

Tormod Torfæus: Scholar, Civil Servant, Defence Lawyer and Man of the World.

Hans Eyvind Næss

This article was originally given as a lecture at an international seminar about Tormod Torfæus at Leirubakki, Iceland, in June 2009. After the seminar, the lectures were not published.

Tormod Torfæus was born in Iceland in 1636. He was educated at the University in Copenhagen. In 1660 he was appointed the royal translator of old Icelandic manuscripts. He is recognized as one of the earliest scholars of history in Scandinavia in the early post Reformation era. Torfæus has a wide production both as a transcriber of manuscripts and as a historian. His life as a privileged servant at the Danish court in Copenhagen turned out a tempestuous one and he had to cope with serious difficulties. This article focuses on his life outside the court during which he sought livelihood by holding changing public positions from 1664 when he left Copenhagen until his death in 1719 at the island of Karmøy in Rogaland.

Torfæus, for better or for worse, came to stand out in his contemporary environment as an exceptional personality.

The life of Tormod Torfæus has attracted a lot of attention both during his own lifetime and later on, not at least due to the magnificent portrait, but also the profound and extensive studies by John Erichsen, and published in 1788.¹ This to my knowledge is one of the most comprehensive biographical studies of its time and makes excellent use of extensive primary archival materials, which are analyzed in a most scholarly way to verify Erichsen's own opinions about Torfæus' deeds as well as his mishaps.

Due to the fact that Torfæus spent most of his life in Stavanger County (Rogaland), my comments will be based on local primary sources that to my



The portrait of Tormod Torfæus used for the invitation to the seminar held in Iceland 2009. The original portrait can be found at Frederiksborg Castle, Denmark.

knowledge have not been fully utilized in former studies. Until the 1660s and 1670s, the region was known as Stavanger len; following administrative changes it then became Stavanger amt, and since 1919 the region has been known as Rogaland County.

A number of locally available archival sources and recently published studies have allowed me to add my own impressions of Torfæus as a private and public figure. The Governor's archives date back to the late 1500s; there are documents here relating to the career and activities of Torfæus. The court records for Stavanger city as well as the region have been preserved almost continually since 1615. The archives from the regional judge, the local appeal court, (*lagmannen – Icelandic logmadr*) still exist from 1637. Several censuses and ledgers have also survived. Records relating to property, sale and purchase of ownership, mortgages etc. have been kept since the late 1600s. Stavanger's Church records and notary records since 1688 have also survived, as well as records from many of the parishes. Regrettably the oldest probate records and registers recording property details of the deceased date only from 1724 onwards, the year after the death of Torfæus' second wife. There are also numerous letters of various kinds in civil servants' archives dating back to the early 1700s. Most of these records can be found in the regional department of the Norwegian National Archives in Stavanger.

In 1707, whilst Torfæus was ill, he received a visit from the dean at Karmøy, Jens Barsøe. We know this from a letter written by Barsøe to the bishop in Kristiansand dated 28 March 1707. In this letter he concludes, quite rightly, that if Torfæus' was to die the probate procedures should be conducted by a clerical court and not by the local secular judge. This was because Torfæus was considered as a learned man and as such his property should be handled in the same way as for other learned persons, such as the clergy. Interestingly, this also clearly demonstrates that when Torfæus fell ill in 1706 he was expected to die quite quickly, but as we know he recovered and lived on for a further 13 years.²

A few articles about Torfæus have been published in "Ætt og Heim", the local history association's yearbook. The most recent local history contribution is the history of Karmøy. Until now three volumes have been published. They take us from the prehistoric age up to 1800. It is the third volume, "Karmøys

historie III – furet værbitt, over vannet. Fra Reformasjonen til 1800”, covering the period from the Reformation to 1800 that concerns Torfæus.³

Torfæus came to Norway and settled here more or less permanently for the rest of his life. During the years 1660-1664 he was the *de facto* Royal Historian with specific duties connected to the translation of old Icelandic documents. Torfæus was paid 300 daler annually, a considerable salary at the time. He was close friends with King Fredrik III, whom he saw regularly and discussed matters relating to his work. He was at the time a young man of 24; for his age he was very well educated, well read, and well mannered. His learning and his position at the royal court brought him in to contact with a huge number of learned contemporaries, and he would have stood out as a cosmopolitan with knowledge and good manners. However, this young immigrant from Iceland living at the royal court as the king's protégé might well have attracted envy from the 'better bred' courtiers already in residence there.

When the king appointed Torfæus as a “Cammererer” for the diocese region of Stavanger, it was a rather extraordinary appointment. Torfæus first settled in Kristiansand, a city established in 1641 by King Christian IV. At this time the bishop still resided in Stavanger as he had done since the early 1100s, and so the reason for the location of Torfæus' new position seems to have been caused by changes that took place throughout the secular administration during the 1660s. In 1661 the king had ousted the old noble families in hereditary power out of the ministries. After several defeats in three successive wars with Sweden, he replaced them with conspicuous leaders from the bourgeoisie, men with money but also social, international and political influence that could help to restore the personal power of the king. The new coalitions that were formed were followed by a peaceful, albeit dramatic restructuring of the organization of the combined Kingdom of Denmark and Norway in the capital and in the regions. A strict bureaucracy was developed, the essence of which still exists in both countries. A governor with authority over the county governors and the ministries was established. For southwest Norway this civil servant – named *stiftamtman* - was located in Kristiansand. So until the bishop was moved from Stavanger to Kristiansand in 1682, the religious centre of power continued to be Stavanger, but the regional secular capital became Kristiansand.

