was propelled by building activities and the craft of stone perforation. These practices were not only induced by the human cognition and intentionality but as well directed by the materials involved. In this sense, the stones built up an inherent part of Þorkell's persona as they were invested in the identity of the craftsman. Þorkell had to adapt to the stones in his daily activities and they supported the human by means of their materiality, creating a composite persona of human and non-human attributes. His material relations endowed Þorkell at Búðarárbakki with life, in the same manner as the stone themselves, through their human relations, acquired life.

Ágrip

Líf sérhverrar persónu má skoða frá mismunandi sjónarhornum. Þess vegna eru ævisögur aldrei og fullkomnar frásagnir sem segja frá lífinu í heild sinni—öllum atburðum, samböndum, tilfinningum og skoðunum—heldur eru þær brotakenndar og sérvaldar, einatt ófullkomnar og í hlutum.

Ævisagan, sem fræðihugtak, hefur rutt sér leið inn í fræðilega orðræðu hinna ýmsu sviða og hefur hún jafnframt fundið sér farveg innan fornleifafræði og efnismenningarfræða. Þar hefur skapast sú hefð að fjalla um efnislegar ævisögur eða ævisögur hluta í ljósi þróunarferils þeirra, þ.e.a.s. í ljósi ferðalags hluta frá sköpun til eyðileggingar og aftur til nýs lífs í gegnum rannsóknir og varðveislu. Í slíkum efnisævisögum, sem einkum vísa í hugmyndir Kopytoffs um menningarævisögu hluta (e. *Cultural Biography of Things*); hefur áhersla verið lögð á margbreytilega merkingu þeirra og stundarveruleika (e. *temporality*), hvaða stöðu og virðingu hlutir hafa og hvernig þessir þættir breytast í tímans rás. Þess konar rannsóknir taka einkum á merkingu hluta eða hvernig við getum nálgast eðli og kjarna mannlegrar hugsunar og atferlis með rannsóknum á síbreytilegri merkingu þeirra. Áherslan á hið huglæga umfram hið efnislega hefur leitt til þess að kallað hefur verið eftir nýrri sýn á sambandi manna og hluta. Þetta nýja sjónarhorn er síður mannhverft (e. *anthropocentric*) en dregur fram samhverfa eiginleika í sambandi manna og hluta og metur aðild þeirra að tilurð og viðhaldi samfélaga, atburða, einstakra gjörða og persóna til jafns að verðleikum.

Þessi doktorsritgerð miðar að því að staðsetja ævisöguformið innan netverks manna og hluta líkt og hér hefur verið lýst. Í ritgerðinni held ég því fram að ævisagan byggist á endurheimt (e. *re-membering*) ævisögulegrar nærveru (e. *presence*) sem samanstendur af eftirlifandi leifum þess safns sem mótaði persónuna. Þannig er persónan fjölstundleg (e. *multi-temporal*) vera, samsett úr þáttum sem eru ekki aðeins mennskir, svo sem hugsun og vitsmunir, meðvitund og sjálfskennd, innsæi og fyrirætlan, heldur líka efnislegir, enda er allt það sem lýtur að persónunni efnislega mótað. Þetta á til jafns við um líkama einstaklingsins sem og gjörðir persónunnar, iðju hennar og vitund. Í þessu ljósi er ævisagan ekki aðeins frásögn, sem er samin eftir á, heldur í raun kjarni persónunnar sjálfrar og tilvistar hennar, dregin fram í gegnum hennar efnislegu tengsl. Ævisögur eru því ekki eitthvað sem við sköpum utanum heimildirnar, heldur rís hún upp innan úr sinni ævisögulegu nærveru (e. *biographical presence*). Ævisagan lýsir ferli sem felur í sér endurheimt safna sem byggðu og mótuðu persónuna.

Í þessari doktorsritgerð kynni ég til sögunnar kennilega nálgun á efnislegum söfnum sem ég kalla einvædda fornleifafræði (e. *Singularized Archaeology*). Þessi hugmynd byggir sérstaklega á einsögulegri (e. *microhistorical*) hugmyndafræði sem kallast einvæðing sögunnar

(e. *The Singularization of History*). Hún var sett fram sem gagnrýni á stöðu fræðilegrar orðræðu sem hefur verið leidd áfram af stórsögu og stýrt bæði spurningum, aðferðum og niðurstöðum. Einvædd fornleifafræði styðst jafnframt við hugmyndir um sundrungu persónunnar og hvernig henni er efnislega dreift en slíkar hugmyndir hafa notið ákveðinnar hylli innan fornleifafræði. Einkum styðst hún þó við hugmyndir svo sem Actor-Networ-Theory og Object-Oriented-Ontology sem hafa haft grundvallar áhrif á nýlegt afturhvarf til hlutarins og hugmyndir um "hið nýja félagslega" (e. *new social*).

Rannsóknin sem hér er sagt frá byggir á niðurstöðum fornleifauppgraftar á Búðarárbakki í Hrunamannahreppi. Uppgröfturinn þar leiddi í ljós afar lítinn gangabæ. Staðarins, Búðarárbakka, er jafnframt getið í Jarðabókinni frá 1703 þar sem fram kemur að gamall og einrænn maður að nafni Þorkell hafi búið þar í um áratug á síðar hluta 17. aldar. Ég held því fram að þar hafi hann aðeins búið árstíðabundið og aflað sér tekna með framleiðslu gataðra steinverkfæra, einkum steinsleggja. Fornleifasafnið, ásamt þessum fábrotnu rituðu heimildum, eru hin ævisögulega nærvera þessa ákveðna kotbónda. Persónan og vitund hennar eru samsettar úr þessum heimildum, samhliða því efnisvæðingarferli sem felst í rannsóknarverkefninu sjálfu. Efniviðurinn frá Búðarárbakka er að mörgu leyti mjög venjulegur og lítt eftirtektarverður. Þannig fellur hann í raun mjög vel að söguþræði stórsögunnar um íslenskt samfélag á 17. öld, til dæmis hvað varðar byggingarsögulega þróun, viðurværi og samfélagsgerð. Með því aftur á móti að einvæða sjónarhornið á efniviðinn og kanna í þaula þær athafnir, sambönd og tengsl sem efnismenningin leiðir í ljós, getum við öðlast nýja sýn á safnið, þar með talið á efnisleg tengsl persónunnar.

Persóna Þorkels á Búðarárbakki var drifin áfram af húsbyggingu og viðhaldi húsa auk handverks sem fólst í götun steina. Þessu atferli var ekki aðeins stýrt af mannlegu hugviti og fyrirætlan heldur líka af efnislegum hlutum sem þátt tóku í verkefninu. Á þennan hátt voru steinarnir eðlislægur hluti persónu Þorkells enda lögðu þeir til vitundar þessa 17. aldar handverksmanns. Í sínum daglegu athöfnum varð Þorkell að laga sig að steinunum sem í efnisveruleika sínum veittu mannlegum þáttum persónunnar stuðning og mynduðu samsetta persónu með bæði mennskum og ómennskum einkennum. Með sambandi sínu við steinana var Þorkeli á Búðarárbakka veitt líf, á sama hátt og steinarnir sjálfir, í gegnum sín mennsku sambönd, öðluðust líf.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is about the constitution of the persona and how its biography emerges through things. It draws among others on the idea of the continuous recombination of assemblages including both human and non-human attributes. A doctoral thesis is exactly such an assemblage that owes its existence to the relationship of many, both people and things. Therefore, this thesis, that I claim my own, and for which I aim at earning some merits, is not my work alone but has come into being through the enchainment of various people and things. I owe gratitude to them all.

Firstly, I owe thanks to my supervisor, Gavin Lucas, who never gave up on me but demonstrated patience, even in the seemingly most desperate situations. The same applies to Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir, members of the doctoral committee. Both of them were a valuable inspiration for me throughout the whole project as well as providing me with the necessary critique and provision. I am in particular thankful to Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon for stepping in at a very critical moment, suggesting and initiating changes that were absolutely vital for the progression of the dissertation.

Furthermore, I am indebted to many within the University of Iceland, in particular to Margrét Guðmundsdóttir, project manager at the Centre for Research in the Humanities for the tolerance she showed me. I was also very lucky to enjoy events of both Dialogues with the Past (Dialpast), the Nordic Graduate School in Archaeology and the Danish Graduate School in Archaeology. These events were absolutely crucial for the development of my dissertation as it offered me the necessary community of postgraduate students with whom I debated and shared ideas as well as access to a number of senior lecturers from around the world that gave interesting comments on my work, and so helped me progress.

The fieldwork at Búðarárbakki was like any other archaeological endeavour a co-production of many. A group of 15 archaeologists and anthropologists as well as students of archaeology from the University of Iceland and the University of Hamburg participated in the excavation and the post-excavational work. I need to thank all them for their invaluable contribution and enjoyable time together at Búðarárbakki. They are: Brynhildur Baldursdóttir, Böðvar Þór Unnarsson, Dagný Arnarsdóttir, Guðbjörg Melsted, Janet Mitchel, Jóhann Gunnarsson Robin, Jonathan Nekes, Jóna Kristín Ámundadóttir, Óskar Leifur Arnarsson, Sandra Sif Einarsdóttir, Sigrún Antonsdóttir, Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson, Sonja Schäfer, Stefan Wellmer and Ulla Weichlein. I am as well grateful to Ísólfur Gylfi Pálmason, the former municipal manager of the district of Hrunamannahreppur, and Hannibal Kjartansson, utilities manager of Hrunamannahreppur, for their support throughout the fieldwork at Búðarárbakki.

Finally, I owe eternal gratitude to my friend and colleague, Bjarni F. Einarsson, who not only introduced me to Búðarárbakki but also gave me his permission to use this site for my doctoral research. His continuous support and interest in all my works, including how his company, The Archaeological Office (*Fornleifafræðistofan*), maintained the excavation, is the sheer reason for me being an archaeologist today.

And last, but certainly not least, I am indebted to my family, especially my three children, Stella, Símon and Karen who suffered and had to bear with me for overly long time. Yet without them, all of this would have been absolutely meaningless.

Funding

Everything costs money and I stand in great dept to all those who helped me finance this project. They are: The Eimskip Fund of the University of Iceland (*Háskólasjóður Eimskipafélags Íslands*), The Icelandic Archaeology Fund (*Fornleifasjóður*), Iceland's Energy Transmission System (*Landsnet hf.*), the district of Hrunamannafreppur, and The Archaeological Office (*Fornleifafræðistofan*).

Contents

Part II
Main Theme

Part III
Final Cadenza

List of figures

Singularization of the Past: the history and archaeology of the small and ordinary

Building Identities: the architecture of the persona

Twisted Lives: On the Temporality and Materiality of Biographical Presences

List of tables

Part I

Prelude

Concerning the character of this work

A study is a matter of process. The Latin etymological origin of the word itself, ‘studere’, means to work intensively on something which implies that something is under way, something is about to be unravelled. A study describes the interesting course of events when solutions to problems are being worked out or as the elaboration of enlightening answers to intriguing questions. It implies the procedure of the work or *how* new knowledge is accumulated. There is nothing straightforward about a study. It is a winding road with a number of blind alleys and detours. Nonetheless, we normally encounter studies or academic research as something very precise, fix and invariant, definite and unequivocal. We often sense little process in the works delivered, be that a postgraduate dissertation, a scholarly paper, or an academic talk. We seldom hear about the devious off-road journeys of a study or the many times a scholar comes to a dead end in the development of arguments.

It is, however, not my intention to dwell on this point or add something new to this discussion. I start my dissertation by reflecting on this condition of scholarship because I need to explain the career of my own work, the path it has taken through the years and the outcome presented in these texts. This dissertation has, like any other academic work, during its process of becoming, been through manifold turns, revisions and alterations, and one might argue that it has only a faint resemblance with the ideas and intentions I set out with in the very beginning. Furthermore—and this is perhaps the most important thing that I have learned—a doctoral thesis or for that matter any other academic publication is not, and never can be, a finished, complete, monolithic product that contains all the answers to the problems and questions posed. A scholarly work is more akin to a music score. A composer certainly writes his music with a fully formed idea and intention of how it is supposed to be performed and sound. Yet each performance, be that in the solitude of the musician’s home or in front of an audience in the concert hall, gives birth to new hues and sonorities and variations in rhythm and tempo. A score is a means to an end not an end in itself. It does not stand for itself but depends upon continuous reruns and reinterpretations.

I would like to visualize my work in terms of a score, of sheet music. Thus, I have chosen musical captions, i.e. *prelude, main theme* and *final cadenza*, for the individual parts of this work. One may find it affected or pretentious, but to me it has been a necessary reminder of parting with the idea of completeness and valuing the directive manner of the thesis. I would like to present this work as a theme to which I, and hopefully others as well, can add new variations. And as with music, each new act questions earlier performances through its

reinterpretation and revitalization. If I can inspire people to continue to play on the theme given in this thesis, I feel that I have succeeded.

The main theme of this dissertation is like a suite or a compound of three almost independent melodies, previously published texts in international academic journals (Mímisson, 2012; 2016; Mímisson & Magnússon, 2014). Yet they are thematically and tonally interrelated as they are all born out of a research excavation that I conducted between 2005 and 2009 at Búðarárbakki in the upper parts of the district of Hrunamannahreppur in Southern Iceland. Hence, the site, the material remains and the individual responsible for it, build up the focal point of this work. The three papers are intended to reflect different facets of the research project. Put together they demonstrate the project from the theoretical outset to the ideological conclusion. The papers are enfolded by texts that aim to educe the common thread presented in the papers and the doctoral work as a whole. The prelude frames the idea of biography, including a concise synopsis of the use of the category of biography within archaeology. Furthermore, the prelude aims at setting the scene for the papers by illuminating the fieldwork at Búðarárbakki, its progression and findings. The final cadenza sums up the discussion and looks out for possibilities this work may lead up to in the future.

The first paper, *Singularizing the Past: the history and archaeology of the small and ordinary* (Mímisson & Magnússon, 2014), was published in June 2014, in the *Journal of Social Archaeology*. It deals with the basic theoretical stance of this thesis that derives from a critique of the condition of social history set forth by the microhistorian, Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, beginning more than fifteen years ago (Magnússon, 2003; 2006; Magnússon & Szijártó, 2013). Under the caption of *The Singularization of History* Magnússon has argued that grand narratives have dominated all aspects of research; questions, methods and outcomes alike. Thus, social history has failed to present the history of common people on their own terms (Magnússon, 2003: 701). The Singularization of History aims at avoiding the pitfalls of the grand narratives by focusing on the details and nuances of the material at hand and the narrative possibilities that lie within it. In the paper we try this particular train of thought in relation to material culture introducing an approached tagged *Singularized Archaeology*. We apply it to a dominant feature of the artefact assemblage at Búðarárbakki, the so-called stone hammers. The outcome is a story—a partial biography—that in various ways defies the grand narrative about settlement, household production and farming of the later 17th century in Iceland.

In the second paper, which is titled *Building Identities: the architecture of the persona* (Mímisson, 2016), published in the *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* in March 2016, I move the perspective from the artefacts to the archaeological structures at Búðarárbakki. Applying the idea of Singularized Archaeology, developed in the previous paper, I elaborate on the discrepancy between the homogeneity of architectural design and the variability of personalized practices manifested in the material remains. I argue for a change of perspective on architecture, i.e. from the two-dimensional preconceived design towards the notion of

architecture that is a continuous process subjected to the materials used, methods applied as well as personal intentions and aims. The singularized approached affords a gaze into the personal biography and identity of the peasant at Búðarárbakki from the vantage point of a rather generalized and homogeneous material.

The third paper that I submit to this dissertation is titled *Twisted lives: on the temporality and materiality of biographical presences*. It was published in the *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* in September 2012. In it I work on the idea of biographical presences and shared biographies from the perspective of Heideggerian phenomenology. Instead of regarding biographies as the processual narrative of a person, conceived in the bodily circumscription of the individual, I argue for a biography that survives through the presence of material culture. Things not only stand in for lives long gone but participate in the career of past peoples. Therefore, they add new aspects of materiality and temporality to biography and the constitution of the persona that are otherwise left unnoticed.

The category of biography builds up the fundamental connection between the previously published papers—it is the common thread that runs through the work as a whole. This, of course, calls for a logical question: what kind of biography applies to the material culture that this research rests upon? The following chapter will elaborate on the idea of biography within archaeology and material culture studies in general and work on some of the different ways it has been used and theorized. I will present my critique of the more conventional view on biography as well as addressing how I aim to counter this stance within this dissertation.

References

Magnússon SG (2003) The Singularization of History: Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge. *Journal of Social History* 36(3): 701–735.

Magnússon SG (2006) Social History as “Sites of Memory”? The Institutionalization of History: Microhistory and the Grand Narrative. *Journal of Social history* 39(3): 891–913.

Magnússon SG and Szijártó IM (2013) *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Mímisson K (2012) Twisted Lives: On the Temporality and Materiality of Biographical Presences. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 16: 455–471.

Mímisson K (2016) Building Identities: The Architecture of the Persona. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 20: 207–227.

Mímisson K and Magnússon SG (2014) Singularizing the past: The history and archaeology of the small and ordinary. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 14(2): 131-156.

The life of biography and its materialization

The category of biography has over the years generated a flourishing corpus of scholarly literature. It has not only been delimited to the genre of literary studies or history but has also entered the scope of various other academic disciplines that have made use of the concept in numerous ways, besides from telling the stories of certain prominent figures. This would include psychology (Garraty, 1954; Runyan, 2003), anthropology (Langness, 1965; Langness & Frank, 1981; Okely & Callaway, 1992), sociology (Shantz, 2009;), and criminology (Goodey, 2000; Shaw, 1930) only to mention a few. Furthermore, archaeology has not been left untouched by the 'biographical turn' as the recent wave of academic interest has been termed (e.g. Chamberlayne et al., 2000; Renders et al., 2017).

Recurrently we have witnessed a debate about the primary object of study within archaeology. What is archaeology about? Is it about the thing-in-itself or the people, the makers and users of things, or the overarching social context—the system behind the Indian behind the artefact—as Flannery (1967: 120) famously framed it? Regardless of our stance towards this debate it should be unequivocal that the abovementioned issues—material culture, humans, as well as societies and cultures generated by humans and things—are all, in one way or another, a part of the archaeological project. Thus, archaeology involves the people of the past including their life histories, origins, fate and fortune.

So, archaeology addresses peoples' lives, both in groups and individual persons, and their biographies. And, archaeologists have dealt with the category of biography in their research, although few have pondered over the concept itself. What is biography? How is it composed? Isn't it just one of these terms that are so crystal clear that it needs no further definition or explanation? The word itself, biography, seems quite transparent and its etymology makes it easy to understand. It is put together by the words *bios* (e. life) and *graphia* (e. writing), which stem from Greek and Latin. Thus, *life writing* would be the direct translation. Still, the translation is perhaps not that straightforward. The term graphia has a much wider reference then to writing. It combines the notion of documenting, recording and describing as commonly seen in the academic taxonomy (e.g. ethnography, geography, choreography or photography). Thus, a much better translation would be life narrative in order to acknowledge other forms of relating than just the written word. Scrutinizing the first part of the word is also necessary because the life that bios refers to has a very specific meaning. In this etymological combination bios represents the career or *Werdegang* of a person, its social or political life, and so stands in opposition to *zoe* indicating animal or organic life (Agamben, 1995: 9).

Interestingly, today's biographies are seldomly formatted by that strict distinction between zoe and bios. They are generally seen as linear narratives with a clear and definite beginning and ending—from birth to death or creation to destruction—thus, maintaining its emphasis on the social life (bios) within the framework of its bare life (zoe; cf. Agamben, 1995). This general view on biographies disregards somewhat the variability in biographical representations. Hence, biography has both been regarded in terms of singular life histories that describe the particularities or uniqueness of a single subject as well as generalized master narrative of certain stereotypes or forms of living. Biographies may be processual narratives that retell the career of a particular subject from birth to death or parallel narratives that set two or more careers up against each other as a comparison of similar circumstances in life and their biographical development. Biographies can be an interesting auto-narrative, a reflection of a subject on itself and its career, or it is an account by an outsider maintaining a distance to the biographee, i.e. the biographical subject. Biographies may claim for a narrative completeness, although they are always selective, fragmentary and incomplete. No life cycle can be documented in such a detail that it fulfils the ambitions of completeness nor are any sources of a life history, be that textual, oral or material data, unequivocal to the extent that they are free from multiple interpretation and alternative biographies (Fowler, 2004: 1; Magnússon, 2004: 347). Furthermore, biographies may be variously costumed. Some are dressed as fictions leaving margins for creativity, narrative play and intuition, whereas others stick to the sources, following them meticulously and claiming to present the facts of life under consideration. Yet, whatever the narrative approach, there is always a tight bond between the biographee and the biographer as the biographical subject is never a marked off entity without references to other persons, things or places, but is always enmeshed with others in a multi-temporal context.

Plutarch's *Lives of Noble Greeks and Romans* is generally regarded as the very origin of biographical writing at the turn of the first century A.D. These are stories that contemplate biography to some extent as shared between persons as they are set up as Greek-Roman parallels, clearly affected by Plutarch's ancient Greek notion of the fundamental difference between bios and zoe. Hence, the emphasis is on the comparison of persons and their characterizations rather than the chronological accounts of the individual life processes. For instance, Plutarch argues that Brutus' betrayal of Julius Caesar or Dion's rebellion against Dionysus the Younger in Syracuse should be considered in terms of their Platonian upbringing: "They came from the selfsame school … nor need we wonder that the performance of actions allied and akin" (Plutarch, 1932: 1155). Whatever, the comparative approach, Plutarch regards the life processes of his leading actors in quite straightforward terms and inflexible. His biographies are thus a kind of master narratives illustrating certain categories of life histories.

The category of biography also is interestingly intertwined with archaeology in general, although it has not always been acknowledged or directly commented on. One might claim that the very art of typology and seriation involves a certain notion of a material culture biography,

to wit from the traditional perspective that regards biography as the developmental account of a subject from its creation to dissolution. Objects emerged, passed through various developmental stages, and finally deceased after having given birth to new forms and stylistic features. Hence, the developmental career of things created the basic means of societal interpretation within culture-historic archaeology and participated in giving rise to cultures and societies as well as concluding them.

The notion of life history in relation to material culture was also included into the processual program. It was not least an integral part of Behavioral Archaeology from the early 1970s and onwards (LaMotta & Schiffer, 2001: 21; Schiffer, 1976; Skibo and Schiffer, 2008: 9–10), included into the notion of behavioral chains and chaîne opératoire analyses.

Notwithstanding, it wasn't until the 1980s that biography became a concept more widely implemented in the archaeological discourse or material culture studies in general. Pioneering works in this field were Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) *The Meaning of Things*, a study of the materialization of the home and how we shape our most intimate surroundings with things and how things within the domestic sphere are awarded with meaning and value. The authors launched their book by underscoring the reciprocity of the human-thing relationship.

> Man is not only *homo sapiens* or *homo ludens*, he is also *homo faber*, the maker and user of objects, his self to a large extent a reflection of things with which he interacts. Thus objects also make and use their makers and users.
> (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 1).

Still, in their work Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton view people and things as separate entities (1981: 173) and argue for a relationship between the two in hierarchical terms. Thus, the process of bestowing meaning upon things is almost exclusively unilateral, i.e. travelling from people to things, where human interest and intention is the prime mover. Despite this Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton argue that in the course of this process, aspects of the persona move onto things as well. So, personal biographies are extended beyond the lifetime of the individual by the means of the endurance of material objects.

> Through these objects a part of the self comes to be embodied in the consciousness of others and will continue to exist long after the consciousness that molded them has ceased to exist. (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 191).

Thus, biography only exists by the means of things and their longevity. In the sense of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, material and human biographies become intertwined or twisted as ancient things absorb and transfer past people's lives. This was indeed one of the key ideas put forth in Appadurai's (1986) edited volume *The Social Life of Things*, in particular in the lead article by Kopytoff (1986), *The Cultural Biography of Things*. This volume focuses primarily on commodities, value and exchange in a broad global and historical perspective. In

the introductory chapter Appadurai sets out with the intention of proposing an alternative viewpoint on the circulation of commodities in social life. He concludes that the process of valuing and revaluing commodities through exchange endows commodities with social life in a similar manner as persons (Appadurai, 1986: 3). Kopytoff agrees with Appadurai on the general limits of the conventional Marxian commoditization theory and expands his ideas a step further. He starts with a brief reflection on the art of commoditization and argues that the polarity between individualized persons and commoditized things is exceptional and recent. This he illustrates by discussing the commoditization of people, or the process of slavery. It allows him to conclude that the …

> … biographical consideration of enslavement as a process suggests that commoditization of other things may usefully be seen in similar light, namely as a part of the cultural shaping of biographies. (Kopytoff, 1986: 65).

Thus, we may ask conventional biographical questions in our dealing with things: What was a thing's career and what is considered an ideal career for such a thing? Where does it come from and who made it? What was its periodization, meaning the various stages of its life and how did its use and function change with growing age? What happened to the thing when it reached the end of its use-life? Furthermore, what was the thing's status and how did it realize the possibilities of it (Kopytoff, 1986: 66–67)? In his article Kopytoff exemplifies this by illustrating the biography of houses by the Suku in Central Africa that succeed several biographical changes throughout their use-life. This could range from a housing for a couple or a wife with children, to a guest house or a dwelling for a widow or teenagers, and finally to a stable. Each stage in its biography would not only tell of its material development but would have been culturally informed. Any deviation from the standard cultural biography of a Suku house would have been extremely revealing for the house owner or its inhabitant, it would have told stories of its social status and prosperity. So, Kopytoff insists that the method is culturally informed as things are cultural constructs in the same manner as people are.

> A culturally informed economic biography of an object would look at it as a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories. (Kopytoff, 1986: 68).

The participation of things in the cultural flow renders the biographical approach to things eminently appropriate in order to "make salient what might otherwise remain obscure" (Kopytoff, 1986: 67). Cultural biographies reside in the perennial tug-of-war between economies expanding commoditization and cultures constraining it (Appdurai, 1986: 17). In this sense, Kopytoff sees commoditization and singularization—a concept he uses for the process of decommoditization (not to be confused with the use of the word *singularization* in this thesis)—as counteractive processes. Things-in-motion is a key issue in Kopytoff's

argumentation. Contrary to Marxian commodity theory, Kopytoff argues that things are constantly moving in and out of the status as commodities. Thus, the status of a thing does not belong to its inherent essence. It is only something that a thing experiences in the moment of exchange. During other periods of its career the status is much more equivocal. In these lasting periods of ambivalence, a thing is subjected to an infinite variety of attempts to singularize it, that is removing it from its status of commodity (Kopytoff, 1986: 83).

Kopytoff's cultural biography of things had a great repercussion within archaeology and increased the interest in biographical approaches considerably. The journal *World Archaeology* dedicated a whole issue to the idea of cultural biography (Gosden & Marshall, 1999) presenting papers that addressed versatile themes, for instance Hamilakis' (1999) interesting elaboration on the 'Elgin' or Parthenon Marbles and their fascinating cultural biography through nearly 2500 years, including their social and political reality in Greece as well as among Greek diaspora around the world, Rainbird's (1999) biographical approach to the material transformation in ancestral representation, i.e. from pottery to tombs, in prehistoric Micronesia, or Saunders' (1999) paper on the shifting meaning of brilliant objects as seen in the cultural biography of pearls during the earliest encounter between Amerindians and Europeans.

Thus, we can see that the implementation of the category of biography to archaeological materials and questions differed significantly. There were, however, some common threads that dominated the cultural biographical discourse mainly following up on how objects accumulate biographies throughout their lifetime. The idea of things having biographies linked into the discussion about the continuity and duration of material objects, being of the past, yet in the present. In his reflection on the life on an artefact Shanks (1998) points to the various events in the life cycle of a thing and states that "[t]he durability of the artifact, its historical continuity, holds together these events of its life–cycle" (Shanks, 1998: 17). Within the debate there were mainly two dimensions at work. One was about the often so-called *afterlife* of things, looking beyond the scope of their original *use-life*. Such discussions on the afterlife of things aimed at departing from the strict categorization between the systemic context (from procurement through use, maintenance, reuse and recycling to discard) and archaeological context (from deposition, though excavation, conservation, interpretation, to archiving, storing or exhibiting), and rather seeing the whole life history of a thing as an intertwined continuum.

The concept of afterlife has been used to emphasize the ongoing life history of monuments after they receded from their primary cultural context. Holtorf (1998: 24) criticized the use of this term because, as he claims, it may refer to the afterlife of the builders of these monuments, but it does not relate to the afterlife of the monuments themselves. Holtorf himself (1998; 2002) published two notable papers elaborating on the ideas of the ongoing cultural biography of archaeological objects and monuments, i.e. beyond their conventional or primary use-life. In the first one Holtorf (1998) employed the notion of cultural biography to megalith graves in Northern Germany. In the paper he is not so much concerned with the megaliths as burials in

the Neolithic, but their later existence and the association people had with these monuments during later prehistoric, protohistoric and early historic periods. In order to establish a closer relation between his argumentation and the idea of biography Holtorf terms the use-life periods of the megaliths *birth*, *childhood* and *youth* whereas *adulthood* and *old age* stand for their later life history and reuse. Holtorf displays how the megaliths were acknowledged and recognized throughout the Bronze Age, Iron Age and the medieval periods. It involved an active preservation of the monuments, although not in modern terms of heritage but through constant revisits and reuse. The pattern of activity in and around these monuments changed, and therefore the meaning of the megalithic monuments changed as well.

In a later work Holtorf (2002), traces the life history of a potsherd from excavation through documentation, classification, interpretation and preservation, concluding that its earlier life is always a direct reflection of the present, which is inherently constructed by the methods and conventions of the archaeological process. Holtorf points out that due to the life history metaphor material biographies were narrowed down to their conventional use-life or systemic context. He, however, emphasizes that material biographies, and thus also material identities, short or long, go beyond that scope, and are in fact the outcome of the present life of past things (Holtorf, 2002: 63). Furthermore, he asserts that …

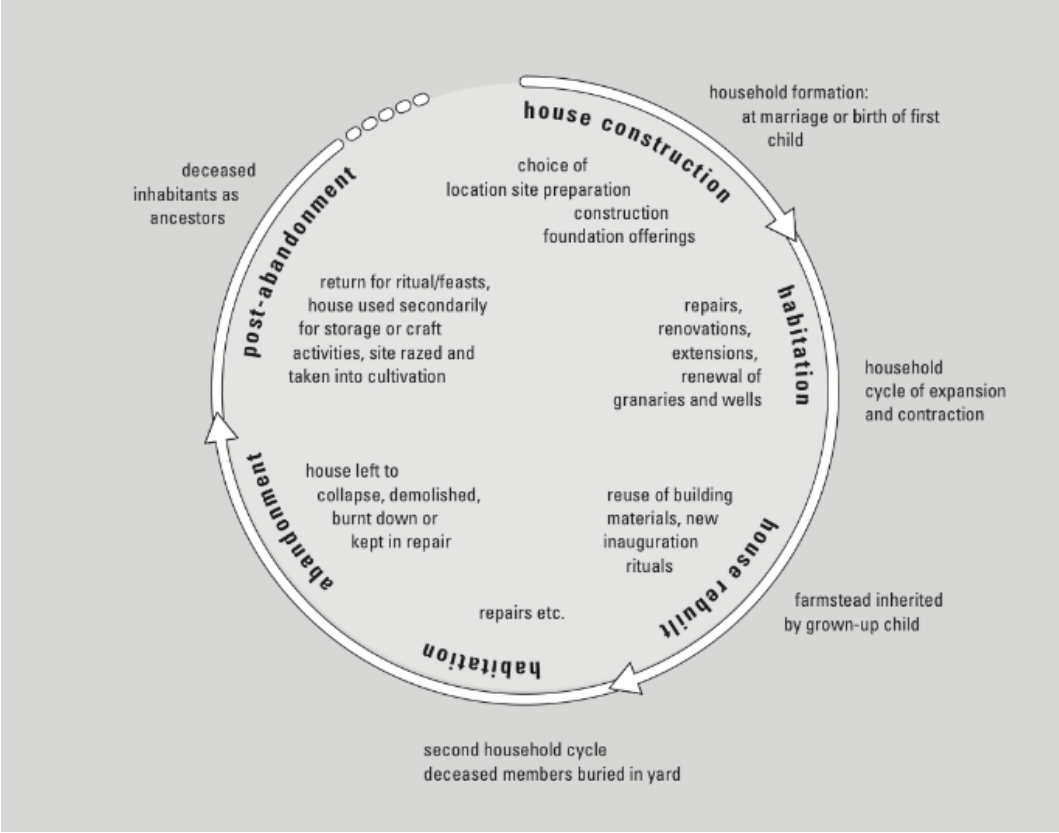
> … [a] study of the life history of things must therefore not assume anything about *what they are*, but try to understand *how they came to be* ancient artefacts or whatever else. I am arguing for an investigation of the life histories of things as they unfold in the present and extend both into the past and the future. (Holtorf, 2002: 55).

Consequently, Holtorf not only acknowledges that things continue their life history after concluding their so-called use-life but argues that their biographies are first and foremost a conception of the practices of archaeology in the present. Lucas (2005) partly accedes to Holtorf's argumentation by demonstrating various temporalities within the biography of an object that in addition are often conflicting. *Old* or *new*, *ancient* or *modern*, are for instance not the inherent properties of things but something we take out of the context in which the object is situated. Chronologically ancient artefacts can thus easily be very new if they are unknown and strange. This may be the case during the use-life of a thing, but it certainly applies to archaeological objects in general. The antiquity of an archaeological object is deduced from the archaeological process, because "[i]ndeed, it was archaeology that created the terms by which such objects could be identified" (Lucas, 2005: 109).

Kopytoff's influence on archaeology concerned mainly the idea of object biographies, illustrating how things pass various phases of alternating identities that move far beyond our conventional notion of the things' use-life. Thus, biography became in a sense a new means to discuss old issues, i.e. the use, wear and social status of archaeological objects. But how did this affect biography in a more traditional sense, meaning the life histories of people? Gerritsen

(1999; 2003; 2008), followed Kopytoff's original argumentation quite rigorously, in which he demonstrated a clear interrelation between material and human biographies. He, in fact, picked up directly on Kopytoff's example of the Suku house (see above) where he argues that the cultural biography of a house and the life history of its inhabitants are inherently intertwined. Hence, the veneration of people, their fate and fortune, would have been reflected in the biography of their houses. Gerritsen, working on Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements in the Southern Netherlands, argued as well that the life cycle of a house mirrored the life cycle of its household (fig. 1) where the establishment of a settlement and its abandonment would have been directly enmeshed with certain biographical events of the household, i.e. its inhabitants.

Figure 1 A diagram demonstrating Gerritsen's notion of cultural biography hinting at a correlation between the life history of a farmstead and its household (Gerritsen, 2003: 107, fig. 3.36)



Based on the idea of the social life of things and their cultural biographies a new perspective on the shared life histories of people and things emerged. Still, the biographies told were rather general and often lacked insight, substance or empathy, or as Gilchrist (2000: 325) once criticized, the often generalized stories archaeologist tell about past people, individuals or groups, tend to depict static images of men and women at a single point in time without any career, past or future. In this she resonates with the general postmodern groundswell opinion that missed real persons with individual identities and faces (cf. Shanks & Tilley, 1987: 61; Tringham, 1991: 94). Indeed, peopling the past became one of the central themes of

postprocessualism, among others the feminism of the 1980s and 1990s (Gilchrist, 1999: 2; Meskell, 1999: 55), and many different approaches were attempted in order to repopulate the past. Tringham's (1991; 1994) and Spector's (1991) fictional narratives gained a deserved attention. However, their stirring narratives bear only an indirect relation to the archaeology of the people they aimed at reviving (cf. Whittle, 2003: 52). The fictional flavour of their stories reflected a certain postmodern perspective on academic narratives (Cornell & Fahlander, 2002; Fahlander, 2003, 2008; Tilley, 1991, 1993). Yet more than the fictional constructivism it was rather the intimacy and empathy with the people of the past that engendered an alternative perspective on archaeological narratives that found a continuation throughout the 1990s (e.g. Meskell, 1996, 1998, 1999; Tarlow, 1999, 2000; cf. Whittle, 2003: 51). Thus, following the spirit of postmodernism, it was in part the growing interest in the individual as an analytical and narrative unit of the past that lead to an increased discussion about identity, personhood and biography, and the relationship of these categories with material culture. Another special issue of *World Archaeology* (Gilchrist, 2000) was dedicated to this theme. Many of the issue's articles interestingly involve the body and its biography (e.g. Joyce, 2000; Key, 2000; Pettitt, 2000), although material representations of the human life cycle are also emphasized in others (e.g. Boivin, 2000; Foxhall, 2000; Sofaer Deverenski, 2000a).

In view of this all, we might also argue that biographies are more than anything else an identity narrative, covering equally individual and social identities, and how these categories are manifested. The identity concept has for a long time been an important issue within the humanities and social sciences (cf. Diaz-Andreu et al., 2005; Insoll, 2007; Jones, 1997; Kind, 2015; Lindholm, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2012; Shennan, 2003). Nonetheless, and not less than the concept of biography, it remains an ambiguous and controversial term that resists a clear and common understanding, a platitude meaning almost anything. On the one hand, identity refers to the similarities between people, i.e. how a group identifies with certain common issues and things. On the other hand, identity is something that separates a subject from the rest, meaning it refers to the distinctiveness of the one in comparison with the others. Furthermore, identities are created by the subject itself as an expression of the individual self but are concurrently conceptualized by the surroundings upon the singular subject. Identities may be approached at various scales, from the partible person to nation states. And this is indeed how we encounter the concept of identity in scholarly work, that is, mostly through the elaboration on different categories of identity such as personhood, the body and the individual (Fischer & DiPaolo-Loren, 2003; Fowler, 2001; 2004; 2010; Joyce, 2005), age, sex and gender (Gilchrist, 1994; Joyce, 2000; Sofaer Derevenski, 2000b), class and rank (Wason, 1994), profession and skill (Adamson, 2007; Dobres, 2000), ritual and religion (Insoll, 2001, 2004), population and ethnicity (Cox & Sealy, 1997; Jones, 1997) or nationality and nationalism (Hamilakis, 2007; Malkki, 1992).

The enthusiasm for identity has become apparent in a number of publications in recent years. It has certainly brought plenty of divergent perspectives to the fore, but they seem to make a certain common assumption about the process of identity making. Identities are namely first and foremost relational, not only towards other humans, social conditions or situations, but also towards things. Identities are therefore inherently material. They do not arise unconsciously or to our unawareness nor are they something that is thrown upon us but are actively constructed. We invest in our identities as well as in the identities of others and the investment takes place through our involvement with things. But this is not a one-way relationship in which material culture is the mere product or reflection of identity that is primarily a cognitive expression. Identities emerge from the material relations that people go into. Hence, material culture—objects and things—has the power to move us into certain directions and manage our actions and practices—our identity. In short: materials, as the structural or building elements of our identities, possess agency.

In the 1980s the notion of agency gained considerable attention within archaeology and material culture studies (Barrett, 1994; 2001; Dobres & Robb, 2000; 2005; Gardner, 2007; Hoskins, 2006; Johnson, 1989). The interest was born out of the discussion on agency and structure as seen for instance in the works of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984; 1991). The emphasis was on the interrelationship between these two phenomena, i.e. how structure is formed by means of the agentive abilities of people, and in parallel how people's agency is defined by the social structures that surround them. So, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is based on our practices with things. With the concept of habitus Bourdieu approaches the dualism of agency and structure from the perspective of the person and its socialization. People act according to their social background, often unconsciously and without recognizing the influence of their material surroundings. Because the material surroundings—objects and things—are integrated into social practices, they shape the habitus as well (Bourdieu, 1977: 72). Giddens' *Structuration Theory* works the same way very much, although the perspective is rather set on the duality of structure, which is described as being simultaneously the cause and consequence of social actions. What makes Giddens' approach particularly interesting is his claim that agents and structures share the same ontological status. Humans are agents; thus, things can also have agency as they participate in the process of structuration (Giddens, 1984: 25).

The notion about the mutual interaction between structure and agency opened up a clearer vision on the material relationships of people and how material things contribute to actions and practices. Within anthropology, archaeology and material culture studies 'material agency' became a buzzword. Gell's posthumously published work on *Art and Agency* (Gell, 1998) had an immense influence on this debate. He argued that objects of art have agency because they affect us; they arouse feelings like happiness, anger or disgust on which we react. Gell rejected the traditional semiotic approaches to art and claimed that art is first and foremost a social

action. Hence, it is about doing or making things. In the process of creating an art object we invest parts of our personhood into the things. An artist invests his skill in the materials he is working with and uses the piece of art to distribute parts of his virtue and efficacy. Skill is thus a fundamental element of Gell's argumentation. An object of art turns into an agent when the logic behind its creation becomes latent to the observer due to the virtuosity of the artist. The observer is unable to understand the making of the objects "which announce themselves as miraculous creation" (Gell, 1998: 68) but is captivated by their impression and effect. Thus, the making is central to the object of art, not only to the artist but the observer as well. Non-artistic objects or objects of daily use, in other words mundane things, do not enjoy the same recognition in Gell's agency theory. Their often crude and uninteresting guise customized to their sole functionality renders them non-effective as nobody attends their making. Still, Gell did not quite stick to this reasoning and at many places in his book he gives examples of things that we normally do not consider as art. Thus, some have argued that Gell's approach to agency applies to material culture in general (Hoskins, 2006: 76; Meskell, 2005: 54).

The emphasis on skill and virtuosity disregards somewhat the way in which we encounter things. Things present themselves to us as ready-made relational entanglements; an assembly of various qualities and features, or as according to Heidegger (1971: 171), the manifold gathering of things is their presencing. We encounter the presence of things rather than their making.

There is a fundamental hierarchy in Gell's reasoning depending on the intention behind the effect or action caused by the things' agency. Objects of art do not cause anything by their own effort or attributes but because they have been imbued with parts of the artist's person, its intention, will, and skilfulness. Thus, Gell distinguishes between primary agents possessing will and intention and secondary agents, "entities not endowed with will or intention by themselves but essentially to the formation, appearance, or manifestation of intentional actions" (Gell, 1998: 36). This *a priori* relation between agency and intention brings Gell into a certain conflict. Things are agents but do not possess agency as a self-contained quality that acts independently upon humans but are embedded with human agency. Hence, Miller (2005: 13) has called Gell's approach "a theory of inferred intentionality". Gell sees a fundamental difference between events perpetrated by humans and those brought forth by things, let's say a car crash caused by a puncture or the explosion of a land mine that "*could not help* exploding once trodden on". Thus, "[i]t seems senseless to attribute 'agency' to a mere lethal mechanical device, rather than its culpable user" (Gell, 1998: 20). Nonetheless, he is aware of the qualities that materials impose on humans. Pol Pot's soldiers were only capable of their malicious agency because of their weaponry that provided them with power. He, thus, acknowledges material agency, but limits it to the mere reflection of human intention and will, rendered into objectification.

> I describe artefacts as 'social agents' not because I wish to promulgate a form of material-culture mysticism, but only in view of the fact that objectification in artefact-form is how social agency manifests and realizes itself, via the proliferation of fragments of 'primary' intentional agents in their 'secondary' artefactual forms. (Gell, 1998: 21).

For Gell the issue at stake is fragmentation, the partibility of primary agents, whose essences are spread among secondary agents. It is about distributed personhood. Continuing the example of Pol Pot's notorious soldiers Gell (1998: 21) interestingly states:

> As agents, they were not just where their bodies were, but in many different places (and times) simultaneously. Those mines were components of their identities as human persons, just as much as their fingerprints or the litanies of hate and fear which inspired their actions.

Gell looks for a solution to this controversy in the distributed personhood that circulates with things. Therefore agency, originating with the person, travels with things as well. His approach is consistently Maussian (Gell, 1998: 9) as it appears in Mauss' important *Essay on the Gift* originally published in 1950 (Mauss, 2002). In this seminal essay, Mauss concentrates on how the exchange of objects builds up a tight network of relationships between people. He was not so much concerned with agency as with the process of gift exchange and the constitution of the person (see also Carrithers et al., 1985). In the essay, Mauss analyses gift exchange systems both in recent and historical context and argues that there is no such thing as a free gift. A gift always calls for a reciprocal action. Furthermore, the gift exchange is a total system infiltrating all domains of society, eventually ruling all aspects of the social.

> The institution of 'total services' does not merely carry with it the obligation to reciprocate presents received. It also supposes two other obligations just as important: the obligation, on the one hand, to give presents, and on the other, to receive them. The complete theory of these three obligations, of these three themes relating to the same complex, would yield a satisfactory basic explanation for this form … (Mauss, 2002: 18).

The most intriguing part of the Maussian approach, in particular for material culture studies, involved less the discussion on exchange systems, but how things carried parts of the person with them. The receiver of a gift was thus partially endowed with the personhood of the giver and due to the ubiquity of the gift exchange system each person became distributed and embedded within the whole of society. In this sense, Mauss parted from the predominant Western idea considering the person centred in the notion of the individual. On the contrary, the person was seen spread out in things among the entire community, and therefore, by partaking in the reciprocal circulation of things, it was a composite of others mediated by the essence of things.

Although the idea of partible personhood is most often ascribed to Mauss, it rested on observations and conclusions by anthropologists before him. In fact, the confounding relationship between persons and things had been an issue of anthropology since the late 19th century (Gell, 1998: 9; Meskell, 2005: 54). Malinowski (1984 [1922]), for instance, had already described the complex system of reciprocity of the Melanesian *Kula ring* and how personalities travel with shell valuables (cf. Mauss, 2002: 58); a study that actually made up a significant part of Mauss' argumentation. Hence, it does not come as a surprise that Mauss' ideas influenced a wide range of anthropologists and archaeologist in the latter part of the 20th century. Gell's Maussian stance has already been discussed. But Strathern's book *The Gender of the Gift* (1988) had perhaps an even wider and more profound influence on the debate. Strathern took the Maussian idea of the person a step further in which she highlights the Western notion of the person epitomized in the form of the individual and individualism in comparison with the Melanesian relational personhood. Strathern elaborates the concept of the dividual person. This perspective emphasizes the fragmentation of the persona and the separative character of its relations (Fowler, 2010: 139). The Melanesian dividual person is according to Strathern both fragmented and distributed, as well as multiply composed and assembled (Strathern, 1988: 159). Thus—rigorously following the Maussian tenet that stressed that gift exchange involved all aspects of the social—Strathern saw the person integrated into society as a whole.

> They [persons] contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them. The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm. (Strathern, 1988: 13).

Strathern does not distinguish categorically between the constitution of the person and the social. Her work deals with fragmented and outspread personhood that is not confined to a single individual body but enmeshed among many in a continuous flow of relations. Simultaneously she describes particular social practices that consist of the very same relational conditions. Thus, a person is little more than a downscaled version of society. Herein lies perhaps the greatest success of her work—at least regarding its influence on archaeology—as it unites the debate on personhood, the condition of the person and social practices. Thus, using Strathern's ideas within an archaeological framework allows for a discussion about small issues from a broad perspective. This means that from general material conditions, that normally are used to argue for certain social phenomena, archaeologist could relate to smaller types of composition, such as the notion of a singular person.

One of the most intriguing discussions on Strathern's book is found in Gell's paper *Strathernograms* (Gell, 1999). Therein he dissects her ideas and lends them a "graphic coherence" (Gell, 1999: 31). There are three issues in Gell's argumentation that I would like to highlight, as they are particularly interesting for this work. Firstly, Gell posits that Strathern follows a certain idealism that reflects her view on the role of things. Gell argues, and justifiably

so, that Strathern views things as mere vehicles of meaning that originates in the social code or system. Thus, things have no fixed identities of their own and the relations that are tied to these things do not stand in any obvious coherence to their materiality. Things are thus simply a semiotic container through which relations are mediated. Admittedly, Strathern describes practices and relations where certain features of a participating object may well be understood in a direct metaphorical way, for example the flute in male initiation rites of the Gimi that is said to symbolize among others the birth canal (Strathern, 1988: 111–112; cf. Gell, 1999: 56), and thus granting the young men feminine attributes. Yet, regardless of the form of the flute and its similarity to certain female bodily features, the relation between the thing (a flute), the person (a young man of the Gimi) and the practice (an initiation rite) is not based on the material qualities of the thing (a flute) but its symbolism.

This very same phenomenon can be detected in other ethnographic works from Melanesia. A good example is Hoskins' *Biographical Objects* (1998). She looks at the role of things within the constitution of the person from a different angle. Hoskins is somewhat discontented with the dismissal of the individual in Strathern's work and states that if the concept of the partible person is held viable it must be meaningful at the analytical level of the individual (Hoskins, 1998: 10). Hoskins certainly recognizes the person as a composite being, but one that is rather a compound of auto-narratives mediated through things than a composition of material relations. Still, the relationship between the narrative and the thing, through which it is told, is not always clear. Thus, and not much unlike Strathern, Hoskins' perspective on things is dominated by semiotics. She certainly argues that the Sumanese construction of narrative selves differ from Western narratives in the metaphoric language of objects. The metaphor and the narrative by the Kodi on Sumba start with objects whereas Hoskins argues that in the Western world narratives are verbally established before creating any material relation. She describes certain qualities of materials that may link directly to their meaning or role as initiator of narratives. The betel pipers and arcea nuts that the Kodi keep in their personal betel bag help to keep one alert and awake, thus assisting the chewer to concentrate and contemplate on an unfinished or untold narrative (Hoskins, 1998: 26). But once again, the relation of the thing (the betel bag) with the narrative is primarily symbolic rather than material.

Secondly, Gell argues that there is a certain idealism in the way Strathern looks at relations. In her Melanesian model all relations are internal, which means that all things (humans and non-humans) share an internal connection or are linked through various instances with one another (Gell, 1999: 33). On the other hand, external relations present themselves through the connection of things that exist independently. One individual exists independently from another individual or—using Gell's example—one book can exist independently from the other. Such individuals and books can go into an external relationship, for instance meet at a coffee house or share the same bookshelf but remain separate individualized entities. The contrast between internal and external relations is important for Strathern's argumentation as it epitomizes the

difference between Melanesian gift exchange (internal relations) and Western commodity exchange (external relations).

Thirdly—and this is perhaps the most important aspect of Strathern's work—Gell (1999: 34; see also Jones, 2005: 195) argues that the Melanesia of Strathern does not exist.

> It is important to underline the fact that 'Melanesia' stand for an intellectual project rather than a geographic entity because the methodological usefulness of Strathern's interpretive technique is not restricted to (geographic) Melanesia. (Gell, 1999: 34).

Strathern's ethnographic study is certainly well founded within the anthropological literature of Melanesia as it provides an eminently good "setting for a sustained thought experiment" (Gell, 1999: 34) in an alternative mode of the persona and its gendered relations through concepts such as fragmentation and dividuality. Fragmentation describes the general condition of archaeological materials and archaeologists habitually work from a material basis that is utterly fragmented and divergent. Thus, an integral whole like the individual person as it is conceptualized in our modern Western societies is seldom, if ever, encountered. From this vantage point, i.e. the generally fragmented status of the archaeological record, Strathern's Melanesia is a good way to think about the constitution of people in the past, be that singular persons or communities of people. So, Strathern's *The Gender of the Gift* is as much an intriguing theoretical contemplation on the fragmentation and dissemination of persons, as it is an ethnographical study on social relations in Melanesia.

Strathern's theoretical backdrop was indeed the point of departure for Chapman's fragmentation theory built around his research on earlier Balkan prehistory (Chapman, 2000; see also Chapman and Gaydarska, 2007; 2009). Like it or not, fragments are the main concern of archaeology. This is in most cases certainly due to post-depositional processes. However, Chapman recognizes a vast variety of artefacts that were obviously not deposited as a part of a complete object and show marks of have been circulating, or in use, after their breakage. Hence, he asks: what if fragmentation in itself had a meaning and things were deliberately broken and dispersed; and, what if the scattered deposition of fragments is not the result of post-depositional processes but structured and meaningful? Chapman, who is fascinated by the wealth of material culture in Balkan prehistory, laments that earlier research lacked an awareness of the relationship between the objects and people and how they contributed to social practices. Hence, he proposes an alternative approach that views the development of people through their objectification (Chapman, 2000: 4). Thus, as mentioned above, he picks directly up on the Maussian/Strathernian notion of fragmented personhood that circulates with things, however developing an alternative approach based on the interaction of two processes: enchainment and accumulation. Enchainment is the process that lies behind deliberate breakage of things and the distribution of individual fragments across society. It describes the relations that gift exchange (which had earlier basically been discussed departing from the idea of intact

objects) establishes between people. Therefore, it is a direct translation of the Maussian tenet into Chapman's fragmentation theory. The only difference between Chapman's fragmentation theory and Maussian gift exchange lies in the fragment itself (cf. Fowler, 2004: 38-39). The Melanesian gift exchange rests on whole objects that 'grow' as they accumulate further relations through their circulation within society. The idea is that things can transfer essences of persons to other persons. But whole things cannot be at different places at the same time. An individual object can therefore only spread the essence of a person out among society in which it circulates, i.e. by being handed on from one person to the other. In contrast to this Chapman's theorem parts from the idea of whole things that are fragmented and scattered. Hence, people are enabled to "share a part of the *same* thing at the *same* time" (Fowler, 2004: 38) and so, spreading out essences of the person among society in a single action. However, whereas exchangeable things in the Maussian scheme have clear values, this is not as obvious for fragments. Yet, by moving the focus from the fragments themselves over to the act of fragmentation, the idea becomes a new complexion. Reciprocity is a key element in the Melanesian scheme—the obligation to return a gift—and enchainment is generated through the circulation of gifts, meaning intact things. On the other hand, Chapman emphasizes the importance of fragmentation as a meaningful process, e.g. the chipping of a figurine or the smashing of a ceramic vessel, where enchainment is involved with the act of fragmentation and sharing the broken off objects. The fragment itself is a token of the original event or the act of enchainment. Chapman and Gaydarska (2007) begin their joint work on fragmentation theory with an interesting anecdote describing this process, the funeral of the British archaeologist Leslie Grinsell. It involved smashing the collared urn containing the cremated remains of Grinsell in the presence of 12 of his closest friends. Then each participant took a sherd of the fragmented urn to treasure. Chapman and Gaydarska (2007: 1-2) explain:

> This is what we mean by enchained relations of exchange – not only the material item but the personhood embodied in the thing are exchanged. The materiality of the broken collared urn sherds maintains this social memory of a great archaeologist in a way more specific and special than simply the memories of field trips in Grinsell's company. These sherds are tokens of a place, a group of related people and a very special person at the centre of the network.

