

On the origins of *Pórðar saga kakala*

A thesis submitted to fulfil the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Icelandic

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Declaration

I, Daniel Martin White, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the origins of *Pórðar saga kakala*. Chapter 1 reviews scholarship on the lost original version of *Pórðar saga kakala* (**Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*). By testing previous arguments and suppositions, it concludes that: **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was a “biography” of the adult life (c. 1233-56) of Þórður *kakali* Sighvatsson (c. 1210-56); it was written during the 1270s in the Western Quarter of Iceland; and Svarthöfði Dufgusson (c. 1218-c. 86) may have been its author. It also identifies a gap in previous research of *Pórðar saga kakala*’s earliest history: there has been no satisfactory attempt to establish its contemporary significance. The thesis attempts to remedy this over the following two chapters. In chapter 2, a literary-analytic approach is applied to **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. This literary analysis takes into account the formal elements of the extant text and reconstructed lost original, as well as what we know about the worldview of the audience. Chapter 2 constitutes the point of departure for chapter 3: an historical analysis of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. After theorising about the *telos* of the biographical contemporary saga subgenre in general, **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* is turned to in particular by considering the product of the literary analysis in chapter 2 within a 1270s political context. The conclusion drawn is that the saga can sensibly be considered as a work of propaganda to support Hrafn Oddsson in his power struggle with Þorvarður Þórarinnsson

during the period 1273-9. Chapter 3 then evaluates the ways in which *Pórðar saga kakala* concords with what we know and can infer about Hrafn's political stances to appraise and bolster this interpretation of the text.

Impact statement

In general terms, this thesis is the first ever systematic and lengthy study of *Pórðar saga kakala*. Scholars, students, and others interested in this saga will find it useful. The specific utility of the thesis is its comprehensive perspective on *Pórðar saga kakala*'s origins. This is of particular worth to historians seeking to evaluate and cite the text as a primary source. It also provides a basis for future debate on the literary dimension of the ostensibly historical *Pórðar saga kakala*. This is important as the contemporary sagas have only recently begun to be approached from an aesthetic, rather than merely historiographic, perspective.

Beyond the topic-centric products underscored above, the thesis makes further, and broader, significant and original contributions to research.

Methodologically, the thesis deploys and demonstrates the efficacy of several novel approaches, such as stylometry. Still further, the thesis pragmatically combines tried and tested methods in revivifying and transdisciplinarily integrative ways. For instance, the synthesis of formalist and new historicist approaches in chapter 2 – based on a pragmatic dismissal of the theoretical conflict of the two – accords with and complements the understanding of human cognition presented by scientific disciplines.

At a disciplinary level, this thesis works to rehabilitate the aims of traditional Philology, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the stemmatic method in textual criticism, as well as the methodological and theoretical contributions of New Philology to the study of Old Icelandic texts. This kind of “metaxic” Philology is of significance going forward due to its concordance with an ongoing turn in Literary Studies: scholars of pre-Modern literature are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of integrating lost texts into literary history.

The thesis’ research and analysis will be circulated via a number of peer-reviewed articles. Additionally, alongside the author’s recent publication of an edition and translation of *Pórðar saga kakala*, the thesis is another step towards the aim of producing the first academically rigorous biography of Pórður *kakali* Sighvatsson.

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In terms of reproduced content, I need to thank two individuals for their gracious permission to reproduce material from their works in the section on stylometric localisation in chapter 1 of this thesis. The first is Tam Blaxter for providing me with a high-resolution image of the consensus tree from her paper on the stylistic geography of the *Íslendingasögur*. Because of this, I

was able to include this for illustrative purposes and commentary. The second is Matthew Jockers, whose publisher kindly provided me with a free license to incorporate a modified version of Jockers' authorship attribution R code.¹

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A note on spelling

The medieval sagas are not written in a dead language. Even today – centuries on – Icelanders are able to read these texts with relative ease. In this thesis, I have chosen to follow modern Icelandic spelling conventions. I have modified all direct quotations which adhere to other orthographies. This is an unusual choice as the majority of scholars of medieval Iceland use standardised Old Norse spelling. My justification for this is twofold. Firstly, as Icelandic continues to be spoken despite the creeping influence of English in Iceland, use of modern Icelandic orthography prevents the language of the sagas from being relegated prematurely to history. Secondly, standardised Old Norse is a scholarly construct, and there was no such regularity in spelling conventions during the medieval period. Where non-Icelanders are mentioned, I adhere either to English orthography or that used by the modern occupants of their country.

Introduction

There was a man named Þórður, called *kakali*², the son of Sighvatur, the son of Sturla Þórðarson of Hvammur. Around 750 years ago, an anonymous author penned a ‘mikil saga frá Þórði’ (‘great saga about Þórður’). Part of that text survives today as *Þórðar saga kakala*.³

This thesis does not attempt to retell Þórður *kakali*’s biography from *Þórðar saga kakala* and other primary sources. Instead, it focuses on the ‘mikil saga’ (**Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*) in an attempt to provide a holistic perspective on *Þórðar saga kakala*’s origins.

This introduction opens with an overview of the thesis’ historical background before transitioning into a summary of Þórður *kakali* Sighvatsson’s life. Afterwards, *Þórðar saga kakala* is situated within medieval Iceland’s literary corpus and its contents and transmission history are then laid out. Following this contextualising information comes a problem statement and an outline of the present thesis, including a discussion of

² This nickname (if *kakali* is taken to mean stutterer), as well as a passage in *Þórðar saga kakala* that discuss his laboured speech, would appear to suggest that Þórður had a stutter. However, it is worth noting that some do not accept defining *kakali* as stutterer. For example, Elizabeth Ashman-Rowe (‘*Resen’s annal* and Sturla Þórðarson’ in Elizabeth Ashman-Rowe (ed. & trans.) *The medieval annals of Iceland: A first English translation* 2 vols. (2007 draft), 22 pp., pp. 10, 12 & 15) is of the opinion that the nickname means ‘claypot’, presumably based on the definition given by Richard Cleasby & Guðbrandur Vigfússon (*An Icelandic-English dictionary* (Oxford, 1874), p. 329).

³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 739; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 317.

methodological and theoretical approaches, which concludes this introduction.

I.1 – Historical background, c. 1220-80

This thesis' historical background is to be located during the Age of the Sturlungar (*Sturlungaöld*, c. 1220-64) and in the first couple of decades of Norwegian kingship (1264-80) which followed it. The Age of the Sturlungar was a period of near-continual low-intensity conflict, during which a small number of chieftains struggled against each other to hoard as many chieftaincies as possible, to expand their territory, and to subjugate entire domains belonging to their peers. It saw the ultimate demise of the independent Icelandic Commonwealth with the establishment of Norwegian kingship over all Iceland in 1262-4.⁴ It is around the middle of the Age of the Sturlungar, specifically the years 1242-50, that the most climactic episodes in Þórður kakalí's biography took place.

The period 1264-80 immediately following the Age of the Sturlungar was critical in the entrenchment of Norwegian kingship over Iceland. Two sets of sweeping constitutional reforms were introduced, and Iceland saw the recommencement of the bitter controversy over church-estate ownership. The conclusion of the latter struggle would have consequences for property holding in Iceland far into Modernity. It is during this formative period in post-Commonwealth Icelandic history, particularly during the 1270s, which

⁴ Technically the Commonwealth's constitution continued to exist in near-complete form until 1271 when the *Járnsíða* lawcode arrived in Iceland.

provides the historical context for the writing of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* (the dating of which is discussed at further length in chapter 1).

I.1.1 – The Age of the Sturlungar, c.1220-64

The Age of the Sturlungar is often called a period of ‘civil war’, but this is misleading.⁵ To the English speaker, the term ‘civil war’ strongly evokes images of profound internal strife and suffering of the order described in *Völuspá*:

Bræður munu berjast / og að bönum verðast, / munu systrungar
/ sífjum spilla; / hart er í heimi, / hórdómur mikill, / skeggjöld,
skálmöld, / skildir eru klofnar, / vindöld, vargöld, / áður veröld
steypist; / mun engi maður / öðrum þyrma.⁶

(Brothers will battle each other / and slay one another. /
Nephews will / betray their kinsmen. / It is hard on Earth – /
great whoredom, / an axe age, a sword age, / shields are
cleaved, / a wind age, a wolf age – / before the world collapses.
/ No man will / show mercy to others.)

While the primary sources (and some nationalist scholars) attempt to portray the Age of the Sturlungar as one of unbridled chaos, complete societal collapse, and rampant moral degeneracy, the reality was not as dramatic as this.⁷ Battles were not especially regular occurrences: there are only a

⁵ E.g., Guðmundur Halfdanarson, *The A to Z of Iceland* (Toronto, 2010), p. xvii; Ann-Marie Long, *Iceland's Relationship with Norway c. 870-c. 1100: Memory, History and Identity* (Leiden, 2017), p. 12; Hans Jacob Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence: Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2008), p. 43; Erika Sigurdson, *The Church in Fourteenth-Century Iceland: The Formation of an Elite Clerical Identity* (Leiden, 2016), p. 12.

⁶ Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Eddukvæði Sæmundar-Edda* (Reykjavík, 1956).

⁷ For a good example of nationalist hyperbole with respect of the Age of the Sturlungar, cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sturlungaöld. Drög um íslenska menningu á þrettánda öld* (Reykjavík, 1940) and its critique by Jesse Byock

handful to speak of during the entire period.⁸ Moreover, the number of battlefield casualties on any given side following even the most violent confrontations were two orders of magnitude smaller than the total number of combatants, due to an almost universal aversion to gratuitous or indiscriminate deployment of lethal force.⁹

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the Age of the Sturlungar was a contentious era; furthermore, some of the outbreaks of violence from the period can correctly be classified as warfare in some cases, irrespective of how much they lacked in intensity in comparison with the events of so-called civil wars taking place elsewhere in Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Four distinct though interrelated controversies are identifiable: the power struggles between Icelandic chieftains; the Icelandic Church's struggle for autonomy and influence; the Norwegian king's struggle to submit Iceland to his rule; and the struggles between the three social classes of thirteenth-century Iceland.

Let us begin by exploring the conflict between the Icelandic chieftains for national dominance, which began c. 1220. At that time, all of the

(‘The Age of the Sturlungs’ in Elisabeth Vestergaard (ed.) *Continuity and Change: Political Institutions and Literary Monuments in the Middle Ages* (Odense, 1986), pp. 27-42).

⁸ The Battle of Helgastaðir (29-30 August 1220), the Battle of Grímsey (Spring 1222), the Battle of Bær (28 April 1237), the Battle of Örylgsstaðir (21 August 1238), the Battle of Húnaflói (25 June 1244), the Battle of Haugsnes (19 April 1246), and the Battle of Pverá (19 July 1255).

⁹ Oren Falk, ‘Helgastaðir, 1220: A Battle of No Significance?’, *Journal of Medieval Military History* 13 (2015), pp. 93-138, pp. 121; Jesse Byock (‘The Age of the Sturlungs’ in Elisabeth Vestergaard (ed.) *Continuity and Change: Political Institutions and Literary Monuments in the Middle Ages* (Odense, 1986), pp. 27-42; Hugh Firth, ‘Coercion, vengeance, feud and accommodation: homicide in medieval Iceland’, *Early Medieval Europe* 20 (2012), pp. 139-75.

chieftaincies in Iceland were held by a handful of élite families. Of these protodynasties, the most active in the power struggles of the Age of the Sturlungar were the Haukdælir, the Ásbirningar (until 1246), and – unsurprisingly – the Sturlungar. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the leading individuals of this period did not belong to clearly defined kin groups due to the amount of intermarriage which took place within the upper class.

The power struggle between the Icelandic chieftains can be subdivided into three phases. Phase I (1220-37) involved a protracted period of discord and infighting among the Sturlungar. Phase II (1237-52) saw various powerful Sturlungar prosecute conflicts against the Haukdælir and/or Ásbirningar. Phase III (1252-64) brought the sequence of power struggles to a conclusion, and consisted of a complex series of clashes between, on the one hand, Icelandic subjects and retainers of the Norwegian king, and on the other, an ever-diminishing number of sovereign regional leaders and rival claimants to the chieftaincies and domains held as fiefs by those loyal to the Crown.

Next, we must consider the Icelandic Church's efforts to wrest independence and authority from the chieftains. Showdowns between lay and clerical authorities in Iceland had been taking place for a while before c. 1220, first during the episcopacy of Bishop Þorlákur *helgi* Þórhallsson of Skálholt (1178-93) and then from the commencement of Guðmundur *góði* Arason's tenure as bishop of Hólar (1203-37). The friction would also continue after the Age of the Sturlungar, ending over three decades later with total victory for the Icelandic Church in the Treaty of Avaldsnes (1297). There

were two phases to the conflict between lay and clerical authorities during the Age of the Sturlungar. Phase I (c. 1220-37) was the era of Bishop Guðmundur's later clashes with local and regional leaders – mostly from the Northern Quarter – and resultant periods spent in exile. Phase II (1237-64) saw the Norwegians appointed to the Icelandic sees at Skálholt and Hólar (i.e., Bishops Botolv, Sigvard Tettmarsson and Henrik Kårsson) attempt to promote their king's interests and bring the Icelandic Church more into line with the rest of the Archdiocese of Nidaros.

Third, let us examine the Norwegian king's mission to make Iceland part of his kingdom, which can be divided into three phases. Phase I (1220-41) consisted of the initial, groundless efforts by the rulers of Norway to bring Iceland under their rule, using Snorri Sturluson and Sturla Sighvatsson as agents. In 1220, Snorri Sturluson – a retainer of the King Hákon – returned to Iceland in the midst of the trade war between the Oddaverjar and the Norwegian merchants. While in Norway, Snorri had managed to prevent King Hákon and Earl Skúli from sending an invasion fleet to Iceland by pledging to promote the Norwegian royal cause in Iceland. However, Snorri's promises proved empty, and he did not do anything to advance the Norwegian king's cause at that time. Then in 1235 Snorri's rival, his nephew Sturla Sighvatsson – another retainer of the Norwegian king – was sent to Iceland to carry out the task Snorri had failed to accomplish. But, Sturla's mission also failed, ending with his death at Örylgsstaðir in 1238. Shortly after, Skúli – now a duke – revolted against King Hákon. Snorri soon rallied to Skúli's side and was allegedly promised the Earldom of Iceland if he brought the

country under the duke's rule. However, Skúli's rebellion was soon quashed and Snorri was assassinated on King Hákon's orders in 1241. Snorri's death as a traitor in 1241 meant his property and chieftaincies were claimed – in accordance with Norwegian law – by the king, making Hákon a key figure in Icelandic politics overnight. Phase II (1241-61) saw the continued rise of the Norwegian king as a force in Icelandic politics; Hákon acquired more chieftaincies during this period and he sent a handful of his Icelandic retainers on missions to advance his cause, notably Þórður *kakali* – to whom we shall return to soon – and Gissur Þorvaldsson – who became the Earl of Iceland and was enfeoffed with personal dominion over the Northern Quarter, the Southern Quarter, and Borgarfjörður in 1258. Three important concessions were made by the Icelanders to the Norwegian king over the course of these twenty years: in 1256 many of the householders in the Northern Quarter promised to pay him taxes, during the period 1258-9 some of the chieftains vowed fealty to the Norwegian king and joined Earl Gissur's retinue, and 1260 saw the Rangæingar/ Áverjar swear allegiance to King Hákon. During phase III (1261-4), the Icelanders, guided by King Hákon's agent, Hallvard Gullsko, and Earl Gissur, swore allegiance and agreed to pay taxes to the Norwegian king (this was Magnus Lagabøte Hákonsson from 1263-4).

Finally, there is the matter of class struggle. Viewed simplistically, thirteenth-century Icelandic society could be divided into three groups: a minute overclass comprising the chieftains and bishops, a large householding class encompassing everyone with a fixed residence, and a

similarly sizable impoverished class made up of vagrants which had grown exponentially in size as property ownership consolidated into fewer hands and ever more of the island's farmland degraded during the period up to 1200.

This is a simplistic view for several reasons. To give just one, the large middle class in this rubric contains everyone from estate owners with vast holdings to tenant farmers eking out a meagre existence. Inevitably, class struggle took place within this so-defined middle class; however, such conflict is more a perennial consequence of tenant-landlord relationships than an historical contingency, unlike the increase in vagrancy or emergence of an ever more powerful overclass, both of which caused and fueled civil strife.

During the Age of the Sturlungar, chieftains and householders formed interest groups to oppose the threat posed by vagrancy to the property and lives of the householding classes; equally, at other times, chieftains and vagrants would strike up alliances against recalcitrant or hostile members of the householding class.

I.1.2 – The establishment of a new order, 1264-80

We have seen that, during the period 1262-4, Iceland subordinated itself to the Norwegian king's rule.¹⁰ The last remaining sovereign chieftain family, the Svínfellingar, swore allegiance and granted the power of taxation to the king in 1264.

¹⁰ Gustav Storm (ed.), *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania, 1888), pp. 27 & 134-5.

Nevertheless, little change occurred in Iceland immediately following this final submission. Chieftains still controlled domains, now holding their chieftaincies and corresponding territory as fiefs from the Norwegian king. The native constitution continued to operate – albeit dysfunctionally – as it had for decades. Earl Gissur continued to wield loose authority over the country until his death on 12 January 1268.¹¹ However, the king had brought peace to the chieftains by becoming their ruler and receiving them into his retinue.¹²

Bishop Sigvard died the same year as Gissur, and Árni Þorláksson – acting bishop of Skálholt since 1267 – was consecrated to the see in 1269.¹³ Árni's formal appointment would inaugurate the second struggle between the lay and clerical élite over power and property, though admittedly tensions had apparently been growing since shortly after the end of the Commonwealth period with a renewed controversy over clerical celibacy.¹⁴

In 1270 King Magnus appointed two of his retainers – Hrafn Oddsson and Ormur Ormsson – as governors of Iceland.¹⁵ Ormur would drown that

¹¹ Gustav Storm (ed.), *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania, 1888), pp. 68 & 137.

¹² Einar Ól. Sveinsson & Jóhann S. Hannesson (trans.), *The Age of the Sturlungs: Icelandic Civilization in the Thirteenth Century* (New York, 1953), p. 40.

¹³ Gustav Storm (ed.), *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania, 1888), pp. 68 & 137-8; Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 775.

¹⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 774f.

¹⁵ Sigurður Sigurmundsson, 'Goðinn frá Valþjófsstað', *Andvari* 87 (1962), pp. 177-96, p. 191.

same year, leaving Hrafn with control of the whole country.¹⁶ Additionally, Bishop Árni saw his first success in his conflict with lay magnates, for 1270 saw the church estates of Oddi in Rangárvellir judged to be the property of the Icelandic Church.¹⁷

Sturla Þórðarson brought a new lawcode (*Járnsíða*) to Iceland in 1271.¹⁸ Though *Járnsíða* was gradually phased in in Iceland through a process of amendment and ratification lasting until 1273, the first sections which passed into law overturned the constitution of the Icelandic Commonwealth, reforming all branches of government in the country.¹⁹

In 1273, the conflict over the control of church properties went before the Norwegian king and the archbishop of Nidaros, who set down the judgment that the Icelandic Church should rightfully be in control of the estates of Oddi and Vatnsfjörður.²⁰ Hrafn Oddsson was in Norway at this time and it would not have been surprising – if we trust the historicity of *Árna*

¹⁶ Gustav Storm (ed.), *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania, 1888), p. 68.

¹⁷ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 776-7.

¹⁸ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 780f.; Gustav Storm (ed.), *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania, 1888), p. 138.

¹⁹ For a series of good scholarship on constitutional (and other) changes in Iceland after the Commonwealth era, cf. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'The Icelandic aristocracy after the fall of the Free State', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 20 (1995), pp. 153-66; 'Changing Layers of Jurisdiction and the Reshaping of Icelandic Society c. 1220-1350' in Juan Pan-Montojo & Frederik Pedersen (eds.) *Communities in European History: Representations, Jurisdictions, Conflicts* (Pisa, 2007), pp. 173-88; 'The making of a skattland: Iceland 1247-1450' in Steinar Imsen (ed.) *Rex Insularum: The King of Norway and his skattlands as a political system c. 1260-c. 1450* (Bergen, 2014).

²⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 784-6.

saga biskups' account of the events of 1271 (or failing that, refer simply to his advocacy in the 1280s²¹) – if he had been at this meeting on the side of the Icelandic owners of church estates.²² The same year as the archbishop's judgment, Hrafn's tenure as sole governor of Iceland was broken by the decision of the Norwegian king to split jurisdiction over Iceland between him and Þorvarður Þórarinnsson.²³

During the General Assembly of 1275, Bishop Árni introduced a new set of Christian laws to Iceland which were ratified.²⁴ The following year, an apparently bitter conflict sprang up between Bishop Árni and Þorvarður Þórarinnsson.²⁵ Concurrently, there appears to have been a power struggle between Hrafn and Þorvarður which had likely been ongoing since at least 1273: 'hann segir og að höfðingjar voru ósamþykkir sín í milli en allir trúir kónginum' ('he said that the leaders were disagreeable with each other but remained fully faithful to the king').²⁶ The existence of tensions between the two top men in Iceland is especially unsurprising as, in addition to having to share power, they were also old enemies.

²¹ Gustav Storm (ed.), *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania, 1888), pp. 68 & 139.

²² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 781.

²³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 787.

²⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 780.

²⁵ Although we ought be conservative with our use of *Árna saga biskups* – cf. Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 796-8.

²⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 800.

The year 1278 saw Hrafn Oddsson and Þorvarður Þórarinsson arrive in Norway.²⁷ They were both ennobled in 1279 and sent back to Iceland, though Lord Hrafn was given the additional honour of being appointed King Magnus' standard-bearer, one of the highest ranks in the Norwegian king's retinue, typically competed for by the barons (formerly called the landed men).²⁸ This promotion set Hrafn above Þorvarður, making the former lord the sole governor of Iceland.

1280 saw the arrival of another new lawcode (*Jónsbók*) in Iceland which was taken into law the following year.²⁹ Thus, by the end of the decade there was a new status quo: Hrafn had overcome Þorvarður and the transitional era of the *Járnsíða* constitution was over. However, the conflict between the ecclesiastic and lay establishments which heated up during the 1270s had only just begun. The conflict over church estates would not end until the Treaty of Avaldsnes nearly two decades later in 1297.³⁰

I.1.3 – Þórður *kakali* Sighvatsson, c.1210-56

Whilst – as chapter 1 will argue – **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was written at the dawn of a new period of Icelandic history, Þórður *kakali*

²⁷ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 801; Gustav Storm (ed.), *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania, 1888), p. 140f.

²⁸ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 806; Gustav Storm (ed.), *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania, 1888), pp. 70 & 141.

²⁹ Gustav Storm (ed.), *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania, 1888), pp. 29 & 70; Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 811.

³⁰ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Viking Friendship: The Social Bond in Iceland and Norway, c. 900-1300* (Ithaca, 2017), pp. 78-9.

Sighvatsson casts a heavy shadow over the history of the Commonwealth's final act. Þórður was most prominent during the middle decades of the Age of the Sturlungar, and played a significant role in each of its four controversies. The general contours of his biography are uncontroversial and shall now be enumerated.

Þórður was born in c. 1210 to Sighvatur Sturluson.³¹ As Þórður grew up, he saw his father Sighvatur and brother Sturla rise to positions of political preeminence in Iceland during the 1220s and 1230s. During this time, he obtained from them a vast wealth of knowledge on how to play the political game. In 1237, Þórður bade farewell to his father and brother, and travelled to Norway to serve in the retinue of King Hákon Hákonsson of Norway. He would never see his father or brother again. Sighvatur and Sturla died in combat at the Battle of Örlýgsstaðir on 21 August 1238. When Þórður eventually returned to Iceland in the autumn of 1242, he sought to reclaim his patrimony – which had been appropriated after the battle – and to wreak vengeance.

By 1242, Kolbeinn *ungi* Arnórsson of the Ásbirningar and Gissur Þorvaldsson of the Haukdælir – the killers of Sighvatur and Sturla – had emerged victorious from a series of confrontations with the Sturlungar, changing the balance of power in Iceland dramatically. Together, Kolbeinn and Gissur held sway over an area spanning the Northern and Western

³¹ Based on numerous secondary attestations (e.g., Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Patriarch: Myth and Reality' in Shannon Lewis-Simpson (ed.) *Youth and Age in the Medieval North* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 265-84, p. 277) and Þórður being over the medieval Icelandic age of majority (around sixteen years old) in 1235, by virtue of his bearing of weapons.

Quarters, as well as the Southern Quarter west of Þjórsá. In 1242, Gissur went abroad leaving Kolbeinn with control of all the territory except for Árnesþing. Gissur's representative in Árnesþing was to be his cousin Hjalti *biskupsson*, the son of Bishop Magnús Gissurarson. The alliance between the Haukdælir and Ásbirningar was to continue while Gissur was away: in order to maintain the hard-won status quo, Kolbeinn and Hjalti were to come to each other's aid whenever one or the other needed it.

This bleak situation confronted Þórður when he arrived back in Iceland from Norway in 1242. But what happened next is remarkable. By 1245 Þórður had reclaimed his patrimony, though he continued seeking vengeance for his father and brothers with great success, totally defeating his enemies through battle in 1246 and litigation in 1247. Then, during the period 1248-9, he managed to establish himself as the leader of Iceland, the first person ever to do so. Had Þórður not travelled to Norway in 1250 to comply with a summons issued by King Hákon in 1249, it is likely Þórður may have ended up becoming the king or earl of Iceland.³²

The judgment Þórður received in favour of his case against Gissur at the Norwegian king's court in 1247 was effectively voided in 1249-50. The end of this peaceful settlement prompted the Flugumýri Arson (*Flugumýrarbrenna*) on 22 October 1253.

³² Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sturlungaöld. Drög um íslenska menningu á þrettánda öld* (Reykjavík, 1940), p. 16; Jón Jóhannesson & Haraldur Bessason (trans.), *A history of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth – Íslendinga saga* (Winnipeg, 1974), p. 264; Hans Jacob Orning, 'Statsutvikling i Norge og på Island i høymiddelalderen belyst ut fra en analyse av Þórðr kakali Sighvatssons og Sverre Sigurdssons vei til makten', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 4 (1997), pp. 469-86, p. 485; Costel Coroban, *Ideology and power in Norway and Iceland, 1150-1250* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 174.

Pórður resided in Norway during the period 1250-6 serving as the king's sheriff, first of Gauldalen in Trøndelag and later of Skien in Telemark. He passed away in 1256, allegedly dying shortly after receiving a letter expressing King Hákon's intention to send him back to Iceland.

1.2 – *Pórðar saga kakala*: Preliminaries

Pórðar saga kakala is our principal and only detailed source of Pórður's life, and, to some extent, Icelandic history during the 1240s. In the most recent edition by Örnólfur Thorsson (first published by *Svart á hvítu* in 1988; reissued by *Mál og menning* in 2010), *Pórðar saga kakala* covers the periods 1242-50 and 1254-6.

1.2.1 – The form and genre of *Pórðar saga kakala*

In Icelandic, the word 'saga' has many different uses, all referring to a narrative of some description. 'Saga' and cognate terms with identical meanings have been (or were) used in all Germanic languages for a long time – e.g., the obsolete English word 'saw' from Middle English 'sawe' and Old English 'saga' and 'sagu'. Ultimately all derive from Proto-Germanic 'sagō' (tale), a nominalisation of '*sagjaną' (to speak).³³ When referring to texts from medieval Iceland in particular, the sagas are prose stories which

³³ Vésteinn Ólason ('Family Sagas' in Rory McTurk (ed.) *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 101-18, p. 101) notes that, on occasion, the word 'saga' is 'used to describe a sequence of events out of which a story could be made.'

ostensibly take the past as their subject matter.³⁴ Typically, poetic stanzas are interspersed throughout saga narrative. Three major topics act as the focus for the sagas: genealogy, the origins of toponyms, and conflict.³⁵

Icelandic sagas composed during the thirteenth century are typically written in a laconic, sober, and superficially realistic style. Saga literature is thought to have first developed in medieval Iceland 'through the confluence of two streams: a clerical, international Latin one... and a popular, native vernacular one'.³⁶ Sagas are a diverse literary form. They are most often sorted into the following genres by modern scholars: legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*), family sagas (*íslendingasögur*), kings' sagas (*konungasögur*), contemporary sagas (*samtíðarsögur*), bishops' sagas (*biskupasögur*), chivalric-romantic sagas (*riddarasögur*), and hagiographic sagas (*heilagramannasögur*).³⁷ This is not a perfect way to categorise sagas. It must be acknowledged that there is some overlap between each of these groupings; to give an example, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* can be considered both a king's saga and a contemporary saga. Moreover, they are

³⁴ Heather O'Donoghue, *The genesis of a saga narrative: verse and prose in Kormaks saga* (Oxford, 1991), p. vi; Peter Hallberg & Paul Schach (trans.), *The Icelandic saga* (Lincoln, 1962) pp. 1-3.

³⁵ Theodore Andersson, *The Icelandic family saga: An analytic reading* (Cambridge, 1967); Jesse Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic saga* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 57ff.; Diana Whaley, 'A useful past: historical writing in medieval Iceland' in Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.) *Old Icelandic literature and society* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 161-202, p. 191; Christopher Callow, *Landscape, tradition and power in a region of medieval Iceland: Dalir, c. 900-c. 1262* (PhD thesis: University of Birmingham, 2001), p. 34.

³⁶ Diana Whaley, 'A useful past: historical writing in medieval Iceland' in Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.) *Old Icelandic literature and society* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 161-202, p. 191.

³⁷ Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to The Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 27-30.

a modern classification system: the Icelanders themselves would have simply considered all of them sagas, perhaps only making the distinction between ‘lygisögur’ (lying sagas) and ‘sannar sögur’ (true sagas).³⁸

In the modern classificatory system, *Pórðar saga kakala* is to be found among the contemporary sagas; the texts of this genre typically describe events which took place a relatively short time prior to their writing.³⁹ More specifically, *Pórðar saga kakala* is a member of the biographical contemporary saga subgenre, more of which will be discussed later in this thesis. Conversely, under the medieval rubric, *Pórðar saga kakala* would have been considered one of the true sagas, because it was inspired by real rather than imagined events.

1.2.2 – The contents of *Pórðar saga kakala*⁴⁰

Pórðar saga kakala begins *in medias res*. Chapter 1 is a prologue of sorts, summarising events in Iceland following the seizure of two of Þórður’s cousins, Órækja Snorrason and Sturla Þórðarson, at Hvítárbrú in the year 1242.⁴¹ The chapter reports that Órækja and Gissur Þorvaldsson travelled abroad and tells how Kolbeinn *ungi* subjugated the Western Quarter of

³⁸ Mikhail Steblin-Kamenskij & Kenneth Ober (trans.), *The Saga Mind* (Odense, 1973), p. 31.

³⁹ Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to The Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 29.

⁴⁰ This section (1.2.2), wherein a synopsis of *Pórðar saga kakala* is provided, is more-or-less a verbatim extract of the summary of the saga in the introduction to my translation of the text, cf. Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), pp. 12-4.

⁴¹ An account of this may be found in *Íslendinga saga*, cf. Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 450-7.

Iceland to his leadership. Chapter 2 describes Þórður *kakali's* arrival back in Iceland in September 1242. Chapters 2-5 provide an account of Þórður's attempt to gather support for his case against Kolbeinn and Gissur for the deaths of his father and brothers at Örlýgsstaðir in 1238.

Chapters 6-7 explain the course of events when, after gathering an army, Þórður immediately invades the Southern Quarter. This campaign comes off as a success in chapter 7, and chapters 8-10 describe the escape of Þórður and his men from Kolbeinn, who has been made aware of the incursion by Hjalti *biskupsson*, the interim leader of Árnesþing.

Chapters 11-22 tell of a series of escalating skirmishes between Þórður's and Kolbeinn's sides, and the raising of navies by each. Following a devastating attack on Vatnsdalur by Þórður, Kolbeinn avenges himself by pillaging Dalir and the region around Reykhólar, before hunting down Þórður's brother, Tumi *yngr*, and killing him, in chapters 23-6. This outrage, and the harsh measures imposed on the Eyfirðingar set the stage for chapters 27-35, which describe the course of the naval engagement called the Battle of Húnaflói and the amphibious manoeuvres which followed.

Though the Battle of Húnaflói proves undecisive, a partial resolution between the two sides is reached in chapters 36-8 by Kolbeinn returning Þórður's patrimony to him and promptly dying shortly after. Þórður establishes himself as the leader of Eyjafjörður while Brandur Kolbeinsson takes the helm in Skagafjörður. Chapters 39-41 describe escalating tensions between Þórður and Brandur, culminating in a second confrontation at the Battle of Haugsnes in chapters 42-4.

Having summarily executed Brandur following a catastrophic defeat of the Skagfirðingar, Þórður and Gissur agree to resolve their own dispute through the mediation of the Norwegian king in chapter 45. The two travel to Norway and submit their case to the Norwegian king's judgment in chapter 46. Chapter 47 tells what happened next in Iceland and dates the death of Brandur. Returning to Norway in chapter 48, it is stated that Cardinal William of Sabina decided the dispute in Þórður's favour, and that he was to be sent by the Norwegian king to promote the royal cause with the assistance of the new bishop elect of Hólar, Henrik.

Chapter 49 summarises Þórður's time in Iceland during the period 1247-50. Most of the narrative is taken up with the matter of how he established leadership over the whole country and notes some key events during his ascendancy. Þórður and Bishop Henrik, however, fall out, for the latter believes the former to have laboured more on his own behalf than the king's. The consequence is that Bishop Henrik goes to Norway and makes the case against Þórður before King Hákon in 1249. Chapter 49 ends abruptly in the winter of 1249-50 by telling how few support Þórður's case in Norway.

Chapter 50 – the last – picks up the story four years after the end of chapter 49, with Gissur's arrival in Norway in 1254 after the Flugumýri Arson on 22 October 1253. After a confrontation with Þórður at the court, we hear about Þórður's activity in Norway as a sheriff, his popularity, and then an account of his death.

I.2.3 – The transmission history of *Pórðar saga kakala*

Pórðar saga kakala is preserved in *Sturlunga saga*, a compilation of texts mostly centred on the feuds of the Icelandic political élite during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The *Sturlunga saga* canon comprises the following texts: *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns*, *Porgils saga og Hafliða*, *Ættartölur*, *Sturlu saga*, *Íslendinga saga*, *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða Arasonar*, *Guðmundar saga dýra*, *Haukdæla þáttur*, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, *Pórðar saga kakala*, *Porgils saga skarða*, *Svínfellinga saga* and *Sturlu þáttur*. It is worth noting that *Sturlunga saga* is not comprised of a selection of self-contained narratives. This is because many of its component texts have been interlaced to place events in a mostly chronological order, thus forming a single narrative.

Sturlunga saga is extant in forty-nine manuscripts, only two of which are medieval vellums.⁴² Given *Pórðar saga kakala*'s inclusion in the two

⁴² Adv. 21.3.17 (c. 1729-45); AM 114 fol. (c. 1630); AM 115 fol. (c. 1639-72); AM 116 fol. (c. 1600-99); AM 117-118 fol. (c. 1675-99); AM 119 fol. (c. 1675-98); AM 120 fol. (c. 1675-99); AM 121 fol. (c. 1600-99); AM 122 a fol. (1350-70); AM 122 b fol. (c. 1375); AM 385 fol. (c. 1722-43); AM 386 fol. (c. 1775-1836); AM 437 4to (c. 1600-1700); AM 437-438 4to (unknown date); AM 438 4to (c. 1600-1700); AM 439 4to (c. 1646); AM 440 4to (c. 1650); AM 93 8vo (c. 1650-99); BL Add. MS 11,127 (c. 1696); GKS 1012 fol. (c. 1728-37); Holm. Papp. 8 4to (c. 1650); ÍB 53 fol. (c. 1780); ÍB 181 4to (1755-6); ÍB 235 8vo (c. 1727-1850); JS 13 fol. (1737); JS 14 fol. (c. 1730); JS 368 8vo (c. 1700-1870); Lbs 34 fol. (1727); Lbs 125 fol. (unknown date); Lbs 223 fol. (c. 1700-99); Lbs 224 fol. (c. 1700-99); Lbs 235 fol. (1681-2); Lbs 444 fol. (1783); Lbs 594 fol. (c. 1775-99); Lbs 330 4to (1805-7); Lbs 331 4to (1807-8); Lbs 636 4to (c. 1200-1900); Lbs 836 4to (c. 1790); Lbs 1411 a 4to (1814); Lbs 1477 4to (c. 1700-1899); Lbs 1629 4to (c. 1700-1800); Lbs 4104 4to (c. 1800-25); Lbs 4105 4to (c. 1800-25); Lbs 4106 4to (c. 1800-25); Lbs 4107 4to (c. 1800-25); Lbs 4108 4to (c. 1800-25); Lbs 1145 8vo (c. 1600-1899); NKS 1234 fol. (c. 1700-50); NKS 1685 4to (c. 1800-49); NKS 1704 4to (c.

medieval manuscripts, it is self-evident that it was introduced during the compilation of the original *Sturlunga saga* (**Sturlunga saga*).

The identity of the compiler of **Sturlunga saga* is obscure, though it is widely held to have been either Þórður Narfason or Þorsteinn Snorrason who compiled it at some point during the early- to mid-fourteenth century.⁴³ Þórður Narfason (d. 1308), one of the Skarðverjar, was lawman twice: the first time before and the second at the turn of the fourteenth century. Importantly, it is known that Þórður studied law at the lawman Sturla Þórðarson's knee during the winter of 1271-2.⁴⁴ Þorsteinn *böllóttur* Snorrason (d. 1351), one of the Melamenn, was abbot of Helgafell from 1344 (though consecrated in 1345) until his death.⁴⁵

In addition to *Þórðar saga kakala*, **Sturlunga saga* is thought to have included the following texts: *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns*, *Þorgils saga og Hafliða*, *Ættartölur*, *Sturlu saga*, *Íslendinga saga*, *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða Arasonar*, *Guðmundar saga dýra*, *Haukdæla þáttur*, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* and *Svínfellinga saga*. Guðrún Nordal highlights that

1700); NKS 1809 4to (unknown date); NKS 1809 a-b 4to (c. 1750); Rask 21 a (c. 1600-1815); UppsUB Ihre 77 (c. 1650-99). The list derives from Guðrún Nordal (ed.), *Poetry on Icelandic History* (Forthcoming), as represented by Guðrún Nordal, '*Sturlunga saga (Stu)*', *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (2016) <https://tinyurl.com/y5cdy5v2> (Accessed: 13 October 2019). Apart from those cases where an alternative citation is given for a manuscript's dating elsewhere in this thesis, the dates assigned in this footnote derive from the same source as the list.

⁴³ Helgi Þorláksson, '*Sturlunga – tilurð og markmið*', *Gripla* 23 (2012), pp. 53-92, p. 87ff; Sverrir Jakobsson, *Auðnaróðal. Baráttan um Ísland 1096-1281* (Reykjavík, 2016), p. 273.

⁴⁴ Sigurður Sigurmundsson, '*Draumar Jóreiðar*', *Andvari* 88 (1963), pp. 33-8, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Helgi Þorláksson, '*Sturlunga – tilurð og markmið*', *Gripla* 23 (2012), pp. 53-92, p. 56.

Porgils saga skarða and *Sturlu þáttur* were introduced into *Sturlunga saga* during the late fourteenth century and that these two texts were not part of **Sturlunga saga*.⁴⁶ Peter Hallberg has argued that *Porgils saga skarða* and *Sturlu þáttur* were written by the same author. Guðni Jónsson notes that it is believed Þórður Hítningur was the author of *Porgils saga skarða* and *Sturlu þáttur*, and that he wrote during the period 1275-80.⁴⁷

Íslendinga saga is the largest component text of *Sturlunga saga*, and it is certain that a version of it formed the larger part of **Sturlunga saga*. This is because its text constitutes a substantial portion of all extant versions of *Sturlunga saga*: no doubt this is why the traditional name for the compilation is *Íslendinga saga hin mikla*.⁴⁸

Íslendinga saga describes political events in Iceland during the eighty-year period from the death of Hvamm-Sturla Þórðarson in the early 1180s until the end of the Commonwealth period in the early 1260s. The original (**Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*) was composed by Sturla Þórðarson.⁴⁹ As it is known that Sturla died in 1284, we have a clear *terminus ante quem* for

⁴⁶ Guðrún Nordal, 'To dream or not to dream: A question of method' in John McKinnell, David Ashurst & Donata Kick (eds.) *The Fantastic in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: Sagas and the British Isles* (Durham, 2006), pp. 304-13, pp. 308 & 311.

⁴⁷ Guðni Jónsson, *Sturlunga saga* vol. 3 (Reykjavík, 1954), p. xi.

⁴⁸ For example, it is used as the title for the seventeenth-century manuscript of *Sturlunga saga* AM 116 fol., 1r. Occasionally, the title used was simply *Íslendinga saga*, e.g. AM 115 fol., 1r.

⁴⁹ Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 'The Works of Sturla Þórðarson' in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 8-19, p. 8.

**Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*.⁵⁰ There has been debate over how much of **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* Sturla wrote before his demise. Björn M. Ólsen and Pétur Sigurðsson both believed that **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* did not go beyond 1255.⁵¹ Björn thought the post-1255 material in *Sturlunga saga* which editors have long classified as part of **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* had originally belonged to a lost **Gissurar saga og Skagfirðinga*. Pétur believed that **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* was finished off after Sturla's death by the compiler due to the patchy quality which characterises the narrative of *Íslendinga saga* from the mid-1250s onwards. Jón Jóhannesson disagreed with Björn and Pétur, arguing that Sturla did write all of **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*, and, moreover that it reflects in its surviving form (i.e., *Íslendinga saga*) the fact that Sturla deliberately left gaps, due to an assumption on his part that readers might find accounts of this history already written in other sagas; however, this is unlikely to be correct, for we know that *Íslendinga saga* is not identical to **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*.⁵² More recently, R. George Thomas has upheld Pétur's view that Sturla did not live to write **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* beyond 1255 and that it was

⁵⁰ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson, 'Sturla Þórðarson, The Politician' in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 1-7, p. 6

⁵¹ Björn M. Ólsen, 'Um *Sturlungu*', *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta* 3/2 (1902), pp. 193-510, p. 385ff.; Pétur Sigurðsson, 'Um *Íslendinga sögu* Sturlu Þórðarsonar', *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta* 6/2 (1933-5), pp. 1-179, p. 10ff.

⁵² Jón Jóhannesson, 'Um *Sturlunga sögu*' in Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), pp. xxxiv-xli. Also, cf. Anton Zimmerling, 'Bishop Guðmundr in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*: The cult of saints or the cult of personalities?' in Rudolf Simek & Judith Meurer (eds.) *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages* (Bonn, 2005), pp. 559-569, pp. 560-1.

finished off by Þórður Narfason after Sturla's death to the best of his ability.⁵³ Regardless of whether or not Þórður was the person responsible for compiling **Sturlunga saga*, I think it likely – given his pupillage under Sturla – that he would have been the one who attempted to finalise **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* if his teacher truly died before completion. Perhaps Þórður was the one who endeavoured to finish **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* by piecing together notes left behind by his former teacher and appending them to what Sturla had already drafted, while Þorsteinn Snorrason was the compiler of **Sturlunga saga*?

The other texts in *Sturlunga saga* are inserted at the front and posterior of *Íslendinga saga* or have been woven into it; they also interlace with each other at times. Wherever content in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* or other independent versions of sagas in the *Sturlunga saga* canon was mirrored somewhere in **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*, it was almost always redacted from one or the other by the compiler during the creation of **Sturlunga saga*, leaving a single component text to provide the information.⁵⁴ The same applied when any of the texts which were compiled into **Sturlunga saga* contained the same content as each other in independent form. Nonetheless, the compiler did not do this in every case.

There are many possible explanations for why the compiler kept two or more accounts of certain events, the most probable being: hasty composition; oversight due to human error because of the scale of the

⁵³ R. George Thomas, 'Introduction' in Julia McGrew (trans.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 1 (New York, 1970), pp. 11-45, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Jónas Kristjánsson & Peter Foote (trans.), *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature* (Reykjavík, 2007), p. 188.

compilation; an aspiration to include as detailed accounts as possible; an awareness by the compiler of the proper due diligence required of him within medieval Icelandic historiographical practice to note contradictory reports, so that his audience might know, and decide between, alternative perspectives on what happened; and a desire to preserve narrative flow or other stylistic qualities which may have been destroyed by editing that was too heavy-handed.

Beyond redacting duplicate content, the compiler further edited the texts he included in **Sturlunga saga*. Among the texts in **Sturlunga saga*, only *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* has survived to the present day in two complete recensions independent of the *Sturlunga saga* manuscript tradition, one of which is an abridgement, but which are both known to scholars by the title *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*. Comparison of *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* with *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* is valuable for working out the working method of the compiler of **Sturlunga saga*.⁵⁵ Additionally, there are several *Guðmundar sögur* – hagiographic accounts of Bishop Guðmundur Arason’s life – apart from the *Sturlunga saga* canon’s *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða Arasonar* in existence.⁵⁶ *Guðmundar sögur* evidently derive most of their content from some recension of *Sturlunga saga* (as well as other extant and lost texts), though it is not

⁵⁵ Jónas Kristjánsson & Peter Foote (trans.), *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland’s Medieval Literature* (Reykjavík, 2007), p. 193.

⁵⁶ Stefán Karlsson, ‘Introduction’ in Stefán Karlsson (ed.) *Guðmundar sögur biskups. Ævi Guðmundar biskups, Guðmundar saga A* (Copenhagen, 1993), pp. xv-clxxvi; Joanna A. Skórzewska, *Constructing a Cult: The Life and Veneration of Guðmundr Arason (1161-1237) in the Icelandic Written Sources* (Leiden, 2011).

altogether clear whether or not the extra materials they contain come from an independent version of *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða Arasonar* or elsewhere.⁵⁷ Interestingly, *Guðmundar saga A* may be more representative of **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* than *Íslendinga saga*, giving further insights into the compiler's working method.⁵⁸ Still further, *Porgils saga skarða* is preserved in an independent fragment (NRA 56, of which only two leaves survive, dated to c. 1300), but that saga was not part of **Sturlunga saga*.⁵⁹ The comparison of the surviving leaves of NRA 56 with the version of *Porgils saga skarða* in the *Sturlunga saga* manuscript tradition does, however, underscore the method of the editor of *Reykjafjarðarbók*, whom first introduced it into the compilation.

Returning to *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* and *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*: comparisons between the independent and compiled versions of the saga carried out by Úlfar Bragason, Guðrún Nordal, Ásdís Egilsdóttir, and Torfi H. Tulinius have found the former far less religious in character than the latter.⁶⁰ Margaret Cormack has also noted that

⁵⁷ Erika Sigurdson, *The Church in Fourteenth-Century Iceland: The Formation of an Elite Clerical Identity* (Leiden, 2016), p. 40.

⁵⁸ Cf. Anton Zimmerling, 'Bishop Guðmundr in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*: The cult of saints or the cult of personalities?' in Rudolf Simek & Judith Meurer (eds.) *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages* (Bonn, 2005), pp. 559-569, p. 560-1.

⁵⁹ Jónas Kristjánsson & Peter Foote (trans.), *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature* (Reykjavík, 2007), p. 193). For the contents of this fragment, cf. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), pp. 290-3.

⁶⁰ Úlfar Bragason, 'The structure and meaning of *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*', *Scandinavian studies* 60 (1988), pp. 267-92; Guðrún Nordal, 'The contemporary sagas and their social context' in Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.) *Old Icelandic literature and society* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 221-41, pp. 221-2; Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 'Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, pilgrim and

the compiler's decision to incorporate a version of the saga of Bishop Guðmundur *sans* the miracles in its independent versions, but neither of the sagas of the other saintly bishops of Iceland Þorlákur and Jón, may indicate that a distinction was being made 'between the *religious* and the *historical*' in selecting content for inclusion.⁶¹

These scholars appear to have hit on a valid conclusion given the secularity (and brevity) of *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* when compared with *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*:

<i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka</i> (chapter number⁶² and content)	<i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i>
1: Preface to the saga with distinct religious overtones.	Content not included in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> .
2: Enumerates the ancestors and family of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson at length.	Content not included in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> .
3: Describes Hrafn's pursuits and pours praise on his positive personal qualities and acclaims	Content not included in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> .

martyr' in Gareth Williams & Paul Bibire (eds.) *Sagas, saints and settlements* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 29-40; Torfi H. Tulinius, 'Hvers manns gagn. Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson and the social role of Icelandic chieftains around 1200', *Saga-Book* 40 (2016), pp. 91-104, p. 94.

⁶¹ Margaret Cormack, 'Christian biography' Rory McTurk (ed.) *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 27-42, p. 27.