The procedures for control of all revenue and spending were improved and strengthened in both Denmark and Norway. Additional civil servants were appointed with responsibility for all finances and audits, church accounts, customs, taxes of all kinds, income and spending etc. But only in one location was a *cammererer* position established, and this was the rather personal appointment of Torfæus in the diocese of Kristiansand. He was given extensive authority to collect all revenues of whatever kind. His authority accordingly superseded both the bailiffs' authority - up until then the bailiff had been in charge of the local secular finances - and also that of the diocese church accountants - *stiftskriverne* - who were responsible for all regional accounting involving church finances. The *cammererer* not only checked that the accounts were correct before money was sent to Copenhagen and statements confirming accounts were co-signed by the *stiftamtman*; the *cammererer* was also to check whether or not all the other regional financial administrators handled their tasks legally. The king's assignment of Torfæus as *cammererer* is dated 8 July 1664. A copy dated 10 July 1664 and confirmed by Torfæus with his signature as a correct copy dated 1 March 1665 is preserved in the Stavanger Archives.⁴

Looking back, one can only speculate whether the King used the ongoing administrative restructuring to give Torfæus a public office whereby he kept a position and his annual salary to avoid controversies at court. Alternatively, he might have thought that the idea of a *cammererer* was a good one, later to be introduced in every diocese. To my mind, looking back, this experiment was doomed to fail; it was impossible for one man in a sensible way to be able to communicate across wide distances with a high number of civil servants performing partly parallel tasks. A new civil servant with responsibility for *stiftamt* accounting was created in 1670 for each of the four Norwegian *stiftamts*, but these civil servants were given more precise tasks than had been the case with the *cammererer* experiment.⁵

The failure of this public function assigned to Torfæus was actually predicted in a letter sent by Torfæus to the local governor in Stavanger County on 13 August 1664. After having notified the governor of various challenges he adds, "...And in addition are obviously to be seen in the letter of assignment even more difficulties, - among others concerning the proper way of accounting for the royal revenue and for establishing routines for dealing with all the money receipts".⁶ Not surprisingly he adds as a PS in the letter to

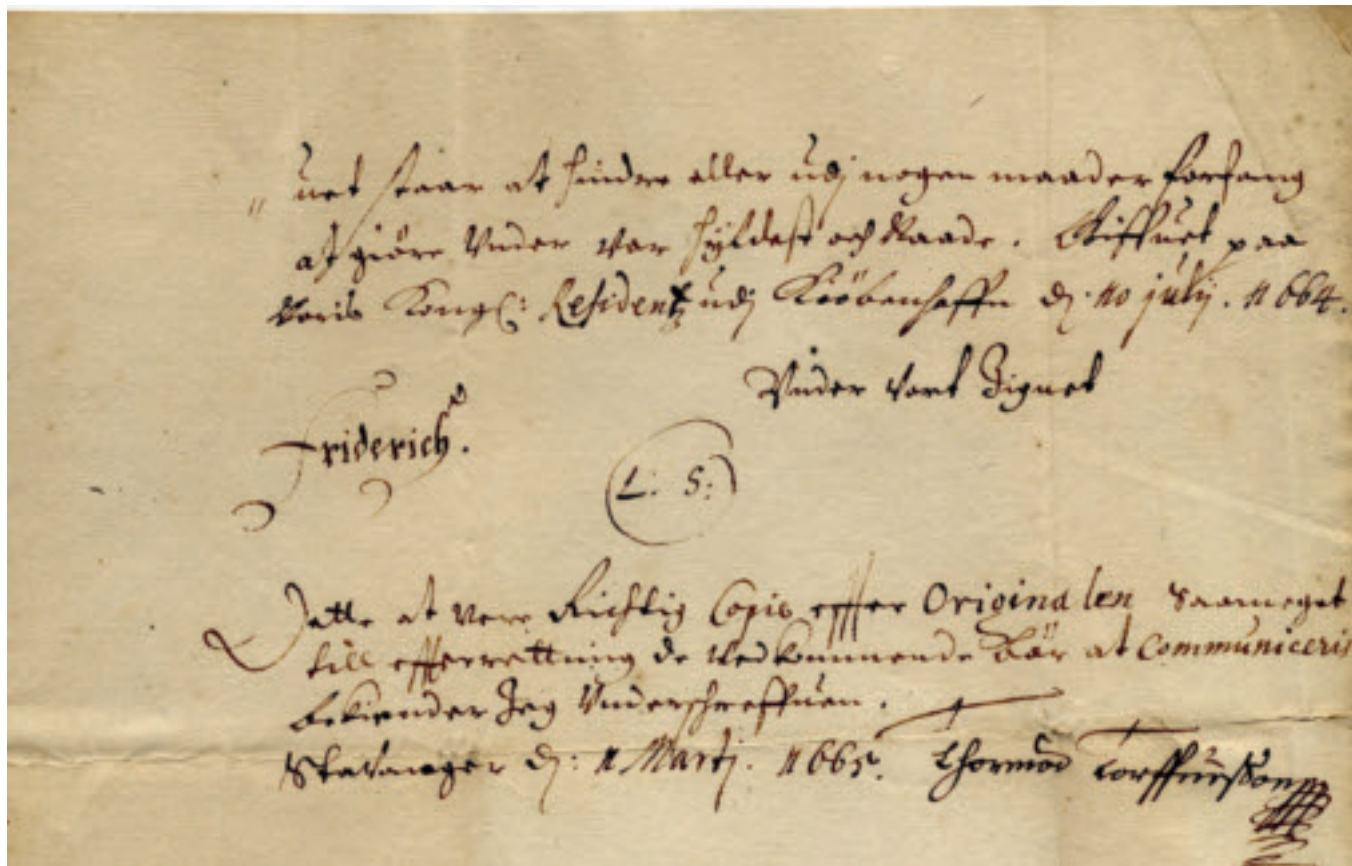
In 1648, following the death of his father Christian IV (1577-1648), Frederik III (1609-1670) came to the throne, and during his reign absolutism was introduced to Denmark. It was at this time that Torfæus lived at the Danish royal court. Here he enjoyed the trust of the king, was recognised, and paid a generous salary for transcribing old Norse sagas and other documents. Photograph of painting from free internet admission.