Accumulation, the other basic principle of Chapman's fragmentation theory, yet much less discussed in the scholarly literature (Brittain & Harris, 2010: 582), describes the process of putting together sets of whole objects or bodies. Chapman describes this process as an act of enchainment as the objects/bodies that make up the sets can be seen as the elements of a greater whole that are reassembled in order to represent a common identity or a community. This kind of whole-object enchainment is more linked to metal objects, due to their property of not being easily broken up or fragmented (Chapman, 2000: 44). Nonetheless, it is of course not bound to such material categories. One might say that the key difference between accumulation in terms

of sets and enchainment though fragmentation lies in the direction, or as Chapman (2000: 46) himself points out "the concept of expansion". If enchainment is encouraged through the expansion or diffusion of fragments, accumulation in sets is understood as the assembling of distinct objects into relationally integral wholes—accumulation is about agglomeration of elements. Thus, Chapman's accumulation describes material relations that are analogous to that of elements within composite entities, be that beads in a necklace (Chapman 2000: 46) or the individual parts of a car engine.

Although Chapman does not site assemblage theory or its main protagonists Deleuze (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and DeLanda (2006) anywhere in his works, his take on accumulation certainly reflects some of its essence. Core concepts of assemblages such as content and expression, or territorialisation and deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 88) shine through at various places in his works. We see this for example in the selective elements that are accumulated (content) and the statements that the accumulation aims at enunciating (expression), or the strong tie between people, things and places (territorialisation), seen in Chapman's (2000: 31; Chapman and Gaydarska, 2007: 12-14) discussion on place-value (for a further discussion of assemblage theory vs. fragmentation theory see: Lucas 2012).

Further allusions to assemblage theory can be found widely within archaeology. Interesting examples are Gansum (2004; 2008) and Back Danielsson (2008) that have discussed the use of cremated bones in iron forging and pottery during the Late Iron Age in Scandinavia. Here we encounter enchainment through the fragmentation of the human body by means of cremation and its redistribution among the community within things. Interestingly, not only the essence (e.g. character traits) of the deceased individual is attributed to the objects, but the human remains are literally merged into the things. In addition, we see accumulation at work in the composition of new objects including human material. Objects of this kind must have represented an alternative ontological level of personified things—materialized humans.

The idea behind accumulation is, in a sense, somewhat similar to the notion of reassembling as presented by Actor–Network–Theory (Latour, 2005). We may encounter this process both in ethnographic and in archaeological materials. Fowler (2004: 84), based on older sources (Barraud et al. 1994; De Coppet, 1981) describes a mortuary rite by the 'Are' where the descendants bring material elements of the deceased to the funeral and present them as a gift, thus reassembling the persona in death, which had been spread out among society in things. Þóra Pétursdóttir (2009; 2012), applies the same train of thought to her analysis of Icelandic Viking Age burials, arguing that the only time a person is complete, is in death, where the person is reinstalled including its material components.

In this relationship, the concept of *re-membering* is quite interesting. Olsen (2003; 2010: 119) uses it extensively in his appeal for an increased awareness for the role of things as a part of the social (cf. Latour, 1993; 2005). However, re-membering is a strong concept that draws upon various interrelated issues at stake. In a more direct sense, it emphasizes the claim for

acknowledging the active role of things within the social just as it alludes to memory and the relation between memory and material culture (cf. Jones, 2007b; Van Dyke & Alcock, 2003). But in a somewhat derived sense, it hints at the intertwined relationship between people and things and the social matrix, being made up by various *members* that are only temporarily brought together—re-assembled, re-configured, re-membered (cf. Butler, 1990: 161). Above I cited literature that describe the persona, which has been dis-membered and diffused in life but is re-membered in death through the burial. Yet, practically every social action or practice can be illustrated as an act of re-membering, be that our daily drive to work that re-associates the driver, the car, streets and roads, traffic lights etc., or a weekly game of football, re-membering the players, the boots, the ball, the pitch etc. In the same sense, archaeology itself is of course a process of re-membering.

It is not overly stressed that archaeology is the discipline of things (Olsen, 2003: 89). However, archaeology studies things of the past, not only from the perspective of their mere material properties, but also, and not less importantly, in association with past cultures, societies and communities, events, practices and actions. These are all dis-membered collectives or assemblages that archaeology aims at re-membering. In the interesting *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time* (Serres, 1995) Serres points out to Latour that "[h]umanity begins with things; animals don't have things". Latour's response, "[t]he misunderstanding is complete" (Serres, 1995: 166), in which he means that the current scholarship has ignored the contribution of things to humanity altogether, is perhaps a little bit disappointing. A truly Latourian response would have included that in the same way things start with humans. In this sense, Lucas (2012: 262) has posited that "this is why we can do archaeology. Because we recognize the human in objects".

Thus, it is clear that we cannot understand the biography of material objects without their human factor, which is described in how they were produced, used, reused and discarded, or kept, treasured, maintained and disgraced. On the other hand, it is by the means of the mere physical presence of material culture—their material features and qualities, hence materiality—that the lives of past peoples remain visible and apprehensible. The biographies of past peoples are present–at–hand because they are materialized, objectified, embodied in material objects—in things.

How does this affect the way we look at biography? Regardless of our slant to the relation of people and things it is clear that biography always has a subject at its centre. When archaeologists (and others) write about biography they tend to fall back onto the tendency of separating between people and things by emphasizing one or the other as the main subject of their approach. We need to transform the subject which must resist the rupture between people and things. To my mind the idea of thingless people or inhuman things is inconceivable. Yet, in order to avoid privileging one or the other we need to elaborate on our terminology. We could start with the relation between an object and a thing on one side, and an individual and a person

on the other. A stone boulder lying in a riverbed is certainly an object representing all the qualities of a stone. However, it is only a thing if it goes into a relation with a human that might remove it from the riverbed, chisel a hole in it, provide it with a shaft, and use it as a hammer (the alteration of the stone is of course unnecessary). Some might claim that by this I am only restating the dichotomy between nature and culture, which I am not. By this I am underscoring that objects and things do not move on the same ontological level. The concept "object" refers to its mere material physique, whereas the thing implies its material-human relation. But we certainly talk about objects of material culture and we use objects all the time. That is very true, because there are no things without being objects too, but there are certainly objects that are not things.

Interestingly, the same applies to the relationship between the individual and the person. Many might argue that the individual signifies the biological organism, whereas "the human being as a person is a complex of social relationships" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940: 193-194). I do agree with this assertion to a certain extent. I am fully aware that my understanding of Radcliffe-Brown's statement deviates from his own intention which rested on the dualism between the material and the mental. Hence, I do not see the individual as entirely free from social relations because the body, which is the epitome of the individual, is always culturally constituted and historically inscribed (cf. Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1978) and thus not devoid of the constrictions or concessions set upon by society. Secondly, the social relations I argue for are always materially constituted. The social is not limited to human-human interactions but a merger between humans and non-humans, or as Latour (1999: 182) seminally claimed: "Action is a property of associated entities". Furthermore, it "is simply not a property of humans *but of an association of actants*". Thus, social action and practices are not the property of individuals or objects but a property of the association itself—the re-membering. For a Latourian the subject of a biography would be the collective, the network of associations that create an action, the Royal Air Force being the entity that flies (not the airplane or the pilot) or the shooter being the one that shoots (not the human or the gun). By the same token, the subject of this thesis is such a composite, relational entity—a network of actants—something we may call a person or a thing. Persons and things are not the same although they share the same ontological level. They are a continuum moving back and forth on a seesaw, meaning that a person can be more or less material and a thing can include various degrees of humanness. Here we recognize a clear danger of imbalance by which the person is privileging the human but the thing the material attributes of the composition. I claim that biographical theory and writing has been imbalance in the sense that personal biographies have often lacked the thingly essence and material biographies have underrated the human. We can overcome this bias by moving to a higher ontological level—a larger network—which in the case of my thesis could be called a household. However, this would dismiss some of the necessary tension between the material and human elements of the composition. This biography aims at triangulating the field of relations that

exist between persons, things and households. Biography is therefore a narrative that describes various relations that we can coin under the concepts of persons, things or households depending on the balance within the system. Biography is not just a narrative, one that we can form or mould the way we like but an essential property of persons and household describing their relational being.

The subject of this thesis started with a clear human slant as it aimed at a particular person by the name of Þorkell known from written sources. However, the sources this thesis is based upon are almost entirely material—objects and things—whereas the individual human component is absent. However, the things, be that stone hammers, fragments of pottery or clay pipes or the architecture are all components of that very persona we call Þorkell. My project was a process of re-membering those material elements in terms of that person. The aim is not a complete person but a series of human-material relations, each expressing distinct aspects of the persona—each relation being a person in itself.

References

Adamson G (2007) *Thinking Through Craft*. Oxford: Berg.

Agamben G (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Appadurai A (1986) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Back Danielsson IM (2008) Bodies and Identities in the Scandinavian Late Iron Age. In: Jones A (ed.) *Prehistoric Europe: Theory and Practice*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 312–329.

Barraud C, de Coppet D, Iteanu A and Jamous R (1994) *Of Relations and the Dead: Four Societies Viewed from the Angle of their Exchange*. Oxford: Berg.

Barrett JC (1994) *Fragments from Antiquity: An Archaeology of Social Life in Britain, 2900-1200 BC*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Barrett JC (2001) Agency, the duality of structure, and the problem of the archaeological record. In: Hodder I (ed.) *Archaeological Theory Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 141–164.

Boivin N (2000) Life rhythms and floor sequences: excavating time in rural Rajasthan and Neolithic Çatalhöyük. *World Archaeology* 31(3): 367–388.

Bourdieu P (1977) *Outline of the Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brittain M and Harris O (2010) Enchaining arguments and fragmenting assumptions: Reconsidering the fragmentation debate in archaeology. *Worlds Archaeology* 42(4): 581–594.

Butler J (1990) *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. London: Routledge.

Butler J (1993) *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*. New York: Routledge.

Carrithers M, Collins S, Lukes S (1985) *The category of the person: Anthropology, philosophy, history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chamberlayne P, Bornat J and Wengraf T (eds.) (2000) *The turn to biographical methods in social sciences*. London: Routledge.

Chapman J (2000) *Fragmentation in Archaeology: People, places and broken objects in the prehistory of south-eastern Europe*. London: Routledge.

Chapman J and Gaydarska B (2007) *Parts and Wholes: Fragmentation in Prehistoric Context*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Chapman J and Gaydarska B (2009) The fragmentation premise in archaeology: from the Paleolithic to more recent times. In: Tronzo W (ed.) *The fragment: an incomplete history*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, pp. 131–153.

Cornell P and Fahlander F (2002) *Social Praktik och Stumma Monument. Introduktion till Mikroarkeologi*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.

Cox G and Sealy J (1997) Investigating identity and life histories: isotopic analysis and historical documentation of slave skeletons found on the Cape Town foreshore, South Africa. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 1(3): 207–224.

Csikszentmihalyi M and Rochberg-Halton E (1981) *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

De Coppet D (1981) The life-giving Death. In: Humphreys S and King H (eds.) *Mortality and Immortality: The Anthropology and Archaeology of Death*. London: Academic Press, pp. 175–204.

DeLanda M (2006) *A New Philosophy of Society: assemblage theory and social complexity*. London: Continuum.

Deleuze G and Guattari F (1987) *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Diaz-Andreu M, Lucy S, Babic S and Edwards, DN (2005) *The Archaeology of Identity: Approaches to Gender, Age, Status, Ethnicity and Religion*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Dobres MA (2000) *Technology and Social Agency*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Dobres MA and Robb J (eds.) (2000) *Agency in Archaeology*. London: Routledge.

Fahlander F (2003) *The Materiality of Social Practice: A Microarchaeology of Burial*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.

Fahlander F (2008) Differences that matter: Materialities, material culture and social practice. In: Glørstad H and Hedeager L (eds.) *Six Essays on the Materiality of Society and Culture*. Lindome: Bricoleur Press, pp. 127–154.

Fischer G and DiPaolo-Loren D (2003) Embodying Identity in Archaeology: introduction. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 13(2): 225–261.

Flannery KV (1967) Culture History v. Cultural Process: A Debate in American Archaeology. *Scientific American* 217(2): 119–122.

Foucault M (1978) *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Fowler C (2001) Personhood and social relations in the British Neolithic with a study from the Isle of Man. *Journal of Material Culture* 6(2): 137–163.

Fowler C (2004) *The Archaeology of Personhood: An anthropological approach*. London: Routledge.

Fowler C (2010) Relational personhood as a subject of anthropology and archaeology: comparative and complementary analyses. In: Garrow D and Yarrow T (eds.) *Archaeology and Anthropology: understanding similarities, exploring difference*. Oxford: Oxbow, pp. 137–159.

Foxhall L (2000) The running sands of time: archaeology and the short-term. *World Archaeology* 31(3): 484–498.

Gansum T (2004) Role of the Bones – from Iron to Steel. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 37(1): 41–57.

Gansum T (2008) Reproduction and Relocation of Death in Iron Age Scandinavia. In: Fahlander F and Oestigaard T (eds.) *The Materiality of Death: Bodies, burials, beliefs*. Oxford: Archaeopress, pp. 141–146.

Gardner A (ed.) (2007) *Agency Uncovered: Archaeological perspectives on social agency, power, and being human*. London: Routledge.

Gell A (1998) *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Gell A (1999) Strathernograms, or the semiotics of mixed metaphors. In Hirsch E (ed.) *The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams: Alfred Gell*. London: Athlone, pp. 29–75.

Gerritsen F (1999) To build and abandon: The cultural biography of late prehistoric houses and farmsteads in southern Netherlands. *Archaeological Dialogues* 6(2): 78–97.

Gerritsen F (2003) *Local Identities: Landscape and Community in Late Prehistoric Meuse-Demer-Scheld Region*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Gerritsen F (2008) Domestic Times: Houses and Temporalities in Late Prehistoric Europe. In: Jones A (ed.) *Prehistoric Europe: Theory and Practice*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 143–161.

Giddens A (1984) *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Giddens A (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gilchrist R (1994) *Gender and material culture: the archaeology of religious women*. London: Routledge.

Gilchrist R (1999) *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past*. London: Routledge.

Gilchrist R (2000) Archaeological biographies: realizing human lifecycles, -courses and -histories. *World Archaeology* 31(3): 325–328.

Goodey J (2000) Biographical lessons for criminology. *Theoretical criminology* 4(4): 473–498.

Gosden C and Marshall Y (1999) The cultural biography of objects. *Worlds Archaeology* 31(2): 169–178.

Hamilakis Y (1999) Stones from exile: fragments from the cultural biography of the Parthenon (or "Elgin") marbles. *World Archaeology* 31(2): 38–54.

Hamilakis Y (2007) *The Nation and its Ruins: Archaeology, Antiquity and National Imagination in Modern Greece*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heidegger M (1971) *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper & Row.

Holtorf C (1998) The Life-History of Megaliths in Mecklengburg-Vorpommern (Germany). *World Archaeology* 30(1): 23–38.

Holtorf C (2002) Notes on the Life History of a Pot Sherd. *Journal of Material Culture* 7(1): 49–71.

Hoskins J (1998) *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*. New York: Routledge.

Hoskins J (2006) Agency, Biography and Objects. In: Tilley C, Keane W, Rowlands M and Spyer P (eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 74–84.

Insoll T (ed.) (2001) *Archaeology and World Religion*. London: Routledge.

Insoll T (2004) *Archaeology, Ritual, Religion*. London: Routledge.

Insoll T (2007) *The Archaeology of Identities: A Reader*. London: Routledge.

Johnson M (1989) Conceptions of agency in archaeological interpretation. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 8(2): 189–211.

Jones, A. (2005) Lives in fragments? Personhood in the European Neolithic. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 5(2): 193–224.

Jones, A (2007b) *Memory and Material Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jones S (1997) *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing identities in the past and present*. London: Routledge.

Joyce RA (2000) Girling the girl and boying the boy: the production of adulthood in ancient Mesoamerica. *World Archaeology* 31(3): 473–483.

Joyce RA (2005) Archaeology of the Body. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34: 139–158.

Key CA (2000) The evolution of human life history. *World Archaeology* 31(3): 329–350.

Kind A (2015) *Persons and Personal Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Kopytoff I (1986) The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process. In: Appadurai A (ed.) *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 64–92.

Langness LL (1965) *Life History in Anthropological Science*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Langness LL and Frank G (1981) *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography*. Novato: Chandler and Sharp.

LaMotta VM and Schiffer MB (2001) Behavioral archaeology: toward a new synthesis. In: Hodder I (ed.) *Archaeological Theory Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp.14–64.

Latour B (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Latour B (1999) *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Latour B (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Lindholm C (2007) *Culture and Identity: The History, Theory and Practice of Psychological Anthropology*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

Lucas G (2005) *The Archaeology of Time*. London: Routledge.

Lucas G (2012) *Understanding the Archaeological Record*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Magnússon SG (2004) *Fortíðardraumar: Sjálfsbókmenntir á Íslandi*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Malinowski B (1984) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesia New Guinea*. Prospect Heigths: Waveland Press.

Malkki L (1992) National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees. *Cultural Anthropology* 7(1): 24–44.

Mauss M (2002) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: Routledge.

Meskell L (1996) The somatization of archaeology: Institutions, discourses, corporeality. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 29(1): 1–16.

Meskell L (1998) Intimate Archaeologies: the case of Kha and Merit. *World Archaeology* 29(3): 363–379.

Meskell L (1999) *Archaeologies of Social Life: Age, Sex, Class et cetera in Ancient Egypt*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Meskell L (2005) *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt: Material Biographies in Past and Present*. Oxford: Berg.

Miller D (2005) Materiality: An Introduction: In: Miller D (ed.) *Materiality*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1–50.

Okely J and Callaway H (1992) *Anthropology and Autobiography*. London: Routledge.

Olsen B (2003) Material Culture After Text: Re-membering Things. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 36(2): 87–104.

Olsen B (2010) *In Defence of Things*. Plymouth: AltaMira Press.

Pettitt PB (2000) Neanderthal lifecycles: developmental and social phases in the lives of the last archaics. *World Archaeology* 31(3): 351–366.

Pétursdóttir Þ (2009) Icelandic Viking Age Graves: Lack in Material – Lack of Interpretation? *Archaeologia Islandica* 7: 22–40.

Pétursdóttir Þ (2012) Fé og frændur í eina gröf: Hugleiðingar um kuml og greftrun í íslensku samhengi. In: Kristjánsdóttir S (ed.) *Ólafía IV: 6 Meistarastykki*. Reykjavík: Fornleifafræðingafélag Íslands, pp. 139–162.

Plutarch (1932) *The lives of the noble Grecians and Romans*. New York: Modern Library.

Radcliffe-Brown AR (1940) On Social Structure. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 70(1): 1–12.

Rainbird P (1999) Entangled biographies: western Pacific ceramics and the tombs of Pohnpei. *World Archaeology* 31(2): 214–224.

Renders H, de Haan B and Harsma J (eds.) (2017) *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*. London: Routledge.

Saunders NJ (1999) Biographies of brilliance: pearls, transformations of matter and being, c. AD 1492. *World Archaeology* 31(2): 243–257.

Schiffer MB (1976) *Behavioral Archaeology*. New York: Academic Press.

Schwartz SJ, Luyckx K and Vignoles VL (2012) *Handbook of Identity: Theory and Research*. New York: Springer.

Serres M (1995) *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Shanks M (1998) The Life of an Artifact. *Fennoscandia Archaeologica* 15: 15–42.

Shanks M and Tilley C (1987) *Social Theory and Archaeology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Shaw C (1930) *The Jack Roller*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Shantz J (2009) Biographical Sociology: Struggles over an Emergent Sociological Practice. *a/b: Auto/Biographical Studies* 24(1): 113–128.

Shennan SJ (ed.) (2003) *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity*. London: Routledge.

Skibo JM and Schiffer MB (2008) *People and Things: A Behavioral Approach to Material Culture*. New York: Springer.

Sofaer Deverenski J (2000a) Rings of life: the role of early metalwork in mediating the gendered life course. *World Archaeology* 31(3): 389–406.

Sofaer Deverenski J (ed.) (2000b) *Children and Material Culture*. London: Routledge.

Spector J (1991) What This awl Means: A Time of Loss one Summer day at Little Rapids. In: Gero J and Conkey M (eds.) *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 388–406.

Strathern M (1988) *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tarlow S (1999) Wormie clay and blessed sleep: death and disgust in later historical Britain. In: Tarlow S and West S (eds.) *The familiar past? Archaeologies of later historical Britain*. London: Routledge, pp. 183–198.

Tarlow S (2000) Emotion in Archaeology. *Current Anthropology* 41(5): 713–745.

Tilley C (1991) Interpreting material culture. In: Hodder I (ed.) *The Meaning of Things: Material Culture and Symbolic Expression*. London: Routledge, pp. 60–73.

Tilley C (1993) Interpretation and the Poetics of the Past. In: Tilley C (ed.) *Interpretative Archaeology*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 1–27.

Tringham R (1991) Households with Faces: The Challenge of Gender in Prehistoric Architectural Remains. In: Gero J and Conkey M (eds.) *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory.* Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 93–130.

Tringham R (1994) Engendered Places in Prehistory. *Gender, Place and Culture* 1: 169–203.

Van Dyke RM and Alcock SE (eds.) (2003) *Archaeologies of Memory*. Malden: Blackwell.

Wason PK (1994) *The Archaeology of Rank*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

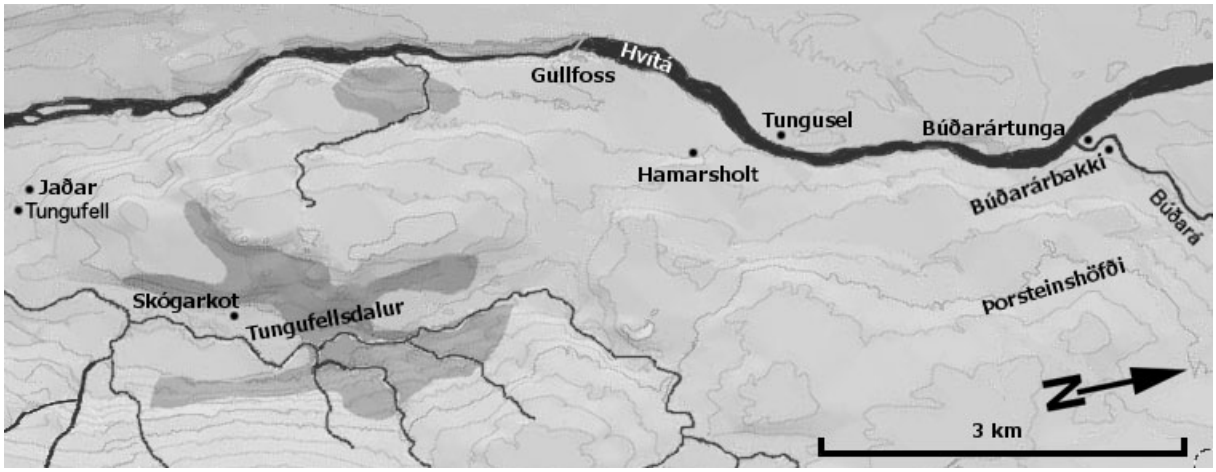
Whittle A (2003) *The Archaeology of People: Dimensions of Neolithic life*. London: Routledge.

Re-membering Búðarárbakki

Setting the scene

The relatively short and narrow valley of Tungufellsdalur presents an impressive picturesque scenery in the ascending southern lowlands of Iceland where it stretches from the southwest to the northeast parallel but little east of the canyons of the river Hvítá (fig. 2). Not only the valley bottom but also its hillsides are intensively grown, mainly with bushy and crooked birch. The preservation of this rich vegetation throughout the centuries is certainly due to several causes including restricted grazing and limited habitation.

Figure 2 A map of the higher parts of the southern lowlands of Iceland marking the place names mentioned in this chapter.



Nonetheless, the valley has constantly served its part in the farming strategy of Tungufell and Jaðar, the two farms at its southern boundaries, and now innermost settlement of the district of Hrunamannahreppur. At the northern brim of the valley, where one reaches into the higher levels of the Icelandic inland, the scenery changes abruptly. The rich growth of the valley behind has now been substituted by scanty, eroded and gravely surfaces, where the last remaining turf sods—remnants of a grassy surface now long lost—have obtained their own place names in the vastness. From these higher levels a wide vista opens to the traveller reaching from the southwest, where the view stretches from the main farming areas of the southern lowlands into the central highlands of Iceland towards the northeast. One may from advantageous locations admire the glacial cap of Hofsjökull and the ragged and snowy peaks of Kerlingaföll. However, it is the distant view of the western mountain silhouette rising some

20 km away that consistently captures one's attention, whereas the immediate view is caught by Bláfell, a table mountain standing closer by. The distance is predominated by the kilometres-long eastern flanks of Eystri-Hagafellsjökull, a part of the glacier Langjökull, that in its smoothness creates a marked contrast to the strikingly jagged peaks of Jarlshettur. On the other hand, some prominent mountains of the west, such as Hlöðufell or Þórisjökull, only enter the view during good visibility. The distant view to the east is generally blocked by the elevation of the highland plateau (fig. 3).

A few kilometers north of the valley of Tungufellsdalur, travelling the wavy plateau into the highlands, one observes the contrast between this outspoken wasteland and the green, grassy strips that stretch along the riverbanks. First of Hvítá's tributaries, north of Tungufellsdalur, is the river Búðará. This freshwater river arises in Miklaalda in the highlands approximately 16 km northeast of its final target. It meanders through Búðarárdrög to the southwest, parting the planes of Búðarártunga from the rising plateau in the east along its final three kilometers before conjoining Hvítá below the hillsides of Þorsteinshöfði, some 4,5 kilometres upstream from the waterfall Gullfoss.

Figure 3 A picture taken from the eroded plateau of Þorsteinshöfði looking over the grassy riverbanks of Hvítá. In the background there are Jarlshettur and the glacier Langjökull (left; fading into the clouds) and Bláfell (right) (photo KM; towards N).

On the western banks of its final curve, facing the southernmost point of Búðarártunga, we encounter Búðarárbakki the archaeological site addressed in this work. It lies on a small land spit underneath the hills of Þorsteinshöfði, carved by the river Búðará. The outermost parts of the spit are river gravels formed by the seasonal floods of the river and its movements within the bed. The riverbanks rise steep from that gravely bottom some six meters above the riverbed.

The higher levels of the interior of the land spit form a small grassy trough that falls slightly off towards the southwest where it smoothly merges with the banks of the river Hvítá. The farm remains of Búðarárbakki are located at the outermost brink of this grassy trough above the river gravels. Later soil erosion has cut into the banks and damaged a small part of the archaeological remains. Now the erosion is retreating and the wounds in the riverbanks are slowly healing mainly owing to the very recent and intensified re-vegetation in the area.

This rather peculiar location of Búðarárbakki, where it lies at the brim of the riverbanks, is certainly not distinctive for a farmstead. Here it is exposed to strong winds from all directions. One could reason that a location at a lower point of that grassy trough, receiving a little protection by the slopes, would have sheltered the farm somewhat better. In addition, Búðarárbakki does not comprise particularly favourable farming land. There is no home pasture other than the withered grass on that small land spit that accommodated the farm. Due to the silty and extremely dry soil conditions the surroundings are rather barren. Consequently, there is a complete lack of peat soil in the vicinity, this so important building material and heating source in Iceland. On the other hand, the barren land opens an easy access to stones, both large block, slabs and smaller boulders, for building as well as for craft production.

Figure 4 The land spit where Búðarárbakki is located (photos KM; left towards NW; right towards S).

Our historical awareness of Búðarárbakki and its inhabitant derives from the Land Register (*Jarðabók*) from 1703 where it is included together with other legal farmsteads of the district of Ytri Hreppur, which is equivalent to the modern district of Hrunamannahreppur.[1] Frederik IV, king of Denmark, commissioned the Land Register in 1702. The king appointed the professor and the famous collector of Icelandic medieval manuscripts, Árni Magnússon (1663–

[1] In this dissertation I will only refer to modern district name of Hrunamannahreppur (except in direct citations) being the original and official name of the district. It was for a long time custom to talk collectively about Hrunamannahreppur and its adjacent Gnúpverjahreppur and simply call them Hrepparnir (the districts). The districts were then normally distinguished in the common speach as Ytri (western) and Eystri (eastern) Hreppur (cf. Kålund, 1984: 134-135).

1730), and Páll Jónsson Vídalín (1667–1727), who had studied theology with Árni Magnússon in Copenhagen and later became the deputy law speaker at Alþingi, to carry out the work (Halldórsson, 2004: 300–301; 189; Þorsteinsson & Jónsson, 1991: 230–231). Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín were assigned to collect information on the condition of Icelandic farms, their costliness, manorial dues, harvest, encumbrances and resources. The work lasted many years and the data collection was not finished until 1714. The documentation of Hrunamannahreppur was completed in 1709. The Register, however, is normally ascribed to the year of 1703 due to a population census that Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín conducted in that year, alongside the work on the Land Register. This massive and for Icelandic settlement history utmost important work was, however, not published until the early 20th century save for the data of three counties in East and Southeast Iceland which were lost in the city fire of Copenhagen in 1728.

Regarding the biographical coherence of this work, the record on Búðarárbakki in the Land Register needs to be considered in the context with two other farms, namely, Túngufell (also named Túngusel and Gamla Sel) and Búðarártunga. The biographical journey of the protagonist of this thesis, the peasant Þorkell, through the Land Register starts in Túngufell in the district of Biskupstungur, west of Hvítá.

> **Tungu Sel**, also called **Gamla Sel** [Tunga shieling and Old shieling]. It is called so in the land of Bræðratunga where it is known as Túnguheiði [Tunga heath] north of all farms in East Túnga. (Túnguheiði is apart from the homeland of Bræðratunga and in between are the estates of farms that lie on the west side of Hvítá in East Túnga).
>
> In this particular Túngufell (which used to be a shieling) raised a farm some 50 years ago, and a few more, a man called Þorkell (the very one that later built Búðarártúnga in the highland pasture of Ytri Hreppur) and there he lived either one or two years. Later another man lived there for one or two years (perhaps it remained uninhabited for a few years in between), but the farm was abandoned again and since then 40 years or so have elapsed, and it has not been resettled again, as it is utterly uninhabitable because meadows were none and outer fields nothing but barren highlands. (Magnússon and Vídalín, 1918–1921: 277).[2]

In the passage about Túngufell (Tungu Sel or Gamla Sel) we encounter this character, Þorkell, who later moved to Búðarártunga in Hrunamannahreppur. Curiously enough, the Land Register links this site to three different farm names. Inferring from the text, one may assume that the name Túngufell was given by Þorkell in order to distinguish his farm from the earlier shielings, underlining the independent habitation in contrast to the earlier shieling activity. Following up on Þorkell, we cross Hvítá and move over to Hrunamannahreppur. The two last

[2] Translation Kristján Mímisson. This applies to all translations from Icelandic sources in this dissertation.

farms of the district mentioned in the Land Register are Búðarártunga and Búðarárbakki. The account of these two farms is as follows:

> **Budarár-tunga** is the name of the southernmost part of the highland pasture of Ytri Hreppur. There an aged man built a farm almost 50 years ago. He had all his life from a sheer restlessness moved from one farmstead to the other and so lived at 27 different places. This farm he built in displeasure, or, according to some, with the permission of a few district officers. Here he lived for about 4 years.
> Manorial dues none.
> Lease none, and
> Hay-making was none other than small patches he harvested in the highland pasture, but the livestock grazed mainly on broadleaved willow. Meadows were south of the river.
>
> After four years he abandoned the farm and relocated across the river where he raised another farm that he called **Budarár-backi.**
> There he lived for 9 or 10 years without dues to begin with. In the last years he paid …
> Manorial dues xx ells
> Lease none
>
> Finally, he moved to Skógarkot, a croft from Túngufell, and there he died the same year. Búðarárbakki was deserted and has not been resettled since, and it is unlikely that it ever will.
>
> Hay-making from outer fields were none other than what he got from the highland pasture, but the infield started to revegetate in the final years so he could harvest the amount for half a cow. Yet now it is all wasteland again. (Magnússon and Vídalín, 1918–1921: 273).

One could posit that these passages from the Land Register demonstrate an interesting and coherent personal background of the last 14 to 16 years in the life of this peasant called Þorkell. It is only a partial life history as it omits any further elaboration on his earlier life process. Yet the Register not only documents his movements from one place to another and attaches it to fairly detailed historical dating but also provides us with some insights into the circumstances of his settlement and farming as well as hinting at his personal characteristics and social status. Consequently, the Land Register introduces us to an already aged man that around 1660 built a farm in an earlier shieling from the farm Bræðratunga, that he named Túngufell. A year or two later he relocated to Búðarártunga where he dwelt for about four years. The last decade of his life, i.e. approximately between 1665 and 1675, he resided at Búðarbakki, whereas its abandonment conjoins fittingly with the very year of his death. The remembrance of Þorkell refers obviously to an outsider, a social misfit. The recurrent relocations are not brought up in order to discuss his earlier life in any detail but to illustrate a significant character trait of Þorkell,

something that distinguished him as a person. So, he is described as a restless man that may have had difficulties getting along with his neighbours and compatriots.

According to the written documentation the peasant's dwelling at Búðarártunga was regarded ambiguously among the people of the district, probably due to its location within the communal highland pasture (Sigmundsson, 1979: 121), hence, outside the jurisdiction of the local authority. So, he may have been forced by the district authority to move across the river to Búðarárbakki and back under the jurisdiction of the district. In return the local authority may have promised him tax exemption, an understanding that held for a few years, but later on Þorkell was charged with low dues. Concomitant with the later taxation the dwelling at Búðarárbakki may have become impossible for Þorkell, i.e. he did simply not produce enough revenue in order to keep up with the taxation. Considering this, we need to regard the strong emphasis in the Land Register on the barren and desolate environment of these upland farms. They had neither in- nor outfields for harvesting winter fodder and the highlands were anything else than plentiful, making farming practically impossible. In addition, and further affirming his helplessness, Þorkell was at that time already aged and possibly not in good health. Consequently, he was once more forced to dissolve his home and relocate. His last dwelling was in Skógarkot, a croft of Tungufell in the district of Hrunamannahreppur (not to be confused with Túngufell or Tungu Sel that Þorkell built in the district of Biskupstungur). It is conceivable that the landlords in Tungufell in Hrunamannahreppur took pity on that exhausted old man providing him a refuge. Þorkell, the peasant at Túngufell in Biskupstungur as well as Búðarártunga and Búðarárbakki in Hrunamannahreppur (and possibly many other unknown places), died the same year he left Búðarárbakki. We do not know where he was buried but he was likely given a farewell in the chapel at Tungufell in Hrunamannahreppur.

This concludes practically all the written documentation about the peasant Þorkell. There are later textual sources that interestingly only mention Búðarártunga but never its inhabitant. One of these sources is *Chorographica Islandica* which is a work normally ascribed to Árni Magnússon (1955). It consists of material that was obviously gathered in the processing of the Land Register in the early 18th century. Some of it is written by Árni Magnússon himself but other parts are the work of his clerks or other registrars. The text about Hrunamannahreppur was, for instance, written by the minister Daði Halldórsson in Steinholt. He mentions briefly the abandoned settlement of the highland pasture of Hrunamannahreppur. There it says:

> In the west, north of Hamarsholt are Búðartunga, Heygil, Þórarinsstaðir. More farms are mentioned in the northerly highland pasture that were deserted in the big plague, namely Búrfell, Rafntóftir, Ásgarður the southern and the northern. But for what is true I have no convincing documentation. (Magnússon, 1955: 41)

Evidently, minister Daði Halldórsson refers his account to what he knows from hearsay. He dates the abandonment of the three northerly farms to the so-called big plague. Here he seems to refer to information about the abandoned settlement of the highland pasture of

Hrunamannahreppur that may be found in an appendix to the Land Register. It links the abandonment of the higher settlement of the pasture to a plague of the mid 14th century (Magnússon and Vídalín, 1918-21: 275–276). However, it is unclear if this dating applies to the southerly farms as well (i.e. Búðarártunga which he calls Búðartunga, Heygil and Þórarinsstaðir).

Approximately a hundred years after Daði Halldórsson, i.e. in 1818, Búðarártunga is once again mentioned, this time in a letter from the minister Jón Steingrímsson in Reykjadalur to the Danish Commission of Antiquities (Rafnsson, 1983: 212–214). It resembles much earlier accounts, although stressing a new reference for the dating of the abandonment of the highland settlement.

> In Hvítárhvammar, the part of the highland pasture closest to Hamarsholt, people know about distinct farms that stood there in antiquity but were deserted due to eruptions of Hekla, amongst I recall in particular: Búdartúnga, Rógshólar, Laugar, Þórarinsstadir and Mörþúfur, and clear signs of these ancient farms are still visible by the old ruins that are there. (Rafnsson, 1983: 213).

It is unclear if Jón Steingrímsson assumed that all the farms he mentioned were deserted following one and the same eruption, or which one of the numerous Hekla-eruptions he was referring to.

It is somewhat a mystery that the collective memory about the settlement in Búðarárbakki and Búðarártunga faded away soon after Þorkell's abandonment. The memory of Búðarárbakki and Búðarártunga may have merged under the place name of the latter one. This was the more familiar place name as it applies to the whole area between the lower course of Búðará and Hvíta. Búðártunga might, thus, have referred to both places in later centuries. But how is it that the local ministers, Daði Halldórsson in the early 18th century and Jón Steingrímsson in the early 19th century, did not know about Þorkell and could not link Búðarártunga and its settlement with him?

The textual sources provide an interesting perspective on the peasant at Búðarárbakki. It is a process-biography that alludes to the characterization of the peasant, his position within the community and interaction with the compatriots of the district. It is a biography that links life to places and the life process of the person in question is reflected in the prosperity or rather misfortune of the farms. What this partial biography lacks, and the aspect of it that I aim to emend, drives at the relationality of the person and its material constitution. The textual sources justifiably relate person and places but only by featuring the person as the plaything of external circumstances. The textual sources are too short and sketchy to awake a notion of the person as a matter of composition, a mosaic of characterizations, actions and performances, landscapes, and things. The Land Register was undeniably written with a certain intention in mind, thus, influencing the presentation and including some information and omitting other. It is not only subjected to manifold ways of interpretation but also there are critical issues regarding its

plausibility and consistency. Þorkell himself is utterly unknown in other records than the Land Register. Therefore, it remains difficult to validate his existence through cross comparison between texts. Furthermore, the account on Þorkell reveals some stereotypical traits that are encountered at various places in the Register (e.g. Magnússon and Vídalín, 1918–21: 217, 255) referring to other similarly vague individuals from the past, some mentioned by a name, other nameless. Hence, the persona of Þorkell, as it appears in the Land Register, may well be a common denominator for several individuals of the district—akin to the way Búðarárbakki and Búðarártunga may have merged into one place—and not the characterization of a real and bodily singular individual. This, however, does not influence the aims of this work. From my standpoint there is no need to question the information about Þorkell, inasmuch as the Land Register has indeed proven to be a reliable source about the settlement of Iceland at the turn of the 18th century.

As I touched upon above, there is a short account of earlier abandoned settlements in the upper part of the highland pasture attached to the Land Register of Hrunamannahreppur. Interestingly enough Búðarárbakki and Búðarártunga, although deserted at the time of the registration in the early 18th century, are not included in this account but listed with other inhabited farms of the district. It may be due to their recent abandonment that they were not considered with the much earlier and deserted sites of the inland settlement which are accounted for in the attachment to the Register.

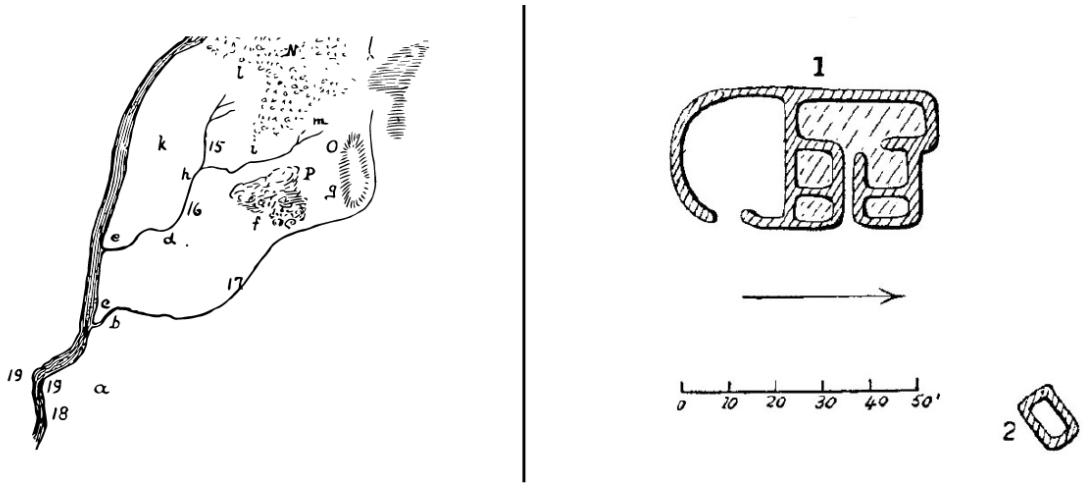
During the short period of inhabitation in the late 17th century Búðarárbakki and Búðarártunga comprised the innermost settlement of Hrunamannahreppur. After the abandonment of Búðarárbakki around 1675 Hamarsholt, situated at the eastern banks of Hvítá some 3,5 kilometers south of Búðarárbakki, took over as the last farm of the district. Hamarsholt was abandoned in 1875 (Eldjárn, 1949: 1) leaving the distribution of settlement in Hrunamannahreppur to the current state.

In the very late 19th century the attachment in the Land Register guided two antiquarians on their travels through the highland pasture of Hrunamannahreppur in order to document its archaeological heritage. These were Brynjúlfur Jónsson from Minni Núpur (1838–1914), a longtime member and a project leader of the Icelandic Society of Antiquities (*Hið íslenzka fornleifafélag*), and the Danish military captain, Daniel Bruun (1856–1931), who spent 13 summers in Iceland during the period between 1896 and 1923 carrying out various archaeological excavations and survey projects around the country (Friðriksson, 1996: 8).

Brynjúlfur Jónsson (1896: 3–4) started his survey of the district in 1895 by visiting Búðarártunga and Búðarárbakki. He does not describe the location of the farms in any detail but mentions that Búðarárbakki and Búðarártunga are located opposite to one another on each side of the river Búðará. Interestingly, in an appendix enclosed to the 1896 issue of the Yearbook of the Icelandic Society of Antiquities (*Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags*) there is a map with the exact location of both Búðarárbakki and Búðarártunga (fig. 5). Brynjúlfur

Jónsson gives a precise description of the clearly visible surface features at Búðarárbakki: a very small house with doors facing the south, behind four rooms of similar sizes, two on each side of a passage leading through the centre of the farm, and the fifth room, much larger, crossing at the end of the passage. Furthermore, an enclosure west of the farm that he interprets as a hay-storage. The large room at the back of the house Brynjúlfur Jónsson defines as the *baðstofa*, the main living and working quarter of the farm, but gives no further explanations regarding other rooms. In addition, it seems to him worth mentioning that there is no byre at the farm. He concludes that one of the small front rooms might have fulfilled that function or that cows were simply not held at Búðarárbakki, yet an unlikely possibility according to Brynjúlfur Jónsson. Considering Búðarártunga, Brynjúlfur Jónsson cannot detect any structures on the surface other that a smooth elevation on a flat grassy area at the southernmost point of the plains of Búðarártunga. He, however, claims to see a line of stones emerging out of an erosion face, proving to him that the mentioned elevation indeed covers the archaeological remains of Búðarártunga. Strangely, Brynjúlfur Jónsson seems to be unaware of the information in the Land Register about the age of the farms or he simply just disregards it. He rightfully assumes these two farms being much younger than other archaeological remains of the upper district. His assumption is based on the layout of the house remains in Búðarárbakki as well as on the fact that these two sites are located nearest to the contemporary settlement, obviously presuming a continuous southwards regression of the settlement.

Figure 5 The documentation of the two 19th century surveys of Búðarárbakki. To the left is a section from a map by Brynjúlfur Jónsson (1896: I) showing the location of Búðarárbakki (b) and Búðarártunga (c) on the opposite banks of the river Búðará (17) at its junction with the river Hvítá (18) a short distance north of Gullfoss waterfall (19). To the right a drawing by Daniel Bruun of the surface remains at Búðarárbakki (Bruun, 1898: Table IX; Bruun, 1928: 151).



Two years after Brynjúlfur Jónsson's survey Daniel Bruun travelled the district with much the same intention. Brynjúlfur Jónsson accompanied Bruun and his attendant, Fonnesbech-Wulf, on this journey (Bruun, 1898; 7; 1928: 146). In a report on his surveys in Iceland in 1897,

Bruun published a drawing of the surface remains at Búðarárbakki and recounts the narrative from the Land Register. Furthermore, he adds that the remains do not appear to be old and that there was no housing for sheep. In addition, Bruun mentions in the text, and depicts on his drawing, a very small separate surface structure to the northeast of the house. He, however, does not discuss the site in any detail, possibly because he thought there was little to add to Brynjúlfur Jónsson's account, published only a year before. In a second and reworked edition of Bruun's seminal work *Forntidsminder og nutidshjem paa Island* (*Ancient Monuments and Modern Homes in Iceland*), he entirely dismisses the discussion on Búðarárbakki and Búðarártunga (cf. 1928: 144-148).

It is thus absolutely evident that the location of Búðarárbakki (and Búðarártunga) was unequivocal at the end of the 19th century, as Bruun and Brynjúlfur Jónsson confirmed by their surveys, description, drawing and mapping. Why Kristján Eldjárn, the later Icelandic State Antiquarian, does not include the two sites in his coverage about the ancient settlement of the district in two almost identical articles published in 1948 and 1949 remains somewhat obscure. Kristján Eldjárn, who had excavated the medieval farm site Þórarinsstaðir in 1945 and, therefore, was perhaps not particularly interested in the post-medieval settlement of the area, must have had a clear knowledge of the sites, based on Brynjúlfur Jónsson's and Bruun's works. As he reviews earlier texts about the settlement of the upper parts of Hrunamannahreppur he simply comments that "Búðarártunga takes a special position" (Eldjárn, 1949: 3) without any further elaboration. It is hard to understand the kind of insignificance that Búðarárbakki and Búðarártunga seem to fall into through its disregard in Bruun's later works and Kristján Eldjárn's elaboration on the ancient settlement of Hrunamannahreppur.

In 1927 the first Icelandic State Antiquarian, Matthías Þóðarson, declared the ruins at Búðarárbakki protected by law jointly with Þórarinsstaðir and Laugahvammar, a fact that would seem to contradict this disregard. Matthías Þórðarson, however, does not seem to have been well acquainted with the locality and topography of the site and it is not even certain if he ever visited Búðarárbakki. Hence, his extremely brief and somewhat confusing description: "[Búðarárbakki] at the south-eastern banks of Búðará, by the road" (Georgsson, 1990: 75).

It is unclear to which road Matthías Þórðarson is referring. Actual roads have never existed near Búðarárbakki other than various bridle paths and much later provisional roads built in connection to the constructions of high voltage lines in the area. So, Matthías Þórðarson must have been pointing to the general bridle paths that lead through the upper district along the plateau, above Þorsteinshöfði. These paths turn off towards Búðará north of Þorsteinshöfði were they descend a defile at the back of the headland leading directly to a ford across Búðará some 750 meters above the actual location of Búðarárbakki. Could Matthías Þórðarson have meant these paths, that are well out of sight from Búðarárbakki? This ambiguous description of Búðarárbakki's location by Matthías Þórðarson resulted in unnecessary confusion later one. As

a consequence, the site was either misplaced (Landmælingar Íslands, 1994) or not marked at all on later maps (Landmælingar Íslands, 1996).

After the mid 20th century Búðarárbakki and Búðarártunga had fallen into a complete silence and it was not until in 2001 that the sites raised interest again. This time it was due to the construction of a new high voltage line (Sultartangi Line 3) that crosses Búðará near the aforementioned ford across the river Búðará (Einarsson, 2001). Bjarni F. Einarsson of the Archaeological Office (*Fornleifafræðistofan*) carried out a mandatory archaeological survey in October 2001. Mainly resting upon the description by Matthías Þórðarson and strangely disregarding the map drawn up by Brynjúlfur Jónsson in 1895, Bjarni F. Einarsson preliminarily located Búðarárbakki just north of the ford. However, in his survey report he (Einarsson, 2001: 11) mentioned that the alleged remains of Búðarárbakki were very vague and he was not at all sure if this was indeed the right location. Consequently, Bjarni F. Einarsson suggested a small-scale trial excavation in order to clarify the uncertainty (Einarsson, 2001: 20). The trial excavation was carried out in August 2004 (Einarsson, 2004) showing that the surface features he had suggested were just natural formations. This unavoidably demanded a further survey along the river Búðará that quickly lead to the correct placement of Búðarárbakki. The following trial excavation at the rediscovered site showed that the archaeological remains lie directly underneath a tephra layer from Hekla from 1693, reasonably squaring with the dating of the abandonment of Búðarárbakki given by the Land Register, and thus providing a reliable link between the archaeological remains and the reference to Búðarárbakki in the Land Register.

The true location of Búðarárbakki was well outside the construction area, meaning that the trial excavation had been unnecessary if it had not been for the uncertainty about Búðarárbakki's location. Hence, it was ironically due to its ascription of insignificance and process of forgetting that Búðarárbakki received renewed academic attention. Consequently, one might claim that the project and this thesis owe their existence to the urge of clearing the uncertainty of the location of Búðarárbakki due to the process of forgetting.

I have often reflected upon the peculiar course of events that led to my project at Búðarárbakki. Certainly, there was a scholarly idea that I had a great interest in realizing. However, I am not sure if the idea had come to fruition if I had not been introduced to Búðarárbakki. In this sense, the scholarly problem that this dissertation addresses, has just as much grown out of the material at hand, i.e. Búðarárbakki, the site and all its stories, including the ones that deal with Búðarárbakki's significance and its remembrance. Moreover; would Búðarárbakki have caught my or any scholarly attention if it would not have been for the enlargement of an aluminium smelter in West Iceland and its need for more electricity provided by a new high voltage line crossing Búðarártunga? Nobody would have given Búðarárbakki any consideration if it had not been for the uncertainty about its location. Perhaps we can discover such peculiar constellations in relation to almost any archaeological site or project, and thus it may seem irrelevant, unimportant and uninteresting. However, given the

biographical keynote of the thesis I have felt bound to outline the biographical career—the *Werdegang*—of the site and the project initiated by the site.

Excavation

The project, that this work is based upon, was first conceived in the winter of 2004–2005. It grew out of a babel of ideas and concepts brewing within me at this time. The questions I grappled with were focused on the often-cited tension between archaeological theory and practice. These were no fundamental concerns about how theory in general may be more practice-led or how the archaeological practice must be better theorized—I wasn't quite that ambitious. On the contrary, these were very particular considerations dealing with the strange controversy between the singular actions performed by individuals, so commonly seen in the archaeological record, and the prevailing tendency for generalized grand narratives that somehow ignore this particularity of the archaeological record.

Hodder (2000: 25) and Lucas (2012: 108) have pointed out that the palimpsest of objects and structures making up archaeological assemblages can very often be traced back to individual actions and events. Of course, archaeology provides also an option of investigating long term changes and relations as its data is often constantly accumulated over a long period of time, and many have called it a special strength of archaeology to be able to jump back and forth between the short and the long terms. However, a certain tension has grown between the short and the long term within archaeology. The particularity of archaeological data—the individual archaeological event—tends to get ignored or fall into the background for the generality that may be extracted from the masses of individual actions and events building up the archaeological record.

Icelandic archaeologists have until recently mainly looked towards written sources for details and particularity in their interpretations, whereas the archaeological material has laid the foundation for the more generalized lineaments of the historical narrative. Thus, archaeology sometimes comes up with historical narratives that are disloyal to the data that substantiates its work. Archaeological narratives tend to generalize and claim comprehension, although the material at hand is rather fragmented, individualized and ambiguous.

Once in a conversation with a good friend of mine, and also an archaeologist, he came up with an interesting story illustrating this strange archaeological controversy: "Think about a literary scholar", he said,

> … who not only must give us the title of a book, but also tell us who the author is, retell the complete story line, with all its characters and events, twists and turns. He is supposed to tell us when the book was written and inform us about the social context it grew out of. Yet he has little in his hands but a few pieces of paper with textual fragments. Most of the time he has only singular letters, sometimes perhaps

> an entire word, very rarely a complete sentence, let alone a paragraph or a whole chapter. It is not even clear if the pieces of paper belong to the same literary work or stem from the same author. They might just as well be written in unrelated languages that the literary scholar is utterly unfamiliar with. This is the situation archaeologists deal with on a daily basis!

This story may very well depict an idealistic scenario, but it fulfils its objective which is to emphasize the gap between the always fragmented nature of archaeological data and the grand ambitions of the historical narratives provided.

I had become interested in tackling this tension between the particularity often found in the archaeological record, yet frequently overlooked, and the generality of archaeological narratives. Through my connection with a group of microhistorians at The Reykjavík Academy (ReykjavíkurAkademían), a non-profit research institution of independent scholars, I had come in contact with a new theoretical approach, *The Singularization of History*, which I thought had a profound relevance to archaeology (see *Singularizing of the Past*). I saw vast possibilities for integrating this framework into theoretical debate within archaeology. My interest was not simply to take a particular theoretical framework and transpose it to archaeological material at its face value. I wanted to approach the problem from scratch, i.e. set up a research program that included the idea of singularization from the very beginning.