⁶² The chapter divisions for *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* given here are taken from Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 1954). In my opinion, the thematic/ episodic principle used to separate the text into chapters in Guðni Jónsson's edition is better for the purposes of comparison than that found in Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010).

	by foreign dignitaries.	
4:	Describes Hrafn's time spent abroad as a young man, including his pilgrimage to Rome.	Content not included in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> .
5:	Markús of Rauðasandur is introduced into the saga.	Content not included in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> .
6:	Describes the dispute between Markús and Ingi Magnússon.	Content not included in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> .
7:	Describes the slaying of Markús and its aftermath.	Content not included in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> .
8:	The Vatnsfirðingar are introduced into the saga, importantly Porvaldur Snorrason.	Content not included in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> .
9:	Porvaldur Snorrason attempts to attack Magnús the priest but he gets away so he just loots the farm. Porvaldur slays Ljótur. Porvaldur goes to meet Hrafn who is very generous to him.	Content not included in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> .
10:	Ragnheiður's prophecy recounted (telling Hrafn than Porvaldur is not to be trusted) and Þórður of Vatnsfjörður dies. Porvaldur goes abroad after the death of Þórður and when he gets back he takes over the farm of Vatnsfjörður and his brother's former chieftaincy.	Content not included in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> .
11:	Hrafn goes abroad with Bishop-elect Guðmundur. The saga makes much of telling the reader about how Hrafn and Guðmundur were the best of friends. When Hrafn arrives home he and Porvaldur visit each other and their friendship appears to be very strong.	This content is very abbreviated (for all intents and purposes omitted) in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> and is combined with that of chapter 12 of <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka</i> .

12: Conflict over a whale carcass and other disputes in the Vestfirðir which Hrafn and Porvaldur are involved in.	<i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> mirrors this content.
13: Discord erupts between Hrafn and Porvaldur due to the latter's villainy.	<i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> mirrors this content.
14: Reports that only Hrafn and Þórður Sturluson did not take part in the attack orchestrated by Porvaldur Gissurason and Sighvatur Sturluson against Bishop Guðmundur; however, it is related that Porvaldur Snorrason took part in that attack. Omens are reported.	<i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> mirrors report of the omens but completely omits the content relating to the attack on Bishop Guðmundur.
15: Porvaldur attempts to attack Hrafn.	<i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> abbreviates this content.
16: Porvaldur is outlawed over the whale dispute.	<i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> abbreviates this content.
17: Porvaldur attempts to attack Hrafn again.	<i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> abbreviates this content.
18: Omens prior to the death of Hrafn are related.	<i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> abbreviates this content.
19: Porvaldur slays Hrafn.	<i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> abbreviates this content.
20: Enumerates the descendants of Hrafn at length.	Content not included in <i>Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i> .

Nonetheless, it is important to note that secularisation was not the aim of the compiler, but a consequence of the compiler's process, which was extracting feud narratives from those of his chosen texts which contained them for

inclusion in the compilation.⁶³ In selecting which component text to provide an account of feud where it existed in more than one, the compiler appears to have chosen the one which had provided the most detailed report of events in independent form. For example, the compiler did not include **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*'s account of Þórður *kakala*'s career in Iceland during the years 1242-50, choosing instead to incorporate **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*'s narrative, which likely provided more detail than the former.

Úlfar Bragason emphasises that the feuds the compiler was interested in were between Icelanders, and that he therefore substantially abridged or redacted content discussing foreign travel except when they were explicitly relevant to his focus on Icelandic disputes, though these may nevertheless have also been shortened.⁶⁴ Stephen Tranter, Ármann Jakobsson, Guðrún Nordal and Úlfar Bragason have separately come to the conclusion that the collection of feud narratives were intended by the compiler of **Sturlunga saga* to illustrate the social disorder caused by feud and to explore methods for re-establishing peace and order.⁶⁵ The compiler also incorporated and wrote additional texts without feud narratives in them to provide both

⁶³ Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 186.

⁶⁴ Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 186.

⁶⁵ Stephen Tranter, *Sturlunga saga: The rôle of the creative compiler* (Frankfurt, 1987), pp. 218-21; Ármann Jakobsson, 'Snorri and his death: Youth, violence and autobiography in medieval Iceland', *Scandinavian studies* 75 (2003), pp. 317-40, pp. 337-8; Guðrún Nordal, 'The contemporary sagas and their social context' in Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.) *Old Icelandic literature and society* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 226; Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 266-7.

background information for the accounts of conflict in **Sturlunga saga* as well as to help reinforce his moral and ideological message.⁶⁶

Two copies of **Sturlunga saga* from the fourteenth century are extant. The vellums are known as *Króksfjarðarbók* (AM 122 a fol.) and *Reykjarfjarðarbók* (AM 122 b fol.), or simply I and II. *Króksfjarðarbók* was written during the 1350s or 1360s in western Iceland.⁶⁷ The vellum originally comprised 141 leaves, but we only have 110 of these.⁶⁸ Consequently, there are several large lacunae in *Króksfjarðarbók*. Luckily, there are many surviving paper copies descended from *Króksfjarðarbók*, collectively known as the Ip class, which allow us to fill the lacunae with a degree of certainty. The earliest of the Ip manuscripts is AM 114 fol., written c. 1630 by Jón Gissurarson.⁶⁹ AM 114 fol. is the archetype for the rest of that class, though it is worth noting that AM 114 fol. is a bad copy.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns, Ættartölur, Haukdæla þáttur, and Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar.*

⁶⁷ Úlfar Bragason, *On the Poetics of Sturlunga* (PhD thesis: University of California, Berkeley, 1986), p. 11. Stefán Karlsson (*Guðmundar sögur biskups I: Ævi Guðmundar biskups, Guðmundar saga A* (Copenhagen, 1983), p. xli) has stated that the hand that wrote AM 399 4to (*Guðmundar saga hin elzta*; dated to 1330-50) is the same one that wrote AM 122 a fol.

⁶⁸ Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 'The works of Sturla Þórðarson' in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, chieftain and lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 8-20, p. 16.

⁶⁹ Úlfar Bragason, *On the Poetics of Sturlunga* (PhD thesis: University of California, Berkeley, 1986), p. 12.

⁷⁰ Cf. Leonie Viljoen, *Svínfellinga saga: A new critical edition of BL Add. 11, 127 fol.* (PhD thesis: University of Cape Town, 1995), p. xxxiii; Úlfar Bragason, *On the Poetics of Sturlunga* (PhD thesis: University of California, Berkeley, 1986), p. 12.

Reykjarfjarðarbók was written c. 1375 at Akrar in Skagafjörður and originally comprised 180 or more leaves.⁷¹ *Reykjarfjarðarbók* barely made it through to the present day; indeed, most of it did not: Már Jónsson tells how it 'was torn to pieces in 1676-1679 as it was damaged by moisture. The owner, a well-to-do farmer, gave leaves to his friends for use as book covers'.⁷² Because of this, only thirty badly damaged leaves of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* survive today, due to Árni Magnússon's diligent collection of them at the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁷³

Several paper copies descended from *Reykjarfjarðarbók* were made during the seventeenth century and later, known as the I/p class of manuscripts.⁷⁴ In c. 1635, Björn of Skarðsá made a copy of *Reykjarfjarðarbók*, the now lost **Skarðsárbók*, which was the archetype of the I/p recensions of *Sturlunga saga*.⁷⁵ Björn drew mostly on *Reykjarfjarðarbók*, but also interpolated from *Króksfjarðarbók*, noting what

⁷¹ Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 'The works of Sturla Þórðarson' in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, chieftain and lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 8-20, p. 16.

⁷² Már Jónsson, 'Manuscript hunting and the Challenge of Textual Variance in Late Seventeenth-Century Icelandic Studies' in Rens Bod, Jaap Maat & Thijs Wetsteijn (eds.) *The Making of the Humanities Volume I: Early Modern Europe* (Amsterdam, 2010), pp. 299-312, p. 307.

⁷³ For a list of where Árni acquired each leaf, cf. Kristian Kålund (ed.), *Sturlunga saga efter membranen Kroksfjardarbok* vol. 1 (Copenhagen, 1906-11), pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

⁷⁴ N.B., despite the fact that the transmission history of *Sturlunga saga* appears to be bifid, I am simplifying the account here somewhat by siloeing I/p and II/p. In reality, the editors of II/p were not averse to borrowing small extracts from I/p, and much the same may be said for I/p, the manuscripts of which evidently owe a minority of material to II/p.

⁷⁵ **Skarðsárbók* is not to be confused with *Skarðsárbók*, also written by Björn, which is a version of *Landnámabók*.

material came from which manuscript.⁷⁶ Björn also wrote a summary of **Skarðsárbók* in c. 1646 which still exists today and is called AM 439 4to.⁷⁷ A handful of manuscripts descended from **Skarðsárbók* are now extant, two of which are considered to be of particular importance. The first is Holm. Papp. 8 4to, composed by Halldór Guðmundsson in Eyjafjörður in c. 1650, which is highly likely to be a copy of **Skarðsárbók*.⁷⁸ The second is BL Add. 11,127, put together at Oddi in c. 1696, which is a direct copy of **Skarðsárbók*.⁷⁹ The I/p manuscripts give a fair idea of what *Reykjarfjarðarbók* was like in its complete form.

There are a few considerable differences between I/p and II/p recensions of *Sturlunga saga*. It is worth briefly noting and challenging Ólafía Einarisdóttir's view, based on evidence from four of the five earliest Icelandic annals (*Resensannáll*, *Høyersannáll*, *Skálholtsannáll* and *Konungsannáll*), that these variations were the consequence of the editors of *Króksfjarðarbók* and *Reykjarfjarðarbók* each copying selectively from **Sturlunga saga*.⁸⁰ A major issue with Ólafía's conjecture is her assumption that **Sturlunga saga*'s

⁷⁶ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, 'Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar and *Sturlunga saga*: On the working method of the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* when including *Hrafn saga* in his anthology', *Gripla* 8 (1993), pp. 55-80, p. 58. Leonie Viljoen (*Svínfellinga saga: A new critical edition of BL Add. 11, 127 fol.* (PhD thesis: University of Cape Town, 1995), p. xxxiv) notes that many of Björn's annotations are preserved in BL Add MS 11,127.

⁷⁷ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, 'Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar and *Sturlunga saga*: On the working method of the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* when including *Hrafn saga* in his anthology', *Gripla* 8 (1993), pp. 55-80, p. 60.

⁷⁸ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, 'Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar and *Sturlunga saga*: On the working method of the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* when including *Hrafn saga* in his anthology', *Gripla* 8 (1993), pp. 55-80, p. 59.

⁷⁹ Leonie Viljoen, *Svínfellinga saga: A new critical edition of BL Add. 11, 127 fol.* (PhD thesis: University of Cape Town, 1995), p. xxxiv.

⁸⁰ Ólafía Einarisdóttir, 'Om de to håndskrifter af *Sturlunga saga*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 83 (1968), pp. 44-80, pp. 62-3.

terminus post quem of c. 1300 is representative of its actual date of writing, and, therefore, that the compilation precedes the production of the earliest Icelandic annals.⁸¹

Recent research has undermined the older consensus about who compiled **Sturlunga saga*, indicating that the text could have been written at almost any point during the first half of the fourteenth century.⁸² Another issue is the fact that, even if some of the early annalists did rely upon **Sturlunga saga* as a source, there is no evidence to suggest that their content was solely derived from that text. Indeed the notion of one source here seems improbable. Thus, there is no good reason to suppose that the sources for *Króksfjarðarbók* and *Reykjarfjarðarbók* (other than **Sturlunga saga*) would not also have been available to the annalists.

Even though *Króksfjarðarbók* contains interpolations, these are few and minor; consequently, it is probably near to what **Sturlunga saga* must have been like.⁸³ *Reykjarfjarðarbók*, for its part, is thought to have been more representative of the pre-compilation texts of the *Sturlunga saga* canon than

⁸¹ Ólafía Einarsdóttir, 'Om de to håndskrifter af *Sturlunga saga*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 83 (1968), pp. 44-80, p. 47. **Sturlunga saga* probably does precede *Skálholtsannáll* which is the fifth earliest Icelandic annal.

⁸² Helgi Þorláksson, '*Sturlunga* – tilurð og markmið', *Gripla* 23 (2012), pp. 53-92; Sverrir Jakobsson, *Auðnaróðal. Baráttan um Ísland 1096-1281* (Reykjavík, 2016), p. 273. Multiple candidates for compiler have been known about since at least the nineteenth century (cf. Guðbrandur Vigfússon, 'Prolegomena' in Guðbrandur Vigfússon (ed.), *Sturlunga saga including the Islendinga saga of Lawman Sturla Thordsson and Other Works* (Oxford, 1878), pp. ciii-cv) but for the most part Þórður Narfason had been considered likeliest to have been compiler up until recently.

⁸³ This characterisation has been opposed by some, e.g. Ólafía Einarsdóttir, 'Om de to håndskrifter af *Sturlunga saga*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 83 (1968), pp. 44-80.

Króksfjarðarbók.⁸⁴ This view can be substantiated through two arguments which indicate that the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* consulted independent versions of the texts in **Sturlunga saga* while producing his or her manuscript of *Sturlunga saga*.

The first is Björn M. Ólsen's argument that because *Reykjarfjarðarbók* was far more religious in character than *Króksfjarðarbók* (and more detailed in most places – my own observation, which is supported by Guðrún Nordal⁸⁵), it must be a better indication of what the individual texts of *Sturlunga saga* were like before they were first compiled into **Sturlunga saga*, given what we discussed earlier about the compiler's working method. Nonetheless, it is important to temper this with an awareness that, apart from providing a basis on which to adjudge nearness to **Sturlunga saga* or pre-compilation texts, some of the differences between *Króksfjarðarbók* and *Reykjarfjarðarbók* can also be interpreted as products of each manuscript's origins. Guðrún Nordal is particularly strong on the importance of understanding the divergences between the two *Sturlunga saga* vellums in their respective spatiotemporal contexts, as social, political and/or economic factors would have demanded that certain material be included or excluded.⁸⁶ It could be argued for instance that aspects of

⁸⁴ Björn M. Ólsen, 'Um *Sturlungu*', *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta* 3/2 (1902), pp. 193-510, p. 196.

⁸⁵ Guðrún Nordal, 'Rewriting history: The fourteenth-century versions of *Sturlunga saga*' in Judy Quinn & Emily Lethbridge (eds.) *Creating the medieval saga: Versions, variability and editorial interpretations of Old Norse saga literature* (Odense, 2010), pp. 175-90, pp. 182-3 & 186-7.

⁸⁶ Guðrún Nordal, 'To dream or not to dream: A question of method' in John McKinnell, David Ashurst & Donata Kick (eds.) *The Fantastic in Old Norse-*

Reykjarfjarðarbók's heightened religiosity (compared with *Króksfjarðarbók*) could be explained by the Icelandic Church's pressure or influence on the editor. After all, the strongholds of the Northern Icelandic Benedictine School (at Píngeyrar and Munka-Pverá) were not far away from Akrar.

The second argument which can be made in favour of the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* having consulted independent versions of the texts in **Sturlunga saga* while producing his or her manuscript of *Sturlunga saga* is based on the identity of *Reykjarfjarðarbók's* editor. Palaeographic evidence strongly suggests that *Reykjarfjarðarbók* was produced by Björn Brynjólfsson (and/ or possibly his brother Benedikt) at Akrar, which is thought to have housed a scriptorium.⁸⁷ Björn is known to have written up to eleven of the medieval Icelandic manuscripts which have survived down to the present day.⁸⁸ We may surmise that other texts known to have been written by Björn might give an indication of the editorial approach taken to *Reykjarfjarðarbók*. As an example, let us consider Björn's manuscript AM 62 fol., a manuscript of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta*, which in all its recensions is the most extensive of the sagas centred on the life and deeds of King Olav Tryggvason of Norway (hence its name 'the greatest saga'). Elizabeth Ashman-Rowe notes that in making AM 62 fol., Björn took enhanced an early recension of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* by supplementing it with material from

Icelandic literature: Sagas and the British Isles (Durham, 2006), pp. 304-13, pp. 311-2.

⁸⁷ Stefán Karlsson, 'Ritun Reykjarfjarðarbókar. Excursus: Bókagerð bænda' in Stefán Karlsson (ed.) *Stafkrókar. Safn ritgerða eftir Stefán Karlsson* (Reykjavík, 2000), pp. 319-29, p. 310.

⁸⁸ Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, 'Manuscripts and Palaeography' in Rory McTurk (ed.) *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 245-64, p.253.

Færeyinga saga, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Landnámabók*, in addition to completely incorporating versions of *Helga þáttur Þórissonar* and *Norna-Gests þáttur* and expanding the conversion narrative with lost Latin material written by the monk Gunnlaugur Leifsson about Olav Tryggvason's attempts to spread Christianity.⁸⁹ Therefore, Björn is known to have supplemented the saga books which he edited using numerous other texts on at least one prior occasion. The question now is whether or not Björn also did this when he edited *Reykjarfjarðarbók*.

We know from Ilp that in complete form, *Reykjarfjarðarbók*'s account was almost always more detailed than *Króksfjarðarbók*'s.⁹⁰ For instance, notwithstanding that there is additional content in *Króksfjarðarbók*'s recension of *Þórðar saga kakala* which was not present in *Reykjarfjarðarbók* (e.g., some of the content about the incursion into Dalir around the time of Tumi's execution), let us consider that 'Tumi's execution [chapter 24 of *Þórðar saga kakala*] is described in more detail in' *Reykjarfjarðarbók* than it is in *Króksfjarðarbók*.⁹¹ We ought to be mindful of Ólafía Einarisdóttir's proposal that *Þórðar saga kakala* was shorter in *Reykjarfjarðarbók* than in *Króksfjarðarbók*, based on her interpretation of a marginal annotation in BL

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Ashman-Rowe, 'The Adaptation of *Laxdæla saga* in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*', *Leeds Studies in English* 36 (2005), pp. 157-74, p. 158.

⁹⁰ For a useful handlist, cf. Guðrún Nordal, 'To dream or not to dream: A question of method' in John McKinnell, David Ashurst & Donata Kick (eds.) *The Fantastic in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: Sagas and the British Isles* (Durham, 2006), pp. 304-13, pp. 307-8.

⁹¹ Guðrún Nordal, 'To dream or not to dream: A question of method' in John McKinnell, David Ashurst & Donata Kick (eds.) *The Fantastic in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: Sagas and the British Isles* (Durham, 2006), pp. 304-13, p. 307.

Add MS 11,127 which she suggests implies that chapters 47-9 were not present in the former of the two vellums.⁹² My own view is that the wording in BL Add MS 11,127 – ‘önnur saga jók þessu’ (‘another saga added to this’) – refers only to chapter 47, given that this chapter is absent from AM 439 4to whereas 48 and 49 are not. It is not clear whether chapter 47 was a portion of **Sturlunga saga* that Björn decided not to copy into *Reykjarfjarðarbók* for some reason, or if it was an addition by the editor of *Króksfjarðarbók*.

Another example to show Björn’s supplementary editorial approach is the case of chapters a-e (designated such by Kristian Kålund⁹³) of *Svínfellinga saga* in *Reykjarfjarðarbók* (as preserved by Ilp). Chapters a-e are not present in *Króksfjarðarbók*. There has been much debate regarding the origins of chapters a-e. Pétur Sigurðsson asserts that chapters a, b, d and e were taken directly by the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* from **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*, while c was the editor’s own creation using *Porgils saga skarða*.⁹⁴ Finding Pétur’s view compelling with respect to the origins of chapters a-e, Grégory Cattaneo goes on to explain his view that the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* must have thought these additions would serve to better integrate the remote easterners into their recension of *Sturlunga saga*, which

⁹² Ólafía Einarsdóttir, ‘Om de to håndskrifter af *Sturlunga saga*’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 83 (1968), pp. 44-80; ‘Om samtidssagaens kildeværdi belyst ved *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*’, *Alvíssmál* 5 (1995), pp. 29-81, pp. 51; Kristian Kålund (ed.), *Sturlunga saga efter membranen Króksfjarðarbók udfyldt efter Reykjarfjarðarbók* vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 1906-11), p. 101n1. Jón Jóhannesson (‘Um *Sturlunga sögu*’ in Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), p. xliii) also discusses this.

⁹³ Kristian Kålund (ed.), *Sturlunga saga efter membranen Kroksfjardarbok* vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 1906-11), pp. 116-9.

⁹⁴ Pétur Sigurðsson, ‘Um *Íslendinga sögu* Sturlu Þórðarsonar’, *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta* 6/2 (1933-5), pp. 1-179, pp. 94-9.

has an overwhelming western and northern bias.⁹⁵ The origins of chapter c have proved controversial: while Jón Jóhannesson shared Pétur's point of view that it was written by the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók*, Björn M. Ólsen and Finnur Jónsson were of the opinion that it came from **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*.⁹⁶ In much more recent times, Úlfar Bragason has agreed with Björn and Finnur.⁹⁷ Guðrún Nordal notes that *Reykjarfjarðarbók's* editor evidently augmented his version of *Svínfellinga saga* material but has opposed Pétur's view, maintaining that chapters a, b, d and e cannot have come from among **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* because the *Króksfjarðarbók* recension of *Sturlunga saga* does not contain said content anywhere.⁹⁸ Nordal instead holds that chapters a, b, d and e were the invention of the *Reykjarfjarðarbók* editor. Yet, Nordal does not consider the possibility that the original sagas from which *Sturlunga saga's* constituent texts stemmed were most probably still extant and in circulation during the late fourteenth century. Moreover, the reasoning that **Íslendinga saga hin*

⁹⁵ Grégory Cattaneo, 'Écrire l'histoire d'une faide dans l'Islande du XIIIe siècle. Quelques remarques sur la Saga des Svínfellingar', *Tabularia* 16 (2016), pp. 91-118, p. 97.

⁹⁶ Jón Jóhannesson, 'Um *Sturlunga sögu*' in Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), p. xlv; Björn M. Ólsen, 'Um *Sturlungu*', *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenskra bókmennta* 3/2 (1902), pp. 193-510, p. 469ff.; Finnur Jónsson (*Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie* vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 1923), p. 730-3.

⁹⁷ Úlfar Bragason, *On the Poetics of Sturlunga* (PhD thesis: University of California, Berkeley, 1986), p. 78.

⁹⁸ Guðrún Nordal, 'To dream or not to dream: A question of method' in John McKinnell, David Ashurst & Donata Kick (eds.) *The Fantastic in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: Sagas and the British Isles* (Durham, 2006), pp. 304-13, pp. 308; 'Rewriting history: The fourteenth-century versions of *Sturlunga saga*' in Judy Quinn & Emily Lethbridge (eds.) *Creating the medieval saga: Versions, variability and editorial interpretations of Old Norse saga literature* (Odense, 2010), pp. 175-90, p. 183.

sérstaka cannot have contained chapters a, b, d and e because **Sturlunga saga* most probably did not is flawed, given what we know about the compiler's propensity to redact. It is plausible, therefore, that the information about Þórður from chapters a, b, d and e of *Reykjarfjarðarbók's* recension of *Svínfellinga saga* came from **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*, as Pétur Sigurðsson claims. If Ólafía Einarasdóttir's view that the editors of the fourteenth-century vellums copied selectively from **Sturlunga saga* is adopted, one may construe that this happened because the *Króksfjarðarbók* editor decided for some unknown reason to omit these parts of **Sturlunga saga's* version of *Íslendinga saga*. As discussed above, I do not agree with Ólafía's view that the fourteenth-century editors selectively copied material: I think it is more likely that the *Reykjarfjarðarbók* editor simply added them to his recension using **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*.

The supplementary details in *Reykjarfjarðarbók* attested in these two examples must have come from somewhere (even if it was simply the editor's imagination); nevertheless, it is unlikely – given what we know about the editor's identity – that the extensions were down to mere invention on his part. Moreover, *Reykjarfjarðarbók* includes recensions of *Porgils saga skarða* and *Sturlu þáttur* unlike *Króksfjarðarbók*; thus, there is already hard evidence for the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* consulting thirteenth century texts to augment his copy of **Sturlunga saga*. The editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* also added versions of *Jarteinasaga Guðmundar biskups* and *Árna saga biskups*. These were not inserted amongst the copy of *Sturlunga saga* in *Reykjarfjarðarbók*; consequently, *Jarteinasaga Guðmundar biskups* and *Árna*

saga biskups should not be regarded as augmentations of the same type as *Porgils saga skarða* and *Sturlu þáttur*. However, despite the different integrative process, this is still further evidence of *Reykjarfjarðarbók*'s editor consulting other texts to supplement his copy of *Sturlunga saga*. Consequently, would make more sense if the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* took his extra content from pre-compilation recensions of the texts in **Sturlunga saga*, including **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*.

It is clear from our discussion of *Pórðar saga kakala*'s transmission that much scholarship has been produced the origins of *Sturlunga saga* (i.e., the writing of **Sturlunga saga* and the transmission of the compilation through the production of the most important manuscripts).⁹⁹ The same cannot be said of *Pórðar saga kakala*'s genesis.

Previous research has attempted to establish the dating, localisation, authorship, and contents of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*; however, the methodologies and reasoning undergirding these perspectives have often been obscure and limited. It is not possible to stay at this stage, without doing further work, that any of these questions have been satisfactorily handled, even if they have been treated to some extent.

Beyond these matters, it is worth noting that the contemporary significance of the saga has not been established: previous scholars have applied an incorrect date of origin and, thus, historical contextualisation to **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. This necessarily means that the contemporary significance of the saga remains a gap in the scholarly

⁹⁹ N.B., research on many of the post-medieval manuscripts of *Sturlunga saga* is needed.

literature. Furthermore, it is worth noting that neither *Pórðar saga kakala* (in isolation from *Sturlunga saga*) nor a reconstruction of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* have been subjected to literary analysis before.

I.3 – Outline and approaches

The current state of affairs is problematic, because lacking a full understanding of the conditions of *Pórðar saga kakala*'s genesis impedes historians seeking to cite its account of the past. As already mentioned, *Pórðar saga kakala* is our only source for much of the history of Iceland during the 1240s. Other sources which shed light on certain events from this period include some of the Icelandic annals and extant documents, *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, and a handful of the component texts of *Sturlunga saga* (*Íslendinga saga*, *Svínfellinga saga*, and *Porgils saga skarða*).

Recently, the need for a rigorous re-evaluation of the historicity of the contemporary sagas (a genre which includes *Pórðar saga kakala*) has become both apparent and acute. For many years, scholars typically used the contemporary sagas most uncritically, regarding them as essentially objective accounts of the matters and events they purport to describe. In arguing for the importance of his own narratological research, Úlfar Bragason has shown the wrongheadedness of such an approach to texts of this genre.¹⁰⁰ Recent years have seen an increased awareness among scholars of the need to be far more critical when dealing with the contemporary sagas. The shift in attitudes is most noticeable when comparing Jón Viðar

¹⁰⁰ Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 31-6.

Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson's 2017 edited volume *Sturla Þórðarson* with Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir and Jónas Kristjánsson's 1988 volume *Sturlustefna*. While the authors of chapters in *Sturlustefna* had a tendency to emphasise the objectivity of the contemporary sagas, the contributors to *Sturla Þórðarson* were more concerned with subjectivities by identifying biases and perspectives.

Within the historical method, the origins of a primary source need be known to carry out the source-critical analysis which is an essential feature of good historiographical practice. The present thesis seeks to resolve the issues generated by the current dearth in the scholarship with a comprehensive study of *Þórðar saga kakala's* earliest history.

Chapter 1 reviews previous scholarship on the origins of *Þórðar saga kakala*. There, the results of former researchers are tested, and it is shown, rather than simply told, that our knowledge of this subject is currently deficient. Chapters 2 and 3 seek to fill the gap identified in the literature by advancing a proposition concerning the contemporary significance of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* from two separate analytical perspectives.

In chapter 1, it is argued that **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was written during the 1270s in the Western Quarter, possibly by a certain Svarthöfði Dufgusson (c. 1218-c. 86¹⁰¹), and consisted of a biography of

¹⁰¹ Date range based on Svarthöfði being at least sixteen years old in 1234 (Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 358) and having died prior to Eiríkur Marðarson taking up residence at Hrafnseyri, which took place in 1286 or earlier (vol. 2, p. 855).

Póroar kakali covering the years c. 1233-1256. Chapter 1 reaches these conclusions through the application of several methodological approaches.

The methods used to identify the age of **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla* are drawn from Einar Ól. Sveinsson's famous dissertation on the subject of dating the Icelandic sagas, specifically: considering 'historical evidence' where 'a saga mentions people or events of an age later than that with which it is concerned', examining the 'relations' of the saga with other literature, and analysing the frequencies of archaicisms relative to 'new words' and 'word forms'.¹⁰² Later on in the thesis (in chapter 3), where an historical analysis is performed on **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla*, it is possible to use another of Einar Ól.'s approaches to dating – speculating about 'events, people, or incidents which took place in the time of their authors'. This is reflected in the conclusion where there is a tentative narrowing down of the proposed date of composition for **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla* to 1273-9. The other methods that Einar suggest are not applied for a variety of reasons. Noting 'the ages of the manuscripts' is not particularly helpful for **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla*, as *Sturlunga saga* – which contains *Póroar saga kakala* – is a compilation of texts with various dates of origin. Reading for 'clerical and romantic influences' and comparing the saga under examination with the so-called 'heroic' sagas were possibilities; however, these are somewhat blunt instruments given that **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla* is evidently not a particularly late saga. Finally, critiquing 'the skill displayed in the sagas' is based on outdated presuppositions about the

¹⁰² Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Dating the Icelandic sagas: An essay in method* (London, 1958).

quality of sagas written at particular times in Icelandic history, and is a view closely associated with the nationalism of the time that Einar Ól. was alive.

Whereas Anglo-Saxonists can read for regionalisms to come to the conclusion that *Beowulf*, for example, was first written in Mercia, scholars of medieval Iceland cannot because the language we work with lacks subnational dialects.¹⁰³ Often, when scholars attempt to locate the birthplaces of the sagas, they appear to take first the semi-quantitative approach of finding the text's locus of action – if this is possible and the result is reasonable – and then a known site of textual production in this area – or the nearest one to it – whether an episcopal see, a monastery, or a chieftain's centre of power (typically the site of a major church). Occasionally, the scholar will propose the existence of a new textual centre unattested in the primary material. Thereafter, they will typically justify their choice of location *post hoc* through qualitative study – thematic analysis and/or historical criticism – of the saga in question. A refined, more quantitative version of the initial step in this method would be to look at the geographical distribution of all toponyms in the saga. However, there is good reason for us to take into consideration both the locus of action and the toponomastic clusters. On the one hand, knowing the locus of action allows us to return to a larger geographical scale in the face of the weight of other evidence contradicting the more precise predictions of toponomastic clusters. On the other hand, where there is a concord with conclusions drawn from other forms of evidence the toponomastic clusters can provide confirmatory

¹⁰³ For this view Richard North, *The Origins of Beowulf: From Virgil to Wiglaf* (Oxford, 2006).

evidence with a degree of precision which looking to the locus of action simply cannot.

For a long time, scholars of medieval Icelandic literature have also applied stylometry in attempts to analyse sagas in various ways, such as to prove or disprove attributions of authorship. The most notable examples are the first forays in the field made by Peter Hallberg during the 1960s. However, there have recently been advances in the application of stylometry to the medieval Icelandic corpus, particularly with respect to Tam Blaxter's attempt to use it to localise the sagas. Given the promise of stylometry, in that it may provide an approach to localisation to compensate for the lack of regionalisms in medieval Iceland, I also apply a stylometric methodology using an adapted form of the R code written by the digital humanist Matthew Jockers (which he uses to identify authors).

In sum, chapter 1 localises **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla* using the distant reading methods discussed above: identifying the main geographical setting of the narrative, categorising the toponyms mentioned in the saga, and subjecting the text to stylometric analysis.

The methodology for ascribing authorship must first be anchored in a consideration of theory. Let us begin, therefore, by defining “author” for the purposes of this thesis. The concepts of “author” and “authorship” have proved troublesome term for scholars in the humanities since the late 1960s. Rather than get embroiled in this complex debate, which would detract from the matter at hand, this thesis takes “author” to have its common, everyday meaning. There is a philosophical basis for doing so, beyond pragmatic

considerations about the space available for discussing methodological approaches: Ludwig Wittgenstein's Ordinary Language Philosophy recommends adopting the mundane meaning of terminology, to avoid falling into the trap of a protracted (and potentially fallacious, circular and self-defeating) debate, which may produce only a rarefied and unrecognisable definition for a technical term. As it is, I do not feel that the debate around what constitutes authorship is facile or fruitless; merely that adopting the ordinary meanings of "author" and "authorship" is the optimal working approach for the purposes of this thesis, and that this decision is philosophically justifiable.

The body of literature produced by scholars of medieval Iceland seeking saga authors is massive for such a small discipline. Often, the conclusions of such studies are suspect due to the minimal evidence which can be marshalled and the lack of a consensus on a rigorous methodological approach for ascribing authorship. There is some promise in the application of stylometric methods; however, beyond this, it may be that a methodological textbook (like Einar Ól. Sveinsson's on dating the Icelandic sagas) needs to be published on approaching the identification of authorship. In the absence of a clearly defined and accepted methodology, I make use of abductive heuristics to reason through the available circumstantial evidence to show that the possibility of Svarthöfði's authorship is both reasonable and the best available explanation (given the evidence we currently have); nevertheless, I by no means claim to prove his authorship.

The approach taken to reconstructing the content of the lost original of *Póroar saga kakala* is an inversion of redaction criticism. It seeks after the contents of the source text, **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla*, by taking the contents of *Póroar saga kakala* in the extant manuscripts and reversing the compilational and editorial processes in play throughout its transmission history. This critique makes use of the categories of evidence used in textual criticism (external and internal evidence), but is not interested in the production of an edition of the lost original.

Chapter 2 applies a literary analysis to **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla* as a first step towards determining its contemporary significance. This is done by closely analysing four key literary elements of *Póroar saga kakala* – i.e., narrative structure, characterisation, the plot's structure, and tone – in light of the content of **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla*, as well as its literary milieu, and the élite social and political ideologies circulating in Iceland at the time it was written during the 1270s. The chapter takes a mixed-method approach to reconstructing the thirteenth-century audience's reading of **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla*, combining techniques used by formalists with those from new historicism. There is an apparent tension in combining approaches from schools of literary criticism in diametric opposition to one another, and this demands an explanation. The philosophical baggage which comes along with many literary theories seems to be unhelpful insofar as it restricts the critic. This can be illustrated through analogy: one need not decide between Aristotelian and Newtonian mechanics to drive a nail into a piece of wood, one need simply determine whether a wrench or hammer

would be the appropriate instrument for carrying out that specific task. Consequently, a pragmatic point-of-view is adopted, such that the techniques derived from divergent schools are deployed during the chapter as different tools with differing functions.

Chapter 3 makes use of historical analysis to propose that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* may have been written as a work of propaganda intended to provide political support to a great magnate – namely: Hrafn Oddsson – during the 1270s. The historical-critical method applied to **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* in the second half of this chapter requires that, before proceeding, text and addressees must be contextualised, and the main themes present in the text explored. Following that groundwork, the historical-critical method consists in discerning how these two elements interact with one another to account for the text’s relationship to its context.¹⁰⁴ In practice, this means that chapter 3 takes the literary reading from chapter 2 and considers how this meshes with the political context of the 1270s. Given the élite nature of textual production in thirteenth-century Iceland, the political context in particular is the “high” politics of Iceland (and Norway). However, as discovering the intended purpose of a text is not a positively or directly verifiable goal, the historical analysis should be seen as another means of approaching the question of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*’s contemporary significance, complementary to and building upon the literary-analytic method applied in chapter 2.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew Marohl, *Faithfulness and the Purpose of Hebrews: A Social Identity Approach*, p. 38.

Nevertheless, before applying the historical-critical method to **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla*, the first half of chapter 3 connects the biographical contemporary sagas to High Medieval literary practice to theorise, in a general sense, why the texts of this subgenre were written. The rationale behind this derives from form criticism, which posits that the genre of a text is downstream of its purpose. Nonetheless, cross-case comparison of the text of a genre (or, in this case, a subgenre) can only take us so far as it takes into account neither the particularities of each individual text nor its specific historical context. Consequently, the subgeneric context established in the first half of the chapter serves to govern the horizon of expectations brought to bear on the analysis **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla*, as a guard against misplaced exegesis. The texts of the biographical contemporary saga subgenre considered during this initial part of chapter 3 are *Sturlu saga*, *Guðmundar saga dýra*, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*, *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, *Porgils saga skarða*, *Sverris saga*, and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*.

Overall, this thesis is a venture in what might be called “metaxic” Philology, due to its admixture of old and new concerns and methods. In essence, it attempts to rehabilitate the goals of traditional Philology, whilst remaining cognisant of the theoretical and methodological developments in the Humanities leading to, amongst other things, the advent of New Philology.

Chapter 1

Literature review

As with most of the contemporary sagas, there has been a paucity of scholarly attention dedicated to *Pórðar saga kakala* over the years, to the extent that a monograph on the text has never been produced. Despite the general lack of research on *Pórðar saga kakala*, there have been varying degrees of academic interest in specific research questions with the consequence that the saga's origins have been partially illuminated. This chapter critically engages with what literature there is (on the dating, localisation, authorship, and contents of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*), testing the quality of the existing scholarship and identifying areas in need of further research. The conclusion reached by the close of this chapter is that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was written during the 1270s in the Western Quarter, probably by Svarthöfði Dufgusson, and that the saga covered a longer time period than *Pórðar saga kakala* (c. 1233-56 versus 1242-50 and 1254-6). It is also noted that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*'s contemporary significance has not been established by previous researchers.

1.1 – That 70s saga: Dating **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*

Scholarly attempts to identify the age of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* have proposed dates clustered in and around two decades: the 1250s and

1270s.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, only one scholar from either school of thought – namely, Helen Carron – has provided evidence to back up an opinion on **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*'s dating.

1.1.1 – References to historical personages

Helen Carron has highlighted three historical personages referenced in *Pórðar saga kakala* for whom datable characteristics are mentioned, namely: 'Vermundur Halldórsson, er síðan var ábóti at Þingeyrum' ('Vermundur

¹⁰⁵ Einar Már Jónsson, 'La saga de Thórdur kakali: Une œuvre de propagande?', *Médiévales* 50 (2006), pp. 47-57, p. 54; Costel Coroban, *Ideology and power in Norway and Iceland, 1150-1250* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 169; Axel Kristinsson, 'The revered outlaw: Gísli Súrsson and the Sturlungs', *The CAHD papers* 4 (2009), pp. 1-12, p. 11; R. George Thomas, 'Introduction' in Julia McGrew (trans.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 1 (New York, 1970), pp. 11-45, p. 20; Jón Jóhannesson, 'Um Sturlunga sögu' in Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), pp. xxxv-xli; Björn M. Ólsen, 'Um Sturlungu', *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta* 3/2 (1902), pp. 193-510, p. 467; Peter Hallberg, 'Enn um aldur Fóstbræðra sögu', *Skírnir* 150 (1976), pp. 238-263, pp. 249-50; Þórhallur Vilmundarson, 'Ólafur chaim', *Skírnir* 151 (1977), pp. 133-62, p. 135; Jónas Kristjánsson & Peter Foote (trans.), *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature* (Reykjavík, 2007), p. 198; Helen Carron, 'History and *Pórðar saga kakala*' in John McKinnell, David Ashurst & Donata Kick (eds.) *The Fantastic in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: Sagas and the British Isles* (Durham, 2006), pp. 161-70, p. 162; Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 26; Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and salvation in Old Norse literature* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 9; Örnólfur Thorsson, 'Inngangur' in Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.) *Sturlunga saga. Skýringar og fræði – Íslendingabók – Ynglingatal – Veraldar saga – Leiðarvísir Nikuláss Bergssonar – Samþykktir og sáttmálar – Ættir og átök – Kort – Tölur – Orðasafn – Nafnaskrá – Staðanafnaskrá [Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 3] (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. xv-cxii, p. xxviii; Anton Zimmerling, 'Bishop Guðmundr in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*: The cult of saints or the cult of personalities?' in Rudolf Simek & Judith Meurer (eds.) *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages* (Bonn, 2005), pp. 559-569, p. 564; Ólafía Einarsdóttir, 'Om samtidssagaens kildeværdi belyst ved *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*', *Alvíssmál* 5 (1995), pp. 29-81, pp. 50-1.

Halldórsson, who later became the abbot of Þingeyrar”) – he became abbot in 1255; ‘Leif austmann er síðan var kallaður Knarrar-Leifur’ (‘a Norwegian named Leiv, who was later known as Knarrar-Leiv’) – he received this nickname at some point between 1242 and 1261; ‘Brandur prestur Jónsson er síðan var biskups at Hólum’ (‘the priest Brandur Jónsson – who later became bishop of Hólar’) – he became bishop in 1263.¹⁰⁶ The last of these quotations indicates that the earliest **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* could have been written was 1263. The *terminus post quem* of 1263 is further supported by the fact that the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* appears to have used *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (as discussed in chapter 2) as a source: *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* was composed by Sturla Þórðarson in 1263-5.¹⁰⁷

Because Carron refuses to rule out the possibility that the details about these historical personages were later interpolations by **Sturlunga saga*’s compiler, she concludes with a broad dating of 1263-1300 for **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. The end date of 1300 stems from Carron’s belief that Þórður Narfason was the compiler of **Sturlunga saga*.

¹⁰⁶ Helen Carron, ‘History and *Pórðar saga kakala*’ in John McKinnell, David Ashurst & Donata Kick (eds.) *The Fantastic in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: Sagas and the British Isles* (Durham, 2006), pp. 161-70, p. 162; Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík 2010), pp. 463, 531 & 537; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), pp. 39, 253 & 273; Hermann Pálsson, *Eftir þjóðveldið. Heimildir annála um íslenska sögu 1263-89* (Reykjavík, 1965), p. 51; Sverrir Jakobsson, Þorleifur Hauksson & Tor Ulset (eds.), *Íslensk fornrit* vol. 32 (Reykjavík, 2013), p. 221; Jón Þorkelsson (ed.), *Diplomatarium Islandicum* vol. 3 (Copenhagen, 1896), p. 150. Carron’s approach is likely derived from Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Dating the Icelandic sagas: An essay in method* (London, 1958).

¹⁰⁷ Þorleifur Hauksson, Sverrir Jakobsson & Tor Ulset (eds.), *Íslensk fornrit* vol. 31 (Reykjavík, 2013), p. xxxii.

While Carron's caution is understandable, I do not think there is any reason to assign the compiler a probability of having written these details equal to or greater than that of the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. It must first be admitted that the phraseology employed with respect to the future career trajectories of Leiv, Brandur and Vermundur – i.e., 'er síðan var' – is common throughout the other texts which made up **Sturlunga saga*.¹⁰⁸ Given this commonality, we cannot therefore categorically deny the possibility of the compiler's hand at these points in *Pórðar saga kakala*. This is in actuality the strongest and only argument in favour of the compiler's intervention in these passages, though Carron does not make it, because her paper is not primarily concerned with finding the most exact date possible for **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*'s composition. However, as this phrase also appears regularly throughout medieval Icelandic literature, it is not a sure indicator of the compiler's intervention.¹⁰⁹ Thus, there is no good reason to consider the compiler of **Sturlunga saga* as any more likely than the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* to have noted these details about the lives of Leiv, Brandur and Vermundur. Furthermore, there is nothing in particular which should cause us to consider these as interpolations by the compiler;

¹⁰⁸ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 114, 117, 172, 190, 252, 279, 296 & 392; Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 550-1, 636 & 640-1.

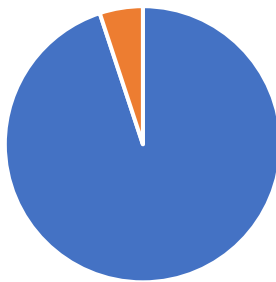
¹⁰⁹ For a handful of examples, cf. Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Heimskringla* (Copenhagen, 1911), pp. 33, 101, 129, 140, 302, 316, 370, 510, 520, 577, 578 & 582; Guðbrandur Vigfússon (ed.) *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* (Copenhagen, 1860), p. 25; Sigurður Nordal (ed.), *Íslenzk fornrit* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1933), pp. 196; Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.), *Íslenzk fornrit* vol. 5 (Reykjavík, 1934), pp. 18 & 157.

consequently, application of Occam's Razor dictates that we would be best placed to consider them as having been present in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*.

1.1.2 – The ratio of 'um' to 'of'

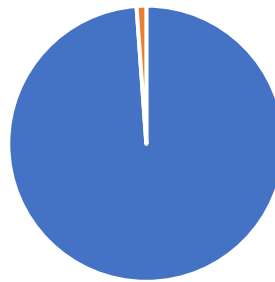
Carron's use of particular historical personages to date **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* is not the only possible technique available to us: linguistic anachronisms also reflect the age of a text. For example, from the start of the thirteenth century onwards, 'of' was increasingly replaced by 'um' in Icelandic. To illustrate this, let us consider the ratio of 'um' to 'of' in one saga from c. 1205¹¹⁰ (*Heiðarvíga saga*) and another from c. 1280 (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, referred to hereafter as *Njála*):

Heiðarvíga saga (c. 1205)



■ Frequency of 'um' ■ Frequency of 'of'

Njála (c. 1280)

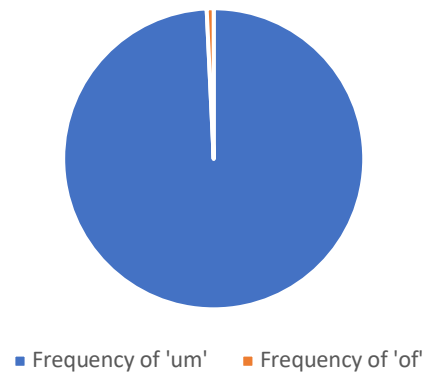


■ Frequency of 'um' ■ Frequency of 'of'

¹¹⁰ This dating of *Heiðarvíga saga* is disputed by Bjarni Guðnason, *Túlkun Heiðarvígasögu* (Reykjavík, 1993), p. 253; nevertheless, the saga has been deemed by most scholars to be of early origin, e.g. Sigurður Nordal & Guðni Jónsson, 'Formáli' in Sigurður Nordal & Guðni Jónsson (eds.) *Íslenzk fornrit* vol. 3 (Reykjavík, 1938), pp. v-clv, p. cxxx; Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180-1280)* (Ithaca, 2006), p. 76; Christopher Callow, 'Dating and Origins' in Ármann Jakobsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas* (Abingdon, 2017), pp. 15-33, p. 21.

Einar Ól. Sveinsson in his textbook on dating the Icelandic sagas noted that in *Króksfjarðarbók*, there is disparity between the older and younger component texts of *Sturlunga saga* in how frequently they employ the words ‘um’ and ‘of’. Consequently, the ratio of ‘um’ to ‘of’ can be used for dating the originals of **Sturlunga saga*’s component texts: the compiler did not update the language in them. In this light, let us now bring in the extant *Pórðar saga kakala* for comparison with the two sagas above:

Pórðar saga kakala



The similarity of the ratios of ‘um’ to ‘of’ in *Njála* and the extant *Pórðar saga kakala* against the contrasting *Heiðarvíga saga* shows – unsurprisingly – that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was most likely written during the late thirteenth century.

1.1.3 – Associated literature

Taking into account the dating of the literary works connected to a saga is yet another effective means of finding, adjusting and corroborating terminal dates for a text’s production found during a review of the historical

evidence.¹¹¹ It is best to begin in the case of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* by considering **Sturlunga saga* which, as we know, included *Pórðar saga kakala*. **Sturlunga saga* dates from the first half of the fourteenth century, though it is not altogether clear precisely what the compilations *terminus ante quem* is given that we have two candidates for compiler. For the present author's part, Þorsteinn Snorrason appears the most likely of the two, which would indicate that the absolute latest **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* could have been written was before Þorsteinn's death in 1351. However, as we cannot completely rule out the possibility that Þórður Narfason was the compiler, the *terminus ante quem* provided by **Sturlunga saga* could be as early as the year of Þórður's death in 1308.

The deadlock caused by looking to **Sturlunga saga* can be resolved by considering **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* instead. It has been argued that Sturla used **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* as a source – or at least, had read and was responding to it – when he wrote **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*.¹¹² This can be shown quite simply by comparing chapters 307 and 308 in Örnólfur Thorsson's edition of *Sturlunga saga* (the last two chapters of *Íslendinga saga* before the compiler's interpolation of *Pórðar saga kakala*) with chapters 309 to 311 (the first three chapters of *Pórðar saga kakala*).¹¹³

¹¹¹ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Dating the Icelandic sagas: An essay in method* (London, 1958), pp. 76-95.

¹¹² Jónas Kristjánsson & Peter Foote (trans.), *Eddas and sagas: Iceland's medieval literature* (Reykjavík, 2007), p. 195; R. George Thomas, 'Introduction' in Julia McGrew (trans.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 1 (New York, 1970), pp. 11-45, p. 18.

¹¹³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 456-8;

Beyond this evidence, the *Formáli* to *Sturlunga saga* comes tantalisingly close to stating that Sturla used **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* as a source for **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*.¹¹⁴ It runs as follows:

Flestar allar sögur þær er hér hafa gerst á Íslandi voru ritaðar áður Brandur biskup Sæmundarson andaðist en þær sögur er síðan hafa gerst voru lítt ritaðar áður Sturli skáld Pórðarson sagði fyrir Íslendinga sögur og hafði hann þar til vísindi af fróðum mönnum þeim er voru á öndverðum dögum hans en sumt eftir bréfum þeim er þeir rituðu er þeim voru samtíða er sögurnar eru frá. Marga hluti mátti hann sjálfur sjá þá er á hans dögum gerðust til stórtíðinda.¹¹⁵

(Nearly all the sagas whose events took place in Iceland before Bishop Brandur Sæmundarson died had been written down, but few of those sagas whose events happened since had been written down, before the poet Sturla Pórðarson produced sagas about Icelanders and for that he had the knowledge of learned men, those who were around during his childhood, as well as some letters written by contemporaries of those people which the sagas are about. He was able to see and hear many things for himself, when great events took place during his life.)