the governor in Stavanger, Henrich Below, a reminder that the king has exempted him from any legal and economic responsibility in connection with the performance of his duties as *cammererer* (*tagit mig fri for Caution for Stiftens intrader*) about which the audit authorities had been notified.⁷ John Erichsen is aware of the exemption and comments on this saying that he is convinced that the king did this as a special favour to Torfæus because he held him in higher royal esteem than was normal at the time.⁸ I agree with Erichsen on this interpretation, because to bestow such a favour on a civil servant is quite exceptional in seventeenth century Denmark. It should be observed that the very expensive procedures being introduced in the administration after 1661 were aimed at achieving a higher degree of public control over finances regardless of their nature; and only one person is exempted from this. Torfæus' subordinates, the church accountants, the *stiftskrivere*, as well as the bailiffs were not exempted from personal responsibility for overspending or incorrect accounts. The worst that could happen was that civil servants with insufficient royal revenues could be charged with fraud and punished. Some lost their lives on such charges. In many cases accounts from the local church accountants or bailiffs that were not approved would lead to their personal responsibility for the debt to the Crown. There are many examples of such personal economic tragedies in Rogaland in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

For us, the most remarkable story concerns Peder Lauritsen. He came to Stavanger from Bergen and was appointed diocese accountant responsible for all church revenues and spending in the whole diocese from 1664. He was the responsible accountant when Torfæus was appointed as his superior. After Torfæus received his position, Peder Lauritsen submitted his accounts to him. Tormod Torfæus' receipts for receiving the accounts from the year 1666 are preserved in the Stavanger archives.⁹ In 1667 Peder was appointed bailiff for the south of Rogaland and he still held this position on 7 November 1668, by which time Torfæus had already resigned. Peder died at the turn of the year 1669/1670 after having been ill for several months. It was then disclosed that his debt to the king from his deficit as church accountant was 2500 dalers, more than six times Torfæus' annual salary. Peder's widow according to the law was responsible for the debt of her deceased husband. No exemption was granted. Even though the case was taken to court, she was sentenced in 1674 to pay 1202 dalers to the state.¹⁰ There is a paradox here that needs to be explained; Peder Lauritsen's widow and family ended

up personally bankrupt due to strengthened audit control, but his controller, Torfæus, got off scot free.

Torfæus resigned in 1667. The *cammererer* experiment was over. This function was not revived in the course of later developments of the Danish-Norwegian bureaucracy. The personal position bestowed upon Torfæus was about to end anyhow, if not for any other reason than that in late 1665 Torfæus moved to his wife's farm at Karmøy in Rogaland. This was a location

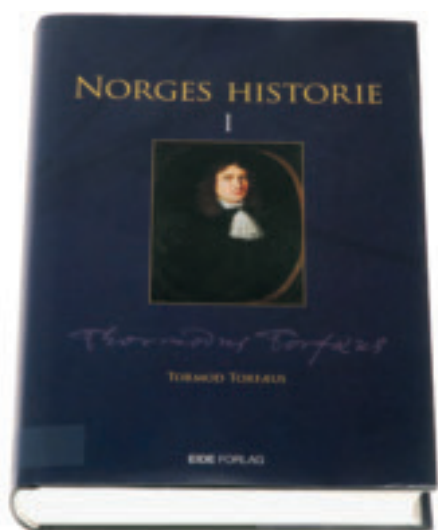


from which it was not easy to perform important governmental tasks covering most of south and south-west Norway.

The experienced and learned young man of only 31 years that arrived in Karmøy in 1665 came to be a conspicuous personality in his new home parish. He was still entrusted with tasks as a historian and saga translator and published widely from 1667 onwards. Although he became ill in 1706, he

This document confirms that on 1 March 1665 Torfæus was appointed as *cammererer* by Frederik III, see footnote 4.

Photography: Statsarkivet i Stavanger.