In the midst of this personal musing I participated in the above-mentioned trial excavation at Búðarárbakki in the summer of 2004, directed by Bjarni F. Einarsson (2004) of the Archaeological Office. This short introduction to the site, based on three very small trenches into the archaeological remains (totalling 3 m^2), in addition to other three trenches (4 m^2) in the outlying areas, convinced me that this could be the right place to develop my ideas in the field. On the one hand, there was the historical reference to the recluse's home, Búðarárbakki and the individual, Þorkell, who was responsible for it. This information was then linked to the very short-term settlement allowing an insight into a partial biography of a single person. These circumstances were not necessary for realizing my ideas, but they seemed extremely beneficial as they gave a very clear-cut frame of reference. On the other hand, the archaeological remains were well preserved, and rather manageable and easy to excavate as the they were neither disrupted by younger structures, nor were they intermingled with older phases of habitation.

Thus, Búðarárbakki presented itself as an ideal site to test my ideas in the field, although there were some doubts in the back of my head. I intended to approach the site, and work with its remains, structures and finds, on its own terms. Settlement sites are often understood only in comparison with other synchronic or diachronic settlement sites. Still, each site represents a network of its own, reflecting relationships that grew and were maintained within that settlement. These relationships were not only between humans (although often overly emphasized), but also between humans and things, or between things (not forgetting animals if they were present), thus allowing for distinctive patterns of relations within and between

various settlement sites. I argue that an approach in line with the ideas of The Singularization of History could open up insights into these distinctive, particularized relations that emerge out of the material at hand and are not imposed onto the material by higher level ideological systems. Furthermore, I propose that the internal network of relationships within a particular settlement site may remain obscure if the emphasis of investigation is predominantly placed in a comparative framework.

My approach, however, called for certain particularized attention during the fieldwork. We may deal with an archaeological site from a generalized perspective, where we focus on familiar forms, structures and building elements, constantly looking for comparison, using earlier work to substantiate the material at hand, or we may concentrate on the internal relationships between the same elements and the artefacts on site. Of course, most archaeologist tend to do both, and at most archaeological excavations there is a tendency of swinging back and forth between the general and the particular. I, however, wanted to lean somewhat towards an emphasis on the at times underprivileged internal relations. I wanted to look at the architecture in terms of something that is in the process of building rather than already built; I wanted to consider forms in terms of movement within or between them rather than a schematic layout or a blueprint; and I wanted to treat objects in terms of specific relations rather than general functions.

Tim Ingold (1993: 152) opened his seminal paper *The temporality of the landscape* by claiming that the "*the practice of archaeology itself is a form of dwelling*". Thereby he related archaeological practice to the Heideggerian notion of Being-in-the-world. Doing archaeology does not mean that we approach past remains from a detached distance. Quite the contrary, we are enmeshed with the past. Our entanglements with archaeological materials and the past in general are, from an ontological perspective, the same as with the present (see *Twisted lives*) as they unfold through things and our association with them. Thus, following Ingold's example and expanding somewhat his assertion, I claim that *the practice of archaeology is a form of re-membering*, where humans and things are brought into collectives that have been dismembered, drifted apart and dislocated, and whose relations have been obscured and forgotten. The practice of archaeology re-assembles or re-members the elements that build up complex networks of the past and the present. It does so not only by reconstructing earlier existing relations but also by creating new ones. When an archaeological artefact is unearthed, it does not become the same functional thing as it used to be but something different, yet at the same time it still remains itself.

How does this work? On the one hand, the artefact—or for that matter any archaeological finding—becomes an important source of archaeological analysis, as evidence of a date, an indication of trade, or a reference of cultural change. It is registered, filed, stored and possibly exhibited. It gains a new social status as an object of cultural heritage, preserved by law, a fountain of new identities. This process through which an archaeological find travels has generated an interesting discussion on material or object biographies, an issue that I touched

upon above. My point simply is—and thereby the controversy is somewhat unraveled—that although the afterlife of archaeological findings is delineated by new and different relations compared to those that prevailed during its use-life, the relationality, or the process that relates humans and things, stays the same.

Let's take a typical stone hammer artefact from Búðarárbakki as an example. It would have gone through an interesting course of changes, from being picked up from the river bed and brought to the site as raw material, partaking in the craftmanship of producing stone hammers by being perforated, breaking up during production and thus not fulfilling its primary purpose (interestingly, never becoming a proper stone hammer), receiving a secondary role in the maintenance of the drystone walls of the house, resting there as a part of a house ruin, found and collected more than 300 years later during an archaeological excavation, brought to the National Museum of Iceland as a part of Iceland's cultural past, and, finally, receiving a leading role in my personal doctoral study. It is clear, that the stone has had an eventful life history, and its identity has changed several times, during its use- and afterlives. Nonetheless, it still *is* that stone, and it beholds all its stony qualities, its weight and hardness, porosity, colour etc. Its enduring stony properties allow it to survive and all its relations in the past and present pay due to this. At the heart of all its relations lies its stoniness.

It is the identical process that rules the relationship between things and humans in, and between, the past and present. The relations created between humans and things are not only directed by the cognitive abilities of humans but in the same way by the material properties of the things. So, it is on the grounds of the relationality of things—their membership to humanity—that the past becomes alive and meaningful.

About the fieldwork

The project that this thesis is based upon started in 2005 when it was awarded a small funding from The Icelandic Archaeology Fund (*Fornleifasjóður*) in order to test my ideas about The Singularization of History in the field. Admittedly, these first steps into the project were taken with utmost precaution—some would say in awe for the task. The beginnings of the project were accompanied by some severe doubts and insecurity regarding the intentions of the project. What if there were only a few or even no finds that could provide insights into the peasant's daily routine? What if the structures granted no detailed access into activities such as building, maintenance or structural alterations? What if the remains of Búðarárbakki rendered themselves devoid of any clues about lived experience in the past? Would the archaeological remains be able to add something new to the fragmentary biography of Þorkell at Búðarárbakki or simply substantiate what was already known from the written sources? Against this background we need to understand the cautious beginning of the research project in 2005.

Other problems arose in the outset of the excavation. The eye of an archaeologist is trained to recognize certain features. In Iceland generally—for sure not in all parts of Iceland, but

especially in the South where I had up until then done most my fieldwork in Iceland—the variegation of turf is a clear indication of built structures. South Icelandic turf contains predominantly strong shades of brown, yellow and red paired with variously black or greyish, sometimes even greenish or white strips of volcanic tephra and it is thus easily recognizable. At Búðarárbakki this colourfulness was spotted instantly in roof turf that had collapsed into the house structures. Wall turf proved to be more difficult to detect. In general, walls were easily distinguished through stone walling. The soil piled up against the stone walling was, however, hard to differentiate from the aeolian silt of the natural surroundings (see further discussion below). This led to some misconceptions about the stratigraphy and composition of structures, which is well illustrated by a description of the south-eastern outer wall taken from the research report of 2005.

> It was a surprise when it turned out that the south-eastern outer wall at Búðarárbakki was built of stones alone. … The surface appearance of the archaeological remains was due to the piling up of aeolian silt at the wall in the lee of the wind by the entrance. (Mímisson, 2005: 19).

This turned out to be a total misreading of the stratigraphy (cf. Mímisson, 2006: 21). The "aeolian silt" piled up against the stone walling was in fact the outer part of the wall construction which was solely made up of soil (no turf), i.e. the same loess as the natural soil of the surroundings and so completely missing the well-known colourfulness of turf walls. Such a misunderstanding of the stratigraphy led of course to some wrong or bad decisions in the process of excavation. However, they were limited in scale and not decisive, and the mistakes could all be reversed.

Although very small in scale and despite the complications, the first excavation period led to a series of unexpected and interesting results. The most intriguing was the discovery of seven stone hammers found stuck under floor slabs of the outer part of the entrance area in addition to one more stone hammer found intermingled with wall debris. Finding stone hammers as such was neither unexpected, nor intriguing at all. The exciting aspect of this find was the almost total exclusivity of the stone hammers within the artefact assemblage because besides two iron artefacts (a nail and a small angled plate) no other finds were made in the first season. Furthermore, all the artefacts (but perhaps one) were either unfinished examples or production failures. This situation allowed for speculations about the role of stone hammers for the inhabitant at Búðarárbakki. In the excavation report of the 2005 season I already dared to conclude that …

> … [t]he artefact assemblage is very special, and it indicates that the inhabitant pursued a craftmanship of perforating stones, which he even might have traded for his subsistence. (Mímisson, 2005: 31).

Following this first season, I worked out a new and comprehensive research plan. Accordingly, the remains of the house at Búðarárbakki were to be investigated entirely in three excavation seasons from 2006 to 2008. In addition, and in the firm conviction that most activities at a hermitage like Búðarárbakki were carried out in the open, I intended to look into the outer activity areas such as the pen attached to the southwest of the house. Furthermore, I intended to locate the site of Búðarártunga, where Þorkell had built his farm before moving across the river to Búðarárbakki, by means of remote sensing. The plan was to finish the excavation of the south-western part of the house in 2006, excavate the other half of the house remains in 2007, finish up the excavation in 2008 as well as investigating the outer activity areas. The remote sensing would be included when possible. The research plan worked out perfectly and in 2008 everything was aimed at completing the fieldwork. However, as commonly experienced in archaeology, new and unexpected findings were made in the final steps of the fieldwork, which called for an additional but short excavation season in 2009 (fig. 6).

The fieldwork took place during short periods each year, alternatively in the months of May, July and August (Mímisson, 2005: 13; 2006: 8; 2008: 11; 2009: 12; 2010: 8) so that work was normally carried out within small and meticulously defined trenches. It was not until 2008 that the entire research area had grown together, and a full overview of the archaeological remains was gained. The fieldwork followed the principle of excavating each context individually. Nonetheless, standing structures such as stone walls were taken down to the last row of stones and in some places soil walls were sectioned or excavated completely in the hope of documenting various building phases. Otherwise, all cultural layers, roofs and wall collapses, floor layers—both earthen and paved floors—were removed completely leaving no residues but the outlines of the house and the pen.

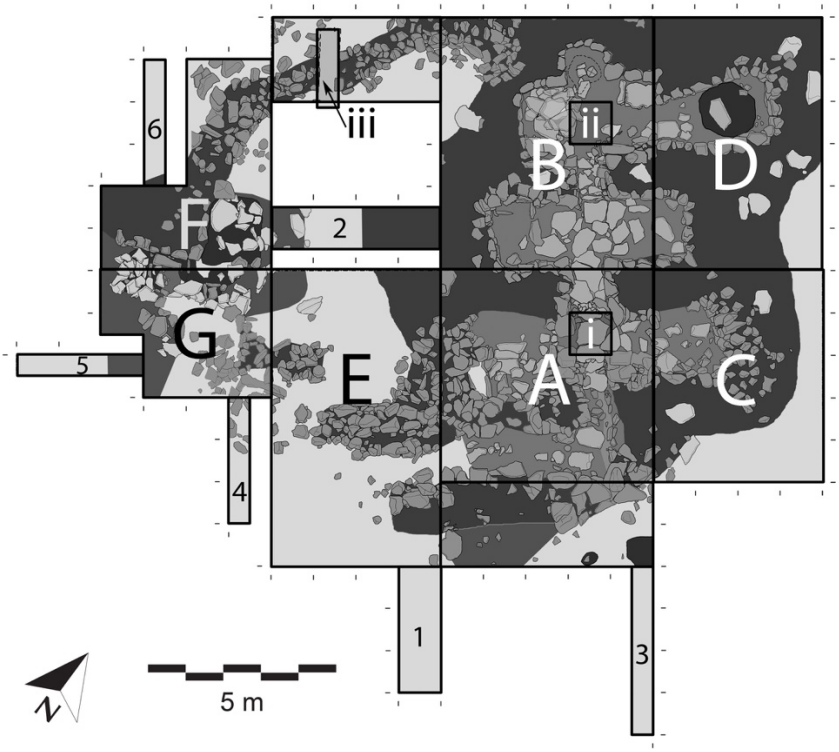
The progress of excavation and each season's results were published in annual reports (Mímisson 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010) including descriptions of structures and finds as well as complete records of documentation. Each report is of course only a preliminary draft and thus merely depicting a certain moment in an ongoing project. In the following I will aim at summarizing the results of the fieldwork at Búðarárbakki based on the information from the annual reports. Furthermore, in it I will draw some new conclusions about the fieldwork and its results that I have only been able to do with the proper wisdom of hindsight and reflection.

Búðarárbakki: concerning its structures

Búðarárbakki presents a quintessential settlement site in Iceland, i.e. a place comprising the remains of a solitary homestead. This was for a thousand years the dominant form of habitation in the country or from the earliest settlement period in the 9th century until the 19th century when urbanization gradually took over. Normally, we consider such homesteads in terms of a

farm or a farmstead, meaning a self-sufficient farming unit built up of a residential building, usually with one or more outhouses, be that barns, byres, sheepfolds, smithies etc., accommodating people, animals and things in various compositions and numbers. The appellation itself, 'farmstead', attributes of a certain identity to the settlement as well as anticipating a specific range of activities on site. Calling Búðarárbakki a farmstead implies therefore an identity, not only of the site and the material constellation but its inhabitant—the farmer—as well.

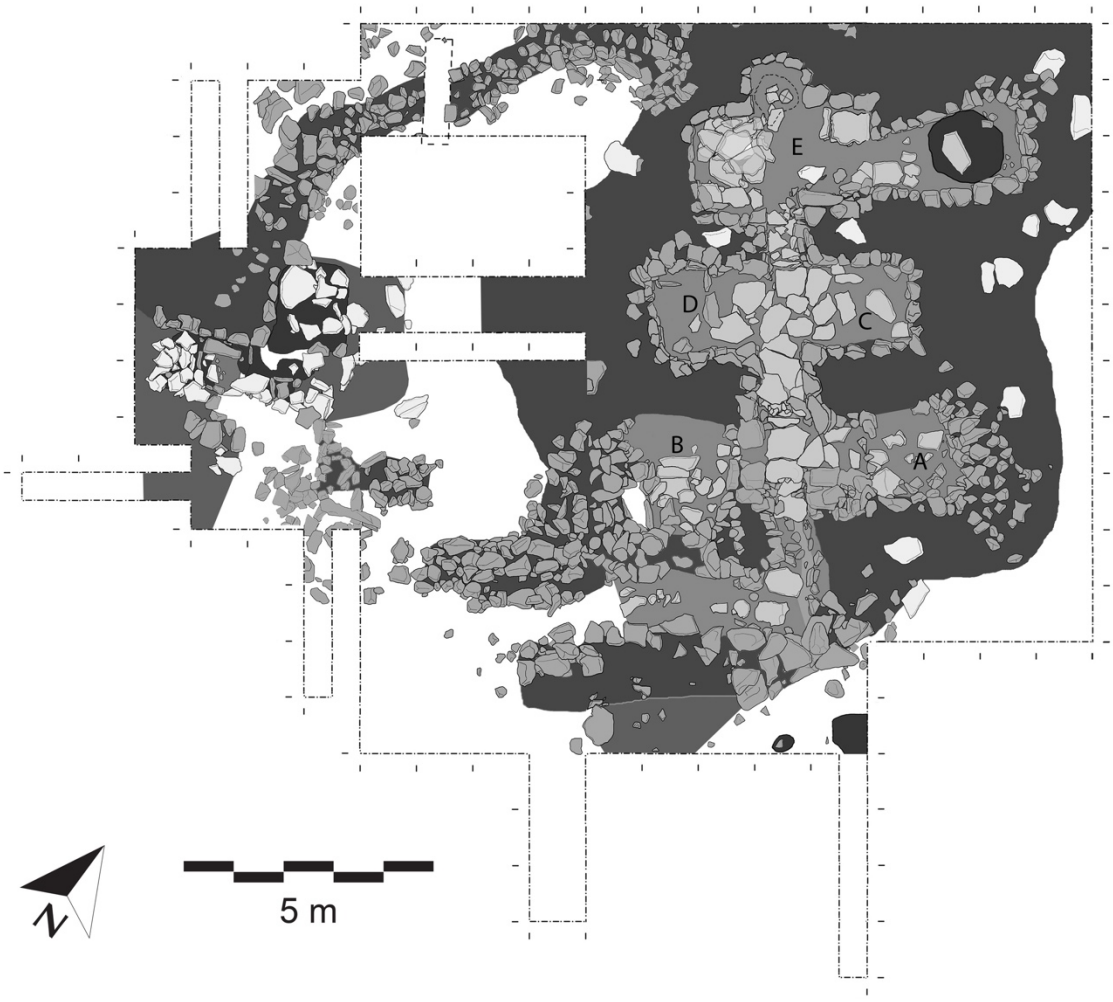
Figure 6 A plan drawing showing the areas excavated each season at Búðarárbakki: i– iii: Test pits 1, 2 and 5 from 2004 (Einarsson, 2004); A–I: Excavation areas, 2005–2009; 1–6: Trial sections, 2008–2009 (Mímisson, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010).



Within archaeology, and as discussed above, personal identities are something we extract out of material relations, rather than having them imposed upon these relations beforehand. Identities are drawn out of material assemblages, for example a settlement site, and what they contain and reveal. Certainly, distinctive types of houses, applying a specific and well-known architectural arrangement count as a strong argument for a particular identification with a certain way of life. It allows us to assume a range of identities with which this particular type of architecture is associated. Nonetheless, one needs to take care not to overemphasize identities based on the architectural form alone. Primarily, identities are not fixed but constantly in flux and never singular, nor surfacing in seclusion. Therefore, Búðarárbakki can bring forth a quite

different composition of identities, although the buildings bear a striking architectural resemblance to the contemporary (or semi-contemporary) farmsteads at Sandártunga and Forna Lá (see below). The architectural guise of Búðarárbakki, together with the written information about its habitation in the Land Register, should yield a strong argument defining Búðarbakki as a farm and its inhabitant as a farmer. Nonetheless, Búðarábakki also evokes many other kinds of identities such as building and craftmanship. One may, of course, ask how this does not fit in with the notion of farming. Farming does not only involve animal husbandry or agriculture, but a whole range of different activities and identities. But as we know, the builder and the craftsman can as well emerge out of material relations that are completely unrelated to farming or at least tone down the farming aspect.

Figure 7 A plan drawing of Búðarárbakki.



Búðarárbakki is a small passageway house of a five-room arrangement (fig. 7). The passageway house is an architectural form, appearing in various layouts, that is well-known in

Iceland from the 14th century and onwards. From a multitude of passageway houses in Iceland Sandártunga and Forna Lá (Eldjárn, 1951) offer by far the best comparisons to Búðarárbakki, although having a slightly different setup. Both sites were excavated by Kristján Eldjárn (1951) in the 1940s and became very soon prime examples of small and rather poor passageway farms from the early modern times.

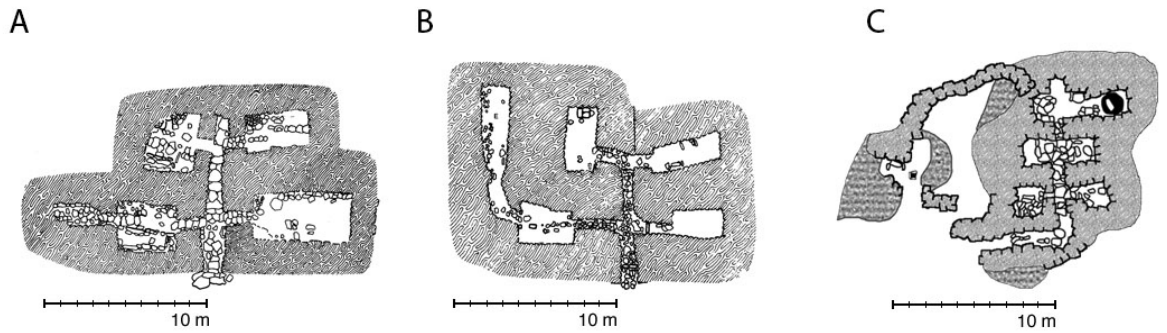
Sandártunga is located in the valley of Þjórsárdalur and was—like many other homesteads in that area, throughout the centuries—abandoned following a devastating volcanic eruption in Mount Hekla. The abandonment of Sandártunga in 1693 is well documented both in written records as well as archaeologically (Þórarinsson, 1951), thus confirming its final habitation contemporary with Búðarárbakki. Kristján Eldjárn (1951: 115) states that older remains are to be found underneath the excavated ruins, but he did not continue his investigation into the lower strata. A recent revisit of Sandártunga (Lucas & Ævarsson, 2017) confirmed several earlier phases of buildings.

The dating of Forna Lá, which lies on the northern coast of the Snæfellsnes peninsula, is somewhat more ambiguous. Kristján Eldjárn (1951: 108) claims a date between 1450 and 1550 based on two arguments: a) Three fitting artefacts of a small copper cauldron that Kristján Eldjárn links with a type commonly found in Norway between the 15th and 17th century; b) Forna Lá is not mentioned in the Land Register and must have been forgotten and thus abandoned some time before the time of its registry in the earliest 18th century. These are on the one hand valid arguments but on the other hand one might say that the close architectural resemblance between Forna Lá and Sandártunga—and for that matter their likeness to Búðarárbakki—could suggest a more contemporary date for all three of these farmsteads. Hence, a 17th century date for Forna Lá can by no means be excluded (cf. Einarsson, 2004: 25). As in the case of Sandártunga, Kristján Eldjárn points out that the excavated remains at Forna Lá seem to superimpose earlier building phases, which he, however, did not “dare” to investigate (Eldjárn, 1951: 106).

Sandártunga and Forna Lá have a strikingly similar layout consisting of two rows of rooms (two front and two back rooms) cut by the passage (fig. 8). The fifth room is an annex out of the left front room. Interestingly, Kristján Eldjárn gave two different interpretation for this uncanny architectural resemblance. The left front room at Forna Lá is according to Kristján Eldjárn a byre with an annexed barn, whereas the same room at Sandártunga is interpreted as *baðstofa* or the main living quarter, with an annexed pantry. The different interpretations rest on an argumentation based on the inbuilt structures of each rooms. Kristján Eldjárn (1951: 105) claims that the left front room at Forna Lá had a dung channel along the centre and stalls at the outer wall. The stalls were, however, not compartmentalized by vertical slabs like in the byres excavated for instance at Stöng (Roussel, 1944: 92), Gröf (Gestsson, 1959: 38) or Bær (Einarsson, 2007: 19). Conversely, at Sandártunga Kristján Eldjárn (1951: 113) argues that inbuilt structures in the left front room (a line of stones alongside the outer wall at

approximately one-meter distance) were the foundation for a bedstead. Hörður Ágústsson (1987: 244; 1989: 277) counters Kristján Eldjárn's interpretation and states that the alleged byre and barn at Forna Lá is in fact a *baðstofa*—a living room— with an annexed pantry as in the case of Sandártunga. Hörður Ágústsson argues that the structures Kristján Eldjárn interprets as stalls are in fact bedsteads and the putative dung channel is simply a drain (see below).

Figure 8 A plan drawing of a) Forna-Lá (Eldjárn 1951: 104), b) Sandártunga (Eldjárn, 1951: 111) and c) Búðarárbakki illustrating the size difference between these three houses.



Thus, if we agree with Hörður Ágústsson, then there is not much difference in the architectural setup between Forna Lá and Sandártunga, i.e. living quarters are in the front and workrooms in the back. The main distinction lies in the lack of any source of heating (a hearth or a fireplace) and cooking inside Sandártunga whereas Forna Lá had some sort of a fireplace in three rooms. Kristján Eldjárn (1951: 113) argues that due to some amount of ash in the floor layer of room IV (the front room opposite to the living room) this must have been the kitchen, a conclusion rather based on feeling than on strong archaeological evidence. However, and strangely inconsequential, Kristján Eldjárn finishes the sentence by admitting that all floor layers in Sandártunga contained equal amount of ash. Well, a hearth or a fireplace producing the ash in the floor layer must have been somewhere, yet its location remains a mystery. It is not impossible that a kitchen could have stood separately and there were several outhouses in Sandártunga that were not investigated. Kristján Eldjárn (1951: 110) presumes they were all stables which sounds plausible as they were all located at some distance to the farmhouse. Unfortunately, these remains are now completely eroded (Lucas & Ævarsson, 2017: 17). The coring project in 2017, conducted by Gavin Lucas and Uggi Ævarsson, revealed a thick charcoal layer inside the living room at a depth of 90 cm below the surface which is consistent with the late 17th century floor level. This finding inevitably raises the question if it is possible that Kristján Eldjárn overlooked the residues of a fireplace inside the living room?

An interesting aspect of Forna Lá is a system of drain. These drains led out of three of the four rooms into the passage and from there out of the house. Interestingly, the only room that was not drained in this manner was the right backroom. In one corner of this room there was a fireplace filled with fire cracked and charred, fist size stones, so called cooking stones. Hence,

it seems that this room was exceptionally damp by either boiling water or, as Kristján Eldjárn (1951: 105) hints at, by a steam bath. He poses the question if this was an ancient bath room. The term *baðstofa* means literally *bath room* and functioned within a larger Scandinavian context as a kind of a sauna where cold water was splashed onto hot stones in order to generate steam. It was not until the 15th century that the term *baðstofa* was transposed to the main living room, often—beside the kitchen—the only heated quarter within the farm (Sigurðardóttir, 1966: 69–79). Anyway, drainages are a well-known features in Icelandic turf houses throughout the centuries, fulfilling various function, but served mainly to drain the generally very damp quarters (e.g. Árnadóttir, 1987: 40; Einarsson, 2008: 15, 21; Eldjárn, 1951: 106; Gestsson, 1959: 24; Snæsdóttir et al., 2006: 685).

All things considered, Sandártunga and Forna Lá are certainly very small in comparison to medieval passageway farmhouses (e.g. Gröf or Kúabót) and Sandártunga had arguably an estate value that was below average in the late 17th century. Another aspect that relates both sites and one that gives support to the notion of poverty is the general scarcity of finds. At Forna Lá only 11 finds were published and at Sandártunga the excavators reported 17 finds in addition to an undisclosed number of manuport stones and animal bones. A later survey at the National Museum of Iceland showed that more finds from the excavation were collected than reported (tot. 51; Lucas & Ævarsson, 2017: 8). This poverty of finds was not exceptional for sites excavated in the earlier half of the 20th century and it has often been put aside as a methodological bias (cf. Vésteinsson, 2004: 87). Researchers in Iceland were often more interested in the inner layout of houses and their internal structure rather than in the multitude of artefacts that could be retrieved from a midden or an earthen floor layer. Thus, floor layers were often not excavated at all, let alone sieved. One of the aims of revisiting Sandártunga in 2017 was to locate a midden in order to recover material from the final phase of settlement (Lucas & Ævarsson, 2017: 10). The researchers succeeded in locating the midden, still they had to concede that the scarcity of finds registered during the excavation in 1949 was more characteristic for Sandártunga than assumed. This let them to conclude that "[d]espite the lack of sieving in 1949, it seems unlikely that if any appreciable quantities of ceramics, glass or clay pipes were present, they would have been missed" (Lucas & Ævarsson, 2017: 15–16).

Búðarárbakki resembles Sandártunga and Forna Lá in many ways, although the floor surface at both farms is around twice the size of Búðarárbakki (Sandártunga, approx. 48 m^2; Forna Lá, approx. 68 m^2; Búðarárbakki = 29,33). The general layout is familiar and based on the same grammar, i.e. a passage and a set of similarly sized rooms on each side. Furthermore, Búðarárbakki shares the find poverty with Forna Lá and Sandártunga. Different excavation techniques and strategies led of course to a much larger number of finds at Búðarárbakki (134 find numbers) than originally documented at the other two sites. Nonetheless, a relative scarcity of finds is a phenomenon that has been observed at many sites in Iceland and seems to follow a certain pattern that cannot entirely be reduced to methodological bias, i.e. different excavation

techniques or strategies. Further below I will discuss in more detail how the finds poverty at Búðarárbakki lines up with these other sites of reference. However, before that I want to delve into the architecture of Búðarárbakki.

A blueprint

The passageway farm at Búðarárbakki consists of three rows of rooms along the passage, two front room, a middle row and the large living quarter at the end of the passage (fig. 7). The stratigraphy at Búðarárbakki frames the site between two easily recognizable tephra-layers. Underneath the cultural remains, and only cut by the sunken floor level of the house and workshop at Búðarárbakki, there is an approximately one-centimetre thin black layer of finest tephra, very likely from Veiðivötn in 1477. The geologist Sigurður Þórarinsson (1949) surveyed tephra-layers in Hrunamannahreppur in relation to Kristján Eldjárn's excavation at Þórarinsstaðir in 1945. He does not document the VV–1477 layer but the so-called Hekla–1300 layer. It is not of the utmost importance, which layer it is. Much more important is the tephra-layer from an eruption in Hekla in 1693 that seals the archaeological remains. This is a course black tephra-layer, up to six centimetres in thickness, that covered the house remains directly in the earliest stages of its ruination. Here and there, the tephra has filled open spaces within the ruins, demonstrating clearly the relatively short time interval between the abandonment of Búðarárbakki and this devastating eruption. This fits perfectly to the reference in the Land Register that indicates a settlement at Búðarárbakki between 1665 and 1675 (see above).

Búðarárbakki deviates a little from the architectural setup of Sandártunga and Forna Lá. As indicated by the appellation the passageway house is dominated by a passage or a corridor that links all (or at least most) rooms of the house together. Interestingly, passages in Icelandic turf houses have received relatively little attention in the architectural discussion. This is quite strange considering the dominating character of passages in medieval and post-medieval architecture in Iceland. The passage has mostly been treated in terms of a path or connection between the individual rooms of the house, in which domestic activities took place. The passage itself has on the other hand not been considered especially important within the architecture as it has not been regarded as a locale for domestic practices. Notwithstanding, the passage was literally the lifeline of Icelandic passageway houses for which Búðarárbakki stands as a typical example. It controlled and directed all movement within the house as it linked all the individual parts of the house together. Rooms could only be entered and exited by means of the passage and all domestic practices, that took place within the house, could only be integrated through the passage. At Búðarárbakki this directional aspect of the passage was even maintained exiting the house by its outer extension, constraining all movement from the house into one direction, i.e. towards the workshop located west of the house.

Almost the entire passage was paved with large flagstones or slabs. Only the western most part of the outer extension was not completely flagged but laid with singular slabs or stepping-

stones. Underneath the flags, beginning at the backmost part of the entry area and leading outwards was a drain, a bare 20 cm deep at its deepest and approximately 15 cm wide. The drain started very shallow, had its deepest part at the front door and got shallower again as it led through the outer extension wall of the passage. The construction of the drainage is identical to the drainage system at Forna Lá, although it is of course not as elaborate. The drainage at Búðarárbakki had obviously the sole function of capturing water seeping through the roof and walls as well as from the ground and leading it out of the house.

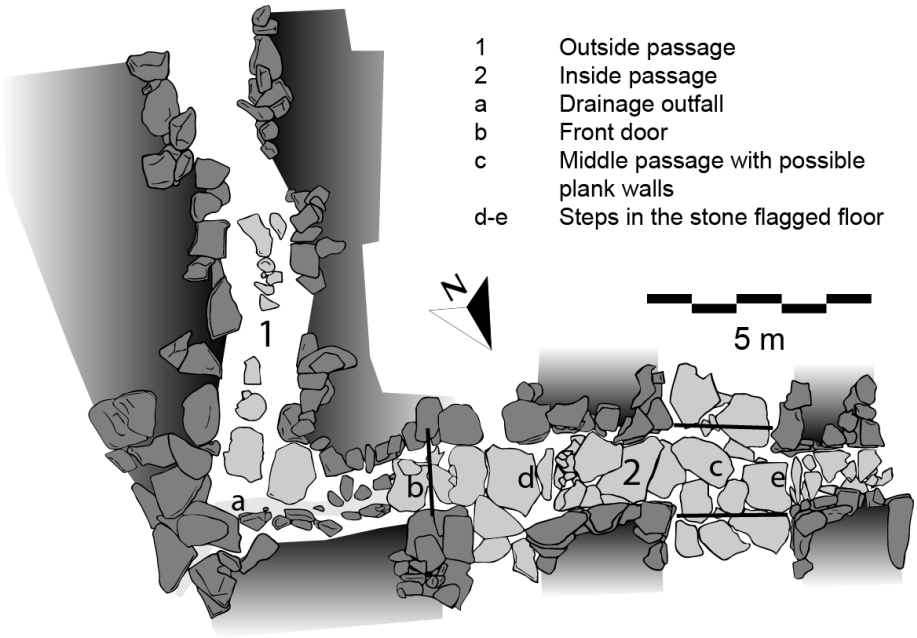
The passage at Búðarárbakki is not a homogeneous space but consists of varying sections (fig. 9). There is the outer section that was not roofed, the entry area from which the two front rooms of the farm were entered, the middle section crossing the two middle rooms of the house, and the final section leading into the main living quarter situated at the end of the passage. The backmost section lies some 70 cm higher than the outer section. The rise of the passage is rather gradual, although with two steps on its way, one right behind first section and the another after the middle section. Interestingly, there is no threshold at the entrance. Thresholds, blocks of stones, often rising as high as 20–25 cm above the floor level, are not unusual, although far from being universal. Such a threshold, 20 cm high, was found at Sandártunga (Eldjárn, 1951: 113) but none in Forna Lá. A threshold could also have been a part of the wooden doorframe and thus not preserved.

The first section of the passage is also one of Búðarárbakki's unique architectural features. This outer elongation had no function but directing all movement coming out of the house towards the working shed. It was formed by the south-western house wall on the one side and on the other side by a parallel wall structure built in the same manner, i.e. with a drystone walling facing the inside of the passage and with soil scooped against the walling from the outside. However, in the part where it connects with the south-eastern outer wall, beyond the entrance to the house and where the drainage lead through the wall, it was built as a mere drystone wall without the soil component on the outside. This outer extension wall was quite low, not higher than 50 cm and around two meters thick, gradually wedging out until it simply faded into the natural soil. Thus, it could not provide the entrance any shelter from wind or rain. On the sloping surface of that wall there was a large flag stone (53x75 cm), broken into three pieces. The slab was broken through a hole that had been chiselled peripherally through its thinner part. This may have been a horse stone, used to tether up a horse by pulling the leash through the hole (fig. 10).

Walking along the passage towards the entrance one would take a sharp left turn into a narrow channel, around 60–80 cm wide and 150 cm long, between the outer walls leading up to the entrance. The entrance with the doorway was at the end of this channel, only 80 cm wide. The doorway must have been a timber structure; a doorframe, including a threshold, and a hinged plank door. During the 2004 trial excavation a so-called door stone was found in the doorway. It is a fist size stone with a chiselled hole and indents on each side, through and around

which a string was tied. Such a stone functioned as an automatic door closer. The stone at Búðarárbakki is, however, only 272 g and thus perhaps too light for a door closer. Still, much suggests that the door was very small. Indicating by the wall height of the outer walls at the entrance the doorway was probably not higher than 120 cm and the plank door itself not larger than approximately 60x90 cm. Could such a small stone weigh against a plank door of this size?

Figure 9 The passage at Búðarárbakki and its individual parts.

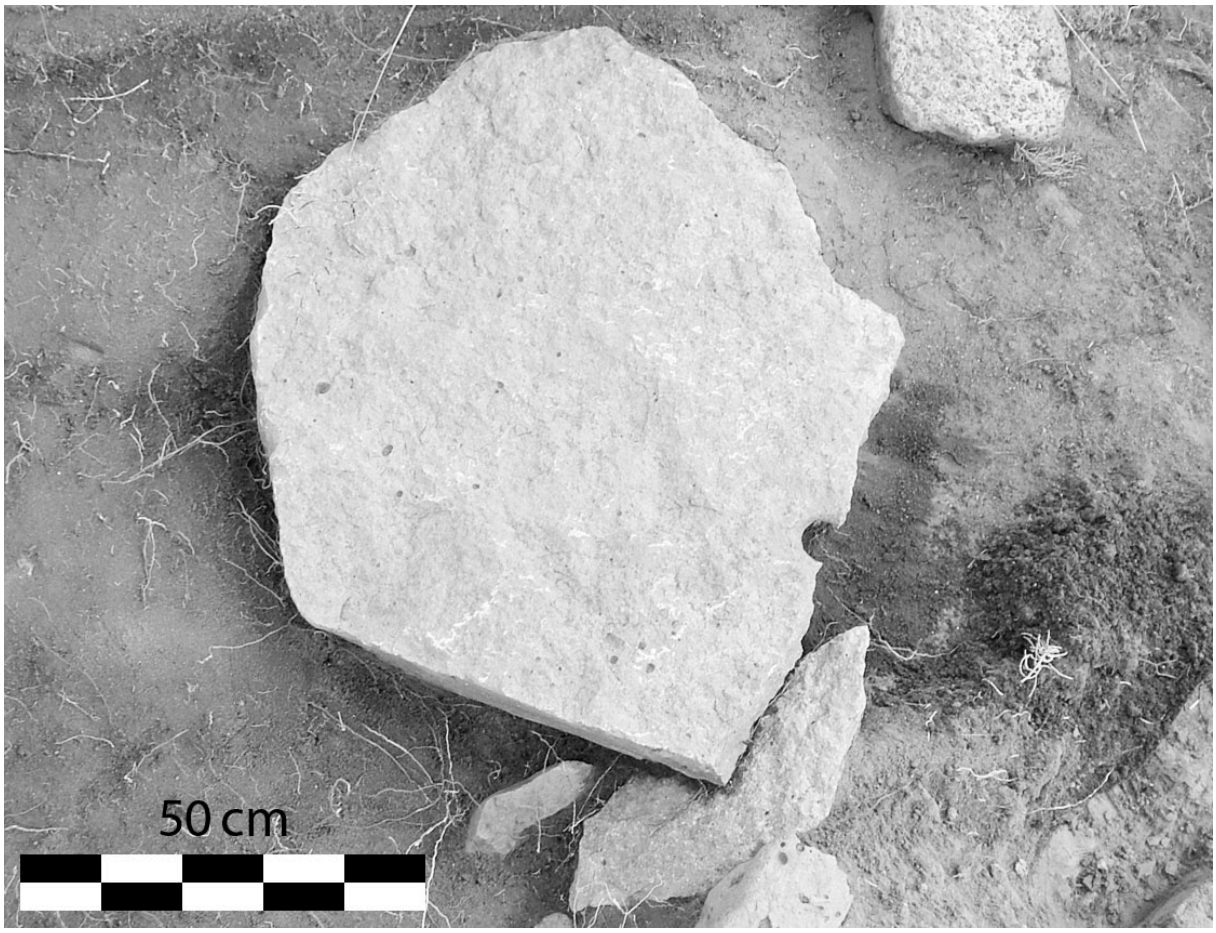


Entering the house, the passage continues past the two front rooms, as is it widens a little bit, reaching a width of 80–100 cm. On each side there are extremely narrow doors, only around 50 cm wide, leading into the two front rooms (A and B). No remains of its wooden framework were detected. Room A (on the right side of the passage) is only a little less than two square metres and has a strange form with a meter-long entry passage and an irregular floor surface where each corner has a different angle (fig. 11). A stone in the south-eastern corner of the room has an interesting indent that seems to dictate the angle of that corner and so demonstrating how the material actively participates in forming the architecture (see *Building Identities*, fig 5). The floor in room A was a mix of singular flag stones and earthen floor. The floor layer was completely sterile missing the usual traces of charcoals, ash or artefacts, and residues of inbuilt structures were absent as well.

Room B was slightly larger with a floor surface of 2,5 m^2. Its form was similarly uneven with the southern side much smaller (105 cm) than the northern side (189 cm), thus somewhat trapezoidal in shape (fig. 11). The southern part of the floor was laid with slabs whereas the northern part was the same immaterial earthen floor as found in room A. In the south-western corner of room B there was a small stone setting at the edge of the stone flagged floor that created an oval trough. In the early phases of excavation this was believed to be a fodder trough

and room B was thought to be a byre, similar to Kristján Eldjárn's interpretation of the left front room at Forna Lá (see discussion above). However, the only finds in room B—all found within the oval trough—were three animal bones, two diagnosed as cattle (table 4) with clear butchering marks. Thus, the trough could have been a tub for storing meat and room B might have been a pantry.

Figure 10 A horse stone (HRHR-2009-63-105) lying on the surface outside the outer passage (photo KM).

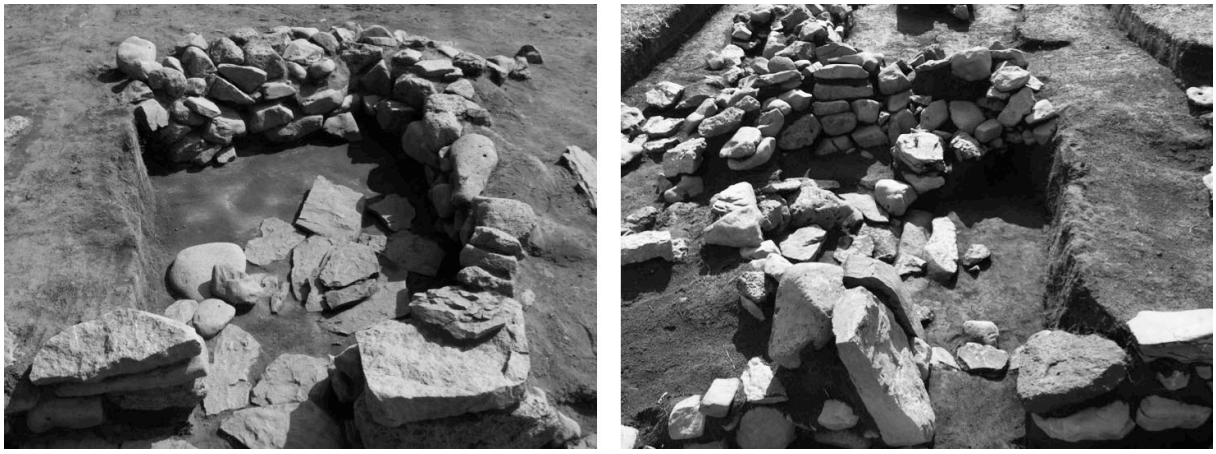


The middle section of the passage opens up into the two middle rooms (C and D) (fig 12). It is possible that the rooms were separated from the passage with plank walls, although nothing indicates such timber walls. If they existed, they must have stood directly on the flagged floor, as it spreads out seamlessly into the rooms on each side without leaving any marks of a plank wall. Such a timber partitioning of the passage is well-known and has been documented in Gröf (Gestsson, 1959: 13–14), Kúabót (Gestsson, 1987a: 28), Reyðarfell (Grímsson, 1976: 569) and Bær (Einarsson, 2008: 8), just for a few examples. The rooms are 2,5 (C) and 2,3 (D) m^2 large. Room D was spilt up by two vertically standing slabs that linked to the northern wall in the centre of the room. This created two equally sized compartments with a 40 cm wide opening between the two at the southern wall. The inner compartment had an earthen floor without much traces of habitation (ash, charcoals, burnt bones etc.). The function of this compartmentalization

is unclear. Only four finds were made in the middle section of the house: an iron nail and two whetstones in room D and a peculiar smooth stone, a manuport, inside room C.

In Forna Lá and Sandártunga the main living quarters were in the front of the house, an architectural setup that goes back into the Middle Ages. In the early passageway houses the old hall was spilt up by the passage into a hall and sitting room (*skáli* and *sofa*) leading to smaller facilities the back. At Búðarárbakki this was the other way around as the main living quarter (E) was located in the back of the house at the end of the passage (see *Building Identities*, fig. 7). This is, with its almost 10 m^2, by far the largest room in the house. It has a somewhat strange layout that supports the idea that it was extended eastwards at a later stage. The extension has nonparallel walls whereas the original part has a quite regular floor surface. Furthermore, the room has a unique variation to vernacular architecture in Iceland with the half-round niche located directly opposite to the passage (see *Building Identities*, fig. 8; *Twisted Lives*, fig. 3). In this niche there was a post that partook in carrying the roof. Thus, the roof might have been elevated in this part allowing for more freedom of movement (see further discussion in *Building Identities*).

Figure 11 The two front rooms of the house at Búðarárbakki. Room A to the left and room B to the right (photos KM; left towards SW; right towards NE).



Room E differs from all other rooms in the house. This applies to its inbuilt structures that clearly hint at its usage as well as the number and variety of artefacts found in the room. Entering the room there is stone flagged floor covering the entire western part. Interestingly, it overlays a small, roundish storage pit that was dug into the floor. The pit was 50 cm diameter and around 40 cm deep (fig. 13). The sides of it were lined with stones and in it there were the remains of decaying wood and a couple of unidentified bones of which two were fishbones (table 4). Opposite the storage pit and next to the niche there was a seat built of stones (see *Building Identities*, fig. 8). The seat is nicely situated in a corner, so providing walls on two sides to lean up to while seated. Besides the area of flagstones in the western part, the room had a conventional earthen floor with clear grey and reddish stains of ash and peat ash. The floor layer was for the most parts very thin (< 1 cm) with the exception of the half-round niche

wherein the underground surface formed a small depression that was filled with a floor layer reaching up to 20 cm thickness.

East of the seat there is the later extension to the room. Akin to the front rooms it has a rather irregular form, 260 cm long and 80 cm wide, broadening up to 130 cm at the back. The earthen floor layer of the western part of room E does not continue into the extension. In there we find the same immaterial earthen floor as in the middle and front rooms. The eastern part of the extension is covered with a round charcoal layer (fig. 14). This charcoal layer crossed the entire room and was around 120 cm in diameter. It filled a shallow depression in the floor. The depression was covered with a thin turf layer on which the fire had burned. On top of the layer there lay a floor slab, obviously put into the layer after the fire had burnt up. Around the charcoal layer three loom weights—objects in the making—were found (see below). This peculiar round

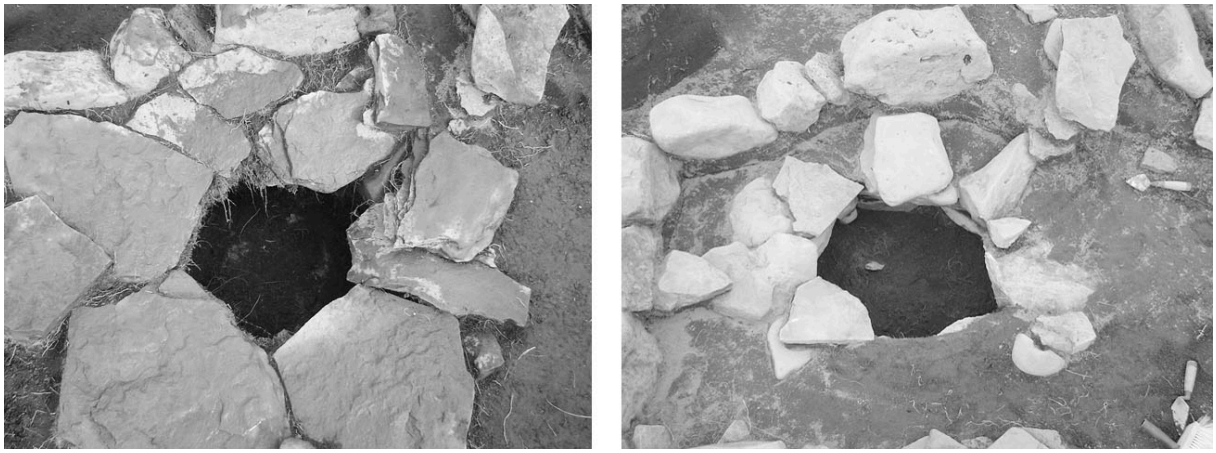
Figure 12 The central part of the passage with room C (above) and D with its two compartments (below) (photo KM, towards NE).

charcoal layer is the only proof of controlled fire within the house at Búðarárbakki. Yet, it cannot stand for a hearth or a permanent fireplace—a feature so desperately needed for a permanent, year-round settlement. It shows all the evidence of a short term burning at a relatively low temperature. It did not produce any ashes, nor were any burnt bones associated with the layer. The fire must have burnt shortly before Búðarárbakki's abandonment, shown by

the clear demarcation of the charcoal layer. The coal dust did neither stain into the floor layer around it, nor was it covered by any kind of sediments. Nonetheless, the ash and peat ash found in the floor layers at Búðarárbakki—little as it is—must have come from somewhere. It is, however, evident that it was not created within the house.

Room E shows all evidences of having been the main locus of activities inside the house. The finds spectrum is quite different from other parts of the house. Not only there are more finds in room E (18) than in all other parts of the house combined (8; excluding stone hammer artefacts that were stuck into walls or under floor slabs and thus gained a secondary function as building material), but also the finds (e.g. pottery, sewing needle, knife, clay pipe) show an interesting and varied range of household activities. Here the recluse went about his daily routine, rested, ate, repaired his garment and worked on some of his smaller pieces of craftmanship.

Figure 13 The storage pit under the flagged floor in the western part of room E, the main living quarter (photo KM, towards WNW).

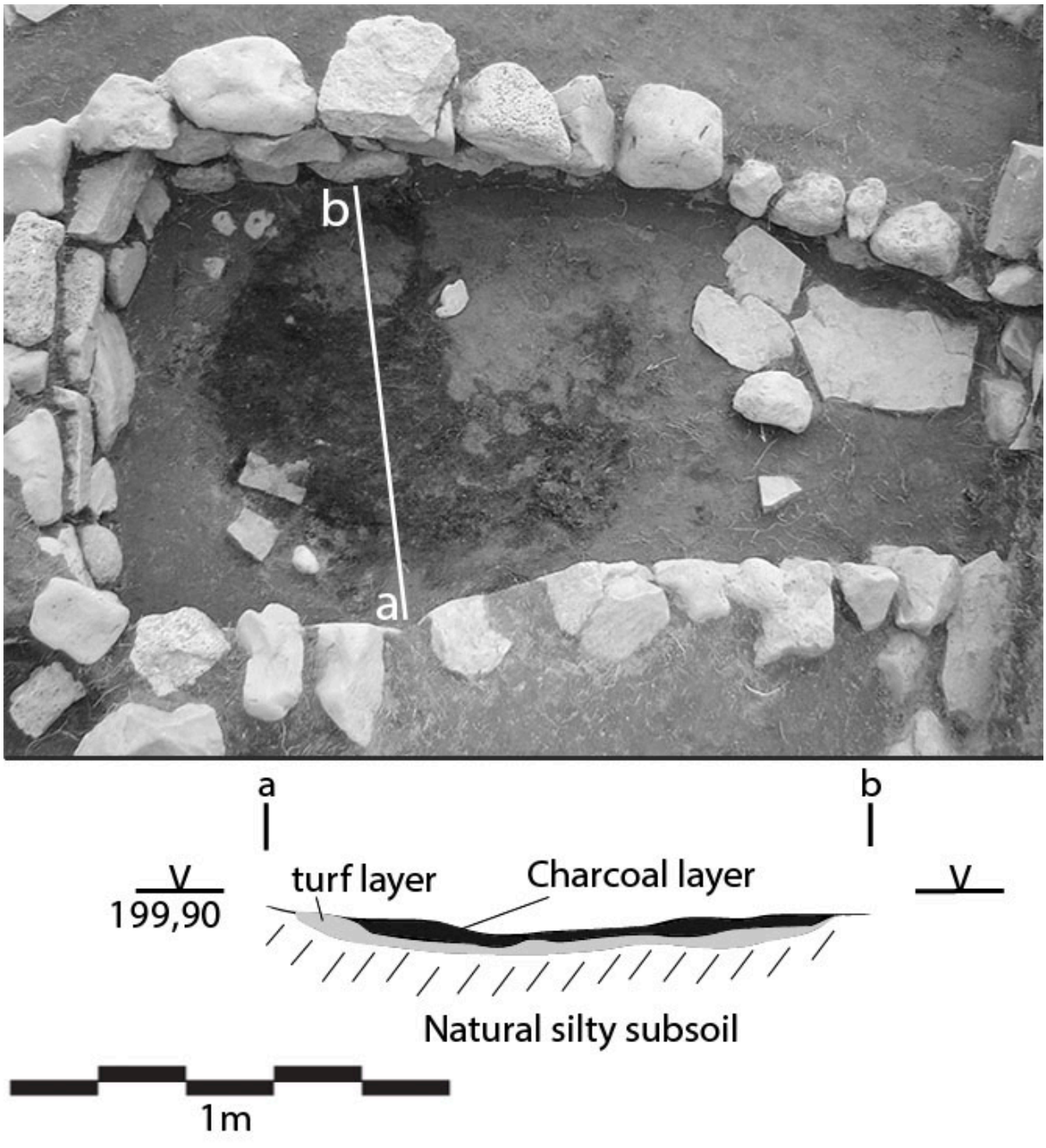


Thus, room E was the hub of indoor activities. Still, it is a truism that most activities in a rural setting take place outside. Notwithstanding, outside activity areas are very seldom a part of archaeological investigations in Iceland. The research project that this work is based upon aimed, however, especially at investigating the spread of outdoor activity areas by means of trenches dug radially from the house at Búðarárbakki. Furthermore, the pen attached to the western side of the house was partly excavated in order to understand its function and role within the architecture and the daily practices of Þorkell at Búðarárbakki. Brynjúlfur Jónsson (1896: 3) assumed that the wall around the pen was a hay-wall (*heygarður*). Such structures are well-known in Iceland from early on. They consist of turf walls, around 80–120 cm high, often attached to animal houses. Against these walls hay was stored over the winter, covered and weighted down with brushwood and turf (Jónasson, 1961: 85). The wall around the pen at Búðarárbakki was, however, essentially a drystone wall, arguably with a turf core (Einarsson, 2004: 22), and could not have been particularly high (max. 40–50 cm). The interior of the pen is about 26 m^2. Its southern part, where one entered it through a 50 cm wide gate, had a slightly

sunken surface level, whereas in its central part the western outer wall of the house faded gradually into the pen and so created a somewhat uneven interior surface of the pen.