This passage can and has been interpreted in a variety of ways by previous scholars, but it seems most likely to me that this section of the *Formáli* is enumerating the types of sources Sturla used: other sagas, oral accounts,

Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 459-65.

¹¹⁴ There is a disjunct in the *Formáli*: the first part describes the compiler's working method in constructing **Sturlunga saga* but the second part appears to discuss Sturla's approach to writing **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*. If the hypothesis noted previously – that Pórður Narfason finished **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* for Sturla while Þorsteinn Snorrason compiled **Sturlunga saga* – is correct, then it is perfectly reasonable to conclude that the second part of the *Formáli* should be attributed to Pórður Narfason (possibly based on Sturla's notes or own **Formáli*) and the first part to Þorsteinn Snorrason. Úlfar Bragason ('Sagnaskemmtun á Reykhólum og Sturlunguhöfundur' in Sverrir Tómasson (ed.) *Samtíðarsögur* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1994), pp. 784-98, pp. 787-9) takes a similar view to this.

¹¹⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 100.

letters and his own experiences. While it would have been far more convincing evidence if Sturla's sources were explicitly named in the *Formáli*, this aside is indirect evidence that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* – as one of the few sagas already written – was used to draft **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*.¹¹⁶

Given that **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*'s *terminus ante quem* has to be 1284, the year that Sturla Þórðarson died, this suggests this same year is the absolute latest **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* could have been written. I find assigning **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* the same *terminus ante quem* as **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*'s unsatisfying. Sturla must have had enough time to read and digest the contents of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* before writing his own revised account of events. Portions of **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* covering 'the period prior to 1243' are thought to have been drafted in c. 1266 before the work was temporarily abandoned.¹¹⁷ Sturla would have only to have resumed writing in 1276, based on the assumption that he withdrew somewhat from the political arena, having left the position of lawman for all Iceland that year.¹¹⁸ The notion that Sturla retreated wholesale from politics overlooks the fact that he remained lawman of the Northern and Western Quarters until 1282 (even if his contemporaries

¹¹⁶ Jónas Kristjánsson (& Peter Foote (trans.)), *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature* (Reykjavík, 2007), p. 195) agrees with my position that Sturla knew other contemporary sagas, like *Pórðar saga kakala*.

¹¹⁷ Helgi Þorláksson, 'The Bias and Alleged Impartiality of Sturla Þórðarson' in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 200-11, p. 201.

¹¹⁸ Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 'Sturla Þórðarson' in Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir & Jónas Kristjánsson (eds.) *Sturlustefna. Ráðstefna haldin á sjö alda ártíð Sturlu Þórðarsonar sagnaritara 1984* (Reykjavík, 1988), pp. 9-36, p. 20.

did complain at his increasing introversion). Moreover, as Sturla was in Norway being ennobled (and likely composing *Magnúss saga lagabætis*) between 1277 and 1278, he cannot have done much work on **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* at this time.¹¹⁹ In my view, only in 1282 when he sequestered himself on Fagurey in Breiðafjörður, can he have dedicated the time necessary to redraft and attempt to complete **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*, a task which he appears never to have managed (thus adding further weight to the argument that at least part of this text had a late date of origin).¹²⁰ Evidently, all of Sturla's sources must have become available to him by this time, as he would be dead within two years of leaving for Fagurey. Consequently, it is 1282 that should be given as **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla's terminus ante quem*.

Given the evidence which suggests a date of composition at any point during the period 1263-82, it is clear, therefore, that those of the learned opinion that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was written during the 1270s are most probably correct.

1.2 – From out west: Localising **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*

Those who have ventured a view on the matter, such as Jónas Kristjánsson, have speculated that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was written

¹¹⁹ Hermann Pálsson, *Eftir þjóðveldið. Heimildir annála um íslenska sögu 1263-89* (Reykjavík, 1965), p. 16; Þorleifur Hauksson (ed.), *Árna saga biskups* (Reykjavík, 1972), pp. lxxxviii-xci; Sverrir Jakobsson, Þorleifur Hauksson & Tor Ulset (eds.), *Íslensk fornrit* vol. 32 (Reykjavík, 2013), p. lx.

¹²⁰ Helgi Þorláksson, 'The Bias and Alleged Impartiality of Sturla Þórðarson' in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 200-11, p. 201.

in western Iceland.¹²¹ Nevertheless, this view has hardly been backed by any sort of thoroughgoing analysis using methods of either close or distant reading. In order to test this supposition, this section makes use of the following distant reading methods: identifying the main geographical setting of the narrative, categorising the toponyms mentioned in the saga, and subjecting the text to stylometric analysis.

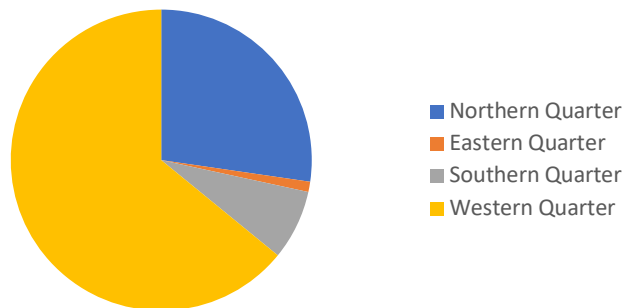
1.2.1 – Locus of action and toponomastic clusters

While the locus of action in the extant *Pórðar saga kakala* is hardly so confined an area as in, say, the family sagas (i.e., a district or region), it does give a hint as to which Quarters **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*'s may most likely have been written in. Yet, there is a caveat: sagas do not necessarily have to have been written in the area in which the events it describes occurred. For example, many sagas of Norwegian kings were written in Iceland but nearly all the action took place in Norway. However, given the Icelandic setting of the saga in question, we can tentatively propose that because the extant *Pórðar saga kakala* mostly describes events taking place in the Northern and Western Quarters of Iceland, this area is likely to house the saga's place of origin.

We can increase the precision of our speculation by sorting all of the toponyms in the extant *Pórðar saga kakala* by area on a Quarter scale. The presupposition undergirding this proposal is that the more places one knows in a given Quarter, the more likely one is to hail from it, or, at least, to have

¹²¹ Jónas Kristjánsson & Peter Foote (trans.), *Eddas and sagas: Iceland's medieval literature* (Reykjavík, 2007), pp. 195 & 198.

lived adjacent to it. Again, we need to treat these results with caution. The saga having a locus of action to speak of will naturally correspond with there being more toponyms from that area mentioned in the saga. Therefore, this potentially more exact method is prey also to the objection that a saga does not have to be written in the same area as that in which the action described therein takes place. This limitation duly recalled, let us review the results:



As the illustration shows, the area with the most locations mentioned in the extant *Pórðar saga kakala* is the Western Quarter. If our presupposition is correct, the toponymic data predicts that the Western Quarter will be most likely to house our production site due to its containment of 64% of the toponyms in the saga.

1.2.2 – Stylometric localisation of *Pórðar saga kakala*

In 2018, Cambridge academic Tam Blaxter took advantage of the processing power of modern computers to use a larger corpus than in previous stylometric studies of the sagas.¹²² Tam's study sought to identify regional variations in the style of medieval Icelandic literature. I am not so much interested here in the ultimate results of Tam's study – i.e., the specific

¹²² Tam Blaxter, 'Towards a stylistic geography of the *Íslendingasögur*', paper presented to the Old Norse in Oxford Seminar, 22 May 2018.

regional stylistic quirks she found – as much as the clustering of the sagas in her corpus. Tam analysed her corpus using three metrics: ‘type ngrams (sequences of words as they occur in texts, distributions of word lengths, and type:token ratio (richness of vocabulary)’.¹²³ After this, Tam presented the relationships between the sagas in the corpus she used in a consensus tree. The extant *Pórðar saga kakala* was included in Tam’s corpus, so let us consider the cluster her model situated it among:



The placement of the extant *Pórðar saga kakala* in the tree among texts from Dalir and Borgarfjörður (in the Western Quarter) accords well with what we established when the toponyms in *Pórðar saga kakala* were considered. Nevertheless, I was not content to accept Tam’s results at face value, as they have not yet been subject to the peer-review process. Consequently, I carried out my own stylometric experiment to localise **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, the methodology and results of which shall now be discussed.

¹²³ Tam Blaxter, ‘Towards a stylistic geography of the *Íslendingasögur*’, paper presented to the Old Norse in Oxford Seminar, 22 May 2018.

Using *RStudio*, I applied a slightly modified version of Matthew Jockers' R code for machine classification of texts to *The Saga Corpus*.¹²⁴ There were a few matters to attend to before running *RStudio*. After downloading *The Saga Corpus*, I moved the .xml files contained in the .zip folder to the directory `~/Documents/PhD/Stylometrics/The Saga Corpus/Textar úr fornsögum/corpus`. I then extracted the text of the extant *Pórðar saga kakala* from `F1F.xml` (containing an edition of *Sturlunga saga*). I entitled the new .xml containing *Pórðar saga kakala* as `Unknown_pórðar saga kaka1a.xml`, and then renamed the other .xml files in the corpus according to the format `<Quarter>_<title>.xml` replacing `<Quarter>` with each saga's presumed Quarter of origin (based on its locus of action¹²⁵ or the residence of its known author) and `<title>` with the name traditionally given to the saga. At this stage, I also removed any sagas from my corpus for which a value for `<Quarter>` was not forthcoming. The revised corpus now had the following contents and metadata:

¹²⁴ R Core Team, 'R: A language and environment for statistical computing', *The R project for statistical computing* (2018), <https://www.R-project.org/> (Accessed: 16 March 2019); RStudio Team, 'RStudio: Integrated development for R', *RStudio: Open source and enterprise-ready professional software for R* (2015), <http://www.rstudio.com/> (Accessed: 16 March 2019); Matthew Jockers, *Text analysis with R for students of literature* (New York, 2014), pp. 119-34; Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson & Sigrún Helgadóttir, 'Morphosyntactic tagging of Old Icelandic texts and its use in studying syntactic variation and change' in Caroline Sporleder, Antal van den Bosch & Kalliopi Zervanou (eds.) *Language technology for cultural heritage: Selected papers from the LaTeCH workshop series* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 63-76.

¹²⁵ Identified using Emily Lethbridge, Hjördís Erna Sigurðardóttir, Gísli Pálsson, Zachary Melton, Trausti Dagsson & Logi Ragnarsson, 'Mapping the Icelandic Sagas', *Icelandic Saga Map* (2014) sagamap.hi.is (Accessed: 16 March 2019).

<Quarter>	<title>
<p><i>Austfirðingafjórðungur</i> (Eastern Quarter)</p>	<p><i>Droplaugarsona saga</i> <i>Fljótsdæla saga</i> <i>Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls</i> <i>Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða</i> <i>Vopnfirðinga saga</i></p>
<p><i>Norðlendingafjórðungur</i> (Northern Quarter)</p>	<p><i>Bandamanna saga</i> <i>Finnboga saga ramma</i> <i>Hallfreðar saga</i> <i>Heiðarvíga saga</i> <i>Kormáks saga</i> <i>Ljósvetninga saga</i> <i>Reykdæla saga</i> <i>Svarfdæla saga</i> <i>Valla-Ljóts saga</i> <i>Vatnsdæla saga</i> <i>Víga-Glúms saga</i></p>
<p>Unknown</p>	<p><i>Pórðar saga kakala</i></p>
<p><i>Sunnlendingafjórðungur</i> (Southern Quarter)</p>	<p><i>Njála</i> <i>Flóamanna saga</i> <i>Harðar saga og Hólmverja</i> <i>Kjalnesinga saga</i></p>
<p><i>Vestfirðingafjórðungur</i> (Western Quarter)</p>	<p><i>Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss</i> <i>Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa</i> <i>Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar</i> <i>Eiríks saga rauða</i> <i>Eyrbyggja saga</i> <i>Fóstbræðra saga</i> <i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i> <i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i> <i>Gull-Póris saga</i> <i>Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu</i> <i>Hænsna-Póris saga</i> <i>Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings</i> <i>Heiðarvíga saga</i> <i>Heimskringla</i> <i>Laxdæla saga</i> <i>Víglundar saga</i></p>

Following preparation of the corpus, I had to change the main xml element in the files of the corpus from mimDoc to TEI so that it would parse in R.

A couple of limitations of the corpus, and, therefore, possible limitations of the stylometric method for the purposes of localisation, are apparent from a thoughtful examination of the table. Firstly, the Western Quarter is overrepresented (most medieval Icelandic texts probably came from this area), meaning the sample size is much greater, which increases the odds of mistaken quantitative identification of stylistic similarity with that subcorpus. Secondly, the texts of the corpus come from many different time periods, so the corpus as presented here makes the assumption that variations in style are locational rather than temporal. This could be a fairly tenuous position to take because, although a diachronic analysis of Icelandic shows it to be a very conservative language, one of the factors driving this is the virtual absence of regional dialects in Iceland due to the vast majority of the population being highly mobile agricultural labourers prior to the twentieth century. However, I would contend that saga writers were almost certainly members of the social and political élite, and so were unlikely to have had quite the same unsettled existence as the masses, even if there was interregional communication and exchange within this group. Moreover, whilst texts were in circulation between centres of production, any textual centre's "library" would most likely have been dominated by texts written at the same place. Still further, it is important to remember that written literary style is different to spoken linguistic style, given that they pertain to different media, registers, and contexts. These three things indicate that, while very

gradual and uniform language change took place in Icelandic, different “schools” of saga writing could conceivably have had statistically significant stylistic quirks which remained static over time.

The experiment was started by booting up *RStudio*, identifying the filepath of the .xml files in the corpus, and defining the filetype used.¹²⁶

```
>setwd("~/Documents/PhD/Stylometrics/The Saga Corpus/Textar úr
fornsögum")
>library(XML)
>input.dir <- "corpus"
>files.v <- dir(input.dir, ".*xml")
```

Each saga in the corpus was then converted into a continuous string of text and partitioned into ten equal chunks. Tables containing the frequencies of the words in each of the ten chunks of all the sagas in the corpus were then generated.

```
getTEIWordSegmentTableList <- function(doc.object, chunk.size=10){
  orð <- getNodeSet(doc.object,
                    "/d:TEI/d:text/d:body/d:div1/d:div2/d:p/d:s//d:w",
                    c(d = "http://www.tei-c.org/ns/1.0"))
  words <- paste(sapply(orð,xmlValue), collapse=" ")
  words.lower <- tolower(words)
  words.list <- strsplit(words.lower, "\\w")
  word.v <- unlist(words.list)
  max.length <- length(word.v)/chunk.size
  x <- seq_along(word.v)
  chunks.1 <- split(word.v, ceiling(x/max.length))
  removeBlanks <- function(x){
    x[which(x!="")]
  }
  chunks.1 <- lapply(chunks.1, removeBlanks)
  freq.chunks.1 <- lapply(chunks.1, table)
  rel.freq.chunk.1 <- lapply(freq.chunks.1, prop.table)
  return(rel.freq.chunk.1)
}
>book.freqs.1 <- list()
```

¹²⁶ As mentioned, the used code below is derived from that written by Matthew Jockers (*Text analysis with R for students of literature* (New York, 2014), pp. 119-34). All credit for its efficacy here rightly belongs to him, not me. Additionally, I have also rewritten and simplified Jockers’ explanations of his code to incorporate here: any errors resulting are mine alone.

```
for(i in 1:length(files.v)){
  doc.object <- xmlTreeParse(file.path(input.dir, files.v[i]),
                             useInternalNodes=TRUE)
  chunk.data.1 <- getTEIWordSegmentTableList(doc.object, 10)
  book.freqs.1[[files.v[i]]] <- chunk.data.1
}
```

These tables were then converted, first into a matrix, then into a data frame.

```
my.mapply <- function(x){
  my.list <- mapply(data.frame, ID=seq_along(x),
                   x, SIMPLIFY=FALSE,
                   MoreArgs=list(stringsAsFactors=FALSE))
  my.df <- do.call(rbind, my.list)
  return(my.df)
}

>freqs.1 <- lapply(book.freqs.1, my.mapply)
>freqs.df <- do.call(rbind,freqs.1)
```

The data was then organised, providing each chunk of text with an ID.

```
>bookids.v <- gsub("\\\\..*", "", rownames(freqs.df))
>book.chunk.ids <- paste(bookids.v, freqs.df$ID, sep="_")
>freqs.df$ID <- book.chunk.ids
```

The data was cross tabulated and then converted into a data frame.

```
>result.t <- xtabs(Freq ~ ID+Var1, data=freqs.df)
>final.df <- as.data.frame.matrix(result.t)
```

Word frequency data was then mapped to the relevant chunks of the texts in the corpus as well as the Quarter to which each saga was localised to at the start of the experiment (i.e., based on their respective loci of action). A vector of Quarters was then generated which was bound into a final data frame.

```
>metacols.m <- do.call(rbind, strsplit(rownames(final.df), "_"))
```

```
>colnames(metacols.m) <- c("samplelocation", "sampletitle",
"samplechunk")
>location.v <- gsub("$", "", metacols.m["samplelocation"])
>locality.df <- cbind(location.v, metacols.m, final.df)
```

The feature set was then reduced to exclude words without ‘a mean relative frequency across the corpus of [at least] 0.005’.¹²⁷ This was then incorporated into the final data frame.

```
>freq.means.v <- colMeans(locality.df[,5:ncol(locality.df)])
>keepers.v <- which(freq.means.v >=.005)
>smaller.df <- locality.df[, c(names(locality.df)[1:4],
names(keepers.v))]
```

The data duly prepared, classification analysis could begin, culminating in the creation of the model.

```
>unknown.v <- which(smaller.df$location.v == "Unknown")
>train <- smaller.df[-unknown.v,5:ncol(smaller.df)]
>class.f <- smaller.df[-unknown.v,"location.v"]
>library(e1071)
>model.svm <- svm(train, class.f)
```

The test data was then isolated and sent to the model so that it could predict the Quarter *Pórðar saga kakala* (and, thus, **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*) came from.

```
>testdata <- smaller.df[unknown.v,5:ncol(smaller.df)]
>final.result <- predict(model.svm, testdata)
```

¹²⁷ Matthew Jockers, *Text analysis with R for students of literature* (New York, 2014), p. 129.

The model predicted that every single chunk of the extant *Pórðar saga kakala* bears the stylistic hallmarks of deriving from a text written in the Western Quarter.

```
>as.data.frame(final.result)
      final.result
Unknown_þorðar saga kakala_1 vestfirðingafjórðungur
Unknown_þorðar saga kakala_10 vestfirðingafjórðungur
Unknown_þorðar saga kakala_2 vestfirðingafjórðungur
Unknown_þorðar saga kakala_3 vestfirðingafjórðungur
Unknown_þorðar saga kakala_4 vestfirðingafjórðungur
Unknown_þorðar saga kakala_5 vestfirðingafjórðungur
Unknown_þorðar saga kakala_6 vestfirðingafjórðungur
Unknown_þorðar saga kakala_7 vestfirðingafjórðungur
Unknown_þorðar saga kakala_8 vestfirðingafjórðungur
Unknown_þorðar saga kakala_9 vestfirðingafjórðungur
```

The concerns raised above concerning the possible limitations of the stylometric method of localisation motivated me to perform a test run of this model. The test run produced two important results.¹²⁸ Firstly, the model correctly identified the locality of the sagas tested in all but one case (i.e., more than 50% of the chunks of each saga were ascribed to the correct Quarter). The failure was in the case of *Heiðarvíga saga*, whose locus of action is in the Northern Quarter, but which may well have been written in the Western Quarter (as the model predicted); thus, this apparent error does not serve undermine the efficacy of this method but, rather, strengthens it. Secondly, the ascription of locality by the model to any given chunk had a 90% accuracy rate.

Consequently, stylometric analysis of *Pórðar saga kakala* using Jockers' R code suggests a place of origin for **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*

¹²⁸ Cf. Matthew Jockers, *Text analysis with R for students of literature* (New York, 2014), p. 131) for the R code needed to run such a test.

somewhere in the Western Quarter, supporting the conclusion drawn from toponymic evidence.

1.3 – Svarthöfði Dufgusson: The author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*?

Recently, scholars have not been concerned with who wrote **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* and why this author wrote it, but the matter of who patronised it. This shift in interest appears to have been a way to get around the so-proclaimed ‘death of the author’ and the now popular conception of authorship taking many forms that has problematised any search for a text’s originator.

Nevertheless, the issue of who wrote **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* has attracted answers from at least three prominent scholars. Guðbrandur Vigfússon believed there never was a **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* and that Sturla Þórðarson wrote *Pórðar saga kakala*, classifying it as part of *Íslendinga saga* (perhaps he meant **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*?).¹²⁹ Björn M. Ólsen disputed Guðbrandur’s view, and showed that Sturla could not have written *Pórðar saga kakala* – though Björn’s reasoning is partially erroneous given his view that **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* predated **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* – and suggested Svarthöfði Dufgusson as the author for **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* instead.¹³⁰ Jónas Kristjánsson

¹²⁹ Guðbrandur Vigfússon, ‘Prolegomena’ in Guðbrandur Vigfússon (ed.), *Sturlunga saga including the Íslendinga saga of Lawman Sturla Thordsson and Other Works* (Oxford, 1878), p. cv.

¹³⁰ Björn M. Ólsen, ‘Um *Sturlungu*’, *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta* 3/2 (1902), pp. 193-510, p. 466.

believes **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was written by a ‘partisan... of the Sturlungar’ who ‘was closely familiar with Pórður’s activities and movements, especially in the west of Iceland’, though moves swiftly on to compare the literary skill of the author unfavourably with that of Sturla Pórðarson.¹³¹

Jónas’ view is certainly the safest in that it pinpoints precisely the criteria any candidate for authorship of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* would need to fulfil. However, he does not propose a specific individual as the saga’s author. Given that Björn’s view is compatible with Jónas’, it is Björn’s perspective that we shall weigh the evidence for to determine whether or not we should adopt it. As we will soon see, there is plenty of circumstantial evidence to support it.

1.3.1 – Witness and informant: The preservation of Svarthöfði Dufgusson’s memories and points of view in *Pórðar saga kakala*

Pétur Sigurðsson was the first to propose Svarthöfði’s memories as the main source of the saga’s content.¹³² Helen Carron has noted that *Pórðar saga kakala* ‘acknowledges... two types of source material, namely the poetry of two poets and one document, a letter’.¹³³ Additionally, Carron goes on to mention possible informants whose memories contributed to **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, such as Ingjaldur Geirmundarson, Svarthöfði

¹³¹ Jónas Kristjánsson & Peter Foote (trans.), *Eddas and sagas: Iceland’s medieval literature* (Reykjavík, 2007), pp. 195 & 198.

¹³² Pétur Sigurðsson, ‘Um Íslendinga sögu Sturlu Pórðarsonar’, *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta* 6/2 (1933-5), pp. 1-179, p. 164.

¹³³ Helen Carron, ‘History and *Pórðar saga kakala*’ in John McKinnell, David Ashurst & Donata Kick (eds.) *The Fantastic in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: Sagas and the British Isles* (Durham, 2006), pp. 161-70, p. 163.

Dufgusson and Björn *drumbur* Dufgusson. Carron also implies that in mentioning the fire at Hítardalur using similar language, *Pórðar saga kakala* is alluding to *Hungurvaka*, though the chapter which contains that reference is thought to have been a later interpolation.¹³⁴ Einar Már Jónsson has noted that the roll Pórður presented to King Hákon in 1246 is another likely source.¹³⁵

The poet whose skaldic constructions were used most by the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* is Ingjaldur Geirmundarson. The first piece of Ingjaldur's, a complete six verse poem known as *Atlöguflokkur*, is inserted into the saga's portrayal of the Battle of Húnaflói (1244), in much the same manner as in combat and other climactic scenes from other sagas. The end of such verses in other sagas are to evidence the surrounding prose and provide colour to it, and such purposes can be assumed to apply to this case. Similarly to *Atlöguflokkur*, a second series of six verses, named *Brandsflokkur*, is to be found in the saga's portrayal of the Battle of Haugsnes (1246). A single, self-contained verse of Ingjaldur's is also included amongst this material. The second person that we know of whose poetry was used as a source by the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* is Skáldhallur. The sole cited poem of Skáldhallur's, a six-verse composition called *Brandsdrápa*, is also to be found inserted in amongst the prose description of the Battle of Haugsnes. Given our reconstruction of **Pórðar*

¹³⁴ Helen Carron, 'History and *Pórðar saga kakala*' in John McKinnell, David Ashurst & Donata Kick (eds.) *The Fantastic in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: Sagas and the British Isles* (Durham, 2006), pp. 161-70, pp. 164 & 166.

¹³⁵ Einar Már Jónsson, 'La saga de Thórdur kakali: Une œuvre de propagande?', *Médiévales* 50 (2006), pp. 47-57, p. 53.

saga kakala hin mikla's content given below, it seems likely that the verse by Snorri Sturluson for Þórður after the Battle of Örlygsstaðir was likely included in the saga (and thus one of its sources). It is fairly obvious, given that skaldic poetry made up a meagre portion of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* that other sources must have been used.

Recall to mind that earlier, in our analysis of *Sturlunga saga's Formáli*, we were able to draw up a list of Sturla's sources for **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*. These sources were of three types, namely: other sagas, oral reports and documents. There is no reason to suppose that the author of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, who was evidently well versed in the historiographical practices of his time and society, did not avail himself of sources of these types in producing his own text.

As regards documents, two appear to have been used as sources. The first is a letter sent from Brandur Kolbeinsson to Gissur Þorvaldsson in 1246, which is quoted verbatim in chapter 41 of *Þórðar saga kakala*. This letter was couriered by two of Brandur's men: Gegnir Illugason and Hámundur Þórðarson. While Gegnir died in 1246, it is not clear what became of Hámundur. If we assume Hámundur lived for some years after, he may have been able to relate the content of the letter to the author of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* so that the original document did not need to have been directly consulted.

The other document is the 'rollu langa er hann hafði látið rita um skipti þeirra Haukdæla og Sturlunga' ('long scroll, which he [i.e., Þórður] had had written about the dealings of the Haukdælir and Sturlungar'). As the long

scroll is not extant, we do not know how it may have informed the writing of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. However, given what we know about the scroll's contents, that it was a narrative account of the feud between the Haukdælir and Sturlungar, it is fairly clear that it cannot have been a source for much of the surviving content of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* (i.e., as far as it is extant in *Pórðar saga kakala*).

The rest, and therefore the majority, of the saga must be assumed to have been sourced from oral reports. We can name some of the individuals who probably provided these: Svarthöfði Dufgusson (possibly also Björn drumbur Dufgusson), Hrafn Oddsson, Teitur Styrmisson, Steinvör Sighvatsdóttir, Ingjaldur Geirmundarson (witness for Norway 1246-7 and other events; possibly wrote the roll, given that Pórður commissioned him to make poetry) and Kolfinna Þorvaldsdóttir (Kolfinna for the part of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* represented by chapter 50 of *Pórðar saga kakala*)

Consequently, not only is Svarthöfði a major character in *Pórðar saga kakala*, he is evidently also an eyewitness source of most of the events described and many sections of the text are evidently written from his point of view (albeit in the third person). For example, *Pórðar saga kakala* chapter 49 appears to date events from Svarthöfði's perspective:

Sumar það er Pórður fór til Íslands var tveimur vetrum eftir það er Kolbeinn ungi andaðist og Svarthöfði Dufgusson fór utan í Hvítá með vöru þá er Kolbeinn lagði til utanferðar Pórði. Var Svarthöfði þann vetur í Noregi er Pórður var á Grund. En það sumar er Pórður fór utan kom Svarthöfði út í Vestmannaeyjum.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 547.

(The summer that Pórður returned to Iceland was two winters after the summer when Kolbeinn ungi died and Svarthöfði went abroad via Hvítá with those goods which Kolbeinn had provided for Pórður's journey abroad. The winter that Svarthöfði was in Norway, Pórður was at Grund. The summer that Pórður went abroad, Svarthöfði returned to Iceland via the Vestmannaeyjar.¹³⁷)

Moreover, *Pórðar saga kakala* lionises him and justifies his actions. To illustrate this, let us consider the following episode from chapter 10 of *Pórðar saga kakala*, which not only reflects Svarthöfði's point-of-view, despite being written in the third person, but also presents him as a hero:

Nú er að segja frá þeim Svarthöfða og Þórði Bjarnarsyni er þeir lágu í fönninni þar til er flokkur Kolbeins var um fram riðinn. Stóðu þeir þá upp og gengu til bæja og fengu sér hesta. Riðu þeir í Stafaholt og drápu á kirkjudur. Dufgus karl gekk til dura og fagnar vel syni sínum og spurði hvort hann vissi að Ólafur chaim var þar með þrjá tigi manna. Þeir Svarthöfði hlupu þá þegar á hesta sína og riðu í brott. Þá spurði Svarthöfði Þórð: 'hvar veistu bæ þann vera er kominn sé frá almannavegi?' Þórður segir: 'bær heitir í Skógum er við skulum til ríða.' En er þeir komu þar þá fóru þeir í baðstofu og afklæddust. En er þeir höfðu litla hríð sofið þá var þeim sagt að menn Kolbeins riðu að garði. Hlupu þeir Svarthöfði þá upp og skutu inn brynjum sínum og stálhúfum í ofninn en þeir hlupu út. Skildi þá með þeim. Hljóp Þórður í skóg en Svarthöfði til hestanna. Reið hann þá undan sem ákafast en þeir eftir og kvíuðu hann fram á hamri nokkrum. Hann hratt þar fram af hestinum og hljóp þar sjálfur eftir. Það var hár hamar en hvorki sakaði hann né hestinn því að mikill lausasnjór var borinn undir hamarinn. En engi þeirra vildi þar eftir fara. Riðu Kolbeins menn þá leið sína. Svarthöfði fór heim á bæinn til vopna sinna og reið þaðan vestur til Sauðafells. Síðan fór hann út í Fagurey til Þórðar. Þórður Bjarnarson fór heim í Eskiholt.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 307.

¹³⁸ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 482.

(Now we must return to Svarthöfði and Þórður Bjarnarson. The two men lay in the snow drift until Kolbeinn's army had ridden past. They stood up and went to a nearby farm and got themselves horses. Then, Svarthöfði and Þórður rode to Stafaholt and knocked on the church door. The man Dufgus went to the door and greeted his son Svarthöfði well, asking whether he knew that Ólafur chaim was there with thirty men. On hearing this, Þórður and Svarthöfði leapt immediately onto their horses and rode away. Then Svarthöfði asked Þórður: 'do you know where we might find a farm far off the beaten track?' Þórður responded: 'there is a farm called Skógar, to which we shall presently ride.' When Svarthöfði and Þórður arrived there, they went into the bath-house and undressed. After they had been in the bath-house for a little while, they were informed that Kolbeinn's men had ridden into the yard. Svarthöfði and Þórður then leapt up, shot into their byrnies, and set their steel hats on their heads, before running outside. They split up: Þórður ran into the woods and Svarthöfði to the horses. Svarthöfði then rode away as fast as he could, but Kolbeinn's men made chase, and he was eventually cornered on some cliff. Svarthöfði pushed the horse over the edge and leapt himself after it. It was a high cliff, but neither he nor the horse were injured from the fall, because there was much loose snow accumulated beneath it. None of Kolbeinn's men wished to follow, so they rode away. Svarthöfði went home to the farm for his weapons and rode thence west to Sauðafell. From there he went out to Fagurey to meet Þórður. Þórður Bjarnarson went home to Eskiholt.¹³⁹)

It is also worth remembering the description of Svarthöfði fleeing the Battle of Húnaflói from chapter 31 of *Þórðar saga kakala*, which acquits him of cowardice in leaving without avenging himself on Óttar *snoppulangur* for the slaying of Svarthöfði's brother Kæggill-Björn:

Hrafn bað hann þá fara sem honum líkaði en hér er nú Óttar snoppulangur bróðurbani þinn. Svarthöfði kveðst ekki það hirða, sagði að unninn mundi sá sigurinn að sinni er auðið var. Hafði Svarthöfði þá fengið stór sár og vissi Hrafn það eigi. Reru þeir Svarthöfði þá frá og til lands.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), pp. 95 & 97.

¹⁴⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 521.

(Hrafn asked him to go where he pleased, ‘though here now is Óttar *snoppulangur*, the killer of your brother.’ Svarthöfði said it did not matter, saying that he would deal with it when the victory was fated for them. Svarthöfði had received a large wound, though Hrafn did not know this. Svarthöfði and the others then rowed away to the mainland.¹⁴¹)

Nevertheless, Svarthöfði’s positive portrayal as well as his prominence as a source and point-of-view character does not constitute overwhelming evidence in favour of his authorship of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. Indeed, some may consider that because Svarthöfði was nothing more than a violent enforcer – albeit one from a chieftain family – he was incapable of writing anything of lasting endurance, let alone **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*; however, I do not think such a one-dimensional view can be at all accurate.

1.3.2 – Svarthöfði Dufgusson in retirement after the Battle of Pverá

The Battle of Pverá (1255) marked the end of Svarthöfði’s career as a key advisor to and follower of powerful chieftains, following this engagement he withdrew completely from the forefront of political events as far as the sources indicate:

Porgils reið til bæjar upp til Pverár hinnar litlu. Voru þar margir menn í bænahúsi. Þar var kominn Svarthöfði Dufgusson undir bænhússvegginn og var hann særður meiðslasárum, höggvinn um þvert andlitið. Bað hann griða heldur ákaflega. Porgils gaf honum grið.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 221.

¹⁴² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 705.

(Porgils rode up to the farm of Pverá hin litla. There were many men in the chapel. Svarthöfði Dufgusson was situated at the foot of the chapel's wall; he had received mutilating wounds to the head and across the face. Svarthöfði begged for mercy and Porgils granted this.)

Svarthöfði may have been permanently disabled by the wounds he sustained at the Battle of Pverá, or alternatively so humiliated by having to beg Porgils *skarði* for his life that he was no longer capable of being involved in violent action. Apart from possible physical difficulties Svarthöfði may have incurred from his head wound, it is worth noting that in medieval Iceland, permanent disability would have exacerbated the emasculatory effect of Svarthöfði's cowardice.¹⁴³ Interestingly, chapter 50 of *Pórðar saga kakala* (covering the years 1254-6 and which, interestingly, mentions the death of Svarthöfði's brother Kolbeinn in 1254) neglects to mention the Battle of Pverá and, consequently, this embarrassing occurrence. Perhaps this indicates that an account of Svarthöfði's mutilation and plea for mercy was absent also from **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla?*

We do know that Svarthöfði lived until at least 1277 (possibly only dying as late as c. 1286, shortly before his brother Björn *drumbur*), for *Árna saga biskups* tells us:

Á þessu sama sumri, er hið tíunda var biskupsdóms herra Jóns erkibiskups, komu út bréf hans. Það hið fyrsta að hann stefndi báðum biskupum vorum til Noregs á tveggja vetra fresti, til þess

¹⁴³ Cf. Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 78-82 & 87-90; Anthony Adams, 'He took a stone away: Castration and Cruelty in the Old Norse *Sturlunga saga*' in Larissa Tracy (ed.) *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 188-209.

kennimanna fundar, sem hann ætlaði að hafa í Björgvin. Hitt var annað, að hann ritaði enn til beggja biskupanna, bjóðandi þeim að leysa þann mann, er Oddur hét og var Þórarinsson, bróðir Þorvarðar, af því tveföldu banni, sem hann stóð í þá er hann var veginn í Geldingaholti: því öðru, sem Heinrekur biskup bannsetti hann, fyrir uppteikt þeirra peninga, sem í kirkju voru bornir í Felli, og í Grímsey og Ljósavatni, svo og fyrir rán í Hvammi og Oddur kallaði sektarfé, og fyrir upptöku hvals í Grímsey, þess er biskup átti; og hinu öðru, sem hann féll í á Fagranesi, takandi nefndan Heinrek biskup, og flytjandi í virkið á Flugumýri, og harðlega haldandi í því sama virki með fullkominni nauðung, til þess er prestar í Norðlendingafjórðungi og norrænir menn tóku hann burt þaðan úr öllu klandi Odds og hans manna. En því að Oddur hafði boðið nokkrar sættir fyrir sig, og fara af héruðum eftir boði biskups, ef enginn væri annar til: það hafði og Ólafur Oddsson svarið og Svarthöfði Dufgusson fyrir biskupi, að Oddur beiddist prests fundar við dauða sinn, og náði eigi.¹⁴⁴

(During this same summer, which was the tenth in the archbishopric of Lord Archbishop Jon Raude, his letter arrived in Iceland. First, the archbishop gave our bishops two years notice that he was summoning both to a meeting of clerics which he intended to hold in Bergen. Second, he wrote to both bishops, offering them to pardon that man, who was named Oddur Þórarinsson, the brother of Þorvarður, of the twofold ban under which he stood when he was slain at Geldingaholt. One ban was placed on him by Bishop Henrik for looting those monies which had been borne into the churches of Fell, Grímsey, and Ljósavatn; for raiding at Hvammur for goods which Oddur called fines; and for taking a whale on Grímsey which belonged to the bishop. The other, which he received at Fagranes, for assuming the name of Bishop Henrik, occupying the stronghold of Flugumýri, and standing firm in the same stronghold with complete obstinacy, until the priests of the Northern Quarter and Norwegian men drove all the calumny of Oddur and his men away from there. But for that Oddur offered to leave the region at the request of the bishop if no other settlement could be made on his behalf. Also, Ólafur Oddsson and Svarthöfði Dufgusson have sworn before the bishop that Oddur asked to meet with a priest at his death, but not mercy.)

What can he have been doing during the decades following 1255? The quotation given above, indicates two important things. The first is that

¹⁴⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 800-1.

Svarthöfði was still involved in Icelandic politics in some way after 1255 (despite no longer participating as a combatant in conflict). The second is that Svarthöfði's memory of events during the Age of the Sturlungar was deemed reliable.

It seems improbable that Svarthöfði would have lived the rest of his life doing nothing after 1255, injured though his body and reputation may have been. Perhaps the end of one career opened up the opportunity for Svarthöfði to try his hand at something else? We know that when Sturla Þórðarson eventually withdrew from politics he dedicated himself to his writing projects. Could Svarthöfði have done the same? Given that Svarthöfði was a member of the Icelandic élite, he most probably had the means: literacy and the wealth needed to afford on vellum. It is likely that Svarthöfði was literate: his father owned three of the wealthiest parishes churches in Western Iceland (Sauðafell, Hjarðarholt and Stafholt). Svarthöfði's upbringing likely took place at one or more of these church centres: this would have exposed him to clerical, learned culture from an early age. However, even if – as seems unlikely – Svarthöfði could not read or write, he certainly would have had access to a literate priest at Hrafnseyri – where he lived with his wife Herdís Oddsdóttir – to whom he could dictate the saga.¹⁴⁵

1.3.3 – Was Svarthöfði Dufgusson one of the learned Sturlungar?

¹⁴⁵ Böðvar Bjarnason, *Hrafnseyri* (Reykjavík, 1961), p. 41 & 54.

Beyond Svarthöfði simply having had the means and opportunity to do so, I think it likely that he would have had an interest in producing literature. Recently, the concept of learned Sturlungar has come into vogue among scholars.¹⁴⁶ The foundations for this trend go back a few years, with research having found that the true men-of-action among the Sturlungar, Sighvatur Sturluson and Þórður *kakali*, most probably wrote (or at least sponsored) works of literature,¹⁴⁷ and even Sturla Sighvatsson ‘var... löngum þá í Reykjaholti og lagði mikinn hug á að láta rita sögubækur eftir bókum þeim er Snorri setti saman’ (‘remained for a long while at Reykholt and was most inclined to have saga books written using the books which Snorri had put together’).¹⁴⁸ While Richard North’s argument that Sighvatur was responsible for *Víga-Glúms saga* is certainly compelling, of the two I am especially convinced by Axel Kristinsson’s contention that *Gísli saga Súrsson* was written/ sponsored by Þórður *kakali*. Beyond the evidence marshalled by Axel Kristinsson, it is worth noting a couple of parallels: firstly, between Þórður and Gísli who were plucky outlaws being hunted down and surviving against the odds, and secondly, between Björn and his twelve cronies (note

¹⁴⁶ Karl G. Johansson, ‘The Learned Sturlungar and the Emergence of Icelandic Literate Culture’ in Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir & Helgi Þorláksson (eds.) *Snorri Sturluson and Reykholt: The Author and Magnate, his Life, Works and Environment at Reykholt in Iceland* (Copenhagen, 2018), pp. 333-88.

¹⁴⁷ Richard North, ‘Sighvatr Sturluson and the authorship of *Víga-Glúms saga*’ in Wilhelm Heizmann, Klaus Bödl & Heinrich Beck (eds.) *Analecta Septentrionalia: Beiträge Zur Nordgermanischen Kultur- Und Literaturgeschichte* (Berlin, 2009), pp. 256-80; Axel Kristinsson, ‘The Revered Outlaw: Gísli Súrsson and the Sturlungs’, *The CAHD Papers* 4 (2009), pp. 1-12.

¹⁴⁸ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 329.

Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's analysis of Björn's threat to the peaceful life and property-holding of householders) and *Ásbjörn* and the Guests.

It is also worth bearing in mind that, long after Svarthöfði's death, close family involvement in literary production continued: his grandson-in-law Haukur Erlendsson was the author of *Hauksbók* and his great-great-grandson was Jón Hákonarson the patron of *Flateyjarbók* and *Vatnshyrna*.¹⁴⁹

Leaving the matter of whether or not Svarthöfði wrote **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* aside for a moment, it is undeniable that he was involved in its writing as a chief witness to events. This was not an exceptional occurrence for Svarthöfði, for, as Robert Glendinning notes, there is evidence that he was the main source for a particular episode of *Íslendinga saga* which took place in 1255.¹⁵⁰ Given what we have already discussed, Glendinning's observation makes it apparent that Svarthöfði played some role in not one but two writing projects during the years after 1255. No leap of logic is required to state that he followed the custom of his relatives by taking part in literary activity.

The circumstantial evidence we have discussed is consistent with Björn M. Ólsen's theory that Svarthöfði was the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. I would like to stress that nothing I have said is proof positive of Svarthöfði's authorship, though in my view what has been discussed shows that he is the likeliest author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin*

¹⁴⁹ Incidentally, Jón was married to Ingileifur, whom *Vatnshyrna* alleges was the great-great granddaughter of Þórður *kakali*.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Glendinning, 'The dreams in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga* and literary consciousness in 13th-century Iceland' in Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) *Alþjóðlegt fornsagnaping, Reykjavík 2.-8. Ágúst: Fornögurnar og íslenskt miðaldarþjóðfélag (Fyrirlestrar)* (Reykjavík, 1973), p. 14.

mikla we know of, given the facts available to us. Nonetheless, given that Svarthöfði's authorship is only a possibility (in light of circumstantial evidence), in chapters 2 and 3 the person who wrote **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* is only referred to as 'the author' to avoid giving the false impression that this attribution is decided fact.

1.4 – Reconstruction of a lost text: The contents of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*

Nearly all the earliest modern scholars were of the view that *Pórðar saga kakala* covers more-or-less the same timeline as **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. Björn M. Ólsen expressed the view that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* encompassed an account of the years 1242 to 1256, while Pétur Sigurðsson claimed it covered an even shorter period, suggesting the original saga encompassed the period 1242 to 1250 (or possibly only 1247).¹⁵¹

Kristian Kålund and Jón Jóhannesson took the opposite view and separately declared the opening of *Pórðar saga kakala* to be unnatural and unusual, conjecturing that it opened with Pórður's birth and upbringing as well as his sojourn in Norway between 1237 and 1242.¹⁵² Úlfar Bragason has

¹⁵¹ Björn M. Ólsen, 'Um *Sturlungu*', *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta* 3/2 (1902), pp. 193-510, p. 348; Pétur Sigurðsson, 'Um *Íslendinga sögu Sturlu Þórðarsonar*', *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta* 6/2 (1933-5), pp. 1-179, pp. 91, 148 & 151.

¹⁵² Kristian Kålund, 'Om håndskrifterne af *Sturlunga saga* og dennes enkelte bestanddele', *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie* 16 (1901), pp. 259-300, pp. 296-7; Jón Jóhannesson, 'Um *Sturlunga sögu*' in Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), p. xli.

noted that most scholars today are in agreement with Kristian Kålund and Jón Jóhannesson that the narrative of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* reported on a much longer period of history than *Pórðar saga kakala*.¹⁵³ Be that as it may, it is considered that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* need not necessarily have been much more lengthy than *Pórðar saga kakala* in terms of word-count.

The only researcher in recent times to express a belief that *Pórðar saga kakala* is essentially representative of the content of the original saga is Einar Már Jónsson, who thinks the narrative had been left unfinished by its author in 1249.¹⁵⁴ I do not give much regard to Einar's resurrection of this traditional view, but it is nevertheless important for us to assess whether or not the now dominant modern view of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla's* content is supported by the evidence.

1.4.1 – The unpreserved opening chapters: the years c. 1233-42

Let us begin by considering the opening of *Pórðar saga kakala*.

Chapter 1 opens as follows:

Einum vetri eftir lát Snorra Sturlusonar hófust þeir atburðir er mörg tíðindi gerðust af síðan, utanferð Gissurar Þorvaldssonar fyrir sunnan land en Órækja fór utan í Eyjafirði. Það haust kom út Þórður Sighvatsson að Gásum og Jón Sturluson og var þá barn að aldri. Solveig móðir hans kom og þar út og dætur hennar. Jón lindiás var stýrimaður á skipi því.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 101.

¹⁵⁴ Einar Már Jónsson, 'La saga de Thórdur kakali: Une œuvre de propagande?', *Médiévales* 50 (2006), pp. 47-57, p. 51.

¹⁵⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 459.

(The consequences of these events, which occurred in the year following Snorri Sturluson's death, were far-reaching. Gissur Porvaldsson went abroad from southern Iceland while Órækja departed for overseas from Eyjafjörður. That autumn, Þórður Sighvatsson returned to Iceland via Gásir. With Þórður on this journey were Jón Sturluson, still a child at that time; Solveig, Jón's mother; Solveig's daughters; and Jon lindås, the captain of their ship.¹⁵⁶)

Úlfar Bragason has noted that this cannot be how **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* began as it lacks the features we expect to see at the beginning of a saga, commencing as it does *in medias res*.¹⁵⁷ Nearly all sagas open with an ancestor narrative before introducing the protagonist. The ancestor narrative will explain where – or, rather, from what family stock – the titular character came from (recall that Icelandic society to this day makes use of patronymics), and the protagonist will typically be introduced as a young man (in rare cases the character's life is related with very spare detail from birth). Subsequently, the antagonist and/ or source of conflict is introduced – almost always before the plot has actually begun to unfold (*Njála* could be read as a prominent exception to this rule because of its convoluted multigenerational plot). Evidently, this general observation of the common features of saga openings applies to the biographical contemporary sagas; for example, *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar* and *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*, which are extant in unredacted form, fit this mould. The absence of the features characterising the beginnings of Icelandic sagas from *Pórðar saga*

¹⁵⁶ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 25.

¹⁵⁷ Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 101.

kakala's first chapter strongly suggests that this cannot be where **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* began.

It is most likely, instead, that part or all of chapter 1 was not even part of the original saga. The compiler of **Sturlunga saga* had a proclivity for using summaries to shift the focus from one component text to another. To show this, all one need do is compare the beginning of *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* with *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*.¹⁵⁸ It is, nonetheless, worth noting that these transitional summaries are not found when interlaced component texts of *Sturlunga saga* are switched between in quick succession.

As chapter 1 of *Pórðar saga kakala* appears like a summary intended to aid the transition to a new component text, we may surmise that it was probably written by the compiler – using content from the original saga – to preface the continuous block of material he had taken from **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, it needing an introduction after his having chopped off the beginning of the saga. Needless to say, whatever the provenance of *Pórðar saga kakala*'s first chapter, the original saga began with earlier events than these. For example, the opening words of *Pórðar saga kakala* – ‘einum vetri eftir lát Snorra Sturlusonar’ (‘in the year following Snorri Sturluson’s death’) –

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 230; Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 883.

implies that Snorri Sturluson's death was mentioned if not described in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*.¹⁵⁹

Örnólfur Thorsson has noted that he shares Jón Jóhannesson's opinion that the lost opening chapters had told 'frá æsku Pórðar og uppvaxtarárum á Íslandi og vist hans í Noregi 1237-1242' ('about Pórður's childhood and years growing up in Iceland, as well as his stay in Norway between 1237 and 1242').¹⁶⁰ But, can this interpretation be substantiated?