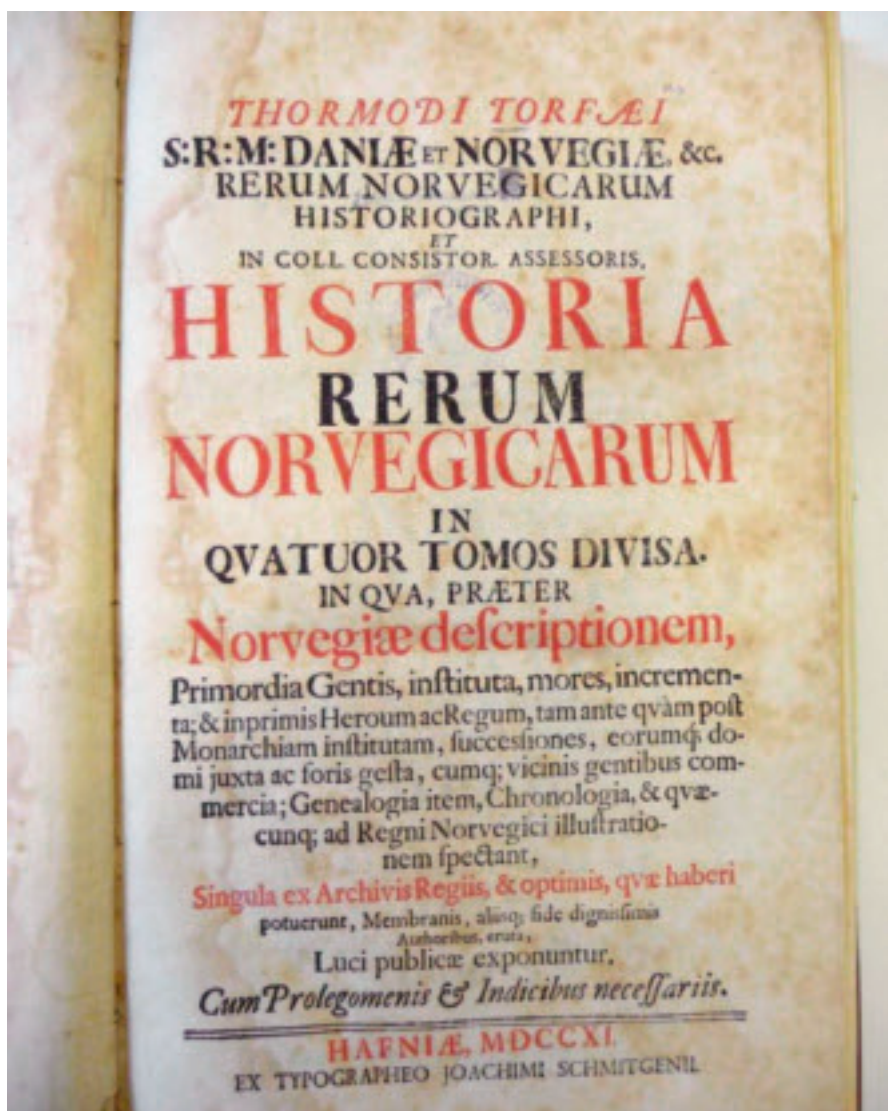


In 1704 Frederik IV visited the Stangeland farm at Karmøy. During this visit Torfæus showed the king a manuscript of his history of Norway. Torfæus' comprehensive history of Norway was first published in Latin in 1711. In 2008 the first three volumes of *Historiae rerum Norvegicarum* were translated into Norwegian and published.

Photography: The Norwegian National Library and MUST / Museum Stavanger

continued his work, albeit to a lesser degree until the publication of his *Historia rerum Norvegicarum* in 1711.

Torfæus is one of the most prolific scholars, historians and writers that we have had in Norway. Even taking into account that he had translators as assistants during most of these years, his scientific production was at times performed under extremely difficult circumstances.



Torfæus was connected to a great number of persons within the establishment, not only at the court in Copenhagen, but even more within the regional establishment in Rogaland from the 1660s onwards. The letter to the governor in Stavanger from 1664 is of a more personal kind than any other letter preserved in the Governor's archives that I know of. Most of these letters are very formal, containing long and rather superficial paragraphs, and concluding with tedious sentences of submissiveness, loyalty and obedience: Torfæus in his letter dated 13 August 1664 adds a personal touch, extending his warmest regards and wishes to the governor Henrich Below, his wife and his noble children on behalf of himself and his beloved – he was betrothed to Anna Hansdatter – at the Stangeland farm at Karmøy.¹¹

Torfæus married Anna Hansdatter on 9 July 1665. She was born in 1620 and died in 1695. Torfæus remarried in 1709 to Anna Hansdatter Gammel who was born in 1660 and died in 1723. We shall look a little more closely into his family connections and his social relations in Rogaland and remember that he stayed here from 1665 until his death in 1719, i.e. 54 years.

John Erichsen reflected on the time when Torfæus first met Anna Hansdatter. He refers to stories dating their first meeting to 1658-1659, but after interpreting additional information from Torfæus' own letters concludes that it must have been in connection with his travels in 1665 as a *cammererer* that Torfæus first met Anna at her farm Stangeland. At that time she was a widow. Torfæus had however visited Stangeland in the late 1650s and most certainly met with Anna and her then husband, Ivar Nilsen Lem, the bailiff for the Utstein Monastery property. Lem died in 1664, and as we have seen Torfæus refers to Anna as his beloved in early August that year in spite of the public betrothal not taking place until 12 February 1665, the ceremony being conducted by the parish pastor at Avaldsnes church, Christen Bentsen Schaaning.¹²

Anna's first husband was the pastor and lector in theology at the Stavanger cathedral, Laurits Jonsen. After his death she married Ivar Nilsen Lem who was bailiff for the Utstein property during the years 1652-1657. Ivar Lem was also the son of one of the richest property owners in Rogaland during the early 1600s, Nils Pedersen Lem residing in Bergen. Most of the men the king appointed as governors for Norwegian counties or property owned by the king were Danish noblemen residing in Denmark. Ivar Lem was the bailiff for



The Stavanger merchant and ship owner Peder Valentin Rosenkilde (1772-1836) was a descendant of Børge Christoffersen, a farmer who made his fortune during the 1600s from the timber trade at Aubø in Ryfylke. This portrait can be seen at the "Rosenkildehus", it was built in Stavanger's town centre in 1812 by P.V. Rosenkilde. Today the building is owned by the Stavanger region's Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
Photography: Anders Hildeng Næss