During the final days of excavation in 2008 a somewhat unexpected and suspicious structure was uncovered in the westernmost part of the pen (fig. 15; see also *Building Identities*, fig. 9). The first traces of this structure were roof slabs that lay almost vertically in the soil covered by a few centimetre-thin turf layer. The roof slabs outlined a very small L-formed structure with a sunken floor level as they had fallen alongside the walls of this peculiar structure. Underneath the roof slabs there was a layer of burnt brushwood, which is typical of

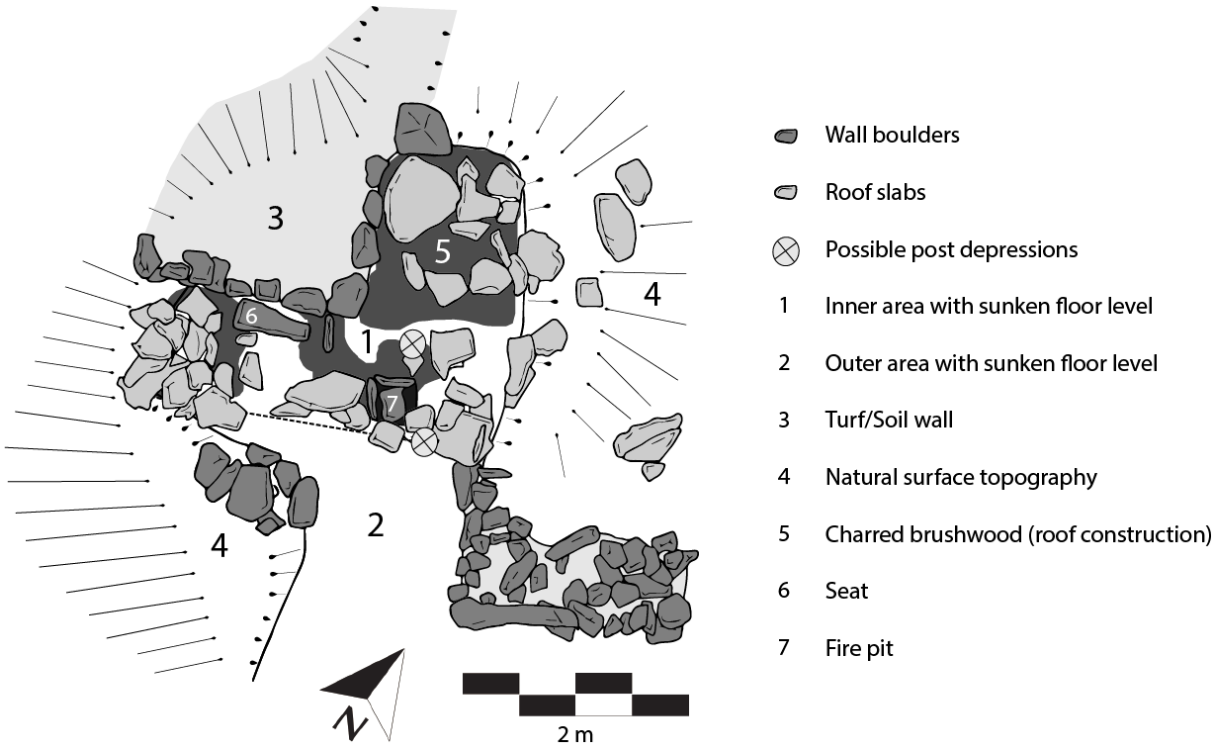
Figure 14 The charcoal layer in room E (photo KM; towards ENE).



roof structures in Icelandic turf houses (see discussion below). The roof had fallen directly onto the floor level of this structure with no remains of any airborne material between the roof and floor that could temporarily separate the abandonment from the collapse of the roof.

The strangest thing about this architectural feature was the inconsistent types of walls that supported the roof. The structure seemed to be open towards the south into the area in front of the gate into the pen. Towards the west there was a conventionally built wall of unworked

Figure 15 The workshop in the western part of the pen.



stones and soil (see below) that linked into the northern part of the wall around the pen, whereas towards the east and southwest the natural form of the surface served as some kind of wall. It was an *ad hoc* built shed with a sunken floor level and a headroom that was probably not more than one meter. At the southern side of the built wall there was a seat constructed in the same manner as the seat inside room E. Around this seat there was a massive floor layer of ash and peat ash. This floor layer spread out around the southern part of the shed and into the outer activity area in front of it. East of the seat, directly under the overhanging roof there was a small pit—40x40 cm large and 40 cm deep—backed with stone slabs on all four sides (fig. 16). In this pit there were alternating layers of ash and silt, demonstrating the iterative sparking off a fire in the pit. The ash layers contained tiniest iron fragments in some numbers—mainly tips of nails and slag. Hence, one may assume that Þorkell at Búðarárbakki did some iron working, although nothing points at an elaborated forge.

Around 50% of all artefacts at Búðarárbakki were found within this approximately 16 m^2 large area in- and outside of the working shed. The find spectrum differs considerably from the

finds found within the house or in other outside areas excavated at Búðarárbakki. It is characterized by a number of iron and copper alloy artefacts (66% of all iron finds and 90% of all copper alloy) combined with pieces related to the production of stone hammers. In addition, there is an assembly of objects related to the industry of perforating stones, such as cores from stone hammers, chisels and whetstones.

The excavation at Búðarárbakki did not reveal any other structures. In 1896 Daniel Bruun (see fig. 5) drew a small outhouse to the east of the house at Búðarárbakki. The trial excavations

Figure 16 The fire pit in the workshop at Búðarárbakki with alternating layers of ash and aeolian silt (photo KM; towards NE).

in 2004 could, however, not confirm any remains there. Other suspicious surface features to the southeast of the house were also investigated but led to the same negative results (Einarsson, 2004: 21). Hence, Búðarárbakki seems to consist of this single building, that was obviously built in order to present a certain identity, be that of the farmer, craftsman or simply of the independent land- and homeowner. All things considered, evidences of farming, i.e. animal husbandry and hay-making, are practically none which therefore forces one to pose the question if Búðarárbakki was at all a farm. In addition, the seeming lack of a proper hearth within the house, i.e. the necessary heating source for a winter settlement at Búðarárbakki, allows one to wonder if Þorkell lived there all year round, or if he only dwelt there seasonally (see further discussion in *Twisted lives* and *Singularizing the Past*).

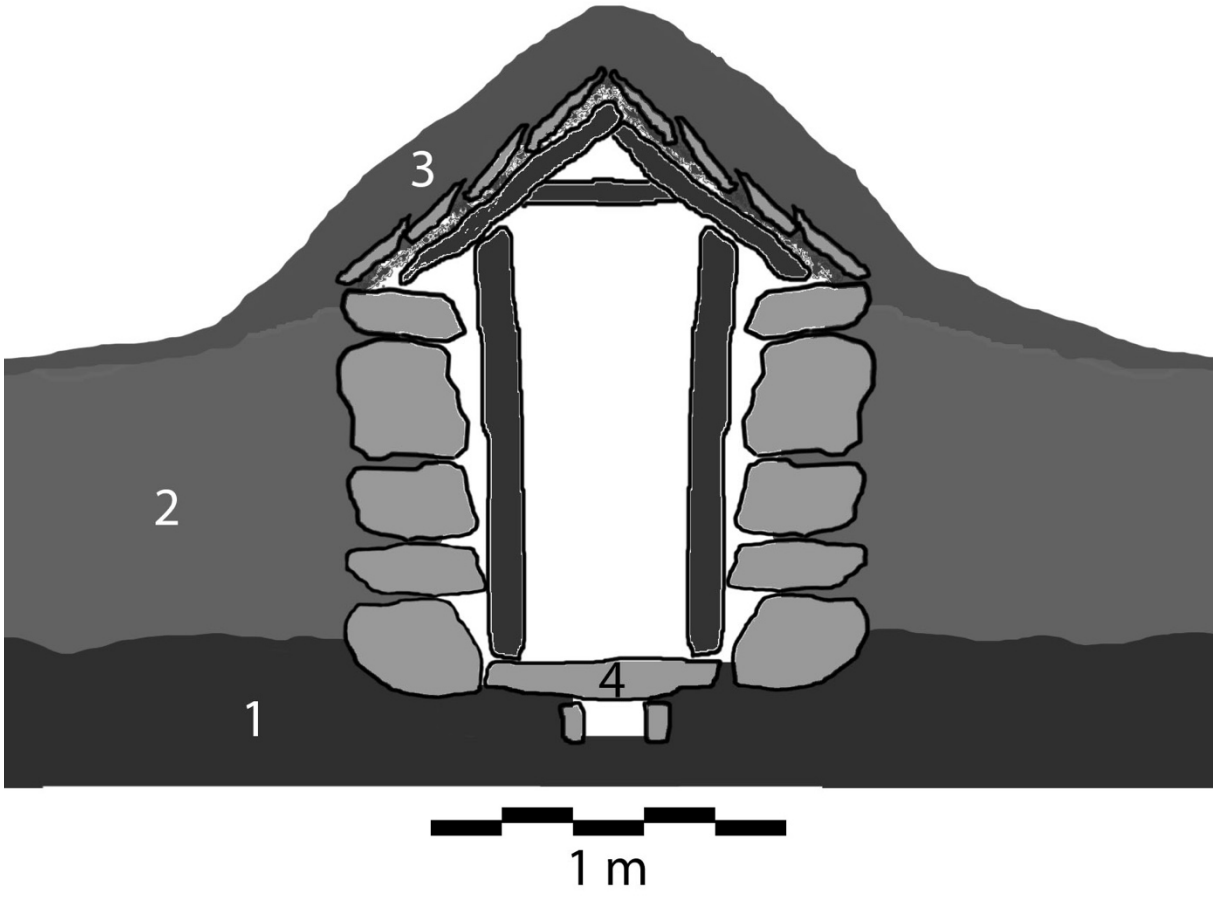
Structural elements

The walls at Búðárbakki are simple structures in terms of technology and material but called for skilful handling and permitted variation and improvisation. They are all built by the same basic principle: the inner façade is formed by a drystone wall of unworked stones, boulders, rubble and slabs of various size and shape, skilfully compounded into stacks that stood up to a height of max 60 cm (fig. 17). The outer part is made of soil, piled up against the drystone wall. The original height of the walls inside the house would have been in average around 100 cm but perhaps reaching a maximum height of 120 cm. This, of course, is just an assumption based

on the amount of debris found inside the buildings. Nonetheless, wall height would have been variable. So were outer walls much lower than walls located more centrally inside the building.

Turf walls in full height (or very close to it at least) have been preserved at various places in Iceland, for example in Sandártunga (Eldjárn, 1951: 113). Eldjárn does not state their height exactly but from the profiles one may take that they were between 80 and 130 cm high. The late 14th century farm, Bær in south-eastern Iceland, that was just as Sandártunga completely deposited with volcanic tephra, had walls with an average height of approx. 120 cm but varying between 80 and 160 cm (Einarsson, 2007: 33). This is similar to the contemporary farm at Gröf (Gestsson, 1959: 10–11) and the late 15th century farm in Kúabót (Gestsson, 1987a: 28–29). Thus, in comparison with the farms mentioned above the wall height at Búðarárbakki seems to have been somewhat lower, underscoring the extremely close quarters. One must also keep in mind that the houses mentioned above were in all their dimensions much larger than Búðarárbakki.

Figure 17 A schematic section showing the various building elements discussed in this chapter. 1) subsoil; 2) walls and carrying posts; 3) roof structure; 4) flagged floor with drainage.



Stone settings often gain the greatest attention in the discussion of wall structures. Earlier archaeologists would even leave other parts of the walls unexcavated focusing entirely on the stones (cf. Gestsson, 1959: 10). This is a bit paradoxical considering that the largest part of the wall structure is made out of turf and soil. The interest in the stone walls beyond the parts made of turf and soil lies perhaps in the investment that is put into the stone walling. Certainly, turf walling requires a similar investment, and much has been written about particular techniques of turf cutting and turf stacking (e.g. Ágústsson, 1987; Stefánsson, 2013). This theme has, however, not earned much attention within archaeology (for exceptions see Einarsson, 2015: 226–238; Kristjánsdóttir, 2012: 73–75) possibly because it is often difficult to discern the kind of turf technology in an archaeological context. Anyway, drystone walls of unworked stones demand a complex assembly of the material properties of stones and a skillful building technique (see *Building Identities*).

The outer part of the walls at Búðarárbakki had no turf component but were entirely made of soil. This is somewhat unusual although unstructured walling techniques may have been more common than normally presumed. Still, it reflects aptly the lack of peat soil in the barren landscape of Búðarárbakki's vicinity. The thickness of the soil walls was in average around 175 cm but varied of course much depending on the inner layout of the houses from about 100 cm to 450 cm. Moreover, it is difficult to define exactly the outer boundaries of the soil walls as they fade gradually out into the natural ground. The soil walls were piled up directly on the surface in contrast to the drystone walling that was dug down approx. 15 cm following the sunken floor level of the houses (see below). Soil walls are of course very unstable and give easily in from the weight of the roof that rested almost completely on the walls. This was compensated by building thick walls with a very gradual, flat slope. Counter to this principle was the comparatively thin south-western outer wall that faced into the outer extension of the passage. Two stone bracings were built into this wall possibly in order to strengthen it.

Despite all the walls at Búðarárbakki being built by the same principle there is an interesting internal difference in the wall structures. Surrounding the pen there are walls that are stone built with a turf/soil core. House walls tended to have stone walling facing into all activity areas, both inside and outside. This is seen, for example, in the outer extension of the passage or in parts where the outer walls face into pen. Inside the house there were also walls without stone settings. This was the case with the north-eastern walls in both of the front rooms (rooms A and B). One could think that this was because they had collapsed entirely into the room. This is rather unlikely as all of the walls at Búðarárbakki had at least the bottom row of the stone setting in place. Neither does the amount of debris inside the rooms support a complete breakdown of the walls. The stones could also have been removed, although the idea of sorting out all the stones from these two walls and leaving others untouched is obscure and farfetched, or they might have had a wooden panel of which, however, there are no traces left.

Finally, there are the wall structures of the small working shed in the western part of the pen that need mentioning (see above). The small structure had an interesting set of inconsistent wall elements. Mixed with standard wall structures the contours of the natural surface were used as walls. The wall height must have been very low. The stone walling reached only 40 cm from the floor layer. This is very likely to have been the original height of the wall as almost no wall collapse was found inside the shed. The floor level of the work shed had been dug down between 15 and 30 cm creating banks opposite to the built wall on which the roof would stretch on to. Obviously, in the case of the shed a simpler solution of wall building was chosen, but simultaneously a more unsteady one, perhaps because it was only planned for a short period, a season or two.

The remains of the roof are often the archaeological features that are most easily distinguishable. This was definitely the case at Búðarárbakki. Roofs were built in the traditional manner of Icelandic turf houses, well-known throughout the centuries: supporting roof timbers, stone slabs and a turf cover. Roof slabs were found collapsed into all rooms. Many of them lay inside the rooms in a vertical position alongside the walls, whereas others were found lying on the surface of the outer walls having slid down the walls. Moreover, in all buildings a layer of turf covered the collapse of the roof slabs. Nothing of the timbers was preserved and it is not unlikely that it was removed at the time of abandonment. Removing the roof timbers, including supporting posts would of course have led to an immediate collapse of the roof. This can be discerned at many places at Búðarárbakki, amongst other in the passage where the roof slabs had fallen directly onto the floor (see *Twisted Lives*, fig. 5). There were no sediments separating the roof slabs from the floor that would indicate an interval between the phases of use and collapse.

The weight of the roof lay largely on the walls. Though, there must have been carrying posts alongside the walls that would have supported the wooden frame on which the roof slabs were put. Normally, such posts would have stood on post-stones or post-slabs that would have lifted the wooden posts above the often moist surface of the floor and protected them from rotting. At Búðarárbakki there were, however, no such post-stones along the walls, neither in the passage nor in the individual rooms. Possibly, posts stood directly on the floor slabs. This would have been easily solved in the passage that was completely paved with slabs, but somewhat more complicated inside the rooms that were only partly covered with slabs. At one place in the house there was a freestanding post participating in carrying the span of the roof. It stood in the centre of the half-round niche of the main living quarter. In fact, there were two posts shored up using two different methods (see *Building Identities*, fig. 8). Located centrally in the niche there were typical post-slabs and right beside them a post-hole. Both were covered by the same earthen floor layer indicating that both posts—the one standing on the slabs and the other located in the hole—were removed during inhabitation of Búðarárbakki. What

elements substituted the post as roof bearing structures is not clear. Possibly, neither one of the posts played a part in holding up the roof but were simply parts of some interior arrangement.

The roof remains of the working shed, located in the pen, marked out the layout of this structure very well. Slabs had fallen into the interior of the shed with a turf layer covering them. Underneath the slabs there was a thin charcoal layer belonging to the roof structure—the remains of brushwood used to fill up the sparse wooden framework carrying the roof. These remains of the roof superimposed directly the original surface layer. The roof construction of the shed required some interesting solutions as supporting walls were rare. The ridge of the roof must have been carried by at least two posts. Neither post-holes, nor post-slabs were found that could substantiate this conclusion. Still, the roof must have had some inner support. However, there are two notable depressions in the original surface layer that could well be formed by post holding up the ridge of the roof.

Floors at Búðarárbakki were mainly stone flagged. This applies to the passage that was completely covered with flag stones as well as the major parts of all five rooms, although none of the rooms was entirely covered with flag stones. Outside the stone flagged floor one could detect an ultra-thin floor layer that, however, lacked the material features of an earthen floor, i.e. ash, charcoals, burnt bones and artefacts. The only room to have a conventional earthen floor of any thickness was the main living quarter (room E; see above). The same applied to the working shed in the western part of the pen. Surrounding the working area, i.e. the seat and fire pit, there was an earthen floor layer with a spread of ash, peat ash and charcoals.

Búðarárbakki: re-membering architecture

The small settlement site at Búðarárbakki illustrates an interesting place of habitation citing various architectural motifs. It certainly exhibits a very well-known architectural layout; a blueprint incorporated in the social memory of the Icelandic population of the 17th century. A passageway house, like the one at Búðarárbakki, was not simply one of many options facing an entrepreneur establishing a new settlement but an obligation in the sense that it represented a certain status, that of the independent settler, or a farmer as it may have been in most cases. The building of a passageway house signalled a social identity, counted as the representation of a certain social standing. Thus, the fulfilment of essential functions of a household may not always have been the main impetus of building a passageway house. Much indicates that large parts of the passageway house at Búðarárbakki were practically unused—perhaps entirely unnecessary for the inhabitant's daily routine. Floor layers are extremely sparse in most quarters and finds are practically absent. The only exception to this is room E—the main living quarter in the house—and the working shed inside the pen, both having thicker accumulations of floor layers and a larger number of finds. The living quarter and the working shed where the main hubs of all activity on site. This was underscored by the way they were directly linked through

the passage. Movement rolled completely unobstructed between the sites of rest and recovery at one end and labour and craftmanship at the other.

So, the layout of Búðarárbakki followed indeed a prescribed house form. Still, it is not a simple replication but an interesting improvisation of a well-known theme. This emerges both in the way Þorkell at Búðarárbakki took liberty in creating special features to his house that gave it a personal tint, separated it from other passageway houses and underscored its uniqueness, as well as how material was used and incorporated. Walls were built of pure soil instead of ably cut and stacked turf due to the lack of peat, resulting in walls that were unstable and had to be constantly tended to. Nonetheless, the architecture of the house followed the conventional building traditions of the time in terms of its architectural arrangement and technology and structure. The archaeological remains of the working shed stand in a marked contrast to this, as they leave many questions open about its structural composition. The working shed demonstrates clearly a completely different driving force behind the building activities, reflecting in very distinct approaches to building. Whereas the house had an obvious building plan and a fully-fledged idea about the outcome, the working shed was an *ad hoc* building where decisions were made along the way and the outcome matured during the process.

Búðarárbakki is clearly a homestead. This is stated in the Land Registry from 1703 and the passageway form manifests its status as well. Notwithstanding, categorizing the site as a homestead in terms of year-round settlement, self-contained and as far as possible independent in its subsistence, is severely challenged by the want of a hearth or any other heating source inside the house. The location of Búðarárbakki at approximately 200 meters above sea level should demand some sort of heating during the winter months. In this region the average yearly temperature seldomly reaches more than 4° C and the coldest months are in average below 0° C.[3] The remains of an open fire inside the main living quarter (room E) does not fulfil the requirements of a hearth, neither for cooking nor as a permanent heating source. Thus, the traces of ash and peat ash in floor layers—as sparse as they are—must have come from another combustion, possibly from the small fire pit in front of the workshop. Of course, turf houses were extremely well isolated due to their thick turf walls and roofs. Thus, inside temperatures may well have been sufficient without an elaborate heating, even during the coldest period. Búðarárbakki is certainly not the only excavated house in Iceland that seems to lack a heating source within the living space. The absence of one at Sandátunga has already been mentioned, but a similar situation seems to be present at the medieval sites of Gröf, Kúabót and Bær. At Gröf and Kúabót the only proper fireplace was in the bath room (*baðstofa*; see discussion above), located in the back of the housing (Gestsson, 1959: 25–27; 1987b: 47–49). Other possible fireplaces are less structured—somewhat similar to the fireplace inside room E at Búðarárbakki—and may have been used only temporarily (Gestsson, 1959: 18; Árnadóttir,

[3] These values derive from yearly averages (1965–2003) from the weather station at Jaðar which lies some 10 km south of Búðarárbakki and at an altitude of only 135 m above sea level (https://www.vedur.is/Medaltalstoflur-txt/Stod_902_Jadar.ArsMedal.txt).

1987: 54). Bjarni F. Einarsson (2008: 25) elaborates on this problem with regards to the want of fireplaces within the living areas at Bær and concludes that living quarters may have had short-term open fires on the floor, or that heat may have been brought into the houses with so-called cooking stones, heated up in larger fireplaces located away from the living quarters, such as in kitchens or bath rooms. Furthermore, lamps burning train oil might also have provided, not only light but also heat.

I, however, argue that the situation at Búðarárbakki calls for a reconsideration about its inhabitation. Much indicates that Þorkell only dwelt at Búðarárbakki during the summer. The argument is built on the extremely scanty cultural remains and the lack of heating source. This also helps explaining how farming activities seems to be absent. A year-round settlement without any farming relation is a rather ill-conceived idea. Furthermore, the material assemblage points towards specialized craftmanship and industry and away from animal husbandry and agriculture (see further discussion below).

The building of a house is an interesting hybrid of human and material properties, where the agentive features of humans and things unite. At Búðarárbakki this is demonstrated in the dimensions of the structures whose building are all within the capacity of a single human being. It is an implicit condition as during the building process the human takes on a variety of material functions such as posting up, holding, lifting, raising etc. At the same time the material executes some of the human assignments in the decision making and the final outcome. The shape of unworked stones, the contours of the outer surface and the properties of soil all partake in deciding the angle of a corner in a room, the way stones are stacked into walls or the thickness and slope of the outer walls and roof. A building or an architecture is thus akin the essence of the person, always a composition of human and thingly attributes.

Búðarárbakki: concerning its finds

At Búðarárbakki 134 find numbers were registered including a total of 207 artefacts, which belonged to nine material categories (table 1). This may seem a low number of finds and it certainly is if compared to recent farm site excavations in Iceland. Many earlier excavations yielded much fewer finds. This was both due to the methods of excavation and the selection of artefacts collected and preserved. Animal bones were often ignored and whole things or larger artefacts were preferred over heavily fragmented, small or unrecognizable objects. The two main sites of reference, Forna Lá and Sandártunga, both fall into this category. At each site only about a dozen finds were made (Eldjárn, 1951: 106–108, 115). The approach taken by the excavator, Kristján Eldjárn in the 1940s, was characterized by a rather selective collection of finds compared to the standards of modern excavation practices and an inadequate sampling of cultural layers, in particular floor layers. Presumably, this may have resulted in much of the finds being either left unattended or still untouched in the earth. A number of artefacts from

Sandártunga that were never accounted for or published, yet collected, and found in the archives of the National Museum of Iceland (see above; Lucas & Ævarsson, 2017: 8) seem to support this earlier approach to archaeological artefacts. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, recent excavations at Sandártunga (Lucas & Ævarsson, 2017) seem to underscore the general notion of find scarcity—a kind of a reverse Pompei effect—so allowing for some historical interpretation for the very few finds instead of solely putting the blame on methodology and collection strategy.

Table 1 Finds at Búðarárbakki according to material categories. A) Front and middle rooms (incl. inner passage); B) Living quarter (room E); C) Incorporated into structures; D) Workshop; E) Outside, on the original surface (incl. outer passage); F) Stray finds; G) Non-artefacts.

Material Category	Areas within the site							Total no.
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	
Iron	5	10	1	55	12	1	0	84
Stone	4	8	18	13	16	4	5	68
Copper alloy	0	3	0	23	1	0	0	27
Bone	4	10	0	2	2	0	0	18
Clay	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	3
Glass	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Iron slag	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Wood	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Wool	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total within area	13	36	19	96	32	6	5	**207**

The scarcity of finds at Búðarárbakki has a logic and coherent historical reason. It is on the one hand contingent upon the very short period of habitation, thus, as discussed above, resulting in the small-scaled accumulation of cultural layers. In addition, middens—often the principal suppliers of artefacts at farmstead excavations in Iceland—could not be located around the buildings, thus preventing an insight into the materials wasted. One needs of course to consider that substantial midden layers did not accumulate due to the limited and interrupted periods of habitation as well as due to the household size of a single person. On the other hand, the housings are likely to have been cleared out of all useful things, both objects and structural elements, such as timbers, as the site was abandoned (cf. Þórarinsson, 1951: 118; Lucas & Ævarsson, 2017: 7–8).

By taking all of this into account, the find assemblage at Búðarárbakki and its miniature size makes perfect sense. The finds mirror in an interesting manner the practices on-site, the craftmanship, household, leisure and consumption. The assemblage does not give the impression that entire find categories are missing due to natural or cultural formation processes. Quite the contrary, the material assemblage—as small-scaled as it is—has its internal coherence, both in the things themselves and their distribution around the site. It renders a certain sense of

completeness as the various categories of finds link interestingly into material networks that we might call daily practices. Of course, the idea of completeness is illusive as there is no such thing as the complete archaeological assemblage, there is no complete excavation or sampling, no complete rescue, no complete recording (Lucas, 2001: 24; 2012: 19; Roskams 2001: 33). The question of completeness regarding find assemblages does not revolve around 'having it all' but rather the representativity of the assemblage. How are the various find categories represented within the assemblage as a whole? What are the lacunae and why do they exist? There are certainly many gaps in a miniature finds assemblage like Búðarárbakki's and it is very fragmented in every sense. Still, it presents a coherent whole and it is rather the presence of certain things that grabs one's attention than the absence of others.

In the following I will describe the findings at Búðarárbakki. There are various approaches available in order to outline a particular find spectrum. This could be done by focusing separately on individual object types, material categories or the find distribution. I, however, choose to address the artefact assemblage through certain networks of things that constitute specific practices.

Perforations

Stone hammers are the most characteristic find category at Búðarárbakki (see *Singularizing the Past*, fig. 4; *Twisted Lives*, fig. 4). In total 37 stone hammers artefacts were found of which 25 pieces were embedded into the built structures, i.e. in the walls or under floor slabs, seven lay either scattered about the surface outside the houses or were lined up on the outer surface of the turf walls, three were located inside the workshop, and two were stray finds (see *Singularizing the Past*, fig. 2; Twisted *Lives*, fig. 2). It is not only the ratio of stone hammers in the total number of finds at Búðarárbakki (18 %) that is unusually high compared to other farm sites in Iceland, but also the pure size of the assemblage. Búðarárbakki's stone hammer assemblage is in fact one of the largest in Iceland. Certainly, there are a few sites that have yielded far more examples such as Viðey (250 pcs.), Stóraborg (71 pcs.) or Reykholt (74 pcs.). These are, however, not only multi-periodic sites covering several centuries of continuous habitation, but also places of higher status, thus having much larger households and involving more extensive and elaborate household practices. The unusual size of the stone hammer assemblage at Búðarárbakki becomes more evident when compared to places like Bessastaðir (48 pcs.), the residence of the Danish governor in Iceland, or the bishop's sees in Skálholt (22 pcs.) or Hólar (24 pcs.).[4]

All of the stone hammers at Búðarárbakki were either unfinished or broken objects of which only four had a finished shaft hole. Hence, 33 of 37 stone hammers at Búðarárbakki are definite production failures, thus a clear example of industrial craftmanship. Moreover, six core

[4] All of the numbers and ratios are calculated or taken from the comprehensive catalogue of stone hammers found at archaeological excavations in Iceland compiled by Árman Dan Árnason (2018).

fragments from the perforation of stone hammers were collected, interestingly illustrating the material residues of the craftmanship. The perforation of stone hammers was certainly a part of any normal household practice and unfinished stone hammer artefacts have been found at many archaeological sites in Iceland (n=22; 48% of all sites were stone hammers have been found; Árnason, 2018). Still, not a single site has produced similar numbers or ratios of unfinished stone hammer artefacts like Búðarárbakki (n=33; 89%). Viðey, a medieval monastic site and a post-medieval high ranked farm and centre of administration, comes closest to Búðarárbakki with 28 unfinished pieces, which is, however, only 11% of the total number of stone hammers. At Gufuskálar, a late medieval and early post-medieval fishing station, the ratio of unfinished artefacts is 56%, the assemblage is however much smaller (n=16). The average ratio of unfinished stone hammers found at archaeological excavations in Iceland is 14%.

One of the problems with stone hammer presence at various archaeological sites lies in the varied definition of hammer-like artefacts. We encounter such finds as fish hammers, grinders, rotating whetstones, loom weights or anvil-bases in the records of the various archaeological excavations. Furthermore, we find stone hammer-like tools in multifunctional settings, such as for building (so-called 'wall-kneader'), agriculture (so-called 'sod-mallet') or forging (*aflsteinn*, a stone between the furnace and the bellow; Árnason, 2018: 9–12; Sveinbjarnardóttir, 2012: 159). Certainly, there are differences between the various find categories, mainly with regards to size of the stone and the shape of the hole, although they are not always explicit. The average stone hammer at Búðarárbakki was about 17 cm in diameter and 8 cm thick with a shaft-hole of 3,7 cm.

Stone hammers are best known for their use in beating dried fish, so-called fish hammers (*fiskasleggja*) as discussed in *Singularizing the Past*. Interestingly, hammer-like artefacts from earlier sites, i.e. from the settlement period to the late Middle Ages, are less likely to be labelled stone hammers. In fact, around 95% of all stone hammers from archaeological excavations in Iceland are latest medieval or post-medieval and approximately 60% are from the 17th century or later. This is of course partly influenced by site selection; i.e. later periods of Icelandic history have quantitatively been excavated much more than earlier periods. Nonetheless, most multi-periodic sites show a distinct increase in numbers in the 17th century (e.g. Viðey, Stóraborg, Reykholt). It is possible that this had to do with changes in the treatment of dried fish. In fact, fish hammers are mostly unknown in medieval written sources. In *Qualiscunque description Islandiae* from 1590, that is thought to be the work of Oddur Einarsson, bishop in Skálholt (1589–1630), the use of fish hammers is described. There it says that dried fish were beaten with wooden clubs or better with stone hammers (Einarsson, 1971: 124–125). The earliest known mentioning of a fish hammer is in an inventory of the convent at Reynisstaður from 1408. The listing does, however, not clarify if it was a stone hammer or a wooden club. One can imagine that in post-medieval times, at least from the 17th century onwards, stone hammers could have overtaken this role of wooden clubs completely, and so possibly explaining the

notable increase in numbers of stone hammers in this period. This development may also have laid the foundation for a stone hammer manufacture as we see at Búðarárbakki.

Table 2 Perforated stones and cores from stone perforation

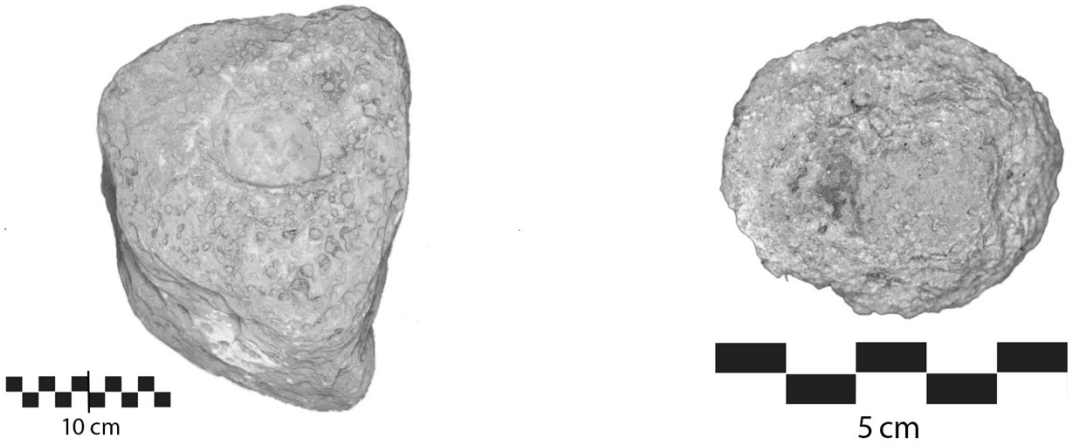
Find no	Item	Location	Observation
HRHR-2004-76-5	Door stone	On the passage floor at the entrance	With a hole and indents through and around which a string was tight
HRHR-2005-63-6	Stone hammer	Under a flag stone in the passage outside the entrance	Unfinished, broken in half, hole from one side
HRHR-2005-63-7	Stone hammer	Under a flag stone in the passage outside the entrance	Unfinished, broken in half, hole from one side
HRHR-2005-63-8	Stone hammer	Under a flag stone in the passage outside the entrance	Unfinished, broken in half, holes from both sides
HRHR-2005-63-9	Stone hammer	Under a flag stone in the passage outside the entrance	Unfinished, broken in half, hole from one side
HRHR-2005-63-10	Stone hammer	Under a flag stone in the passage outside the entrance	Possibly finished, broken in half, hole finished from both sides
HRHR-2005-63-11	Stone hammer	Under a flag stone in the passage outside the entrance	Unfinished, broken in half, holes from both sides
HRHR-2005-63-12	Stone hammer	Under a flag stone in the passage outside the entrance	Unfinished, slightly broken, hole from one side
HRHR-2005-63-13	Stone hammer	In debris from the western outer wall inside the outer extension of the passage	Unfinished, broken in half, hole from one side
HRHR-2006-63-16	Core from a stone hammer	Stray find–most probably from excavation area A in 2005	Clear working facies, no visible pecking marks
HRHR-2006-63-20	Stone hammer	Under a flag stone in the passage by the first step	Possibly finished, broken in half, finished holes from both sides
HRHR-2006-63-24	Stone hammer	Inside the western outer wall	Unfinished, broken in half, hole from one side
HRHR-2006-63-26	Stone hammer	Under a flag stone in room E by the storage pit	Unfinished, broken in half, holes from both sides
HRHR-2006-63-27	Stone hammer	In debris from the western outer wall inside the outer extension of the passage	Unfinished, broken in half, hole from one side
HRHR-2006-63-28	Stone hammer	Under a flag stone in the passage just outside the entrance	Unfinished, broken in half, hole from one side
HRHR-2006-63-29	Stone hammer	Inside the western outer wall facing into room B	Unfinished, broken in half, hole from one side
HRHR-2006-63-32	Stone hammer	Under a flag stone in the centre of the passage	Unfinished, broken in half, no hole
HRHR-2006-63-33	Stone hammer	On the surface of the eastern outer wall	Unfinished, broken in half, shallow hole from one side
HRHR-2006-63-34	Stone hammer	On the surface of the eastern outer wall	Unfinished, broken in half, hole from one side
HRHR-2006-63-35	Stone hammer	Inside the western outer wall facing into the pen	Unfinished, broken in half, holes from both sides
HRHR-2006-63-38	Stone hammer	In the wall around the pen	Unfinished, slightly broken, shallow hole from one side
HRHR-2006-63-39	Stone hammer	In the wall around the pen	Unfinished, broken in half, holes from both sides
HRHR-2006-63-40	Stone hammer	In the wall around the pen	Unfinished, unbroken, shallow hole from one side
HRHR-2007-63-43	Stone hammer	In the wall around the pen	Unfinished, broken in half, slightest traces of perforation
HRHR-2007-63-46	Stone hammer	On the surface outside the pen, in front of the passage	Unfinished, unbroken, shallow hole from one side
HRHR-2007-63-51	Loom weight	On the floor inside room E by the fireplace	Unfinished, unbroken, holes from both sides, core still inside the stone
HRHR-2007-63-52	Stone hammer	On the surface outside the pen, by the gate	Unfinished, unbroken, shallow hole from one side

HRHR-2007-63-53	Loom weight	On the floor inside room E by the fireplace	Complete
HRHR-2007-63-56	Loom weight	On the floor inside room E by the fireplace	Complete
HRHR-2008-63-67	Stone hammer	Stray find–came probably from the wall around the pen	Unfinished, a third broken off, hole from one side
HRHR-2008-63-68	Stone hammer	Stray find	Unfinished, broken in half, shallow hole from one side
HRHR-2008-63-72	Stone hammer	In the wall around the pen	Unfinished, broken off the surface, a shallow ring pecked in the centre of one side
HRHR-2008-63-73	Stone hammer	In the wall around the pen	Unfinished, broken in half, very shallow hole from one side
HRHR-2008-63-74	Stone hammer	In the wall around the pen	Unfinished, broken in half, shallow hole from one side
HRHR-2008-63-75	Stone hammer	On the surface outside the passage extension, by the drain outfall	Unfinished, unbroken, slight pecking marks
HRHR-2008-63-78	Stone hammer	In the wall around the pen	Unfinished, broken in half, hole from one side
HRHR-2008-63-84	Stone hammer	In the outer wall of the passage extension	Unfinished, two-thirds broken off, very shallow hole from one side
HRHR-2009-63-98	Core from a stone hammer	On the surface outside the working shed	Clear working facies, no visible chisel marks, belongs to HRHR-2009-63-99
HRHR-2009-63-99	Stone with a hole	On the surface outside the working shed	A large stone with a chiselled hole in top centre, core from the (HRHR-2009-63-98) lay next to it.
HRHR-2009-63-103	Stone hammer	On the surface of the outer wall of the passage extension, by the horse stone (HRHR-2009-63-105)	Unfinished, a third broken off, hole from one side
HRHR-2009-63-104	Stone hammer	Inside the working shed	Unfinished, broken in half, holes from both sides
HRHR-2009-63-105	Horse stone	On the surface of the outer wall of the passage extension	Complete, broken in three parts
HRHR-2009-63-115	Core from a stone hammer	On the surface outside the working shed	Clear working facies, no visible pecking marks
HRHR-2009-63-117	Core from a stone hammer	On the surface outside the working shed	Clear working facies, slight pecking marks
HRHR-2009-63-119	Core from a stone hammer	In debris from the wall around the pen, outside the working shed	Broken, clear working facies, clear pecking marks
HRHR-2009-63-127	Stone hammer	Under the seat inside the working shed	Finished, broken in half
HRHR-2009-63-128	Stone hammer	Under the seat inside the working shed	Finished, quarter of a stone hammer, a splash of iron slag on its surface by the hole
HRHR-2009-63-130	Stone hammer?	Under the seat inside the working shed	A quarter of a stone hammer (?), the surface of the stone has been reworked, thus no traces of a hole
HRHR-2009-63-134	Stone hammer	On the surface around 5 meters south of the working shed	Unfinished, small part broken off, slight pecking marks on the surface on one side

In addition to the stone hammers, a further six perforated stone objects were found at Búðarárbakki: a so-called door stone (see discussion above), three loom weights, a horse stone (see discussion above; fig. 10) and a suspicious stone with a hole (HRHR-2009-63-99) found in front of the workshop. It is approx. 20 cm in diameter, thus similar to a stone hammer, yet much thicker (or higher), around 30 cm. Hence, it seems very unlikely that the craftsman at Búðarárbakki visualized this stone as a hammer with a wooden shaft. Next to the stone lay a core that fitted perfectly into the hole (fig. 19). Both core and hole were much larger than in the

average stone hammer (4,8 cm vs. 3,7) and had a strange oval form, thus deviating from the standard round holes in the stone hammers. What did the craftsman intend to do with this stone? Was he planning to chisel a hole through this 30 cm thick piece of stone? Was he experimenting with new ways of production? Did he intend to chop down the stone like a log and so producing three or four stone hammers out of one piece? Was he working on a different object, whose function we cannot unravel? Or, was it simply an object where the craftsman practiced his handicraft and skills, exercised his knowhow without further purpose or a thoughtful intention?

Figure 18 The strange stone with a chiselled hole (HRHR-2009-63-99) and a core (HRHR-2009-63-98) that was found next to it fitting perfectly to the size of the hole (photos KM).



Anyway, together with the stone hammers, these artefacts underscore the craftmanship of stone perforation and its importance in the daily routine for Þorkell at Búðarárbakki. The practice of perforating stones appears almost as an obsession where the technique was not only used to produce certain types of commodities but was tried out on different object categories, some quite ordinary (stone hammers, loom weights), others unusual, yet intelligible (i.e. the horse stone; HRHR-2009-63-105), and still others completely enigmatic (HRHR-2009-63-99).

One question still remains though: how were the stones perforated and what tools participated in that process? What kind of material networks came about through the process of perforation? It is clear the holes were chiselled or pecked. Many of the stones show clear marks of chiselling, and chiselling marks are as well detected on the cores (see *Singularizing the Past*, fig. 4). The marks indicate that it must have been a thin and pointy tool, more like a pick or a bodkin, rather than a heavier flat-ended chisel. However, tools directly linked to the chiselling or pecking are rare if any. For example, the finds assemblage at Búðarárbakki does not include a single hammer and there are no undisputed chisels or picks either. But an alternative avenue of interpretation opens up by a detailed look at the all the nails and fragments of pointy iron objects found at Búðarárbakki. Altogether 47 iron artefacts were identified either as an iron nail or a fragment of a nail (mostly broken off points or heads of nails). These nails are easily distinguished into two distinct types (table 3): type I are flat nails with 2,5–4 cm long

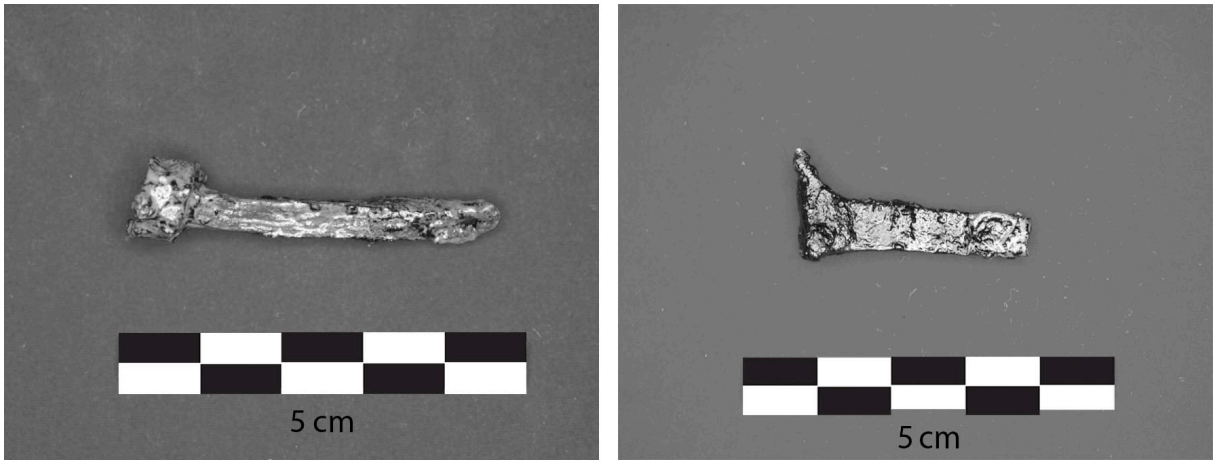
shafts and equally flat heads that were forged with the nail and type II that are somewhat longer (approx. 5 cm) with quadrilateral shafts (fig. 20; see also *Singularizing the Past*, fig. 3). Type II has round face-pinched heads, barely 1 cm in diameter and up to 3 mm thick. The idea is that type II was—at least also—used in perforating stones, whereas the flat nails (type I) were obviously used in construction, as for example seen in find HRHR-2008-63-83, which was found with timber remains attached to it. This is supported by three main arguments: firstly, the distribution of the various nail types, of which type II is predominantly found in and in front of the working shed; secondly, the use wear of the nails of type II; and thirdly, the chiselling or pecking marks found on stone hammers and cores matching the size and shape of the type II nails (see *Singularizing the Past*, fig. 4).

Table 3 Nails and picks/chisels

Find no	Item	No	Type	Location / Observation
HRHR-2004-76-1	Pick/Chisel	1	II?	Room E – floor
HRHR-2004-76-3	Nail	1	I	Room E – floor
HRHR-2004-76-4	Nail	1	I	Room E – floor
HRHR-2005-63-15	Nail	1	I	By the doors into room A – floor
HRHR-2005-63-18	Nail	1	I	Inside SW outer wall
HRHR-2006-63-30	Pick/Chisel	1	II	Room D – floor
HRHR-2006-63-37	Nail	1	I	Outside the pen – surface
HRHR-2007-63-47	Nail	1	I	Room E – under the charcoal layer
HRHR-2007-63-48	Pick/Chisel	1	II	Room E – floor
HRHR-2007-63-50	Nail	1	I	Room E – floor
HRHR-2008-63-83	Nail	1	I	In the outer passage – surface; stuck inside a piece of wood
HRHR-2008-63-88	Nail	1	I	Inside the workshop – in the charcoal layer
HRHR-2009-63-92	Point	1	II?	Inside the pen – surface
HRHR-2009-63-93	Point	1	I	Room E – floor
HRHR-2009-63-100	Head of a pick/chisel	1	II	Inside the workshop – by the fire pit
HRHR-2009-63-102	Pick/Chisel	1	II	Inside the workshop – floor
HRHR-2009-63-114	Clench bolt, nail	2	I & II	Outside the workshop – surface
HRHR-2009-63-116	Nail, pick/chisel, points	7	I & II	Outside the workshop – surface
HRHR-2009-63-118	Nail	1	I	Outside the workshop – surface
HRHR-2009-63-120	Points	1	II	Outside the workshop – surface
HRHR-2009-63-123	Nail and pick/chisel	2	I & II	Inside the workshop – by the seat
HRHR-2009-63-125	Pick/Chisel, points	3	II	Inside the workshop – by the fire pit
HRHR-2009-63-126	Points	2	II	Inside the workshop – by the fire pit
HRHR-2009-63-131	Nail, pick/chisel, points	13	I & II	Inside the fire pit
HRHR-2009-63-133	Pick/Chisel	1	II	Outside the workshop – surface

What does this imply? How are we to envisage the practice of perforating stones at Búðarárbakki, if rather small picks fulfilled the role of chisels. The picks or chisels were of a size that only permitted a two- or three-finger grip. Therefore, the hammer must have been comparatively small, and the strokes more like a fast pecking or drumming rather than heavy thumping. Did this technique prevent the stones of breaking in two before the hole had been finished?

Figure 19 Nails of the two main types found at Búðarárbakki, type II (left; HRHR-2009-63-133) and type I (right; HRHR-2009-63-118) (photos KM).

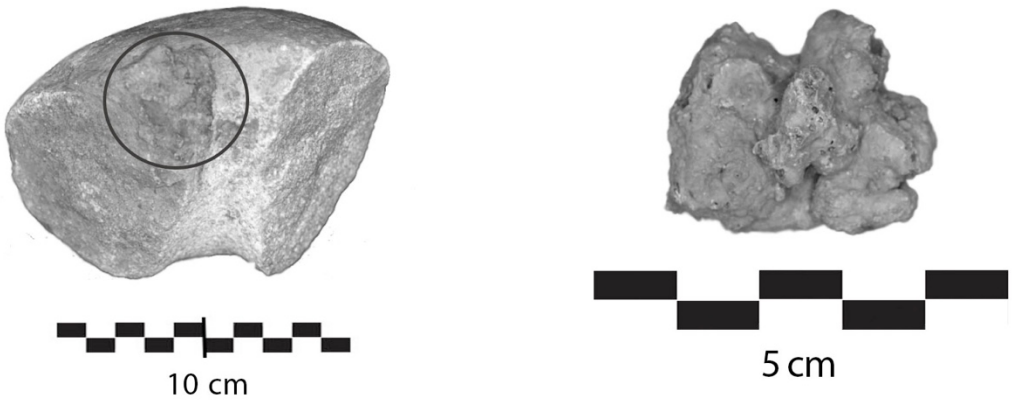


The picks or chisels would wear down easily as the points would become blunt or break off. The craftsman would have sharpened a new point with a small and handy whetstone or forged a new point. At Búðarárbakki we can trace down these activities. Firstly, there are broken off points that were found in and around the fire pit in front of the working shed (see above), as well as slag that implies some forging on the site (fig. 21). Then, there is the whetstone with a wooden shaft, found only an arm's length from the fire pit amidst other residues of the stone perforation, including other more conventional whetstones. The handle of this rather small whetstone (HRHR-2008-63-87; see table 5; see *Singularizing the Past*, fig. 5) was held tight by a small ring or a brace made of copper alloy. A whetstone like this one was of course used to sharpen different kinds of small items, such as knives (HRHR-2008-63-60), needles (HRHR-2008-63-81) or for that matter small iron picks or chisels, used in the perforation of stone hammers.

Moreover, in the fire pit a piece of slag was found, indicating iron working. The slag was certainly from the site and not imported, as shown by incrusted slag on a stone hammer found inside the working shed only about a meter away from the fire pit (fig 21). Did the craftsman forge his own picks/chisels? I rather doubt that, because a little bit of slag does not necessarily indicate elaborate ironworking. However, he might have tried to rework and repair his chisels when points and heads broke off.

Much is missing from the assemblage that created the stone hammers and other perforated objects at Búðarárbakki. The most obvious missing part is the human, whose life span is evidently outlived by the material residues. However, there are also various material components of this assemblage that may have been removed from the site, akin to the human body, or have not survived the more than 300 years in the ground. These are among other things hammers, and possibly anvils or wooden shafts. Still, the assemblage is in itself coherent and bears clear signs of the practices that were lived out at Búðarárbakki in the late 17th century. These are the materializations of daily practices that have through time been dismembered and obscured but are now re-membered.

Figure 20 A stone hammer fragment with a splash of slag (left; HRHR-2009-63-128) and a small piece of slag from the fire pit (right; photos KM).



Inconspicuous consumption

Around a half of all find numbers at Búðarárbakki include objects that are somehow related to the craftmanship carried out on site. Then there is of course a large number of finds whose relations are much more obscure; some are the remains of other daily practices that are more difficult to discern than the craftmanship, others are simply unfathomable. A number of the tiniest cut or broken off fragments of copper alloy belong to this latter category. They were predominantly found in the main activity area by the working shed but seem to lack all sensible relation to other materials found at Búðarárbakki.

In contrast to these finds, there are a few artefacts that stand out due to their relation to daily household activities. The very few animal bones belong to this find category as they bear a clear witness to food consumption. The bone assemblage does not surprise us in any way. It consists of cattle and sheep or goat. In addition, two fish bones survived at the bottom of the storage pit in the main living quarter of the house (room E). The bone assemblage shows also clearly that many pieces were cut into standardized pieces of food such as a veal/beef shank and shoulder and a split sheep's head. The pieces may have been smoked, dried, salted or singed, and brought to the site in ready-to-eat portions.

The recluse ate in his main living quarter (room E), where he spent most of his time indoors to nourish, rest and recharge. At times work may have taken all his time and concentration, so that he must have eaten during work. A few bones were also found in the working shed. Ultimately, three bones were found in room B (see above) leading to the conclusion that this room may have been a pantry.

Table 4 Animal bones

Find no	Item	No	Species	Location / Observation
HRHR-2004-76-2	Tooth	1	Bos	Room E – floor
HRHR-2006-63-19	Jaw	1	Ovis/Capra	Room E – floor
HRHR-2006-63-21	Jaw, teeth	1	Ovis/Capra	
HRHR-2006-63-25	Unidentifiable	4	2x Fish, 2x ?	Room E – in the storage pit
HRHR-2007-63-44	Tooth	1	Ovis/Capra	Outside the house – surface
HRHR-2007-63-55	Tarsal bone	1	Bos	Inside the pen – surface
HRHR-2008-63-58	Scapula, metatarsal	2	Bos	Room E – by the seat
HRHR-2008-63-59	Phalanx	1	Bos	Room E – floor
HRHR-2008-63-69	Scapula	1	Bos	Room B – in the trough
HRHR-2008-63-70	Tibia	1	Bos	Room B – in the trough
HRHR-2008-63-71	Unidentifiable	1	?	Room B – in the trough
HRHR-2008-63-77	Unidentifiable	1	?	Room E - floor
HRHR-2008-63-79	Tooth, metatarsal	2	Bos, Ovis/Capra	Room E – under the seat
HRHR-2009-63-113	Radius, scapula	2	Bos	Inside the workshop – floor

Furthermore, at Búðarárbakki somewhat more than a handful of household artefacts were found (fig. 22). They circumscribe many basic household activities and necessities, such as drinking, cutting and carving, sparking fire, attending one's garments and tools, lighting up the darkness, as well as pleasure and relish. These household finds include, a piece from a small three-footed pipkin (9 cm in diameter); a knife, whose blade had broken but remained in use, perhaps as a scrape; sparking stones (two cores and a single flake) of obsidian and calcedony; various types of whetstones, made of imported schist; a sewing needle; a candlestick made of iron with a pointed end that was thrust between stones in a walling or directly into the turf; and two extremely smooth manuport stones, one of yellow rhyolite, palm sized and irregular in form, the other of greyish basalt, almost completely spherical. Then there are two tiniest fragments of glass, one 23x16 mm, the other 11x6 mm, both 1,5 mm thick. Both fragments were completely flat and the larger one had a rounded edge. Was this window glass or possibly glass from a lantern? Both options seem somewhat out of place for Búðarárbakki, being a rather poor household. Glass windows or lanterns are things we would rather expect at higher ranked settlement site. Still, the glass *is* there just as two similarly inconspicuous stem fragments from

clay pipes. Tobacco was at the time of Þorkell at Búðarárbakki still rather expensive (see *Singularizing the past*), so it is questionable if the recluse could afford this commodity, although not impossible. But what if the pipes were imported to the site by some local commissioners or other well-off persons, that visited Þorkell discussing the adoption of manorial dues or the purchase of stone hammers? What if Þorkell imported the artefacts to the site himself as a token of modernity, i.e. a new habit that was spreading out quite fast during the late 17th century? We can, of course, never know exactly, what were the relations of these things at the site, but their presence demonstrates an interesting confusion between our material classifications and the expectations they lead us to. Furthermore, these finds connect an unlikely place to a far-reaching material network. Suddenly, Búðarárbakki and its poor peasant inhabitant, Þorkell, a local craftsman using local material to produce commodities that unlikely travelled beyond the boundaries of his district or county, becomes a member of a global phenomenon, through pipes that were probably produced in England or the Netherlands (Mehler, 2004) and traded around the world, and glass and pottery imported from the Baltic region or Germany (Sveinbjarnardóttir: 1996).