Let us work backwards from 1242. It is fairly clear that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* must have provided some sort of account of Pórður's time in Norway between 1237 and 1242. We know that the compiler cut off the beginning of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* and that material largely or totally unrelated to Icelandic feuds – for example, that discussing foreign travel – was shortened or redacted by the compiler of **Sturlunga saga*. Úlfar Bragason has hinted that he thinks **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* contained material discussing Pórður's encounters with Aron Hjörleifsson.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, the portrayal of Pórður in *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar* is disjunctive when compared with *Pórðar saga kakala*, so it would seem that the material must have been different in emphasis and/ or content.

¹⁵⁹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 459.

¹⁶⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson, 'Inngangur' in Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.) *Sturlunga saga. Skýringar og fræði – Íslendingabók – Ynglingatal – Veraldar saga – Leiðarvísir Nikuláss Bergssonar – Samþykktir og sáttmálar – Ættir og átök – Kort – Töflur – Orðasafn – Nafnaskrá – Staðanafnaskrá* [*Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 3] (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. xv-cxii, p. xxviii.

¹⁶¹ Úlfar Bragason, 'Arons saga. Minningar, mýtur og sagnaminni', *Ritið: tímarit Hugvísindastofnunar* 13 (2013), pp. 125-45, p. 127.

It also seems likely that there was some discussion of events taking place in Iceland during the period that Þórður was in Norway: for example, the injury sustained by Kolbeinn *ungi* following the Battle of Örlygsstaðir is mentioned a couple of times *Þórðar saga kakala* in a manner that suggests the text had already narrated how Kolbeinn received this.

But did the narrative run further back in time than 1237? We noted earlier that on incorporating the texts into **Sturlunga saga* he nearly always shortened or redacted material duplicated in two or more texts, leaving one of the component texts to provide the information. It seems likely, if **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* covered Þórður's time in Norway, during which time he is known to have encountered Snorri, that the text had at least made mention of the discord between Snorri and Sighvatur earlier in the 1230s. The compiler would not have kept both tellings; consequently, today we only have the account given in *Íslendinga saga*.

If Sturla Þórðarson used **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* as a source, perhaps he drew on it for his account of these years. There is a section to be found in *Þórðar saga kakala* which would seem to provide direct support of the claim that **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* discussed events which took place earlier in the 1230s:

En þenna hinn sama vetur stefndi hann fjölmennan fund í Geldingaholti. Komu þar til allir hinir stærstu bændur í Norðlendingafjórðungi. Bauð Kolbeinn bóndum tvo kosti, talaði langt erindi og sagði deili á um vandræði þeirra Þórðar. Taldi þá upp mannalát þau er hvor þeirra hafði fengið fyrir öðrum. Kveðst þann kost vilja bjóða þeim annan að fara utan og gefa Þórði upp ríki öll og bæta honum svo föður sinn og bræður: 'munuð þér þá verða að eiga yðvart mál á hans miskunn. Varir mig að yður mun Þórður gefast vel fyrir því að þá gafst Þórður mér best er

eg hætti mest mínum hlut undir hann. Voruð þér þá og vinir, Skagfirðingar og hann'.¹⁶²

(This same winter he summoned a meeting of the people at Geldingaholt. All the biggest farmers in the Northern Quarter came there to him. Kolbeinn offered the farmers two choices and delivered a long speech discussing the troubles between Pórður and them. He mentioned then the loss of men, which each of them had inflicted upon the other. Kolbeinn said that he wanted them to choose one of two alternatives. The first option was that he would go abroad and give up to Pórður his whole domain and so compensate him for his father and brothers, and 'you would then be obliged to have your affairs at his mercy. I am aware that Pórður will prove good to you, because Pórður proved best for me when I depended on him most. You were also friends then, the Skagfirðingar and him'.¹⁶³)

The occasion referred to in this quotation took place in 1235 when Pórður was left as interim leader of Kolbeinn's domain while he was abroad, which is described in *Íslendinga saga*:

Um vorið var það títt fyrir norðan land að Kolbeinn ungi bjóst til utanferðar en ríki sitt og bú fékk hann Sighvati til varðveislu. Sighvatur setti niður á Flugumýri Pórð kakala son sinn og fékk honum allt mannaforráð Kolbeins til meðferðar.¹⁶⁴

(During the spring there was news from northern Iceland that Kolbeinn *ungi* was preparing to go abroad, and he gave his domain and farm into the care of Sighvatur. Sighvatur placed his son Pórður *kakali* at Flugumýri and gave him all of Kolbeinn's authority to manage.)

It is unlikely that the section in *Pórðar saga kakala* which describes Kolbeinn's meeting with the Skagfirðingar was an interpolation made by the

¹⁶² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 502.

¹⁶³ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 161.

¹⁶⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 372.

compiler, given how well this extract fits into the speech. It seems likely that the account of Kolbeinn's oration to the Skagfirðingar in *Pórðar saga kakala* was in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. The knowledge assumed by the saga's author in this section therefore suggests that events stretching back to at least 1235 had been described in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. As Þórður only appears first in the historical record (specifically, *Íslendinga saga*) as an adult in 1233 and 1234, then, carrying forward the assumption that Sturla used **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* as a source, we can suppose that this was probably the earliest **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* can have meaningfully started.¹⁶⁵ Possibly, these anecdotes from Þórður's late adolescence/early adulthood were included at the beginning, after a genealogy of the Sturlungar and a list of Sighvatur Sturluson's children rather than a nativity narrative, as Örnólfur seems to suggest.

Although **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* may have opened before 1242, we can safely assume that the hypothesised pre-1242 material was expository and need not have been particularly protracted in length: recall that in other contemporary sagas written in the biographical mode (this subgenre is referred to hereafter as the biographical contemporary sagas), for example *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* and *Arons saga*

¹⁶⁵ The earliest date Þórður is mentioned in *Íslendinga saga* is 1233, present when his father and Snorri reached a settlement in one of the many disputes between their respective factions (cf. Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 348). *Íslendinga saga*'s coverage of 1234 (Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 358). *Íslendinga saga* says of Sighvatur's sons that at that time 'hinir yngri voru þá eigi vopnfærir' ('the younger ones [i.e., younger than Kolbeinn and Þórður] did not yet carry weapons').

Hjörleifssonar, the pre-plot details are given in brief.¹⁶⁶ Probably, only a handful of chapters from the beginning of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* are missing from *Pórðar saga kakala*.

1.4.2 – The mostly extant core chapters: the years 1242-50

Scholars have not attempted to identify content redacted by the compiler from among the portion of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* still extant in *Pórðar saga kakala*. Nevertheless, it is possible to sketch out some thoughts concerning this.

Let us recall that the *Reykjarfjarðarbók* editor probably consulted the original recensions of the sagas in the *Sturlunga saga* canon to supplement their texts, a group which includes **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. We may say with some confidence on this basis that the content found in *Reykjarfjarðarbók's* recension of *Pórðar saga kakala* but not in *Króksfjarðarbók's*, was in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. But we can go even further than this.

Pórðar saga kakala leaves some subplots hanging without adequate resolution. Let us recall the following episode (chapter 20):

Penna vetur var Pórður Bjarnarson í Görðum með Einari Ormssyni frænda sínum. Hann hafði verið með Órækju í Reykjaholti að drápi Klængs Bjarnarsonar. Ormur Bjarnarson reið með tólfta mann í Garða til Einars. Komu þeir þar síð um kvöldið í þann tíma er þeir Einar og Pórður ætluðu að ganga til baðs. Tóku þeir Ormur Þórð þar höndum. Leiddu þeir hann þá

¹⁶⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 884; Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), pp. 237-8.

inn til stofu. Þórður varð við alla vega sem best og vasklegast og bauð fyrir sig allt það er honum sómdi. En þá er hann sá að Ormur vildi ekki annað hafa en líf hans þá beiddist hann prestsfundar. Og svo var gert. Eftir það var hann leiddur í ytri stofuna. Lagðist Þórður þá niður opinn og bað þá hyggja að hvort honum blöskraði nokkuð. Ormur fékk þá mann til að höggva hann. Sá hét Einar munkur. Eftir það reið Ormur heim austur á Breiðabólstað.¹⁶⁷

(That winter, Þórður Bjarnarson was at Garðar with Einar Ormsson, his kinsman. He had been with Órækja at Reykholt when Klængur Bjarnarson was killed. Ormur Bjarnarson rode in a company of twelve men to Einar at Garðar. They arrived there late in the evening at the time when Einar and Þórður intended to go and bathe. Ormur and his men arrested Þórður and led him into the sitting room. Þórður behaved best in all ways and offered in exchange for his life all that which would be honourable. However, when he saw that Ormur would not accept anything except for his life, he asked to meet with a priest. That was done. Afterwards, he was led into the outer room. Þórður then lay down on his back and asked them to watch to see if he blanched at all. Ormur then got a man to execute him. That man was named Einar munkur. After that, Ormur rode east to his home at Breiðabólstaður.¹⁶⁸)

After this, Ormur Bjarnarson is abandoned as a character in *Þórðar saga kakala*, terminating the subplot telling of his own conflict with Þórður *kakali*. It does not make sense for his part in the saga to end abruptly and arbitrarily with this incidence: no vengeance is taken for the killing of Þórður Bjarnarson, one of Þórður's inner circle of followers. While it is difficult to know how much or what, if anything, might have been lost from this subplot, it is fairly straightforward to identify where it must have closed in **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. Consider the following details from *Høyersannál's* notices for 1249 and 1250:

¹⁶⁷ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 498.

¹⁶⁸ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 149.

1249... Þorþr tok valld yfir Sunnlendinga fiorðung oc rak utan Orm B. Son Philippum oc Haralld Sæmundar sonu.
1250... Θ Orms Biarnar sonar.¹⁶⁹

(1249... Þórður took power over the Southern Quarter and drove abroad Ormur Bjarnarson, as well as Filippus and Haraldur, the sons of Sæmundur.
1250... Ormur Bjarnarson died.)

The banishment of Ormur by Þórður and his death in exile the following year would be a well-fitting end, for it is suggestive of vengeance for Þórður Bjarnarson. This is far from the only example of an unresolved subplot in the saga.

Úlfar Bragason has suggested that there exists material in *Þórðar saga kakala* (or particular recensions of it) which was not in **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, stating that the compiler of **Sturlunga saga* inserted chapters at strategic points in his grand, chronologically ordered narrative as recapitulations of the action previously described.¹⁷⁰ He gives chapter 121 of *Íslendinga saga* and chapter 47 of *Þórðar saga kakala* as examples of this.¹⁷¹ I would nuance this by noting that these are merely post-compilational additions: possibly written by the compiler but just as likely to have been added by one or other of the fourteenth-century editors. For example, as discussed earlier, chapter 47 of *Þórðar saga kakala* may well have been added by the *Króksfjarðarbók* editor. Chapter 1 of *Svínfellinga saga* is a

¹⁶⁹ Gustav Storm (ed.), *Islandske annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania, 1888), p. 66.

¹⁷⁰ Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 102.

¹⁷¹ Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 102.

further example of the kind of chapter represented by chapter 121 of *Íslendinga saga* and chapter 47 of *Pórðar saga kakala*:

	Ís, ch. 121	Psk, ch. 47	Ss, ch. 1
Dating	<p>Gissur Þorvaldsson bjó að Reykjum í Ölfusi þau misseri er þeir önduðust Magnús biskup og Guðmundur biskup. Hann gerðist höfðingi mikill, vitur maður og vinsæll. Þá hafði hann átta vetur og tuttugu. Þá var liðið frá hingaðburð vors herra Jesú Kristi tólf hundruð þrjú tigar og sjö ár. Hafði Gissur gerst skutilsveinn Hákonar konungs frænda síns þá er hann skorti vetur á tvítugan.</p> <p>(Gissur Þorvaldsson lived at Reykir in Ölfus during that six month period when Bishops Magnús and Guðmundur died. He became a great leader, a wise man, and popular. At that time – in A.D. 1237 – he was twenty-eight years old. At</p>	<p>Kolbeinn var þá nær sjötugum manni er hann andaðist. En Brandur var hálfertugur er hann féll, vetri yngri en Kolbeinn ungi. Jafnlengd Brands og þeirra manna er þann dag létust er fjórum nóttum fyrir Jónsmessu Hólabiskups. Þá var liðið frá falli hins heilaga Ólafs konungs sex vetur hins tíunda tigar og hundruð tólfrætt en frá brennunni í Hítardal er mest tíðindi höfðu þá önnur orðið hér á landi, tveim vetrum fátt í tíu tigi vetra. Þá er Brandur féll var Innocentíus páfi í Róma, Friðrekur var keisari, Eiríkur var konungur í Svíþjóð, Eiríkur og Abel í Danmörk, Hákon konungur í Noregi, Heinrekur konungur í Englandi.</p> <p>(Kolbeinn was almost 70 years old when he died, and</p>	<p>Þá er Hákon konungur Hákonarson hafði þrjátígu vetra ráðið Noregi kom Vilhjálmur kardináli í Noreg og vígði Hákon konung undir kórónu. Það var á fimmta ári páfadóms Innocentíusar. En þrem vetrum síðar fór utan Heinrekur biskup Kársson og Þórður kakali. Þá var kjörinn til lögmanns Sturla Þórðarson. Á þeim misserum andaðist Árni óreiða, son Magnúss Ámundasonar.</p> <p>(When King Hákon Hákonsson had ruled for thirty years, Cardinal William came to Norway and coronated King Hákon. That was during the fifth year of the papacy of Innocent IV. Three years later, Bishop Henrik Kársson and Þórður <i>kakali</i> went abroad. At that time, Sturla Þórðarson was elected to the lawspeakership. During that season, Árni óreiða died; he was the son of Magnús Ámundason.)</p>

	nineteen, Gissur had been dubbed a trencher-bearer of King Hákon, his kinsman.)	Brandur 35 years old when he fell, a year younger than Kolbeinn ungi. The death day of Brandur and the men who died with him is four nights before the mass of Jón the bishop of Hólar. This was 216 years after the death of Saint-King Ólafur and 98 years after the fire at Hítardalur, which was the second most significant event ever to take place here in Iceland. When Brandur died, Innocent was the Pope in Rome, Frederick was the Holy Roman Emperor, Erik Eriksson was the King of Sweden, Erik and Abel were the Kings of Denmark, Hákon was the King of Norway, and Henry was the King of England. ¹⁷²⁾	
Key event	Í þenna tíma var svo mikill ofsi Sturlu Sighvatssonar að nær öngvir menn hér á landi héldu sér réttum fyrir honum og svo hafa	Nú skal hér taka til á Íslandi. Það sumar eftir Haugsnessfund og fall Brands var friður á Íslandi. Staðar-Kolbeinn var þá fyrir ráðum að Hólum og var heill	Brandur prestur Jónsson var vígður til ábóta á því ári er Hákon konungur var vígður undir kórónu. Hann réð fyrir austur í Þykkvabæ í Veri og var ágætur höfðingi, klerkur góður,

¹⁷² Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), pp. 299 & 301.

<p>sumir menn hermt orð hans síðan að hann þóttist allt land hafa undir lagt ef hann gæti Gissur yfir komið. Gissur var meðalmaður á vöxt og allra manna best á sig kominn, vel limaður, snareygður og lágu fast augun og skýrlegur í viðbragði, betur talaður en flestir menn hér á landi, blíðmæltur og mikill rómurinn, engi ákafamaður og þótti jafnan hinn drjúglegsti til ráðagerðar. En þó bar svo oft til þá er hann var við deilur höfðingja eða venslamanna sinna að hann var afskiptalítill og þótti þá eigi víst hverjum hann vildi veita. Hann var frændríkur og flestir hinir bestu bændur fyrir sunnan land og víðar voru vinir hans. Þá var og vel með þeim Snorra Sturlusyni.¹⁷³</p>	<p>lítt um sumarið eftir fundinn. Naut hann hvorki svefnis né matar og þótti mikið fráfall Brands sonar síns. Hann kom til Staðar að finna Jórinni nokkuru fyrir Ólafsmessu hina fyrri og gisti að Stað og fékk ekki mælt við Jórinni né aðra hugðarmenn sína. Þaðan reið hann upp á Víðimýri til Ingigerðar dóttur sinnar. Lagðist hann í rekkju er hann kom þar og andaðist Ólafsmessu hina síðari og þótti þeim mönnum er gjörst vissu sem honum mundi mannamissir mjög grandað hafa. Var hann færður til Staðar og jarðaður fyrir sunnan kirkju hjá Brandi syni sínum.¹⁷⁴</p> <p>(We must now return to events in Iceland. The summer after the Battle of Haugsnes and Brandur's death there was peace in Iceland. Kolbeinn of Staður was then staying at Hólar and</p>	<p>vitur og vinsæll, ríkur og góðgjarn. Og í þann tíma hafði hann mest mannheill þeirra manna er þá voru á Íslandi. Hans móðir var Halldóra Arnórsdóttir en móðir Halldóru var Guðrún dóttir Brands biskups Sæmundarsonar.¹⁷⁶</p> <p>(Brandur Jónsson, the priest, was consecrated abbot the year that King Hákon was coronated. He rode from the east to Pykkvabær in Álftaver and was a fine leader, a good cleric, wise, popular, wealthy, and benevolent. At that time he had the greatest favour with those men who were then in Iceland. His mother was Halldóra Arnórsdóttir, whose mother was Guðrún, the daughter of Bishop Brandur Sæmundarson.)</p>
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¹⁷³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 388-9.

¹⁷⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 546.

¹⁷⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 550.

(At that time, so greatly overbearing was Sturla Sighvatsson that almost no-one here in Iceland was able to stand up to him and thus some men have quoted him since as having said that he thought the whole country would be under his control if he could overcome Gissur. Gissur was of average height and of all men most accomplished, well-limbed, and keen-eyed. He had piercing eyes, an intelligent appearance, and was better spoken than most men here in Iceland, with an affable and booming voice. Gissur was not an aggressive man and was always thought to grant the most watertight advice. However, it happened often that when he was in dispute with chieftains or relations and friends of his that he was aloof and

remained there during the summer after the Battle of Haugsnes. He was ill and could neither eat nor sleep for grief over his son's death. He went to Staður to meet Jórunn to celebrate the former mass day of Saint Ólafur and stayed there, but was unable to speak to either Jórunn or any of the people closest to him. From there he rode to Víðimýri to his daughter Ingigerður. Kolbeinn took to bed when he arrived there and died on the latter mass day of Saint Ólafur. The people who knew most about the circumstances assumed he had died of a broken heart due to the death of his son. He was taken to Staður and was buried in front of the southern wall of the church with his son Brandur.¹⁷⁵)

¹⁷⁵ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 299.

<p>did not know who he wanted to support. Gissur was rich in kinsmen and most of the best householders from southern Iceland and others were his friends. At that time, all things were well between Snorri Sturluson and him.)</p>	
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It is clear from the above that these chapters – drawn from three separate component texts – are written according to the same, annalistic formula, with a number of reference events being used to date a key event in the history of thirteenth-century Iceland. Consequently, while the chapters act more as temporal signposts than recapitulations, Úlfar Bragason is most likely correct in his view that they were not present in their respective sagas prior to compilation. We should therefore adopt the conclusion that chapter 47 was not part of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*.

I would also add that the amplifications of *Pórðar saga kakala* in *Króksfjarðarbók* – when compared with the text of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* – seem unlikely to have been derived from **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*:

The telling of the brutal vengeance wrought by Kolbeinn *ungi's* men in [Dalir] is more extended in *Króksfjarðarbók* and the stanza by the old woman naming the chieftains attacking Sturla Þórðarson's farm at Tunga is only found in *Króksfjarðarbók*.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Guðrún Nordal, 'To dream or not to dream: A question of method' in John McKinnell, David Ashurst & Donata Kick (eds.) *The Fantastic in Old Norse-*

Unlike in *Reykjarfjarðarbók*'s case, there is no strong evidence suggesting *Króksfjarðarbók*'s editor consulted **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* to augment his or her version of *Sturlunga saga* and the absence of the supplementary details found in *Króksfjarðarbók* from *Reykjarfjarðarbók* indicates they were absent in **Sturlunga saga*, which makes it still more unlikely that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* contained them.

The view that the editor of *Króksfjarðarbók* did not augment his text using **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* may well be a misapprehension, but I am trying to be cautious. The easiest way to disprove it is to put forward a conclusive argument showing firstly that chapters 47-9 of *Pórðar saga kakala* were not in *Reykjarfjarðarbók* (as the marginal note in BL Add MS 11,127 can be read as suggesting) and secondly that the provenance of these chapters lay in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. Ólafía Einarsdóttir has attempted to do this, but the matter is far from decided.¹⁷⁸

1.4.3 – The barely surviving closing chapters: the years 1250-6

Úlfar Bragason has argued that ‘sennilega hefur sögunni lokið með frásögn af dauða Pórðar’ (‘the saga probably ended with tell of Pórður’s death’) in 1256.¹⁷⁹ Chapter 49 – considered the final chapter of *Pórðar saga*

Icelandic literature: Sagas and the British Isles (Durham, 2006), pp. 304-13, pp. 307-8.

¹⁷⁸ Ólafía Einarsdóttir, ‘Om de to håndskrifter af *Sturlunga saga*’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 83 (1968), pp. 44-80; ‘Om samtidssagaens kildeværdi belyst ved *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*’, *Alvíssmál* 5 (1995), pp. 29-81, pp. 51.

¹⁷⁹ Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 101-2.

kakala by Örnólfur Thorsson's predecessors as editors of *Sturlunga saga* –

does not discuss this, but ends as follows:

Sumar þetta kom út bréf Hákonar konungs til Þórðar og var honum stefnt utan. Og þar voru á nokkurar sakargiftir og átölur við Þórð um það að hann hefði meiri stund á lagið að koma landi undir sig en undir konung sem honum þótti einkamál þeirra til standa. Heinrekur biskup fylgdi og þessu að Þórður héldi eigi það er hann hefði konunginum heitið. Fóru þá í margar greinir með þeim svo að nálegt engi hlutur bar þeim saman. Svall þetta sundurþykki svo að Heinrekur brá til utanferðar þetta sumar og kom á fund Hákonar konungs. Tók hann við biskupi forkunnar vel því að hann vissi að hann hafði einarðlega fylgt hans máli á Íslandi. En biskup flutti ekki mjög mál Þórðar og kvað hann eigi efna það er hann hefði heitið, kvað konungs vilja aldrei mundu við ganga á Íslandi meðan Þórður réði svo miklu. Biskup var með konungi um veturinn og hlýddi konungur allmjög á hans sagnir. En þá var fátt þeirra manna í Noregi er mjög drægju fram hlut Þórðar nema nokkurir lögunautar hans.¹⁸⁰

(That summer a letter from King Hákon arrived for Þórður, and he was summoned abroad. There were some accusations and reproaches against Þórður in this: that he had taken more pains to ensure that he established himself as leader of the country rather than the king, as he thought their special, personal agreement to stand. Bishop Henrik agreed that Þórður had not stuck to that which he had promised to the king. Now many disputes emerged between them, so that there was nearly nothing on which they were agreed. This disagreement grew to the extent that Henrik determined to go abroad that summer and he came to meet King Hákon. He greeted the bishop exceedingly well, because he knew he had faithfully pursued his case in Iceland. The bishop did not speak favourably about Þórður's case and said that he did not perform that which he had promised and said the king's cause would never proceed in Iceland, while Þórður controlled everything. The bishop was with the king over the winter, and the king listened closely to what he said. However, there were at that time few men in Norway who promoted Þórður's case, except for some of his messmates.¹⁸¹)

¹⁸⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 549-50.

¹⁸¹ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 313.

Úlfar Bragason's considers that chapter 49 – the final chapter of *Pórðar saga kakala* in the editions which preceded that of Örnólfur Thorsson – cannot be where **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* ended because there are no concluding words or other signposts such as a list of the protagonist's descendants or a statement stating that the saga has ended.¹⁸² Across the saga corpus, there are four things which are typically discussed at the ending of a saga: an epilogal episode following the saga's denouement, commentary on the protagonist's and antagonist's lives after the epilogue (or, if there is not one, the denouement), provision of genealogical information such as a list of descendants, and a statement that the saga is complete. These are features found at the end of biographical contemporary sagas such as *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* and *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*.

Certainly, there is no statement at the end of chapter 49 which explicitly states that it is complete. Yet it is worth nuancing Úlfar Bragason's observation that the saga shows no sign of coming to an end, for there is a list of Pórður's children to be found midway through chapter 49:¹⁸³

¹⁸² Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 101.

¹⁸³ There appears to be evidence that Pórður had another son – Kolbeinn – not included in this list. For a variety of views on this, cf. Einar Arnórsson, 'Smiður Andrésón', *Saga* 1 (1949-53), pp. 9-126, pp. 17-8, 33, 46-8, 52 & 126; Jón Guðnason & Ólafur P. Kristjánsson, *Íslenzkar æviskrár frá landnámstímum til ársloka 1940* vol. 6 (Reykjavík, 1976), p. 520; Einar Bjarnason, 'Árni Pórðarson, Smiður Andrésón og Grundar-Helga', *Saga* 12 (1974), pp. 88-108, p. 88; Ingólfur Sigurðsson, 'Frú Puríður og herra Pétur: Um ættir og ættatengsl í Rangárþingi á 14. og 15. öld', *Fréttabréf Ættfræðifélagsins* 20/4 (2002), pp. 11-5, pp. 11-2; Helgi Þorláksson, 'Sturlunga – tilurð og markmið', *Gripla* 23 (2012), pp. 53-92, p. 69.

Um vorið gerði Þórður annað bú í Geldingaholti í Skagafirði og var hann þar löngum. Var þar fyrir Kolfinna Þorsteinsdóttir. Hún var frilla Þórðar og áttu þau dóttur er Halldóra hét. Þórður átti tvo sonu við Yngvildi Úlfsdóttur, Þórð og Úlf. Styrmir hét son hans og Nereiðar Styrmisdóttur. Jón kárin var elstur. Hann var fæddur í Vestfjörðum.¹⁸⁴

(During the spring, Þórður established another farm at Geldingaholt in Skagafjörður, and remained there for a long time. Kolfinna Þorsteinsdóttir controlled the household there. She was Þórður's mistress, and they had a daughter, who was named Halldóra. Þórður had two sons with Yngvildur Úlfsdóttir, Þórður and Úlfur. Styrmir was the name of his son with Nereiður Styrmisdóttir. Jón kárin was the eldest, he was born in the Vestfirðir.¹⁸⁵)

The placement of this list, however, is not where one would expect it (i.e., after the close of events) for, subsequently, the narrative continues.¹⁸⁶ Therefore, it is clear that the list of Þórður's children should not be taken as a signpost of narrative termination.

Because of the lack of a self-reflective closing statement, a properly situated list of descendants, a real summary of either Þórður's or Gissur's life following the events of chapter 48, or an epilogal episode, chapter 49 of the saga cannot be where **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* concluded, if it were ever even in the latter. Additionally, the composition of chapter 49 appears rushed and somewhat disconnected; consequently, it is not a stretch to consider that, as in chapter 1's case, it was the compiler's own creation.

¹⁸⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 548.

¹⁸⁵ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 309.

¹⁸⁶ In **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* the list would likely have been situated among or after the content extant in chapter 50 of *Þórðar saga kakala*.

Even if this is so, doubtless the compiler would have used material from **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* to write it.

There is an interpolation extant in 11p manuscripts of *Sturlunga saga*, which tells of Pórður's life between 1254 and 1256.¹⁸⁷ It is not present in *Króksfjarðarbók* and must have been added by the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók*. The chapter ends as follows:

Hafði Pórður sýslu í Skíðunni. Þeir fóru báðir til Hallands með konungi. Er þar mikil saga frá Pórði. Pórður var vinsæll í sýslu sinni og þykir þeim sem fáir íslenskir menn hafi slíkir verið af sjálfum sér sem Pórður. Svo segir Kolfinna Porvaldsdóttir, og var hún þá með Pórði, að bréf Hákonar konungs komu til hans síð um kvöld er hann sat við drykk, það er Pórður vottaði að konungur hafði gefið honum orlof til Íslands og gera hann mestan mann. Varð hann svo glaður við að hann kvað öngvan hlut þann til bera að honum þætti þá betri. Þakkaði hann konunginum mikillega. Drukku menn þá og voru allkátir. Litlu síðar talaði Pórður, sagðist og eigi fara skyldu af Íslandi ef honum yrði auðið út að koma. Litlu síðar segir Pórður að svifi yfir hann. Var honum þá fylgt til hvílu sinnar. Tók hann þá sóttinni svo fast að hann lá skamma stund og leiddi hann til bana. Er frá honum mikil saga.¹⁸⁸

(Pórður's county was in Skien. Pórður and Gissur both went to Halland with the king. There is a great saga about Pórður. Pórður was popular in his county, and they think that there have been few Icelandic men like him. So says Kolfinna Porvaldsdóttir, and she was with Pórður at this time, that a letter from King Hákon came to him late in the evening, when he was sat at drink, in which Pórður saw that the king had given him leave to return to Iceland and appointed him the country's governor. He was filled with joy and commented he had never received better news than this. Pórður thanked the king profusely. Now men drank and they were exceedingly merry. Shortly after this, Pórður spoke, vowing that he would never leave Iceland if he was fortunate enough to return. A little later on, Pórður noted that a chill had come over him. He was then

¹⁸⁷ This interpolation has already been discussed above with the designation as chapter 50 of *Pórðar saga kakala*.

¹⁸⁸ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 738-40.

helped to his bed. A sickness then took hold of Þórður with such rapidity that he only lay for a short while before he died. There is a great saga about him.¹⁸⁹⁾

Örnólfur Thorsson is of the view that this interpolation was a direct copy of the final chapter of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. Because of this, he classified it as chapter 50 of *Þórðar saga kakala* in his edition of *Sturlunga saga*. We have established that the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* made use of pre-compilation versions of the texts in the *Sturlunga saga* canon, including **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. It is therefore highly probable that Örnólfur Thorsson is correct.

However, it is worth noting that chapter 50 of *Þórðar saga kakala* cannot be a verbatim quotation by the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* of the ending of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. If it were, there would be a self-reflective statement to the effect that the saga had come to an end instead of a comment pointing the reader in the direction of another – presumably greater – saga.¹⁹⁰ Consequently, we may surmise that Örnólfur Thorsson is right in thinking that the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* copied the ending of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* but must recognise that it was edited prior to its insertion into this recension of *Sturlunga saga*. It is therefore likely to be a summary of the closing chapters of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* or, at minimum, a modified version of its final chapter. However, we now have a lacuna representing four years between chapters 49 and 50: can we say at

¹⁸⁹ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 317.

¹⁹⁰ The saga from which, incidentally, Örnólfur Thorsson is implying the chapter ultimately derives.

all what **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* might have said about the period 1250-54?

Following six years of peace, 1252 saw the Icelandic political élite return to a state of internecine strife. It seems probable – given that these disputes were mostly a consequence of Pórður and King Hákon independently handing out the same chieftaincies and domains as fiefs to their men – that there would have been discussion of events in Iceland during the years 1252-4 **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*.

There is another argument that could be made. Earlier, we noted that chapters a, b, d and e in 11p recensions of *Svínfellinga saga* could be interpolations the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* made using sections from **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*. Recall also our assumption that Sturla used **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* in writing **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*. Chapter 49 of *Pórðar saga kakala* covers content similar to that of chapters a, b, d and e. We have already established that chapter 49 of *Pórðar saga kakala* is a summary of content from the original saga. Taking all these things together, it is therefore natural to suppose that though they were copied by the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* from **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*, the content of chapters a, b, d and e ultimately derives in turn from **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. The only objection to this is the question of why the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* would choose to use **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* instead of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* for chapters a, b, d and e if the same content had been in both texts. Perhaps it was because of Sturla's positive reputation as a historian, as evinced by the *Formáli*, which at its end

notes his wisdom and sincerity. Alternatively, it could have been because Sturla had already extracted the essential details from **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* or even for stylistic reasons, as *Íslendinga saga* has been judged (albeit in recent times) to be of a higher artistic standard than *Pórðar saga kakala*. Any one or combination of these reasons would have provided the editor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* with justification to prefer **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* to **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, and, what is more, to quote the former more-or-less verbatim without having to make alterations as he would have had to with the latter.

However, I think the prospective appraisal of events in Iceland during the period 1250-6 in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* would have had to have been terse as would behove an author writing from the far-remove perspective of Pórður in Norway. The notion that it was brief is further supported by the absence of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*'s coverage of these events from **Sturlunga saga*; evidently, *Svínfellinga saga* and *Íslendinga saga* were included by the compiler because their originals dealt with these disputes in greater detail.

Given the possibility that the saga about Pórður covered events in Iceland between 1250 and 1254, the narrative must also have discussed his life in Norway during that period. This too is no longer extant in *Sturlunga saga*: the compiler of **Sturlunga saga* would not have included the information about Pórður's life in Norway which may have been in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* because the relevant details were already to be found in **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* (evidenced in *Íslendinga saga* and

Svínfellinga saga) and the extra material would have been surplus to his requirements.

A review of the evidence indicates that Jón Jóhannesson, Úlfar Bragason, and Örnólfur Thorsson's vision of the content of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* should be accepted (with the reservation that it probably did not cover Pórður's childhood), while it is clear that the earlier view of *Pórðar saga kakala* as being effectively or completely unadulterated in its progress through compilation, editing and copying phases cannot be true.

1.5 – A gap: The contemporary significance of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*

This chapter has reviewed the scholarly literature on *Pórðar saga kakala*'s origins in depth. The goal of the literature review was to summarise and evidence what we know about **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* as well as to identify gaps in current knowledge. We have seen how it is fair to carry forward the scholarly conclusions that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was written during the 1270s in the Western Quarter, possibly by Svarthöfði Dufgusson, and that the saga originally covered a longer period of time (c. 1233-56) than it does in its extant form (1242-50 and 1254-6). However, we are about to see that there is an unfilled gap in research which demands filling.

Recently, there has been a modest uptake of interest in what purpose **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* may have been intended to serve. Einar Már Jónsson has argued that the saga was commissioned by Pórður himself and

intended as a propaganda piece to provide Þórður with political legitimacy and justify his use of force during his rise to power.¹⁹¹ Similarly, Axel Kristinsson has proposed that the saga may have been an attempt by Þórður, or a successor of his, to establish ‘unity and common identity’ in his domain by ordering the creation of a ‘common history’ which used a heroic figure as a ‘unifying symbol’.¹⁹²

Nevertheless, we know from the dating of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* that neither Einar Már Jónsson nor Axel Kristinsson can be correct in their suppositions about the purpose of the saga: Þórður predeceased the production of the text by about two decades and also by that time the complex of sovereign domains had not existed in Iceland for around a decade.

I do not believe that it is possible to establish the intended purpose of a saga either positively or directly. I read the work of Einar Már Jónsson and Axel Kristinsson as subjecting *Þórðar saga kakala* – or, rather, **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* – to historical analysis to determine its contemporary significance. The fact of the matter is, as discussed above, their historical analyses have been based on the assumption that **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was written during the late-1240s or 1250s. This literature review has shown this point of departure to be mistaken. There is therefore a need to

¹⁹¹ Einar Már Jónsson, ‘La saga de Þórður kakali: Une œuvre de propagande?’, *Médiévales* 50 (2006), pp. 47-57, pp. 49 & 54-5.

¹⁹² Axel Kristinsson, ‘Lords and literature: The Icelandic sagas as political and social instruments’, *Scandinavian journal of history* 28 (2003), pp. 1-17, pp. 7-8.

determine contemporary significance by applying historical analysis within the 1270s context that we have shown the saga to have originated within.

Additionally, historical analysis is not the only methodology that can be applied to a text to determine contemporary significance: another is literary analysis. Excepting a brief discussion of *Þórðar saga kakala* as a component of the *Sturlunga saga* compilation in Úlfar Bragason's *Ætt og saga*, which – while significant – is hardly a literary analysis of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, there has been no further or substantial attempt to subject *Þórðar saga kakala* (or **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*) to aesthetic critique and analysis.

Consequently, a gap in research which demands filling is the application of these two methodologies to **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, in order to determine its contemporary significance from a parallax view. In the next two chapters, the current state of affairs shall be rectified.

Chapter 2

Literary analysis

This chapter carries out a literary analysis of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* to begin to establish the contemporary significance of the saga. The analysis herein closely examines four key literary elements of *Pórðar saga kakala* (narrative structure, characterisation, the plot's structure, and tone) in light of the content of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, its literary milieu, and the élite social and political ideologies circulating in Iceland at the time it was written during the 1270s. Three arguments are presented across this chapter. The first is that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla's* narrative structure encouraged the reader to focus in on Þórður's personal qualities. The second is that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* implicitly attributed Þórður's successes to his possession of exceptional characteristics. The third is that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* would have been understood as attributing Þórður's destiny to his blood, with God limiting his prospects somewhat by ordaining that he was born into an aristocratic, though not royal, family. The chapter concludes by using the products of literary analysis to summarise the overarching themes of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. By considering the configuration and contexts of these themes, we see how **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* reflected the dominant ideological-philosophical currents at its time of writing.

2.1 – A narrative in orbit around an individual character

2.1.1 – The interlaced narrative structure of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla: Pórðar saga kakala*, chapter 9 as a test case

Úlfar Bragason has claimed that *Pórðar saga kakala* has an interlaced narrative structure.¹⁹³ To examine this proposition, let us use chapter 9 of *Pórðar saga kakala* as an example. This is to show that interlaced action is the fundamental narrative structure of *Pórðar saga kakala* (and **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, when it existed); however, because the saga's plot comprises a main plot and several interwoven subplots, it is also interlaced on a grander scale. This higher level interlacement is visible within the narrative action of a scene at times.

The most conservative deconstruction one may do of the chapter's narrative action is into three narrative strands (P_x, K_x, B_x) which each correspond with a group of characters (Pórður and his men; Kolbeinn and his men; and the Borgfirðingar):

P₁ | En er Pórður kom ofan í Reykjardal að Englandi þá kom í móti honum Pórður Bjarnarson og segir honum að Kolbeinn var norðan kominn með fjölmenni og sat þá í Reykjaholti.

(When Pórður came down into Reykjardalur at England, Pórður Bjarnarson came to meet him and told him that Kolbeinn had arrived from the North with a company and was sat at Reykholt at that time.)

B₁ | Ari hét maður. Hann bjó þá að Lundi í Reykjardal hinum syðra. En Böðvar Pórðarson bjó þá í Bæ. Hann átti Herðísi Arnórsdóttur systur

¹⁹³ Úlfar Bragason (*Ætt og saga: Um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 99) compares the narrative structures of *Pórðar saga kakala* and *Guðmundar saga dýra*. The latter was not written by someone with a good grasp of the technique (Jacqueline Simpson, 'Advocacy and art in *Guðmundar saga dýra*', *Saga-book* 15 (1961), pp. 327-45, pp. 327 & 337).

Kolbeins. Þeir voru systkinasynir Sighvatur faðir Þórðar og Böðvar.

(There was a man named Ari. At that time, Ari lived at Lund in Reykjadalur hinn syðri. Böðvar Þórðarson lived then at Bær. He was married to Herdís Arnórsdóttir, Kolbeinn's sister. Böðvar was also Þórður's first cousin.)

P₂ Þórður reið ofan eftir Reykjardal til Bæjar og beið þar til þess er flokkurinn kom allur eftir. Og þá er menn voru saman komnir leitaði hann ráðs til hinna betri manna hvað upp skyldi taka. Lagði þá næsta sitt hver til. Eggjuðu þeir er áræðamestir voru að ríða skyldi að þeim í Reykjaholt, kölluðu þar marga mundu vera lítt til færa að verjast fyrir kulda sakir. En allir hinir vitrari menn sögðu það óráð að svo fáir menn riðu að þar sem slíkt fjölmenni væri fyrir, sögðu þá allskörulega riðið þó að hann riði vestur um svo að hann ætti ekki við þá. Var það ráðs tekið. Reið þá Þórður ofan eftir dal og ætlaði yfir um á að Gufuskálum og svo vestur Langavatnsdal. En er hann kom ofan á Völlu þá var sagt að eigi var hrossís yfir ána. Sneri þá flokkurinn allur upp til Grafarvaðs. Og er menn komu upp frá Þingnesi þá reið Þórður á síki eitt. Brast niður ísinn undir hestinum og var hvortveggi á kafi, hesturinn og hann. Og er hann kom á land var hann alvotur og sneri ofan aftur til Þingness og sex menn með honum.

(Þórður rode down along Reykjadalur to Lund and waited there until his whole army had gathered there. When the men were all together, he asked the other leaders what plan they should adopt. Nearly all then expressed their own view. The most daring urged that they ride to Reykholt, stating that many of the men there would be little able to defend themselves due to the cold. However, all the wiser men said that it would be unwise for such a small army as they were to ride to a place where there would be such a large host before them. These men proposed instead that it would be a magnificent idea if Þórður rode westwards so that he need not concern himself with Kolbeinn and his forces. It was this plan that was adopted. Þórður proceeded to ride down along the valley and planned to ride over the river at Gufuskálar and so west to Langavatnsdalur. But when he came down to Vellir, it is said that there was no ice bridge over the river which the horses were able to walk on. The whole army then turned back up to Grafarvað. As men travelled up from Þingnes, Þórður was riding over one trench; however, the ice broke down under the horse, and both he and his mount tumbled into the water. After Þórður made it ashore, he was completely soaking. Thus, he headed back down to Þingnes with six men.)

B₂ Þá bjó sá maður í Þingnesi er Börkur hét og var Ormsson. Hann tók vel við Þórði og skipti við hann klæðum. Þar létu þeir menn Þórðar eftir hesta nokkura. Setti Börkur þá inn í hús hjá hrossum sínum. Reið Börkur þá með Þórði upp til Grafarvaðs. En er hann sneri ofan aftur

heyrði hann til hvorstveggja flokksins, Þórðar og Kolbeins.

(At that time that man lived at Pingnes who was named Börkur and he was Ormur's son. He greeted Þórður well and gave clothes to him. Þórður's men left some horses behind there. Börkur then placed the horses inside the house where he kept his own. After this, Börkur rode with Þórður up to Grafarvað. As soon as Börkur turned back to go back down, he was able to hear two groups, one of which was Þórður's and the other Kolbeinn's.)

P₃ Þórður reið til Stafaholts og áði þar og þaðan út yfir Norðurá. Í Svignaskarði setti hann eftir sex menn til njósnar. Voru þar Dufgussynir þrír, Sanda-Bárður og Þorsteinn kollur Þorbergsson, Þorgeir stafsendi. En Þórð Bjarnarson setti hann eftir í Eskiholti ef Kolbeinn riði hið neðra. En Þórður reið út á Mýrar með allan flokkinn og var allill færð.

(Þórður rode to Stafholt and rested there a while before heading on from there out over Norðurá. At Svignaskarð he posted six men as sentries. These six were the three sons of Dufgus, Sanda-Bárður, Þorsteinn kollur Þorbergsson, and Þorgeir stafsendi. Þórður also left Þórður Bjarnarson behind to watch at Eskiholt, in case Kolbeinn rode below. Þórður proceeded to ride out to Mýrar with his whole army but the going was tough.)

B₃ En er Ari á Lundi varð var við ferðir Þórðar tók hann hest sinn og reið til Bæjar sem hvatast. En er hann kom í Bæ var Böðvar í rekkju. Ari segir Böðvari að flokkur Þórðar riði ofan eftir Reykjardal og bað hann gæta hrossa sinna að þau yrðu eigi tekin.

(When Ari of Lund became aware of Þórður's journey, he took his horse and rode to Bær as fast as he could. On arriving at Bær, he found that Böðvar was in bed. Ari told Böðvar that Þórður's forces had ridden down through Reykjadalur, and asked him to take care of his horses, so that they did not get taken.)

K₁ En fyrir voru komnir menn Kolbeins, Þorvaldur keppur og tveir menn aðrir. En er þeir heyrðu hvað Ari sagði spruttu þeir upp og riðu sem mest máttu þeir til Reykjaholts og segja Kolbeini hvað títt var. Hann bað hvern mann spretta í klæði sín og ríða eftir sem hvatast. Og er þeir voru búnir riðu þeir ofan eftir Reykjardal og komu í Bæ.

(But before this, Kolbeinn's men had arrived, Þorvaldr keppur and two others. As soon as they heard what Ari said, they sprang up and rode as quickly as they were able to Reykholt and gave Kolbeinn the news. Kolbeinn asked every man to dress quickly and ride after Þórður and his troops as fast as possible. Once Kolbeinn's forces were ready, they rode down Reykjadalur and came to Bær.)

B₄ Var Böðvar úti og spurðu þeir hann um ferðir Þórðar. Hann kveðst ætla að löngu mundi hann vestur um riðinn.

(Böðvar was outside and they asked him about Þórður's journey. He said that he thought that Þórður would long since have ridden west.)

K₂ Riðu þeir Kolbeinn þá ofan á Völlu og spurðu þar að Þórður hefði upp snúið til Grafarvaðs. Snúa þeir þá upp til Þingness.

(Kolbeinn and his men then rode down to Vellir and discovered there that Þórður had turned up to Grafarvað. Thus, they headed up towards Þingnes.)

B₅ Var Börkur úti. Spyrja þeir hann að um ferðir Þórðar. Hann kvaðst eigi vita það hvort Þórðar menn voru eða aðrir, kvað þar ríða annan flokk að öðrum í alla nótt. Kolbeinn bað hann ganga á leið með þeim. En er Kolbeinn reið á brott dvöldust þar eftir nokkrir menn hans og fundu hesta í húsi einu, þá er alvotir voru og nýteknir undan söðlum. Riðu þeir þá eftir Kolbeini og segja honum að þeir hefðu fundið hestana og kváðu að þar mundu vera menn Þórðar nokkurir. Reið Kolbeinn þá heim aftur á bæinn. Einar langadjákn Jónsson reið að Berki og setti spjótshalann millum herða honum og bað djöfulinn segja það hann vissi. Börkur kvaðst eigi vita hvað hann segði honum en ekki mun eg þér fleira segja. Börkur hóf upp öxina er hann hafði í hendi og laust til Einars en Einar bar fram hjá og kom höggið á lend hestinum. Í því kom að Hallur Jónsson og kvað engan mann skyldu Berki illt gera. Hann var annar maður en Brandur Kolbeinsson mest virður af Norðlendingum. Var þá rannsakaður bær allur í Þingnesi og tekið fé það sem laust var innan gátta en rænt hjá fram hrossum öllum. Og varð þetta löng dvöl. Riðu þeir Kolbeinn í brott. En Börkur kveðst ætla að skammt mundi líða að þeir sjálfir mundu verst una við dvöl sína og verr en hann við félat sitt.

(Börkur was outside. Kolbeinn's men asked Börkur about Þórður's journey. Börkur replied that he did not know whether they were Þórður's troops or others, but said that there had ridden one group of men after another 'throughout the whole night'. Kolbeinn asked him to come on the journey with them. After Kolbeinn rode away, some of his men remained at Þingnes and found horses in one of the houses. They noticed that some were completely soaking and had recently had their saddles taken off. The men immediately rode after Kolbeinn and told him that they had found the horses, and said that some of Þórður's men would be at Þingnes. Kolbeinn now rode back to the farm. Einar langadjákn Jónsson sped at Börkur and pointed his spear-shaft between the householders shoulders and commanded the devil to tell them what he knew. Börkur said he did not know what Einar expected him to say, 'but I will not say any more.' Börkur hefted up the axe which he had in his hand, and launched at Einar, but Einar dodged it, and the blow dug into a horse's leg. At that Hallur Jónsson arrived and said that

no man should do evil to Börkur. Hallur was the second most honourable man in northern Iceland after Brandur Kolbeinsson. Then the whole farm at Þingnes was ransacked and all the loose goods were seized and all the horses stolen. Kolbeinn's men remained there for a long time doing this. Afterwards, Kolbeinn and his troops rode away. Börkur commented he did not think that it would be long until they themselves would come off worst from their stay and worse than he for his lost wealth.)

K₃ Kolbeinn reið nú í Stafaholt. Þar fengu þeir sanna njósn af um ferðir Þórðar og riðu þá eftir sem ákafast.

(Now Kolbeinn rode to Stafholt. There they got trustworthy news about Þórður's journey and they rode back as quickly as they could.)

P₄ Njósnarmenn Þórðar hvorirtveggju sjá er flokkur Kolbeins kom í Stafaholt. Brugðu þeir þá við og riðu fram eftir Þórði. Höfðu þeir Kolbeinn þá skeiðreitt eftir stígnum. Dró þá saman skjótt. Kafðist þá hesturinn undir Þórði Bjarnarsyni en annar undir Kægil-Birni. Gerðu þeir þá ýmist að þeir runnu eða riðu að baki þeim Svarthöfða og Bárði. En er þeir komu að Langá þá bar leiti á milli. Þá hljóp Svarthöfði af hesti sínum og bað Björn bróður sinn á bak stíga: Eg sé að oss dugir eigi lengur tvímenning en við Þórður Bjarnarson munum forða okkur sem verða má. Björn kvaðst aldrei mundu frá honum ríða. Þeir Þórður og Svarthöfði tóku þá skeið ofan eftir ánni en þeir Björn riðu fram eftir flokkinum Þórðar sem ákafast. En þeir Svarthöfði og Þórður köstuðu sér í snjóinn og jósu á sig mjöllinni.