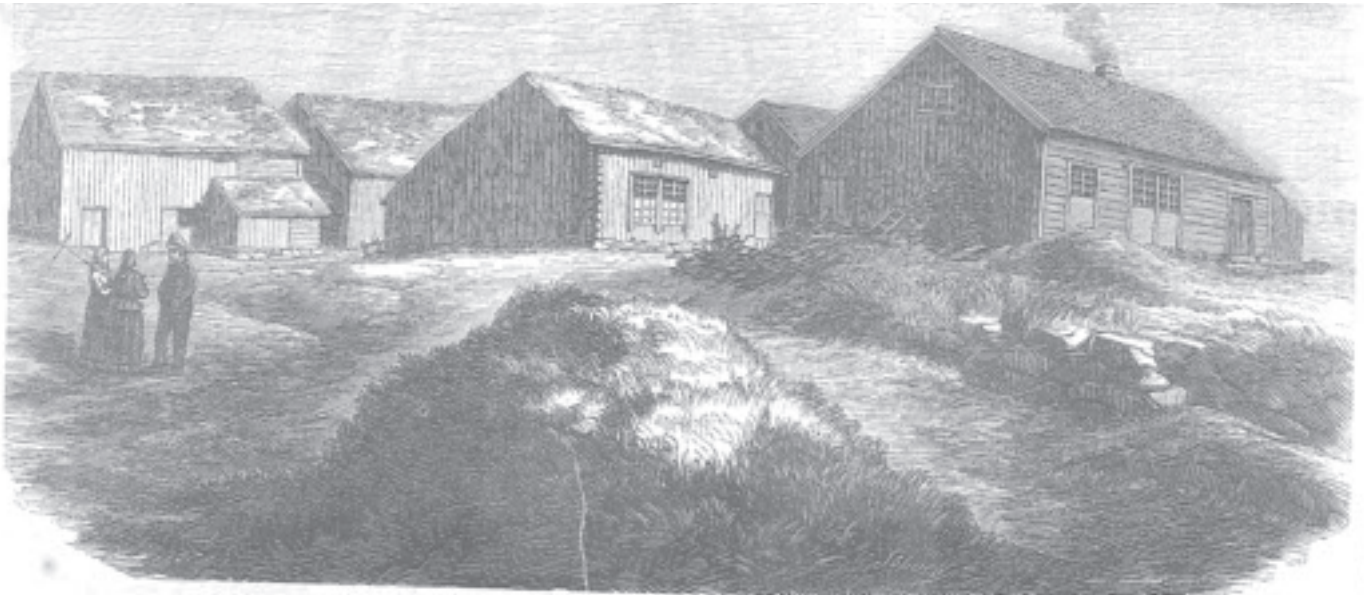
the Utstein governor, Christoffer Lindenov.¹³ Anna and Ivar had two children, and their daughter Mette Ivarsdatter married two parish pastors in Jæren in succession and later married the postmaster in Stavanger, Laurits Friis. Ivar also had a son, Nils Ivarsen Lem. Anna was the daughter of a rich farmer from the parish of Feda in Agder County, Hans Jensen, and his wife Susanna Danielsdatter. There were close connections between Rogaland and Agder at this time. One of the richest farmers in Ryfylke, Børge Kristoffersen in Sjernarøy, came from Feda together with his brother, Hans Kristoffersen. Børge built a fortune on the timber trade from Rogaland to the European continent and to the British Isles. His fortune laid the basis for the wealth and position of the Valentinsen dynasty in Stavanger city for almost two centuries. The family house is at present the headquarters of the Stavanger Chamber of Commerce. Ivar Lem died in 1664. It is unlikely that Torfæus can refer to Anna Hansdatter as his fiancée in August that same year unless they had known each other for some time. The reason why Anna, who had stayed in Stavanger with her first husband, moved to Karmøy was that Ivar Nilsen traded this farm from the king in 1655. When Torfæus married Anna he also married into one of the largest farms on Karmøy, to which he was given full ownership after Anna died in 1695.

The social standing of Torfæus' second wife, Anna Hansdatter Gammel, should not be overlooked. She was the daughter of a Stavanger city merchant and councillor, Hans Pedersen and his wife Maren Clausdatter. They both died in 1678.¹⁴ Maren's sister Abigael Hansdatter was married to Kristen Kristensen Trane, a rich merchant and son of a former bailiff at the Utstein monastery. Abigael later married Christian Gram who was the president, or head of the city council of Stavanger from the 1660s.

Torfæus' marriages illustrate that he moved in the circles of noblemen, governors, bailiffs, judges, mayors, parish pastors, bishops, merchants and ship owners, that is to say the whole regional establishment throughout his whole life. He does not appear to have ever been welcomed to the court of the new king Christian V (1670-1699), but by marrying a rich widow he secured the necessary resources and stability to continue working as a dedicated historian. He certainly seemed to feel at ease with the position and the working, social and environmental conditions he had obtained. Even though he was not bestowed with a public title again until 1682 he must have continued in a favourable position with the new king; when he was charged

with murder after a fight in an inn in 1672, he was pardoned and his punishment was reduced to heavy fines.

The position Torfæus held in Rogaland was to be fully recognized when the next king, Fredrik IV (the third Torfæus had served) visited him at Stangeland farm while travelling through Norway in 1704. During this visit Torfæus presented the king with the draft of his comprehensive history of Norway. It is said that in order to honour the King, Torfæus had a red carpet placed over



the ground, and it stretched from the pier where the king's ship landed up to Torfæus' residence.¹⁵

Life at Stangeland farm was not a quiet one; the farm was an economic entity, a business, relating to the sale of farm products and fisheries. Besides this, Torfæus bought and sold properties, both locally and in the city of Stavanger. He inherited city sites and houses with his first wife. In 1673 Torfæus loaned 30 dalers to a citizen in Kopervik on Karmøy.¹⁶ In 1675 he sold an old city property dating back to the early 1600s, then the regional judge's city residence, a property that Anna's first husband had bought and where Anna previously had lived.¹⁷ In 1678 Torfæus charged the city judge, Kristen Andersen, for not having paid rent for the years he had lived in Torfæus'

This drawing is taken from the "Skillings-Magazin" dated 16 May 1867. The house shown in the middle dates back to the 1600s and is presumed to have been the dwelling of Tormod Torfæus.

Photography: University of Agder

house in Stavanger.¹⁸ In 1690 the county governor sold three sites to Torfæus that formerly had belonged to the city president Christian Gram.¹⁹ Two of them he sold the following year to Johan Prahl, one of the richest merchants and shipowners in Stavanger.²⁰ The third site Torfæus sold in 1702 to a farmer, Jens Tasta.²¹ In 1691 the customs officer in Stavanger, Eskild Bjerjing mortgaged the farm Hodnefjeld on Mosterøy to Torfæus.²²

Anna Hansdatter Gammel must have been a strong and conspicuous woman among her contemporaries. She was older than Torfæus, and had lived an eventful life with her two former husbands mingling in the upper class of society in the city and county. The rank of women was much higher in the seventeenth century than we are accustomed to think. At this time in Rogaland about 10 percent of the farm owners and heads of farm households were women.²³ And some of the women were very visible amongst their contemporary powerful men; several of the merchants running vast multi-commercial enterprises were women. One person most active in court cases both at parish level as well as conducting cases in the regional court of appeal was a woman.²⁴ There are multiple examples on the position of and recognition of women as very independent and respected members of society. An important reason is that widows were allowed to continue their husband's business regardless of it being private or public. In the years 1634-1635 Rogaland had a female governor, Margretha von der Lyhe, the widow of the former governor, the Danish nobleman Jørgen Brochenhuus.²⁶

This was a time when several women at the bottom of the social ladder were burnt to death as witches. But moreover, from the Middle Ages until changes took place in Norwegian law in 1687, women held an equal position with men on juries. Persons of the same sex and rank as persons suspected of having committed crimes were appointed to swear on the Bible on their guilt or innocence, a position women did not regain until the twentieth century.²⁷ It is highly probable that both Anna and Tormod had regular connections with several of the prominent women in Rogaland.