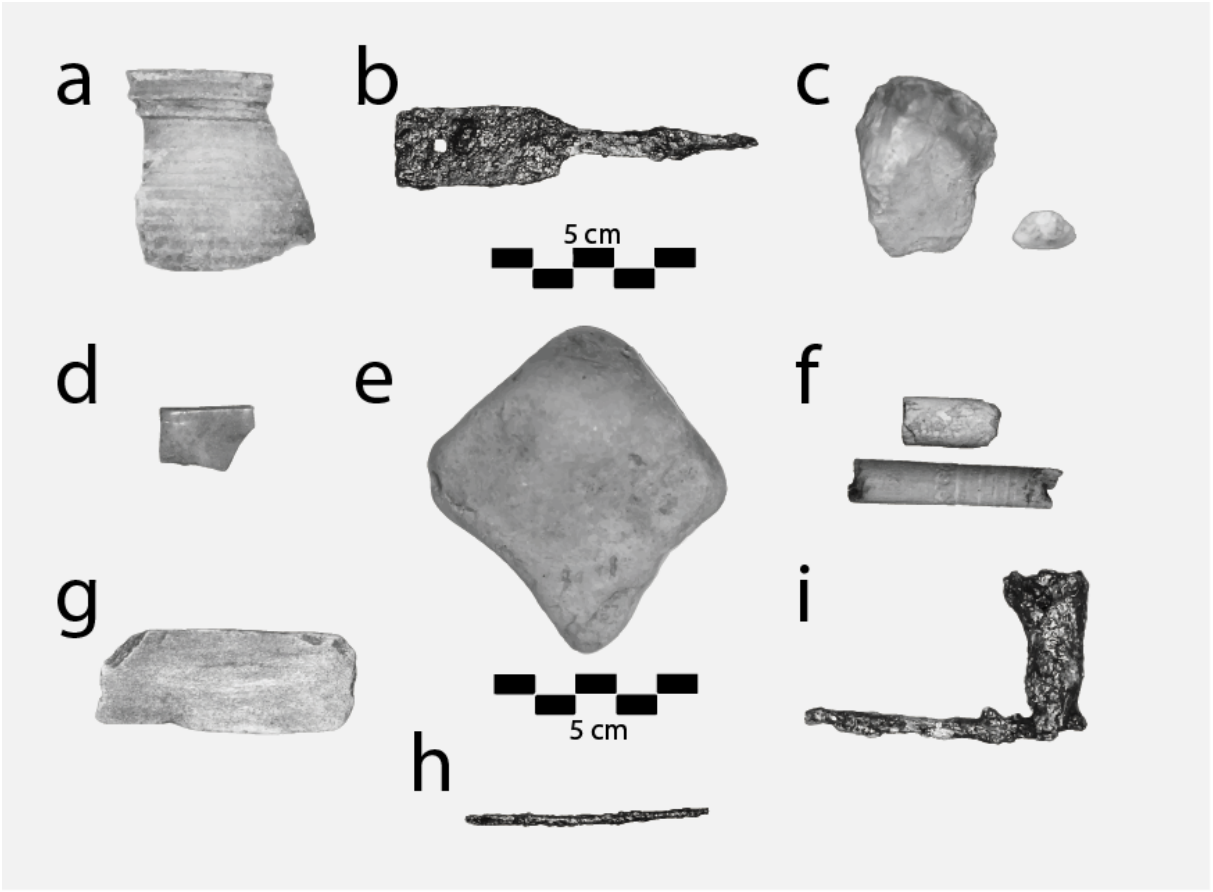
Table 5 Tools and other household items

Find no	Item	No	Mat.	Location / Observation
HRHR-2006-63-17	Clay pipe	1	Clay	Stray find
HRHR-2006-63-22	Whetstone	2	Schist	Inside SW outer wall
HRHR-2006-63-31	Whetstones	2	Schist	Room D – floor
HRHR-2007-63-36	Clay pipe	1	Clay	Room E – floor
HRHR-2007-63-42	Manuport, stone	1	Rhyolite	Room C – floor
HRHR-2007-63-45	Tube	1	Iron	
HRHR-2007-63-49	Glass	1	Glass	Room E – floor
HRHR-2008-63-60	Knife	1	Iron	Room E – floor
HRHR-2008-63-61	Sparking stone	2	Calcedony	Room E – floor
HRHR-2008-63-62	Pottery	1	Clay	Room E – floor
HRHR-2008-63-65	Textile	1	Wool	Outside the workshop
HRHR-2008-63-66	Sparking stone	1	Obsidian	Stray find
HRHR-2008-63-80	Manuport, stone	1	Basalt	Room E – under the seat
HRHR-2008-63-81	Sewing needle	1	Iron	Room E – under the seat
HRHR-2008-63-85	Glass	1	glass	Room E – floor
HRHR-2008-63-87	Whetstone with a shaft	2	Schist / Copper alloy	Outside the workshop – surface
HRHR-2009-63-95	Whetstone	1	Schist	Workshop – by the fire pit
HRHR-2009-63-97	Whetstone	1	Schist	Workshop – by the fire pit
HRHR-2009-63-122	Whetstone	1	Schist	Workshop – by the seat
HRHR-2009-63-124	Copper hook	1	Copper alloy	Workshop – by the seat
HRHR-2009-63-132	Candlestick	1	Iron	Workshop – by the seat

The household artefacts are a group of selective finds that illustrate a home in terms of living, use and wear as well as consumption. These are quite inconspicuous finds that pop up isolated and not in great numbers. There are no statistics of pottery found at Búðarárbakki, nor

a chronology of the clay pipe finds. There is just the simple presence of things, through which their relations are born.

Figure 21 A selection of household artefacts at Búðarárbakki: a) Pipkin-fragment (HRHR-2008-63-62); b) Knife (HRHR-2008-63-60); c) Sparking stone and flake (HRHR-2008-63-61); d) Glass-fragment (HRHR-2007-63-49); e) Manuport (HRHR-2007-63-42); f) Two clay pipes (HRHR-2006-63-17; HRHR-2007-63-36); g) Whetstone (HRHR-2009-63-122); h) Sewing needle (HRHR-2008-63-81); i) Candlestick (HRHR-2009-63-132; photos KM).



"Small Finds, Big Histories": the material culture at Búðarárbakki

"Small Finds, Big Histories" was the caption Mary C. Beaudry chose for the introductory chapter in her inspiring work *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing* (Beaudry, 2006). In her book the 'small finds' referred to scale as she was dealing with some of the inconspicuous small tools of sewing such as needles, pins and thimbles, although arguably she addressed larger objects such as scissors and shears as well. In her work Beaudry makes an interesting and a very strong case for these small finds, arguing that they contain histories—eminent stories about past lived experiences—that would otherwise be ignored.

The finds assemblage of Búðarárbakki is characterized by the small and ordinary. By the small and ordinary I am not referring to the plain size of things or their commonness. The small and ordinary are simply all the things that tend to be left out or smoothed over by grand and generalized narratives; things that are commonly not thought to contribute to the grand

narratives. Therefore, the small and ordinary can apply to things of all shapes and sizes and refer to all scales. Within archaeology there are certainly many that have set focus on the small, ordinary and unimpressive like Deetz (1977) in his work on the small and forgotten things. There he argues that in the smallest and most trivial things lies hidden information that can contribute to alternative views on history. Nonetheless, Deetz does not see all things as equally important (Deetz 1977:120-121) and his approach is more like an epistemological test of material culture against textual sources rather than looking at the ontological strength of material culture and its narrative properties.

The small and ordinary are at the heart of my stories. Stone hammers and iron pick or chisels, a single and very common ceramic pot, tiny pieces of glass and fragments of clay pipes. Certainly—and one could make a strong argument for it—archaeology has scrutinized all these find categories in depth. However, stone hammers, nails or miniature fragments of common find categories that are found isolated are normally not the focus of attention but often at best play a supporting role. The historicity of such finds is, if considered at all, downplayed and they are normally not thought to be of a great historical significance or contribute to important history. Yet they do. Their mere presence grants them a voice that we must pay attention to. Their stories are interesting too, not only because they are neat in a certain local setting, but because they emerge out of a network of relations that are both short and long. Hence, they are truly Big Histories.

References

Ágústsson H (1987) Íslenski torfbærinn. In: Jóhannsson FF (ed.) *Íslensk þjóðmenning*. Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, pp. 227–344.

Ágústsson H (1989) Húsagerð á síðmiðöldum. In: Líndal S (ed.) *Saga Íslands 4*. Reykjavík: Bókmenntafélagið – Sögufélag, pp. 261–300.

Árnason ÁD (2018) *Milli steins og sleggju: Eru allar steinsleggjur fiskasleggjur?* MA-thesis. Reykjavík: University of Iceland.

Beaudry MC (2006) *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing*. New Haven: York University Press.

Bruun D (1898) *Gjennem affolkede bygder paa Islands indre højland*. Copenhagen: Det Nordiske Forlag.

Bruun D (1928) *Forntidsminder of nutidshjem paa Island*. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel.

Deetz J (1977) *In Small Things Forgotten. The Archaeology of Early American Life*. Garden City: Anchor Books.

Einarsson BF (2001) *Fornleifaskráning vegna mats á umhverfisáhrifum Sultartangalínu 3*. Reykjavík: Fornleifafræðistofan.

Einarsson BF (2004) *Búðarárbakki – 17. aldar býli í felum*. Reykjavík: Fornleifafræðistofan.
Einarsson BF (2007) *Bær við Salthöfða: Eyðibýli í Öræfum IV*. Reykjavík: Fornleifafræðistofan.
Einarsson BF (2008) *Bær við Salthöfða: Eyðibýli í Öræfum VI*. Reykjavík: Fornleifafræðistofan.
Einarsson BF (2015) *Landnám og landnámsfólk: Saga af bæ og blóti*. Reykjavík: Skrudda.
Einarsson O (1971) *Íslandslýsing: Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae*. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs.
Eldjárn K (1948) *Gengið á reka: Tólf fornleifaþættir*. Akureyri: Bókaútgáfan Norðri.
Eldjárn K (1949) Eyðibyggð á Hrunamannaafréttir. *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1943–1948: 1–43.
Eldjárn K (1951) Tvennar bæjarrústir frá seinni öldum. *Árbók Hins íelenzka fornleifafélags* 1949–1950: 102–115.
Friðriksson A (1996) *Sagas and popular antiquarianism in Icelandic archaeology*. Avebury: Aldershot.
Georgsson Á (ed.) (1990) *Ská um friðlýstar fornleifar á Íslandi*. Reykjavík: Fornleifanefnd.
Gestsson G (1959) Gröf í Öræfum. *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1958: 5–87.
Gestsson G (1987a) Kúabót í Álftaveri I. *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1986: 11–38.
Gestsson G (1987b) Kúabót í Álftaveri III. *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1986: 47–50.
Grímsson Þ (1976) Miðaldabyggð á Reyðarfelli. In: Kolbeinsson G (ed.) *Minjar og mentir: afmælisrit helgað Kristjáni Eldjárn 6. desember 1976*. Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður, pp. 565–576.
Halldórsson Ó (2004) Bókmenntir á lærdómsöld 1550–1770. In: Líndal S (ed.) *Saga Íslands 7*. Reykjavík: Bókmenntafélagið – Sögufélag, pp. 215–316.
Hodder I (2000) Agency and individuals in long-term processes. In: Dobres MA and Robb J (eds.) *Agency in Archaeology*. London: Routledge, pp. 21–33.
Ingold T (1993) The Temporality of Landscape. *World Archaeology* 25(2): 152–174.
Jónasson J (1961) *Íslenzkir þjóðhættir*. Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja.
Jónsson B (1896) Rannsókn byggðaleifa upp frá Hrunamannahreppi sumarið 1895. *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1896: 1–13.
Kålund K (1984) *Íslenskir sögustaðir*, 1. bindi Sunnlendingafjórðungur. Reykjavík: Örn og Örlygur.
Kristjánsdóttir S (2012) *Sagan af klaustrinu á Skriðu*. Reykjavík: Sögufélag.
Landmælingar Íslands (1994) *Atlastkort 1: 100 000*, blað 46, Hlöðufell. Akranes: Landmælingar Íslands.
Landmælingar Íslands (1999) *Aðalkort 1:250 000*, blað 6, Miðsuðurland. Akranes: Landmælingar Íslands.
Lucas G (2001) *Critical Approaches to Fieldwork: Contemporary and historical archaeological practice*. New York: Routledge.

Lucas G (2012) *Understanding the Archaeological Record*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lucas G and Ævarsson U (2017) *Archaeological Investigations at Sandártunga, Þjórsárdalur 2017*. Reykjavík: Háskóli Íslands – Minjastofnun Íslands.

Magnússon Á (1955) *Chorographica islandica: Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta*, Annar flokkur, I.2. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag.

Magnússon Á and Vídalín P (1918–1921) *Jarðabók.* 2. bindi (Árnessýsla). Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafjelag í Kaupmannahöfn.

Mehler N (2004) Tóbak og tóbakspípur á Íslandi á 18. öld. *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 2002–2003: 131–150.

Mímisson K (2005) *Þorkell á Búðarárbakka: Fornleifafræðileg persónurannsókn á 17. aldar kotbónda úr uppsveitum Árnessýslu*. *Skýrsla I*. Reykjavík: Fornleifafræðistofan.

Mímisson K (2006) *Þorkell á Búðarárbakka: Fornleifafræðileg persónurannsókn á 17. aldar kotbónda úr uppsveitum Árnessýslu*. *Áfangaskýrsla ársins 2006*. Reykjavík: Fornleifafræðistofan.

Mímisson K (2008) *Þorkell á Búðarárbakka: Fornleifafræðileg persónurannsókn á 17. aldar kotbónda úr uppsveitum Árnessýslu*. *Áfangaskýrsla ársins 2007*. Reykjavík: Fornleifafræðistofan.

Mímisson K (2009) *Þorkell á Búðarárbakka: Fornleifafræðileg persónurannsókn á 17. aldar kotbónda úr uppsveitum Árnessýslu*. *Áfangaskýrsla ársins 2008*. Reykjavík: Fornleifafræðistofan.

Mímisson K (2010) *Þorkell á Búðarárbakka: Fornleifafræðileg persónurannsókn á 17. aldar kotbónda úr uppsveitum Árnessýslu*. *Áfangaskýrsla ársins 2009*. Reykjavík: Fornleifafræðistofan.

Rafnsson S (ed.) (1983) *Frásögur um fornaldarleifar 1817–1823*. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi.

Roskams S (2001) *Excavation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sigmundsson S (ed.) (1979) *Árnessýsla: sýslu- og sóknarlýsingar Hins íslenska bókmenntafélags 1839–1843 og lýsing Ölfushrepps anno 1703 eftir Hálfdán Jónsson*. Reykjavík: Sögufélag.

Sigurðardóttir A (1966) *Híbýlahættir á miðöldum*. Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður og Þjóðvinafélag.

Snæsdóttir M, Lucas G and Vésteinsson O (2006) Fornleifar og rannsóknir í Skálholti. In: Guðmundsson Ó (ed.) *Saga biskupsstólanna: Skálholt 950 ára – 2006 – Hólar 900 ára*. Akureyri: Hólar, pp. 674–697.

Stefánsson H (2013) *Af jörðu: Íslensk torfhús*. Reykjavík: Crymogea.

Sveinbjarnardóttir G (1996) *Leirker á Íslandi = Pottery found in excavations in Iceland*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornleifafélag – Þjóðminjasafn Íslands.

Sveinbjarnardóttir G (2012) *Reykholt: archaeological investigations at a high status farm in Western Iceland*. Reykjavík: Þjóðminjasafn Íslands – Snorrastofa.

Vésteinsson O (2004) Icelandic farmhouse excavations: field methods and site choices. *Archaeologia Islandica* 3: 71–100.

Þorsteinsson B and Jónsson B (1991) *Íslandssaga til okkar daga*. Reykjavík: Sögufélag.

Þórarinsson S (1949) Örlög eyðibyggðarinnar á Hrunamannaafréttií ljósi öskulagarannsókna. . *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1943–1948: 44–65.

Þórarinsson S (1951) Heklugosið 1693 og eyðing bæjarins í Sandártungu. *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1949–150: 115–118.

Part II

Main Theme

Singularizing the Past: the history and archaeology of the small and ordinary

Mímisson K and Magnússon SG, *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2014, Vol. 14(2) 131–156

Article

Journal of Social Archaeology
2014, Vol. 14(2) 131–156

DOI: 10.1177/1469605314527393
jsa.sagepub.com
SAGE

Singularizing the past: The history and archaeology of the small and ordinary

Kristján Mímisson
Department of Archaeology, Centre for Research in the Humanities, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland

Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon
Department of History and Philosophy, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland; National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland

Abstract

Recently a fierce criticism has been aimed at social history and how it has been directed by various forms of grand narratives. Some microhistorians have lent this critique a voice from where a new theoretical framework, the singularization of history, has arisen. It rejects the notion that fragments of historical data can be put together into rational and coherent metanarratives but emphasizes the need for an inward focus on the material at hand and interpretations free from idealized perspectives on the past. Consequently, it involves scrutinizing the details of each event and object of research, looking for meaning within them rather than in larger contexts. In this paper, we intend to pose the question of if or how the idea of the singularization of history may apply to archaeology. Furthermore, we want to reflect upon the possibilities of a 'singularized archaeology' that regards the things at hand by honouring the nature of singularities, their relations and ontological constitution and how they reassemble into composite entities like practices, events or persons.

Corresponding author:
Kristján Mímisson, Department of Archaeology, Centre for Research in the Humanities, University of Iceland, Sæmundargata 2, 101 Reykjavík, Iceland.
Email: krm6@hi.is

Keywords
The singularization of history, singularities, microhistory, microarchaeology, object-orientated ontology, flat ontology

Introduction

Claims that archaeology is a late bloomer in integrating new ideas or theoretical frameworks from the broader field of social sciences and humanities may have been tenable long ago but certainly not today. Contemporary scholarship is by its nature far too interrelated and disciplinary boundaries have become increasingly blurred. Notwithstanding, there is too often a lack of intensive and conscious exchange of ideas between disciplines, even scholarly debates that intersect to a high degree as in the case of social history and social archaeology.

In this paper, we will attempt to deploy a theoretical framework that has been termed the singularization of history and was introduced to the social historical critique by one of us (Magnússon, 2003, 2006; Magnússon and Szijártó, 2013) a decade ago. Our aim is not a simple transfer of this theoretical debate into archaeology. The singularization of history is a sentiment that we intend to adopt in our thinking about the things at hand. Therefore, instead of testing directly its appropriateness to a certain category of research material or the general (or particular) social archaeological discourse, we intend to try it on ourselves working with a particular assemblage of material culture. In doing so, we hope to generate new 'archaeological' perspectives on singularization that can rebound into the social historical debate and contribute to some kind of a hybrid genre (cf. Burke, 2004: 113) or post-disciplinary thought (Mímisson, 2004: 41–42). We intend to part with the notion that theoretical frameworks and historical narratives are only lingustic constructions layering on top of the research material. It is our belief that theories and narratives should not be subjected to the condition of metanarratives but must always be born out of the material at hand, be that textual passages or archaeological artifacts.

Counter to some historians, archaeologists are certainly accustomed to thinking from fragmented materials and incompleteness is undeniably a part of all archaeological sources (Lucas, 2012; Roskams, 2001: 31–34). Still, there is a need for an inspiration not only to acknowledge the epistemological strength of things small and ordinary but also to enquire after their ontological condition. By things small and ordinary we do not refer to the plain size of things or their commonness. The small and ordinary are simply all the things that tend to be left out or smoothed over by grand and generalized narratives; things that are commonly not thought to contribute to the grand narratives. Therefore, the small and ordinary can apply to things of all shapes and sizes and refer to all scales. An emphasis on the small and ordinary is thus true to the maxim that all things are in fact equal (Latour, 2005, 2012: 193). Within archaeology there are certainly many that have set their focus on the small, ordinary and unimpressive, like Deetz (1977) in his work on the small

and forgotten things. There he argues that in the smallest and most trivial things lies hidden information that can contribute to alternative views on history. Nonetheless, Deetz does not see all things as equally important (Deetz, 1977: 120–121) and his approach is more like an epistemological test of material culture against textual sources rather than looking at the ontological strength of material culture and its narrative properties.

But in order to understand from what ground this theoretical framework of the singularization of history has derived and what explicit use it may have for archaeology, we feel it is important to view in comparison the development and the current circumstances of the scholarly domains of social archaeology and social history; how both of these disciplines have contributed to a fuller understanding of the small and ordinary and its importance for wider scholarship in the humanities and the social sciences.

Social history versus social archaeology: The affinities of etymological sisters

In a 1996 article in the special issue of *Journal of Social History* the German social historian Jürgen Kocka (1996) discusses his own definition of social history, which includes on the one hand historical studies of social structures, processes and experiences and on the other hand an approach that views general history in a relation to the aforementioned social dimensions. Kocka's definition, with which many social historians would concur, gives an indication of the problem facing the discipline. By this we mean the kinds of synthesis on which great numbers of social historians have placed heavy emphasis in recent years. This emphasis is related to the powerful links which have grown between the social sciences and social history in the past few decades. The original aim of social history was to act as a counter to history with a single focus, and scholars stressed the fact that the past was more varied than the picture drawn up by conventional political history. Hence, with the rise of social history there was a fragmentation of the 'storyline' which led to renewed calls for synthesis (Mergill, 1995). In other words, when the subject matter of social history disintegrated into disparate pieces, there was felt to be a need for a framework which might organize it neatly into logical patterns and structures and thus provide the discipline with a scientific foundation (Iggers, 1997: 51–94). Thus, social historians made urgent calls for a new version to replace the old grand narrative. One might say that the content may be different but the methods and aims are the same, namely to provide people with a general overview of a grand chain of events. This overview may be complicated, but never to the extent that it precludes the possibility of providing a continuous and coherent account.

Systematical research in the vein of the social sciences was to be the key to future research in history, with emphasis both on economics and historical demography. The leaders of the *Annales* school had an enormous influence on historical study at this time. Their philosophy was founded on 'the emphasis on the study of the

largest possible aggregates; the priority granted to measurement in the analysis of social phenomena; the choice of a time frame long enough to make large scale transformations visible (and, as a corollary, the need to situate analyses within different time frames)' (Revel, 1996: 493). Revel remarks that nearly all generations of the *Annales* school 'also took a sort of scientific voluntarism: the only objects that one can study scientifically are those constructed according to explicit procedures in light of an initial hypothesis which is then subjected to empirical validation' (Revel, 1996: 493–494).

Miguel A Cabrera (1999: 79) argues that the underlying view behind 'these historians' research and theoretical work is that reality does not possess intrinsic meaning and, therefore, consciousness is not its reflection (either non-mediated or symbolic), nor are individuals' social positions the causal foundation of their actions.' The point is that social history has gone full circle over the last decades. As we see it, it has fallen into the same trap as traditional political history, namely of presenting clear versions of historical developments by its unremitting insistence that research be placed within a broad and overriding context provided by the metanarratives (Iggers, 1997; Munslow, 1997; Wilson, 1999).

This development had its reaction within the discipline of history. For example, the instigators of microhistory in Italy went on the offensive. They attacked large-scale social scientific studies based on massive quantitative conceptualizations because the inherent generalizations distorted the actual reality at the base. The emphasis of microhistory was on small units and how people conducted their lives within them. This was above all a drastic methodological transformation, for example, from the social scientific emphases of the *Annales*, although admittedly small scale approaches certainly existed within that scholarly domain as well (cf. Le Roy Ladurie, 1979).

The *Annales* school was an influential scholarly framework traversing from social history to archaeology in the late 1980s (Bintliff, 1991; Hodder, 1987; Knapp, 1992). Archaeology was even presented as social history's access to the long term, as Hodder once stated: 'Archaeology can, in particular, offer its long time span to this debate' (Hodder, 1987: vii). However, the main problem archaeologists were faced with concerned the relationship between the short term event and the long term continuity. Hence, many embraced the *Annales* and the principle of different timescales addressing distinct historical processes. This enabled a more nuanced scrutiny of the apparent conflict between the long and the short term.

In general and contrasting with the development within social history, social archaeology never passed through the same degree of institutionalization. Although having been introduced early (Trigger, 2006: 425), the concept of social archaeology did not become a common term within the broader field of the discipline until the 1970s (Meskell, 2001: 13; Orser and Patterson, 2004: 13). However, culture-historical archaeology of the early to mid 20th century was not devoid of the social, as clearly seen in the works of Grahame Clark (e.g. 1939, 1983; Clark and Piggott, 1965) and Gordon Childe (e.g. 1950, 1951, 1958). They, however, dealt with the issue from a diffusionist and evolutionist point of view, where

social development was accounted for within the boundaries of preconceived social or cultural groups. Hence, they approached the social more from a societal perspective (Orser and Patterson, 2004: 11; Preucel and Meskell, 2004: 4; Trigger, 2006: 425). With the rise of processualism in the 1960s and 1970s a new and bracing emphasis on the social was witnessed. This somewhat amplified focus still remained rather introspective and the debate concerned more the definition of subsystems (of which one was the social) and their mutual interaction. Processual archaeology did, however, not join in the contemporary postmodern social-theoretical debate, mainly because of its tendency towards natural sciences. Both culture-historical and processual archaeology strived towards a general synthesis of the past that was manifested in a leaning towards various types of grand narratives; on the one hand through the historiographical framework such as diffusion, and on the other hand through the methodological approach as in systems theory.

It was thus unsurprising that postprocessual archaeology took the turn towards social theory. The critique had multiple facets, yet fragmentation and the art of narrative were doubtless two essential keywords, both aiming against the general desire for a coherent societal synthesis. The idea of complete, fixed societal entities was strenuously opposed in favour of a discussion of fragmented and more protean social categories (e.g. gender, ethnicity, class, race). Equally, a greater emphasis was placed on the various social aspects of the archaeological practice in the present, both regarding the general intertwining of the past and the present, and not least considering the ethical and socio-political implications of heritage; a discussion that has lately become somewhat dominant within social archaeology (e.g. Breglia, 2006; Meskell, 1998; Meskell and Pels, 2005; Smith, 2004). This concerns not least how various stakeholders have been involved in or excluded from heritage making, thus advancing conflicting narratives on history and heritage (e.g. Green et al., 2003; Kojan and Angelo, 2003), and it has found its reaction in the recent rise of public archaeology (e.g. Merriman, 2004; Shackel and Chambers, 2004).

Within the broader theoretical debate parts of postprocessual archaeology began to use the social as a discursive medium. Materiality in particular attained a special emphasis (e.g. Hodder, 2012; Lucas, 2012; Meskell, 2005; Miller, 2005; Thomas, 2004, 2005). The concept of materiality has been variously defined, but in a broad sense it has been considered to cover the intersection of humans and the material world, sometimes termed the 'socialness of things' (Fahlander, 2003: 59; see also Hodder, 2012: 1). One might claim that this perspective reversed the causes by letting the social account for material culture rather than using the material at hand to explain the social. Hence the social simply replaced concepts like the functional, ideological or symbolic.

The social seemed to have removed the material of all its tangible properties or, as Tim Ingold (2007: 2) put it in his critique on the materiality-discussion: 'To understand materiality, it seems, we need to get as far away from materials as possible'. The critique came mainly from scholars leaning towards object-orientated ontologies or Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) (e.g. Domanska, 2006; Karlsson, 2005; Olsen, 2003, 2007, 2010; Webmoor, 2007; Witmore, 2007).

Their common claim was that the social needed to be addressed from a new ontological perspective. The question was less about how objects stand in for lost ideologies and meanings but rather what things are essentially and how they, by their own merits, build up and constantly reassemble the social (Latour, 2005) in past and present. Hence, this was a categorical change from the epistemological to the ontological register, a change towards what Gavin Lucas (2012) has coined the 'new social' in archaeology.

In retrospect, one may claim that social history and social archaeology have moved in different directions. Whereas social history, rigidly institutionalized, took a radical methodological turn towards the social sciences and empiricism leading to an enhanced focus on the long term and large scale, social archaeology has moved from that condition towards a more varied and particularistic perspective on social categories and their material relations. No doubt there were alternative approaches, towards the short term of the event within social history (e.g. Joyce, 2010; Sewell, 2005) as well as the long term within social archaeology (e.g. Kristiansen and Rowlands, 1998). A detailed look reveals, however, a common thread towards the small, ordinary and marginal – a movement that deserves closer attention.

Microhistory and the singularization of history

Microhistory has been one of the important movements in the critique of social history. An interesting variation to microhistory has recently arisen in Iceland, a discourse which now might well be looked at separately as the Icelandic School of Microhistory (ISM). The framework of the Icelandic variant can be retraced to the roots of microhistory in Italy in the late 1970s that emphasized a new focus on the scale of the objective, the art of narrative and the distortion of the normative. Italian microhistory approached the concept with an underlying nod to microsociology and interpretative anthropology by spotlighting the singular and the particular within the society and stressing the agency of the individual participants in the development of the whole (Burke, 2005: 38). It drew in particular upon ideas such as Clifford Geertz's thick description (Geertz, 1973), as it maintained that the reduction of scale of observation was a matter of research procedure rather than the dimension of the object of interest (Levi, 1991: 95). The Italian microhistorians claimed that by taking an upward perspective from the swards of society one could reveal previously unnoticed historical processes and circumstances that defied the general unifying historical complexion inevitably given by the mainstream of macrohistorical approaches. Hence, they urged for social multiplicity and regarded the presentation of the normative with an utmost caution. Thus, they concentrated strongly on deviations from the normative, i.e. various kinds of anomalies and aberrations from what generally was considered to fall within normal social behaviour (Magnússon and Szijártó, 2013: 19–20).

The ISM rests upon many of these fundamentals although with some peculiarities that distinguish it from the general theoretical framework of

microhistory. On the one hand it critiqued the general historical art of narrative, as historiography became very central to Icelandic discourse, and on the other hand it put a strong emphasis on the self within text or rather the writing of the self. In that sense the ISM was influenced by the German *Alltagsgeschichte* (Lüdtke, 1995) and the vast amount of so-called ego-documents available in Iceland (Magnússon and Ólafsson, 2012; Ólafsson, 1998: 54) placing the category of biography, in particular auto-biographical writing, at the centre of the ISM.

Within the critique of traditional social historical historiography the concept of the singularization of history took a central position. It was initially set out to clarify the concept of microhistorical methods and developed further in a recently published book called *What is Microhistory?* (Magnússon and Szijártó, 2013). Accordingly, social history had failed to make ordinary people the subject of history on its own terms (Magnússon, 2003: 701). The failure was to be found in its emphasis on metanarratives and other single-edged visions of history, orientations often compiled under the concept of grand narratives. The conventional macro-historical approach tended to present historical results in a coherent and complete fashion that allowed practically no space for uncertainties or doubts, nor the pre-conceptions of the researcher. It either ignored the fragmentary condition of the research material or balanced it out by means of a generalized narrative. Ultimately historical scholarship had created the condition that made research incomprehensible if not associated with and aptly placed within the predetermined structure of the grand narrative (Magnússon, 2006: 907; Magnússon and Szijártó, 2013: 124). Conversely, microhistory emphasized the necessity for an inward focus on history. Within the ISM an absolute and unconditional cut from the grand narrative of general history was pleaded, keeping the approach essentially flat, whereas others, including the vanguard of Italian microhistory, stressed the importance of chaining their down-scaled histories to larger general historical contexts (Brown, 2003: 16; Ginzburg, 1993; Magnússon, 2003: 714; Peltonen, 2013).

The idea of the singularization of history is based on the following: the model looks inward, and studies all aspects in close detail, bringing out the nuances of the events and phenomena under investigation. The focus is always fixed on the matter at hand. The approach consists in investigating with great precision each and every fragment connected with the research material and bringing up for consideration all possible means of interpretation that bear directly upon it. Despite the extreme scale reduction some structural orientation is needed within the frame of reference. But this structure must be malleable, i.e. the frames must be more limited and easily controlled. This opens up an opportunity to give a range of voices from within society access to historical research, regardless of their status within the sequence of events.

The approach often used in microhistory is called 'the evidential paradigm' (Ginzburg, 1989). The premise here is that research into small units calls for minute analysis of clues and signs in the sources. Thus the microhistorian discerns the *direction* of the case rather than chasing after facts and figures that batten the case down and disregard the multitude of different agents involved. In applying this

approach it is necessary to bring out all the unique features – however trivial they may appear – and make them the subject of the study.

To take an example of how microhistory within the framework of the singularization of history challenged traditional historical positions, one could look at the research on popular literacy in Iceland. It is known that the reading and writing capacities of the general Icelandic population increased considerably from the mid 18th century onwards. This development has traditionally been explained by having taken place in the wake of the Enlightenment and Lutheran piety (Guttormsson, 1989). A microhistorical approach to this topic (Magnússon and Ólafsson, 2002; Ólafsson, 1998) has, however, revealed that early literacy in Iceland evolved as an interesting interplay between the mainly clerical injunction for literacy and children's personal motivations. Children used the knowledge to read and write in their personal striving to cope and survive within a world where death, hunger, hardships, heavy labour and harsh environments were ubiquitous (Magnússon, 1997, 2005: 370; Magnússon and Ólafsson, 2002: 193).

Out of this grew a new kind of being, groups of lay scholars – barefoot historians – that formed an informal institution on a par with the official institutions in Iceland (Magnússon, 2013). This institution provided ordinary people with books and pens and the opportunity to obtain knowledge and seek entertainment, to organize and document their lives, to express their feelings and opinions and to communicate and maintain relationships (Ólafsson, 2013). It has been argued that these activities of the popular scribes of Icelandic peasant culture were an essential factor in the education and culture of the people of Iceland, working in parallel to the institutions that ostensibly directed these areas of society, with each influencing and being influenced by the other (Magnússon and Ólafsson, 2012).

From the singularization of history to singularized archaeology

Archaeologists are certainly accustomed to detailed analyses of miniscule features and elements, ever increasing the resolution of their analytical focus. These approaches are, however, different from the singularization of history. By tendency they follow an overly atheoretical and materialistic particularism (cf. Johnson, 1999: 31), often separating the matter of concern from the interpretative base (for exceptions see Haslam, 2006). This leads to explanations in archaeology that are frequently based on something other than the archaeological material at hand. Archaeological narratives become detached from things past and present, leaving them inert and almost meaningless without reference to other sources, findings or situations. Material culture is certainly always contextualized and its context is, of course, of paramount importance to our understanding of it. How can we otherwise address material objects or structures at all? Problems, however, arise when the context itself becomes the object of investigation, dominating the approach and the questions posed by its generalized framing. In doing so, material assemblages become entirely subjected to the context instead of asking how the context is affected by the material assemblage.

The singularization of history urges the researcher to bring out the contradictions that exist between contexts and the material at hand. This is the precondition for approaching ideas, points of view or things that otherwise do not come to the fore. Therefore this approach brings into prominence the contradictions and inconsistencies within the material at hand, and heightens the paradoxes that always exist between the research material and the generalized framework.

The keywords here are two: *singularity* and *singularization*. Singularities express the small and ordinary, the unimpressive and unattended subjects of history. They are not necessarily singular, individual, isolated or unique but represent a limited set of material from where the historical narrative emerges. Due to the singularized attitude towards the research material the focus remains on the event, person, object or material assemblage involved, instead of making larger abstractions such as society, class, meaning or ideology the focal point of research (cf. Lucas, 2012: 189). Singularization represents a search for a way that creates an intrinsic and logical context around the proper subjects of research, dissociated from the preconceived ideological package of metanarratives. Singularization does not mean 'in isolation' as the framework urges for a detailed investigation into all the intertwining elements that the material at hand goes into and all the relations of which it partakes.

Material culture or things are not isolates but singularities in the above illuminated sense and must be treated as such. The singularization of history tames our gaze at the singularities and draws our attention not only to the epistemic value that lies within them but also to their ontological essence (Magnússon and Szijártó, 2013). This perspective is evident in the early work of Italian microhistorians (Ginzburg, 1980; Levi, 1988).

An alliance between archaeology and microhistory is too rarely seen (for exceptions see e.g. Boric, 2007; Brooks et al., 2008). The idea of singularized archaeology, however, takes much from microhistory and is in fact based on the premises of the singularization of history. It utterly rejects the grand narrative in its historiography as it looks inward regarding the things at hand by honouring their nature as singularities, their intimate relations and ontological constitution. It focuses on how they reassemble into composite entities that build up, for instance, practices, events or personas. Furthermore, singularized archaeology works from the historiographical proposition that narratives are not constructions entirely detached from the material at hand but emerge from within the subject matter.

Singularized archaeology does of course take its influences from within archaeology, of which one would certainly be the Swedish microarchaeology movement (Cornell and Fahlander, 2002a, 2002b; Fahlander, 2001, 2003, 2008, 2012). This theoretical framework should clearly not be confused with the equally termed analytical microarchaeology dealing with the scientific analysis of the microscopic archaeological record (c.f. Weiner, 2010) as the Swedish version obtains the prefix not from the actual scale of research material but the scale of perspective and research procedure (Fahlander, 2003: 81). Thus the microhistorical subject definitely echoes in the Swedish microarchaeology by following microsociology's

concerns with the scrutiny of small-scale activities, as well as in their hermeneutic narrative approach.

The microarchaeologists emphasized the microanalysis of *social practices*, a vantage point better matching the generally fragmentary status of the archaeological record (Fahlander, 2003: 53). Archaeological materials, be they household fragments scattered in a floor layer, accumulated debris in a waste heap or the spread of objects over an ancient surface, comprise a palimpsest of unconscious actions and singular events (cf. Hodder, 2000: 25). This led the microarchaeologists to the question of how to bring these opposites together, conserving both the singularity of each event as well as the routine of repetitive practice. How can social action be understood as both unique and momentary, as well as constantly recurring and consistent? This problem unfolded into the central issue of the microarchaeology of the 'small and ordinary' (Fahlander, 2003: 6, 166) through the conceptualization of *serial practice* and its relation to materialities (Fahlander, 2003: 42).

The idea of serial practice rested upon Sartre's (1978: 166) concept of *series*. Series are in fact a congregation of singularities, participating in a unifying practice which is conducted unconsciously and without a shared identification, that is without a public and outspoken group identity. The microarchaeologists incorporated material culture to Sartre's theorem and so added a material dimension to social practice. Structures and objects, i.e. things, must be understood by their very own properties – their materiality – and materialities must be seen by the means of their 'socialness' and determining effect on people (Fahlander, 2003: 35). This material effect can both be intentionally implemented and unconsciously and unpredictably influencing and regulating human practice. As a consequence serial practice describes a social pattern where agencies are in flux. It presents a conglomerate of human and material agents generating practices in which relationality is given prominence over the almost imperceptible singular item. Herein we find clear affinities with ANT that influenced in particular the later microarchaeology (Fahlander, 2007, 2008, 2012).

With regards to the art of narrative, microarchaeology occupied a rigorous poststructuralist position by describing the historiographical approach as 'fiction' (Cornell and Fahlander, 2002a; Fahlander, 2003: 54, 2008). Accordingly, the character of conventional archaeological data is grounded in its constructiveness. This refers to how we bring a specific order to the mess of materials that archaeologists habitually work with, and the abstract taxonomies that force the analysis of social actions into tight constraints of categories such as sex, gender, religion, cosmology, race, ethnicity, class, etc. We encounter similar ideas for instance in Christopher Tilley's (1991, 1993) likening of material culture with text and that of archaeological narratives with poetry, but also – where it was perhaps taken to its ultimate expression – in the early feminist fictions of Ruth Tringham (1991, 1994) and Janet Spector (1991) who used the form of story-writing very explicitly in their approaches to the past. This obfuscation between scholarship and fiction represents perhaps the closest affinities between microhistory and microarchaeology. Both,

indeed, were heavily influenced by the 'linguistic' or 'narrative turn', rooted in the writings of for instance David Carr (1986), Hayden White (1973) and Paul Ricoeur (1984). One of us (Magnússon, 2005: 370) once similarily stressed that the textual self is a complex blend of fact and fiction, i.e. events that occurred versus events retold.

The narrative constructivism formed the main critique of a new realism within material culture studies, recapped under the tagline of 'the return to things' (Domanska, 2006; Olsen, 2003, 2010). It adhered directly to the approach of ANT (Latour, 1999, 2005; Law and Hassard, 1999) and Bruno Latour's (1993: 142) invocation of an extended democracy to things. Latour shares many influences with microhistory, mainly in his reference to microsociology. Thus, he is generally a sceptic of the conventional conception of the social, and claimed that we 'live in collectives not societies' (Latour, 1999: 192). By that Latour emphasizes a symmetrical viewpoint on material culture, concluding that it is co-equal to the human in every action or practice. Indeed, it is hard to conceptualize something we might consider merely human or entirely thingly or as proposed by Latour (1999: 182; original emphasis): 'Action is simply not a property of humans *but of an association of actants*'.

Microhistory, microarchaeology and symmetrical archaeology, relating to ANT, share from various perspectives a common ground. Conversely, we recognize fundamental differences in the attitude towards concepts such as narrative, materiality, singularity and relationality. The microhistorical framework set out by scrutinizing singular historical objects and posited that the tune of time could be best explored by retracing such historical singularities in miniscule detail. The same applies in part to the microarchaeological approach. They, however, were confronted with archaeological material that at first glance translates less directly than historical documents to textual discourse. The notion of seriality and how material culture is constantly embedded into practices released possibilities for interpretations that were not restricted by predetermined socio-cultural categories but open to variability in material engagements. Both microhistory and microarchaeology did not consider the historical narrative as an inherent component of the past, meaning that the historical narrative was rather regarded an intrinsically present discourse. The *latourian* call for an extended democracy to things renounces this opinion. The historicity of material things is not irresolute, impenetrable or constantly reinvented but rests in the things themselves. Material narratives must thus be gained from the things themselves as their historicity is embedded in their properties as the '*properties of materials, in short, are not attributes but histories*' (Ingold, 2007: 15).

The things at hand

To illustrate the implications of the singularization of history for archaeological research we take an example of an archaeological project carried out by one of us, Kristján Mímisson, on a site at the borders of the southern highlands of Iceland.

The site, which is known by the name of Búðarárbakki, is a prime example for an archaeological approach that emphasizes the small and ordinary and lays great stress on the singular things at hand and their relationality.

Early 18th century written sources, in particular the Icelandic Land Register (Magnússon and Vídalín, 1918–1921: 273), tell about the short settlement at Búðarárbakki and its inhabitant, a peasant by the name of Porkell. The land register allows us to follow the whereabouts of the peasant during the last 14–16 years of his life. He is described as an aged and restless man who was constantly on the move. The last four domiciles are mentioned in the land register of which Búðarárbakki on the eastern banks of the river Búðará is of special interest (Figure 1). There he lived for a decade at the end of his life.

The land register was undeniably written with a certain intention in mind, thus including some information and omitting other information. The account of Porkell is not only open to multiple ways of interpretation but there are also critical issues regarding its consistency. One aspect concerns the narrative itself, which was first written down some 20–30 years after the peasant died. Moreover, it reveals some general traits that are encountered at various places in the register referring to other similarly vague individuals from the past, often social outcasts. As Porkell is utterly unknown to other records than the land register it remains difficult to validate his existence through cross comparison with other documents. Hence, the persona of Porkell, as he appears in the land register, may well be a common

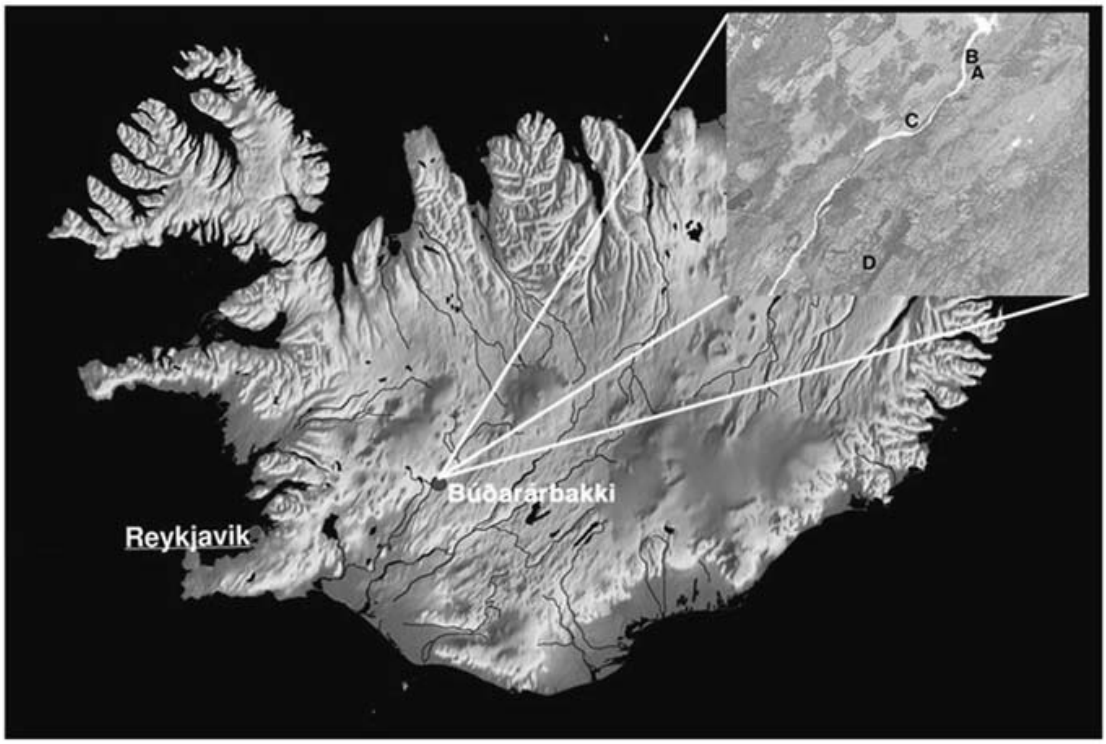


Figure 1. The location of the four places that the land register links to the peasant, Porkell: (A) Búðarárbakki, (B) Búðarártunga, (C) Tungufell and (D) Skógarkot.

denominator for several characters and not the personification of a singular, bodily circumscribed individual. This, however, is not a flaw or a limitation of the textual sources that needs correction but symptomatic for the constitution of the persona, being fragmented and distributed. It is unambiguous that the textual self of the peasant Porkell as it appears in the land register is quite different from the individual alive. Still, both elements, i.e. the living individual and the textual self, are equivalent representations or biographical presences of the historical persona that we perceive under the headline 'Porkell at Búðarárbakki' (Mímisson, 2012).

The textual sources present a biography that links a life to different places. Furthermore, the life-process of the person in question is reflected in the prosperity and misfortune of the farms he settled, hence merely featuring the person as a plaything of external circumstances. Nonetheless, the text provides an interesting perspective on the peasant at Búðarárbakki as it alludes to his character, his position within the community, and interaction with his compatriots of the district. These written passages, that cover only a page altogether, reflect a common theme of Icelandic identity. It is an archetypal representative of the independent peasant or farmer that we can trace back to the earliest Viking Age settlers in Iceland that sought refuge and autonomy on the isolated island from the oppression of the emerging royalty in Scandinavia. Later we encounter this identity-category time after time both in Icelandic historical and fictional literature, now more as a struggle of the peasant classes with the estate owners.

The excavation at Búðarárbakki (2005–2009) revealed a very small residence of a type known as the passageway farm, an architectural form that existed in many variations from the Middle Ages until the late 19th century. It is defined by the presence of a central passage or corridor creating an axial arrangement (Figure 2). The central passage with all its elements is not only the literal centrepiece of the architecture but also a key feature in assembling the activities, movements and practices on-site. It is the trajectory that connects the two main hubs of the farmstead that are located at each end of the passage. These are the main living quarter furthest inside the house where we find a place of rest and relief and the workshop, an area of industry in the western part of a pen attached to the farmhouse. There the peasant attended his craftwork and maintained his livelihood.

The house shows practically all standard features of a passageway farm of its time yet it lacks one which leads to an important conclusion. There is no hearth inside the building. A year-round dwelling at Búðarárbakki was impossible without a proper hearth. A fireplace inside the main living quarter was at best an illuminant for the dark chamber and cannot have been a source of sufficient heating for long and cold winters.

The general finds assemblage is, like the architecture, unimpressive and in fact typical for many postmedieval peasant homes. There are a few fragments of glass and pottery from drinking vessels, a knife and a sewing needle, two tobacco clay pipe fragments, a candlestick that would be stuck into a turf wall, small whetstones, a variety of iron and copper fragments, mostly unidentifiable pieces but also including the usual nails, spikes and rivets. Furthermore, a number of stones with holes,

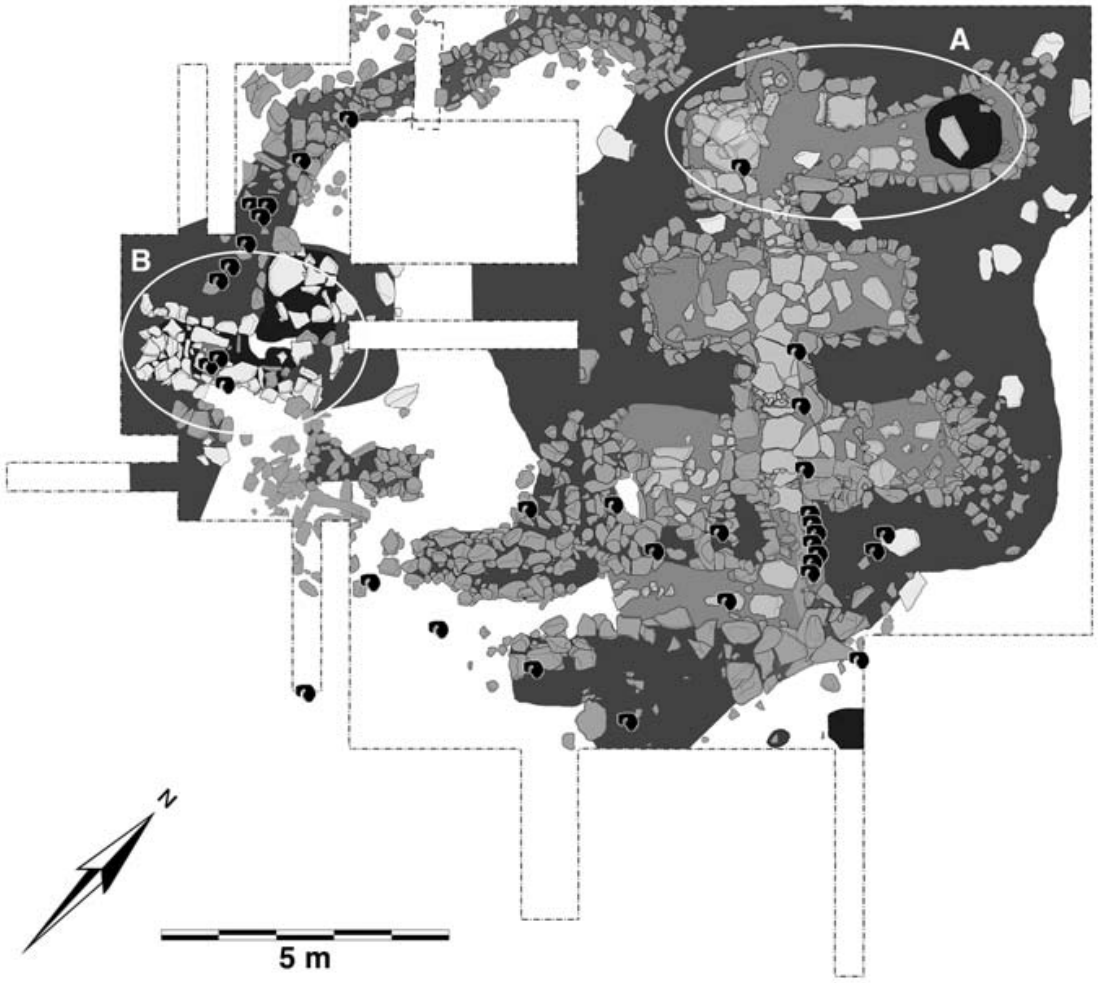


Figure 2. A plan of Búðarárbakki indicating the location of the main living quarter (A) and the workshop (B) as well as the 37 stone hammer artifacts.

door- and loom weights, stone hammers and a large stone slab, possibly used to tether a horse, lying in the farmyard. However unimpressive, from within this conventional finds assemblage emerge historical narratives that reach far beyond functional and technological descriptions, and pull together histories that link up to the biography of Porkell, the peasant at Búðarárbakki.

It is in particular the stone artifacts that catch the attention and among them the stone hammers are of greatest interest, both because they are quite numerous (37) and because they comprise a significant part of the total finds at Búðarárbakki (28%). Most of the hammers were found embedded into the built structures, either stuck into the stone walls, tucked under stone slabs of the floors or lined up on the outside surface of the turf walls like signposts of a trade (Figure 2).

Stone hammers are rather homogeneous objects that show practically no typological changes through time, from the earliest periods of settlement in Iceland in the 9th–10th centuries AD to the late 19th century. They are frequently found at postmedieval farm sites in Iceland. In most cases, there are only a few examples (1–10) but at larger multiperiod sites they are counted in dozens and hundreds.