(Þórður sentries all saw Kolbeinn arrive at Stafholt. They broke cover and rode from there back to Þórður. Kolbeinn and his men had a good course for riding on the path. The two groups of horsemen were getting closer and closer together. Þórður Bjarnarson's horse then caved under him and another under Kægil-Björn. They began alternating between running and riding back with Svarthöfði and Bárður. When they reached Langá, they were shielded from view. Svarthöfði leapt from the back of his horse and asked his brother to mount its back saying: 'I see that we shall no longer ride together. Þórður Bjarnarson and I will try our best to escape.' Björn refused to abandon him. Þórður and Svarthöfði now ran down along the river, and Björn and Bárður rode on after Þórður's army as fast as possible. Svarthöfði and Þórður cast themselves into the snow and covered themselves with it.)

K₄ Þeir Kolbeinn sóttu þá svo fast fram að ekki var nær í milli þeirra.

(Kolbeinn and his men pursued with such vigour that there was little distance between them.)

P₅ En er þeir Bárður komu eftir þá var Hrafn Oddsson á halaferðinni. Þeir báðu hann hvata eftir Þórði og segja honum hvað er títt var er hann hafði hvíldan hest. En er hann hitti Þórð þá gekk Þórður og leiddi hestinn eftir sér. Hrafn bað hann fara á bak, segir að Kolbeinn var þá nálega kominn á hæla þeim en meiri von að þeir Svarthöfði og Þórður séu teknir. Eftir það sté Þórður á bak og reið þá fram eftir skógargötunum þar til er klif var lítið. Þar bar þá leiti í milli. Bað þá Þórður alla sína menn af baki stíga, kvað þar við skyldi nema og hlaupa á þá. En þar varð sem víða annarstaðar að flóttamanninn er eigi hægt að hefta. En er Þórður sá þetta, að þá hleypti margur sá mest er áður kvaðst hafa þreyttan hest svo að hvergi mátti ganga, þá bað Þórður, er því mátti eigi áleiðis koma að nema þar við, að fólkið skyldi eigi svo geyst ríða og sendi þá fram fyrir Guðmund sorta og bauð að eigi skyldi brott ríða af bænum í Álftártungu. En er Þórður kom á bæinn þá sté þar af baki alþýða. Og þá segir honum Ingjaldur skáld Geirmundarson og kvað séð vera hversu þá mundi fara: Nú flýr öll alþýða en hinir betri menn munu eigi frá yður ríða. En ef þú bíður hans þá verður það þinn skaði og þeirra manna er þér fylgja. Stigu þeir þá á bak. Tók þá og svo að batna færðin að þá var allt skeiðreitt. Þórður bað þá menn fara í kirkju er þrotna höfðu hesta. Hlupu þá í kirkju nær þrjú tígir manna. Brú var á Álftá og var þar seinfært yfir. En er Þórður kom yfir ána hleypti sinn veg hver. Þórður sendi menn fram eftir liðinu og bað menn saman halda hvað sem í gerðist. En því kom ekki til leiðar. Varð þá eigi fleira í reið með Þórði en hans menn og voru það sex tígir manna.

(When Bárður and Björn arrived, Hrafn Oddsson was travelling at the rear of the army. They asked him to speed after Þórður and tell him what the tidings were, because he had a rested horse. When Hrafn reached Þórður, Þórður was at that time walking and leading the horse after him. Hrafn asked him to remount, saying that Kolbeinn had nearly come upon them and that it was more than likely that they would be arrested. Straightaway, Þórður remounted and rode along a forest path until he reached a little cliff where they were in cover. Þórður then ordered his men to dismount, and said they should ambush Kolbeinn's troops. Nevertheless, it transpired as at other times that fleeing men are not easy to stop. When Þórður saw that the majority galloped away – those who had previously said that their horses were exhausted to the point that they could barely walk anywhere – and identified that it would not be possible for them to make a stand there, then he ordered that the folk not ride off with such haste. He also sent forward Guðmundur sorti to instruct them that they should not ride beyond the farm at Álftártunga. When Þórður reached the farm, all the people there dismounted. Then the poet Ingjaldur Geirmundarson spoke to him and said it had become apparent how matters would go, because 'now all the common folk flee, but the better men will not abandon you. Nonetheless, if you wait for Kolbeinn, then the result will prove shameful to you and those men who follow you.' Therefore, they remounted. Now the roads became considerably more passable and

soon they were all on a good path for riding. Þórður told the men with exhausted horses to seek the sanctuary of the church. Immediately, nearly thirty men ran into the church. There was a bridge over the Álftá and it took a long time to get over there. After Þórður came over the river, the troops began to scatter. Þórður sent men forward after the men to ask them to stick together whatever the circumstances. But that did not come to pass. By now there were no more than sixty men riding with Þórður (these were his own men.)

K₅ En er Þórður var burt riðinn úr Álftártungu þá kom þegar flokkurinn Kolbeins. Varð þá svo nær farið að þeir sem norður höfðu snúið frá kirkjunni og fyrir húsin að þá er þeir sneru aftur náðu þeir eigi kirkju. Voru þá vegnir tveir menn í kirkjugarðinum, Sigmundur Hallsson og Torfi Þorgeirsson. Gengu þeir Kolbeins menn þá til kirkjudura og rannsökuðu hvað manna þar væri inni. Í því bili kom Kolbeinn, kvað þá óviturlega gera, lágu þar og gerðu ekki það er framkvæmd væri í en látið Þórð draga undan og alla þá er nokkuð mannsmót væri að. Setti hann þá þar eftir er ófærir voru. Síðan tóku þeir eftirreið sem ákafast. En er þeir komu að Álftá varð þeim eigi þar greiðfært yfir því að Þórður hafði látið af draga brúna. Þá varð þeim Kolbeini allt saman mikil dvöl.

(As soon as Þórður rode away from Álftártunga, immediately after came Kolbeinn's men. The distance between them was so insignificant that when those who had wheeled northwards from the church in front of the house turned around, they were unable to reach the sanctuary of the church. Two men were killed in the churchyard, Sigmundur Hallsson and Torfi Þorgeirsson. After this, Kolbeinn and his men strode up to the church door and enquired which men were inside. At that moment Kolbeinn arrived and said that it would be unwise if they dawdled here rather than focusing on the important task at hand and so allowed Þórður to get away with all the other significant men. Kolbeinn left those of his troops there who were unable to travel, but the remainder resumed the chase as quickly as possible. When Kolbeinn's men reached Álftá, they could not easily get over the river, because Þórður had had the bridge dragged down. Kolbeinn and his men were then stranded on the opposite side of the river for a long while.)

P₆ Þórður sneri nú út eftir Mýrum. Og er hann kom yfir Hítará þá sté Teitur Styrmisson af baki og Kolbeinn grön og enn fleiri menn og vötnuðu hestum sínum er vatn féll á ísnum. Þá riðu Kolbeins menn sunnan að ánni. Og er þeir Teitur stukku upp af ánni þá sneri Þórður aftur en Kolbeins menn sneru þá aftur undan því að þeir voru fáir eftir komnir. Teitur bað þá menn skunda á bak, kváðu þetta ekki vera annað en dvöl þeirra. Reið þá hver undan sem mátti. En Þórður reið um daginn jafnan síðast og vildi hann aldrei svo mikið ríða sem alþýðunni var í hug. Töluðu þá sumir við hann en sumir keyrðu hestinn undir honum. Bar þá enn undan.

(Pórður now turned out beyond Mýrar. After he made it over Hítará, Teitur Styrmisson, Kolbeinn grön, and yet more men dismounted to allow their horses to drink the water falling from the ice. At that time, Kolbeinn's men were riding towards the southern bank of the river. When Teitur and the others hurried up from the river, Pórður turned his forces back to face Kolbeinn's men, but the latter turned tail and fled as so few of them had arrived at that point. Teitur then told the men to remount, saying that they should not be diverted by this. Everyone then rode on as fast as they could. All day, Pórður rode at the back of the company, and he would never ride faster than everyone else wanted to. Some of them talked with him, but others urged their horses on. Again they escaped Kolbeinn's clutches.)

K6 Kolbeins menn tóku þá drjúgum menn af Þórði er hestana þraut. Voru þeir allir flettir en á sumum unnið. En er Þórður reið út á vaðlana þá sáu þeir Kolbeins menn að undan mundi bera og hurfu þá aftur.

(Kolbeinn's men then arrested great numbers of Pórður's men, whose horses were tired. They were all undressed, and some wounded. When Pórður rode out onto the flats, Kolbeinn's men saw that he had got away, and then they turned back.)

P7 Þórður reið í Miklaholt og dvaldist þar um hríð. Þar bjó þá Guðmundur Ólafsson. Hann var vinur mikill Sturlunga. Fýsti hann Þórð sem fyrst burtreiðar. Reið Þórður þaðan vestur Kerlingarskarð og svo til Helgafells. Fékk Þórður sér þar skip og fór út í Fagurey en hestana lét hann reka hið innra. Kom hann þar laugardag fyrir hádegi. Það var hinn næsta dag fyrir Andrésmessu. Þótti það öllum mikil furða og varla dæmi til finnast að menn hefðu ríðið hinum sömu hestum í einni reið af Þingvelli og til Helgafells í svo miklum ófærðum sem þá voru. Þórður reið fimmtadag um hádegi af Þingvelli en kom til Helgafells föstunóttina er stjarna var í austri. Þóttust þá allir þegar vita að Þórð mundi til nokkurra stórra hluta undan rekið hafa.

(Pórður rode to Miklaholt and stayed there for a while. At that time Guðmundur Ólafsson lived there, he was a great friend of the Sturlungar. He pleaded with Pórður that he immediately ride away. Pórður headed from there west to Kerlingarskarð and still further westward to Helgafell. Pórður got himself a ship there and went out to Fagurey, but the horses he had driven along on the mainland. He reached Fagurey on Saturday before the high day. That was the last day before St. Andrew's mass. Everyone thought it was completely amazing and without comparison, that men had ridden the same horses in one journey from Þingvellir and to Helgafell on such atrocious paths. Pórður rode from Þingvellir at midday on Thursday, and came to Helgafell on Friday night, when the star was in the east. Folk straightaway arrived at the conclusion that Pórður had escaped for some great destiny.)

K₇ Kolbeinn reið í Álfartungu með allan flokkinn og var þar um nóttina. En um morguninn eftir voru menn leiddir úr kirkju. Var þá höggvin hönd af þeim manni er Þórhallur hét og var Oddleifsson. Annar maður hét Naddur er enn var handhöggvinn. Hann hafði riðið norðan með Teiti Styrmissyni. Fengu þá allir aðrir menn lífs grið og lima en voru flettir vopnum og hestum. Reið Kolbeinn eftir það í Hítardal og var sagt þar allt hið sanna um ferðir Þórðar.¹⁹⁴

(Kolbeinn rode to Álfartunga with his whole army and remained there overnight. The morning after, people were led out from the church. The man who was named Þórhallur and was Oddleifur's son, had his hand cut off. A second man, who was named Naddur, also lost his hand: he had ridden north with Teitur Styrmisson. Everyone else was granted a truce of life and limb, but their weapons and horses were confiscated. Afterwards, Kolbeinn rode to Hítardalur and heard there the whole truth about Þórður's journey.¹⁹⁵)

Let us imagine that each of the three figurative strands highlighted was exchanged for a literal one of the same colour. The resultant pattern would be as follows:



The diagram clearly shows a fairly regular plaited configuration, indicating that *Pórðar saga kakala* has – and that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* had – an interlaced structure.

2.1.2 – The function of interlacement in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*

One of the reasons the author composed **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* using the technique of interlacement was to enable the representation

¹⁹⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 477-82.

¹⁹⁵ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), pp. 83-93.

of simultaneous action.¹⁹⁶ Chapter 9 of *Pórðar saga kakala* serves as a particularly good example of this. There are five points in this chapter where events occur in different locations at precisely the same time (t_x): t_1 (P₃, B₃, K₁); t_2 (K₃₋₄, P₄); t_3 (P₅, K₅); t_4 (P₆, K₆); t_5 (P₇, K₇). The use of interlacement to express simultaneity was common in Icelandic and foreign literature during the Middle Ages: **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was therefore nothing special in this respect.¹⁹⁷

Nevertheless, interlacement fulfilled an additional role in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. To illustrate what this might be, we need briefly consider *Morkinskinna*. Ármann Jakobsson has suggested that *Morkinskinna* – a lengthy saga comprising several royal biographies – was structured using the technique of interlacement to interesting effect, for ‘the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* circle around kings... to see them more clearly, their virtues and their defects’.¹⁹⁸ Alison Finlay is unconvinced by Ármann’s narratological interpretation based on what she sees as superficial reference of Carol Clover’s theory of saga origins in tale interlacement and analogy with the skaldic practice of *nykrat*.¹⁹⁹ Whilst Finlay is correct that the validity of the *þáttur*-theory (a.k.a., the *vefnaður*-theory) and its applicability to

¹⁹⁶ For more on ‘the respect for historical time’ by the composers of medieval Icelandic literature, cf. Vésteinn Ólason, ‘Family Sagas’ in Rory McTurk (ed.) *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 101-18, p. 106.

¹⁹⁷ Vésteinn Ólason, ‘Family Sagas’ in Rory McTurk (ed.) *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 101-18, p. 104; Carol Clover, *The Medieval Saga* (Ithaca, 1982), p. 61ff.

¹⁹⁸ Ármann Jakobsson, ‘The Amplified Saga: Structural Disunity in *Morkinskinna*’, *Medium Aevum* 70 (2001), pp. 29-46, p. 40.

¹⁹⁹ Alison Finlay, ‘*Staður í nýjum heimi: Konungasagan Morkinskinna*. By Ármann Jakobsson [Review]’, *Saga-book* 27 (2003), pp. 110-2, p. 111.

Morkinskinna is an open question, the text evidently has an interlaced structure. Moreover, the literary effect of this interlacement in *Morkinskinna* is, as Ármann describes, that it shifts the reader's perspective slightly and thus serves parallaxically – alongside the main narrative – to better observe the king under examination. This is hardly a controversial reading, as the use of anecdotal digression is a common rhetorical device.

By reapplying Ármann's reading of *Morkinskinna*'s interlaced structure, I hold the use of interlacement in **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla* was not solely for the purpose of reporting simultaneous perspectives: in *Póroar saga kakala*, just as in *Morkinskinna*, these cyclical digressions from and returns to the protagonist, Póroar, serve to emphasise his personal qualities by offering concrete examples and inviting regular comparisons with other characters. To illustrate this with an example, let us return to chapter 9 of *Póroar saga kakala* (quoted in full above), where three points of contrast are made visible.

The first is the reaction of the Borgfirðingar to the two leaders. On the one hand, Kolbeinn appears to inspire fear in the Borgfirðingar, as attested by Ari of Lund's concern that his horses will be stolen by the northern army: 'Ari... bað hann gæta hrossa sinna að þau yrðu eigi tekin' ('Ari... asked [Böðvar] to take care of his horses, so that they did not get taken').²⁰⁰ Further examples of Kolbeinn's rule-by-fear can be found in *Póroar saga kakala* throughout the opening chapters where it is repeatedly stated that oaths

²⁰⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 478; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Póroar kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 85.

were extracted under duress and how Kolbeinn prevents opposition by inspiring terror in potential enemies.

On the other hand, Þórður seems to inspire fidelity in the Borgfirðingar, which can be seen in how, in spite of obvious threats posed to Börkur Ormsson's life and property, he assists Þórður: 'Börkur... tók vel við Þórði og skipti við hann klæðum. Þar létu þeir menn Þórðar eftir hesta nokkura. Setti Börkur þá inn í hús hjá hrossum sínum' ('Börkur... greeted Þórður well and gave clothes to him. Þórður's men left some horses behind there. Börkur then placed the horses inside the house where he kept his own');²⁰¹ and refuses to betray him: 'Einar langadjákn Jónsson reið að Berki og setti spjótshalann millum herða honum og bað djöfulinn segja það hann vissi. Börkur kvaðst eigi vita hvað hann segði honum en ekki mun eg þér fleira segja' ('Einar langadjákn Jónsson sped at Börkur and pointed his spear-shaft between the householder's shoulders and commanded the devil to tell them what he knew. Börkur said he did not know what he expected him to say, "but I will not say any more").²⁰² In the remainder of *Þórðar saga kakala*, there are many examples of Þórður inspiring loyalty in his lessers (outside his inner circle). For instance, let us recall the speech that Þórður delivers to his troops following the Battle of Húnaflói where he states that they had 'proved [their] courage and fidelity' by holding their own against a numerically superior opponent, indicating the fulfilment of his injunction prior

²⁰¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 478; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 85.

²⁰² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 479; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 87.

to the battle that they be ‘sem hraustastir þó að í nokkura raun kæmi’ (‘their bravest selves, even if danger arose’).²⁰³

Admittedly, there are several examples of householders reneging on their loyalty to Pórður or showing themselves to be self-interested and unfaithful. For example, consider Ingjaldur Geirmundarson’s statement during the flight from Kolbeinn in 1242 that ‘flýr öll alþýða’ (‘all the common folk flee’) and the mention that ‘skutust... margir við Pórð í trúnaðinum og fóru til fundar við Kolbein’ (‘some men reneged on their loyalty to Pórður and sought out Kolbeinn’) following the Battle of Húnaflói.²⁰⁴ Perhaps these incidents are included because **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was written well within living memory of these events? Alternatively, **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* may be emphasising just how formidable or terrifying an opponent Kolbeinn *unghi* truly was, or even making a classist statement about the ‘common folk’ as untrustworthy.

The second is the differing *modi operandi* of the two commanders. In spite of the fact that Kolbeinn clearly takes part in the chase, he appears to lead from the rear echelon, content to entrust his subordinates with carrying out his will, for example: ‘Kolbeins menn [emphasis mine] tóku þá drjúgum menn af Pórði er hestana þraut... En er Pórður reið út á vaðlana þá sáu þeir Kolbeins menn að undan mundi bera og hurfu þá aftur’ (‘Kolbeinn’s men then

²⁰³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 513; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 199.

²⁰⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 480 & 529; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), pp. 89 & 243.

arrested great numbers of Þórður's men, whose horses were tired.... When Þórður rode out onto the flats, Kolbeinn's men saw that they had got away, and then they turned back [i.e., to *rendezvous* with Kolbeinn]'.²⁰⁵ However, it is apparent from elsewhere in *Þórðar saga kakala* that the author had great respect for Kolbeinn, indicating that this is not a moral judgment on Kolbeinn, more an assessment of his diminished leadership ability when compared with Þórður:

Hann hafði sig lengstum lítt við orustuna um daginn. Báru til þess tveir hlutir, sá annar að hann þóttist hafa liðskost gnógan en sá annar að hann var heill lítt og þótti honum sér varla hent að ganga í stórerfiði. En allir menn vissu að Kolbeinn var hinn fræknasti maður og höfuðkempa til vopna sinna. Stóð hann við siglu á kastalanum og skipaði þaðan til atlögu.²⁰⁶

(He played little part in the actual fighting for most of the day. This was due to two reasons. The first is that he thought he could rely on his subordinates. The second was that he was not in good health and thought he would hardly be capable of any great exertion. But all people knew that Kolbeinn was an exceedingly brave man and a military genius. He stood by the sail on the castle and commanded the attack from there.²⁰⁷)

Conversely, Þórður is truly in the thick of it, leading from the front and setting a positive example of command to his men: 'Þórður reið um daginn jafnan síðast og vildi hann aldrei svo mikið ríða sem alþýðunni var í hug.' ('all day, Þórður rode at the back of the company, and he would never ride faster than

²⁰⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 481; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 93.

²⁰⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 518.

²⁰⁷ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 215.

everyone else wanted to’).²⁰⁸ There are several other examples of Þórður’s heroic, charismatic leadership in *Pórðar saga kakala*. To give just one of these, consider the saga’s full quotation of *Atlöguflokkur* concerning which describes Þórður fighting ‘þar er fyrðar... brutu eggjar’ (‘where men clashed swords’) and ‘fyrir skjöldu’ (‘in front of the shields’) and stating that he ‘ekki allsnart... hjarta... skjálfa [mjög] [í styr]’ (‘felt no fear in his heart during the battle’) and ‘mundi síst [flýja] á sundi’ (‘would not flee across the sea’) but rather ‘leggja [þar frá... glaumi]... Gunnar seims’ (‘sailed towards the booming battle’) despite having ‘tveim hlutum minna [lið]’ (‘the smaller of the two forces’).²⁰⁹

The third, is the heroism of Þórður’s closest followers versus the villainy of Kolbeinn’s inner circle. This is evident in their respective reactions to adverse circumstances. On the one hand, when the horse ridden by Kæggill-Björn collapses under him, Svarthöfði sacrifices his own mount, allowing his brother to escape while he hides in a snowdrift (and makes an impressive getaway in chapter 10).²¹⁰ By doing this, the brothers are both able to escape Kolbeinn’s clutches.

On the other hand, Kolbeinn’s men compensate for their failure in hunting down Þórður by threatening Börkur in his own home and ransacking

²⁰⁸ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 481; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), pp. 91 & 93.

²⁰⁹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 517-8 & 522-3; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), pp. 213, 223 & 225.

²¹⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 479 & 482.

the place afterwards. Had Kolbeinn's men chosen to make haste after Þórður, rather than having a 'löng dvöl' (lit. staying there for a long time), perhaps they would not have assisted in fulfilling the householder's prophecy that they would soon 'verst una við dvöl sína og verr en hann við félat sitt' ('come off worst from their stay and worse than he for his lost wealth').²¹¹ After all, near the end of the chase, there only seems to have been a hair's breadth separating the two parties at one point: 'Þeir Kolbeinn sóttu þá svo fast fram að ekki var nær í milli þeirra' ('Kolbeinn and his men pursued with such vigour that there was little distance between them').²¹² There are plenty of occasions where the villainy of Kolbeinn's closest followers shows in *Þórðar saga kakala*, though the example which stands out most is the slaying of Gils Torfason:

Nú verður þar til að taka er fyrr var frá horfið að Kolbeinn reið út með Hrótafirði. Og er hann kom í Bæ til Torfa þá hljóp Gils son hans út og vildi gera njósn nábúum sínum. En þeir Kolbeinn sáu hann og riðu þeir eftir honum. Gegnir Illugason kom fyrst að honum og lagði þegar í gegnum hann. Þar lést Gils. Þótti þetta verk allillt því að þeir feðgar voru vandlega saklausir.²¹³

(Now we must take up where we left off before with Kolbeinn riding out along Hrótafjörður. When he came to Torfi's place at Bær, his son Gils ran out, intending to warn his neighbours. However, Kolbeinn and his men saw him and rode after him. Gegnir Illugason reached him first and immediately stabbed

²¹¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 479; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 87.

²¹² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 479; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 89.

²¹³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 505.

him. There Gils died. This was thought an utterly evil deed because father and son were complete innocents.²¹⁴)

Evidently, from the evidence presented above we can begin to form an idea of how Pórður's character is presented in *Pórðar saga kakala*. Based on what we have already seen, Pórður has a complex of personality traits which fit within the semantic field covered by the descriptor *chevalier*.

There are many instances of Pórður embodying chivalry throughout *Pórðar saga kakala*. The obvious examples are his prowess in battle and loyalty to his liege lord, the Norwegian king. Nevertheless, in addition to his grasp of the basics of knighthood, there are a number of ethical principles which he holds strongly to; consequently, he is a good lord in addition to being a superb warrior and faithful vassal. We shall explore a handful of these here to provide a flavour.

Firstly, in *Pórðar saga kakala*, Pórður refuses to harm or violate what he perceived to be innocent and defenceless, namely: women and churches. It is reported that 'tvennir voru þeir hlutir er Pórður bauð mestan varnað á, að þeir skyldu eira konum og kirkjum' ('Pórður gave a strong injunction to his men to spare two things: women and churches').²¹⁵ The impression of Pórður's respect for the sacred space represented by churches is augmented by the following pledge he is purported to have made: 'Pórður strengdi þess heit að láta aldrei taka mann úr kirkju hverjar sakir sem sá hefði til við hann og það efndi hann' ('Pórður promised that he would never

²¹⁴ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 171.

²¹⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 496.

had a man taken from a church's sanctuary irrespective of what that person had done to him, and he would fulfill this pledge').²¹⁶ The author of *Pórðar saga kakala* shows Pórður living up to this ethical stance rather than simply making empty declarations:

Reið þá Pórður suður um heiði Skarðaleið til Laugardals þar til er hann kom í Tungu til bús Gissurar. Þar var þá fyrir Þóra Guðmundardóttir móðir hans. Var þar allt í kirkju borið svo þar var engi hlutur inni til matar mönnum nema flautaker eitt. Vildu menn þá drepa fé en Pórður bannaði það, kvað ekki dveljast skyldu að því, kvað hermenn verða þann mat að hafa sem til væri.²¹⁷

(Pórður rode on Skarðaleið south over the heath to Laugardalur. Eventually, he came Gissur's estate at Tunga. Then there was before them Þóra Guðmundardóttir, Gissur's mother. Everything in the household had been taken into the church, such that there was nothing with which to feed the men except for some whipped milk. The men wanted to kill livestock, but Pórður would not allow that, saying they should not dawdle doing this and that warriors must have each whatever food was at hand.²¹⁸)

Let us recall that this quotation is reporting Pórður's arrival at a farm belonging to Gissur, one of the two men who had done most to destroy his family. Yet, Pórður does not burn the buildings, kill the household's livestock, or enter the church and loot it (the last being something which *Pórðar saga kakala* reports Kolbeinn and his men doing several times during the early 1240s). He instructs his men to eat only what is freely available, and shortly afterwards they move on. Bræðratungukirkja, the church at Gissur's estate at

²¹⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 498.

²¹⁷ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 472.

²¹⁸ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 67.

Tunga, was dedicated to the Apostle Andrew, and it is clear that Pórður is implicitly viewing not only the sanctuary but also the farmland, buildings, and animals connected to it as belonging to the saint rather than Gissur (who by this logic was only the custodian of the church estate). Consequently, Pórður did not want to insult the Apostle Andrew and has church, property and livestock left be. Interestingly, Pórður does not kidnap Gissur's mother, despite the fact that she would evidently have been a useful bargaining tool, or even harm her in any way. This indicates that he completely respected her non-combatant status, in spite of the fact that his own mother was deprived of all the property which had belonged to Sighvatur following the Battle of Örlygsstaðir.

Secondly, Pórður is presented as being merciful to the truly contrite. This conditional mercy reflects *Konungs skuggsjá*, which recommends that kings – though in practice most of the leadership advice therein can be applied to almost any situation of command – forgive those who are truly sorry for their actions and willing to make up for them.²¹⁹ *Konungs skuggsjá* in turn is reflecting the Christian theology of repentance insofar as believers are saved from the fires of Hell by confessing to sins committed and seeking to make amends for them. That *Pórðar saga kakala* presents Pórður as showing mercy according to the model presented in scripture and *Konungs skuggsjá* is best highlighted by how he deals with Þorsteinn Jónsson, whom he had intended to have slain:

²¹⁹ Oscar Brenner (ed.), *Speculum regale. Ein altnorwegischer Dialog nach Cod. Arnamagn. 243 Fol. B und den ältesten Fragmenten* (Munich, 1881).

Pórður segir að Þorsteinn skyldi grið hafa. Eftir það gekk Pórður til og sagði að eigi voru þeir fleiri í Norðlendingafjórðungi er hann hefði við verr haft áður en hann fór utan en eigi skyldi hann það meir ánýja en tak vopn þín og klæði og far með mér. Og svo gerði Þorsteinn... Þaðan hvarf Þorsteinn Jónsson aftur og vann Pórði áður trúnaðareid. Skildu þeir þá með vináttu.²²⁰

(Pórður then decreed that he would grant Þorsteinn mercy. After that, Pórður came over to him and said that there were not many men in the Northern Quarter with which he had hated more since he went abroad but that this would not continue any longer. ‘Get your weapons and clothes and follow me’ he said. Þorsteinn did so... Here, Þorsteinn Jónsson turned back after swearing allegiance to Pórður, and they now parted in friendship.²²¹)

There are echoes of the calling of the apostles in the above quotation, specifically when Christ summoned his future followers and they immediately leave their past lives and sins behind.

Pórður’s mercy is closely bound up with an emphasis on the Golden Rule (“doing unto others as one would have done unto oneself”). This can be illustrated by the following episode of *Pórðar saga kakala*:

En um morguninn í dögum þá kom Hákon galinn ofan úr héraði er hann hafði verið á njósn. Sagði hann að Kolbeinn Arnórsson ungi hefði verið um nóttina í Fljótstungu með þrjá tigi manna... Pórður bað þá halda saman flokkunum öllum um daginn. Hafði hann þá svo mikið lið að orpið var á tólf hundruð manna. En hann reið upp í héraðið á njósn að vita hvað títt var. Reið hann þá upp á Gilsbakka og frétti þar að Kolbeinn hefði riðið norður á heiði. Gerði Pórður þá menn á njósn norður á Tvídæguru en hann sat á Ferjubakka á meðan. En er þeir komu aftur segja þeir að setur væru þrennar í Skagafirði en kölluðu kyrrt allt annað, sögðu Kolbeinn hefði riðið norðan á njósn en engir höfðu til orðið aðrir. Þótti mönnum þar enn mjög sýnast hvatleiki Kolbeins að hann reið með svo fá menn að slíkum stórflokkum

²²⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 495f.

²²¹ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 141.

sem þar voru fyrir. En er Pórður frá þetta þá dreifði hann flokkunum. Fóru þeir Böðvar og Þorleifur þá heim en Pórður reið vestur í fjörðu og Sturla.²²²

(The next morning as the sun rose, Hákon returned from the district where he had been posted as a sentry. He said that he had spotted Kolbeinn Arnórsson during the night at Fijótstunga with 30 men... Pórður then ordered the army to hold together for the whole day. He now had a great army: there were as many as 1,440 men. Pórður rode up to the district to seek out and know what news there was. He now rode up to Gilsbakki and discovered that Kolbeinn had ridden north up to the heath. Pórður sent scouts northwards up to Tvídægri, but himself remained at Ferjubakki. When these men returned, they reported that while there were three sentries posted in Skagafjörður, all else was quiet. They also noted that Kolbeinn had ridden from the North to gather intelligence, but no others had come. People thought that Kolbeinn had been overly hasty in riding against such a large army with so few men of his own. On hearing this, Pórður disbanded his army. Böðvar and Þorleifur returned home while Pórður and Sturla rode to the Vestfirðir.²²³)

As mentioned above in respect of Gissur's mother, Kolbeinn was in a vulnerable position which Pórður could easily have used to his benefit. Pórður had nearly fifty times as many men as Kolbeinn and would have been able to overwhelm and kill him. However, Pórður does not do this, he disbands his army and returns home. This reflects an "ethic" which is quite common in the sagas (notably implied in *Njála*) that it is unmanly to annihilate an opponent if one possesses overwhelming force. Pórður would not have secured an honourable victory, thus, *Pórðar saga kakala* sees him withdraw. I do not think this is the case here, however: typically, threats against the weak are seen as shameful in the context of one-on-one

²²² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 497f.

²²³ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), pp. 145 & 147.

interactions, such as in *Njála* when Gunnar of Hlíðarendi criticises Hrútur for challenging the elderly Mörður *gigja* to duel during the court case over Unnur's dowry. What we see here is not weakness on the part of Kolbeinn, but rather laxity or stupidity. There was no taboo against taking advantage of the careless or simple in medieval Iceland, consider for example Pormóður Bersason's use of Fífl-Egill (whose name would be rendered in English as "Foolish Egill") in *Fóstbræðra saga*. Therefore, it would seem that Þórður is showing a respect for Kolbeinn that he would like – but knows he would not receive – in return, which is the embodiment of the Golden Rule.

Finally, *Þórðar saga kakala's* representation of Þórður is as a generous man. There are numerous examples of his largesse in the saga, many being feasts held and gifts given.²²⁴ Nevertheless, the most important instance is where *Þórðar saga kakala* alleges that Þórður was known for his munificence, following his exceedingly liberal grant to the widow Þuríður Ormsdóttir following Tumi's death: 'fékk Þórður af þessu gott orð af alþýðu. Þótti öllum mönnum honum þetta vel fara' ('this benevolence endeared Þórður to all the people, and everyone thought he had acted nobly').²²⁵

²²⁴ Viðar Pálsson ('Forming Bonds With Followers in Medieval Iceland: The Cases of Thordr kakali and Thorgils skarði' in Kim Esmark, Lars Hermanson & Hans Jacob Orning (eds.) *Nordic Elites in Transformation, c. 1050-1250, Volume II: Social Networks* (New York, 2020), pp. 214-26) covers these well.

²²⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 511.

2.2 – An exceptional individual: **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*'s rationale for Pórður's success during the 1240s

Having begun to cover the subject of Pórður's personality and character during the previous section, we shall now go deeper into how he is depicted throughout *Pórðar saga kakala*.

2.2.1 – King Sverre conceptualised as a prefiguration of Pórður kakali

Several scholars have identified that *Sverris saga* heavily influenced the characterisation of Pórður in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*.²²⁶ Most obviously, Pórður and Sverre appear to share a common approach to command and leadership in their respective texts. James Knirk has noted the immense detail and length given over to King Sverre's speeches in *Sverris saga*.²²⁷ Sverre Bagge connects this loquaciousness – and King Sverre's democratic approach to command – with his charismatic leadership style.²²⁸

Pórður exhibits a similar democratic streak – it seems that he gathers his men for advice and views every time a crucial decision needs making on campaign in *Pórðar saga kakala*, for example: prior to the incursion into

²²⁶ Einar Már Jónsson, 'La saga de Thórdur kakali: Une œuvre de propagande?', *Médiévales* 50 (2006), pp. 47-57, pp. 53-4; Costel Coroban, *Ideology and power in Norway and Iceland, 1150-1250* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 173; Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and salvation in Old Norse literature* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 12; Hans Jacob Orning, 'Statsutvikling i Norge og på Island i Høymiddelalderen belyst ut fra en analyse av Pórðr kakali Sighvatssons og Sverre Sigurdssons vei til makten', *Historisk tidsskrift* 4 (1997), pp. 469-86.

²²⁷ Cf. James E. Knirk, 'Literary moments in the *Sverris saga* – Speeches' paper presented to The Third International Saga Conference, Oslo, 26-31 July 1976.

²²⁸ Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense, 1996), pp. 24-33.

Árnesþing in 1242 ‘heimti hann þá saman alla hina bestu menn og leitaði ráðs við þá hvert á skyldi snúa’ (‘Þórður now rode with his whole force south to Dalir, where he gathered together all of the best men to seek their advice as to what their objective should be’) and a little later, during this excursion, it is noted that ‘áttu menn þá hlut að við Þórð að heldur skyldi ríða austur yfir árnar, kváðu þangað liðveislu von. Þórður lét eftir bænum mann’ (‘then those men who were of that opinion told Þórður that they thought they should ride east over the river, saying that from there support could be expected. Þórður gave into the entreaties of these men’); when there was an opportunity to attack two of Kolbeinn’s followers who were nearby with a light force ‘heimti... Þórður saman hina bestu menn og leitaði ráðs við þá hvað til ráðs skyldi taka’ (‘Þórður summoned together all the best men and solicited their counsel as to what plan they should implement’); after Þorsteinn Hjálmsón made an offer of a settlement to Þórður on behalf of Kolbeinn ‘Þórður gerði... ráð sín og vinir hans’ (‘Þórður... kept his own counsel and that of his friends’); immediately before the Battle of Húnaflói ‘tóku menn... ráðagerðir’ (‘men... began to make plans’) and once Þórður’s troops rendezvoused after the engagement, ‘lét Þórður... kalla saman liðið og skaut á húsþingi’ (‘Þórður... summoned everyone together and held a council’).²²⁹

The somewhat surprising ascription of several public addresses to Þórður in *Þórðar saga kakala* augments the impression of an equivalency

²²⁹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 471, 473, 487, 503, 515 & 524; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), pp. 61, 67, 111, 165 & 227.

with Sverre in terms of command style. One particular episode even suggests that Þórður was a competent orator in spite of his alleged stutter:

Talaði Þórður þá langt erindi. Hafði hann upphaf á sínu máli að hann krafði alla menn þar liðveislu og uppstöðu svo skjótrar að allir skyldu komnir í Saurbæ að allraheilagramessu. En er Þórður hafði lokið sinni ræðu þóttust menn það finna að hann mundi vera vitugur maður þegar er hann fengi stillt sig fyrir ofsa. En nokkuð þótti mönnum hann stirt tala í fyrstu. En því djarfari og snjallari var hann í málinu er hann hafði fleira mælt og fjölmennara var við.²³⁰

(Þórður then spoke for a long time about his mission. He began his speech by demanding the support of everyone present and that they prepare in haste so that all should come to Saurbær on All Saint's Day. When Þórður had finished his speech, the first reaction of those gathered was that he must be an intelligent man because he was able to suppress his pride. Though some of the men thought his speech had been strained at first, his speech became bolder and more eloquent the longer he talked and the larger the crowd got.²³¹)

Incidentally, one would be remiss, on reading this quotation, to note that simply because Þórður exercises restraint here that his character lacks the same anger we observe from Sverre in *Sverris saga*.²³² At several points in *Þórðar saga kakala*, Þórður expresses his fury; a good example of this is when he threatens to besiege the See of Skálholt in 1242.²³³ In the incidents where Þórður and Sverre are enraged they are embodying 'royal anger'. This phenomenon would have been seen by the contemporary audience as

²³⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 469.

²³¹ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 55.

²³² *Sverris saga* observes that Sverre's aggressive temperament was compatible with his eventual kingship but incompatible with his original priestly vocation, and he expresses anger at several other points in the text. Cf. Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense, 1996), p. 53.

²³³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 474-6.

illustrating their capability (though not eligibility, *per se*, in the case of Þórður) to lead on a national level.²³⁴ Royal anger is particularly potent in the context of Christianity because the rage of a supreme leader mirrors the wrath of God, and, thus, calls to mind the power of the sovereign Ruler of the Universe. Consequently, the angry authority figure is seen as possessed of transcendent power.

The military skills of Sverre and Þórður are both significant in their respective sagas. The presentation of Þórður's conduct in battle in *Þórðar saga kakala* is summarised by the following remark: 'gekk og engi jafndjarflega fram af Þórðar mönnum sem hann sjálfur' ('among Þórður's men no man demonstrated more gallantry than he did himself').²³⁵ Bravery is not necessarily commensurate with martial skill (unless one survives – which can also be put down to dumb luck) but there are plenty of descriptions in *Þórðar saga kakala* which purport to attest to Þórður's prowess at close-quarters combat which indicates that good fortune was simply another factor. One way in which Þórður's military skill is highlighted in *Þórðar saga kakala* is that he orders his men to make stockpiles of stones before engaging with

²³⁴ For perspectives on how anger could be utilised politically and in disputes in medieval Scandinavia, cf. Hans Jacob Orning, *Unpredictability and presence: Norwegian kingship in the High Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 1ff.; 'Royal anger between Christian doctrine and practical exigencies', *Collegium medievale* 22 (2009), pp. 34-54; Kim Esmarck & Hans Jacob Orning, 'General introduction' in Kim Esmarck, Lars Hermanson, Hans Jacob Orning & Helle Vogt (eds.) *Disputing strategies in medieval Scandinavia* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 1-30, pp. 8-9; Sveinung Boye, 'Chronicling angry bishops: On the use and perceptions of episcopal anger in 13th-century Scandinavian narratives', *Collegium medievale* 28 (2015), pp. 5-36, pp. 5-6.

²³⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 517; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 211.

the enemy. The tactical importance of stones in medieval Icelandic warfare cannot be overstated: in many of the battle descriptions we have, volleys of rocks precede hand-to-hand combat. For another example of Pórður's tactical skill in *Pórðar saga kakala*, consider the fact that he deliberately manoeuvres his army so that they are attacking the flank of Brandur's forces when the two sides first come together at the Battle of Haugsnes:

Fylking Skagfirðinga horfði við í móti vestri og ætluðu þeir að Pórður skyldi þaðan að ganga en þeir Pórður riðu ofan með brekkunum. Og er þeir stigu af hestum sínum og hljópu saman þá horfðu þeir á jaðarinn Skagfirðinga fylkingu.²³⁶

(The army of the Skagfirðingar were facing east as they assumed that Pórður would attack from that direction. However, Pórður and his army rode down the slopes and when they dismounted their horses and ran together they faced the flanks of the army of the Skagfirðingar.²³⁷)

Sverre's personal qualities – his innate charisma, power, and tactical skill – are presented as the cause for his ascent to the throne in *Sverris saga*.²³⁸ It should therefore be of little surprise – in light of the parallels with Pórður's personality already discussed – to discover that the trajectory of his rise to power in *Pórðar saga kakala* closely mirrors Sverre's in the *Grýla* section of *Sverris saga*.²³⁹

²³⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 538.

²³⁷ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 277.

²³⁸ Sverre Bagge, 'Ideology and Propaganda in *Sverris saga*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 108 (1993), pp. 1-18, pp. 11-7.

²³⁹ I hold that chapters 1-100 of *Sverris saga* constitute *Grýla*. However, there is not unanimity in the scholarly community. For some of these views and arguments, cf. Hans Jacob Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence: Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2008), p. 41. The

The sagas first report Þórður's and Sverre's arrivals in Iceland and Norway respectively. Both protagonists visit their sisters soon after landing ashore. Subsequently, each is joined by the former followers of a politically and militarily vanquished relative.²⁴⁰ Each attains some small success against their enemies: Þórður a legal judgment against the Árnésingar²⁴¹ and Sverre several military victories. Later, both make miraculous escapes from their enemies. The sagas describe skirmishes prosecuted by the protagonists and/or their men before providing accounts of a first climactic battle at which Þórður and Sverre each win victories, though they are ultimately indecisive in a strategic sense. An interlude follows in the sagas, though this is far longer and more violent in *Sverris saga*. Afterwards comes a second climactic battle which results in decisive victories and the ensuing establishment of control by each protagonist over their country.

career trajectories of Sverre and Þórður are strikingly reflective aspects of that of King David, cf. David J. Goldberg & John. D. Rayner, *The Jewish People: Their History and Their Religion* (London, 1989), pp. 27-9. For more on Davidic elements in *Sverris saga*, cf. Francesco D'Angelo, 'Noster Predecessor David: La Regalita Davidica in Occidente tra XII e XIII Secolo', *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 46 (2016), pp. 591-615; David Bond West, *Biblical Allusions in Sverris saga* (MA thesis: University of Iceland, 2012), pp. 12-9; Sverre Bagge, 'Ideology and Propaganda in *Sverris saga*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 108 (1993), pp. 1-18, pp. 3-4 & 6-7; Ármann Jakobsson, 'King Sverrir of Norway and the Foundations of his Power: Kingship Ideology and the Narrative in *Sverris saga*', *Medium Ævum* 84 (2015), pp. 109-35, pp. 127-8.

²⁴⁰ Sverre Bagge's (*From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense, 1996), p. 22) discussion of the Birkebeinar could be equally applied to the sons of Dufgus and the others who join Þórður in Dalir.

²⁴¹ The people of Árnésþing are often referred to as 'Sunnlendingar' ('Southerners') in *Sturlunga saga*. As 'Sunnlendingar' typically denotes inhabitants of the Southern Quarter in general rather than Árnésþing in particular, I have chosen to refer to the people of Árnésþing as 'Árnésingar' even though *Þórðar saga kakala* and other texts use 'Sunnlendingar'.

To those familiar with *Sverris saga*, therefore, the allusions in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* would have made Þórður appear as an able individual ascending to, and holding, a position of national leadership due to his possession of the requisite personal qualities. There are many further examples in *Pórðar saga kakala* (beyond the several already mentioned above) of Þórður proving himself to have the characteristics befitting – and necessary to become – a national leader.²⁴² For example, there is a judgment passed on his leadership potential and achievements by an unnamed mass of people (typically, assessments of an individual’s worth and/ or attainment in the sagas which are put down to “general hearsay” are a means by which the author intervenes into the narrative to make their own point of view explicit):

Póttust þá allir skilja, þeir er í þessari ferð höfðu verið með Þórði, að hann mundi verða hinn mesti höfðingi ef hann héldi sér heilum. Þótti og mönnum mikils um vert er hann hafði slíkum stórflokkum saman komið í svo fátækum sveitum.²⁴³

(All those who had participated in this campaign with Þórður now believed that he would become the greatest leader if he could keep himself away from harm. It was thought particularly estimable that he had been able to gather such a large army together from such impoverished districts.²⁴⁴)

²⁴² In addition to the instance we are about to discuss, consider the following select quotation from *Pórðar saga kakala* (Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 499; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 153): ‘tók Ásbjörn það upp fyrir honum að hann skyldi vinna nokkur stórvirki og kvað þá eigi mundu þykja minna um hann vert en Þórð bróður hans’ (‘Ásbjörn suggested to Tumi that he perform some great work so that men would not think less of him than his brother Þórður’).

²⁴³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 498.

²⁴⁴ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 147.

The reference to becoming ‘hinn mesti höfðingi’ (‘the greatest leader’) indicates that Þórður is on a trajectory which will end in him leading several regions if not the entire country (i.e., the most powerful leader). Beyond the degree of greatness anticipated for Þórður, it is evident that this does not refer to him merely being likely to become sole leader of a region as by this point in the narrative: he has control of the Vestfirðir – the ‘fátækum sveitum’ (‘impoverished districts’) referred to are clearly this part of Iceland; his sphere of influence is expanding into Húnaþing in the Northern Quarter; and he is beginning to establish a dominant position in relation to his kinsmen, the leaders of Dalir, Snæfellsnes, and Borgarfjörður. The quotation also reflects an association of Þórður’s actions – manifestations of his personal qualities, in this instance his charisma and skill at inspiring men – with the assessment of his potential to be a supraregional or national leader: ‘allir... þeir er... höfðu verið með Þórði’ (‘all those who had participated... with Þórður’) and ‘þótti og mönnum mikils um vert er hann hafði’ (‘it was thought particularly estimable that he had been able to’). Yet, there are indications that another factor influenced the path of Þórður’s career by the subjunctive statement ‘ef hann héldi sér heilum’ (‘if he could keep himself away from harm’). *Þórðar saga kakala* is saying here that for Þórður, personal qualities will not be enough, and good/ bad fortune (a concept bound up with destiny and equally associated with supernatural forces) is going to play a role in how things turn out for him.

In *Sverris saga*, celestial patronage made Sverre's ascent to the throne possible.²⁴⁵ This is also true for Þórður's reclamation of his father's domain in *Pórðar saga kakala*. Indirect divine support is made clear by the fact that the two both actively seek the patronage of the Virgin Mary and Saint Olaf to positive effect.²⁴⁶

There are many further examples of indirect divine support in *Pórðar saga kakala*. Firstly, when Þórður addresses his brother-in-law Hálfðan, he requests his assistance so that 'ef guð gefur þann tíma að vér mættum með nokkuru móti fá sæmdir vorar' ('we can attempt to regain some of our honour, if God wills it'), his ultimate success indicating that God did will it.²⁴⁷ Secondly, when Þórður escapes Kolbeinn's clutches after the chase through Borgarfjörður, the following is noted:

Pótti það öllum mikil furða og varla dæmi til finnast að menn hefðu ríðið hinum sömu hestum í einni reið af Þingvelli og til Helgafells í svo miklum ófærðum sem þá voru. Þórður reið fimmtadag um hádegi af Þingvelli en kom til Helgafells föstunóttina er stjarna var í austri. Póttust þá allir þegar vita að Þórð mundi til nokkurra stórra hluta undan rekið hafa.²⁴⁸

(Everyone thought it was completely amazing and without comparison, that men had ridden the same horses in one journey from Þingvellir and to Helgafell on such atrocious paths.

²⁴⁵ Cf. Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense, 1996), pp. 32-3.

²⁴⁶ E.g., Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 515; Þorleifur Hauksson (ed.), *Íslenzk fornrit* vol. 30 (Reykjavík, 2007), p. 26. Haki Antonsson (*Damnation and Salvation in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 10-3) provides a good analysis of this.

²⁴⁷ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 464; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 39.

²⁴⁸ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 481.

Pórður rode from Þingvellir at midday on Thursday, and came to Helgafell on Friday night, when the star was in the east. Folk straightaway arrived at the conclusion that Pórður had escaped for some great destiny.²⁴⁹)

This passage is on the borderline between implicit and explicit reference to divine intervention. Thirdly, before a possible battle during Kolbeinn's incursion into Dalir, Pórður 'tók... heit mikið til guðs' ('made great promises to God') and indeed, does not have to engage with Kolbeinn's forces after having had to prepare in haste.²⁵⁰ Fourthly, more-or-less immediately prior to Ásbjörn's death, Vigdís Markússdóttir 'bað þeim margra fyrirbóna og bað guð hefna þeim skjótt sína mótgerð' ('spat a slew of curses at them and called on God to soon avenge the slaying'), suggesting that God complied with this request.²⁵¹ Fifthly, when Pórður was offered a settlement by Kolbeinn when the latter felt he was close to dying, he makes the following comment: 'Pórður kveðst engi grið vilja, sagði og að hann vildi í öngra manna dóm leggja eignir sínar eða mannaforráð í Eyjafirði' ('Pórður replied that he would neither agree to a truce nor would he allow custody of his property and authority in Eyjafjörður to be determined by any man'), the implication being that only God would ultimately dictate whether or not he would be able to

²⁴⁹ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 93.