We know that Torfæus throughout his life had a profound interest in lawmaking and court procedure, particularly during the court case for murder where he was personally at risk of being sentenced to death and executed.²⁸ His learning and his critical scientific attitudes to the interpretation of sources, and his serious endeavours as a historian to discern true history from oral

histories, provided him with a modern methodological approach that stood him in good stead when he was himself involved in cases at court. Some of them were civil cases, such as the one where Torfæus argued at the city court in Stavanger for a distant relative's right to inheritance, a case that dragged on for two years, 1682 – 1684.²⁹ In another civil case in 1677 Torfæus claimed the rent for a church chair in Stavanger cathedral that a citizen had rented from Ivar Lem in 1655, but had not paid the rent for in 22 years.³⁰ In 1699 Torfæus charged a widow in Kopervik for having built houses close to the sea on a site that belonged to him, and having done so she had not paid rent to Torfæus for the use of the site. The court decided that the house should belong to Torfæus.³¹

The longest conflict with a neighbour started in the 1650s when Ivar Lem and Anna Hansdatter first tried to remove David Davidsen from the outskirts of their farm, the place where he ran his trading and fisheries business. Torfæus finally received a letter from king Fredrik III in 1668 to expel Davidsen.³² During all this time Davidsen was involved in more conflicts at court than presumably any other person, so this cannot be taken as an example to show that Torfæus was seeking out local conflicts; in this case he probably ended a story that the whole local community was happy to see terminated.

In 1680 a trial on witchcraft started at the local regional court at Karmøy, the so-called *fjerdingsting* for Karmsund. A woman, Turid Litlasund, charged Eilert Tollefsen for smearing her good name with stories, whereby he had spread rumours that she was a witch. During the hearings of witnesses, however several stories were told sustaining suspicions and rumours about Turid herself. The tables were turned; Turid became the target of accusations. In spite of the suspicions being rather vague, the stories about Turid alleged that she had caused illness and cast evil on members of the local community. The public prosecutor, Mr. Peder Lauritsen, as well as Eilert Tollefsen, demanded Turid be sentenced to death. The court case lasted for months and in July 1681 Torfæus was appointed defence council for Turid by the *amtman*, the regional governor. The arguments used by Torfæus in this court case are among the most rational ones that had up until then been spoken in favour of any accused witch. Torfæus referred to the law and he demanded that accusations should pertain to observable facts, which was not to be seen in the case the prosecution had brought against Turid. He concluded that the whole case was based on rumours that had no value at all

as proof. He demanded Turid to be acquitted. The regional judge, Bartholomeus Haagensen, residing in Stavanger, found no evidence to have been forthcoming against Turid. She was accordingly acquitted and the accusers were sentenced to cover all costs involved.³³

From an undated letter from these years we find the signatures of Torfæus, the county judge, the bailiffs and all the regional judges, an additional proof that even without having a formal function in the regional bureaucracy, Torfæus sided with the whole establishment and the local elite in public matters.³⁴

Historically, it is noteworthy that the laws against witchcraft in Norway were introduced in 1584 by king Fredrik II. This was a response to a requirement for a law by which witches could be sentenced to death, and was initiated by the Stavanger diocese Lutheran bishop Jørgen Eriksson.³⁵ The bishop knew the king personally and approached him directly asking for a law against witchcraft. The witch persecution during the following decades resulted in approximately 300 men and women being executed for witchcraft in Norway. Ninety-seven years later Tormod Torfæus stands up in the same county, being acquainted with the king, the court and the administrative establishment, and speaks against the crime of witchcraft as an impossible act that could not be committed. This is surely a time of change and Torfæus stood out as one of the personalities who contributed to making those changes in mentality and in public opinion happen.

Tormod Torfæus was a handsome man to judge by the contemporary portraits; some of the literature describes him as a womaniser, outstanding in the art of love and with presumed illegitimate children not known to posterity.³⁶ His experience at the court at the time, where he is said to have been extremely well appreciated by the girls surrounding him most certainly did not make him a adherent of chastity. Torfæus would have been an exception to his sex not to indulge in love affairs. Even later in life on Karmøy, on his travels, at parties and celebrations of various kinds, and being married to a much older wife, his inclinations would have been unnatural by the standards of his own environment should he not have had an active, may be even flourishing sex life. Be that as it may; Torfæus was raised in an environment filled with royal fashion. He was an ambitious man devoted to scholarly work whereby he made the most out of his special skills as a philologist. He also

At a city court meeting in Stavanger on 5 December 1682 the appointment of Tormod Torfæus as royal historian was publicly announced. Seen here on the same page is the announcement bestowing the same rank on Torfæus as that held by professors at the University in Copenhagen.

Court reference: Rådstuerettsprotokoll 1680-1683, page 69. Photography: Statsarkivet i Stavanger

sought the comfort that accompanied being well off, having public income and other revenue that made it possible to live a life filled with comfort on Karmøy, a life that to the highest possible degree could compare with the life he was brought up to appreciate and enjoy in Copenhagen.

As historians we know how difficult it is to reconstruct daily life on a personal level from the past, particularly since most surviving archival materials are public sources often created by governmental officials. But in the case of Torfæus we can find a few traces that make him stand out as a man of fashion who obviously wanted his contemporaries to realize that he stood above most of the more primitive local customs. Furthermore, that he surrounded himself as best as he could with continental fashion, this probably having been appreciated by his peers and his colleagues among the elite, many who like himself had emigrated from Denmark to Norway.