These are natural boulders of porous greyish basalt with a chiseled round hole for a wooden shaft. At Búðarárbakki there was easy access to the raw material that was lying in abundance on the barren surface around the site as well as along the river bed of Búðará. The average diameter of the stone hammers from Búðarárbakki is 16.8 cm, the holes are on average 3.7 cm in diameter, and a full size stone hammer would have weighed between 3 and 4 kg on average. Most stone hammers are fairly round or round-oval in shape, derived from natural formation processes (Sveinbjarnardóttir, 2012: 159). These objects would have been multifunctional tools applied in various types of activities and we know from records that they were used in various tasks such as food processing, building and iron making (Sveinbjarnardóttir, 2012: 159). Nonetheless, the stone hammers are commonly linked to the processing of dried fish and often termed fish hammers in historical texts. Through the ages fish has been dried in Iceland by hanging. Hanged fish, which is hard, used to be softened by beating it with a hammer or a club, normally shortly or directly before consumption (Kristjánsson, 1985: 320). This process is recorded as having been performed with a swinging stroke. The hammers from Búðarárbakki show a low ratio between the size of the holes (and thus the thickness of the wooden shaft) and the size or weight of the boulders. This suggests that most hammers – at least many of the larger ones – would probably have been used by applying a vertical pounding rather than a swinging stroke. Hence, it is very possible that the hammers, however unimpressive and homogeneous in appearance, fulfilled various distinct functions determined by their size. In fact there are sources that discriminate between smaller stone hammers, termed 'wall-kneaders' applied in turf-building, and larger more general ones (Jónsson, 1945: 289–290). Identical objects dated to the Viking Age (9th–10th century) have been variably interpreted as stones weights, small grinding stones or querns (Nordahl, 1988, 51; Stenberger, 1943: 168–169). Indeed, there are a few objects with square shaft holes possibly indicating a rotation of the stone but they are not confined to the settlement period or any one particular period in time.

But there is more to the stone hammers from Búðarárbakki, something that makes this assemblage unique in Iceland. Namely, they are all unfinished examples or manufacture failures with the possible exception of only three objects. It has been a common understanding that the manufacture of stone hammers belonged to the standard household craftmanship and that they were produced on site according to the demands of the household. Manufacture failures are known from other sites, but they are very rare. Búðárárbakki, however, shows that in the later 17th century stone hammers must have been traded as a commodity, possibly accounting for the lack of larger numbers of manufacture failures or unfinished objects elsewhere.

The notion of large scale manufacture is underscored by other finds and the distribution of finds. Almost 70% of all finds at Búðarárbakki were either found in the main living quarter or in the workshop. There is, however, an interesting difference in the finds spectrum. The living quarter is dominated by household artefacts but in the workshop we find exclusively residues of the production. There are,

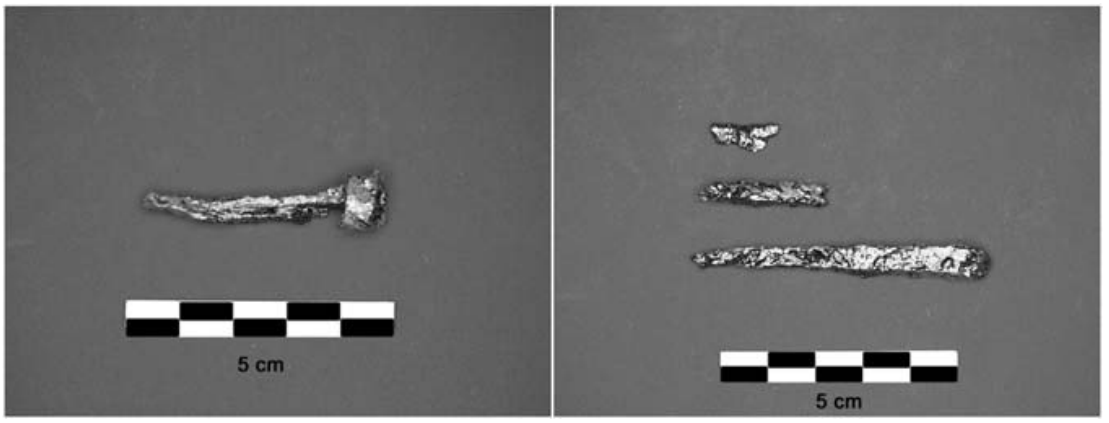


Figure 3. Iron spikes and spike fragments that were used to chisel the holes into the stone hammers.

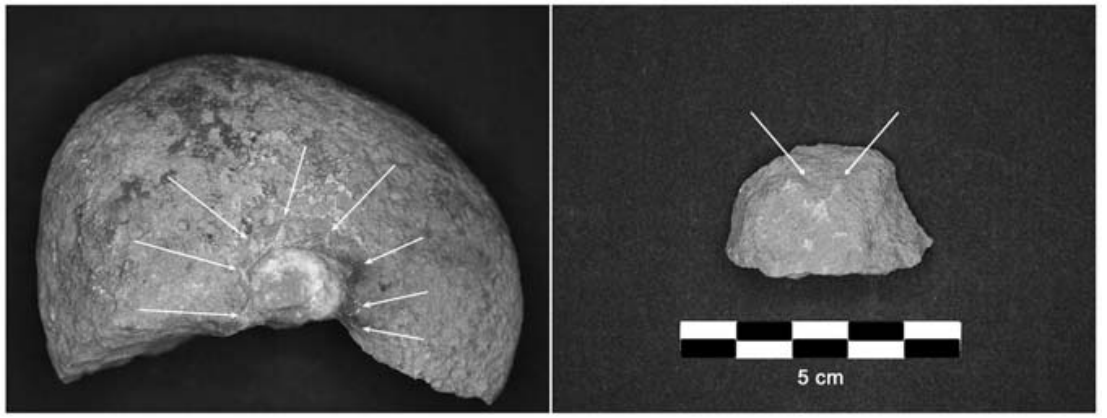


Figure 4. A stone hammer broken during manufacture (left) and a core from a stone hammer (right), both with clear tracks of the chiseling (see arrows).

among others, quadrilateral spikes with an unusual thick head (Figure 3) and a number of small iron fragments of such spikes (i.e. broken-off points) that were used to chisel the holes into the stones. A detailed look at the holes of the stone hammers reveals clear traces of the spikes and the chiseling on the sides of the holes (Figure 4). Furthermore, several cores flakes from the holes of the stone hammers were found which show likewise traces of the chiseling. At Búðarárbakki a few whetstones were discovered, including one example with a copper socket (Figure 5). Underneath the socket traces of wood were detected, implying that this whetstone must have had a handle. It is a very unusual whetstone but perfectly formed for sharpening the point of the small spikes. The importance of the spikes for the stone hammer manufacture is underscored even further by a fireplace in a small pit with stone slabs backing all four sides, located directly in front of the workshop. The stratigraphy of the filling showed an interchanging sequence of ashes and aeolian silt indicating a seasonal firing. In the ashes traces of iron and iron slag were found. Slag was as well detected on one hammer artefact found close to the fireplace. The

Figure 5. A whetstone with a copper socket for tightening a wooden handle.

craftsman would have used the fire to soften the iron of the chisels in order to reform the point when broken off as there is otherwise no evidence of elaborate ironwork.

The finds at Búðarárbakki allow a detailed *chaîne opératoire* analysis of the stone hammer manufacture, from the raw material collected from the barren land around the farm and/or the riverbed of Búðará running past it, the production itself, to the maintenance of the tool kit as well as the deposition of the manufacture failures in the building structures. But is there evidence for the trading of the stone hammers, can we address them as commodities? At Búðarárbakki there is in fact not much that can indicate the revenues of the stone hammer trade. The only things that draw attention are two clay pipe fragments. Tobacco came to Iceland, at the onset of the 17th century and the earliest pipes are from that period (Mehler, 2004: 133). During the 17th century historical documents show a considerable decline in the price of tobacco and concomitantly clay pipes become a widespread find category at archaeological sites in Iceland, indicating a general increase of smoking. In 1658, around the time when Porkell settled at Búðarárbakki, tobacco was still fairly expensive, a pound costing 30 fish (Hallgrímsdóttir, 1993: 134). So, if we assume that the peasant himself smoked the pipes and paid for the tobacco, he must have had a sufficient revenue coming from his own industry, the trade in stone hammers.

The stone hammers at Búðarárbakki are singularities in the sense that they belong to a common category of material culture that has been considered historically insignificant, let alone able to throw light on personal biographies. This particular assemblage illuminates an elaborate daily routine of a 17th century peasant and ties up his personal, admittedly very fragmented, biography, not as a passive stand-in for a life now long lost, but as an active participant in that life and the creation of that persona in past and present.

Singularizing the past: An alternative view

The immediate question that arises from this work is in what manner does it differ from an archaeological approach that leans towards the grand narrative. Let us investigate this question by visualizing what kind of grand narratives such a traditional approach to the material at Búðarárbakki would have relied upon and what it would have contributed.

In practice a grand narrative departs from abstract categories about, for example, social structures or identities or even larger overarching phenomena. Such a theme exists for the 17th century in Iceland that outlines the most devastating times in its history. It comprises bad climatic conditions with lower average temperatures and longer periods of sea ice around the island, having dramatic impact on the agricultural subsistence of the people. Furthermore, perennial pestilences and a few catastrophic volcanic eruptions frame this historical scene. In addition, the 17th century is characterized by two events that have long been considered among the most degrading in the history of Iceland, i.e. the implementation of a trade monopoly by the Danish king in 1602, and the oath of allegiance to the monarch's absolutism forced on the Icelandic people by the king in 1662. These circumstances have characterized the period as a time of woe and suffering, which lasted for more than 200 years (Porsteinsson and Jónsson, 1991: 209). Nonetheless, this era was characterized as well by shorter periods of prosperity with substantial population growth and rising estate prices and tenancy. It occurred mainly after the middle of the century and may be seen in an increase in the number of new farms being established, not least in southern Iceland during the decade 1660–1670 (Porláksson, 2004: 15). The new settlement stretched into uninhabited areas at the periphery, both because the primary land was fully utilized and because higher ranked farms disbanded older crofts and called in the properties, forcing tenants to resettle.

Búðarárbakki falls perfectly into this period and might well be regarded as a prime example for the settlement and farming expansion of the mid 17th century. The structural remains at Búðarárbakki comply in almost every respect to a farm from that period. Direct comparison with excavated late 16th or 17th century farms in Iceland, such as Sandártunga and Forna-Lá (Eldjárn, 1951), supports this conclusion. Furthermore, some would argue that these farms (including Búðarárbakki, of course) provide a perfect link in the evolutionary history of the Icelandic passageway farm (Ágústsson, 1987), linking these sites to another grand narrative that we will, however, not go further into here. Each site has certainly its special features, but they all fit the *building identity* that has been used to characterize post-medieval Icelandic farming and peasantry as well as the general decline of the 17th century (Eldjárn, 1951: 114). In addition to all of this and underscoring even more the farming guise, the land register records Búðarárbakki as a legal farm and the account in the register emphasizes strongly the farming identity by measuring the peasant's fortune against the land quality and farming possibilities.

Finds are certainly very few, perfectly corresponding with the short settlement period (about 10 years) and a household of only one person. The find categories at

Búðarárbakki are as well distinctive for a peasant farm, although their composition is somewhat peculiar due to the large amount of stone hammer manufacture failures, although it is questionable if an approach directed by the grand narrative would have customized the methodology in order to track down every stone hammer (see below).

If using the grand narrative as a starting point, there is in fact nothing contradicting the narrative about the peasant farming expansion of the mid 17th century in Iceland that would attract particular scholarly attention. The simplicity and generality of the structures and finds are all too fitting and consistent with the grand narrative of the peasantry that was forced to live at the periphery of habitable land, engaged in arduous animal husbandry, suffering from hardship, repetitious pestilence and natural catastrophes, invariably fixed in its social caste. Such a scholarly approach would at best reduce the life-history of Porkell to a master biography of a series of people living at that period in time.

With a detailed look at the material assemblage, placing an emphasis on the material narratives that derive from it, we can, however, approach the persona of Porkell from a more particularistic and alternative point of view. The settlement at Búðarárbakki was restricted to the summer season, which leaves the biography of its inhabitant even more incomplete and fragmented than if it had been a year-round dwelling. The material at hand shows a reiterated change of dwelling between winter and summer that must have gone along with parallel changes in the social situation. Búðarárbakki was thus a site where social transformation took place, a transformation that was short term and repeated year after year. Accordingly, Porkell dwelt only seasonally at Búðarárbakki, pursuing his specialized craftmanship, swaying between the dependency of a farm labourer or a pauper under the care of social welfare or individual benefactors during the winters and the independency of his own homestead and industry in the summer months.

Singularizing the gaze on the stone hammers and their material relations shows that they are the perfect node that ties together the composite essence of the personal biography of Porkell at Búðarárbakki. They are not simply a silent witness of the actions that once took place there or of a livelihood that was maintained. On the contrary, they are the centrepiece in a network of multi-temporal agencies, both human and non-human. The hammers are the product of a material and human blend that relied equally on the availability of raw material, the material properties of the porous basalt and the bodily executed skills of Porkell. The stone hammers at Búðarárbakki make no claim for a completeness in the biography of Porkell. Indeed, biographies, even our own (cf. Fowler, 2004: 3), are always partial and incomplete, and both spatially and temporally distributed (Magnússon, 2005; Mímisson, 2012: 461). The material narrative that emerges from the stone hammers and their material relations, including the seasonal occupation of the site, conforms to this notion of a multi-fragmented biography that is spread among various agencies, and consequently shared by people and things (Mímisson, 2012).

Conclusion

We have in this paper introduced a framework termed the singularization of history and employed it on an archaeological case study. In doing so, we have attempted a singularized archaeology that may add new perspectives to the discussion initiated with the singularization of history.

An inward focus on the small and ordinary, a circumscribed and normally untreated set of material culture, allows for a more detailed perspective on the biography of the persona and a more varied vision of personal lived experiences and identities, without being entrapped by impersonal metanarratives or blunt materialism. The focus must be directed inwards onto the singularities, the small and ordinary issues that otherwise tend to be ignored or are not considered significant. Stone hammers or iron spikes have never attracted any attention within Icelandic archaeology. Neither has been considered to contain detailed information about social identity or the biographical fate of past individuals, let alone that such objects were granted agency and regarded as crucial in the creation and preservation of the persona. The central issue behind singularization is not seclusion but relationality. Singularized archaeology thus aims at tying up relations from the vantage point of the material at hand and reassembling these material relations into composite entities that build up practices, events and/or personas. Approaches like this are normally termed 'bottom-up'. We, however, want to emphasize the 'bottom' rather than the 'up' as the approach aims almost exclusively at tying together the horizontal material relations rather than moving up from the material at hand into the higher altitudes of abstract phenomena.

Furthermore, the focus on singularization recognizes and concedes the influences of the material at hand on the process of research and methodology. The stone hammers were a prime mover in the excavation procedure at Búðarárbakki. The first encounter of seven stone hammers under stone slabs in the house entrance induced a more detailed and particular attention to the stone settings of both walls and floors, thus turning the focus towards this particular singularity. Both the paved floors as well as the stone settings of the walls were partly dismantled, piece by piece, in order to track down the hammers located in the wall and floor structures. Only by means of this procedure was it possible to find the multitude of stone hammer fragments that were embedded in the structures themselves, both manufacture failures and unfinished objects, of which some were only showing the smallest traces of chiseling. If one were approaching the archaeological remains top-down and with a preformed grand narrative in mind, one would have run the risk of missing out on these finds.

From this perspective the project at Búðarárbakki presents a study that opens up an alternative way of biographical research from the basis of the material culture at hand. Iceland in the 17th century was predominantly a farming society, yet only a minority could be defined as landowners. The biggest proportion of the population were tenants, labourers and paupers; people who have so far only received limited historical attention. Búðarárbakki demonstrates that among this

large number of dependents, transient movement between classes – i.e. between dependency and autonomy – was possible and practised without being tethered to farming. The ability of providing for oneself by means of specialized manufacture, an art of proto-industry, gave birth to more varied possibilities expressing identity, autonomy and self-determination.

The idea of singularized archaeology draws upon the idea of the singularization of history, adding the notion of materiality to the debate. Hence, it aims at highlighting this shared and symmetrical human-material existence as it draws upon the multitude of narratives that emerge directly out of this essential and unceasing fusion. As discussed in the paper, the idea shares traits with various theoretical approaches, yet it has an invariantly important message. The manifestation of singularized archaeology lies in delimiting the focus without constraining the gaze, approaching each object and each material assemblage with the assurance that all things are historically significant. Thus, it is an approach that enables us to listen in to the history and archaeology of things small and ordinary – fragmented and incomplete as they are – that otherwise are left unheeded.

Acknowledgements

Kristján Mímisson would like to thank Bjarni F. Einarsson of the Archaeological Office (Fornleifafræðistofan) for the immeasurable assistance and support during the fieldwork at Búðarárbakki. Furthermore, both authors would like to thank Gavin Lucas for his constructive criticism and support during the course of this work and the anonymous reviewers of JSA for their comments on the earlier version of this paper.

Funding

Kristján Mímisson was supported by the Eimskip Fund of the University of Iceland and for the fieldwork at Búðarárbakki Mímisson received funding from The Icelandic Archaeology Fund (Fornleifasjóður) and Landsnet hf, Iceland's Energy Transmission System. Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon was supported by the Icelandic Research Fund (IFR, nr. 141237-051).

References

Ágústsson H (1987) Íslenski torfbærinn. In: Jóhannsson FF (ed.) *Íslensk Þjóðmenning I. Uppruni og Umhverfi*. Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, pp. 226–344.

Bintliff J (ed.) (1991) *The Annales School and Archaeology*. Leicester: Leicester University Press.

Boric D (2007) The house between grand narrative and microhistory: A house society in the Balkans. In: Beck Jr RA (ed.) *The Durable House: House Society Models in Archaeology, Occasional Papers*, Vol. 35. Carbondale: Center for Archaeological Investigations (CAI), Southern Illinois University, pp. 97–129.

Breglia L (2006) *Monumental Ambivalence: The Politics of Heritage*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Brooks J, DeCourse C and Walton J (eds) (2008) *Small Worlds: Method, Meaning, & Narrative in Microhistory*. Santa Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press.
Brown RD (2003) Microhistory and the post-modern challenge. *Journal of the Early Republic* 23: 1–20.
Burke P (2004) *What is Cultural History?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
Burke P (2005) *History and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Cabrera MA (1999) The liguistic approach or return to subjectivism? In search of an alternative to social history. *Social History* 24: 74–89.
Carr D (1986) Narrative and the real world: An argument for continuity. *History and Theory* 25(2): 117–131.
Childe VG (1950) *The Dawn of European Civilizations*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Childe VG (1951) *Social Evolution*. London: Watts.
Childe VG (1958) *The Prehistory of European Society*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
Clark JDG (1939) *Archaeology and Society*. London: Methuen.
Clark JDG (1983) *The Identity of Man: As Seen by an Archaeologist*. London: Methuen.
Clark JDG and Piggott S (1965) *Prehistoric Societies*. London: Hutchinson.
Cornell P and Fahlander F (2002a) Microarchaeology, materiality and social practice. *Current Swedish Archaeology* 10: 21–38.
Cornell P and Fahlander F (2002b) *Social Praktik och Stumma Monument. Introduktion till Mikroarkeologi*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.
Deetz J (1977) *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
Domanska E (2006) The return to things. *Archaeologia Polonia* 44: 171–185.
Eldjárn K (1951) Tvennar bæjarrústir frá seinni öldum. *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1949–1950: 102–119.
Fahlander F (2001) *Archaeology as Science Fiction*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.
Fahlander F (2003) *The Materiality of Social Practice: A Microarchaeology of Burial*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.
Fahlander F (2007) Third space encounters: Hybidity, mimicry and interstitial practice. In: Cornell P and Fahlander F (eds) *Encounters-Materialities-Confrontations. Archaeologies of Social Space and Interaction*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, pp. 15–41.
Fahlander F (2008) Differences that matter: Materialities, material culture and social practice. In: Glørstad H and Hedeager L (eds) *Six Essays on the Materiality of Society and Culture*. Lindome: Bricoleur Press, pp. 127–154.
Fahlander F (2012) Articulating hybridity: Structurating situations and indexical events in North-European rock art. In: Burström NM and Fahlander F (eds) *Matters of Scale. Processes and Courses of Events in Archaeology and Cultural History*. Stockholm: Stockholm University, pp. 53–73.
Fowler C (2004) *The Archaeology of Personhood*. London: Routledge.
Geertz C (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
Ginzburg C (1980) *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Ginzburg C (1989) Clues: Roots of an evidential paradigm. In: *Clues, Myths, and Historical Method*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 96–125.
Ginzburg C (1993) Microhistory: Two or three things that I know about it. *Critical Inquiry* 20: 10–35.

Green LF, Green DR and Góes Neves E (2003) Indigenous knowledge and archaeological science. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3(3): 366–398.
Guttormsson L (1989) Læsi. In: Jóhannesson FF (ed.) *Íslensk Þjóðmenning VI. Munnmenntir og Bókmenning*. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Þjóðsaga, pp. 117–144.
Hallgrímsdóttir M (1993) *Húsakostur Viðeyjarklausturs: Um byggð í Viðey fram á 18. öld*. Skýrslur Árbæjarsafns XXIX. Reykjavík: Árbæjarsafn.
Haslam M (2006) An archaeology of the instant? Action and narrative in microscopic archaeological residue analyses. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 6(3): 402–424.
Hodder I (ed.) (1987) *Archaeology as Long-Term History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hodder I (2000) Agency and individuals in long-term processes. In: Dobres MA and Robb J (eds) *Agency in Archaeology*. London: Routledge, pp. 21–33.
Hodder I (2012) *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
Iggers GG (1997) *Historiography in the Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*. London: University Press of New England.
Ingold T (2007) Materials against materiality. *Archaeological Diaglogues* 14(1): 1–16.
Johnson M (1999) Rethinking historical archaeology. In: Funari PP, Hall M and Jones S (eds) *Historical Archaeology. Back from the Edge*. London: Routledge, pp. 23–36.
Joyce P (2010) What is the social in social history. *Past and Present* 206(1): 213–248.
Jónsson F (1945) *Þjóðhættir og ævisögur frá 19. öld: Minnisblöð Finns Jónssonar frá Kjörseyri*. Akureyri: Pálmi H Jónsson.
Karlsson H (2005) Why is there material culture rather than nothing? Heideggerian thoughts and archaeology. In: Funari PP, Zarankin A and Stovel E (eds) *Global Archaeological Theory: Contextual Voices and Contemporary Thoughts*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, pp. 29–42.
Knapp AB (ed.) (1992) *Archaeology, Annales, and Ethnohistory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Kocka J (1996) What is leftist about social history today? *Journal of Social History* 29: 67–71.
Kojan D and Angelo D (2003) Dominant narratives, social violence and the practice of Bolivian archaeology. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 5(3): 383–408.
Kristiansen K and Rowlands M (1998) *Social Transformations in Archaeology: Global and Local Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
Kristjánsson L (1985) *Íslenskir Sjávarhættir IV*. Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður.
Latour B (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Latour B (1999) *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Latour B (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Law J and Hassard J (1999) *Actor Network Theory and After*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
Le Roy Ladurie E (1979) *Montaillou. The Promised Land of Error*. New York: Vintage Books.
Levi G (1988) *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorcist*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Levi G (1991) On microhistory. In: Burke P (ed.) *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 93–113.

Lucas G (2012) *Understanding the Archaeological Record*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lüdtke A (1995) What is the history of everyday life and who are its practitioners? In: Lüdtke A (ed.) *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 3–40.

MagnússonÁ and Vídalín P (1918–1921) *Jarðbók. 2. bindi (Árnessýsla)*. Copenhagen: Hið íslenzka fræðafjelag í Kaupmannahöfn.

Magnússon SG (1997) *Menntun, ást og sorg: Einsögurannsókn á íslensku sveitasamfélagi 19. og 20 aldar*. Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press.

Magnússon SG (2003) The singularization of history: Social history and microhistory within the postmodern state of knowledge. *Journal of Social History* 36(3): 701–735.

Magnússon SG (2005) *Sjálfssögur. Minni, minningar og saga*. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press.

Magnússon SG (2006) Social history as 'sites of memory'? The institutionalization of history: Microhistory and the grand narrative. *Journal of Social History* 39(3): 891–913.

Magnússon SG (2013) Living by the book: Form, text and life experience in Iceland. In: Kuismin A and Driscoll MJ (eds) *White Field, Black Seeds: Nordic Literacy Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, pp. 64–75.

Magnússon SG and Ólafsson D (2002) Barefoot historians: Education in Iceland in the modern period. In: Lorenzen-Schmidt KJ and Poulsen B (eds) *Writing Peasants. Studies on Peasant Literacy in Early Modern Northern Europe*. Aarhus: Landbohistorisk Selskab, pp. 175–209.

Magnússon SG and Ólafsson D (2012) Minor knowledge: Microhistory and the importance of institutional structures. *Quaderni Storici* 140/aXLVII: 495–524.

Magnússon SG and Szijártó IM (2013) *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Mehler N (2004) Tóbak og tóbakspípur á Íslandi á 18. öld. *Árbók hins íslenzka fornleifafélags 2002–2003*, pp. 131–150.

Mergill A (1995) Grand narrative and the discipline of history. In: Ankersmith F and Kellner H (eds) *A New Philosophy of History*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 151–173.

Merriman N (ed.) (2004) *Public Archaeology*. London: Routledge.

Meskell L (ed.) (1998) *Archaeology Under Fire: Nationalism, Politics and Heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East*. London: Routledge.

Meskell L (2001) From social to cognitive archaeology: An interview with Colin Renfrew. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 1(1): 13–34.

Meskell L (ed.) (2005) *Archaeologies of Materiality*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Meskell L and Pels P (eds) (2005) *Embedding Ethics*. Oxford: Berg.

Miller D (ed.) (2005) *Materiality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Mímisson K (2004) Landslag möguleikanna. Kall eftir faglausri hugsun í fornleifafræði. *Riti*ð 4(2): 29–50.

Mímisson K (2012) Twisted lives: On the temporality and materiality of biographical presences. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 16: 455–471.

Munslow A (1997) *Deconstructing History*. London: Routledge.

Nordahl E (1988) *Reykjavik from an Archaeological Point of View*. Uppsala: Societas Archaeologica Upsaliensis.

Ólafsson D (1998) Að skrá sína eigin tilveru. Dagbækur, sjálfsmynd og heimsmynd á 18. og 19. öld. In: Halldórsdóttir EH and Magnússon SG (eds) *Einsagan – ólíkar leiðir. Átta ritgerðir og eitt myndlistarverk*. Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press, pp. 51–88.

Ólafsson D (2013) Scribal communities in Iceland: The case of Sighvatur Grímsson. In: Kuismin A and Driscoll MJ (eds) *White Field, Black Seeds: Nordic Literacy Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, pp. 40–49.

Olsen B (2003) Material culture after text: Re-membering things. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 36(2): 87–104.

Olsen B (2007) Keeping things at arm's length: A genealogy of asymmetry. *World Archaeology* 39(4): 579–588.

Olsen B (2010) *In Defence of Things*. Plymouth: AltaMira Press.

Orser Jr CE and Patterson TC (2004) Introduction: V. Gordon Childe and the foundations of social archaeology. In: Patterson T and Orser Jr CE (eds) *Foundations of Social Archaeology: Selected Writings of V. Gordon Childe*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 1–23.

Peltonen M (2013) What is micro in microhistory? In: Renders H and de Haan B (eds) *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*. Lewinston: The Edwin Mellen Press, pp. 157–177.

Preucel RW and Meskell L (2004) Knowledges. In: Meskell L and Preucel RW (eds) *A Companion to Social Archaeology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 3–22.

Revel J (1996) Microanalysis and the construction of the social. In: Revel J and Hunt L (eds) *Histories. French Constructions of the Past*. New York: New Press, pp. 492–502.

Ricoeur P (1984) *Time and Narrative. Volume 1*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Roskams S (2001) *Excavation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sartre JP (1978) *Sartre in the Seventies: Interviews and Essays*. London: Deutsch.

Sewell Jr WH (2005) *Logics of History. Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Shackel PA and Chambers EJ (eds) (2004) *Places in Mind: Public Archaeology as Applied Anthropology*. New York: Routledge.

Smith L (2004) *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage*. London: Routledge.

Spector J (1991) What this awl means: Towards a feminist archaeology. In: Gero J and Conkey M (eds) *Engendering Archaeology*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 388–406.

Stenberger M (1943) Ísleifsstaðir, Borgarfjarðarsýsla. In: Stenberger M (ed.) *Forntida Gårdar I Island. Nordiska arkeologiska undersökningen I Island 1939*. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, pp. 145–170.

Sveinbjarnardóttir G (2012) *Reykholt: Archaeological Investigations at a High Status Farm in Western Iceland*. Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland.

Thomas J (2004) *Archaeology and Modernity*. London: Routledge.

Thomas J (2005) Materiality and the social. In: Funari PP, Zarankin A and Stovel E (eds) *Global Archaeological Theory: Contextual Voices and Contemporary Thoughts*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, pp. 11–18.

Tilley C (1991) Interpreting material culture. In: Hodder I (ed.) *The Meaning of Things: Material Culture and Symbolic Expression*. London: Routledge, pp. 60–73.

Tilley C (1993) Introduction: Interpretation and a poetics of the past. In: Tilley C (ed.) *Interpretative Archaeology*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 1–27.

Trigger B (2006) *The History of Archaeological Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Tringham R (1991) Households with faces: The challenge of gender in prehistoric architectural remains. In: Gero J and Conkey M (eds) *Engendering Archaeology*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 93–130.
Tringham R (1994) Engendered places in prehistory. *Gender, Place and Culture* 1(2): 169–203.
Webmoor T (2007) What about 'one more turn after the social' in archaeological reasoning? Taking things seriously. *World Archaeology* 39(4): 563–578.
Weiner S (2010) *Microarchaeology: Beyond the Visible Archaeological Record*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
White H (1973) *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
Wilson NS (1999) *History in Crisis? Recent Directions in Historiography*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Witmore C (2007) Symmetrical archaeology: Excerpts of a manifesto. *World Archaeology* 39(4): 546–562.
Þorláksson H (2004) Undir einveldi. In: Líndal S (ed.) *Saga Íslands VII*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag.
Þorsteinsson B and Jónsson B (1991) *Íslandssaga til okkar daga*. Reykjavík: Sögufélag.

Author Biographies

Kristján Mímisson studied archaeology and physical anthropology at the Universities of Freiburg and Hamburg in Germany as well as Basel in Switzerland, finishing an MA degree from the University of Hamburg in 2002. He worked as a field archaeologist for The Archaeological Office (Fornleifafræðistofan) in Reykjavik between 2002 and 2012. He is currently a postgraduate student in archaeology at the University of Iceland.

Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon (Historian – PhD) is an Associate Professor of Cultural History at the University of Iceland and a Senior Researcher at the National Museum of Iceland. He is as well the chair of the Center for Microhistorical Research at the Reykjavík Academy (www.microhistory.org). He is the author of 17 books and numerous articles published in Iceland and abroad. Two of his latest books are: *Wasteland with Words. A Social History of Iceland* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), and *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* published by Routledge 2013 and co-authored with István M Szijártó.

Building Identities: the architecture of the persona

Mímisson K, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 2016, Vol. 20(1) 207–227

Int J Histor Archaeol (2016) 20:207–227
DOI 10.1007/s10761-015-0322-5

Building Identities: The Architecture of the Persona

Kristján Mímisson [1,2]

Published online: 26 October 2015

Abstract We often approach architecture to deal with people's social identities, as these structures are often the products of communal efforts or institutionalized orders. Nonetheless, we sometimes observe a discrepancy in the architectural homogeneity and the diversity of personalized practices brought forth by architecture. Hence, the built environment possesses often unexplored possibilities to prospect personal identities and biographies. In this paper I intend to scrutinize the role of built structures in the architecture of the persona. From the vantage point of *Singularized Archaeology* I aim at disentangling a quintessential Icelandic passageway house from the seventeenth century. Doing so, I turn the focus away from the standard debate on form and function of architectural design towards the variety of interpretive possibilities incorporated in the archaeological structures themselves, the building materials, the building processes as well as the relationality of the material assemblages that compose the architecture.

Keywords Vernacular architecure · Biography · Singularization · Turf houses · Material narratives

Introduction: The Singularization of Architecture

Built structures—whole or in ruins—comprise one of the most common material categories within archaeology. Archaeologists are thus in many different ways experts on architecture, not only regarding any particular time in the past, but also in a long-term perspective. Icelandic archaeology poses no exception to this claim. Excavations on farm sites from various periods have dominated Icelandic archaeology (Vésteinsson 2004, 2010) and the evolutionary history of vernacular turf house architecture in Iceland from the Viking Age halls of the earliest settlement period in the ninth century

✉ Kristján Mímisson
krm6@hi.is

[1] Reynimelur 52, 107 Reykjavík, Iceland

[2] Department of Archaeology, Centre for Research in the Humanities, University of Iceland, Sæmundargata 2, 101 Reykjavík, Iceland

to the more elaborate passageway farms (Icel. *gangabær*) and gabled-farms (Icel. *burstabær*) of later periods has remained an important topic (Ágústsson 1987, 1998; Bruun 1928; Nilson 1943; Ólafsson 2004; Roussell 1943a). The debate has certainly led to valuable insights into some of the long-term developments yet simultaneously revealed certain shortcomings. The focus was predominantly set on layout and design and the function of individual rooms, resulting in an simple evolutionary scheme from plain to more elaborate house forms. In this sense, Icelandic archaeology dealt with vernacular architecture from the perspective of definite and preconceived house designs, a perspective that framed the debate on the architectural layout of individual house types and the evolutionary process of house forms alike. The developmental history of vernacular architecture in Iceland was thereby thoroughly embedded in an almost undisputed grand narrative emphasizing layout and design at the expense of a multi-dimensional notion of architecture as lived space, constantly being relived and reshaped, a prime mover of domestic activities.

To my understanding a grand narrative is a self-contained version of history, composed of one or many metanarratives, uncritically reproduced time after time. A grand narrative is not necessarily ascribed to a particular author, but may draw its contents from various sources, sometimes entirely unrelated. By the same token, criticizing or opposing a grand narrative does not mean that it is entirely wrong or that the alternatives provided are put forth in order to refute the grand narrative altogether. Many grand narratives circumscribe unequivocal historical scenarios, yet in a very broad and generalized manner. The Three-Age-System is a classic example of this property of an archaeological grand narrative. They do namely thrive on their coarse meshed framework that captures the broad communalities and homogeneity of the issues at stake but tend to miss out on the various alleys and backstreets of history criss-crossing the boulevards of the grand narrative.

In this paper I intend to elaborate on the architecture of particular house remains from the late seventeenth century, completely excavated in five consecutive seasons between 2005 and 2009. The site is known by the name of Búðarárbakki and is located in the uplands of the district of Hrunamannahreppur in southern Iceland (Fig. 1). On first glance, i.e. within the framework of the grand narrative of vernacular Icelandic turf house development, it is not a structure that calls for special attention. Quite the contrary, it fits by and large all the requirements of the grand narrative and stands as a prime example of the quintessential house type of its age. I, however, want to approach this object of interest with a profound belief that the ultimate goal of research is the distortion of any kind of metanarrative (Magnússon 2003, p. 720; Magnússon and Szijártó 2013, p. 124) or as Johnson (1999, p. 34) phrased it so eloquently: "Finally, we should recognize that by definition our work serves to *ironicize master narratives*." Consequently, I will by enhancing the historical resolution attempt to develop my thoughts away from the dominant debate on design and function towards the life that the architecture of this particular house engendered, encouraged and accommodated. The house is central to the biography of its builder and inhabitant, known by the name of Þorkell, as a personal biography can never be separated from the locale of its occurrence. Thus, houses and their architecture can display features revealing personal biographies. Not only in terms of a master-biography, meaning a figurative biographical setting describing the possibilities of individual lives in the past (Robb 2002, p. 155), but in terms of a very particular life-history from the past.

Fig. 1 The places mentioned in the article

Looking at Búðarárbakki there is a certain split between the standardized architectural layout and the variation of personalized practices that the house brought forth. The built environment of Búðarárbakki possesses thus unexplored possibilities of prospecting for certain daily practices in the biography of its inhabitant. Its architecture opens up insights into the material relations of the peasant Þorkell, who built the house around 1660 and lived there for about a decade (Magnússon and Vídalín 1918–27, p. 273). The material contains specific details that illustrate how the life pursued at Búðarárbakki defied the depictions of the grand narrative.

This particular material narrative, i.e. the one that converts a general material setting into a specific personal biography, can be approached from various angles, applying different methods and theory. I prefer to touch upon the issue from a singularized perspective. The *Singularization of History* is an approach that was introduced as a critique of the situation within the scholarship of social history by Magnússon (2003, 2006; Magnússon and Szijártó 2013, pp. 115–116) a little more than a decade ago and has recently found its way into archaeology (Mímisson and Magnússon 2014). The key argument of the *Singularization of History* includes that metanarratives have dominated the discourse, the questions and the methods and thereby the results as well. Metanarratives tend to veil the multitude of varied fates and heterogeneous expressions of history under the cloak of uniformity. Conversely, narrowing the focus on the subject matter and looking for the narratives that rise from within the material at hand, rather than from the ideological abstractions that most metanarratives are based upon, allows for versatile perspectives on the past as it brings forth the importance of the often unattended and unimpressive presences of the past (Mímisson and Magnússon 2014, p. 139). In this sense, Beaudry (2006) launched her stimulating work *Findings*, in which

she deals with some of the smallest and most inconspicuous things, needles, pins, thimbles etc., with the tagline *Small Finds*, *Big Histories*.

One could very well claim that material culture has in general been left unattended and this situation has lately been countered by a strong call for *a return to things* (Domanska 2006; Hodder 2012; Olsen 2003, 2010; Preda 1999). A singularized approach to the archaeological remains of Búðarárbakki turns indeed the attention to the things at hand as it unfolds a detailed and individual narrative on its architecture and design. Furthermore, it will allow us to abstract from the material relations a particular narrative that links into the biography of Þorkell, the builder and only inhabitant at Búðarárbakki.

An Exerpt from Icelandic Architectural History: A Grand Narrative

The history and development of vernacular architecture has been one of the most important and continuously ongoing themes of Icelandic archaeology. The Icelandic historian Valtýr Guðmundsson (1889) and the Danish officer and antiquarian Daniel Bruun (1928 [1897]) were amongst a few who wrote on Icelandic architecture at the end of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, Guðmundsson, who based his analyses on descriptions in medieval Icelandic literature, depicted the Icelandic turf house tradition in much more varied colours than Bruun and many later scholars. Certainly he failed to link the various house types he identified to a detailed chronology which again led to an idea of enhanced diversity. He, for instance, saw the conventional halls of the Viking Age contemporary to the more fragmented design of a passageway house characterized by a central passage that led from the entrance to a cluster of extensions in the back. Guðmundsson's ideas were marked by the notion of decreased diversity in later periods where the passageway farm, this "most complete and economic house form," exterminates other early and less preferable types (Guðmundsson 1889, p. 78), including the hall. Bruun, who drew his conclusions upon archaeological excavations and field surveying, toned down Guðmundsson's statements, although he did not reject them entirely. He stated that the archaeological record did not indicate an emergence of the passageway house earlier than the Middle Ages. Yet he did not exclude the possibility of passageway houses in the Viking Age altogether (Bruun 1928, p. 176).

It was, however, without any doubt the Danish architect Aage Roussell who most strongly influenced the discourse on Icelandic architectural development for the Viking and Middle Ages. Roussell, who was well trained in archaeological fieldwork and later became a curator at the Danish National Museum, directed excavations in Greenland and Iceland in the late 1920s and 1930s and the results were published in pioneering works during the 1940s (Roussel 1941, 1943b). In an essay on early house ruins in Iceland, Roussell (1943b) deconstructs Guðmundsson's ideas of a very early presence of passageway houses and offers a new interpretation of the same textual sources that Guðmundsson used. He comes to the conclusion that the literature describes architecture more in line with a longhouse of the so-called *Þjórsárdalur-type* (Roussell 1943b, p. 207), a house type coined by himself and based on his excavations in the valley of Þjórsárdalur in southern Iceland in 1939. Roussell aimed in many ways at a simpler and more linear evolutionary scheme starting with the plain Viking Age hall through the early medieval *Þjórsárdalur-type* to the more elaborated passageway houses of later periods (Fig. 2). His evolutionary scheme admittedly provided an apt chronological

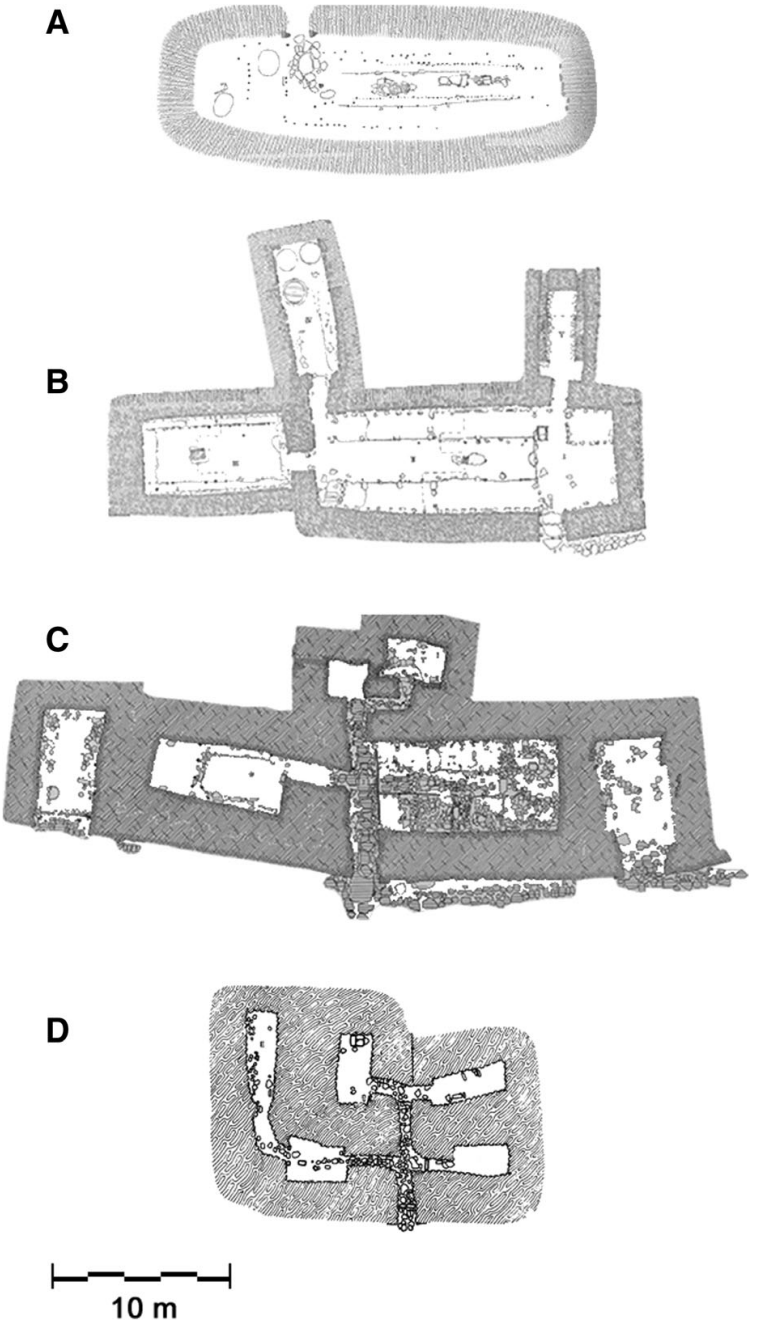


Fig. 2 The metanarrative of the Icelandic turf house architecture from the Viking Age to the late seventeenth century. **a**) The tenth century Viking Age Hall at Ísleifsstaðir (Stenberger 1943, p. 158); **b**) The twelfth-thirteenth century 'Þjórsárdalur-type' farm at Stöng (Roussell 1943a, p. 78); **c**) The fourteenth century large passageway farm at Gröf (Gestsson 1959, p. 32); **d**) The seventeenth century small passageway farm at Sandártunga (Eldjárn 1951, p. 111)

framework for Icelandic vernacular turf house architecture. Simultaneously, it evolved into a metanarrative that since then has been recurrently revised and reproduced (e.g., Ágústsson 1987; Ólafsson 2004; Stefánsson 2013). The debate revolved largely around how individual examples fitted into the broader typology and thus overlooked architectural variability, both chronological and regional (Vésteinsson 2010). But more importantly, it passed by the discussion on the relations between the material presences of houses or individual house structures and the activities and practices that they induced and harboured.

Then there is another metanarrative concerning Icelandic architectural history that needs a mentioning. While Bruun did not entirely refute Guðmundsson's claim that the passageway house could be traced back to the Viking Age, he did counter Guðmundsson by describing the continuous fragmentation in house design as a response to the chronic shortage of firewood due to the deforestation of Iceland. The long-term architectural development was thus not illustrated as a triumph of the passageway house, the most "complete and economic house form," but an architectural reflection of the deterioration of Icelandic economy and society in general (Bruun 1928, p. 197). Regression theories are strong in Icelandic historiography and rooted in nineteenth century romanticism and the struggle for independence, praising the period of the Icelandic Free State in the Viking and early Middle Ages and cursing the times of decline and dependence to Norway and Denmark between the thirteenth and twentieth centuries. Such ideas of regression have been a strong part of most versions of the grand narrative of Icelandic turf house architecture (Ágústsson 1987, p. 296; Ólafsson 2004, p. 136; Rúnarsdóttir 2007a, p. 12, 2007b, p. 9–10; for criticism see Vésteinsson 2002). They describe the development from the hall to the passageway house basically as an unconscious reaction to the lack of construction timber and firewood when houses needed to become more economic in terms of building and heating costs. Therefore, the debate presented the Icelandic turf house evolution from the viewpoint of a material shortage and social decline rather than architectural completion and richness.

It is within this framework that we need to understand the passageway house. The concept includes in fact various house types that have the central passage as a dominating feature. Within archaeology there are two main types, normally distinguished by size. The larger ones, appearing not later than in the fourteenth century, have a clear citation to the Viking Age hall where the passage divides the two large living quarters in the front—hall and sitting room (Icel. *skáli* and *stofa*), by far the largest rooms of the house—leading to the much smaller working and storage chambers in the back. The excavated remains at Gröf (Gestsson 1959), Kúabót (Gestsson 1987) and Viðey (Hallgrímsdóttir 1993) are prime examples of this architectural form. The smaller type is traditionally exemplified in the sixteenth/seventeenth century farmhouses of Forna-Lá and Sandártunga both excavated by Eldjárn (1951) in the late 1940s. Here the rooms are not only smaller, but all of similar sizes. The number of rooms can be variable, whereas four or five room arrangements seem to have been common. Búðarárbakki is a poster child to this latter category of passageway houses.

Due to their reduced size these smaller passageway houses have been considered of lower social and economic rank than the larger ones. The argument is of course valid as we can discern from the Icelandic Land Register from 1703. The estate value of Sandártunga, which was altogether only around 50 m^2, was well below average (Ágústsson 1987, p. 245). Nonetheless, the last leaseholder earned a good reputation within the community (Eldjárn 1951, p. 109). On the other hand, Viðey, an earlier monastic site, belonged to the most prosperous farms in Iceland (Hallgrímsdóttir 1993, p. 26). Truly, the passageway house at Viðey was not completely excavated, yet it is clear that it must have measured more than 150 m^2. However, and from a strict architectural point of view, size alone remains a weak argument for social status. In the early eighteenth century, the private dwellings of the governor of Iceland within the court at Bessastaðir, which contained at that time probably the most impressive buildings in Iceland, were only 42 m^2 (Ólafsson 2010, p. 146). Therefore we must be cautious in not

inferring the economic means of Þorkell at Búðarárbakki directly from the miniature size of the house (approx. 25 m^2).

The aim of this paper is to work against the grain of the metanarratives of vernacular turf house architecture in Iceland. The grand narrative certainly provides a broad chronological framework but simultaneously obscures the potential for considering the variability in architectural form and function, not least regarding building methods, practices and identities. Singularizing the view on the house and meticulously scrutinizing its construction, maintenance and inhabitation allows for insights into the ambiguity often contained in architecture. In order to do so, we should avoid emphasizing the two-dimensional layout and immerse ourselves into the richness of singular elements of architecture and the practices relating to them.

Keeping Architecture Flat

In a recent book, *Making*, Tim Ingold (2013, p. 47) opens up a chapter on house building and architecture with an interesting note:

> "Building is an activity; it is what builders do. Add the article, however, and the activity is brought to a close. Movement is stilled, and where people had once laboured with tools and materials, there now stands a structure—*a building*—that shows every sign of permanence and solidity."

Here Ingold makes a strong argument against the conceptualization of architecture as a design that is separated from house construction and for a return to architecture as "the 'messy practices' that give rise to *real* buildings" (Ingold 2013, p. 59).

The interesting, yet somewhat paradoxical claim of *keeping architecture flat* involves a move from thinking about architecture as a two-dimensional design or layout—a preconceived blueprint—towards thinking about architecture in terms of its material relations; a move away from building as a noun towards the verbal understanding of building. Time is an essential aspect to the ontology of architecture. It is namely something that takes place and endures rather than something that exists in a final completion or as a sophisticated illustration. It is a formation rather than a form. The process is directed by the materials used and the skills performed, to no less extent than by a plan conceived *a priori*. So instead of thinking about architecture by moving from the flat surface of the design up into the higher stratosphere of social abstractions where the design is filled with meaning and the form is described in metaphors, there is a need to stay low and follow the horizontal material relations of the house construction and inhabitation. At the same time we need to understand that the one phase, i.e. construction, does not come to an end when the other, i.e. inhabitation, starts. This requires of course that we accept building as the consequence of dwelling, not the other way around (Heidegger 2001, p. 146; Ingold 2000, p. 186).

Design is thus a part of the process of building that shows consideration for the materials and methods used. Certainly, house design must also be understood in terms of a social memory, but a memory that is not an elusive abstraction but incorporates the integral components of house building, like a formal arrangement and constructional skills, of which both are conditioned to the materials used. A

design without an execution is a mere figment and an execution without an idea remains incomplete.

Both aspects of building, meaning the social memory and the transmission of house design and building skills, have been explicitly scrutinized by Gerritsen (1999, 2003, 2008). His basic idea addresses the relationship between the built environment and the concept of biography. The cultural biography of houses is, according to Gerritsen, inherently interrelated to the fate and fortune of their inhabitants. Thus, houses may have been quite homogeneous in appearance right after they were erected, but acquired individual history which mirrored the social standing of their inhabitants and influenced their social acceptance (Gerritsen 1999, p. 87).

Elsewhere, Gerritsen (2008, pp. 148–153) follows up on the bodily skills of house construction and how they were passed on from generation to generation. Building rhythms are closely linked to architecture as they reflect the commonness of building activities and the longevity of houses. Architecture can thus inform us about how building was integrated into the daily practices and how the building skills were transmitted. Consequently, building rhythms mirror the practicing and performing of building. Therefore, distinct building rhythms can inform us about various identities in the past. This aspect of architecture is pivotal to the understanding of the architecture of Búðarárbakki.

Let us think about turf house architecture in terms of a threesome of building practices, forms and materials. Turf houses are characterized by a varied mixture of turf, soil, stones and wood. Historians of architecture have placed most emphasis on the more 'sophisticated' techniques of turf-cutting, mostly linked to eighteenth-nineteenth century architecture, and how different kinds of cutting were variously combined with soil and stones into standardized kinds of walls (Ágústsson 1987, p. 303–306; Stefánsson 2013, p. 23–31) but somewhat discounted less structured wall constructions (for exeption see Kristjánsdóttir 2012, p. 73–75). In all its colourful variations of brownish, yellowish, reddish and even greenish besides various shades of white and black, turf is perhaps the most easily recognizable material in Icelandic archaeology. Nonetheless, in an archaeological context it normally appears rather unstructured and it can be difficult to discern the type of turf-cutting used or the kind of walling. Certainly, this is also due to post-depositional formation processes but underestimating the influence of less structured walling techniques would be wrong.

In any case, turf houses are built of materials that are alive, not only in terms of the organic component of turf that gives ground to grass and flowers growing on the roof and out of the walls but also in terms of the inherent instability of the building materials. Turf houses are not fixed into an earthbound foundation. Thus the walls are subjected to the laws of gravity, constantly sliding and changing form, affecting their capacity of carrying the weight of the roof. In addition, drystone walls, often raised as a support on the inside and/or outside of the turf walls, are built with unworked stones of different sizes that dislocate easily. The essential quality of the materials is not fixity and permanence but inconstancy and malleability. Movement is thus an inherent character of turf houses. In this sense architecture has been termed 'moving projects' (Latour and Yaneva 2008, p. 1), i.e. something that is constantly transforming, used and worn, maintained and altered. Indeed, it applies to all architecture (cf. Ingold 2000, p. 181, 2013, p. 57) but it certainly is highly apparent in turf houses.

Furthermore, turf houses, like all other architecture, are spatial constructions that regulate the movements of those who inhabit them. Architecture defines space for certain actions as it opens up or prevents the flow of domestic activities. Buildings do not simply shelter or contain the domestic but participate in these practices by means of their spatial arrangement. Certainly, there exists much work on the spatial order of architecture within archaeology and anthropology (Ayán Vila et al. 2003; Buchli 2013; Kent 1993; Pearson and Richards 1994; Robertson et al. 2006). Space syntax analyses (cf. West 1999), for instance, have demonstrated their value in ordering space showing how movements within and between architectural spaces were organized and arranged. These analyses emphasize the possibilities of movement provided by the two-dimentional layout without questioning how inhabitation and movement potentially defied the space syntax. Rúnarsdóttir (2004, pp. 151–152) has shown how western architectural forms and interior arrangements in modern day Tonga are subjected to indigenous customs of use and inhabitation. A bedroom with an American king-size four-poster bed is used for storing things while the inhabitants sleep on the living room floor or the porch according to local habits and traditions. An archaeological space syntax analysis of a modern house from Tonga would certainly miss out on these details.

Spatial analyses on turf houses in Iceland, applying various theoretical and methodological approaches and moving beyond the discussion on form and function, are sporadically seen in the literature. Einarsson (1993, 1995) addressed the Viking Age hall from a traditional structuralist perspective creating gendered discrimination of activity areas within the farmstead. Price's (1995) space syntax analyses on Viking Age to early medieval farm houses indicated a change in spatial arrangement and use, a conclusion that was based on a certain chronological metanarrative for this period (for criticism see Milek 2006, p. 24–25). Milek on the other hand states that a common cultural identity in the Viking Age was demonstrated in the homogeneity of the public parts of the halls whereas the private areas were more variable (Milek 2006, p. 304). Her argument is based firmly on the debatable assumption that there is a fixed relation between homogeneity and cultural identity versus variability and personal identity.