²⁵⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 489; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 117.

²⁵¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 500; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 155.

achieve this goal through his efforts.²⁵² Sixthly, God appears to be responsible for getting Pórður's younger brother, Tumi, out of the picture. Tumi appears to have been a bit useless (recall the poor tactical decision he made in 1242 to seek Hálfðan's support rather than strike Hjalti unawares) and had pretensions to rival Pórður which would have reinaugured the internal family strife typified by the Sturlungar earlier in the thirteenth century: it is noted that he 'heima mundu ef hann væri feigur' ('would be home if he was fated to die') prior to his slaying.²⁵³ Seventhly, Pórður gives thanks to those who had fought for him at the Battle of Húnaflói, 'kveðst öllum skyldu það með góðu launa ef guð gæfi honum tíma til' ('saying that all should receive good rewards from him if God gave him the opportunity to give them'), which suggests that God prevented Kolbeinn from killing him during his invasion/ occupation of the Vestfirðir after the battle.²⁵⁴

Moreover, God himself even appears to aid Pórður and Sverre directly in their missions to assert authority over Eyjafjörður and Norway respectively. One way the Lord expresses His favour openly in *Pórðar saga kakala* and *Sverris saga* allegorically is using the weather.²⁵⁵

²⁵² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 503; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 165.

²⁵³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 505; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 171.

²⁵⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 527; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 239.

²⁵⁵ For one example in *Sverris saga*, cf. Þorleifur Hauksson (ed.), *Íslensk fornrit* vol. 30 (Reykjavík, 2007), p. 35.

In *Pórðar saga kakala* there are at least two examples of tactically advantageous changes in weather. First of all, there is the weather front which stops Kolbeinn and his men in their tracks at Tvídægra:

Kolbeinn reið þá með allan flokk sinn vestur til Miðfjarðar og þaðan suður um Tvídægru. En er þeir fóru upp úr Gnúpsdal lét Kolbeinn telja lið sitt og var vel sex hundruð manna. Kolbeinn kveðst þá ærið lið hafa ef gífta félli. Svo var veðri farið er þeir riðu á heiðina að um morguninn var á krapadrífa og vindur lítill og urðu menn alvotir. En er á leið daginn tók að frysta. Hljóp þá veðrið í norður. Gerðist þá hríð svo grimm sakir myrkurs og frosts að sjaldan verða þvílíkar. Leið eigi langt áður þeir vissu eigi hvar þeir fóru. Dróst þá liðið mjög af kulda. Bað Kolbeinn menn þá stíga af baki og taki menn glímur stórar og viti ef mönnum hitnar við það. Urðu þar svo miklar hrakningar að margir menn týndu vopnum sínum og fengu eigi á haldið fyrir kulda. Gengu þá þegar nokkurir menn til heljar en margir meiddust til örkumla.²⁵⁶

(Kolbeinn now rode with his whole army westwards to Miðfjörður and thence south over Tvídægra. When they came up from Gnúpsdalur, Kolbeinn had his troops numbered and the force was found to be at least 720 men. Kolbeinn commented that the army was large enough if fortune favoured them. As they rode over the heath the weather was such that, during the morning, there was a shower of sleet with little wind. Thus, the men became completely soaked. But as the day wore on, a frost set in. Suddenly, the wind leapt to the north. Then such a greatly dark and frosty storm blew in as one sees only once in a blue moon. It was not long before they had no idea where they were going. Now the army became utterly exhausted from the cold. Kolbeinn ordered the troops to dismount their horses, 'and engage in vigorous wrestling with each other to try and get warm that way.' This led to many severe wounds and many men lost their weapons because they could not keep hold of them because of the cold. It was not long before some men died and many acquired life-altering injuries.²⁵⁷)

²⁵⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 477.

²⁵⁷ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 81.

While this vignette is humorous, it is unlikely that Kolbeinn would have advised his men to brawl to keep warm in reality, no matter how pugnacious a man he may have been. On the surface, *Pórðar saga kakala* is parodying Kolbeinn's belligerent character. But, beneath the lampoon, another layer of meaning may be drawn from this passage. Let us consider two extracts from the Bible. The first is *Job* 37: 10: 'the breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen'.²⁵⁸ *Job* was known to Icelanders at the time, as evidenced by its citation in a homily from *Homiliubók*, dated to around 1200.²⁵⁹ The second is *Exodus* 10: 21-3:

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt – darkness that can be felt.' So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.²⁶⁰

Exodus was also known to medieval Icelanders, being one of the biblical texts included in the *Stjórn* manuscripts.²⁶¹ The Bible evidently ascribes both harsh frost and utter darkness to divine intervention; *Pórðar saga kakala's*

²⁵⁸ Kent Dobson (ed.), *NIV First-Century Study Bible: Explore Scripture in Its Jewish and Early Christian Context* (Grand Rapids, 2014), p. 681.

²⁵⁹ The dating given here came from Thomas Hall, 'Old Norse-Icelandic sermons' in Beverly Kienzle (ed.) *The sermon* (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 661-709, p. 705. For the homily referred to here, cf. Theodor Wisén (ed.), *Homiliubók. Isländska homilier efter en handskrift från tolfte århundradet* (Lund, 1872), pp. 92-8.

²⁶⁰ Kent Dobson (ed.), *NIV First-Century Study Bible: Explore Scripture in Its Jewish and Early Christian Context* (Grand Rapids, 2014), pp. 95-6.

²⁶¹ For *Exodus* 10: 21-3, cf. Carl Rikard Unger, *Stjórn. Gammelnorsk bibelhistorie fra verdens skabelse til det babyloniske fangenskab* (Christiania, 1862), p. 276. N.B., there are also allusions to *Exodus* in *Laxdæla saga* and *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa* which provide further evidence for contemporary awareness of this biblical book.

presentation of the adverse conditions faced by Kolbeinn and his men therefore implies divine intervention in Þórður's favour.²⁶²

Second of all, let us consider the episode – immediately following the death of Tumi – where Þórður commands the weather to change and it does so:

Eftir dráp Tuma sigldu menn hans vestur til Flateyjar. Var þaðan ger njósn vestur í Arnarfjörð. Var Þórði sú sögn borinn að Tumi mundi vera í kirkju en Kolbeinn sæti um kirkjuna. Þórður bað menn sína þegar herklæðast og ganga til skips. Var ýtt skipinu og kafði þegar fyrir hvassviðri og gengu menn þá heim aftur. Hét Þórður þá á guð að veðrið skyldi lægja og jafnskjótt féll veðrið. Fór Þórður þá á skipi inn til Otradals.²⁶³

(After the killing of Tumi, his men sailed west to Flatey. From there information was sent west to Arnarfjörður. Þórður was then passed a rumour that Tumi was holed up in a church surrounded by Kolbeinn. Þórður ordered his men to immediately don armour and board ships. One ship set sail but was immediately sank by bad weather, so everyone returned to the yard. Þórður then called on God to calm the storm and immediately it ceased. Þórður went on a ship to Otradalur.²⁶⁴)

This occurrence evokes the image of Moses far more strongly than the previous example from *Þórðar saga kakala*: there is a clear parallel to two events in the *Exodus* narrative, the plague of darkness (10: 21-3) – which,

²⁶² Kolbeinn and his troops may well have been caught in bad weather in this location, cf. Joonas Ahola 'Arnarvatnsheiði and the space for outlaws' in Natalja Gvozdzetskaja, Irina Konovalova, Elena Melnikova & Alexandr Podossinov (eds.) *Stanzas of friendship. Studies in honour of Tatjana N. Jackson* (Moscow, 2011), pp. 35-47., p. 35; however, bear in mind works like Adam Bierstedt, *Weather and Ideology in Islendinga saga: A Case Study of the Volcanic Climate Forcing of the 1257 Samalas eruption* (MA thesis: University of Iceland, 2019), pp. 21-32.

²⁶³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 510.

²⁶⁴ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 189.

note, is brought on through quasi-magical means through the alignment of freely willed human activity with God's sovereign action – and the parting of the Reed Sea (14: 15-29) which takes place according to the same mechanism and allows the Israelites to traverse this watery obstacle to get to where they need to be.²⁶⁵

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that direct supernatural intervention (or, rather, cooperation?) is rare in *Pórðar saga kakala* and *Sverris saga*. Divine patronage seems more often to sanction (or prevent) history unfolding in a particular way, enabling the efforts of competent humans – through God exercising His transcendent control over causality – to bring about a desired result (or, conversely, by frustrating a capable individual's efforts in spite of their clear aptitude). There is no doubt that in these two texts, the protagonists achieve what successes they do by expressing their personal qualities in the world. The relationship between God's will and individuals' characteristics in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* is a matter we shall return to later in this chapter.

2.2.2 – Emphasising poor odds of success: Pórður kakali and Gestur Pórhallason

**Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* augments the impression given of Pórður's exceptional personal qualities by alluding to another text in which the protagonist faces heavy odds. Significantly, there is no real corresponding sequence in *Sverris saga* to the protracted segment in which

²⁶⁵ Kent Dobson (ed.), *NIV First-Century Study Bible: Explore Scripture in Its Jewish and Early Christian Context* (Grand Rapids, 2014), pp. 100-2.

Pórður seeks shelter and support in chapters 2-5 of *Pórðar saga kakala*.²⁶⁶ These episodes feature a series of failed attempts by Pórður to gather the support of his kinsmen and former allies of the Sturlungar while on the run from Kolbeinn.

Pórðar saga kakala appears to run parallel to *Heiðarvíga saga* here.²⁶⁷ While difficulty getting assistance may well be representative of what happened to Pórður in 1242 in reality, the pattern related in chapters 2 through 5 of *Pórðar saga kakala* accords strikingly well with Gestur Pórhallason's efforts in chapter 10 of *Heiðarvíga saga*.²⁶⁸

<i>Pórðar saga kakala</i>	<i>Sverris saga</i>	<i>Heiðarvíga saga</i>
Kinsmen and friends at Gásir	—	Halldór of Mel
Hálfðan Sæmundarson (and Steinvör)	(Cecilia)	Halldór of Ferjubakki

²⁶⁶ Nevertheless, as already mentioned, Sverre does visit his sister Cecilia, much like Pórður goes to see Steinvör, and Órækja's former followers flocking to Pórður in Dalir does mirror the Birkebeinar joining Sverre.

²⁶⁷ *Heiðarvíga saga* was written in c. 1205 and purports to tell of the events surrounding the demise of Víga-Styr Þorgrímsson and the resultant fallout. The manuscript of the saga was partially destroyed in the Copenhagen Fire of 1728, though the contents of the lost leaves were reconstructed from memory by Árni Magnússon's assistant Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík. For further background to *Heiðarvíga saga*, cf. Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180-1280)* (Ithaca, 2006), pp. 73-7. For more on Jón Ólafsson, cf. Jón Helgason, *Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík* (Copenhagen, 1925); Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 'Lærður Íslendingur á Turni. Af Jóni Ólafssyni Grunnvíkingi', *Gripla* 12 (2001), pp. 125-47; Veturlíði Óskarsson, 'Jón Ólafsson úr Grunnavík. Fyrirmynd Halldórs Laxness að sögupersónunni Jón Guðmundsson frá Grindavík', *Ársrit Sögufélags Ísfirðinga* 52 (2012), pp. 71-89; Matteo Tarsi, 'Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík: cultivation of language in his early writings (1727-1737)', *Language & History* 60 (2017), pp. 180-9.

²⁶⁸ Sigurður Nordal & Guðni Jónsson (eds.), *Íslensk fornrit* vol. 3 (Reykjavík, 1938), pp. 235-41.

(Órækja's ex-followers)	(Birkebeinar)	—
Sturla Þórðarson	—	Illugi <i>svarti</i>
Wedding guests at Hjarðardalur	—	Þorsteinn Gíslason
Ásgrímur Bergþórsson	—	Kleppjárn
Ásbjörn Guðmundarson	—	Fjalla-Teitur

The points of comparison are manifold. Þórður's and Gestur's attempts to secure support are declined exactly five times apiece. Moreover, the first two times help is sought in these sequences, female advocates (or goaders) are mentioned: for Gestur, these are the wives of Halldór of Mel and Halldór of Ferjubakki, while for Þórður these are his mother, when he makes shore at Gásir, and his sister Steinvör, when he attempts to recruit Hálfðan Sæmundarson to his cause. Still further, Sturla Þórðarson, the wedding guests at Hjarðardalur and Ásgrímur Bergþórsson are to Þórður as Illugi *svarti*, Þorsteinn Gíslason and Kleppjárn are to Gestur: it is not long before they come to assist the one who they initially turned down. Finally, there is even the fact that both Þórður and Gestur solicit the services of a vagrant.

Heiðarvíga saga (or at least, the immanent saga of Snorri *goði*, which doubtless encompassed the traditions which contributed to this saga) was certainly well known in thirteenth-century Iceland; it seems likely, therefore, that the audience of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* would have had a degree of familiarity with it. Comparison with this element of *Heiðarvíga saga* would have underscored in the audiences minds the underdog status of Þórður in 1242. While Sverre certainly did face unfavourable circumstances when he

arrived back in Norway in 1176, augmenting this parallel with allusions to Gestur would have emphasised the poor odds Þórður was up against. The young Gestur was fleeing capture and death at the hands of Víga-Styr's relatives. Gestur had slain Víga-Styr to avenge the latter's killing of his father Þórhalli. The youth of Gestur and his desire to avenge a dead father provide further (albeit tenuous) parallels with Þórður *kakali*.

2.3 – God's will: *Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla's explanation for Þórður's ultimate political failure

2.3.1 – A turning point: The bipartite structure of *Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla's plot

Anton Zimmerling notes that despite being partisan, *Þórðar saga kakala* is remarkably neutral in tone, over and above the surface realism characteristic of many sagas.²⁶⁹ Costel Coroban expresses surprise at how neutral *Þórðar saga kakala* appears, but feels this may be down to 'the great number of casualties' and 'extermination of so many notable Icelanders' problematising 'taking a side' or 'revelling in... victory'.²⁷⁰ Moreover, Jesse Byock recognises that these descriptions are accurate stating that the 'cruel realities of political intrigue' are neither hidden nor softened in *Þórðar saga kakala*, and

²⁶⁹ Anton Zimmerling, 'Bishop Guðmundr in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*: The cult of saints or the cult of personalities?' in Rudolf Simek & Judith Meurer (eds.) *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages* (Bonn, 2005), pp. 559-569, p. 564.

²⁷⁰ Costel Coroban, *Ideology and power in Norway and Iceland, 1150-1250* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 172.

seems to believe they report every violent occurrence which occurred.²⁷¹ The idea of all violent occurrences being reported in sagas is shared by Mikhail Steblin-Kamenskij, who thinks violence fit the criteria for saga-worthiness.²⁷² Yet, the reliability furnished by this honesty is bounded by a fair amount of deferral of responsibility or excuse-making in the saga.²⁷³

Concerning supposed “neutrality”, *Pórðar saga kakala* bears a resemblance to *Sturlu saga*, which can be interpreted²⁷⁴ as a biography of Hvamm-Sturla Pórðarson, the progenitor of the Sturlungar.²⁷⁵ While Hvamm-Sturla is the protagonist of *Sturlu saga*, and appears in a fairly positive light in several episodes, the text by no means seeks to present him as anything other than an adroit and accomplished chieftain with his own fair share of deep-set flaws.²⁷⁶ As Peter Foote puts it, Hvamm-Sturla is ‘not all good [or] all bad in’ *Sturlu saga*.²⁷⁷

²⁷¹ Jesse Byock, ‘Governmental order in early medieval Iceland’, *Viator* 17 (1986), pp. 19-34, pp. 30-1.

²⁷² Mikhail Steblin-Kamenskij, *Мир саги. Становление литературы* (Leningrad, 1984), p. 82.

²⁷³ Discussed below, but cf. Costel Coroban, *Ideology and power in Norway and Iceland, 1150-1250* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 172-3 for another perspective.

²⁷⁴ It has also been viewed as a regional chronicle (see chapter 3 of the present thesis).

²⁷⁵ Sverre Bagge (‘Ideology and Propaganda in *Sverris saga*’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 108 (1993), pp. 1-18, pp. 12-3) notes that *Sverris saga* is also fairly neutral (and bipartite). Whilst I am going to be focusing on the relationship between **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* and *Sturlu saga*, we must not rule out further influence on the former by *Sverris saga*. Incidentally, it is worth noting that many biographical sagas have bipartite structures. For more on this phenomenon, cf. Sverrir Tómasson, ‘Skorið í fornsögu: Pankar um byggingu *Hrafnkels sögu*’ in Gísli Sigurðsson, Guðrún Kvaran & Sigurgeir Steingrímsson (eds.) *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum 10. apríl 1994* (Reykjavík, 1994), pp. 787-99.

²⁷⁶ Admittedly, as Vésteinn Ólason (‘Family Sagas’ in Rory McTurk (ed.) *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 101-18, p. 108) notes: ‘saga writers rarely try to depict perfect characters,

Björn M. Ólsen and Walther H. Vogt were of the opinion that the neutrality of *Sturlu saga* stems from the author changing his mind about Hvamm-Sturla midway through the saga.²⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Peter Foote rejects this view, arguing that it derives from a superficial reading of *Sturlu saga* and that ‘the conception of Sturla’s character does not change as the saga proceeds... most important is the fact that the nature of the opposition which he has to meet alters from the earlier to the later part of the saga’.²⁷⁹ Foote’s reading recognises the neutrality of *Sturlu saga* but argues for a consistent tone throughout; furthermore, he contends the text is structurally rather than tonally bipartite, on account of the fact that the plot is composed of two separate overarching narrative conflicts which are related one after the other: Hvamm-Sturla’s earlier struggle to rise to power in his region (presented as a feud with Einar Þorgilsson of Staðarhóll) and his later embroilment in national politics (through his dispute with Páll Sölvason of Reykholt).

Úlfar Bragason holds that *Þórðar saga kakala*’s plot is bipartite.²⁸⁰ If *Þórðar saga kakala* is in two parts, it is almost certain that **Þórðar saga*

and in any case a man's excellence is no guarantee of success or even survival in the saga world... the worthiest saga hero often has faults which contribute to his downfall.’

²⁷⁷ Peter Foote, ‘*Sturlusaga* and its background’ in Peter Foote (ed.) *Aurvandilstá* (Odense, 1984), pp. 9-30, pp. 20-1.

²⁷⁸ Björn M. Ólsen, ‘Um *Sturlungu*’, *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta* 3/2 (1902), pp. 193-510, p. 218; Walther H. Vogt, ‘Charakteristiken aus der *Sturlungasaga*’, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 54 (1931), pp. 376-409, p. 376ff.

²⁷⁹ Peter Foote, ‘*Sturlusaga* and its background’ in Peter Foote (ed.) *Aurvandilstá* (Odense, 1984), pp. 9-30, pp. 20-1 & 23.

²⁸⁰ Úlfar Bragason, *On the Poetics of Sturlunga* (PhD thesis: University of California, Berkeley, 1986), p. 75.

kakala hin mikla was as well. Let us now deconstruct a full synopsis of *Póroar saga kakala* (and **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla*, as far as possible). This will lay bare the plot's composition as a diptych and show that reapplication of Foote's interpretation of *Sturlu saga* is apposite. I shall make use of Jesse Byock's system in which the units of narrative conflict (individual actions within a scene) are each given a letter: T – travel; I – information; A – advocacy, including A^A – arbitration, A^B – brokerage, A^G – goading, A^I – information passing, and A^S – self-advocacy; C – conflict; R – resolution, including R^A – arbitrated, R^D – direct, and R^R – rejected. I have added a sixth, G – support gathering, including: G^S – successful, G^F – failure, and G^P – promise. A, C, R, and G are the active elements and are called feudemes. These and other active elements combine to form feud clusters (scenes within a narrative conflict) which in their turn join together to create a feud chain (a narrative conflict, the literary element which stands at the core of any plot – or even plotline; however, if there are several of these, they can be arranged either in series or parallel, though the *agones* will always remain central to plot).²⁸¹

In *Póroar saga kakala*, the story commences in 1242. Though we have already established that **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla* opened earlier than this, it is likely that everything prior to 1242 would have constituted narrative exposition, so we shall start the synopsis with the events of chapter 1 of *Póroar saga kakala*.

²⁸¹ Jesse Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic saga* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 63-142.

- I/T | Þórður's return to Iceland is reported.
 A¹ | When Þórður steps foot on shore at Gásir some of Kolbeinn's retainers immediately go to Skagafjörður to inform their master of his coming.
 G^F | Þórður discovers those of his kinsmen and friends gathered at Gásir are not inclined to assist him...
 T | ... so he rides to his father's old estate of Grund. On arrival he is warned off remaining and counselled to travel to Keldur in Rangárþing to ask for support from his sister Steinvör and brother-in-law Hálfðan Sæmundarson, which he does. Kolbeinn hears of Þórður's return to Iceland so orders men to go to Gásir to arrest him and sends a warning to Hjalti.
- G^P | Þórður asks Hálfðan for help and is offered it, provided he can recruit significant support from the Western Quarter.
 G^S/T | Tumi and his retainers come to join Þórður at Keldur, and the company now journey together to Dalir. The ranks of Þórður's company are swelled in Dalir by Órækja's former retainers, who flock to his side under the command of the sons of Dufgus and others. Tumi is sent to Hvammur while Þórður continues north to Staðarhóll...
- G^F | ... where he propositions his cousin Sturla. Sturla declines to help Þórður with his mission due to the oath he swore to Kolbeinn.
- T | Þórður takes a ferry north across Breiðafjörður...
 G^F | ... and shortly after arriving in the Vestfirðir he asks Gísli Markússon for support, which Gísli provides neither fully nor directly.
- T | Þórður then goes to Hrafnseyri to see Hrafn Oddsson and Svarthöfði Dufgusson, but finds they are away at a wedding at Hjarðardalur in Dýrafjörður. Þórður summons them to Sanda-Bárður's place at Sandar, whereupon they come.
 G^S | Þórður asks them to join him and they gladly agree.
- I | All of the most important farmers west of Ísafjörður are present at the wedding which Hrafn and Svarthöfði absconded from to answer Þórður's call.
 T | Þórður therefore travels there...
 G^F | ... and delivers a speech in an attempt to get the gathering of local magnates to follow him. Most of them refuse because of Kolbeinn's influence and their sworn obligations to him.
 C | Matters get heated and both sides part angrily.
 I/T | Arriving back at Sandar, Bárður gives Þórður the farm.
- G^S/F | Þórður sends men to begin calling up farmers in Arnarfjörður and Dýrafjörður, going himself to Önundarfjörður where he gets a few recruits. Þórður also attempts to recruit in Ísafjörður but gets next to

- none. Þórður travels to Kaldaðarnes in Steingrímsfjörður where he propositions Ásgrímur Bergþórsson, but is turned down. He then tries to convince the farmers there to join him but they refuse as their leader Ásgrímur would not be going. Þórður recruits a vagrant named Ásbjörn Guðmundarson and founds a company of Guests with Ásbjörn as commander. Ásbjörn and the Guests attempt to recruit farmers from Steingrímsfjörður and get a handful...
- C ... after committing an atrocity.
- T Þórður rides south, rendezvousing with his forces in Saurbær.
- GF Þórður approaches Sturla for a second time asking for help but once again is offered none.
- T During Þórður's march south through Dalir, he is joined by Tumi, Teitur Styrmisson and still more men.
- I Þórður convenes a war council to plan the army's next move. The council determines they are not strong enough to attack Kolbeinn but may be successful against Hjalti. It is also decided that the army attack Loftr *biskupsson's* estate on the way south to avail themselves of arms.
- C Þórður's forces raid Loftr's place at Húsafell in Hítardalur, though Loftr himself manages to escape before their coming.
- T Þórður's troops continue southwards...
- C ... raiding Gissur's estate at Tunga for food on the way.
- I Þórður hears of Hjalti collecting forces and wants to attack, but Tumi forces Þórður to accord with his wish to go to Keldur...
- G ... to ask Hálfðan for help a second time.
- T The army go east to Keldur...
- GF ... but Hálfðan stalls, telling how he must speak with his brothers before granting Þórður's forces any assistance.
- C/I Þórður seizes Ormur Bjarnarson's estate Breiðabólstaður in Fljótshlíð, sitting there to await the decision of the sons of Sæmundur.
- I Hjalti learns of Þórður's presence in the south...
- T ... so rides north to ask Kolbeinn for help...
- I ... after providing instructions to the Árnesingar to mass forces at Skálholt and to the bishop to stall Þórður with negotiations over the terms of a settlement.
- A^{S/B} Bishop Sigvard and Þórður wrangle over the question of who should arbitrate the settlement, and the bishop leaves to consult with the Árnesingar about Þórður's terms.
- R^D Þórður reconciles with Björn Sæmundarson over his involvement in the Battle of Örlygsstaðir.
- R^R Þórður receives news that the Árnesingar have rejected his terms...
- T/G^F ... so he rides to Keldur and tells Steinvör to call up the Rangæingar/

- Áverjar to support him. Hálfðan, who was Oddi when this was taking place, hears of this and disbands the Rangæingar/Áverjar. Þórður rides across Þjórsá to Skálholt to threaten the Árnésingar with a siege.
- A^B The bishop offers Þórður the same terms as he had during the first round of negotiations and threatens to excommunicate them if an attack is made on the episcopal see.
- C Þórður responds by lining his men up for an attack.
- A^A At the last moment, Teitur the lawspeaker asks the bishop to mediate between the two sides. The negotiations end with the Árnésingar agreeing to the arbitration of the bishop and Steinvör.
- R^A The outcome is that the Árnésingar are to be a neutral party in the feud between Þórður and Kolbeinn until such a time that Gissur returns to Iceland. The judgment also stipulates that Þórður is to receive a considerable sum in compensation from the Árnésingar.
- T This done, Þórður leaves for Borgarfjörður.
- G^S Hjalti meets with Kolbeinn in the north, who immediately gathers an army and journeys south. While Kolbeinn's forces are held up by poor weather, they eventually make their way to Borgarfjörður.
- C Þórður and his men are chased around Borgarfjörður by Kolbeinn's army, who commit several atrocities.
- T Þórður nevertheless makes a miraculous escape to Fagurey. Svarthöfði makes a yet more incredible getaway. Kolbeinn gives up the chase and returns home to Flugumýri but posts his own company of Guests near to the Western Quarter to cause mischief.
- I/T/G Þórður stays at Fagurey until shortly before Christmas when he goes ashore to Ballará to claim some property of his there. Þórður spends Christmas at Búðardalur after which he meets with Sturla. Together, they go to Böðvar Þórðarson so that Þórður may petition him for support.
- A^B Böðvar declines due to a conflict of interest but does offer to try and mediate between Þórður and Kolbeinn.
- T Þórður goes to the Vestfirðir, visiting Gísli at Rauðasandur and Tómas *prestur* Þórarinsson at Selárdalur on his way to Sandar. Þórður spends the remainder of winter at Sandar.
- T At the beginning of Lent Þórður meets Böðvar, sending Ásbjörn to meet with Atli Hjálmsson at the same time.
- G^F Ásbjörn's embassy proves to be failure, and, on meeting Böðvar at Helgafell, Þórður discovers Kolbeinn had gained the upper hand in the negotiations and declines any deal offered at this time.
- T Þórður returns home to Sandar and remains there until after Easter.
- T/I During the Rogation Days, Þórður goes to Dalir to launch an attempted attack on Kolbeinn's company of Guests. However, this

- assault is aborted and Þórður return to the Vestfirðir, leaving some of his retainers behind with a mission to attack Kolbeinn's Guests and assassinate the company's commander.
- C Back in the Vestfirðir, Þórður sends Ásbjörn to seize ships from Steingrímsfjörður to begin preparing a naval defence against Kolbeinn launching an amphibious invasion of the Vestfirðir.
- I/T Þórður gives Sanda-Bárður a valuable farmstead as thanks for giving him Sandar, and he moves himself to Mýrar.
- C The men Þórður left in Dalir kill the commander of Kolbeinn's company of Guests.
- I ... and get news of Kolbeinn's intention to make a pincer invasion by land and sea of the Vestfirðir.
- T/C Þórður himself travels to Ísafjörður to collect more men and ships, while Ásbjörn takes ships from Steingrímsfjörður. Ásbjörn sails around from Steingrímsfjörður to Ísafjörður committing atrocities along the way, including the killing of Atli Hjálmsson and his brother Þormóður.
- I/T Þórður is joined by troops in Skutilsfjörður from the neighbouring fjords. Ásbjörn brings his ships to rendezvous with Þórður there. Kolbeinn's ships are spotted, so Þórður summons his men and ships together, there are thirty ships in all, three of which are fully manned.
- T Þórður takes counsel about what to do next and decides not to attack but to journey south with the whole force to Breiðafjörður.
- RA The narrative shifts to Kolbeinn, who is planning to prosecute a case against Þórður for raiding Gissur's farmstead at Tunga. At the assembly, Þórður and fourteen others are outlawed...
- T/C ... and following the judgment, Kolbeinn rides away to Breiðafjarðardalur with 720 men, intending on capturing and killing Sturla Þórðarson.
- T Sturla manages to escape and meets with the sons of Dufgus and some of Þórður's homemen, who had come south from the Vestfirðir. Sturla and they part ways with Sturla going to raise troops.
- C Two skirmishes between these of Þórður's men and those of Kolbeinn's men at Akreyjar and Bildsey are described. In both skirmishes, Þórður's men are victorious and the prisoners are taken to Fagurey.
- T/I Sturla reconvenes with the sons of Dufgus, though his troop raising is reported to have been a failure.
- C The group is involved in another skirmish...
- T ... after which the sons of Dufgus and Sturla go out to Fagurey.
- AI At Fagurey, Sturla sends a message to Þórður. On receiving the communication, Þórður sails southwards with his men, meeting Sturla at Fagurey. Þórður and Sturla then travel to Hólmslát...

- G^F | ... where they meet with Böðvar who yet again refuses Þórður help.
- C | Meanwhile, Kolbeinn and Hjalti *biskupsson* have come together to raid in Laxárdalur, and the atrocities committed by Hjalti and his man Tosti are described.
- T | Following the raid, Kolbeinn and his men ride home to Skagafjörður while Hjalti and his return to Árnesþing. Þórður himself returns to Mýrar.
- I | Tumi moves to Flatey to live with Teitur Styrmisson.
- T | They duo orchestrate a mission, going southwards to attack and maim two of Gissur's men.
- C | After managing this they plunder there...
- T | ... before returning to Flatey.
- C/R^D | Þórður secretly prepares for an attack on Húnaþing and then executes it, raiding, killing and maiming in Húnaþing.
- T | Þórður reaches Vatnsdalur before turning back and going home to Mýrar.
- I | In response to Þórður's attack on Húnaþing, Kolbeinn increases the readiness of his men to ensure they are capable of repelling future attacks on his territory.
- I | Þórður calls up troops and every fighting man comes to him.
- T | Þórður and this army ride south to Saurbær where Sturla rallies to his side.
- I | Men are then called up from the whole of Dalir west of Brattabrekka, swelling the army to about 960 troops.
- T | Þórður continues south to Borgarfjörður where he calls a meeting.
- G^{F/P} | At the meeting Þórður demands the support of Böðvar Þórðarson and Þorleifur of Garðar who refuse to come on a military campaign but do offer to support him at the Alþing.
- I/T | It is noted that Þórður's men now number 1,440 but he disperses the force and everyone goes home.
- C/R^D | A brief notice reports the killing of Þórður Bjarnarson on Ormur Bjarnarson's orders.
- T/I | Tumi moves from Flatey to Snorri Narfason's place at Hólar, whereupon men start flocking to Tumi's side as retainers. Þórður effectively asks Ásbjörn to leave and the latter subsequently goes to join Tumi.
- C/R^D | Tumi sends his men on a mission to attack the northerners, which they do, though Ásbjörn dies on the return journey.
- T | After Christmas Þórður rides south, preparing for an attack on the north.

- G | At this time, Kolbeinn has an existential crisis and summons a meeting of his subjects, offering them two options: either to be led by Þórður or to be in a constant state of military readiness.
- A^A/R^A | Kolbeinn also offers Þórður a settlement but withdraws it, only agreeing to a truce with Þórður until after Easter.
- G^S/T/I | Kolbeinn gathers an army and marches west to avenge the Vatnsdalur attack. The army is split into two companies.
- C/R^D | Kolbeinn and his company harry, loot and butcher their way around northern Dalir and the southeastern Vestfirðir before attacking Hólar, resulting in the killing of Tumi and some of his men, such as Kægill-Björn Dufgusson.
- C | The saga then shifts to tell of Brandur's company, who were sent to raid in Laxárdalur all the way to Hvammsfjörður.
- T | Brandur's company meet up with Kolbeinn's and they ride home to Skagafjörður.
- I | Þórður hears of Kolbeinn's attack and the slaying of his brother. He divides Tumi's inheritance with his widow.
- G | With that done, he sends men to Borgarfjörður to call in the pledge made by Sturla, Böðvar and Þorleifur to support him at the assembly.
- G^F | Nevertheless, the three decline to support him.
- C | Kolbeinn attacks Eyjafjörður...
- I | ... resulting the Eyfirðingar sending word to Þórður that they would support him if he came to the north to help them. Þórður moves from Mýrar to Hrafnseyri. Þórður starts preparing a fleet of ships and fills them with men.
- T | Þórður begins sailing from the Vestfirðir towards Eyjafjörður. Þórður sends word to defend Dalir from incursions by Kolbeinn's men. All Þórður's forces park up beneath Trékyllisey for a meeting.
- A^I | Ásgrímur Bergþórsson comes to Þórður and tells him of Kolbeinn's gathering of troops and that he is planning another amphibious pincer attack on the Vestfirðir. Þórður thinks the rumours are false or at least exaggerated.
- T | Þórður prepares his men and they then sail to Flói.
- T/I/C | The saga now shifts to Kolbeinn. Kolbeinn gathers all the big ships in the Norðlendingafjórðungur to Skagafjörður. Forces are split into two companies. Brandur to lead a ground attack. Brandur lies in wait in Miðfjörður. Sturla gathers a force to repel Brandur – but the forces end up dispersing after disagreement between Þorgils, Sturla and Vigfús. Brandur returns to Skagafjörður to buttress his forces.
- T | Kolbeinn ready to set sail when men come to him to tell of Gissur's return to Iceland. Kolbeinn turns down meeting Gissur because he is already prepared for his expedition.

- C | The two navies meet in Húnaflói, and the sea battle known as the Battle of Húnaflói is enjoined.
- T/I | After the battle, Þórður meets with his men and holds a council. Þórður's side came off well from the battle. Asks what they should do. They agree to abandon the ships. Split into two groups – basically wounded and non-wounded (with some exceptions).
- I | The saga switches to Kolbeinn – still in Húnaflói. Kolbeinn's men had not come off well from the battle.
- C | They kill two of Þórður's wounded men who were still out there. Án, a third, then killed.
- T | Kolbeinn plans to sail to the Vestfirðir to fight Þórður and/or harry there to prevent Þórður raising forces again. They start sailing. Switches back to Þórður. Discovers Kolbeinn sailing straight for them. Þórður grants the farmers leave to go home provided they muster to him when he needed them again. Þórður keeps moving until he reaches Holt in Öundurarfjörður.
- T | The saga switches back to Kolbeinn making shore.
- C | He starts raiding, pillaging and killing.
- G | Þórður gets word that Kolbeinn has reached Ísafjörður so starts calling up Vestfirðingar – also sends a messenger south to summon Sturla, Þorleifur and Böðvar.
- C/R^D | Kolbeinn forces farmers north of Ísafjörður to transfer their allegiance to him. Kolbeinn lays waste to the homesteads of all those who did not.
- I/T | Þórður meets with his forces and sails south to Fagurey – meets Sturla there.
- I | Hears that Gissur has come to Breiðafjörður with a large company...
- R^D | ... and had been reconciled with Jón Sturluson.
- I | Sturla Þórðarson and Böðvar Þórðarson gathered Þórður a force from Borgarfjörður, Snæfellsnes, etc. when they heard of Gissur's arrival.
- T | Gissur fled south when he heard of Þórður's coming from the Vestfirðir. Kolbeinn withdraws from the Vestfirðir and goes to Flugumýri. Þórður returns home to Hrafnseyri after Kolbeinn's withdrawal.
- T | Þórður goes south, meets Sturla, and continues south to raise troops in Dalir. Þórður rides north intending to attack Kolbeinn but eventually turns back. Kolbeinn makes half-hearted chase.
- A^B | Kolbeinn sends a man to try and effect a reconciliation with Þórður.
- R^A | A truce agreed but no reconciliation.
- T | Þórður returns to the Vestfirðir for winter.
- A^S | Negotiations in spring.

RA | Terms of reconciliation – King Hákon to arbitrate. Kolbeinn’s injuries worsen. In exchange for a truce, Kolbeinn gives Þórður leadership of all of the districts north of Öxnadalsheiði, but Brandur is to be leader of all the districts west of Öxnadalsheiði up to Hrutafjörður. Brandur and Gissur are to retain the old Ásbirningar-Haukdælir alliance. Kolbeinn dies and Brandur chosen as leader of all the aforementioned districts.

The overarching narrative conflict in the first half of *Pórðar saga kakala*’s plot tells of a struggle for power, primarily over Eyjafjörður, between Kolbeinn *ungi* (the usurper) and Þórður *kakali* (the rightful leader).

By 1242, Kolbeinn had a position of near-national dominance. This began to break down when Þórður began his insurrection in the Western Quarter in Autumn 1242 and ended completely when Þórður reclaimed power in Eyjafjörður. It is important to note – in light of what will soon be discussed – that Kolbeinn was married to Helga Sæmundardóttir (a descendent of King Magnus Berrfótt through her paternal grandfather Jón Loftsson), indicating that he was a member of the royal family by marriage. The consequence of this (as will soon become apparent) is that part one of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*’s plot suggests that Kolbeinn’s defects of character (with respect to Þórður, who was not a member of the extended royal family of Norway) rendered him unfit to remain as the most powerful man in Iceland in the long run. Furthermore, perhaps the audience would have inferred that these personality flaws explain why Kolbeinn was never asked to join the Norwegian king’s retinue, a fact which – from the perspective of a post-Commonwealth Iceland – would have made him appear even less likely a national leadership prospect than a royal retainer such as

the blue-blooded Gissur Porvaldsson (or even the more humbly born Þórður).

In *Þórðar saga kakala* (and, thus, **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*) a fundamentally political conflict between Þórður and Kolbeinn is presented as a private dispute following the slaying of the former's father and brothers at the Battle of Örlygsstaðir. The feud chain comes to a close with a triple resolution: agreement to seek a settlement, the return of Þórður's patrimony (including authority in Eyjafjörður), and the death of Kolbeinn before the king is able to arbitrate between them. Evidently this was the end of the conflict between Þórður and Kolbeinn, and, consequently, signalled the close of the first part of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla's* plot.

Úlfar Bragason notes that at this point in the plot there is a 'balance which is restored temporarily between the fighting parties', but it is not long before we begin 'loading for a new clash':²⁸²

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| I | Hrafn Oddsson marries Þuríður Sturludóttir. Þórður establishes himself in Eyjafjörður with regional power and his patrimonial property. |
| C | Kolbeinn's old retainers begin making gibes about Þórður and these perpetuate. |
| A ^I | Despite Brandur's attempts to quash them, Þórður eventually hears of them. |
| R ^A | Quarrelling begins, though a truce is in place which is to hold until after the General Assembly. |
| I | Þórður summons his friends to meet him during the winter. |
| G ^S | Þórður sends for troops during the spring. |
| A ^I | A letter is sent from Brandur to Gissur at this time about the threat posed by Þórður. |
| G ^S | Þórður holds a meeting of his subjects at Grund. Tells them he |

²⁸² Úlfar Bragason, *On the Poetics of Sturlunga* (PhD thesis: University of California, Berkeley, 1986), p. 75.

- T intends on attacking Skagafjörður and there is unanimous agreement.
They set off across Öxnadalshéiði.
- G^S Brandur learns of Þórður's gathering of troops and collects some of his own.
- T/I Þórður makes it over to Vallaholt. Brandur at Víðimýri.
A^B/R^R Negotiations are attempted but they fail.
C/R^D The battle of Haugsnes is enjoined, at which Brandur is killed.
- I In short order, Þórður takes over leadership of Brandur's domain and Brandur is buried.
- C Gissur goes to Skagafjörður with a force and the Skagfirðingar swear allegiance to him. Þórður hears of this and gathers a force.
- A^B When they meet, there are negotiations between the two sides at the end of which it is agreed that King Hákon should arbitrate.
- R^A Þórður and Gissur part and are to go to Norway that summer.
- A^A When Þórður and Gissur arrive at Trondheim in Norway, Hákon summons a court to hear the case. Þórður has a scroll recited of the feud between the Sturlungar and Haukdælir while Gissur gives an oral report with the same details. The king sits on the final judgment for a while and asks to hear the case again in Bergen.
- I It is noted that people thought the king would judge in Gissur's favour. Cardinal William of Sabina comes to Norway to coronate King Hákon.
- R^A Case put before the cardinal and he decides in Þórður's favour. Þórður is to return to Iceland while Gissur remains in Norway.
- I Þórður arrives back with Henrik. Establishes control over most of Iceland...
- C ... except for Árnesþing and some of the Rangæingar/Áverjar.
R^D Þórður quickly quashes the opposition attains control of the whole island.
- I Þórður summoned to Norway – allegations that he has been labouring on his own behalf more than the king's. Bishop Henrik agrees with this prognosis.
- C Disputes over everything between Þórður and Henrik.
A^S Henrik goes to Norway and makes the case against Þórður before Hákon. The saga ends abruptly by telling how few support Þórður's case in Norway.
- [R^A *[Gap after the end of chapter 49 of Þórðar saga kakala. The following events reported in other contemporary sagas are likely to have been included in *Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla:*
Þórður returns to Norway and is kept there, *Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla must have included commentary on his time in Norway from

C	1250 onwards. Gissur sent back to Iceland in 1252. Attempted attack by Hrafn Oddsson and Sturla Þórðarson on Gissur.
A ^S /R ^D	Resolution between certain Sturlungar (Hrafn Oddsson ²⁸³ and Sturla Þórðarson) and Gissur.
C/R ^D	The Flugumýri Arson, perpetrated in vengeance for the deaths of Sighvatur and his sons (among other things), resulting in the deaths of Gissur's sons and wife.
C/R ^D	Gissur hunts down and kills some of the arsonists in revenge.
A ^B /R ^R	Attempted settlement between Gissur and the arsonists.
I]	Gissur summoned to Norway due to his failure to subjugate Iceland.]
T	Gissur Þorvaldsson sails from Iceland to the Norwegian king's court.
I	Þórður is there before him and soon hears of the killing of Kolbeinn Dufgusson from Þórður Steinunnarson.
C	Þórður knocks his namesake unconscious with an axe.
I	King Hákon not pleased with Þórður.
A ^S	Þórður asks the king to send Gissur away.
R ^R	King refuses.
I/R ^A	Þórður and Gissur both granted separate counties in Norway to lead.
A ^A /R ^A	King grants Þórður leave to return to Iceland to be its governor but the latter dies soon after hearing this. This must have marked the end of <i>*Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla's</i> plot both in part two and the saga as a whole.

It is important to remember that, while Brandur Kolbeinsson has the appearance of being the main opponent in the second half of *Þórðar saga kakala*, this was evidently not true of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*: there it was Gissur Þorvaldsson. To the extent that Brandur even qualifies as an

²⁸³ It is unclear whether or not Hrafn reneged on this reconciliation in **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. *Íslendinga saga* reports that he knew about – but did not participate in – the Flugumýri Arson in 1253. **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* could have conceivably have cast him as a burner or, indeed, distanced him further from the arsonists than he is presented as being in *Íslendinga saga*. I mentioned earlier in this thesis that chapter 50 of *Þórðar saga kakala* provides no indication of the Battle of Pverá in 1255 having been reported in **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*; consequently, it may be slightly more likely that Hrafn's reconciliation with Gissur was not broken in the saga.

antagonist, he acted as a kind of bridge between the conflict with Kolbeinn (in the first half of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*) and that with Gissur (in the second). What we can surmise of the principal feud in the second half of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* indicates that Pórður and his proxies in Iceland were attempting to obtain justice or vengeance for the death(s) of Sighvatur (and his sons) from Gissur. The recalling of Pórður from Iceland essentially revoked the settlement brought about between him and Gissur by Cardinal William. The apparently private dispute between the principals, Pórður and Gissur, also constitutes a bitter political struggle for national dominance in Iceland. For example, consider the comments made in Brandur's letter to Gissur about Pórður's pretensions to lead the country:

Pað er orðtak Pórðar að engar megi heilar sættir verða nema hann hafi allan Norðlendingafjórðung undir sér að forráði. Hann þykist nú og allan Borgarfjörð eiga og kallar Þorleif úr Görðum öruggan vin sinn.²⁸⁴

(Pórður has proclaimed that there will be no secure settlement reached until he has the entire Northern Quarter under his authority. He thinks now that he owns all Borgarfjörður and calls Þorleifur of Garðar his trusted friend.²⁸⁵)

In the same way as Hvamm-Sturla in *Sturlu saga*, the second half of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* saw Pórður set his sights higher than in part one of the plot.

Assuming the author imitated the structure of *Sturlu saga*'s plot when composing **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, the question remains as to why he

²⁸⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 535.

²⁸⁵ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 267.

did this. Most probably, it was down to a need to explain why Þórður did not end up leading Iceland for the rest of his life while Gissur Þorvaldsson (who was evidently the less able of the two) ended up becoming the earl of Iceland in 1258. Unfortunately for Þórður, possessing royal blood or marrying into royalty, was a non-negotiable criterium for national leadership in thirteenth-century Europe:

To have royal blood running in one's veins was a prerequisite for becoming king in the European ideology of kingship that had already been accepted in Norway by the time of Snorri and his brothers. Andrew Lewis has shown the importance of royal ancestors in the political thinking of the medieval West in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, focusing especially on the French monarchy. The power of kings was legitimated by their royal forebears and there was a particular sacrality attributed to the royal family. Scholars have demonstrated in recent years the extent to which Icelandic chieftains were imbued with this ideology.... The law of the court (*Hirðskrá*) did not allow anybody who did not have blood-ties or ties through marriage to the king's family to become earl.²⁸⁶

As suggested in the quotation, membership of the royal family was not merely interpreted as an indicator that that individual would likely have exceptional personal attributes and thus national leadership potential. By the thirteenth century, in the Scandinavian lands – as elsewhere in Europe – it had also been synthesised with the Christian ideology of kingship, such that

²⁸⁶ Torfi H. Tulinius, 'Pierre Bourdieu and Snorri Sturluson: Chieftains, sociology and the development of literature in medieval Iceland?' in Jon Gunnar Jørgensen (ed.) *Snorres Edda: i europeisk og islandsk kultur* (Reykholt, 2009), pp. 47-72, p. 55.

royal status (by blood or conjugal association therewith) signified divine election to positions of high power:²⁸⁷

God is not really opposed to kinship and human networks... Although the traditional Norwegian – or Germanic – idea of the royal blood and the Christian one of the divine vocation of the king are no doubt very different, they [were] in practice combined, both in Sverre’s propaganda, as presented in [*Sverris saga*], and in the ideology that was later developed by Sverre’s dynasty, that God elects the king through dynastic succession.²⁸⁸

The ancient, Germanic element of the thirteenth-century Icelandic conception of heredity had it that blood causes personal qualities to manifest in an individual. Nevertheless, it is clear that thirteenth-century Icelanders could conceive of a person of non-royal blood displaying greater prowess than a king (consider, for example, *Hemings þáttur Áslákssonar*).²⁸⁹ This is not a paradox if we conclude that thirteenth-century Icelanders had come to consider that blood status not only led to the development of personal qualities in a given individual but also separately represented a divinely imposed constraint on that person’s destiny. From the perspective of the history of ideas, the notion of hereditary election – a Christian influence on royal ideology which became entrenched in Norwegian political culture via propaganda during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries – did arrive and take root in Iceland during the thirteenth century. Consequently, it was

²⁸⁷ These ideas had spread from Norway to Iceland by the 1270s as Costel Coroban (*Ideology and power in Norway and Iceland, 1150-1250* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 1-2) notes.

²⁸⁸ Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord’s Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense, 1996), p. 64.

²⁸⁹ Gillian Jensen (ed.), *Hemings þáttur Áslákssonar* (Copenhagen, 1962).

during the thirteenth century that the Icelandic conception of heredity expanded such that one's personal qualities (seen as a product of blood) – were enacted in the world through free choice – but could only produce an ultimate outcome which fell within a fenced-off garden of forking paths (also considered to be determined by blood).