Not until 1682 did Torfæus acquire a new public position. On 23 September 1682 King Christian V called on him again to be the royal historian, paid by the royal purse. His title was Royal Historiographer and his salary was 600 daler a year. Torfæus had his new appointment publicly announced at the city court in Stavanger on 5 December 1682.³⁷ A new era then began for Torfæus, enabling him to dedicate himself even more than before to his historic research, his translations of saga texts and his *History of Norway*. He was well off financially and socially, as we have seen. He tried to uphold the ways and standards of culture and fashion that were expected of a man brought up at the royal court. We have bits and pieces of local archival material to exemplify this. At his home Stangeland we know that Torfæus and Anna had a vast living space, with a farm that consisted of many houses with multiple functions. A retrospective drawing of this impressive residence was made in 1866 and is presumed to depict the Stangeland farmhouses dating back to the time when Torfæus lived there.³⁸ In their dwelling they had a marvellously decorated iron stove. They also had a huge clock standing on the floor in their living room, a clock that was rather unusual at the time, being very expensive and made in England.³⁹ An old bed kept at the museum at Karmøy is presumed to have belonged to Torfæus.⁴⁰

In accordance with the customs of the time, rich people donated gifts to embellish and decorate the interior of local churches and so did Anna Hansdatter and Tormod Torfæus along with many of their prominent

contemporaries.⁴¹ Three examples clearly show Torfæus as a man of fashion.

The 1600s were not a time for soberness; people drank and quarrelled, most often regardless of social standing, and the clergy were often no more sober than the members of their congregations. In 1634 the king had ordered the judges not to bring liquor to the courtrooms. Liquor and beer were drunk in large quantities by farmers, clergymen and public servants. It is therefore quite extraordinary to find that Torfæus was the first person known to drink



This bed can be seen at the Karmsund Folkemuseum in Haugesund, according to local tradition it may have been Torfæus' bed at the Stangeland farm.

Photo: Karmsund folkemuseum MNB-F.011166.

wine. He complains in a letter from 1690 of a headache after having drunk wine at Nedstrand at a party where presumably the customs officer and the bailiff were present; when the bailiff died a few years later one of the most valuable artefacts left by him was an apparatus used for distilling alcohol.⁴² But even though Torfæus consumed alcohol in considerable quantities during his lifetime, he protested when the vicar in Avaldsnes parish conducted his Sunday service drunk; Torfæus ridiculed him for drinking habits that were not fitting for a vicar and he even tried to have him removed from the parish.⁴³

According to fashion, a necessary part of dressing at court and among the establishment in European

countries at the time was the wig. Torfæus would have used a wig at the very least when he appeared publicly, and in his case we know that he did.

In 1693 a court case at the Stavanger city court was conducted solely involving Torfæus' purchase of a new wig. On Torfæus' authority a certain Klaus Jensen ordered a wig to be delivered by the city surgeon, and he paid three dalers when he submitted the order. Torfæus, however, when receiving the wig, refused to accept it, not finding it to his taste. Klaus Jensen demanded that the city judge kept the wig in order to have the value of it assessed. Then, at a later court meeting, Klaus was sentenced to pay the remaining amount to the surgeon because Klaus was the person who had ordered the wig. Klaus was told that he could charge Torfæus in a new court case to be refunded and paid back the full amount of 5 dalers. The wig was never heard about again. Neither do we know if Klaus got back his money.⁴⁴



Whilst he lived at the Stangeland farm, Torfæus became acquainted with most of the prominent people in Rogaland. When he referred to drinking wine at a party in Nedstrand it is most likely that the Nedstrand customs officer, Erik Jørgensen, was amongst the guests. This epitaph depicting Jørgensen and his family can still be seen in the parish church in Nedstrand.

Photograph: Terje Tveit, Arkeologisk Museum i Stavanger.

In 1711 the king levied an extraordinary tax to be paid by persons wearing wigs. On Karmøy, Torfæus and his wife, the second Anna Hansdatter, paid this tax.⁴⁵

In another court case, Torfæus is seen to have lived up to the most modern trends in attire, not only the case of Torfæus' wig took place in 1693. Earlier the same year, his stepson – Laurits Friis – married to Ivar Lem's daughter Mette Ivarsdatter – came into court representing Torfæus. He made complaints about two dressing gowns (slåbrokker, schlafrocks) and one travel robe (reisekjole) that were missing. The circumstances under which the clothes disappeared were as follows: Torfæus was to be rowed home from Stavanger to Karmøy. In the evening he and his boatmen had to stay overnight at the Tunge farm in Randaberg in order to start to cross the wide Boknafjord the following morning. Some of the goods – at least one dressing gown - were stored in the Tunge farm's wooden waterside warehouse. One of the dressing gowns was not to be found the next morning. Several witnesses were heard in this case and several statements were signed in court.⁴⁶ We do not know how this case ended. The information of interest to posterity is Torfæus' way of life i.e. living up to the very top level of contemporary fashion. Most people did not travel with clothes and additional dressing gowns to be put on top of their night gowns in the morning. The only gentleman in the 1600s that is known to have been involved in court cases that involved wigs and dressing gowns was Tormod Torfæus. I do not think these cases are pure coincidence.

It must be added though, that not only in his daily habits was Torfæus a man trying to live up to the modernity of his times. Also as a farmer it seems that Torfæus tried to use modern agricultural equipment, for instance using modern ploughs to cultivate his farm⁴⁷

The prominent people of the day kept their position in society also after they died by being buried inside the church, and this is where Anna Hansdatter Gammel and later Tormod Torfæus were buried.⁴⁸

So summing up: Torfæus reveals himself for us, the historians of the twenty-first century, as a seventeenth century man of the world, a productive scholar, a historian and a philologist, a civil servant of profound experience, a

defence lawyer and a secular rationalist in the legal profession, a man visible among his contemporaries as a man bringing habits and fashion from the capital's court in Copenhagen to Karmøy. He undoubtedly was a great man of great accomplishments in his own lifetime and for posterity.