Considering medieval or post-medieval architecture in Iceland, spatial analyses are either based on non-archaeological data or have emphasized ecclesiastical and monastic architecture. In this context, Kristjánsdóttir (2009, 2012, 2013) work on the late medieval monastery at Skriðuklaustur stands out. In her recent archaeological research she has effectively demonstrated how the buildings followed the conventional monastic forms and thus contrasted very much the vernacular architecture in Iceland, despite making use of turf, soil and unworked stones as the main building material. Her work not only breaks from the prevailing opinion that has seen the medieval monasteries in Iceland embedded into vernacular house forms (cf. Harðardóttir 1998, p. 35–36; Hallgrímsdóttir 1993, p. 158), but she also provides a wide-ranging theoretical framework for her arguments illustrating how the monastic buildings may be discerned as hybrid mimicries of their ideological prototypes perpetually blending local traditions and the monastic internationalism (Kristjánsdóttir 2013, P. 164, 167).

Finally, there are the recent investigations of Rúnarsdóttir (2007a, 2007b) on late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century turf farms, their social space and material culture. By linking ethnographic, architectural and historical sources Rúnarsdóttir suggests that changes in architecture and households were induced by the social changes of the Enlightenment

that transformed the introverted turf house, somewhat resistant to changes, to a more outward construction, both in architectural and social terms (Rúnarsdóttir 2007a, p. 60). Furthermore, owing to changes in household compositions, architecture became increasingly fragmented. The changes in architecture and material culture influenced, by their own agency, the *habitus* conditioning social space and practices (Rúnarsdóttir 2007b, p. 17, 22).

Against this background I position my own work. The approach I intend to follow in the exploration of the seventeenth-century architecture at Búðarárbakki has, however, more of a hermeneutic and phenomenological touch, as I intend to move through the house at Búðarárbakki scrutinizing certain architectural singularities, i.e. the small, ordinary and unattended things that give form to the architecture and characterize the "messy practices" of building and living in this particular house. I will approach these details by asking questions like: "how do the individual stones direct the structure of a wall?"; "how is the architectural design guided by the existence or lack of certain building materials?"; "what is the relationship between bodily skills, posture and movements and architectural design?"; "how do materials affect that relationship?"; and "what is the ontological relation between built structures and the persons who build and inhabit them?"

It is from the singularized material settings that the historical narrative emerges. I aim at demonstrating how the materials used in the house building, individual on-the-spot decisions, and the local impulse of movement and posture have determined the architecture as much as a preconceived design. A singularized approach is driven to zoom into the manifold stories that can be derived from a material constellation that otherwise is used to substantiate grand narratives of architecture.

Búðarárbakki: A Design without a Blueprint

Búðarárbakki presents a tiny passageway house. It dates to the late 17th century as undoubtedlly demonstrated by the stratigraphy. Tephra from the devastating volcanic eruption in Mount Helka in 1693 covers the remains of the house in its early stages of ruination. It mirrors by and large the contemporary passageway houses (Forna-Lá and Sandártunga, see above; Fig. 3). Hence, the house certainly has a design, although a blueprint of it was never outlined. The architectural design is characterized by a central passage linking all rooms of the house together. The rooms are all very small but the backroom seems to have been enlarged by a later extension.

The entrance of the house is situated in the back of a strikingly narrow strait leading through the approximately two meter thick outer turf walls. The concept 'turf-wall' is somewhat of a misnomer at Búðarárbakki. The walls are namely entirely made of soil, piled up against an inner drystone wall. Proper turf or sod is only found in the remnants of the roof. The choice of building material is generally directed by the natural resources of the surroundings. Búðarárbakki is located on the edge of the Icelandic highlands where the land is eroded and barren, completely lacking of peat soil for good building turf but soil and stones were available in abundance. The sod was used to turf over the roof. Walls built of soil and unworked stones are of course much more unstable than skillfully cut turf-chunks strategically stacked up into standardized types of walls. They have a greater tendency to give way and thus need constant maintenance.

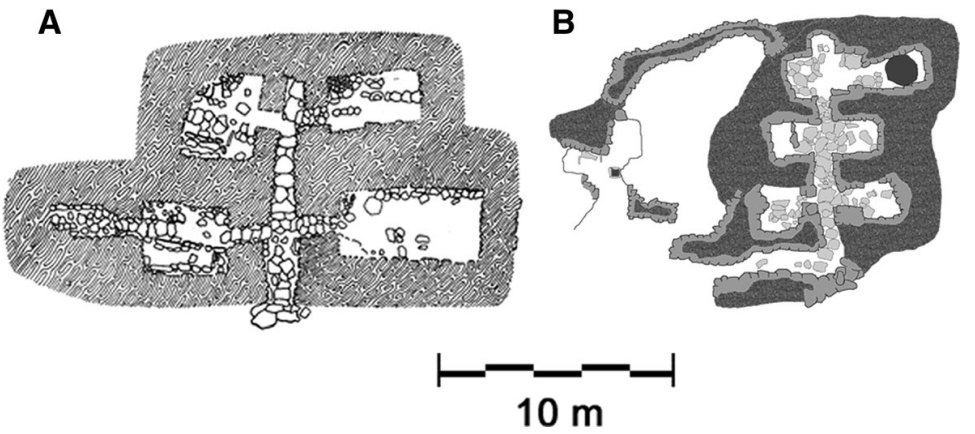


Fig. 3 A plan drawing of **a**) Forna-Lá (Eldjárn 1951, p. 104) and **b**) Búðarárbakki (for comparison with Sandártunga see Fig. 2)

Consequently, soil as the basic material for the wall construction had an essential influence on the building rhythm at Búðarárbakki. The house was not ready-built before moving in but an on-going, 'moving' project demanding full and constant attention. The written sources mentioning Búðarárbakki, in particular the Icelandic Land Register from 1703, imply a life that was propelled by building activity claiming that Þorkell lived at 27 different places throughout his life (Magnússon and Vídalín 1918–1921, p. 273). Even if we do not take this reference literally, it underscores the importance of moving house and building in the life-history of the protagonist.

Around the entrance of the house as well as inside the house, walls rise about 60 cm high above the floor surface, which is paved with large stone slabs, creating an effective three-dimension to the archaeological remains (Fig. 4). The drystone walls are preserved in their near original height, only missing one or two rows of stone courses. Their height suggests that the headroom inside must have been quite low. The doorway was perhaps not higher than 120 cm and the headroom inside the passage perhaps as low as 150 cm. The doorway itself must have been extremely narrow so that one would almost have had to sidle through it.

Having passed the entrance into the passage there are two equally narrow doorways to each side leading into the two small front rooms. Neither one contained any artifacts or inbuilt structures that could reveal something about their function or use, perhaps because they had no function or purpose. The room to the right presents however a feature that shows nicely how the building material, in this case a single stone in the

Fig. 4 Looking out of the entrance to Búðarárbakki

walling, affected the architecture; how the material conducted the form. It is a stone located prominently in southeastern corner of the drystone walling. It has a natural indent facing into the room (Fig. 5). In fact there is nothing special about this stone as the drystone walls are all built of unworked stones of various shapes and sizes, roundish, angular, slabs and boulders. This one, however, participates by its indent in determining the angle of the southeastern corner of the room. The pronounced position of this particular stone catches the eye, but due to the natural formation of all the stones in the walls each and every one of them possess this same determinant property. The drystone walls are thus guided by the natural formation of each stone and the structural form of the walls and their carrying capacity is entirely subjected to the stones, their surface and form. Thus is the design subjected to the properties of the building materials and the skills of the builder who had to adapt and coalesce his intentions to the attributes of the building material.

Furthermore, the walls show an enduring continuation in building activity. Due to the weak walling bonds, the builder constantly needed to react to its movements by restacking the stones, changing their order and formation, removing unsafe material and adding new fixing material to the walling. At several places broken fragments of stone hammers were found stuck into the walls or placed under floor slabs (Fig. 6). These objects were produced on site as a part of the craftwork of the inhabitant (Mímisson 2012; Mímisson and Magnússon 2014). They are in part unfinished pieces, in part production failures, reflecting an interesting relationship between the two most basic activities at Búðarárbakki, house building and stone hammer production.

Moving along the passage must have resembled squeezing through a cave fissure. It was narrow, low, dark and moist. The walk is slightly uphill as the backhouses lie around 70 cm higher than the yard. The passage has a pavement and the slabs in the front produce a hollow sound as they cover an outfall that drains the generally moist quarters, a common feature in Icelandic turf houses.

The passage ends in the backroom which is the largest chamber of the house (Fig. 7). It has a peculiar form that is manifested in a half-round niche facing the passage and about three meter long extension to the east with non-parallel walls. The half-round niche had an important function as in its centre stood the only roof-bearing post in the entire house. This suggests that the roof was elevated in this part. It was possibly the only spot in the building where a full-grown person could stand upright. An elevation of the roof in this area makes perfect sense as it was the main activity area inside the house, the hub of the basic household

Fig. 5 The determinating "corner-stone" of the eastern front room of Búðarárbakki

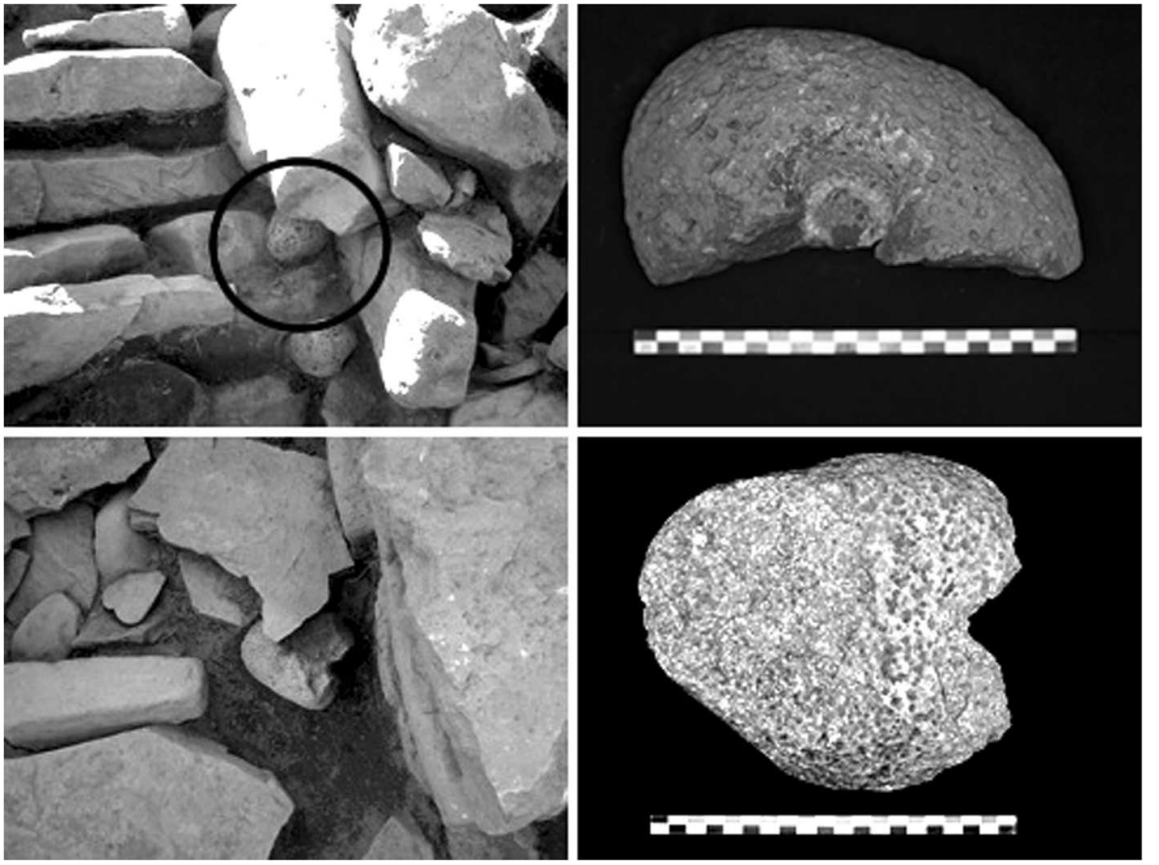


Fig. 6 Two stone hammers from Búðarárbakki and their placement in the walling (*top row*) and floor (*bottom row*)

activities as well as the place of rest and regeneration. Here Þorkell sat down to attend his personal needs, such as repairing his garments and eating. A skillfully structured seat is located right next to the niche (Fig. 8). It is placed in the corner of two walls creating a comfortable setting for a person to lean back. The seat itself is made of a 60×70 cm large stone slab lying on top of two longish shaped carrying stones lifting the seat around 20 cm

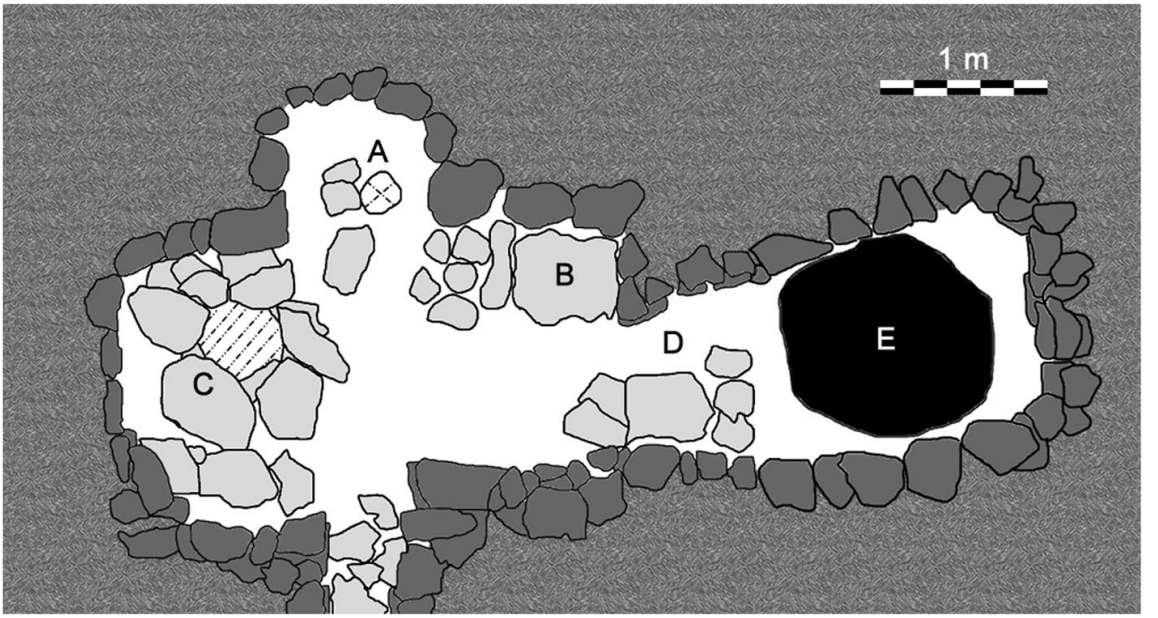


Fig. 7 The living quarter at Búðarárbakki with the **a**) half round niche, **b**) the seat, **c**) the storage pit, **d**) the extension, and **e**) an open fireplace

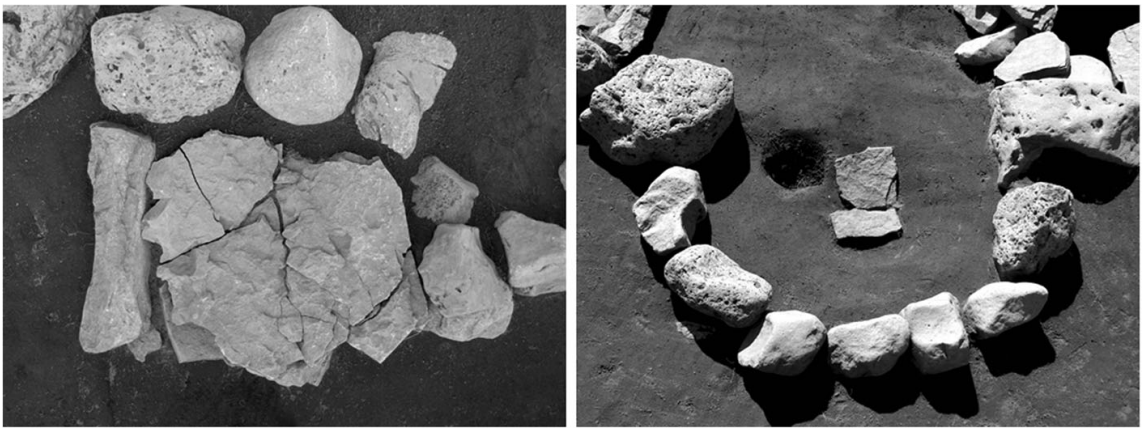


Fig. 8 The seat (*left*) and the half round niche (*right*) in the living quarter at Búðarárbakki

above the floor level. Under and around the seat was an accumulation of household artifacts, such as fragments of glass and pottery, a knife, a sewing needle, a fire stone and a piece of tobacco clay pipe.

Across the room, but within a reach from the seat, a roundish pit was dug into the floor and covered by slabs (see Fig. 7). The pit is nicely built of stones and in the bottom were decayed remains of wood and fishbones. It served as food storage, perfectly constructed in order to keep the supply cool.

Everything in that room was neatly arranged around certain movements and gestures. All things were easily in reach. The architectural design showed regard for the bodily requirements of the inhabitant and was made to fulfill them, an interesting contrast to other parts of the house that rather limited and constrained movement and upright posture.

Turning back through the passage, moving out to the yard one encounters another unique architectural feature of the house at Búðarárbakki. The passage does not simply lead out into the open but continues outside the house where it takes a sharp turn to the west towards a pen which is attached to the western side of the house. This roofless outer passage structure is created by a wall built in the same manner as other walls of the house. It is indeed a peculiar architectural design as its only purpose is to conduct all movement coming out of the house into one direction. The architecture of a passage-way house allows for little intuition or improvisation as all movement is mediated by the passage. The exterior elongation emphasizes the role of the entire passage as a movement regulator. At Búðarárbakki the conducting function of the passage is taken one step further and maintained exiting the house.

But why direct all movement out of the house towards the pen? A section through the pen revealed the remains of a small built structure in the western part of it. This structure can hardly meet with a sophisticated definition of architecture. It is a kind of a kludge consisting of disparate building elements. During the excavation there were many doubts about it. This disbelief was underscored by the seemingly incoherence of its elements. The most obvious and easily recognizable structural element were the remnants of the roof, revealed by stone slabs lying almost vertically in the ground due to them having collapsed into the structure. This way they sketched its interior layout.

The roof appeared to lack any carrying support. There was nothing left of the supporting timber construction which had possibly been removed when Búðarárbakki was abandoned. Furthermore, walls were not easily distinguished. The eastern part was certainly formed by a soil and drystone wall of the same kind as seen elsewhere in the

buildings at Búðarárbakki. The wall stood isolated, pointing into the structure, creating a peculiarly angled layout of its interiors but was not opposed by other walls (Fig. 9). In the southwest, east and north the roof was carried by the banks of the natural surface but the southeastern side of the structure was completely open producing an interesting coherence between the architectural notion of inside and outside.

Based on the estimated original height of the drystone wall, the headroom inside the structure was no more than 1 m. Hence, the only possible manner of entering the building and moving inside it was by crawling. Yet, although the architecture of this tiny shed obstructed almost any kind of movement, making it an inconvenient place for centralizing one's daily practices, an abundance of evidence showed that this was indeed the hub of most activities at Búðarárbakki. Under the canopy of the shed, and right in front of it, Þorkell attended to his industry, the production of stone hammers. A seat set against the wall pinpoints the location of his handicraft. In its immediate surroundings a concentration of artifacts documented the industry, such as fragments of stone hammers, core fragments from the stones, a multitude of broken-off points of iron chisels, whetstones and a candlestick to light up the nearest working space. The work was carried out in a sitting posture and sitting was therefore a ruling factor for the architectural design of the shed.

The small shed or the workshop at Búðarárbakki provides an insight into the improvisatory art of building or how architecture and design at Búðarárbakki was born out of the mere practice of building rather than from a highly developed and preconceived design. The workshop was conceived and designed as the work progressed and the material allowed for. Thus, it is a prime example of the "messy practices" of architecture exposed in the remains at Búðarárbakki.

Building Identities and the Temporality of Building

The title of this paper captures its main focus: *Building Identities*. There is a general consensus in scholarly literature that identities are essentially constructed (Díaz-Andreu et al. 2005; Insoll 2007; Jones 1997; Meskell 2001). Identities are something that people, individually or in groups, consciously or not, construct around themselves. People present themselves though their constructed identities and are perceived through the identities that others—people and things—create. Identities are therefore literally built which means that

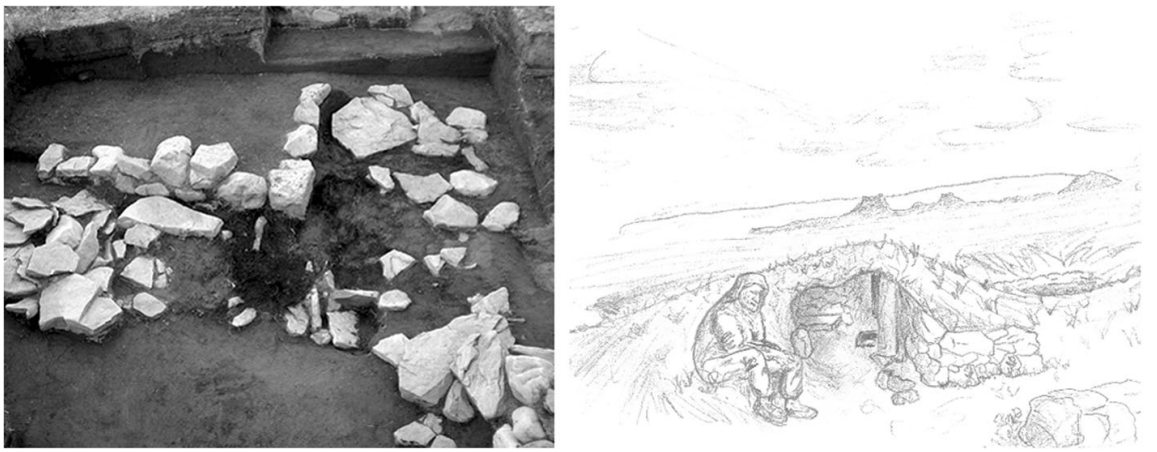


Fig. 9 The remains of the workshed at Búðarárbakki during excavation (*left*). A sketch by the author showing how the workshed may have looked like (*right*)

they are inherently material. In order to understand how building participates in materializing identity we must emphasize the temporality of building, thinking of building in a processual sense, something that takes place, maintains, continues and lasts.

Gerritsen's work on the biography of building and building rhythms, that I mentioned earlier, implies different aspects of building temporalities. Building temporalities refer to houses coming of age, how building is a continuous process that may be paused and continued at different stages of building and how building skills and building memory is being maintained and transmitted within the society (Gerritsen 1999, 2003, 2008). This sets up a perspective where building and usage are not distinct and temporally separated phases of the built structure. Lesley McFadyen (e.g., Bailey and McFadyen 2010, p. 565) interestingly points out that burial chambers in Neolithic long barrows were already occupied before the building of the mound was finished. This overlapping of building and usage applies of course in the same manner to houses as to burial mounds and it underscores the importance of regarding architecture as process, or an investigation of "*making of*, not the *made objects*" (Yaneva 2013, p. 123).

Indeed, building does not exists in a finite form. At Búðarárbakki this appears both in the constant maintenance and remodeling of individual structural elements such as the walls or the stone floors, and in the various changes and extensions made during the very short period of inhabitation, which did not last more than ten years. The short time span of the site is, however, somewhat problematic from an archaeological point of view as it gives the impression that time has come to a halt. Time seems almost absent at Búðarárbakki, or to put it differently: everything seems to have occurred at the same moment in time. Due to the general reversibility of the material assemblages building up the house, time becomes materially almost invisible. We might say that time in archaeology is subjected to changes in material assemblages; and not just any change but namely those who bear marks on the original assemblage. Gavin Lucas (2008, 2012) has elaborated on the relation between time and material assemblages. One of the key concepts in his argumentation involves the idea of reversibility/irreversibility. Lucas (2012, p. 212–213) argues that "[t]he fundamental property in terms of residuality is […] that of irreversibility: the extent to which parts of assemblage bear the imprint of this assemblage, even after disbandment." On the other hand, not all interventions into material assemblages leave visible traces behind. Only events constituting in actions that result in irreversible changes to the original material organization are recognizable in an archaeological context. Lucas (2008, p. 62) offers an apt example of a book collection:

> "One can re-arrange the order of books on the shelf tomorrow and there will be no trace of the former order at all. If I take away some books that I am tired of, the same effect accrues. In short, subsequent events have completely erased antecedent ones and *it is as if they never existed*. This is an anti-historical process in the sense that it creates no history in the collection itself; materially speaking, such projects have the effect of reversing time, and they are extremely common."

Let us transpose this train of thought to the settings at Búðarárbakki. Like the book collection, drystone walls consisting of variously sized and shaped natural boulders do not necessarily reveal an addition to the walling, replacement of singular stones, or a complete restacking of the walling if it were not for things that make the act of maintenance irreversible. At Búðarárbakki the irreversability is induced by materials

that we might consider "foreign" to the walling, i.e. the stone hammers fragments. However, the stone hammer fragments are not only irreversible signs of subsequent intervention into the drystone walls but also irreversible residues of the daily practices on site (Mímisson and Magnússon 2014, p. 15–16) linking up the entanglements of residuality, material assemblages and archaeological events. So, by directing the focus on particular singularities of the material assemblage of house building at Búðarárbakki, the temporality of building and building as a continuous process—a daily practice invariably active in the construction of identity—becomes evident. Building as a process, no less than the craftmanship of stone hammers and certainly much more than farming, as one could deduce from the architectural grand narrative or as hinted at by the written sources (Magnússon and Vídalín 1918–1926, p. 273), materialized the personal identity of the inhabitant, Þorkell.

Then there is another aspect of building that deserves attention, and for this I would like to turn to McFadyen's work once again. She has framed the term 'quick architecture' which is implied by an architectural practice that is structurally redundant and characterized by quick actions in which the embodied labour of the builders and the building materials meld into each other (McFadyen 2007, p. 25ff; Bailey and McFadyen 2010, p. 566). Her examples are perhaps not directly transferable to the situation at Búðarárbakki, but the idea may be reflected in the building practices there. Accordingly, we must envisage building at Búðarárbakki where quick actions were required at many places forcing the builder to prop up the building material and so become one with the process of building. Regarding building in terms of McFadyen's "quick architecture," i.e. as a fusion of human bodies and materials, we must as well look at architecture as an expression of bodily capacities. The notion of the hermit at Búðarárbakki, indicated by the written sources, forces one to conceive the house building being performed by him alone. The architecture at Búðarárbakki is remarkably narrow and tight which can as well be seen as a reflection of the building capacity of an individual. There are no materials too big or too heavy, no structural elements or spans too large or too wide so that they exceed the building capability of a single individual.

But let us expand the idea of "quick architecture" a little further. McFadyen—working on burial architecture—uses the term in order to explain building elements that seem structurally unnecessary. These elements are not only functionally redundant but also in some sense structurally illogical. Considering the workshop at Búðarárbakki, i.e. the small shed-like structure in the western part of the pen, there is a deficiency, at least to a certain degree, in the rational structural composition. The want of proper wall structures or roof carrying posts cannot be brushed off simply as the consequence of natural formation processes and bad preservation. The strange compilation of discordant structural elements is an expression of building that contradicted the notion of architecture as a sophisticated *a priori* design but was carried out by quick and spontaneous actions, where solutions to structural problems were found parallel to the process of building. Building may grow out of a memory that is deeply rooted within the community leading to standardized structures, or it erupts from a snap idea where the improvisational skills of the builder are tested. Thereby, "quick architecture" is driven even more by the attributes of the building materials as the architecture comes into being through the conflation of the human and the material. The workshop is quite literally "quick architecture." It was constructed and designed simultaneously and all kinds of architectural decisions, both regarding layout and the carrying capacity, had to

be made on the spot. A wall was raised where a wall was needed but omitted where other material solutions were available and posts where shored up according to demand but not necessarily conceptualized beforehand.

The workshop and its architecture underscores the importance of building for the self-conception of Þorkell at Búðarárbakki and it brings out the essence of architecture where building and design conflate (cf. Ingold 2013; Latour and Yaneva 2008; Yaneva 2013), where decisions about design are made as building progressed lead by the materials available and used.

Conclusions: The Architecture of the Persona

In this paper I have argued that homogeneous architectural design may be induced by divergent practices of building resulting in differently built identities. We may approach this variation of building identities within a common architectural form by scrutinizing the practices embedded in the material at hand. Directing the focus on certain material singularities can provide a new vision of variously ranging networks of material and human relations, and thus illustrate certain practices and identities that defy the general tenet. Such a perspective on the relationship between materials and humans requires an alternative ontological slant as provided by the actor-network theory (Latour 1993, 2005; Law and Hassard 1999; Olsen 2003, 2010; Witmore 2007) or object-oriented ontology (Harman 2002). In fact, this alternative ontological perspective that describes the constitution of all interactions as the permanent re-emerging of assemblages of human and non-human—say material—attributes has been termed the "new social" in archaeology (Lucas 2012). The persona comprises in an akin manner of such reoccurring and reconstituting assemblages. I do not claim that the persona is simply a microscopic version of larger "social" entities. The human-material network of the persona may be just as far-reaching as a social network. The point I would like to emphasize is that assemblages describing the communal or the social often include material relations describing the scope of the persona. If we look at this in the light of reversibility/irreversibility of material assemblages and take Lucas' (2012, p. 213) example of a house debris, a material constellation (stones, wood, mortar, glass etc.) irreversibly relating to a house, we may both find social and personal connotations. The house at Búðarárbakki is in fact a poster child for the grand narrative of Icelandic architectural history as it refers perfectly to the traditions of its time. Therefore, it possesses a multitude of material references to 17th century society in Iceland and how it was materialized in architecture. At the same time, and by scrutinizing certain singularities of the material assemblage, not least concerning the process of building, we are able to re-assemble some material relations of the persona. These assemblages are not the mere reflection of the persona and its identities but belong to that persona. Accepting this claim we must acknowledge that the stone settings that form the inner drystone walls at Búðarárbakki, the mounds of soil that were piled up against them or the roof raised on top of the walls are the very material constituents of that particular person, known to us as Þorkell at Búðarárbakki. These material assemblages do not only describe the architecture of a house, but the architecture of the persona as well. The rhythm and intensity of building in the daily practices, the merger of the body and the built structure in the process of building and inhabiting the house or how decisions

about design and supporting structures were made are the material identities of the persona, the builder and inhabitant.

Thus, in the architecture of Búðarárbakki we see a life-history re-emerge, a life-history that is short of the embodied individual but affluent in the material relations and the 'messy practices' that an individual of the past went into.

Acknowledgement I would like to thank Bjarni F. Einarsson from the Archaeological Office (Fornleifafræðistofan) for his enthusiasm and assistance during the fieldwork at Búðarárbakki. Furthermore, I owe thanks to Gavin Lucas, Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir for their constructive support and guidance during the writing of this paper. Finally, I would like to utter my gratitude to Charles E. Orser Jr. for his interest in our work in Iceland and assistance in the course of this publication.

This work was funded by the Eimskip Fund of the University of Iceland (Háskólasjóður Einskipafélags Íslands), The Icelandic Archaeology Fund (Fornleifasjóður), Iceland's Energy Transmission System (Landsnet hf), the municipality of Hrunamannahreppur and the Archaeological Office (Fornleifafræðistofan).

References

Ágústsson, H. (1987). Íslenski torfbærinn. In Jóhannsson, F. F. (ed.), *Íslensk Þjóðmenning I. Uppruni og umhverfi*, Bókaútgáfa Þjóðsaga, Reykjavík, pp. 227–344.

Ágústsson, H. (1998). *Íslensk byggingararfleifð I. Ágrip af húsagerðarsögu 1750–1940*, Húsafriðunarnefn ríkisins, Reykjavík.

Ayán Vila, X. M., Blanco Rotea, R., and Mañana Borrazás, P. (eds.) (2003). *Archaeotecture: archaeology of architecture, BAR International Series 1175*, Archaeopress, Oxford.

Bailey, D., and McFadyen, L. (2010). Built Objects. In Beaudry, M. C., and Hicks, D. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 562–587.

Beaudry, M. C. (2006). *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing*, York University Press, New Haven.

Bruun, D. (1928). *Forntidsminder og nutidshjem paa Island*, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Copenhagen.

Buchli, V. (2013). *An Anthropology of Architecture*, Bloomsbury, London.

Díaz-Andreu, M., Lucy, S., Babic, S., and Edwards, D. N. (eds.) (2005). *The Archaeology of Identity*, Routledge, London.

Domanska, E. (2006). The return to things. *Archaeologia Polonia* 44: 171–185.

Einarsson, B. F. (1993). Hið félagslega rými á Granastöðum. *Árbók hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1992: 51–84.

Einarsson, B. F. (1995). *The Settlement of Iceland: a critical approach*, Hið íslenska bómenntafélag, Reykavík.

Eldjárn, K. (1951). Tvennar bæjarrústir frá seinni öldum. *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1949–1950: 102–119.

Gerritsen, F. (1999). To build and abandon: The cultural biography of late prehistoric houses and farmsteads in the southern Netherlands. *Archaeological Dialogues* 6: 78–97.

Gerritsen, F. (2003). *Local Identities: Landscape and Community in the Late Prehistoric Meuse-Demer-Scheldt Region*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam.

Gerritsen, F. (2008). Domestic Times: Houses and Temporalities in Late Prehistoric Europe. In Jones, A. (ed.), *Prehistoric Europe: Theory and Practice*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden.

Gestsson, G. (1959). Gröf í Öræfum. *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1959: 5–87.

Gestsson, G. (1987). Kúabót í Álftaveri I. *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1986: 11–38.

Guðmundsson, V. (1889). *Privatboligen på Island i sagatiden samt delvis i det øvrige Norden*, Høst & Søn, Copenhagen.

Hallgrímsdóttir, M. (1993). *Húsakostur Viðeyjarklausturs: um byggð í Viðey fram á 18. öld*, Árbæjarsafn, Reykjavík.

Harðardóttir, G. (1998). Nokkrar kynslóðir kirkna og klausturhúsa á Munkaþverá. *Árbók hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1996–97: 5–42.

Harman, G. (2002). *Tool-being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Open Court Publishing Company, Chicago.

Heidegger, M. (2001). *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper & Row, New York.

Hodder, I. (2012). *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things*, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden.
Ingold, T. (2000). *The Perception of the Environment: essays in livelihood, dwelling and skill*, Routledge, London.
Ingold, T. (2013). *Making: anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture*, Routledge, London.
Insoll, T. (2007). *The Archaeology of Identity*, Routledge, Abdingdon.
Johnson, M. (1999). Rethinking historical archaeology. In Funari, P. P. A., and Jones, S. (eds.), *Historical Archaeology: back from the edge*, Routledge, London, pp. 23–36.
Jones, S. (1997). *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing identities in the past and present*, Routledge, London.
Kent, S. (ed.) (1993). *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Study*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Kristjánsdóttir, S. (2009). Kanúkaklaustrið að Skriðu í Fljótsdal: heimsmynd alþjóðlegrar kirkju í íslenskum dal. In Olafsson, and Kristjánsdóttir (eds.), *Endurfundir: fornleifarannsóknir styrktar af Kristnihátíðarsjóði 2001–2005*, Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, Reykjavík, pp. 80–95.
Kristjánsdóttir, S. (2012). *Sagan af klaustrinu á Skriðu*, Sögufélag, Reykjavík.
Kristjánsdóttir, S. (2013). Skriðuklaustur Monastery in Medieval Iceland: A Colony of Religiosity and Culture. In Jamroziak, E., and Stöber, K. (eds.), *Monasteries on the borders of medieval Europe: conflict and cultural interaction*, Brepols Publishers, Turnhout, pp. 149–172.
Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*, Havard University Press, Cambridge.
Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
Latour, B., and Yaneva, A. (2008). Give me a gun and I will make all buildings move: an ant's view of architecture. In Geiser, R. (ed.), *Explorations in Architecture: teaching, design, research*, Birkhauser, Basel, pp. 80–89.
Law, J., and Hassard, J. (1999). *Actor Network Theory and After*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.
Lucas, G. (2008). Time and the Archaeological Event. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 18: 59–65.
Lucas, G. (2012). *Understanding the Archaeological Record*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
McFadyen, L. (2007). Neolithic Architecture And Participation: practices of making at barrow sites in southern Britain. In Last, J. (ed.), *Beyond the Grave: New Perspectives on Barrows*, Oxbow Books, Oxford, pp. 22–29.
Magnússon, Á. and Vídalín, P. (1918–27). *Jarðabók Vol. 2 (Árnessýsla)*. Hið íslenzka fræðafjelag í Kaupmannahöfn, Copenhagen.
Magnússon, S. G. (2003). The Singularization of History: social history and microhistory within the postmodern state of knowledge. *Journal of Social History* 36: 701–735.
Magnússon, S. G. (2006). Social History as "Sites of Memory"? The Institutionalization of History: microhistory and the grand narrative. *Journal of Social History* 39: 892–913.
Magnússon, S. G., and Szijártó, I. M. (2013). *What is Microhistory?: Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London.
Meskell, L. (2001). Archaeologies of Identity. In Hodder, I. (ed.), *Archaeological Theory Today*, Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 187–213.
Milek, K. (2006). *Houses and Households in Early Icelandic Society*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Cambridge, Cambridge.
Mímisson, K. (2012). Twisted Lives: On the Temporality and Materiality of Biographical Presences. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 16: 455–471.
Mímisson, K., and Magnússon, S. G. (2014). Singularizing the Past: the history and archaeology of the small and ordinary. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 14: 131–156.
Nilson, A. (1943). Den sentida bebyggelsen på Islands Landsbygd. In Stenberger, M. (ed.), *Forntida gårdar i Island*, Ejnar Munksgaard, Copenhagen, pp. 271–306.
Ólafsson, G. (2004). Frá skála til gangabæjar: húsagerð á miðöldum. In Björnsson, A., and Róbertsdóttir, H. (eds.), *Hlutavelta tímans*, Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, Reykjavík, pp. 130–139.
Ólafsson, G. (2010). *Bessastaðarannsókn 1987*, Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, Reykjavík.
Olsen, B. (2003). Material Culture after Text: Re-Membering Things. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 36: 87–104.
Olsen, B. (2010). *In Defence of Things*, AltaMira Press, Lanham.
Pearson, M. P., and Richards, C. (eds.) (1994). *Architecture and Order: approaches to social space*, Routledge, London.
Preda, A. (1999). The turn to things: arguments for a sociological theory of things. *The Sociological Quarterly* 40: 347–366.

Price, N. (1995). House and home in Viking Age Iceland: cultural expressions in Scandinavian colonial architecture. In Benjamin, D. N. (ed.), *The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings, and Environments*, Avebury, Aldershot, pp. 109–129.

Robb, J. (2002). Time and Biography: Osteobiography of the Italian neolithic lifespan. In Hamilakis, Y., Pluciennik, M., and Tarlow, S. (eds.), *Thinking through the Body: Archaeologies of Corporeality*, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, New York, pp. 153–171.

Robertson, E. C., Seibert, J. D., Fernandez, D. C., and Zender, M. U. (eds.) (2006). *Space and Saptial Analysis in Archaeology*, University of Calgary Press, Calgary.

Roussel, A. (1941). *Farms and Churches in the Medieval Norse Settlements of Greenland*, Reitzel, Copenhagen.

Roussell, A. (1943a). Stöng, Þjórsárdalur. In Stenberger, M. (ed.), *Forntida gårdar i Island*, Ejnar Munksgaard, Copenhagen, pp. 72–97.

Roussell, A. (1943b). Islands tomter. In Stenberger, M. (ed.), *Forntida gårdar i Island*, Ejnar Munksgaard, Copenhagen, pp. 201–214.

Rúnarsdóttir, A.L. (2004). *Modernity and Tradition: Houses and Material Culture in the Kingdom of Tonga*. Doctoral Thesis, University of London, London.

Rúnarsdóttir, A. L. (2007a). *Á tímum torfbæja. Híbýlahættir og efnismenning í íslenska torfbænum frá 1850*, Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, Reykjavík.

Rúnarsdóttir, A. L. (2007b). Material Culture and Social Space in the Icelandic Turf House. In Huijbens, E. H., and Jónsson, Ó. P. (eds.), *Sensi/able Spaces: space, art and the environment*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, pp. 6–24.

Stefánsson, H. (2013). *Af jörðu. Íslensk torfhús*, Crymogea, Reykjavík.

Stenberger, M. (1943). Ísleifsstaðir, Borgarfjarðarsýsla. In Stenberger, M. (ed.), *Forntida gårdar i Island*, Ejnar Munksgaard, Copenhagen, pp. 145–170.

Vésteinsson, O. (2002). Hnignun, aðlögun eða framför? Torfbærinn sem mælikvarði á gang Íslandssögunnar. In Halldórsdóttir, E. H. (ed.), *2. Íslenska Söguþingið. Ráðstefnurit I*, Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, Reykjavík, pp. 144–160.

Vésteinsson, O. (2004). Icelandic farmhouse excavations: field methods and site choices. *Archaeologia Islandica* 3: 71–100.

Vésteinsson, O. (2010). On farm-mounds. *Archaeologia Islandica* 8: 13–39.

West, S. (1999). Social space and the English country house. In Tarlow, S., and West, S. (eds.), *The Familiar Past? Archaeologies of the later historical Britain*, Routledge, London, pp. 103–122.

Witmore, C. (2007). Symmetrical archaeology: excerpts of a manifesto. *World Archaeology* 39: 546–562.

Yaneva, A. (2013). Actor-Network-Theory Approach to the Archaeology of Contemporary Architecture, in Graves-Brown. In Harrison, P., and Piccini, A. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 121–134.

Twisted Lives:
on the temporality and materiality of biographical presences

Mímisson K, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 2012, Vol. 16(3) 455–471

Int J Histor Archaeol (2012) 16:455–471
DOI 10.1007/s10761-012-0186-x

Twisted Lives: On the Temporality and Materiality of Biographical Presences

Kristján Mímisson

Published online: 7 August 2012

Abstract People's biographies are dominated by a multitude of factors. In recent years it has come to a general understanding that people's life histories are embedded in things just as things are premising the biographies of people. Still, the scholarly discussion has concentrated heavily on individual biographies resulting in life-histories of bodies and individuals confined by their bodily framework rather than conceptualizing the person through the mutual interaction between people and things and the interrelationship between various presences in the revelation of the temporality and materiality of biography. In this paper I aim to explore the category of personal biography resting upon aspects of Heideggerian philosophy. I argue for biographical presences that are spread across time, subjected to shared participation and intrinsically intertwined with the narratives they generate. The argumentation rests upon my personal involvement with the biography of a seventeenth-century peasant from the farm Búðarárbakki in southern Iceland. The site and its material culture have emerged as the cause and consequence of our shared life-histories manifesting the notion of multi-temporality and materiality to the category of biography.

Keywords Biography · Persons · Narrative · Materiality · Temporality

Introduction

Material culture and time are undeniably archaeology's most central issues. We can certainly claim that practically everything concerning the process of archaeology is affected by some kind of a temporal awareness and its relationship to the material world. Archaeology's most obvious and perhaps most superficial alliance with time and material culture emerges in the practice of dating and chronology, i.e., the

K. Mímisson (✉)
Department of Archaeology, University of Iceland, Sæmundargata 2, 101 Reykjavik, Iceland
e-mail: krm6@hi.is

sequencing of sites, features and artifacts. This handling of the material culture, encountered for instance at archaeological digs, in museums or just enmeshed into our daily present, may be considered as one of the quintessences of the archaeological practice. The occurrence of the material past is, however, variable and reveals how its tense is somewhat more complex than implicated by a simple date of origin, time of deposition or period of usage. So may finds from an archaeological excavation have an immediate reference to a past context and, thus, reveal something about the "real" events and practices of the past. On the other hand, museum objects have been removed from their past context. Although frequently attempting to preserve a certain notion of pastness, they are now set to fulfill completely new purposes, directed by the present perceptions of politics and society. Contrary to this, is the omnipresent material past that we constantly engage with and is embedded into our present existence. These may be personal heirlooms we treasure, ancient structures filling in and building up our immediate environments or archaeological monuments blending into the landscape in which we move around. We may be unaware of the antiquity of this category of material past that is still present-at-hand but seems to have lost its pastness as it floats into our daily lives. However, its simple presence suffuses us with the kind of multi-termporality that defines our existence. Martin Heidegger (1980, p. 430) remarked to this double meaning of "the past" mentioning "the past belongs irretrievably to an earlier time; it belonged to the events of that time; and in spite of that, it can still be present-at-hand 'now.'"

In this paper I intend to elaborate on the multi-temporality and materiality of biography that is reflected in the ambiguity of the past, being both no longer and still present-at-hand. The argumentation grounds in the relationality of tenses where the subject of investigation and the narrative are not just highly interrelated but dependent upon each other, being each others cause and the consequence. Accordingly, I argue that personal biographies are multi-faceted narratives, embedded in various material presences and endowed with mixed temporal horizons that extend far beyond the notion of the individual subject. Hence, biographies are not limited by a singular life-cycle in terms of a particular linear process from creation to dissolution or birth to death, but are entrapped within biographical presences of different temporal contexts. Such a vantage point on biography discloses the issue of temporality as addressed in the Heideggerian notion of Dasein and its qualities of Being-in-the-world and Being-with.

The Biographical Approach: A Heideggerian Alternative

The category of biography has long constituted an important element within the various disciplines of science and the humanities (Frank 1979, pp. 70–72; Langness and Frank 1981). The general concept of biography constitutes, in fact, merely a generic term for a multitude of historical narratives that aim to outline the social life, the processual career and the cyclical transformations of both persons and things, whereas this paper focuses on the idea of "personal biographies." Traditional personal biographies aim to portray the life-cycle of an "individual person" in terms of its linear process from birth to death. I would claim that this is the common understanding of this particular narrative form at least since Plutarch's biographical writings at

the very end of the first century CE. Yet the biography mostly extends these objectives by presenting the individual life cycle in the light of his or her historical times and with the focus on his or her participation in, involvement with or influence on historical or social processes. So, the biography becomes a vehicle for historical narratives of significant social events and changes or cultural embeddedness that ranges beyond the very individual and its lifetime. This viewpoint on biography may be criticized for impersonalizing history where the particular life cycle becomes a testimony for general historical processes and grand narratives. John Robb (2002, p. 155) states that biographical narratives are "not the life stories of particular notable or ordinary persons, but a cultural idea of what a human life should be." Thus, he conflates the category of biography with a certain notion of a "master narrative" as phrased by Robb himself. Returning to the traditional form of personal biography, we might as well consider it as attempting to break up with the singularity and uniformity of the individual instead of gazing at the its indivisibility by reflecting upon the person in terms of it historical and social context. Accordingly, we may consider it as punctuating the relational character of the person that is enmeshed in a network of people, situations, and materialities.

The individual has long been regarded as a problematic size within archaeology. The idea of the individual that has penetrated modernity (Thomas 2004, p. 119) and may be circumscribed as a separate and singular entity, confined to its body, the very source of agency, and the quintessence of individuality (Meskell 1999, p. 9) remains, however, very persistent. In its quest for humanizing the impersonal processual and culture-historic archaeologies and as a response to what had been criticized as the unpopulated past (Shanks and Tilley 1987, p. 61) much of post-processual archaeology aimed for an "archaeology of the individual." However, many attempts to the individual within archaeology have remained on the level of accrediting past peoples with generalized agency and abilities, knowledgability, self-awareness and self-determination, creativity and intention, instead of looking at the flexible and unpredictable individual agent (Fahlander 2001, p. 16) and the variety of biographies related to the enmeshment of the individual. It may actually seem rather paradoxical but we merely encounter individual life histories in the analysis of the afterlife representation, i.e., of burials and spectacular corporeal finds such as bog bodies or naturally mummyfied corpses, with the Ice-Man or Ötzi as the probably most prominent and heavily debated recent example. Indeed, "real" individuals "with faces" (cf. Tringham 1991) are rarely encountered within archaeology apart when dealing with the remains of human bodies. Human osteology has, thus, contributed considerably to the archaeology of biography (cf. Iscan and Kennedy 1989), not just in general paleodemographic analysis by disclosing the ratio between the sexes and age groups or revealing the general health status, workload or the nutritional basis within a particular population, but also in the analysis of singular cases, bodies or individuals. These individuals are attributed with life histories forensically extracted from their bodily remains, narrating dramatic and varied stories of illnesses, struggles, damnation, sacrifice or even murder (cf. Bahn 2003). Similarly focused on the embodiment of the individual, although not treating organic human remains per se, are biographical projects that aim to materialize the life processes of historically know persons. The project tracing the life cycle of Martin Luther is a poster child for this kind of biographical approaches. Excavations at various locations related to different

stages in Martin Luther's life, ranging from his birth in Eisleben to his death in Wittenberg, are aimed to shed a light on his life process (Meller 2008; Meller et al. 2008). Yet the outcome is less an elaborated scrutiny of the persona Martin Luther emphasizing the relationality of the person through its material interconnectednes but a materialization of the historical figure, i.e., a history of material ownership, constantly chasing the question of the appearance of his things.

Moreover—and in a closer relation to the context of this paper—earlier gender and feminist archaeology enhanced the interest in personal life histories (Gilchrist 1999; Sørensen 2000; Tringham 1991, 1994) that was forced through by the notion of lived experiences in past and present (Preucel and Hodder 1996) as well as being implicated in the discourse on individual vs. cultural identity (Díaz-Andreu et al. 2005; Meskell 1999, 2001). Serving as an example, Janet Spector (1991, p. 390) favored a multi-dimentional approach that would underpin the complexity and variability of gendered labor by the nineteenth-century Dakota Indians in order to come closer to a "more inclusive feminist archaeology" and to avoid "simplistic projections of present notions about gender in the past." Spector turned to the strategy of biographical writing to overcome the limitations of her initial and rather "processual looking" task differentiation approach. During a time of loss one summer day at Little Rapids, Spector tells a partial life history of a fictitious young Dakota girl. The narrative is grounded in a single artifact, an antler awl handle decorated with lines and dots as well as drilled holes preserving traces of red pigmentation, that according to nineteenth-century textual sources on the Lakota Indians may have been related to individual recording of hide working accomplishments (Spector 1991, p. 395). Through the narrative Spector is allowed to include her elaboration on the materiality of the awl handle in relation to the life cycles of Dakota women. Consequently, she relates the singularity of the artifact and its disposal to a rite of passage by Dakota women. She applies an inward focus on the antler awl handle and her interpretations are grounded on the premises of its materiality, which she transforms into a convincing biographical narrative of a past lived experience. From the same vantage point we may regard Tringham's (1991, 1994) fictional narratives of the Neolithic woman of the Vinča culture squaring up with her life and late husband as she watches her house burn down.

Certainly a lot more work has been done on the narrative within archaeology, both regarding archaeological writing in general (cf. Hodder 1992; Joyce 2002, Sinclair 1989; Tilley 1993) whereas others (cf. Campell and Ulin 2004; Wilkie 2003) have framed their narrative approaches in a more explicit setting of historical archaeological case studies. The stories of Spector and Tringham serve here only as well-known instances of the multitude of narrative approaches applied to particular archaeological and historical contexts. Still, it is hard to distinguish clearly between the "historical reality" which is embedded in the presence and pastness of the material culture at hand and the creativity of the authors' own literary flair. Such an approach partly results in a narrative constructivism where the pastness of the archaeological remains become almost secondary compared to the emphasis placed on their present situatedness and creative arrangements as well as the political power relations of the present discourse. The post-modern turn in archaeology emphasized the plurality of interpretations and the notion of multivocality where narratives about the past were likened to poetry and fiction (Cornell and Fahlander, 2002, p. 91; Tilley 1993) and

fantasy and creativity in interpretations were crucial to the making of the past as well as in regenerating its contemporary relevance. Correspondingly, things were assigned with manifold meanings that are constantly altering through time and space (Holtorf 2002, p. 55). Hence, the narrative constructivism has alienated the material past from the historical present resulting in histories that merely layer on the top of material culture rather than being extracted from its essences. Furthermore, materialities are regarded as constructions with sometimes at best a hazy reference to the sources material, rather than considering materialities in terms of the very essential qualities of material culture. This enhanced narrative constructivism that at heart was based on the textual, metaphorical and semiotical premises of post-structuralism lost somewhat sight of the thingly essences and left things themselves passive on the side line. As a consequence, this has raised loud criticism and a call for "a return to things" including their intrinsic material qualities (Domanska 2006; Ingold 2007; Olsen 2003) together with a claim for acknowledging the relationality between persons and things that are never disjunct but always enmeshed in a network of people and things (Knappett and Malafouris 2008; Latour 2005; Olsen 2003, 2007; Webmoor 2007; Witmore 2007).

Personal biographies have, thus, emphasized the body and the individual through its bodily constitution as the main point of departure. This stands in contrast to the debate on personhood, relationality, and divisibility of the person (e.g., Fowler 2004; Gell 1998; Mauss 1985; Strathern 1988). Consequently, questions touching upon the fixity of the individual vs. the relationality of the person need to be addressed. How correlates the singularity of the body as the fundamental expression of the individual with the plurality, partibility, and multi-relationality of the person and the self? Is the idea of divisibility simply a product of the fragmented nature of the archaeological record? Does something as the "complete person" exist and how can we grasp it within the archaeological record? Hodder (2000, p. 25) proposes individual events extracted from the palimpsest of the archaeological record as a starting point, noting that "[i]t is often possible to work out the intentionality and decision-making involved in individual event sequences … without relating those sequences to a particular embodied individual. [And] it may be possible to link individual events and individual sequences of events together as the products of a particular person." This seems to be a practicable way of approaching the activities of certain "embodied individuals" in the field, yet it appears only to materialize biography and generate stories of ownership rather than elaborate on the relational person. Nevertheless, we may notice that Hodder implies that the particular person which arises from the analysis of the sequences of individual events is not necessarily the same as the embodied individual that caused them. Fowler (2002, p. 47) underscores this perspective where he states that "the person and the body need not be the same thing, but can overlap and diverge from each other in culturally specific ways." Herein lies the ambiguity of biography.