Pórður's fall from grace in the original saga followed his rise from regional to national leadership: 'en biskup flutti ekki mjög mál Pórðar og kvað hann eigi efna það er hann hefði heitið, kvað konungs vilja aldrei mundu við ganga á Íslandi meðan Pórður réði svo miklu' ('the bishop did not speak favourably [to the king] about Pórður's case and said that he did not perform that which he had promised and said the king's will would never proceed in Iceland, while Pórður controlled everything').²⁹⁰ Bishop Henrik brings about God's will by effecting Pórður's removal from premiership in Iceland with a negative report to the Norwegian king. That Henrik is a bishop has much symbolic significance: what is described is an inversion of the coronation ritual – described in the previous chapter of *Pórðar saga kakala* (48) – in which a member of the royal family is recognised as a divinely appointed as a national leader by the anointing hand of a prince of the Church.²⁹¹ Pórður would never make it back to Iceland to lead the country after his departure for Norway. Therefore, the implication was that God had rejected Pórður's leadership of Iceland as he was not a member of the royal family.

²⁹⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 549-50; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 313.

²⁹¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 546-7.

Though not a monarchist text, *Sturlu saga* was a good model for the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* to use because its second half describes a clash between a chieftain of royal descent and another without such breeding.²⁹² A superficial reading yields that the reason for Sturla's failure was to intemperately ask for an outlandishly large settlement when he spoke with Páll the priest prior to this.²⁹³ However, there is a deeper meaning to be found when we read the situation through the lens of the thirteenth-century Icelandic conception of heredity. Let us remember that in the case described, Sturla went against Jón Loftsson, the greatest chieftain in Iceland during the latter half of the twelfth century and a member of the Norwegian royal family. The amount of compensation Sturla apportioned himself through self-judgment had the potential – if successfully acquired – to put him on the same level as Jón economically, but also socially and politically due to the honour he would have accrued from the victory. I posit that the audience of *Sturlu saga* would not merely have attributed his failure to his immoderation in asking for too much, but instead the fact that he competed with a bearer of royal blood. By this logic, Sturla was simply unable to attain economic, social, and political parity with Jón because of his humbler background (i.e., not possessing non-royal blood).

Six years after his return to Norway in 1250, Pórður was due to be sent back to govern Iceland by King Hákon but *Pórðar saga kakala* reports that he died shortly after receiving news of this. The misfortune of Pórður in

²⁹² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 98-9.

²⁹³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 96.

being recalled from Iceland and then never managing to return – the implication of the immediacy of his demise being that he was struck dead through divine intervention – therefore served in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* to reinforce the fact that he was not royalty and consequently was ineligible to be the leader of Iceland in the eyes of God.²⁹⁴ Indeed, chapter 50 of *Pórðar saga kakala* – which is most likely representative of the final chapter(s) of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* – has King Hákon refer to Gissur Porvaldsson as his kinsman, underscoring why the latter was eventually able to become an earl while Pórður lost and never regained his position of national leadership.²⁹⁵

It is important, though, to bear in mind that the semantic field covered by the word King Hákon uses to refer to Gissur (i.e., *frændi*) may have been greater in Old Norse than it is in modern Icelandic. Whilst modern Icelandic *frændi* means a true kinsman – an actual relative by blood or marriage –, the same word in Old Norse could denote fictive kinship in much the way that numerous familial terms are used figuratively in today’s languages and cultures. An example of this has been identified by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and his collaborators in an analysis of a portion of *Sverris saga*, in which King Sverre refers to Earl Erling Skakke’s “kinsmen” Lucifer, Adam, Pharoah and

²⁹⁴ Einar Már Jónsson (‘La saga de Thórdur kakali: Une œuvre de propagande?’, *Médiévales* 50 (2006), pp. 47-57, pp. 53-6) comes close to reaching this conclusion from a different direction, commenting that *Pórðar saga kakala*’s replication of the ideology in *Sverris saga* portrayed Pórður’s rise to power as divinely willed. There is evidence of belief in predestination more generally in *Sturlunga saga*, cf. Marlene Ciklamini (‘Divine will and the guises of truth in *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns*’, *Skandinavistik* 11 (1981), pp. 81-8).

²⁹⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 739.

King Saul to cast him as a descendant, and thus continuation, of this tradition of evil princes in seeking a kingly station for which he was not destined.²⁹⁶

However, we know that Gissur was actually related to King Hákon: the two were fourth cousins as they shared a great-great-great-grandfather in King Magnus Berrføtt. As a consequence, the word *frændi* here can be taken to denote this familial relationship – the parallel with *Sturlu saga* becomes still clearer when we remember that Gissur was a descendent of Jón Loftsson while Pórður's grandfather was Hvamm-Sturla.

As we should expect of a medieval Christian text, **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* recommended the acceptance of God's will to its audience, suggesting that the eventual political failure of Pórður (the protagonist) is paradoxically good and right and, therefore, that the ultimate reason for this is to be accepted as a political principle. For example, *Pórðar saga kakala* reports that when attempting to solicit support from those gathered when he Pórður met with Gísli Markússon, he made the following declaration:

'Mun þá vera annað hvort af bragði,' sagði hann, 'að vér munum rétta vorn hlut eða falla ella á fætur frændum vorum, og er þar góður hvor upp kemur'.²⁹⁷

('Then one of two things will happen,' he said, 'either we will right our situation, or otherwise fall at the feet of our kinsmen, and whichever comes about seems good to me'.²⁹⁸)

²⁹⁶ This was first identified in Audun Kjus, Inês Espås Bartolo, Anne Eriksen, Ellen Krefting, Lise Camilla Ruud, Anne Birgitte Rønning, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Kristoffer Vadum, 'Autoritet og eksempel', *Rhetorica Scandinavica* 58 (2011), pp. 57-78, pp. 60-1, This contradicts the received definition in the Cleasby-Vigfússon dictionary (p. 176) which claims that there is not a single example of *frændi* meaning anything other than kinsman.

²⁹⁷ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 467.

²⁹⁸ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 47.

The attitude expressed here reflects Þórður's *amor fati* (love of fate). *Amor fati* is not the same as being “fatalistic” in the sense of “there is nothing one can do about it, therefore, one ought not to bother attempting to avoid the inevitable”; on the contrary, it is a call to do and be one’s best irrespective of the outcome. *Amor fati* is often associated with the idea of eternal recurrence (i.e., that all things inexorably reoccur) such that the mark of greatness is accepting one’s fate to the extent that one would be happy for the same to happen over and over *ad infinitum*. Þórður is stating here that he is content in getting full use of his God-given/ hereditarily derived personal qualities – and does not seek to revel in his achievements – the products of his characteristics mediated by the destiny apportioned by God/ one’s bloodline. This impression that Þórður has an *amor fati* is augmented when he rides to face off with the Árnésingar holed up in the see of Skálholt in 1242: ‘Þórður kveðst svo oft mundi hætta verða í óvænt efni ef nokkuð skyldi að vinnast um hans mál’ (‘Þórður noted that one must often take risks in uncertain situations, if one is to achieve anything in the matter at hand’).²⁹⁹

2.3.2 – Labouring the point: *Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla’s added emphasis on the association between blood, personal qualities and destiny

*Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla gave its audience further steers to make the association between blood, personal qualities and destiny. To

²⁹⁹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 475; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 73.

illustrate this, let us look first to *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. Like **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka*, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* was written by Sturla Þórðarson, whom wrote between 1263 and 1265.³⁰⁰ *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* covers many of the same events as *Íslendinga saga*, though it centres on the life of King Hákon Hákonsson. Despite the fact that they share Sturla as an author, there are several differences between the two texts. On the one hand, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* sees the string of failures by chieftains to bring Iceland under the aegis of the Norwegian king as being representative of them as disloyal vassals due to a lack of effort at promoting the king's cause. On the other, *Íslendinga saga* represents the struggle to incorporate Iceland into the Norwegian kingdom as problematised by the need to compete against rival chieftains. Theodore Andersson and Hans Jacob Orning propose that the differences may be accounted for by acknowledging the differing perspectives Sturla adopted while writing: whereas Sturla wrote *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* as a royal chronicler in the employ of the Norwegian king, **Íslendinga saga hin sérstaka* was written by Sturla independently of a literary patron in his capacity as an Icelandic chieftain.³⁰¹ Nevertheless, it is worth noting the view of Ármann Jakobsson that 'although parts of *Hákonar saga* may be said to represent the political

³⁰⁰ Theodore M. Andersson, *The sagas of Norwegian kings (1130-1265): An introduction* (Ithaca, 2016), p. 134.

³⁰¹ Theodore Andersson, 'Sturla Þórðarson's narrative personalities' in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, chieftain and lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 156-167, p. 167; Hans Jacob Orning, 'Sturla Þórðarson's differing perspectives on 13th century history' in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 148-55, p. 155.

ideology of King Håkon and his son Magnus, Sturla's own views are present in this text as well as in *Íslendinga saga*.³⁰²

Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar seems to have been used as a source for **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. It has not been claimed by previous scholars that *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* was a source of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, though its parallels with *Pórðar saga kakala* have been noted by my predecessors. Helen Carron has found similarities with *Morkinskinna* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, while Haki Antonsson joins Carron in pointing to elements of *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* which are echoed in *Pórðar saga kakala*, adding also *Acts*, *Íslensk hómilíubók* and *Sverris saga*.³⁰³

There are two examples which I feel show that the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* used *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* as a source. Firstly, *Pórðar saga kakala* notes that a certain 'Leifur' (Leiv), mentioned as accompanying Þórður from Norway to Iceland in 1242, later became known as 'Knarrar-Leiv'.³⁰⁴ *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* suggests the Leiv had this nickname in 1261 – though he certainly had it by the time the saga was written in 1263-5 –, and nowhere else is this individual's nickname is

³⁰² Ármann Jakobsson ('A Personal Account: The Official and the Individual in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*' in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 192-9, p. 199).

³⁰³ Helen Carron, 'History and *Pórðar saga kakala*' in John McKinnell, David Ashurst & Donata Kick (eds.) *The Fantastic in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: Sagas and the British Isles* (Durham, 2006), pp. 161-70, pp. 166-8; Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and salvation in Old Norse literature* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 10-3 & 57-63, 64.

³⁰⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 463.

mentioned in the extant contemporary saga corpus.³⁰⁵ The second (and best) example to show the influence of *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* on **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* is the coverage of events at the royal court during the winter of 1246-7 in the former and *Pórðar saga kakala*. The account of this winter in Norway in *Pórðar saga kakala* appears to be a summary of the one in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, for they cover nearly all the same events in a comparable order and with similar phraseology, albeit with considerable abridgement in the former telling:

<i>Pórðar saga kakala</i>	<i>Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar</i>
	Pórður and Gissur arrive in Norway
—	Pope Innocent says he will send a cardinal
Hákon hears Pórður and Gissur's case twice	Hákon resolves Pórður and Gissur's case
—	Hákon prepares for William of Sabina's arrival
	William arrives in Norway
William sent by Pope Innocent	—
—	Hákon greets William with pomp and ceremony
William consecrates Church of the Apostles	
—	William crowns King Hákon
—	Henrik consecrated to Hólar

³⁰⁵ Sverrir Jakobsson, Þorleifur Hauksson & Tor Ulset (eds.), *Íslensk fornrit* vol. 32 (Reykjavík, 2013), p. 221.

	episcopate
William arbitrates in Þórður and Gissur's case	—
William judges in favour of Þórður	—
Þórður given leave to return to Iceland but Gissur to remain in Norway	
Henrik consecrated to Hólar episcopate	—
William crowns King Hákon	—
Þórður and Henrik go back to Iceland	

Despite using *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* as a source, it is evident that the author was not content to cite it verbatim in **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. He abridged, modified, and creatively reordered the material taken from *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* to suit his own subject matter.

Let us consider first the disparity between the saga's accounts of how Þórður and Gissur's case is said to have arrived at a resolution and what happened next. On the one hand, Hákon's arbitration of the case, as reported in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, while certainly plausible, is evidently intended to highlight his status as a *rex iustus*. On the other hand, in **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, Cardinal William's arbitration of Þórður and Gissur's case could be interpreted as an invention designed to give voice to the divine justification for Þórður's actions in his dispute with the

Ásbirningar.³⁰⁶ His success here was destined by God and facilitated by his personal qualities (also God-given).

As a second example, let us look to the differences between what William – acting as God’s mouthpiece – says with respect to the question of the leadership of Iceland in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* and *Póroar saga kakala*. David Ashurst argues that *Póroar saga kakala* presents a more plausible – i.e., true-to-life – version of the cardinal’s commentary than *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*.³⁰⁷ I do not agree with this: I feel that both two texts were written by authors who included William and his words (in differing configurations) with particular aims in mind which had little to do with accurate reportage *per se*.³⁰⁸

On the one hand, in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, William supports Hákon’s incorporation of the island into the Norwegian kingdom:

Pá var og sú skipan ger til Íslands með ráði kardinála að sú þjóð er þar byggði þjónaði til Hákonar konungs, því að hann kallaði það ósannlegt að land það þjónaði eigi undir einhvern konung sem öll önnur í veröldinni.³⁰⁹

(With the advice of the cardinal, it was also decided, concerning Iceland, that the people who lived there should submit themselves to King Hákon. This was on account of the cardinal’s statement that it was improper for that country to not be subject to some king in contrast with all others in the world.)

³⁰⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 546-7.

³⁰⁷ David Ashurst, ‘The Ironies in Cardinal William of Sabina’s Supposed Pronouncement on Icelandic Independence’, *Saga-book* 31 (2007), pp. 39-45, p. 41.

³⁰⁸ Also, cf. Ólafía Einarsdóttir, ‘Om samtíðssagaens kildeværdi belyst ved *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*’, *Alvíssmál* 5 (1995), pp. 29-81, pp. 50-2.

³⁰⁹ Sverrir Jakobsson, Þorleifur Hauksson & Tor Ulset (eds.), *Íslenzk fornrit* vol. 32 (Reykjavík, 2013), p. 136.

On the other, in *Pórðar saga kakala*, there is an ambiguity introduced into William's words and their placement in the narrative is rearranged to further obscure their meaning (*vis-à-vis Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*) – a play on the ineffability of the divine will to mortals – which serves to excuse Pórður of his later presumption to lead Iceland despite not being of the royal family: 'kardínálinn... kvað það... ráð að einn maður væri skipaður yfir landið ef friður skyldi vera' ('the cardinal... [gave the] counsel that if there was to be peace in the country only one man should rule there').³¹⁰ This in turn mitigated the risk of alienating the audience of the saga by excepting anyone who did not recognise there to be a causal link between royal blood and national leadership. Moreover, the ambiguity in the cardinal's words encouraged audience members to ask themselves throughout the remainder of the saga why Pórður was not eligible to govern Iceland, despite having superb personal qualities.

Another association made between blood, personal qualities and destiny in *Pórðar saga kakala* is to be found in the way in which the audience is encouraged to shift responsibility for heinous acts perpetrated by Pórður's side onto his company of Guests. Guests were vagrants who were hired long-term by chieftains during the thirteenth century and appear to have been assigned various tasks including bodyguarding, enforcement, soldiery, and general thuggery. The first attempt to pass blame onto the Guests in

³¹⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 546-7; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 303.

Þórðar saga kakala comes immediately after Þórður's recruitment of the company:

Fór þá Ásbjörn út eftir Steingrímsfirði. Var það flest bónda að burtu voru af bæjum sínum og höfðu fólgist. Höfðu þeir heyrt kvitt af þessari ráðagerð um kvöldið. En þeir urðu allir að fara er heima voru staddir. Fór Ásbjörn þar til er hann kom í Húsavík. Högni hét bóndi er þar bjó. Var hann í brottu. Ásbjörn tók konu hans og hafði með sér, ætlaði þá að bændur mundu eftir ríða og mundi þá ná fundi þeirra. En heimamenn gerðu Högna njósn að kona hans væri í brott tekin. Högni fór eftir þeim Ásbirni við fjórtánda mann. Þeir fundust við heygarð nokkurn. Beiddi Högni þá að Ásbjörn vildi láta lausa konu hans. En Ásbjörn bað þá fara með sér en húsfreyja færi heim. Bændur vildu það eigi, sögðu hann annars maklegan fyrir slíkar tiltekjur. Fór þá í heitan með þeim. Eggjaði Ásbjörn að bændur skyldu að þeim ganga en ekki varð af því. Þá skaut Ásbjörn spjóti og kvað þeim leiða skyldi að þeir færu að mönnum Þórðar í annað sinn. Kom spjótið á Högna upp í hrærana og renndi ofan í lærið. Var það sár mikið og banvænt. Sá var hinn fyrsti áverki er menn Þórðar veittu. Gengu þá bændur upp nokkurir en sumir fluttu Högna heim.³¹¹

(After this, Ásbjörn headed out along Steingrímsfjörður. Most of the householders were away from their households and had gone into hiding: they had receive some news of Þórður and Ásbjörn's plan during the evening, so all those who were then at home left. Ásbjörn continued on his way until he came to Húsavík. At that place there lived a householder named Högni. He was not at home. Ásbjörn abducted Högni's wife and kept her with him, thinking that this would bait the householders into riding after, and eventually meeting, them. Högni's lodgers made him aware that his wife had been abducted, and he chased after Ásbjörn and the Guests with thirteen other men. The two groups met by some hay-yard. Högni then ordered Ásbjörn to release him wife, but Ásbjörn counteroffered, stating that if Högni and the householders came with them, he would let the housewife return home. The householders did not want to do this and said that Ásbjörn deserved something else for such a deed. Matters soon became heated between the two parties. Ásbjörn urged the householders to attack them but nothing came of it. Then Ásbjörn thrust a spear, commenting that the householders would think twice before threatening

³¹¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 470-1.

Pórður's men a second time. The spear entered Högni's groin and rent down his thigh. It was a great and deadly wound. This was the first atrocity which Pórður's men carried out. Afterwards, some of the householders joined the Guests for the journey, but the others took Högni home.³¹²)

A second – more protracted – episode comes not long afterwards (in chapter 13 of *Pórðar saga kakala*), which serves to reinforce this view. It begins innocently enough (by the Guests' standards) with a little low-level hostility: the looting of some ships belonging to the householders of Strandir (presumably smallholding fishermen) and the mutilation of two smiths:

Ásbjörn Guðmundarson fór til Steingrímsfjarðar sem vér gátum fyrr. Tók hann ferju á Heydalsá. Fór hann þaðan norður fyrir Strandir allt til Trékyllisvíkur. Þar söfnuðust saman Strandamenn og vildu verja skip sín og önnur föng. létu þeir þá Ásbjörn eigi ná á land að ganga og var þá grjóttflaug og skotið spjótum og því öllu er laust var. En er þeir höfðu barist skamma hríð fengu Strandamenn af verra og gáfust upp. Tóku þeir Ásbjörn ferjuna Trékyllinn og annað skip gott er Hringaskúta var kölluð og allt það sem þeir þóttust þurfa. Fór Ásbjörn þaðan og norður til Dranga. Þar bjó þá Gunnlaugur smiður Þorvaldsson. Hann átti tvo sonu röskva. Hét annar Auðun en annar Þorvaldur. Þeir voru vasklegir menn og þjóðhagir. Ásbirni þótti þeir verið hafa í óþykkju við sig en hinir mestu vinir Kolbeins. Ásbjörn lét taka þá báða bræður og handhöggva hvorntveggja þeirra, kvað þá nú skyldu með engar njósnir hlaupa á fund Kolbeins. Fóru þeir Ásbjörn norður til Horns. Þar lét hann særa til ólífis einhleyping þann er Þóroddur hét og var kallaður kuggi. Var þar og enn ekki til saka annað en að hann vildi eigi laus láta vopn sín fyrir þeim Ásbirni. Tók hann þá öll þau skip er nokkur vöxtur var að. Fór hann þá vestur til Ísafjarðar.³¹³

(Ásbjörn Guðmundarson went to Steingrímsfjörður as we mentioned earlier. He took a ferry to Heydalsá. Ásbjörn went thence north along Standir all the way to Trékyllisvík. The Strandamenn gathered together to guard their ships and other property. They prevented Ásbjörn and his men from landing,

³¹² Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 61.

³¹³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 485.

throwing stones, spears and everything else they could. However, after a short fight, the householders were subdued and they surrendered. Ásbjörn and his men then took the ferry Trékyllinn, another sturdy ship called Hringaskúta, and all else they needed. From here, Ásbjörn sailed north to Drangar, where Gunnlaugur smiður Þorvaldsson lived. Gunnlaugur had two adult sons, one named Auðunn and the other Þorvaldur: they were tradesfolk and strong men. Ásbjörn thought they were hostile towards him and the best of friends with Kolbeinn. Thus, Ásbjörn had both brothers seized and a hand cut off from each, saying that they would think twice before running to Kolbeinn with information in future. Ásbjörn and his men then went north to Horn. There the vagrant who was called Þóroddur and called kuggi was wounded to death on his orders. There was no reason for this other than that Þóroddur had refused to give up his weapon to Ásbjörn. He also seized all the ships there which were somewhat large. Then he went westwards to Ísafjörður.³¹⁴)

But this was a mere warm-up for Ásbjörn and his Guests: they went on to kill two prominent householders from the north of the Vestfirðir in cold blood:

Atli Hjálmsson hafði farið norður á Strandir eftir hval Þórdísar Snorradóttur. Hún bjó þá í Æðey. Atli fór norðan nokkuð fyrr en gestirnir og vissu þó hvorir til annarra. Atli kom í Æðey með farminn og litlu síðar kom Ásbjörn í Æðey. Kvaddi hann þá Atla til ferðar með sér til móts við Þórð. Atli kvaðst fyrst vilja fara heim norður eftir vopnum sínum og klæðum. Ásbjörn segir hann mundi vilja fara til liðs við Kolbein en vera í móti Þórði: 'skaltu nú eigi svo lausum hala um veifast' og bað sína menn höndla hann. Þórdís Snorradóttir og Bárður Hjörleifsson vildu veita Atla og hélt þá maður á manni. Bauð Atli fyrir sig slíkt er hann mátti en Ásbjörn kvað hann þá deyja skyldu. Var Atli þá veginn. Hét sá maður Skeggi er að honum vó. Líkaði Þórdísi þetta verk verr en illa. Fóru þeir Ásbjörn þá til Þernuvíkur og var Þormóður bróðir Atla eigi heima. Var þeim sagt að Þormóður væri að seli sínu. Kunnu þá eigi heimamenn að varast fyrir því að engi vissi Þormóði ótta von. Þeir Ásbjörn fóru til selsins. Gekk Þormóður út. Var hann þegar handtekinn. Hann spurði með hverju móti ferð þeirra skyldi vera. Ásbjörn kvað hann það brátt vita mundu og segir honum þá víg Atla bróður síns. Þormóður spyr ef nokkura hluti skyldi tjá að bjóða til lífs sér. Ásbjörn kvað þá ekki

³¹⁴ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 107.

því mundi við koma því að drepinn var áður bróðir hans og kallaði hann aldrei trúan mundi verða. Þormóður kvað yfirbætur liggja til alls. Ásbjörn kvað þá ekki mundi tjá skreiðing. Þormóður skriftaðist og bjóst við dauða sínum. Þormóður lagðist eftir það niður. En sá maður hét Atli er hann vó og var Hallsson. Eftir víg Þormóðar fóru þeir Ásbjörn til skipa sinna og sigldu út eftir Ísafirði... Gekk Ásbjörn þá á land og þeir sveitungar. Sagði hann þá allt slíkt er í hafði gerst þeirra ferð. Þóttust það allir finna á Þórði að honum líkaði þessi verk lítt. Tók og alþýða illa á.³¹⁵

(Atli Hjálmsson had gone north to Strandir after a whale beached on Þórdís Snorradóttir's land. She lived then at Æðey. Atli had been up north slightly earlier than the Guests so had not met them then, but he and Ásbjörn were already acquainted. Atli came to Æðey with his cargo and a little later Ásbjörn arrived there also. He then asked Atli to journey with him to meet with Þórður. Atli said that he first wanted to travel north to his home to get his weapons and clothes. Ásbjörn said that Atli was planning to go and join Kolbeinn and become Þórður's enemy, 'but I shall not allow you to do so'. He ordered his men to seize Atli. Þórdís Snorradóttir and Bárður Hjörleifsson wanted to help Atli and confronted the Guests with an equal number of men. Atli offered what his means permitted in exchange for his life, but Ásbjörn said he must die. Atli was then slain. That man who was named Skeggi executed him. Þórdís deemed this work worse than evil. Ásbjörn and his men then went to Pernuvík, but Atli's brother Þormóður was not home. They were told that Þormóður was in the livestock shelter. The household servants gave no regard to this because they did not know Þormóður was in danger. Ásbjörn and his men went to the shelter. Þormóður came out. He was immediately seized. He inquired as to the purpose of their visit. Ásbjörn said that this would soon be known to him and told him of the killing of his brother Atli. Þormóður asked if there was anything he could offer in exchange for his own life. Ásbjörn said this could not be allowed given the slaying of his brother, which made it henceforth impossible to trust him. Þormóður noted that anything was possible, but Ásbjörn said that nothing would be gained from such pleading. Þormóður was then shriven and prepared himself for death, lying down afterwards. And that man who was named Atli Hallsson killed him. After the killing of Þormóður, Ásbjörn and his men went to their ship and sailed away out of Ísafjörður... Ásbjörn then went ashore, along with his company. He then told all that had happened on their

³¹⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 485-7.

journey. It was felt by all that Pórður thought little of Ásbjörn's effort. Everyone else also deemed them evil.³¹⁶)

Pórður is further distanced from their actions in *Pórðar saga kakala* by later appearing to expel Ásbjörn from his presence:

Penna vetur í móti jólum tók að fækkast með þeim Pórði Sighvatssyni og Ásbirni Guðmundarsyni. Gerðist Ásbjörn þá svo stór að hann vildi nær jafnast við hann sjálfan. Bað Pórður hann þá gera annaðhvort, hafa sig í burt eða vera í hófi. Ásbjörn kvað hann eigi þurfa að reka sig í burt en kvað það vel fyrir því að sénar mundu vera framkvæmdir Pórðar þegar er hann færi í brott, sagði og að sá mundi heita mestur maður þeirra ávallt er hann var með. Þorláksmessudag reið Ásbjörn í brottu og þeir þrír bræður, Grímur og Þorkell hnjóðhamar. Riðu þeir þá suður á Hóla. Tók Tumi þá við honum og var hann þar í góðu yfirlæti um jólin.³¹⁷

(This winter, around Christmas, a coolness arose between Pórður Sighvatsson and Ásbjörn Guðmundarson. Ásbjörn became so hubristic that he presented himself as almost Pórður's equal. Pórður told him to moderate his behaviour or get lost. Ásbjörn said that Pórður need not drive him away and that it would be well if Pórður realised how much of a nobody he would be without Ásbjörn, and that he would pledge himself always to the greatest man available. On the mass day of Saint Þorlákur, Ásbjörn and his two brothers – Grímur and Þorkell hnjóðhamar – rode away. The brothers headed south to Hólar, where Tumi welcomed him. Ásbjörn remained there in comfort over Christmas.³¹⁸)

Shortly thereafter, Ásbjörn dies through drowning, though not before carrying out similar acts of brutality on the behalf of Pórður's brother Tumi.

³¹⁶ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 111.

³¹⁷ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 499.

³¹⁸ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 151 & 153.

Admittedly, it is not immediately clear if the real Þórður employed vagrants as Guests specifically in order to carry out these atrocities on his behalf and thus to provide a scapegoat which would absolve him of responsibility in the eyes of the public. Certainly, within the thirteenth-century Icelandic worldview, vagrants were a useful group to whom brutality could be outsourced. By lacking a clear position in spatial-social networks, vagrants were not bound by the norm of moderation which guided the behaviour of most medieval Icelanders.³¹⁹ Additionally, in thirteenth-century Iceland, absolution had to be sought for every sin. Vagrants were typically poverty stricken, and their appalling circumstances might have resulted in them being seen as easily swayed to risk their immortal souls for a small fee. Nevertheless, leaving reality aside and returning to literature, the effect of attributing misdeeds to the Guests in *Þórðar saga kakala* and noting Þórður's disgust is that he is excused of some of the worse things that reportedly happened on his watch.

The author's attempt to dissociate Þórður from responsibility for what we might term today as 'war-crimes' when he wrote **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was made easier by an anti-individualistic and rigid stance towards

³¹⁹ For more on the blaming of outsiders (including vagrants), cf. Nichole Sterling, 'Disposable outsiders and narrative liability in *Njáls saga*', *Enarratio* 16 (2009), pp. 79-96; Jesse Byock, 'Governmental order in early medieval Iceland', *Viator* 17 (1986), pp. 19-34, pp. 25 & 29; Jesse Byock, 'Valdatafl og vinfengi', *Skírnir* 162 (1988), pp. 127-37, pp. 131-5; Roderick Kennedy, *Commonwealth, conversion and consensus: An examination of the medieval Icelandic Free State and political liberalism* (Honors thesis: University of Sydney, 2011), pp. 22, 26f. & 50; Jamie Cochrane, 'Gossips, beggars, assassins and tramps: Vagrants and other itinerants in the sagas of Icelanders', *Saga-Book* 36 (2012), pp. 43-78. Violent vagrants and other outsiders were not the only immoderate people in medieval Iceland – they were simply more likely to be as they had little stake in society.

social class adhered to by members of the thirteenth-century Icelandic élite. This élite ideology is best expressed in another text in the *Sturlunga saga* canon, *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns*.

The opening of *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns* uses the notion of heredity to advocate for a hierarchical society characterised by social immobility.³²⁰ It is worth quoting the relevant section of *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns* in full, for it illustrates the point well. The eponymous Geirmundur and his twin brother, the sons of King Hjör Halvsson, were switched at birth by their anonymous mother with the child of a slave, who was far better looking than the twins:

Geirmundur heljarskinn var sonur Hjörs konungs Hálfssonar er Hálfsrékkar eru við kenndir Hjörleifssonar konungs. Annar sonur Hjörs konungs var Hámundur er enn var kallaður heljarskinn. Þeir voru tvíburar. En þessi er frásögn til þess að þeir voru heljarskinn kallaðir að einn tíma er Hjör konungur skyldi sækja konungastefnu var drottning hans ólétt og varð hún léttari meðan konungur var úr landi og fæddi hún tvo sveina. Þeir voru báðir ákaflega miklir vöxtum og báðir furðulega ljótir ásýnis. En þó réð því stærstu um ófríðleik þeirra á að sjá að engi þóttist hafa séð dökkra skinn en á þessum sveinum var. Drottning felldi lítinn hug til sveinanna og sýndist henni þeir óástúðlegir. Loðhöttur hét þræll sá er þar var fyrir stjórn annarra þræla. Þessi þræll var kvongaður og ól kona hans son jafnframt því sem drottning varð léttari og þessi sveinn var svo undarlega fagur sem þrælskonan átti að drottning þóttist ekki lýti sjá á sveininum og sýndist henni nú þessi sveinn ástúðlegri en sínir sveinar. Síðan ræður drottning til kaups um sveinana við ambáttina en ambáttinni sýndist svo sem drottningu að henni þótti sinn sonur eigulegri en þorði þó eigi að synja að kaupa við drottningu um sveinana. Og tekur drottning við ambáttarsyni og lætur nafn gefa og kalla sveininn Leif og segir drottning þenna svein sinn son. En ambáttin tekur við þeim drottingarsonum og fæðast þeir upp í hálm sem önnur þrælabörn þar til er þeir voru

³²⁰ Daniel White (trans.), 'The Tale of Geirmund the Hel-skinned', *Delos* 33 (2018), pp. 146-56, p. 155.

prevetrir. En Leifur leikur á lófum og hefir virðing sem von var að konungsbarn mundi hafa.³²¹

(Geirmundur heljarskinn was the son of King Hjör, son of that Halv for whom Halv's Heroes were named, who was himself the son of King Hjörleiv. Another son of King Hjör was Hámundur who was also called heljarskinn. They were twins. Here is the story of why they came to be known as heljarskinn. At one time, when King Hjör was obliged to attend a meeting of kings, his queen was pregnant and gave birth to two boys while the king was abroad. They were both extremely large in size, and bizarre and ugly in appearance. However, as no-one thought they had ever seen such dark skin as these boys had, it was decided that this was the ugliest thing about them. The queen paid little attention to the boys, and she felt no affection towards them. Lodhatt was the name of the one slave who managed the other slaves there. This slave was married: his wife also gave birth to a son while the queen had been giving birth, and this boy which the slave's wife had was so strangely fair that the queen thought she could not see a blemish on the boy. She now felt more affection for this boy than her own. Thus, the queen decided to exchange boys with the maidservant. The maidservant was of one mind with the queen in thinking her son was more worth having, but did not dare to refuse to exchange boys with the queen. The queen took the maidservant's son and had him given a name, calling the boy Leiv. The queen said this boy was her own son. The maidservant took the queen's sons, and they were raised in the straw there like the children of other slaves until they were three winters old. Leiv lived a life of luxury, and received the respect due to a king's child.³²²)

However, once grown-up the low-born child proved to be unkingly, while

Geirmundur and his brother grew to be formidable young boys:

Þess er við getið að Bragi skáld sótti heimboð til Hjörs konungs og var með konungi nokkura hrið. Og einn hvern dag er það sagt að konungur og hans menn færu á dýrsveiði og svo hirðin en fátt manna var eftir í höllinni. Bragi skáld var heima og sat í öndvegi og hafði reyrspota einn í hendi sér og leikur að og þuldi í feld sinn. Drottning lá í þverpalli utar í höllinni og var hulin

³²¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 1.

³²² Daniel White (trans.), 'The Tale of Geirmund the Hel-skinned', *Delos* 33 (2018), pp. 146-56, p. 146.

klæðum svo að ekki mátti vita hvort hún var þar nema þeir er áður vissu. Leifur sat í hásæti og lék sér að gulli en þeir Hámundur og Geirmundur sátu í hálmi og hugðu að er Leifur lék sér að gullinu. Þeir sáu og ekki neina í höllinni. Þá mælti Geirmundur til bróður síns: 'Viltu að við forum til Leifs og tökum af honum gullið og leikum okkur að nokkura hríð?' 'Búinn er eg þess,' segir Hámundur. Síðan hlupu sveinarnir að hásætinu og tóku gullið af Leifi en hann glúfnaði og æpir eftir. Þeir mæltu: 'Heyr,' sögðu þeir, 'hvernig konungssonur tekur eftir einum gullhringi og er því satt að segja að það er illa komið er þú ferð með,' þrifa til Leifs og ráku hann úr hásætinu og hlæja að. Þá stendur Bragi skáld upp og gengur að þar er drottning lá í pallinum og styður á hana reysprotanum og kvað vísu þessa: 'Tveir eru inni, / trúi eg báðum vel, / Hámundur og Geirmundur, / hjörvi bornir, / en Leifur þriðji / Loðhattar sonur, / fær þrælum hann, / fár mun enn verri'.³²³

(It is mentioned that one time the poet Brage attended a feast given by King Hjør and was with the king for some time. It is said that one day the king and his men went on a hunt for animals with the retinue and few men remained in the hall. Brage the poet was at home and sat on the raised dais with an old rod in his hand and played with it as he hid in his coat. The queen lay on a wall-pallet at the perimeter of the hall and was so covered with bedclothes that none could have known she was there unless they had prior knowledge. Leiv sat in the high-seat and played with a gold ring. Hámundur and Geirmundur sat in the straw watching how Leiv played with the ring. They did not see anyone else in the hall. Then Geirmundur said to his brother: 'Do you want to go over to Leiv, so that we two may take the gold ring from him, and play with it ourselves for some time?' 'I'm ready for it,' said Hámundur. Then the boys ran to the high-seat, and took the gold ring from Leiv, leaving him downcast and howling. They spoke: 'hear,' they said, 'how the king's son weeps over one gold ring! It is true to say that evil will befall whoever follows you.' They grabbed Leiv, dragged him from the high-seat, and laughed at him. Then Brage the poet stood up, went to where the queen lay on the pallet, steadied himself with his cane, and spoke this verse: 'Two are inside, / I trust both well, / Hámundur and Geirmundur, / born of King Hjør, / and Leiv a third, / Lodhatt's son, / he passes for a slave, / few things are still worse'.³²⁴)

³²³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 1-2

³²⁴ Daniel White (trans.), 'The Tale of Geirmund the Hel-skinned', *Delos* 33 (2018), pp. 146-56, p. 147.

The royal origins of Geirmundur and his brother are assumed by those involved to have become obvious, given their actions in comparison to those of Leiv. The result of this encounter was that the queen decided to take back her children and return the changeling to the slave she got him from:

Drottning stendur nú upp og gengur í burt með sveinana og skiptir nú aftur við ambáttina í annað sinn. Sýnist drotningu nú sem er, að þeir gerðust nú mannvænlegir sem glíkindi er á og þeir áttu tilbrigði. Og um kveldið er konungur kom heim og hafði sest í há sæti sitt þá gengur drottning inn og leiðir sveinana með sér og segir konungi frá öllu þessu efni og hverju hún hafði keypt við ambáttina og biður konung hrinda af sér reiði. Konungur leit á sveinana og mælti síðan: 'að vísu ætla eg að þessir sveinar séu minnar ættar en þó hefi eg eigi séð slík heljarskinn sem sveinar þessir eru'.³²⁵

(The queen now stood up and went away with the boys and switched with the maidservant for a second time. The queen was now fully aware that they had become more promising men, which was likely given their origins. In the evening, when the king came home and had sat in his high seat, the queen went in and led the boys with her. She told the king about the whole of this matter and how she had exchanged with the maidservant. She asked the king not to be angry. The king looked at the boys and then said: 'surely these boys are of my family, even though I have never seen such Hel skin as these boys have'.³²⁶)

The ideology underlying this part of *Geimundar þáttur heljarskinns* is that one's capability and destiny is constrained and influenced by one's blood (which itself was seen by thirteenth-century Icelanders as determined by

³²⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík 2010), pp. 2-3.

³²⁶ Daniel White (trans.), 'The Tale of Geirmund the Hel-skinned', *Delos* 33 (2018), pp. 146-56, p. 148.

God, by virtue of the synthesis of traditional Germanic notions surrounding royal blood and the novel Christian ideology of kingship).³²⁷

Returning now to *Pórðar saga kakala*, it is plain to see that the vagrant Ásbjörn's short, nasty, and brutish existence is predestined by his low birth which is underscored by the words 'eigi var hann ættstór' ('he was not of a great family') when he is introduced.³²⁸ This ideology allows vagrants – and thus, the Guests – to be easily scapegoated (in both literature and reality): they were thought incapable of doing or being/ becoming anything better. In this light, it is also worth noting the example of Ásbjörn's embassy to Atli Hjálmsson (which, evidently, took place prior to Atli's violent death at Ásbjörn's hands):

Á öndverðri langaföstu kom orðsending Böðvars Pórðarsonar til hans að Pórður skyldi koma til móts við hann til Helgafells. Bjóst þá Pórður skjótt við og fór norður til Ísafjarðar. Sendi hann þá Ásbjörn Guðmundarson til móts við Atla Hjálmsson og beiddi að Atli skyldi koma á hans fund og gerast hans maður, ella það hann Ásbjörn sjá það ráð fyrir Atla að Pórði yrði ekki mein að honum. En er Ásbjörn kom í Grunnavík bar hann upp erindi sitt við Atla. En Atli kvaðst vilja sitja kyrr hjá málum þeirra Kolbeins, kveðst eiga Kolbeini gott að launa. Ásbjörn kvað hann eigi mundi svo hjá sitja málunum að eiga ekki við Pórð en vera vinur Kolbeins. Fékk Ásbjörn ekki af Atla. Fannst það á Pórði er þeir

³²⁷ Daniel White (trans.), 'The Tale of Geirmund the Hel-skinned', *Delos* 33 (2018), pp. 146-56, p. 155. Thomas Krömmelbein ('Die spitzenstellung des *Geirmundar þáttr heljarskinns* innerhalb der kompilation *Sturlunga saga*', *Alvissmál* 4 (1994), pp. 33-50, p. 37) interprets the ideology represented at the start of *Geirmundar þáttr heljarskinns* slightly differently to how I have, though he too emphasises the innateness of personal characteristics. Cf. also Marlene Ciklamini, 'Divine will and the guises of truth in *Geirmundar þáttr heljarskinns*', *Skandinavistik* 11 (1981), pp. 81-8.

³²⁸ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 470; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 59.

Ásbjörn fundust að honum þótti lítið erindi Ásbjarnar orðið hafa.³²⁹

(At the beginning of Lent a message arrived from Böðvar Þórðarson, asking Þórður to come to meet him at Helgafell. Þórður swiftly set off and went north to Ísafjörður. He then sent Ásbjörn Guðmundarson to meet Atli Hjálmsson and ask Atli to come to meet him and become his man. If Atli refused, he asked Ásbjörn to see to it that Þórður did not come to any harm from him. When Ásbjörn arrived at Grunnavík, he brought up his errand with Atli. But Atli said that he wanted to remain neutral in the conflict between Kolbeinn and Þórður, saying that he had only had positive dealings with Kolbeinn. Ásbjörn told Atli that he would not be able to have good relations with Þórður if he were Kolbeinn's friend. Ásbjörn got nothing from Atli. It was felt that Þórður, when he met up with Ásbjörn, thought little had come of Ásbjörn's mission.³³⁰)

In this episode, we see a different Ásbjörn to the brutal enforcer elsewhere in the saga. Ásbjörn is muted, and though he uses threat, he is relatively courteous, and certainly does not stab any groins this time around. What is interesting though is that he proves totally ineffective when carrying out diplomacy of this kind, given that he does not manage to achieve anything, a fact which is reiterated by the statement at the end of the vignette 'að honum þótti lítið erindi Ásbjarnar orðið hafa' ('that Þórður... thought little had come of Ásbjörn's mission').³³¹ This is an élitist 'dog whistle', the implication to subscribers of this social ideology being that Ásbjörn – the vagrant – is essentially a beast who is not at home treating with householders, his implied betters.

³²⁹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 483.

³³⁰ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 101.

³³¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 483; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 101.

Let us end by noting that the contention made above that the author of **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla* held to the view that one's destiny and personal qualities are determined by blood is not merely a theory drawn from inference: the perspective is made explicit in *Póroar saga kakala*. Consider the introduction of Hrafn Oddsson into the saga. After agreeing to join Þórður on his campaign of vengeance, 'Þórður þakkaði honum vel og kvaðst ætla sér mundi það mikið mega fyrir sakir frænda styrks þess er Hrafn átti' ('Þórður thanked him well and said he thought he would be of great help by virtue of the strong kinsmen Hrafn had').³³² This is not simply a compliment; rather, it expresses a prediction of how events will unfold as well as what sort of man Hrafn is likely to be based on his family relationships.

2.4 – Summary

This chapter has subjected **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla* to literary analysis using a variety of techniques. It began by noting that **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla* contained a number of divergent narrative strands which served to amplify the biography of one man – Þórður *kakali* – and in such wise, drew the audience's attention to this individual and his attributes.

We saw in the subsequent discussion of characterisation in *Póroar saga kakala* (and thus **Póroar saga kakala hin mikla*) that the intertextual references therein suggest(ed) to the reader that Þórður's personal qualities were what enabled him to achieve vengeance against Kolbeinn, to reclaim

³³² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 468; Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 53.

his birthright to wield power over Eyjafjörður, and – for a time – to rule all Iceland.

We next considered the bipartite structure of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* and evaluated the main plot from a thirteenth-century Icelandic perspective. This analysis showed that, beyond the requirement for a national leader to possess excellent personal qualities, God also needed to have chosen the candidate by preordaining his destiny through the assignation of royal blood (or not, as the case may be).

Given the unifying role of hereditarianism in constructing **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*'s compatibilist view of the respective roles of God and Pórður in the unfolding of the latter's career, the saga construed human destiny as a product of heredity. In this worldview, blood determines individual characteristics and capabilities, whilst also serving as a "license" to achieve a particular destiny by manifesting one's traits and potentiality in the World. This was as much – if not more strongly – a political-ideological position as it was a perspective on the meaning (or purpose) of life in a place like thirteenth-century Iceland. Whilst there was already a pre-existing lack of a distinction between the private and public spheres of life, during this century the contemporary royal ideology of Norway penetrated – and consolidated its position within – Icelandic governmentality.

This abstract thematic reading could easily be applied to many other Icelandic texts of the time, given how well it accords with the *zeitgeist* of thirteenth-century Iceland. Nevertheless, it is clear from the general contours of Pórður's biography (elucidated in the introduction to this thesis) that his life

story would have provided an excellent narrative framework for exploring themes of heredity, predestination, and human agency in a thirteenth-century Icelandic context.

Chapter 3

Historical analysis

In this chapter, an historical analysis of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, which situates its context of writing during the 1270s, is performed to build upon the literary analysis carried out in the previous chapter. The first half of this chapter has a broad scope and connects the biographical contemporary sagas to High Medieval literary practice to theorise, in a general sense, why the texts of this subgenre were written. The rationale behind this derives from form criticism, which posits that the genre of a text is downstream of its purpose. Nonetheless, cross-case comparison of the texts of a particular genre (or, in this case, a subgenre) can only take us so far as it takes into account neither the particularities of each individual text nor its specific historical context. Consequently, the subgeneric context will merely govern our horizon of expectations when analysing **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, as a guard against misplaced exegesis. In the second half of the chapter, **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* itself will be subjected to historical analysis. Ultimately, this chapter comes to the conclusion that the saga was likely intended as political propaganda in support of one of the leading figures in Iceland during the 1270s, namely: Hrafn Oddsson.

3.1 – Why were the biographical contemporary sagas written?

3.1.1 – What motivated textual production in the Middle Ages?

To the twenty-first-century mind, the concepts of education and indoctrination are inseparable, even if one or the other is more dominant in a particular cultural artefact.³³³ To a great extent, awareness of *savoir-pouvoir* shapes how a post-Foucault reader approaches the evaluation of textual purpose. Nonetheless, this does not mean that our propensity to view medieval textual culture through this lens is flawed: the reason that Foucault's compound – *savoir-pouvoir* – is so influential into our time is because it has explanatory power.

Textual production during the medieval period was characterised by two major features. The first is its expensiveness: the creation of vellum codices had a great material cost and, further, would require a significant expenditure of time to commit the text to writing by hand. The second is its association with clerical culture: the close connection of writing in medieval Europe with the Church indicates that ethical and ideological concerns guided textual production, given that where a religion lives or dies depends on guiding the action and belief of its adherents.

The *exemplum* is typical of medieval biography: hagiographic literature was in wide circulation in Europe at the time. *Exempla* function by utilising a biographical subject as a vessel for ideas and ideology. The purpose of *exempla* is not to record the actual events of an individual's life,

³³³ Michel Foucault, Colin Gordon (ed. & trans.), Leo Marshall (trans.), John Mepham (trans.) & Kate Soper (trans.), *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977* (New York, 1980).

per se, but rather to provide a sort of idealised case study of behaviour. The shaping of behaviour is superficially educational, but this is education towards some ideal norm: consequently, *exempla* were not simply for the edification of the audience, but also ideologically motivated. Ideologies are necessarily political because all entail an element of belief, thus creating belief-communities. Furthermore, the preponderance of ideologies take a view on what the World should be like, the manifestation of which requires the acquisition of power.

Exempla were not the only kind of medieval literature, but they provide a good example of why lay and ecclesiastical magnates suffered the expense of textual production. With this in mind, Elizabeth Ashman-Rowe suggests the following dictum for reading medieval literature: ‘when the tale appears to be referring to contemporary politics it probably is. And when it appears not to be referring to contemporary politics, it may still be’.³³⁴

Whilst this is all instructive, biographical contemporary sagas are not hagiographic: how, therefore, do the sagas belonging to this subgenre work to promote the political aims of their authors and commissioners?

In this section, I shall apply the historical-critical method in a cross-case comparison of *Sturlu saga*, *Guðmundar saga dýra*, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*, *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, *Þorgils saga skarða*, *Sverris saga*, and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* to draw out their political functionality. This will set our horizon of expectations for analysing **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, providing a guide for the historical analysis to

³³⁴ Elizabeth Ashman-Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók: Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389* (Gylling, 2005), p. 29.

follow, indirect confirmatory evidence of the reasonableness of its products, and a contextualisation of the text within the biographical contemporary saga subgenre.

3.1.2 – *Sturlu saga*

Sturlu saga interpreted superficially is an origin story for the emergence of the Sturlungar as a political dynasty at the start of the thirteenth century (*Eyrbyggja saga*, with its similar Machiavellian protagonist and episodic form, stands as a prequel of sorts).³³⁵

It is possible that *Sturlu saga*'s narrative, which charts the beginnings of the ascent of the Sturlungar to become the overarching leaders of the Western Quarter, was political propaganda which showed that they came to dominate the area due to superior personal qualities. However, the mere possibility of this being so does not make it likely: while Hvamm-Sturla is an adept political operator in *Sturlu saga*, he is also to a great extent an amoral character by virtue of his Machiavellianism (bordering on being a 'dominus sine virtute' or 'rex iniquus') and, given the protobiological concept of heredity entrenched in the Icelandic psyche at this time, this was not a positive message to be sending to the actual and prospective subjects of Hvamm-Sturla's descendants. Moreover, as discussed in chapter 2, had *Sturlu saga* been Sturlungar propaganda, it would have set a firm limit on their ambitions as it underscores their relatively undistinguished and non-royal heritage.

³³⁵ Viðar Hreinsson, 'Frásagnaraðferð *Sturlu sögu*' in Sverrir Tómasson (ed.) *Samtíðarsögur* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1994), pp. 803-17, pp. 805 & 816.