Prior to moving to the Stangeland farm on Karmøy, Torfæus would have become very familiar with the customs and manners practised at the royal court in Copenhagen. His use of a wig and dressing gown demonstrates that he was a man of fashion. The gouache shown here "An audience while the wig is being powdered" by Pehr Nordquist (1772-1805) belongs to the Swedish National Museum. Photo: Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

Notes

- [1] John Erichsen, Thormod Torfesens Levnetsbeskrivelse, Copenhagen 1788.
- [2] Samlinger til Stavangers historie vol. 2, p. 253.
- [3] Frode Fyllingsnes, Karmøys historie fra Reformasjonen til 1800, 2004.
- [4] Lensarkivet, box 12, file 7, letter 11, Statsarkivet i Stavanger.
- [5] Hans Eyvind Næss, Hekseprosessen mot Turid Litlasund, I Den norske histories fader, Karmøy 2002, p. 57.
- [6] Lensarkivet box 52, Statsarkivet i Stavanger.
- [7] Ibidem
- [8] Erichsen 1788, p. 29.
- [9] Lensarkivet box 53; kvittering for mottakelse av regnskaper fra Tormod Torfæus til Peder Lauritsen, Statsarkivet i Stavanger.
- [10] Fogder og sorenskrivere i Stavanger len og amt, tidsrommet 1500-1700, Ætt og Heim 1981, p. 136-137.
- [11] Letter, op.cit.
- [12] Erichsen 1788, p.- 30.
- [13] Tor Weidling, Klosteret som verdslig len 1537-1664, in Utstein Kloster – og Klosterøys historie (ed. Eldbjørg Haug), ed. by Stiftelsen Utstein Kloster 2005, p. 294, 311ff.
- [14] Stavanger Borgerbok 1436-1850, Stavanger 11935, p. 36f.
- [15] Fyllingsnes 2004, p. 230.
- [16] Samlinger til Stavangers historie vol. I, p. 459.
- [17] Ibidem p. 45of.
- [18] Ibidem p. 468.
- [19] Pantebok for Stavanger, vol. II, fol. 18b, Statsarkivet i Stavanger
- [20] Ibidem fol. 34a.
- [21] Pantebok for Stavanger, vol. III, fol. 93b, SAST.
- [22] Pantebok for Stavanger, fol.54, Statsarkivet i Stavanger
- [23] Hans Eyvind Næss, Jakten på det gamle bondesamfunnet, Ætt og Heim 1991 p. 67-84.
- [24] Hans Eyvind Næss, Elisabeth Mikkelsdatter og Elisabeth Sørensdatter – to kvinnelige bedriftsledere i Stavanger anno 1700, i Ætt og Heim 1988, p. 9-18.
- [25] En dansk kvinne som prosessfullmektig på norske ting; Sofie Jensdatter 1599-1678, i Ætt og Heim 2001, p. 133-166.
- [26] Ibidem p. 161.
- [27] Hans Eyvind Næss, Mededsinstituttet, in Norsk historisk tidsskrift. 2/1991, p. 179-201.
- [28] Torggrim Titlestad, Tormod Torfæus in Norsk Biografisk Leksikon.
- [29] Samlinger til Stavangers historie vol. I, p. 509 and vol. II, p. 428f.
- [30] Samlinger til Stavangers historie vol. I, p. 435.
- [31] Fyllingsnes 2004, p. 101.
- [32] Ibidem p. 105f.
- [33] Næss 2002, p. 50-61, Fyllingsnes 2004, p. 222ff.
- [34] Næss 2002, p. 59f.
- [35] Hans Eyvind Næss, Trolldomsprosessene i Norge på 1500-1600-tallet, Oslo 1981, p. 78-81.
- [36] Torggrim Titlestad, Tormod Torfæus-biografisk portrett, i Tormod Torfæus, Ei innføring, Stavanger 2001, p. 9ff.
- [37] Samlinger til Stavangers historie vol. I, p. 509.
- [38] Fyllingsnes 2004, p. 283.
- [39] Ibidem p. 35f.
- [40] Ibidem p. 276.
- [41] Ibidem p. 145f.

[42] Ibidem p. 197 and Hans Eyvind Næss; Gards og ættesoge for Tysvær, vol. 7, 2001, p. 249

[43] Fyllingsnes 2004, p. 147.

[44] Samlinger til Stavangers historie vol. III, p.183f.

[45] Fyllingsnes 2004, p. 454.

[46] Samlinger til Stavangers historie vol. II, p. 476f.

[47] Fyllingsnes 2004, p. 38.

[48] Ibidem p. 158, 410.

SAMMENDRAG

Artikkelen ble opprinnelig skrevet som et foredrag til et seminar med tittel ”In the Footsteps of a Pioneer – The European Historian Tormod Torfæus”. Seminaret ble holdt på Leirubakki på Island i 2009. Foredragene ble ikke publisert. Dette foredraget er skrevet om og presenteres som artikkel for første gang i Museum Stavangers årbok. Artikkelen er særlig viet Torfæus’ arbeid og liv mens han bodde i Rogaland.

Torfæus hadde skiftende relasjoner til sentraladministrasjonen og hoffet i København. Trolig var han både elsket og foraktet. Selv om han i perioder av sitt liv ble lønnet som sagaoversetter og kongelig historiograf, måtte han også utføre oppgaver innenfor den regionale forvaltning. Det ble opprettet en egen stilling for Torfæus som ”cammerer”. Som cammerer ble Torfæus betrodd ansvaret for kontroll med økonomiforvaltningen til de statlige bestillings- og embetsmenn i Stavanger stift. Oppgaven var meget vanskelig og viste seg umulig å gjennomføre på en tilfredsstillende måte. Om eksperimentet var blitt vellykket, ville dette trolig ha ført til endringer i oppgavefordelingen innenfor det regionale forvaltningsapparatet på landsbasis. Men i stedet ble dette et eksperiment som ikke hadde fremtiden for seg.

Artikkelen kaster lys over den fremtredende rolle Torfæus hadde i Rogaland både som lærd person, en viktig tjenestemann, en modig entreprenør og en svært synlig personlighet i sin egen samtid. Han opptrådte både i rollen som en moderne og uredde forsvarsadvokat i trolldomsprosessen mot Turid Litlasund og som en ”man of fashion” som bragte med seg moter og livsførsel fra hofflivet i København. Og han var sågar vert for kong Fredrik IV under kongens reise til Norge i 1704.