An intriguing discussion on the partiblilty of the person has lately arisen within anthropology and archaeology that in its substance stretches back to Marilyn Strathern's investigations in Melanesia. In her seminal work, Strathern (1988, p. 13), stresses the idea of dividuality and partibility of the person based on the premise that the singular person is the composite representation of relationships. The notion of partiblity comes to the fore through the social conduct of gift exchange. Gifts are not just singular items but penetrated by the person. Thereby, through the practice of gift exchange various qualities or parts of the person are distributed among the members of the

society leading to multiply-authored people (Fowler 2004, p. 26). Janet Hoskins (1998) counters this notion of personhood and critiques Strathern for not presenting a "coherent sense of self out of [people's] movable parts," thus, disregarding the importance of people's "own narratives or exchange histories" (Hoskins 1998, p. 10). Working in Melanesia as well, Hoskins provides an alternative perspective that issues the relevance of biographical objects in people's self-narration provoking a fusion between the narrative self and the material metaphor of an object (Hoskins 1998, p. 191).

A slightly different angle on biography, but truly the most salient approach to biography within archaeology, cites Kopytoff's (1986) cultural biography of things. Kopytoff acknowledged the premise that people can be commodified, and thus treated as objects, just as commodities (things) can be subjectified or singularized becoming the source of agency. This implies that people and things undergo life processes of similar biographical expectations (Kopytoff 1986, p. 67). Archaeologists have adapted to that theoretical framework by, for instance, presenting the life histories of houses in terms of the life cycles of their households (Gerritsen 1999; Tringham 1991, 1994). Others have focused on singular objects in relation to their constantly transmutable meanings (Gosden and Marshall 1999; Herva and Nurmi 2009; Holtorf 1998, 2002; Lucas 2005; Shanks 1998). So, objects may be regarded from different perspectives, where various aspects of their life cycles are emphasized, from production, including form and function, through periods of use and reuse, discard and deposition, to their reemerging as archaeological artifacts manifesting past existences within present settings. The cultural biographical approach has enriched archaeological discussion as it stresses the multi-temporality of material culture and underlines the complex stratification of narratives that is embedded in the very materiality of things.

So, the concept of materiality encompasses the storyline of material culture in their interminable complexities within the social world of people and things, and biographies are the dramatization of the narrative and performative embeddedness of material culture. Lending support to Julian Thomas' (2004, p. 122) appeal to convert the emphases "from the individual as an abstract analytical category, the social atom, to distinct personalities and their biographies," I argue that there is an absolute necessity in considering the category of biography, not representing an image of a monolithic individual—the complete person—but as a mosaic of varied expressions of personhood and multiple characteristics where the shared participation of temporally distinct agents is effective. The shared participation does not merely consider the entanglement between the biographer and the biographee, but also how they are equally involved with the biographical materialities and how they emerge as well as the process of narration and performance.

In order to approach biography from this alternative perspective I have looked to the philosophy of Heidegger. In his most prominent work, *Being and Time,* Heidegger (1980) outlined his phenomenology of Being. The centrality is placed on that of Dasein which is an entity of existence, the source of an "I," as it has in "each case mineness" (Heidegger 1980, p. 68). However, the question of Dasein is not about what it is but about its Being and how it reveals itself. The fundamental disclosure of Dasein is through Being-in-the-world that Ingold (2000, p. 173) once paraphrased as "agent-in-its-environment." Being-in-the-world means that humans emerge from the world instead of constructing it around their spiritual conceptualization as postulated

by the Cartesian Dualism. The essence of Being-in-the-world includes the way we are enmeshed in a network of things and how these things render themselves meaningful and intelligible to us (Thomas 1996, p. 65). The place-bound existence of Dasein is described through Dwelling (Heidegger 1993, p. 350; Thomas 1996, p. 89). Dwelling is a basic character of Being and all human activity can only take place through Dwelling (Heidegger 1993, p. 361). Furthermore, Being-in-the-world and Dwelling are not abstract concepts that may (or may not) be applied to our past subjects, but they address as much to the way we approach the subjects of the past. Ingold (1993, p. 152) put it quite eloquently, maintaining that "the practice of archaeology is itself a form of dwelling." This entails that we are exposed to the same conditions of Being as our past subjects, meaning that, in fact, we are one with the past (Karlsson 2005, p. 36). We can transcribe this shared condition with the past both to the mere presences of the material past and how we associate with it, how we handle the same things, walk the same floors and travel along the same paths as well as to the ontological process of how all these things are manifested (Karlsson 2005, p. 30–31).

Regarding this, we need to consider how Heidegger addresses the relations of Being in terms of its interaction with "Others." Thinking about this relationship we should not regard "Others" as everyone else from which the "I" is isolated, but "rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too" (Heidegger 1980, p. 154). The Being of Dasein is, indeed, not only characterized by its quality of Being-in-the-world, but also in the way it includes the other. The reason for this is that we share the world with others existentially. Thus, the world of Dasein is, a with-world of shared existences because being in such a world means Being-with Others (Heidegger 1980, pp. 154–155).

A Heideggerian approach to biography implies a Being that in its wholeness is intrinsically spread among other Beings (people and things) and is therefore not a fixed entity but an amoebic figure that is not entirely unformed and shapeless, but fluid and flexible and continuously in the state of becoming. Personal biographies are manifested in their presences that are simultaneously of the past and the present just as they are rooted in a future to come. These biographical presences stem as well from the Being of the biographical subject (biographee) as from the process and practice of scholarship (biographer). A personal biography based on archaeological materials must explore both these elements (the properties of the material at hand and the process of archaeology) as both of them reveal presences that are shared components of the biographical narrative. So, by agreeing on the significance of material culture as a carrier of personal biographies we have acknowledged that it extends the life cycle of its owner (cf. Cskiszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, p. 191) and subsequently, by its very material agency, adds new elements to its owner's biography that are multi-temporal, originating in the past, present and the future. The power of material culture is induced by its endurance and conservation and a personal biography needs to keep to the powerful qualities that remain active beyond the "singular individual." Biographies are, thus, just as much about the material afterlife of a person as it is about its earthly existence. Material culture is conditioned by the ontological unity of people and things as it imbues our lives with pastness as well as being the source of our futurity.

Búðarárbakki: Approaching Biographical Presences

Each place or object—in this case the archaeological site Búðarárbakki (Fig. 1)—is engaged with various kinds of life-histories. This involves both the manner of its processual carreer and how its functions, meanings, and relations are generated and transformed through time, as well as the biographical implications the particular place or object has for all the people, who themselves participate in the social networking of that place or object. So does the seventeenth-century farmstead Búðarárbakki, at the conjunction of the rivers Búðará and Hvítá in the district of Hrunamannahreppur in southern Iceland, present itself through different life-processes and biographical presences, fulfilling distinct roles in each and every one of them.

Búðarárbakki is recorded in the Icelandic Land Registry, Jarðabók, from 1703 (Magnússon and Vídalín 1918-27, p. 273) and from these written sources we learn a few things about the site's historical context. The Registry states that the farm was built some decades earlier (i.e., shortly after the mid-seventeenth century) by a peasant named Þorkell. The Registry itself comprises only of brief textual sources that, however, implies some interesting information about this particular person. The peasant is described as a peculiar, old and restless man having lived at 27 different places throughout his lifetime. Four of these places are listed in the Registry, of which Búðarártunga, appears as the most interesting one (Magnússon and Vídalín 1918-27, pp. 276–277)—a farm he built some four years before moving house to Búðarárbakki. At that time the communal highland pasture was demarcated

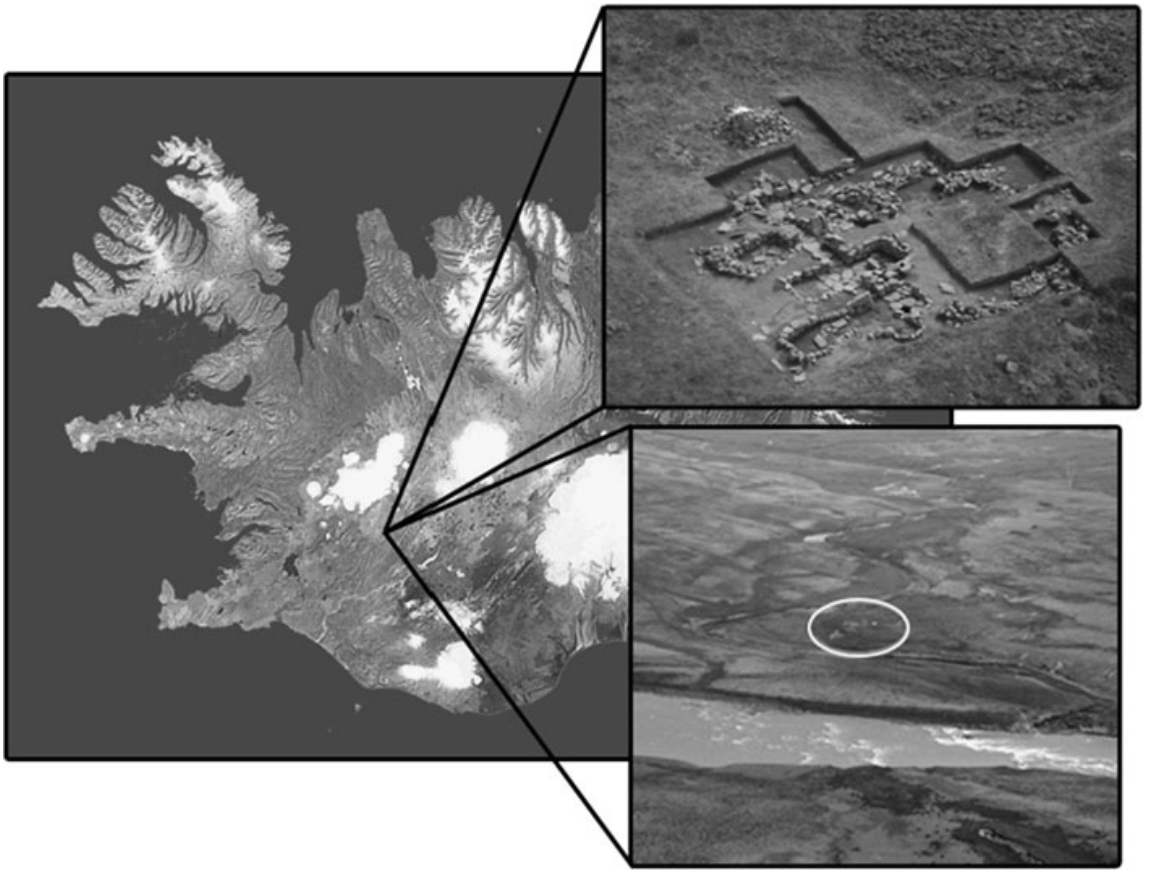


Fig. 1 Búðarárbakki on a map of Iceland (*background*). The location of the site at the river banks of Búðará just before it enters the glacial river Hvítá (*bottom right*; photo Kristján Mímisson). The site during the excavation in 2008 (top right; photo Kristján Mímisson)

from the farming land by the river Búðará. Búðarártunga lay within the communal pasture on the western bank of the river whereas Búðarárbakki is located on the eastern bank only a few hundred meters away, yet outside the communal pasture of that time. According to the written documentation the peasant's dwelling at Búðarártunga was much to the discontent of the people in the district, although with the approval of a few. We read as well from the Registry that Þorkell's dwelling in Búðarárbakki was initially without any dues to the district but later on he was charged a relatively low tax. From these sources it may be inferred that the dwelling at Búðarártunga within the highland pasture and, thus, outside the jurisdiction of the local authority, was a thorn in the side of the people of the district. Þorkell must have been persuaded to move across the river and hence under the local authority by assuring him tax exemption. Concomitant with the inception of taxation the dwelling at Búðarárbakki may have become impossible for Þorkell.

Búðarárbakki is listed as a legal farm yet it is made clear that farming was extremely hard, if not practically impossible. The arable farming land at Búðarárbakki was particularly bad. The land around the farm is described as eroded and scanty (as it is still today) providing insufficient fodder for even one cow. Additional fodder needed to be harvested up in the highland pasture.

Þorkell lived at Búðarárbakki for approximately a decade, before abandoning the farm in the same year as he died. The clerks of the Land Registry report that the farm had never since been resettled. Moreover, they assume it never will. The clerks predicted correctly, Búðarárbakki was never resettled. Yet its location remained present in the collective memory of the local population. At the end of the nineteenth century, the site was surveyed by two antiquarians, Brynjúlfur Jónsson in 1895, the chairman of the Icelandic Society of Antiquities (Jónsson 1896, pp. 3–4), and 2 years later by Daniel Bruun (Bruun 1898), a Danish military officer, actively participating in Icelandic archaeology at the turn of the twentieth century. Both documented the preservation, location and layout of the archaeological remains clearly referring them to the citation in the Land Regristry as the archaeological remains of Búðarárbakki. Therefore, it appears quite strange that the site falls into oblivion during the early twentieth century. Notwithstanding, in 1927 the state antiquarian at the time, Matthías Þórðarson, put the site under heritage protection (Georgsson 1990, p. 75) seemingly without ever having been there. His topographical description is rather confusing and led for instance to the misplacing of the site on later twentieth-century maps. Furthermore, and underscoring the process of forgetting, the later state antiquarian, Kristján Eldjárn (1948, p. 110), does not even mention Búðarárbakki in an essay on the ancient settlement in the district, although he obviously must have been aware of its existence.

The exact location of Búðarárbakki was, thus, in the later twentieth century a matter of some ambiguity. So in 2004, due to the construction of a high voltage line in the area, trial excavations had to be carried out at two distinct locations in order to solve this uncertainty (Einarsson 2004, p. 8). The trial excavations showed, however, that the site itself lay outside the construction area meaning that without the uncertainty about the location no measures linked to the construction activities would have been necessary on behalf of the Icelandic Archaeological Heritage Agency. Hence, it was due to the process of forgetting that Búðarárbakki retrieved its significance and renewed academic

attention. The research project this paper rests upon owes, thus, its existence to the urge of clearing the incertitude of location due to the process of forgetting.

Keeping in mind Ingold's (1993, p. 152) remark on archaeology as a form of dwelling each archaeological project must be considered, including the skillfully executed archaeological practices, as a kind of reinhabiting a place and reinventing the landscape escorted with an intensive engagement with the place and landscape. Accordingly, the archaeological practice generates knowledge that is equivalent to the knowledge that was born out of the practical activity and dwelling of the past. So it is only because we dwell that we are able to implement our scientific practices and grasp the past within that context. It may be stated that the archaeological process is as much about lived experiences and enlivening the past as it is about the systematic collecting, processing and scrutinizing archaeological data. Nonetheless, the archaeological methodology is a means to convert and translate this skillful practice into discursive knowledge. The revisiting of Búðarárbakki between 2004 and 2009 was a resettlement of the place that resembled its original inhabitation and various ways. It did not only involve a skillfully executed daily working routine but it was also marked by a seasonal dwelling with the pitching and maintaining of a working camp, eating and resting as well as the act of movement within the framework of the site and back and forth between Búðarárbakki and the central settlement further south. The new engagement with the place and its surroundings constituted of an exertion of practices, yet aimed for an extraction of discursive knowledge about past practices and lived experiences.

The present day Búðarárbakki is framed by a wilderness scenery with wide ranging view from the southern lowland towards the central highland. The narrow grassy river bank of Búðará features today an exceptional contrast to the totally eroded surroundings. Within that environment we must envisage the farmhouse that was built of unworked stone, soil, and turf. It would have looked much like a grassy mound or a knoll perfectly toning in with the surroundings from which it would hardly have been distinguishable. Búðarárbakki was a small Icelandic passage farm which is an architectural form that lasted in a variety of appearances from the fourteenth to the late nineteenth century. It had thick walls that carried the weight of the roof and its inner arrangement was dominated by a central passage from which all rooms could be entered (Fig. 2). Although, Búðarárbakki fits by and large the standard typology of Icelandic passage farms, it exposes a few structural features that make it quite unique. One of these structural variations is the elongation of the passage outside the farmhouse leading towards the enclosure, thus, creating a rectangular bending on the passage just in front of the entrance into the house. This outer part of the passage is unlikely to have been roofed. It, however, gave shelter to the path from the house towards the workshop which lay inside the enclosure. Furthermore, there is a rounded niche in the living quarter at the end of the passage where the roof must have been slightly elevated, indicated by postholes inside that niche. The distribution of artifacts indicates that most of the inside activities occurred around that place. This part of the house formed a commodious setup for the daily household practices, including a nicely built pit for storing food underlying stone slabs in the floor, a small fire place that would illuminate the otherwise dark premises and warm up the immediate working area, and a stony platform—a seat (Fig. 3)—in the center of the room around which the vast majority of household artifacts at Búðarárbakki were found. Amongst these were fragments of clay pipes and drinking cups (both of glass and pottery), a knife, and a

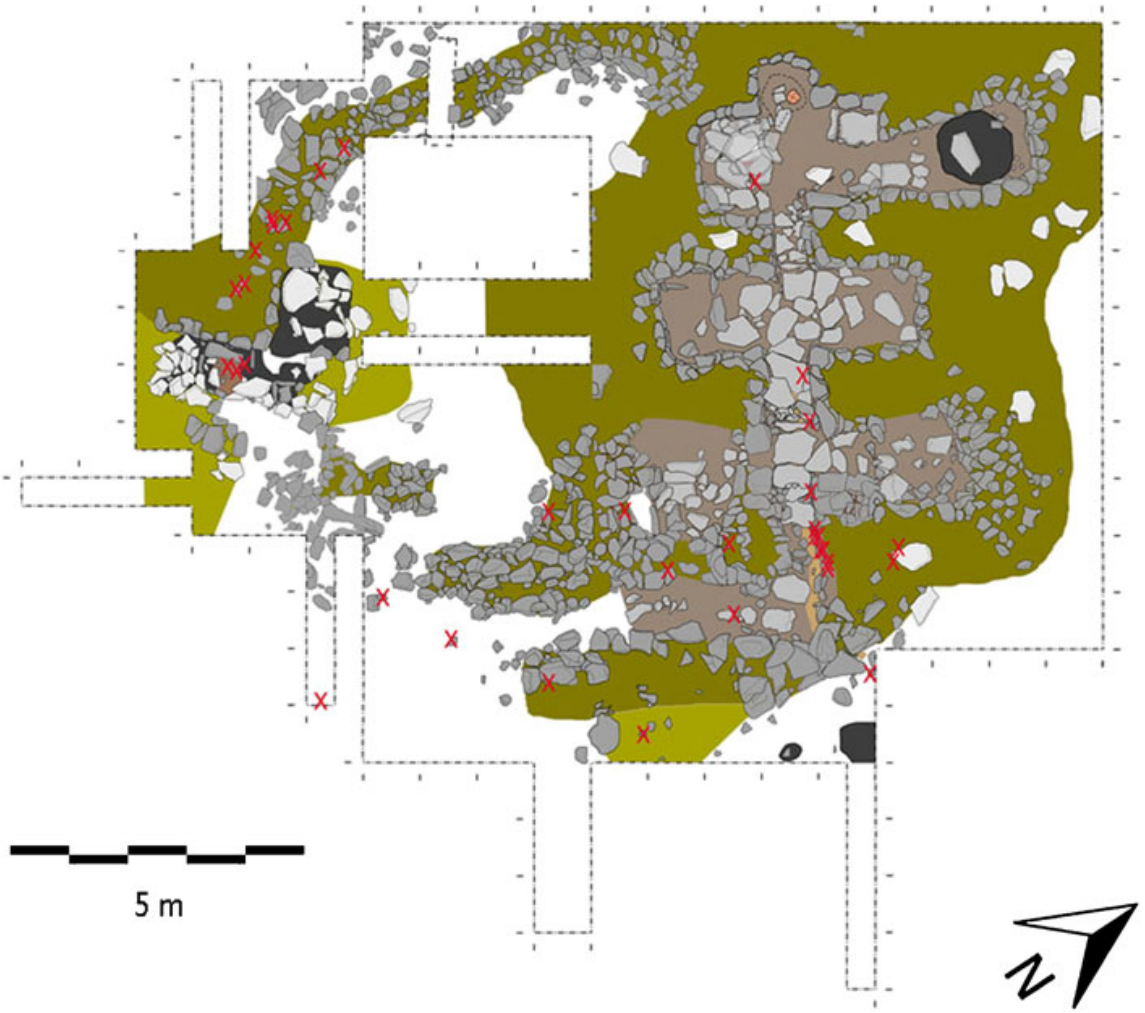


Fig. 2 The layout of Búðarárbakki with 'X' marking where stone hammers were found

sewing needle. Such architectural particularities individualize the house and distinguish it completely from other known examples giving it a specific personal affinity.

Fig. 3 The main activity area in the living quarter of Búðarárbakki with the half rounded niche in the middle, the storage pit to the left and the seat to the right (photo: Kristján Mímisson)

Nonetheless, there are other finds, namely stone hammers (Fig. 4), that dominate the artifact assemblage and distinguish Búðarárbakki explicitly from all other excavated farmsteads in Iceland. Stone hammers are natural boulders (approximately 20 cm in diameter) with chiseled holes for a shaft that are a commonly found on latest medieval and post-medieval farmsteads in Iceland. They are best known as hammers for beating dried fish to soften it, which was a standard household practice up until the late nineteenth century. However, stone hammers were obviously tools for manifold purposes and in written sources one encounters various citations of stone hammers where they are even typologically differentiated according to different tasks (cf. Jónsson 1945, p. 289). The stone hammers from Búðarárbakki differ, however, from the standard archaeological occurrence of such finds as all the fragments are production failures and the majority of them were embedded into the building structures. These residues from the production were for example put under stone slabs of the central passage of the farmhouse in order to level the paved floor, fixed into the stone settings both of the walls of the farmhouse and the enclosure or lined up outside the buildings like signposts of the activities that took place there. Furthermore, the stone hammers must be seen in a context with a workshop in the southwesternmost part of the enclosure, which was a small shelter with a sunken floor level. The shelter was open towards the east and most of the activity occurred in that open area or rather under the verge of the very low roof. Just there was a small pit (40x40cm) that carried a small fire place. The fire had obviously been lit up for short but repetitious periods indicated by a thin alternating layering of ash and eolian silt.

The structures at Búðarárbakki correspond perfectly with what we might expect from a year-round farm, yet the lack of a real hearth along with the distinctive artifact

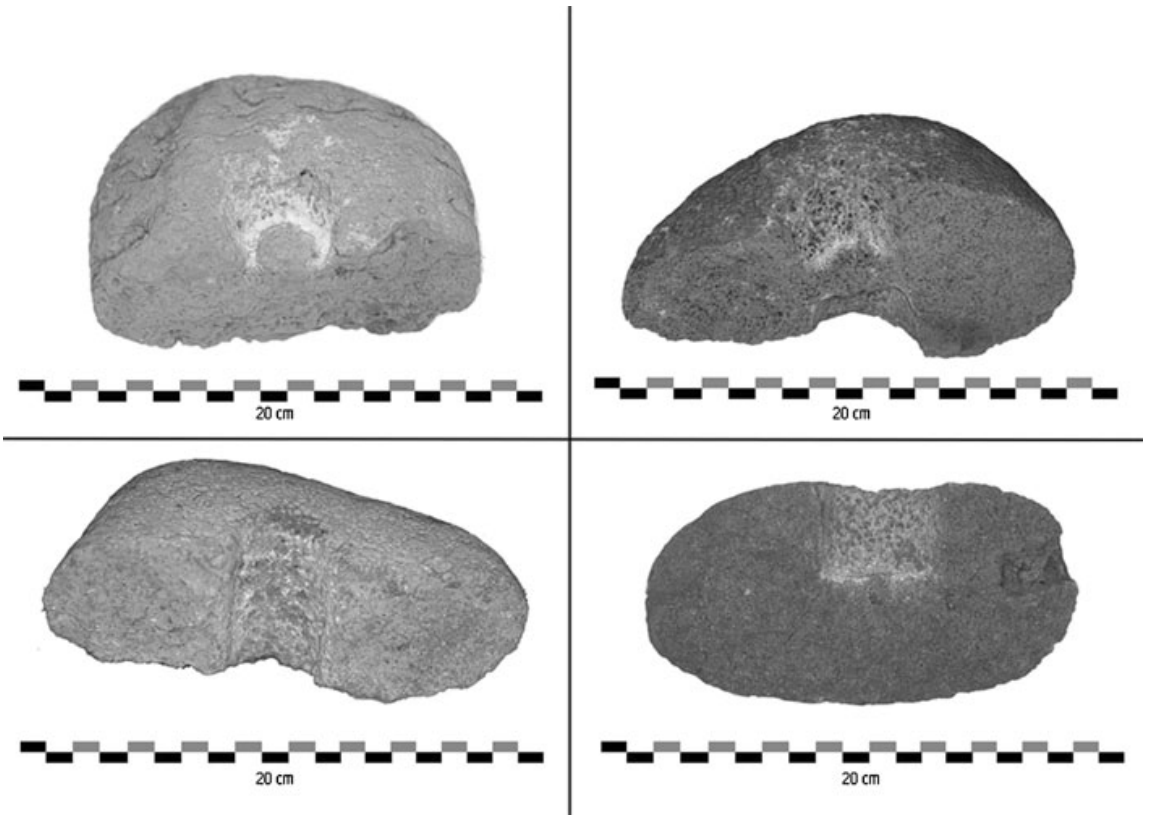


Fig. 4 Stone hammers from Búðarárbakki that broke during production

assemblage strongly imply that it was only seasonally inhabited, therefore somewhat relativizing the farming guise alluded by the house type and indicated in the written sources and architectural layout. This evidence can not be underestimated as Búðarárbakki lies in an altitude of 200 m above sea level which makes a winter dwelling in Iceland practically impossible without appropriate heating. The small fireplace in the living quarter of the farmhouse or the fire-pit in the workshop are too small in scale to have functioned for winter heating. Moreover, neither one of them indicate the practice of continuous lighting but short and repetitive firing. Consequently, the archaeological remains at Búðarárbakki enhance the notion of seasonally performed and specialized craftwork over farming as the main on-site activity in the past. Moreover, the material assemblage which points to the craftwork are not only the broken and/or unfinished stone hammers, but also a number of core fragments from perforating the hammers and iron spikes or small chisels that were applied in the crafting.

The archaeological excavations at Búðarárbakki support by and large the historical framework that is described in the Land Registry, regardless of the conclusion that farming did not constitute the leading activity or way of life at the site. This applies for instance to the dating of the abandonment of Búðarárbakki that by the means of tephrochronology can be pinpointed quite accurately to the period shortly before the devastating volcanic eruption of Mount Hekla in 1693 (Þórarinsson 1949). The volcanic ashes from that particular eruption superimpose the partly collapsed farmhouse, although some of the collapsed structures are situated stratigraphically above the 1693-tephra, demonstrating that the decay of the buildings was merely in its early stages in the year of 1693 (Fig. 5). All taken together, the structures accompanied with extremely thin occupation layers and a sparse artifact assemblage indicate a very

Fig. 5 A section through the farm passage showing roof slabs (no. 1) and roof turf (no. 2) that has collapsed into the passage. It is directly superimposed by the tephra layer from Mount Hekla from the year 1693 (no. 3) (photo: Kristján Mímisson)

short period of habitation prior to its abandonment. Thus, there is an agreement between the written and the material sources defining the site's chronology to a short period in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The archaeological findings at Búðarárbakki compose a remarkable evidence for specific crafting practices performed at Búðarárbakki, moreover, the house structures imply how certain ideologies and identities were pursued by the peasant. Still, the archaeological remains do not merely speak for themselves but are embedded in practices, narratives, and performances contextualized in the past and the present. A biography resting solely upon functional interpretation of the material at hand or inferring directly from the architecture to a certain social structuring of the person will inevitably ignore the materialities drawn from these practices, be that the skillful application of technology associated with the crafting of the stone hammers or the mere practice of archaeology along with its methodological framework, analytical tools, and tradition of discourse. The materialities reveal themselves through the presence of material culture. Taking the craftmanship of the peasant at Búðarárbakki as an example regarding biographical presence we need to accept that it is not only composed by the practice of chiseling wholes into the stone boulders but by complex relations. Reducing the biography to the mere physical activities of technology would strip the craftsman of its agency (Dobres 2000, p. 141) and leave him with nothing more than the functionality of a machine, going about its daily practice without relation to knowledge (past), meaning (present) or intention (future). The craftmanship encountered at Búðarárbakki involves skill, intentionality and endurance on behalf of the craftsman. Skill is commonly understood as the knowledgeable implementation of techniques in order to achieve a certain outcome, e.g., a product that might be seen as the final material result of the skilled practice. Likewise, skill is applied to the performance as such (dancing or singing) that remains forever unmaterialized. Ingold (2000) has invested quite some effort in deconstructing this idea that defines skill as mere procedures and implementation. He argues that skill refers to the form-generating process rather than the final outcome of production or performance (Ingold 2000, p. 291) or as the art historian Glenn Adamson (2007, p. 75) has noted that the constitutive rules of craft may be regarded as a means of itself—skill as the mere activity. Ingold (2000, pp. 304–306) specifies skill as a holistic system that operates within a network of social relations, where human beings merge with the tool. Within such a system not only the material culture but also its narrative and performative aspects like functionality, utility, intentionality, practice, care, investment, experience, and dexterity blend into the person. These are the materialities that the biographical presences mediate. They are not abstractions but grounded in and directed by the material properties—they are not attributes but histories (Ingold 2007, p. 15).

Conclusions: Shared Biographies

Biographies are born out of the interrelationality between different persons, as well as a multitude of material things and various places that stretch over time. However, they have, as argued in this paper, traditionally been tied to singularities, in terms of embodied bound entities. The rather recent emphasis on the relationality, divisibility, and dispersal of the person still seems to contradict the desire for extracting personal

biographies as coherent narratives of "complete persons." We may for instance ask who was this peasant, Þorkell at Búðarárbakki? On what terms can we grasp his life? How do we narrate his biographical presences? Thinking about this in terms of narration, we have to accept that the 'individual person' does not exist, irrespective of our theoretical disposition. Our Western experience may maintain the ideology of the individual, individuality and individualism, yet once turning to the properties of the narrative we will recognize that "[t]he individual in word is not the same as the individual in deed" (Magnússon 2005, p. 370). Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996, pp. 28, 31) have tackled this contradiction stating that "[t]he notion of a narrative of personal experiences implies that a person has his or her own experiences, that selves are ultimately discrete entities. At the same time, the unfolding narrative defines selves in terms of others in present, past, and imagined universes." Furthermore, "[i]f we develop our selves through the stories we tell and if we tell them with others, then we are a complex, fluid matrix of coauthored selves." So, if we are "coauthored" selves (or persons) our biographies must be shared with others. Thus, they are not coherent and temporally or materially restricted but permeable, amorphous and unlimited and mediated both through persons and things. Questions on personal and social identities, on the daily practice, on skill, on the aesthetic esteem, on the character of movement, on personal encounters and liaisons, on means of subsistence, on presence and absence can only be answered if we are capable of dwelling (Heidegger 1993, p. 361). We need to open up intelligibly to the manifestation of things. So are the biographical presences of Þorkell at Búðarárbakki not only grounded in the "thingly" manifestation, but also in our own disclosure. The shared aspect of biography involves the way we are ourselves embedded in the world. We share our lives, not only with our immediate social surroundings and the general temporal framework of society, but also with the singular lives and life-histories we encounter from the past through their presences and materialities. Our biographies are thus just as much in the hands of others as they are of our own creation.

And finally, we need to come to terms with the idea that managing unity out of the chaos of life into a neat and coherent history is inherently naïve if not simply dishonest towards the material sources and the subjects of inquiry (Magnússon 2005, p. 13). Life is in any case ambiguous and contradictory as well as discontinuous and twisted into a web of multi-temporal relations, situations, people, animals, things, and materialities. A personal biography has to respect these features of life in the same manner as it has to be reliable to its biographical presences.

References

Adamson, G. (2007). *Thinking Through Craft*, Berg, Oxford.

Bahn, P. (ed.) (2003). *Written in the Bones: How Human Remains Unlock the Secrets of the Dead*, Firefly Books, Toronto.

Bruun, D. (1898). *Gjennem Affolkede bygder paa Islands indre Højland*, Det Nordiske Forlag, Copenhagen.

Campell, F., and Ulin, J. (2004). *BorderLine Archaeology*, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg.

Cornell, P., and Fahlander, F. (2002). *Social Praktik och Stumma Monument: Introduktion till Mikroarkeologi*, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg.

Csikszentmihalyi, M., and Rochberg-Halton, E. (1981). *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Díaz-Andreu, M., Lucy, S., Babic, S., and Edwards, D. N. (2005). *The Archaeology of Identity*, Routledge, London.
Dobres, M.-A. (2000). *Technology and Social Agency*, Blackwell, Oxford.
Domanska, E. (2006). The Return to Things. *Archaeologia Polonia* 44: 171–184.
Einarsson, B. F. (2004). *Búðarárbakki 17: Aldar býli í felum*, Fornleifafræðistofan, Reykjavík.
Eldjárn, K. (1948). Eyðibýli á Hrunamannaafrétti. In Eldjárn, K. (ed.), *Gengið á reka*, Prentverk Odds Björnssonar H.F., Akureyri, pp. 107–121.
Fahlander, F. (2001). *Archaeology as Science Fiction. A Microarchaeology of the Unknown*, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg.
Frank, G. (1979). Finding the Common Denominator: A Phenomenological Critique of Life History Method. *Ethos* 7(1): 68–94.
Fowler, C. (2002). Body Parts: Personhood and Materiality in the Earlier Manx. In Hamilakis, Y., Pluciennik, M., and Tarlow, S. (eds.), *Thinking Through the Body: Archaeologies of Corporeality*, Kluwer Academic/Plenum, New York, pp. 47–69.
Fowler, C. (2004). *The Archaeology of Personhood: An Anthropological Approach*, Routledge, London.
Gell, A. (1998). *Art and Agency: Towards a New Anthropological Theory*, Clarendon, Oxford.
Georgsson, Á. (1990). *Skrá yfir friðlýstar fornleifar á Íslandi*, Fornleifanefnd, Reykjavík.
Gerritsen, F. (1999). To Build and to Abandon: The Cultural Biography of Late Prehistoric Houses and Farmsteads in the Southern Netherlands. *Archaeological Dialogues* 6: 78–97.
Gilchrist, R. (1999). *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past*, Routledge, London.
Gosden, C., and Marshall, Y. (1999). The Cultural Biography of Objects. *World Archaeology* 31: 169–178.
Heidegger, M. (1980). *Being and Time*, Blackwell, Oxford.
Heidegger, M. (1993). *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, HaperCollins, New York.
Herva, V.-P., and Nurmi, R. (2009). Beyond Consumption: Functionality, Artifact Biography, and Early Modernity in a European Periphery. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 13: 158–182.
Hodder, I. (1992). *Theory and Practice in Archaeology*, Routledge, London.
Hodder, I. (2000). Agency and Individuals in Long-Term Processes. In Robb, J., and Dobres, M.-A. (eds.), *Agency in Archaeology*, Routledge, London, pp. 21–33.
Holtorf, C. (1998). The Life-History of Megaliths in Mecklengburg-Vorpommern (Germany). *World Archaeology* 30: 23–38.
Holtorf, C. (2002). Notes on the Life History of a pot Sherd. *Journal of Material Culture* 7: 49–71.
Hoskins, J. (1998). *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*, Routledge, London.
Ingold, T. (1993). The Temporality of the Landscape. *World Archaeology* 25: 152–174.
Ingold, T. (2000). *The Perceptions of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, Routledge, London.
Ingold, T. (2007). Materials Against Materiality. *Archaeological Dialogues* 14: 1–16.
Iscan, M. Y., and Kennedy, K. A. R. (eds.) (1989). *Reconstruction of Life from the Skeleton*, Wiley-Liss, New York.
Jónsson, B. (1896). *Rannsóknir byggðaleifa upp frá Hrunamannahreppi sumarið 1895*, Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags, Reykjavik, pp. 1–13.
Jónsson, F. (1945). *Þjóðhættir og ævisögur frá 19*, Pálmi H. Jónsson, Akureyri.
Joyce, R. A. (2002). *The Languages of Archaeology: Dialogue, Narrative and Writing*, Blackwell, Malden.
Karlsson, H. (2005). Why is There Material Culture Rather Than Nothing? In Funari, P. P. A., Zarakin, A., and Stovel, E. (eds.), *Global Archaeological Theory: Contextual Voices and Contemporary Thought*, Kluwer Academic/Plenum, New York, pp. 29–41.
Knappett, C., and Malafouris, L. (eds.) (2008). *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach*, Springer, New York.
Kopytoff, I. (1986). The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process. In Appadurai, A. (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 64–91.
Langness, L. L., and Frank, G. (1981). *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography*, Chandler and Sharp, Novato.
Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
Lucas, G. (2005). *The Archaeology of Time*, Routledge, London.
Magnússon, Á., and Vídalín, P. (1918–27). *Jarðabók, Vol. 2 (Árnessýlsa)*. Hið íslenzka fræðafjelag í Kaupmannahöfn, Copenhagen.
Magnússon, S. G. (2005). *Sjálfssögur: Minni, Minningar og Saga*, University of Iceland Press, Reykjavík.

Mauss, M. (1985). A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person, the Notion of Self. In Carrithers, M., Collins, S., and Lukes, S. (eds.), *The Category of the Person*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 1–25.

Meller, H. (2008). *Fundsache Luther. Archäologen auf den Spuren des Reformators*, Theiss-Verlag, Stuttgart.

Meller, H., Rhein, S., and Stephan, H.-G. (eds.) (2008). *Luthers Lebenswelten*, Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt, Halle.

Meskell, L. (1999). *Archaeology of Social Life*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Meskell, L. (2001). Archaeologies of Identity. In Hodder, I. (ed.), *Archaeological Theory Today*, Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 187–213.

Ochs, E., and Capps, L. (1996). Narrating the Self. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25: 19–43.

Olsen, B. (2003). Material Culture After Text: Re-membering Things. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 36: 87–104.

Olsen, B. (2007). Keeping Things at arm's Length: A Genealogy of Asymmetry. *World Archaeology* 39: 579–588.

Preucel, R. W., and Hodder, I. (eds.) (1996). *Contemporary Archaeology in Theory: A Reader*, Blackwell, Malden, MA.

Robb, J. (2002). Time and Biography: Osteobiography of the Italian Neolithic. In Hamilakis, Y., Pluciennik, M., and Tarlow, S. (eds.), *Thinking Through the Body: Archaeologies of Corporeality*, Kluwer Academic/Plenum, New York, pp. 153–171.

Shanks, M. (1998). The Life of an Artifact. *Fennoscandia Archeologica* 15: 15–42.

Shanks, M., and Tilley, C. (1987). *Social Theory and Archaeology*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Sinclair, A. (1989). This is an Article about Archaeology as Writing. *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 8: 212–233.

Sørensen, M.-L. S. (2000). *Gender Archaeology*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Spector, J. (1991). What This awl Means: A Time of Loss one Summer day at Little Rapids. In Gero, J., and Conkey, M. (eds.), *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 388–406.

Strathern, M. (1988). *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Thomas, J. (1996). *Time, Culture and Identity: An Interpretive Archaeology*, Routledge, London.

Thomas, J. (2004). *Archaeology and Modernity*, Routledge, London.

Tilley, C. (1993). Interpretation and the Poetics of the Past. In Tilley, C. (ed.), *Interpretative Archaeology*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, pp. 1–27.

Tringham, R. (1991). Households with Faces: The Challenge of Gender in Prehistoric Architectural Remains. In Gero, J., and Conkey, M. (eds.), *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 93–130.

Tringham, R. (1994). Engendered Places in Prehistory. *Gender, Place and Culture* 1: 169–203.

Webmoor, T. (2007). What About "one Turn After the Social" in Archaeological Reasoning? Taking Things Seriously. *World Archaeology* 39: 563–578.

Wilkie, L. (2003). *The Archaeology of Mothering: An African-American Midwife's Tale*, Routledge, London.

Witmore, C. L. (2007). Symmetrical Archaeology: Excerpts of a Manifesto. *World Archaeology* 39: 546–562.

Þórarinsson, S. (1949). Örlög byggðarinnar á Hrunamannaafrétti í ljósi öskulagarannsókna. *Árbók hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 1943–48: 44–65.

Part III

Final Cadenza

Concerning the outset and the direction

Many years ago, when I was an undergraduate student of archaeology at the Albert-Ludwig University in Freiburg, Germany, I learned that for every answer to a research question that we may find, or for every conclusion regarding an academic issue we may come to, at least ten new questions will inevitably pop up. At that time, just starting to understand the fundamental principles of academy and scholarship, it sounded very strange. Did it mean that by going into research I would not solve any of the enigmas of the past? Would my future research only add to the confusion, and make the past even more unrecognizable, more foreign? Well, of course, this was not the case. The message was simply that the answers one might find, did not lead to a full closure. This means that now at the end of my dissertation I have not come to a closure, although I may have found answers to a few questions and come to some conclusions about problems I was dealing with. Therefore, I am not bringing this research project to a halt, but much rather giving it a direction. Now it is for others to pick up on my final cadenza and continue to play on the theme that I have submitted, and by all means *ad libitum*.

In the beginning of this journey towards my Ph.D., I started out with the intention to resist the status of grand narratives within research and scholarship. It was an ambitious undertaking that has on its way taken some unexpected twists and turns, and now as it is coming towards the end it seems as if I have instead come up with a *Grand Theory* about the constitution of all things and how they relate. In fact, I have carried this accusation with me throughout the whole journey. At the outset of my Ph.D. study I participated regularly in events organized by the Nordic Graduate School of Archaeology, called Dialogues with the Past. At one of these seminars a senior lecturer, a well-known professor of archaeology from Great Britain, told me that he liked my project, but he felt that I had just substituted the *grand narrative* with *a grand theory*. Thus, I might not have achieved as much as I aimed at. It was not the only time I received such comments. At a conference of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) another senior scholar complimented me on my philosophy but simultaneously complained about a want of archaeology. Both times I seemed to lack a decent response to the criticism, probably because on the one hand I had difficulties in understanding what was meant by ‘grand theory’, and on the other hand I have never been able to grasp how much philosophy an archaeological project can tolerate. However, this kept me aware of the tension between my theorizing and the grand narrative.

Thus, the challenges I was facing involved the question in what way grand narratives and grand theories are similar and how they might be distinguished. Was I simply replacing one evil with another, by refuting grand narratives with a grand theory? In this thesis I define grand

narratives as self-contained historical narratives that are continuously repeated until they adopt a life of their own that tends to be taken for granted, almost completely indiscriminately. So, grand narratives always rule from the top down, by dominating the discourse and the general approach to research, dictating the questions asked, methods used and so the outcome as well. My critique of grand narratives does not aim at their historicity but rather the mesh size of their historical scope. Small scale historical circumstances be that individual events and actions, persons and everyday lived experiences and the relationality between people and things, mostly fall through the mesh without proper attention and recognition. So, although grand narratives are not necessarily wrong, their perspective is always somewhat unclear, as they present history in overly broad terms, avoiding particularization, brushing anomalies and contradictions aside. Grand narratives regularize history, which is in its essence unruly and avoids being tamed, as it is always varied, multifarious and has very many different origins. I claim that narratives need to pay a due tribute to the unruliness of history. Thus, they must pay attention to details and variation and constantly hit out at the mainstream and ironize master narratives (Johnson, 1999: 31) by looking at what is happening at the fringes.

I am sure that not everybody would agree with this definition of the grand narrative. For some it is simply a matter of scale. Things like globalization, migration, or capitalism are grand narratives that are more easily approached by large scale, multi-regional, interdisciplinary, big data research (cf. Kristiansen, 2014). This does obviously not square with my definition, as I assert that grand narratives work on different levels. We can approach globalization with a special focus on details and the aberrant, embracing the sometimes very chaotic trajectories of history. Likewise, grand narratives can emerge out of the local and from a restricted data base.

The relationship between theory and narrative is, of course, neither straightforward nor is it easily circumscribed. Theory does not enter the narrative *a priori* but is also formed and developed through the process of narration. Hence, any theoretical framework alters during the course of a project, among others under a great influence of the narrative that is constantly generated. Some of the text in this thesis stems from my ideas before starting the project, and other parts of the text were laid out together with my initial application for funding. Some of the writing came to me during excavation as I brain-stormed in my field diaries, filled my databases with information, discussed with my fellow field workers, drew profiles and pondered over the stratigraphy, and composed field reports after each excavation season. So, the relation between the narrative outcome of a project—this thesis, for example—and its theoretical impetus is highly intertwined and complex.

Theory works, of course, on various levels as well. There are theoretical approaches that are both temporally and geographically constrained. These are data sensitive theoretical models that help us to prognose an outcome if one or more variables are altered. Then there is theory that works on a higher philosophical level, theory that we do not apply to the subject of inquiry but onto ourselves, because it describes the way we think about things, how we envisage the

order of the world. Thus, theory on this higher level is not something we only apply to certain materials in certain situations. They work generally, in all situations. Marxism in not just something we only apply to explain the exploitation of the working classes in the late 19th century, but a way of thinking about, for instance, class society and historical materialism. Heideggerian ontology does not describe Being in premodern times, but the Being of all humankind, throughout history. Actor-Network-Theory does not explain how people and things are being tied up into technologically advanced networks, but how humans and non-humans relate in general, and how they fuse into constantly new ontological categories.

Therefore, our narratives and our theoretical stance are highly interwoven, essentially creating each other. Still, theory and narrative are not the same thing, because they differ in their orientation. If we look at theory as the manner in which we enter a project—explaining our way of thinking and our notional approach to the project—then the narrative is how we exit it. The narrative expresses the final outcome and, thus, it is always directed outwards. Theory has an inwards direction, because we apply it onto our own thinking, rather than onto the research material, and in this sense all theory is grand theory. It provides us with the necessary inward focus needed, to be truthful to the outward direction of our narratives.

Still, theory is never final. It develops, matures and alters during the course of a research project. From the onset of my work and until I released it, I became in contact and under the influence of various theoretical approaches and ideologies that all contributed to my take on the project, my way of thinking about the matter at hand, my personal theoretical framework. Initially, I was influenced by Cornell's and Fahlander's (2002a; 2002b) microarchaeology and their take on Sartre, in particular the concept of Serial Practice. I also became fascinated by Thomas' (1996; 2004) and Ingold's (1993; 1999; 2007; 2013) approach to Heidegger's ontology and his elaboration on the Dasein, its main character of always being-in-the-world, into which it is thrown, a world that is already there and full of Others (Heidegger, 1971; 1980). At the same time, the writings of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) offered me, through their focus on the home and the things we gather around us, an insight into the processes of how persons are materialized, how we value things, and how meaning is invested in them. Similarly, I became interested in Gerritsen's (1999; 2003; 2008) work on the cultural biography of houses and building rhythms based on Kopytoff's (1986) seminal paper *Cultural Biography of Things* in which he discusses the social life of things (cf. Appadurai, 1986) and how things and humans share life histories by the common quality of being able to commoditize and singularize. John Chapman's Fragmentation Theory (2000; Chapman and Gaydarska, 2007) was not only influential to my thinking about fragmentation in general, but mainly in relation to concepts such as enchainment and accumulation, i.e. how things drift, carrying human elements with them, distributing the person among society, as well as how they reassemble into gatherings such as in burials, hoards and cemeteries. His works lead me to further think about Marcel Mauss' (2002) notion of gift exchange and the partible person, and as well about his

later protagonists, like Strathern (1988: 13), who claimed that, through things, that circulate society, a "singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm", or Gell (1998), who argued for an agency to things because they arouse feelings within us, still an agency that is only secondary to human primary agency that is inspired by intentionality. I was also taken by Latour (1993; 1999; 2005) and the Actor-Network-Theory, and how he explains every action (and agency) as a hybridization of various actants, human and non-human. He helped me to 'return to things' (Domanska, 2006) and ponder on the concept of symmetry as it is addressed in Olsen's work (2003; 2007; 2010), starting with the proposition that humans and non-humans are not ontologically distinct but move on the same ontological level. And finally, The Singularization of History (Magnússon, 2003; 2006; Magnússon and Szijártó, 2013)—the theoretical framework that runs through the entire project like a consistent thread—that demands the focus being fixed on the matter at hand, from where the narrative essentially emerges, so keeping the approach flat, instead of looking for historical explanations in some higher spheres of social abstractions.

These authors, works, and theoretical approaches came into my thoughts at different times and affected my work in different ways. Some characterized my thinking during the earlier stages of my research project whereas other ideas dominated my thinking during later stages. Some theoretical approaches remained vivid only for a short period, whereas others nested permanently into my thoughts. It is an interesting potpourri of ideas and views about the constitution of things and their relation to humanity. This corpus of literature may present quite contradictory theoretical ideas. Yet, it all made sense to me, and, together with the material at hand provided by the excavation at Búðarárbakki, they all contributed to my personal theoretical stance—partook in my theorizing, created my own personal *Grand Theory*.

The grand narrative was my point of departure, and through Búðarárbakki, its stone hammers and iron picks, its flagged floors and drystone walls, its marginal location and its ties into global phenomena, its tensions of farming and craft identities, its formidable material presence and inconspicuous historical reference, I hope have departed from it and found a new direction, admittedly by means of a grand theory.

It is from this vantage point that my interest in the life of Þorkell at Búðarárbakki, the 17th century peasant from the upper lowlands of Southern Iceland, must be understood. It began as an inquiry into the partial biography of a human being through his material remains and evolved into an investigation of the relationality of life itself, i.e. how the life in biography is not delimited to the bodily circumscribed individual, but emerges out of the various relations this individual entered with other persons and things during his lifetime and beyond. Biography is not limited to the lifetime of the individual itself but extends with and through things that continue knitting new relations, and so, linking up the past and present.

In this thesis I have argued that the biography of Þorkell depicts a person, a composition of humans and things, that lived seasonally, i.e. during the summer, at Búðarárbakki between

1665 and 1675. He was then already an aged man, although it is impossible to deduce his age in years, as the reference to his age has only survived through the somewhat elusive description in the Land Register. The Land Register is the only source that cites Þorkell by name. This named individual is now long gone, his persona, however, continued living through the comprehensive archaeological remains at Búðarárbakki, in the things that have outlived the individual. Of course, not all the things survive. Much is not preserved due to the processes of natural and cultural formation. This underlines the multi-temporality of biography. Some relations are short lived, whereas others endure, and the various human and thingly members of that particular biography enter and exit the biography at different times. Hence, biographies are always fragmented and partial (Fowler, 2004: 1; Magnússon, 2004: 347).

The biography, re-membered in this thesis, illustrates a person that spent his days crafting stone hammers. The raw material, stone boulders, came most likely from the river bed of Búðará. The specialized craft involved perforating holes into the boulders, using small iron pick/chisels that needed constant maintenance though whetting and forging. Building was another regular (if not daily) practice as the materials used—unworked stones, soil, turf and timber—demanded constant attention. These stories that emerge from the things found at Búðarárbakki relate directly into the partial biography of the inhabitant, Þorkell, and his persona. It is a life history shared between the past and present, an inherent composition of people and things. The things are neither separate from, nor do they run alongside the persona, but are essentially the persona itself.

References

Appadurai A (1986) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chapman J (2000) *Fragmentation in Archaeology: People, places and broken objects in the prehistory of south-eastern Europe*. London: Routledge.

Chapman J and Gaydarska B (2007) *Parts and Wholes: Fragmentation in Prehistoric Context*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Cornell P and Fahlander F (2002a) Microarchaeology, materiality and social practice. *Current Swedish Archaeology* 10: 21–38.

Cornell P and Fahlander F (2002b) *Social Praktik och Stumma Monument. Introduktion till Mikroarkeologi*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.

Csikszentmihalyi M and Rochberg-Halton E (1981) *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Domanska E (2006) The return to things. *Archaeologia Polonia* 44: 171–185.

Fowler C (2004) *The Archaeology of Personhood: An anthropological approach*. London: Routledge.

Gell A (1998) *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Gerritsen F (1999) To build and abandon: The cultural biography of late prehistoric houses and farmsteads in southern Netherlands. *Archaeological Dialogues* 6(2): 78–97.

Gerritsen F (2003) *Local Identities: Landscape and Community in Late Prehistoric Meuse-Demer-Scheld Region*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Gerritsen F (2008) Domestic Times: Houses and Temporalities in Late Prehistoric Europe. In: Jones A (ed.) *Prehistoric Europe: Theory and Practice*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 143–161.

Heidegger M (1971) *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper & Row.

Heidegger M (1980) *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Ingold T (1993) The Temporality of the Landscape. *World Archaeology* 25(2): 152–174.

Ingold T (2000) *The Perceptions of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge.

Ingold T (2007) Materials Against Materiality. *Archaeological Dialogues* 14(1): 1–16.

Ingold T (2013) *Making: anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture*. London: Routledge.

Johnson M (1999) Rethinking historical archaeology. In: Funari PP, Hall M and Jones S (eds.) Historical Archaeology. Back from the Edge. Routledge: London, pp. 23–36.

Kopytoff I (1986) The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process. In: Appadurai A (ed.) *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 64–92.

Kristiansen K (2014) Towards a New Paradigm? The Third Science Revolution and its Possible Consequences for Archaeology. *Current Swedish Archaeology* 22: 11–34.

Latour B (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Latour B (1999) *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge Harvard: University Press.

Latour B (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Magnússon SG (2003) The Singularization of History: Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge. *Journal of Social History* 36(3): 701–735.

Magnússon SG (2004) *Fortíðardraumar: Sjálfsbókmenntir á Íslandi*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Magnússon SG (2006) Social History as "Sites of Memory"? The Institutionalization of History: Microhistory and the Grand Narrative. *Journal of Social history* 39(3): 891–913.

Magnússon SG and Szijártó IM (2013) *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Mauss M (2002) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: Routledge.

Olsen B (2003) Material Culture After Text: Re-membering Things. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 36(2): 87–104.

Olsen B (2007) Keeping things at arm's length: a genealogy of asymmetry. *World Archaeology* 39(4): 579–588.

Olsen B (2010) *In Defence of Things*. Plymouth: AltaMira Press.

Strathern M (1988) *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*. Berkeley University of California Press.

Thomas J (1996) *Time, Culture and Identity*. London: Routledge.

Thomas J (2004) *Archaeology and Modernity*. London: Routledge.