Sturlu saga has an episodic form and takes the shape of a regional chronicle at times; consequently, it is not the best example of a biographical Contemporary saga. Nevertheless, the character of Hvamm-Sturla does tie together the many disparate episodes of the saga so it may as well be considered at least as much of a biographical saga as a regional chronicle.

When we discussed the plot structure of *Sturlu saga* (and apparent shift in tone) in chapter 2, it became clear that the saga charts Hvamm-Sturla's rise to power (and the eventual plateauing of that ascent) through a series of scenes in which his cunning and guile as a political operator are showcased. There is little to be gained from recapitulating material covered earlier here; nevertheless, it is worth analysing a brief illustrative example from *Sturlu saga* which shows Hvamm-Sturla, the political animal, in action. It comes from the end of the first half of *Sturlu saga*, following the "battle" between Hvamm-Sturla and Einar Porgilsson on the heath:

Þá mælti Einar við Svein Sturluson: 'það vildum vér að þú gæfir oss grið því að þú átt þann hlut jafnan í með oss er þá er betur en áður.' Sveinn mælti: 'faðir minn ræður griðum.' Þá settist Einar niður og mæddi hann blóðrás. Þá mælti Hallur Gilsson til Sturlu: 'grið þættumst vér nú þurfa.' Sturla svarar: 'leggið þá vopnin niður.' Þeir vildu það eigi. Þá mælti Sturla: 'grið skulu þeir hafa.' Þá voru þeim grið gefin og mælti engi í móti því að féið færi aftur... Þá er Sturla fór heim af fundinum hafði hann við sér lík Ingjalds og fé allt það er rænt hafði verið. Þeir Einar fluttust og heim og komu menn í mót þeim í Hvammsdal. Eftir fund þenna sátu hvorirtveggju í búum sínum um veturinn og var það mál flestra manna að á þeim fundi skipti um mannvirðing með þeim Sturlu og Einari. Of vorið eftir voru mál búin til alþingis og riðu hvorirtveggju til alþingis og héldu fram málunum og var enn sem fyrr að vinir þeirra gengu í milli og var málum snúið til sátta og skyldi Jón Loftsson gera um og Gissur Hallsson. Og var þeim gerðum svo farið sem líklegast mundu sættirnar verða haldnar en ekki með þvílíkum stafnaburði sem

fyrr voru gervar. Og skildust menn sáttir á því þingi á öll mál þau er milli höfðu verið og fóru við það heim og voru nú sáttir.³³⁶

(Then Einar said to Sveinn Sturluson: ‘we want you to grant us mercy because you have always played a part in improving relations between us.’ Sveinn responded: ‘my father will decide who is granted mercy.’ Then Einar sat down for he was exhausted from bloodloss. Then Hallur Gilsson told Sturla: ‘we are now in need of mercy.’ Sturla answered: ‘then lay down your weapons.’ They would not do that. Then Sturla said: ‘they shall have mercy.’ Then mercy was granted to them and now no-one protested to the cattle being returned... When Sturla went home from the battle he had Ingjaldur’s corpse with him and all the cattle that had been stolen. Einar and his men also went home and men came to meet them in Hvammsdalur. After this battle, both sides remained at their farms over winter and most people were of the view that the battle had proved decisive in the measuring of the respective worths of Sturla and Einar. The following spring, cases were brought to the General Assembly and both sides rode there to defend themselves in the suits. Again, as before, their friends mediated so that the dispute was resolved into a settlement which Jón Loftsson and Gissur Hallsson were to arbitrate. Their arbitration was deemed necessary as it seemed that a settlement decided by these two would be likeliest to held to rather than ignored as had previously taken place. All the suits dividing the men were resolved at the assembly and with that they returned home with everything now fully settled.)

There are a couple of important things to note in the above quotation. Firstly, Hvamm-Sturla, rather than executing Einar Þorgilsson following the battle, permits him to live. Superficially, this may appear as a tactical blunder as it hypothetically enables Einar to fight him another day; however, Hvamm-Sturla’s decree broadcasts two important messages. The first is that Hvamm-Sturla is magnanimous and merciful leader, which is good for public relations as far as his quest to attain sole leadership of his region is concerned. The second is that Hvamm-Sturla is so powerful that he deigns to allow his

³³⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 79-80.

greatest nemesis to remain alive because even this mighty opponent is unable to compete with him.

Secondly, it is worth considering the men involved in bringing about the settlement between the two sides: Jón Loftsson and Gissur Hallsson. Jón – as discussed in chapter 2 – was connected to the Norwegian royal family through an illegitimate daughter of King Magnus Berrføtt and the greatest chieftain in Iceland of his age, while Gissur was a prominent chieftain, lawspeaker, and held the rank of marshall (a position competed for by the landed men, who held a station equivalent to a baron) in the Norwegian king's retinue. Consequently, the fact that Hvamm-Sturla has managed to elevate what started as an intraregional squabble to such a level that two great national figures ended up presiding in judgment over the dispute stands as testament to his ability to climb his way up social, political, and economic hierarchies in his attempt to become a peer of such persons as Jón and Gissur (if, indeed, his ultimate aspiration was not to become an even greater figure than Jón himself).

The selection of a single instance of Hvamm-Sturla demonstrating his skill at political intrigue is difficult because the saga is peppered with possible examples. Where does this leave us? If *Sturlu saga* is viewed as a biography of Hvamm-Sturla with a focus on his "greatest hits" (the key disputes in his career), it could conceivably have been read as a guide (of sorts) for chieftains seeking to elevate themselves, teaching abstract principles of power politics through (purportedly) concrete examples. Together with *Eyrbyggja saga* – which, apart from having an equally Machiavellian

protagonist, has similar structural and stylistic inelegancies to the modern mind – *Sturlu saga* may well have been the closest equivalent in medieval Iceland to Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il Principe*.

However, like *Il Principe*, *Sturlu saga* can be read as a subtle parody rather than a serious manual of *Machtpolitik*. If the parody theory is correct, I would posit that Þórður Sturluson commissioned the saga to critique the acquisitiveness and amorality of his brothers Sighvatur and Snorri.

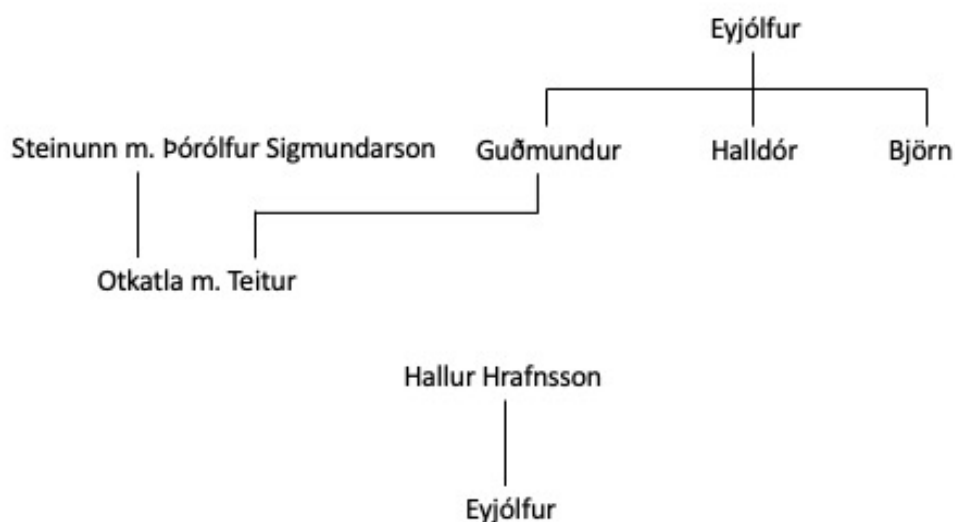
Þórður Sturluson was apparently openly critical of these qualities of his brothers (at least, according to *Íslendinga saga*, which ultimately came from the pen of Þórður's son Sturla). *Sturlu saga* was probably written at some point during the period 1200-25; consequently, if we accept a late dating then it overlaps with the start of the period of strife within the family which is reported in *Íslendinga saga*. *Sturlu saga* positions Jón Loftsson as a person of authority who does not appear to favour Hvamm-Sturla's methods or cupidity; it is worth noting that Jón was Snorri's foster-father. Perhaps Þórður Sturluson was appealing to Snorri's better nature by playing his two father-figures off against one another?

3.1.3 – *Guðmundar saga dýra*

Guðmundar saga dýra – which has a similar episodic form to *Sturlu saga* – can be read, on the surface level, in a similar way: it tells, by means of 'great man history', of the immediate prehistory of the northern domain in and around Eyjafjörður (including the causes and process of authority consolidation therein). However, unlike *Sturlu saga*, *Guðmundar saga dýra*

would not, deeper down, have been read as an instruction manual in *Machtpolitik* (whether serious or tongue-in-cheek); rather, interpreted through the lenses of medieval Christianity and thirteenth-century Icelandic social norms, the life of Guðmundur *dýri* Þorvaldsson reveals the paradoxically high human cost of pursuing and restoring peace in a postlapsarian world.³³⁷

From the very introduction of the eponymous Guðmundur in chapter 3 of *Guðmundar saga dýra*, he establishes himself as a man determined to maintain peaceful order in the region he leads with a number of hostile and pugnacious fellow chieftains. The first dispute Guðmundur involves himself in begins to unfold over chapters 1 and 2 of *Guðmundar saga dýra*. Chapter 1 details a plethora of genealogical information, the pertinent points of which can be summarised with the following simplified family trees:



³³⁷ Helgi Þorláksson, 'Þjóðleið hjá Brekku og Bakka. Um leiðir og völd í Öxnadal við lok þjóðveldis' in Sverrir Tómasson (ed.) *Samtíðarsögur* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 1994), pp. 335-49, pp. 340-1; Jónas Kristjánsson & Peter Foote (trans.), *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature* (Reykjavík, 2007), p. 192.

After the marriage of Teitur and Otkatla, Guðmundur Eyjólfsson gives his farm at Helgastaðir to the couple and becomes a monk. Teitur subsequently dies and an inheritance dispute begins between, on the one hand, Guðmundur's brothers Björn and Halldór (arguing that Guðmundur was not eligible to inherit, having become a monk), and, on the other, Eyjólfur Hallsson (who bought the land from Guðmundur following Teitur's death).

Björn and Halldór are assemblymen of different chieftains, these being Porvarður Þorgeirsson and Öundur Þorkelsson. The brothers give over their parts in the suit to Porvarður and Öundur, and, at the start of chapter 2, the two chieftains make a pact to prosecute the case against Eyjólfur together. After an aborted attempt to reach an arbitrated settlement, men from both sides of the dispute are summoned to the Vaðlaping where the lawsuits are to be heard.

Chapter 3 begins by introducing Guðmundur *dýri* and noting that he went with the chieftaincy/ chieftaincies belonging to Porvarður *auðgi* and his own brother Ásgrímur. Moreover, it is stated that Guðmundur supported neither part in the dispute. At court, no resolution is reached as neither side wishes to compromise over the issue of Helgastaðir; consequently, Porvarður and Öundur declare their intention to join in battle with Eyjólfur and his supporters. However, Guðmundur and his assemblymen intervene and prevent this from happening. Ultimately, no settlement or battle takes place concerning Helgastaðir at the Vaðlaping, and the case is referred to the General Assembly.

Porvarður and Önundur refuse to attend the court session at the General Assembly, and the end of the matter is that they are both outlawed. After the General Assembly, Eyjólfur attempts to prosecute the courts of execution pursuant to the judgments handed down at the General Assembly. In response, Porvarður and Önundur again attempt to join battle with Eyjólfur's forces; nevertheless, Guðmundur and his men again get between the two sides and prevent either courts of execution or battle from taking place.

What follows is tell of how Porvarður and Önundur's men plunder and pillage in the region after this incident, though it is also noted that Eyjólfur's men behaved well at this time. Eventually, the dispute ends with Guðmundur successfully arbitrating a peaceful settlement between the two parties.

Subsequent to Guðmundur's introduction into *Guðmundar saga dýra* as a peacemaker, the saga is peppered with incidences where his character demonstrates his commitment to this role. As a first example, let us consider the following quotation drawn from chapter 12 of the saga: 'Guðmundur svarar: "eigi vil eg vekja láta úr mínum flokk áköst né frumhlaup en taka við sem þriflegast ef þeir gera á oss"' ('Guðmundur answered: "I do not want any member of my forces to provoke the enemy by assailing or accosting them, but we will take them on most deftly if they attack us").³³⁸ Here, Guðmundur is showing that he wishes to pursue the peaceful path, even in spite of there being an opportunity to prevent losses to his own side by attacking early.

³³⁸ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 148.

Nevertheless, in the above quotation from chapter 12, there appears to be a recognition on Guðmundur's part that there are times when he will pursue the violent path (in self-defence) to secure peace. This impression is augmented in chapter 13 when Önundur responds to the omen witnessed by Leifur and Halli in Öxnadalur by noting that Guðmundur – represented disparagingly as an old, frail, hornless sheep (a tacit sexual insult³³⁹) – will eventually have recourse to violent means to keep the peace:

Peir Leifur og Halli voru hjá og svöruðu: 'fyrir litlu gengum við um allan Öxnadal og könnuðum haga allt hið efra og fundum ekki sauða nema á eina kollótta og var af fallin ullin öll og mun hún óvíða ganga í vor og ætlum vér að Guðmundur sitji fast á friðstóli sínum.' Önundur svarar: 'það má vera að hann sitji of stund en ef hann rís upp þá er eigi víst hve lítt hann stígur fram'.³⁴⁰

(Leifur and Halli were at hand and replied: 'a short while ago we went all around Öxnadalur and examined all the upper pastures and found naught except for a hornless sheep which had lost all of its wool and will be unlikely to be walking come spring. We think therefore that Guðmundur will continue to sit fast on his peace-stool.' Önundur responded: 'it may be that he sits fast for a while, but if he should rise up then it is unknown how little he may step forth'.)

So it is that in chapter 14, Guðmundur has realised that in this instance, attempting to resolve matters and restore peace in a peaceful manner is going to prove ineffectual; consequently, he resolves to bludgeon and burn his enemies to restore order to the region:

³³⁹ For more on this, cf. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The unmanly man: Concepts of sexual defamation in early Northern society* (Odense, 1983) among other texts.

³⁴⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 149.

Önundur spurði ef nokkvað skyldi sættum við koma fyrir menn þar. Guðmundur svarar: 'lengi hefir nú ekki orðið af sættum þótt svo sé látið. Mun nú og ekki af því verða'.³⁴¹

(Önundur inquired whether or not some settlement would be forthcoming on behalf of the men there. Guðmundur answered: 'long enough have matters come on for any consideration to be given to a settlement, even if they were to be permitted. But naught will come of that now'.)

Indeed, in an inversion of Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia to facilitate the Achaean journey to wage the Trojan War, so great is Guðmundur's zeal to restore peace that he admits that he would have willingly sacrificed his own daughter in the arson against Önundur to achieve that end:

Þá mælti Þorfinnur til Guðmundar mágs síns: 'það er illa er Ingibjörg dóttir þín er eigi hér inni.' Guðmundur svarar: 'það er vel þótt hún sé hér eigi en þó mundi það nú fyrir engu standa'.³⁴²

(Then Þorfinnur spoke to Guðmundur (his brother-in-law): 'it is wrong that your daughter Ingibjörg is not inside here.' Guðmundur responded: 'it is well to think that she is not here; however, it would not now have changed matters'.)

That Guðmundur is still motivated by the pursuit of peace, even whilst burning his enemy alive in his home, is indicated by his display of restraint even as the fires continue to blaze:

Síðan gekk út Tjörvi og var þar til ætlaður Þorvaldur frá Bægisá og lagði Tjörva í gegnum með sverði. Síðan gekk Tjörvi ofan á völlinn og þar að er Guðmundur stóð. Guðmundur mælti og

³⁴¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 151.

³⁴² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 152.

hafði eigi séð er hann fékk áverkann: ‘gefa skal Tjörva grið,’ segir hann, ‘og ertu ómaklegur’.³⁴³

(Later, Tjörvi made it outside but was fatally wounded there by Þorvaldur of Bægisá who stabbed Tjörvi with a sword. Then Tjörvi went down into the field and came to where Guðmundur was stood. Guðmundur spoke (having not seen that he had been wounded): ‘Tjörvi shall be given mercy,’ he said, ‘because you are not deserving [of death].’)

Immediately after the arson, Guðmundur works to resolve any outstanding disputes, and all matters are eventually submitted to Jón Loftsson for arbitration. Following Jón’s judgment, it is reported that: ‘þá var kyrrt í héruðum eftir’ (‘thereafter, it was tranquil in the region’).³⁴⁴

Despite Guðmundur pursuing peace throughout the saga, the successful restoration of order ultimately comes through the assassination of his foe, Öundur, who is burned alive in his farmstead. It is implied that the perpetration of this grievous act motivates Guðmundur to eventually resign his position of regional leadership and become a monk to spend the rest of his life atoning for his actions (however noble his intentions may have been).

Conceivably, it could be argued that *Guðmundar saga dýra* (contra to having been a mere morality tale about the price to be paid in the noble pursuit of peace) was political propaganda designed to support Sighvatur Sturluson’s sole leadership of the Eyjafjörður region by showing how peace was impossible when multiple chieftains sharing control of the same area were vying for supremacy. In my view, either of the possible readings has

³⁴³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 152.

³⁴⁴ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 155.

merit; moreover, they do not necessarily contradict each other: one could say that the saga reveals that, without the overarching leadership of one man – which requires others to sacrifice their power and independence to some extent, the goal of keeping order within a given area comes at an extremely high and unwarranted cost.

3.1.4 – Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka and Þorgils saga skarða

Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka (also, *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*) and *Þorgils saga skarða* overtly illustrate the approach of true Christian leadership.³⁴⁵

In *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*, we see Hrafn attempting to resolve disputes in a lawful and moral manner, while his foil, Þorvaldur, deliberately seeks the extra-legal and morally dubious (if not outright immoral) solution, for example:

Og er hann fór á brott úr Selárdal með hvalinn gisti hann í Lokinhömrum og er hann var þar um nótt þá var stolinn í brott sumur hvalurinn. Sá stuldur reyndist síðan á hendur þingmanni Hrafn's, þeim er bjó á Sléttanesi. Og er Hrafn var þess var varð hann skjóttur til og bauð honum að gjalda fyrir þingmann sinn slíkt fé sem Þorvaldur vildi gert hafa fyrir hvaltökuna. En

³⁴⁵ Haki Antonsson, 'The present and the past in the Sagas of Icelanders' in Peter Lambert & Björn Weiler (eds.) *How the past was used: historical cultures, c.700-c.2000* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 87-112, p. 105; Kári Gíslason *Narratives of possession: Reading for saga authorship* (PhD thesis: The University of Queensland, 2003), pp. 241-2; Torfi Tulinius, 'Hvers manns gagn. Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson and the social role of Icelandic chieftains around 1200', *Saga-Book* 40 (2016), pp. 91-104; Guðrún Nordal, 'Var Þorgils saga skarða skrifuð í Noregi' in Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (ed.) *Sturlaðar sögur: Sagðar Úlfari Bragasyni sextugum 22. apríl 2009* (Reykjavík, 2009), pp. 27-31, p. 28.

Porvaldur vildi ei þiggja að Hrafn þéttur. Og litlu síðar fór Porvaldur og rændi þann mann er tekið hafði hvalinn og þaðan af tók Porvaldur að ganga á hendur þingmönnum Hrafns að öðru hverju.³⁴⁶

(After he departed from Selárdalur he stayed the night at that farm which is called Lokinhamrar. Some of the whale there was stolen away during the night. One of Hrafn's assemblymen (who lived at Sléttanes) was later found guilty of the robbery. When Hrafn became aware of this he offered Porvaldur compensation on behalf of his assemblyman at any level he wished to set for the theft of the whale. Porvaldur refused the compensation offered by Hrafn; instead, he looted from the man who had taken the whale. Thereafter, Porvaldur took to assailing Hrafn's assemblymen every so often.)

Another example of Hrafn's ethical and lawful stance with respect to disputes comes after Víga-Haukur's attempt on Porvaldur's life on the orders of Gísli and Loftur (the sons of Markús):

Þetta sumar fór Porvaldur vestur í Dýrafjörð til leiðar að vitja féggjalda þeirra er gjaldast skyldu fyrir Hauk en féin komu þar ei fram. Þá beiddi Porvaldur Hrafn að hann skyldi fara með honum á Mýrar að ræna bú Lofts fyrir það er féggöld komu ei fram fyrir Hauk. En Hrafn vildi ei í þeirri för vera, kveðst veita mundu Porvaldi til laga en ei ólaga, mælti að Porvaldur skyldi sækja Loft til laga eða Gísla að lögum um fjörráð eða féggjald og kveðst veita honum mundu til þess. Eftir það fór Porvaldur á Mýrar og rændi þar mörgu fé og lagði á mæli til við Hrafn er hann vildi ei í þeirri för vera.³⁴⁷

(This summer, Porvaldur went west to the harvest meeting in Dýrafjörður to collect the funds to be paid in fines for Haukur, but the payment was not forthcoming. Porvaldur requested that Hrafn come with him to Mýrar to loot Loftur's farm for the fines which had not been paid for Haukur, but Hrafn did not want to participate in this journey. Hrafn stated that he would assist Porvaldur lawfully but not unlawfully: he asked him to summon Loftur or Gísli for plotting a killing or for the payment in line with

³⁴⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 908.

³⁴⁷ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 910.

the law and said that he would support him in this. After that, Þorvaldur went to Mýrar and looted a lot there and laid slander against Hrafn for not accompanying him.)

In a similar vein to Hrafn's lawful and moral approach to conflict, the following vignette illustrates two of his complementary personal qualities, namely his mercifulness and largesse:

Jón hét maður. Hann var Þorsteinsson. Hann var húskarl á þeim bæ er á Kúlu heitir. Þar bjó sá maður er Kjartan hét. Maður hét Símon. Hann var Bjarnason. Hann var heimamaður Hrafns á Eyri. Símon átti barn og byrgiskonu á Kúlu. Jón fífldist að þeirri konu. Einn helgan dag fór Símon til fundar við fylgjukonu sína og sat á tali við hana. En Jón gekk að honum og hjó hann banahögg. Fyrir það víg gerði Hrafn Jón sekan skógarmann. Nokkuru síðar færði Jón Hrafn höfuð sitt en Hrafn gaf Jóni upp höfuðið en hann þakkaði Hrafn höfuðið og launaði illu illt höfuð sem síðar mun sagt verða. Hrafn bætti síðan fé fyrir víg Símonar frændum hans og færði sjálfur fram sýknu hans.³⁴⁸

(There was a man named Jón Þorsteinsson. He was a household servant at that farm which is called Kúla. There lived that man who was named Kjartan. Símon Bjarnarson was the name of a man who was Hrafn's household servant. Símon had a child and a mistress at Kúla. Jón seduced her. One holy day, Símon went to visit his mistress and was sat talking to her when Jón attacked him and gave him a deathblow. For the killing, Hrafn had Jón declared an outlaw. A little while later, Jón threw himself upon Hrafn's mercy and Hrafn granted him that. Jón was joyful for this and thanked Hrafn for his generosity; however, as later will be told, this evil man rewarded Hrafn's generosity with still more evil. Hrafn then paid compensation to Símon's kinsmen and procured Jón's immunity.)

That Hrafn is merciful is parallel for his desire for peace to be kept, which is illustrated in the following episode which takes place after Þorvaldur makes an attempt on Hrafn's life:

³⁴⁸ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 915-6.

Þá dreif mikið lið að Hrafni, bæði Seldælir og margir aðrir. Þeir voru margir vinir Hrafns er mæltu að þá skyldi gera eftir Þorvaldi og drepa hann svo ber sem hann gerðist í fjörráðum við Hrafn er hann vildi brenna hann inni. En það sýndist oft að Hrafn var ógrimmur maður og hann vildi heldur deyja fyrir tryggðar sakir en fyrir ótryggðar. Nú vildi hann eigi gera eftir þeim Þorvaldi né drepa hann svo sem hann átti kost ef hann vildi því að hann vildi eigi vinna það til fára vetra virðingar sem oft kunnu manna ráð verða heldur vildi Hrafn hafa svívirðing af mönnum í orðlagi fyrir guðs sakir og hætta svo lífi sínu til eilífrar miskunnar almáttigs guðs. Fyrir þessa tryggð Hrafns ámæltu honum margir menn fyrir það er hann hafði látið Þorvald undan ganga svo sem Guðmundur skáld Galtason segir Guðrúnu systur Hrafns þá er hún spurði hvað hann heyrði rætt um málaferli þeirra Hrafns. Hann sagði og kvað vísu: ‘Heyri eg Hrafni fjóra / hyrtælendur ámæla, / þjóð er til lymisk á láði, / línspöng, um atgöngu. / Raun mun segja sína / seimhrjóðandi góða: / Vígs er Ullur að öllu / eitrvengs fyrirleitinn’.³⁴⁹

(Then a great force gathered to Hrafn, both Seldælir and many others. Many of Hrafn’s friends said that they should make for Þorvaldur and kill him, given that it was apparent that he had plotted to kill Hrafn, when he attempted to burn him to death in [his farmhouse]. But it often appeared that Hrafn was not a cruel man and he wished to die for the sake of the pious than for the unpious. Now he did not want either to make for Þorvaldur and his men nor kill him (given that he had the choice if he wanted to) because he did not want to work towards a few years of honour, as men typically do; instead, he would rather dishonour men for God’s sake with words and risk his life for the everlasting mercy of almighty God. For this piety, Hrafn was slandered by many men, because they felt that he was letting Þorvaldur get away [with doing whatever he wanted] as the poet Guðmundur Galtason told Hrafn’s sister Guðrún when she asked what he gossip he had heard concerning the dealings of Hrafn and his men. He spoke this poem: ‘I hear gossip / that Hrafn is criticised / and is called a coward / but the masses do not understand. / I would speak truthfully / about this warrior: / he is never uncautious / in all his doings.’)

In *Porgils saga skarða*, other qualities of Christian leadership are pushed to the forefront to be represented by the protagonist, Porgils. The first of these

³⁴⁹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 917-8.

(namely, hardiness and keeping to his word) are mentioned when he is first introduced into the saga:

Hann var hraustur og harðger, syndur vel og hinn mesti harðfari í hvívetna, fámæltur og fastheitinn. Hvort sem hann hét góðu eða illu þá var hann ör í að efna.³⁵⁰

(He was brave and hardy, swam well and was the most hardfaring in all things. He spoke little but was quick to anger. Whatever he promised – whether for good or ill – he was swift to deliver upon his word.)

Another characteristic is Porgils' courage to save the lives of others, which is best represented by his response to a fire which broke out during his time serving King Hákon in Norway:

Konungur kvað á hvar Porgils skyldi standa en hann vildi fram ganga miklu lengra. Fékk hann svo mikinn háska við það að það þótti með ólíkindum er hann hélt lífi meiðingarlaust. Um síðir lét konungur taka langskipsegl og gera alvott og bera að eldinum. Varð það þá um síðir að eldurinn sloknaði með guðs miskunn og hamingju konungs. En Porgils fékk þann orðróm af konungi sjálfum og öllum öðrum er vissu að engi maður hefði þar jafnvel borið sig og borgist sem hann í jafnmiklum háska svo sem Sturla Þórðarson hefir kveðið í erfidrápu þeirri er hann orti um Porgils.³⁵¹

(The king told where Porgils should stand but he wanted to go much further forward. He put himself in so great peril that it was thought unlikely that he would survive unscathed. Eventually, the king had a longship sail made completely soaked and this was borne onto the fire. Finally, it transpired that the fire was extinguished by God's grace and the king's good fortune. Porgils received praise from the king himself and all others who knew that no-one had departed themselves so well and worthily as well as he had in such great peril. Sturla Þórðarson has said

³⁵⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 571.

³⁵¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 580.

as much in the funeral poem which he composed about Porgils.)

Further features which Porgils demonstrates are loyalty and integrity as demonstrated by the following alleged direct quotations from him (which nevertheless were most likely neither transcribed verbatim by the author of *Porgils saga skarða* nor words that the historical Porgils ever actually uttered):

[Porgils saga skarða, chapter 14]

Porgils bað hann eigi heitast við sig ‘en gæt þess bóndi að þú stelst eigi á mig því að það mun illa fyrir mælast ef eg sný baki við þér ef vér erum jafnliða og jafnbúnir. En það sem konungur hefir mér skipað, hvort sem eru ríki eða eignir, þá ætla eg að heimta sem eg vinnst til, hvort sem varðveitir Hrafn eða Nikulás’.³⁵²

(Porgils told him to keep control of his temper and said ‘mark this, householder, that you do not steal from me because it would be poorly spoken of if we were equally numbered and equipped and I were to yield. That which the king has allotted to me, whether a domain or properties, I intend to get as best I can, irrespective of what Hrafn or Nikulás possess.)

[Porgils saga skarða, chapter 16]

Porgils kvaðst þess ósannur vera: ‘veit eg eigi hvort fyrr mundi fara að Hákon konungur mundi slíkt níðingsverk fyrir mig leggja eða eg mundi undir það játa’.³⁵³

(Porgils said that this was untrue: ‘I do not know which would be more unlikely: that King Hákon would command me to do such a despicable deed or that I would obey such an order.)

Despite the fact that Hrafn and Porgils emphasise different elements of Christian leadership, there are a couple of important points of similarity.

³⁵² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 594.

³⁵³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 598.

Hrafn and Porgils both apparently benefit from the patronage of Bishop Guðmundur in their sagas.³⁵⁴ In *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*, Hrafn is a supporter of the bishop, and receives a sunstone as a gift from him. As for *Porgils saga skarða*, Bishop Guðmundur makes the following prognostication concerning Porgils' future and gives him a gold brooch:

Porgils var elstur sona Böðvars. Guðmundur biskup biskupaði hann tvævetran og spurði hveðrar ættar hann væri. Honum var sagt. Biskup var þá að spurður hvað honum litist um sveininn. Hann mælti: 'ef þessi maður bíður aldurs og þroska þá mun hann verða hraustur maður og mikill höfðingi. En eigi kemur það að mér óvörum að hann verði eigi ellidauður.' Guðmundur gaf sveininum gullsylgju og mælti vel fyrir honum.³⁵⁵

(Porgils was Böðvar's eldest son. Bishop Guðmundur confirmed him when Porgils was two years old and asked which family he belonged to. He was told. The bishop was then asked what he thought the boy's fate would be. He said: 'if this man reaches age and maturity then he will become a valiant man and a great leader. However, it does not seem to me that he will die of old age.' Guðmundur gave the boy a gold clasp and blessed him.)

Furthermore, we see parallel deaths for Hrafn and Porgils in their respective sagas. Firstly, in both we see a failure to take due precautions against attack. On the one hand, in *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*, Hrafn does not post a guard to catch Þorvaldur when the latter comes to slay him, as he was of the view that no-one would risk their immortal soul by attacking during Lent. On the other hand, in *Porgils saga skarða*, Porgils also fails to post sentries the evening before his death.

³⁵⁴ Additionally, in *Porgils saga skarða*, Porgils has a very positive relationship with Bishop Henrik.

³⁵⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 570-1.

Secondly, the following accounts of events in *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* and *Porgils saga skarða*, which were purported to have taken place prior to the two protagonists' respective deaths, are in striking accord:

[*Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka*]

Pá er Hrafn var kominn í rekkju mátti hann ei sofna. Hann mælti við mann þann er Steingrímur hét að hann skyldi kveða Andrésdrápu. Hann kvað drápuna og eftir hvert erindi talaði Hrafn mart um þá atburði er gerst höfðu í þínsl heilags Andrés postula.³⁵⁶

(When Hrafn got into bed, he was unable to get to sleep. He spoke to that man who was named Steingrímur and told him to recite *Andrésdrápa*. He recited the poem and after each verse, Hrafn spoke at length about the events which had taken place at the passion of the holy apostle Andrew.)

[*Porgils saga skarða*]

Porgils reið til Hrafnagils. Var honum þar vel fagnað. Skipaði hann mönnum sínum þar á bæi. Honum var kostur á boðinn hvað til gamans skyldi hafa, sögur eða dans um kvöldið. Hann spurði hverjar sögur í vali væru. Honum var sagt að til væri saga Tómass erkibiskups og kaus hann hana því að hann elskaði hann framar en aðra helga menn. Var þá lesin sagan og allt þar til er unnið var á erkibiskupi í kirkjunni og högginn af honum krónan. Segja menn að Porgils hætti þá og mælti: 'það mundi vera allfagur dauði.' Litlu síðar sofnaði hann. Var þá hætt sögunni og búist til borða.³⁵⁷

(Porgils rode to Hrafnagil. He was greeted well there. He sent groups of his men off to stay at nearby households. He was then given a choice of what the evening's entertainment would be: sagas or dances. He asked which saga there were available. He was told that the saga about Archbishop Thomas was there and he chose this because Becket was his favourite saint. The saga was now read all the way through to the point where the archbishop was attacked in the church and the top of his head struck off. People say that Porgils halted the saga at

³⁵⁶ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 926.

³⁵⁷ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 734.

that point and said: ‘that would be a wholly beautiful death.’ A little later he fell asleep. The saga was then halted and a meal was prepared.)

Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka and *Porgils saga skarða* are both parasitic of hagiographies of Thomas à Becket (an Icelandic contribution to the corpus, *Thómas saga erkibiskups*, was produced in four versions³⁵⁸) and each sees the untimely demise of their titular protagonist following a betrayal.³⁵⁹ This appears tragic to the secular mind of our time, but, to the medieval Christian believer, both Hrafn Sveinbjarnason and Porgils *skarði* seem assured of a place in heaven.³⁶⁰ Their (pseudo)martyrdoms are thus triumphant occurrences; though Hrafn and Porgils succeeded for a time as chieftains on Earth, they have ascended to new heights of power by achieving a seat at the right hand of God. The inferable moral is that the truly ambitious will seek (and attain) heavenly over earthly rewards.

Incidentally, the respective betrayals of Hrafn and Porgils (leading to what is presented as “martyrdom”) could be seen as containing a political subtext. *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* is conceivably anti-Vatnsfirðingar/ Ísfirðingar propaganda, in that it shows the iniquity of the other leading family in the Vestfirðir in the early thirteenth century. As for

³⁵⁸ An encyclopaedia entry by Alfred Jakobsen (‘*Thómas saga erkibiskups*’ in Philip Pulsiano & Kirsten Wolf (eds.) *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (Abingdon, 1993), pp. 643-4, p. 643f.) gives a good picture of the translation dimension of *Thómas saga erkibiskups*.

³⁵⁹ Jónas Kristjánsson & Peter Foote (trans.), *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland’s Medieval Literature* (Reykjavík, 2007), pp. 192-3 & 198.

³⁶⁰ Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and salvation in Old Norse literature* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 103-14.

Porgils saga skarða, it can be read as a damning critique of the two leading men in Iceland during the 1270s: Hrafn Oddsson and Þorvarður Þórarinnsson. This reading is borne out by the intensely political function that the cult of Thomas à Becket played in medieval Europe: Becket's story was so potent a political instrument that even as late as the 1500s, King Henry VIII of England saw fit to have Becket's shrine and bones destroyed.

3.1.5 – *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*

Arons saga Hjörleifssonar, which is not dissimilar to *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* insofar as it tells of the trials and tribulations of one of Bishop Guðmundur's supporters, likely presented its fourteenth-century audience (primarily members of the Icelandic social and political élite) with a native model of the ideal *chevalier* to emulate.³⁶¹ Incidentally, *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar* is later than most other biographical contemporary sagas about Icelandic laymen, accounting for its heightened emphasis on service to the Norwegian king and the Icelandic Church rather than regional and national leadership in Iceland. Royal retainership is, nonetheless, present as a minor theme in *Pórðar saga kakala* and *Porgils saga skarða*.

On top of embodying the hardiness and courage of Porgils *skarði* when Aron fights at the Battle of Grímsey, the saga alleges that he also possessed the willing to chastise others for wrongdoing and the moderation that Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson did. Additionally, like Porgils and Hrafn, in *Arons*

³⁶¹ Jónas Kristjánsson & Peter Foote (trans.), *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature* (Reykjavík, 2007), pp. 201-2; Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and salvation in Old Norse literature* (Cambridge, 2018), 135-6.

saga Hjörleifssonar Aron has a close connection with (and the patronage of) Bishop Guðmundur. Firstly, Aron is the second in command of the bishop's forces after Eyjólfur Kársson prior to and at the Battle of Grímsey. Secondly, Bishop Guðmundur acknowledges the validity of Aron's place in society (and complementarity to his own position of clerical leadership) as a warrior/knight who protects the Church because that institution is unable to protect itself.³⁶² This is in line with continental manifestations of the concept of chivalry which were strongly associated with the Crusades; moreover, specifically to the northern world, this echoes *Konungs skuggsjá* which states that one of the roles of lay leadership and the knightly class is to protect the Church.³⁶³ Thirdly, after the Battle of Grímsey, Aron is able to treat the wounds he sustained using water blessed by Bishop Guðmundur.³⁶⁴ *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar* was written during the early fourteenth century; consequently, any reading must take due consideration of the fact that it was likely produced as part, or – at least – in the context, of the campaign to have Bishop Guðmundur canonised which was ongoing in Iceland at the time.³⁶⁵

After surviving in Iceland as an outlaw for some time and a brief stint serving Duke Skule, Aron goes on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem before joining King Hákon's retinue. In a protracted section of the saga which discusses

³⁶² Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), p. 246.

³⁶³ Oscar Brenner (ed.), *Speculum regale. Ein altnorwegischer Dialog nach Cod. Arnabagn. 243 Fol. B und den ältesten Fragmenten* (Munich, 1881), pp. 207-8.

³⁶⁴ Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), p. 253.

³⁶⁵ Cf. Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and salvation in Old Norse literature* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 129-30.

Aron's involvement with Þórður *kakali* during the latter's stint in Norway between 1237 and 1242, we see precisely how the protagonist of *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar* embodies the ideal royal retainer.³⁶⁶ To begin with, Þórður is introduced into the saga and the most important elements of his character prior to him meeting Aron are his drunkenness, disorderliness, and out of control expenditure (due to his lavish entertainments which doubtless included gambling):

Í þann tíma var Þórður Sighvatsson, er kallaður var kakali, utan og hafði verið í Nóregi tvo vetur. Hann var vaskur maður og vel menntur, en ekki til spakur við drykkinn, og því var konungur eigi jafnblíður til hans sem ella myndi. Hann var í garði þeim, er Hallvarðsgarður var kallaður. Þann garð átti Hallvarður svarti, hirðmaður konungs og hinn mesti ofrembingur. Og [var] fátt með þeim, því að metnaður braust í milli þeira Þórðar. Þaðan skammt í brott var garður Arons, en þó var fátt með þeim Aroni og Þórði, enda er þar jafnan fátt, er ólíkara er til. Þann vetur var Bárður, bróðir Arons, á vist með honum og var jafnan í skemmtan með Þórði, því að vegir hans lágu til Íslands, og vildi hann hallast til við hann. Og tók Þórður því vel, en Aron lagði þar ekki til. Þórður helt sig kappsamliga og sína menn, og varð honum kostnaðarsamt, og gekk upp féið mjög. Þá var með honum Hrani Koðránsson, fylgðarmaður hans, og Þórður þumli, hinn þriði hét Pétur, inn fjórði var skósveinn, er Eysteinn hét. Það bar til eitt kveld, að Þórður drakk í skytningi, þar sem drykkur var áfengur. Og er á leið kveldið, gengu þeir menn í brott, er stillingar[menn] voru. En Þórður sat eftir og nokkrir handgengnir menn. En er á leið nottina, sló í kappmæli með þeim og áhöld, svo að þeir börðust með honum og skriðljósum. Þórður var harðger maður og aflamikill. Urðu þeir mjög vanhluta, er í móti voru, og urðu bæði bláir og blóðugir. Voru þeir skildir um síðir, og fer hver til síns herbergis og sofa af nottina. Eftir það kemur morginn, og er tíðum var lokið, ganga þeir fyrir konung, er vanhluta höfðu orðið, og segja honum. Konungr leggur nú fæð á Þórð, en semur þó málið. Nú líður sumarið, og tekur fast að

³⁶⁶ Here I follow and extend the reading of this part of the saga by Haki Antonsson (*Damnation and salvation in Old Norse literature* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 135).

óhægjast fjárhagur Þórðar, og gengur upp í kostnað allt það, er laust er.³⁶⁷

(At that time, Þórður Sighvatsson, who was called *kakali*, was abroad and had been in Norway for two winters. He was a manly man and well-bred, but not too wise with drink, and for this the king was not as equally mild with him as he would have been otherwise. He was in that house which was called Hallvardsgard. That house was owned by Hallvard svarte, a retainer of the king and the most arrogant person. And there was coolness between them, because Þórður and he were in competition for honour. A little way away was Aron's house, however, there was coolness between Aron and Þórður, because there is always coolness where difference exists. That winter, Aron's brother Bárður was staying with him and was constantly being entertained by Þórður, because he was going back to Iceland and wanted to be on good terms with him. Þórður took this well but Aron did not pass comment about it. Þórður richly lavished himself and his men and it became very expensive for him, for he spent much wealth. With him at that time were Hrani Koðráns­son, his retainer, and Þórður *pumli*, a third who was named Pétur, and a fourth was his servant who was named Eysteinn. It happened one evening that Þórður was drinking in the inn, where the drink was intoxicating. And as the evening drew on the moderate men left. But Þórður remained with some of the king's retainers. And as the evening drew on, he was drawn into a dispute and brawl with them, so that they battered each other with horns and lanterns. Þórður was hardy and very strong. Those who were against him came off worse: they had been beaten blue and bloody. Eventually they were separated, and each went to his quarters and slept overnight. After that, morning dawned, and when morning prayer was over, those who had lost the fight went before the king and told him. The king now went cold towards Þórður, but nevertheless righted the dispute. Now summer drew on, and the troubles with Þórður's finances quickened, and now all that was loose was used to pay his expenses.)

Clearly, the fact that it is openly stated that Þórður and Aron had a cold relationship due to the differences between the two of them is a *double entendre*: not only has Aron been hounded from Iceland by Þórður's father

³⁶⁷ Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finn­bogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), p. 274.

and brother, but the author of *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar* is seeking to juxtapose the two characters' personal qualities (with Þórður being a drunken spoilt lout and Aron not so).³⁶⁸ Despite the attempt to distance Aron from Þórður's alleged way of life when the latter first came to Norway, it is noted that Þórður has some redeeming qualities and, therefore, that he has the potential to be a great man if someone sought to refine him.

The unlikely friendship between Aron and Þórður commences after the deaths of Sighvatur and his sons (Þórður's father and brothers) at the Battle of Örlýgsstaðir. Aron takes pity on Þórður, whose money has also just run dry, and here we see two more chivalric qualities embodied by Aron (largesse and the Christian mercy-peacemaking-forgiveness complex of virtues):

Nú er liðið er nokkuð af vetri, þá kemur vestan af Orkneyjum skip það, er á var sýslumaður konungs, er Finnur hét. Þann sama dag gekk Bárður, bróðir Arons, á fund Þórðar til skemmtanar. Þeir Þórður og Hrani sátu at skáktafli. Þeir buðu Bárði undir borð, og svo gerir hann. Því næst kom þar inn Hallvarður bóndi og gekk snúðigt. Engar voru kveðjur af Þórði. Bárður heilsaði Hallvarði og spurði, hvaðan hann kom að. Hann sagðist hafa verið á konungsgarði. 'Hvað var þar tíðinda?' segir Bárður. 'Eigi skortir tíðindi frá frændum yðrum af Íslandi, bardagar stórir og höfðingjalát og mannafall mikið.' 'Hverir hafa höfðingjar látist?' segir Bárður. 'Sighvatur og Sturla og allir synir hans.' Þá lét Þórður af taflinu og svarar svá tíðendum: 'fleira slátra Íslendingar en baulum einum, ef satt er.' Þórður gekk í konungsgarð og vildi heyra tíðindin. En er hann kom þar, [voru] honum sömu tíðindi flutt. Í þessum atburðum bar margar skapraunir at Þórði, fyrst í mannaláti og missi svo göfugra frænda, og þar með var hann orðinn penningalauss, svo að hann mátti eigi halda fylgdarmenn sína, og þar með var hann orðinn fyrir fæð nokkurri af konunginum, er flestum þykkir

³⁶⁸ Haki Antonsson (*Damnation and salvation in Old Norse literature* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 135) sees another juxtaposition in the saga (between Sturla Sighvatsson and Aron Hjörleifsson).

þyngst fyrir að verða. Gengu nú allir menn hans frá honum nema skósveinn hans. Bar hann sig vel. Nú fréttir Aron þessi tíðindi, og var honum það engi harmsaga, sem von var. En þó fannst það á, að honum þótti Þórður þá lítt við kominn. En er Bárður fann það, þá mælti hann við bróður sinn, að hann skyldi Þórð vita [láta], að Aron Hjörleifsson væri nokkru betri drengur en alþýða manna, svo sem margir mæltu. Í þessum flutningi [var] Ragnhildr, kona Arons, með Bárði. Aron tók af engu mikið ok lést ekki vita, hversu Þórður myndi taka hans máli, og kvað sér ofgert þykkja, ef hann tæki lítt. En Bárður kveðst búinn það að forvitnast af Þórði. Gekk Bárður til fundar við Þórð. Höfðu [þeir] skamma stund við talast, áður Bárður frétti Þórð, hversu hann myndi taka, ef Aron vildi nokkrum orðum á hann verpa. En Þórður kveðst Aron einskis eiga að kunna, kveðst ætla, að það eitt hefði hann gert í móti frændum hans, að hann hefði nauður til rekið, – ‘oss hefir einn hlutur mislíkat við Aron.’ Bárður spurði, hver sá væri. ‘Hann hafði nokkur orð í móti, þá [er] eg skylda gerast hirðmaður, og vildi eigi vera lögumautur minn.’ Eftir það skildu þeir tal sitt, og fór Bárður og sagði Aroni tal Þórðar og svör. Aron lét sér fátt um finnast. Nú líðr af nóttin, ok kemr dagur. Varð Ragnhildr vör, at Þórður hefir sett út þann hinn eina grip, er hann átti, svo að fé tæki. Það var ein skarlatsskikkja, fóðruð hvítum skinum. Hún segir Aroni, hvar þá var komið. Knýja þau Bárður bæði, ef hann vildi nokkurn hlut að eiga og fresta ekki lengur. Aron spratt þá upp og gekk við hinn þriðja mann til lofts Þórðar. Var hann þar einn og skósveinn með honum. En þegar Aron kom í loftið, stóð Þórður upp og heilsaði Aroni og tók í hönd honum. Þórður talaði við sveininn hljótt, og gekk hann í [brott], og því næst kom hinn mjaðarbytra, og drukku með gleði um daginn. Þórður sagði, að hann vildi, að Aron dveldist þar um daginn, ef hann vildi ekki lengur. Aron kveðst til þess þar kominn að bjóða honum til sinna herbergja, ef það mætti vera nokkru eftirlátligra en það, sem áður var, og láta þann [veg] ráð gerast. Þórður kvað þá ekki fleiri bjóða sér sæmdir, en sagðist ekki vilja hendi við drepa, – ‘þykkir mér nú daufligt gerast samsætið.’ Sendir Aron þegar og lætr taka skikkjuna, þar sem hún lá á torgi. Ganga nú allir í garð Arons. Hafði Þórður þar góðar viðtökur. Var Þórður þar þrjár vikur í samt. Og á þat ofan bauð Aron honum, að eitt skyldi yfir þá ganga, meðan Þórður vildi það þiggja. Hann tók vel undir það og talaði mörgum sæmdarorðum til Arons.³⁶⁹

(Now when it somewhat drew to winter, a ship came west from the Orkneys on which was a man named Finn, who was the king's sherrif. That same day, Aron's brother Bárður went to

³⁶⁹ Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), pp. 274-6.

meet Þórður for entertainments. Þórður and Hrani were sat at a chess-table. They asked Bárður to take a seat at the table, and so he did. Next the householder Hallvard arrived walking swiftly. Þórður did not acknowledge him with a greeting. Bárður greeted Hallvard and asked from where he had come. He said he had been at the king's palace. 'What was the news there?' asked Bárður. 'There is no lack of news about your kinsmen in Iceland: a large battle has taken place where leaders died and many men fell besides.' 'Which leaders have died?' asked Bárður. 'Sighvatur and Sturla and all his [i.e., Sighvatur's] sons.' Then Þórður got up from the table and replied to this news: 'a greater slaughter of Icelanders than a single cow, if this is true.' Þórður went to the king's palace and wanted to hear the news. And when he came there, he was told the same news. These events caused Þórður much torment, first at the deaths of the men and the loss of so noble kinsmen, and along with this he had become penniless, so that he was not able to retain his followers, and along with this he had come to be regarded somewhat coldly by the king, which most think is the worst possible outcome. All his men no left him except for his servant. He bore himself well. Now Aron learned this news, and it was no grief-inducing tale to him, as was to be expected. However, it was apparent that he felt sorry for Þórður. And when Bárður discovered that, then he said to his brother that he should let Þórður know that Aron Hjörleifsson was a somewhat more noble a man than all other men, such as many had said. Arons wife, Ragnhildur, joined Barður in this pleading. This did not elicit much of a response from Aron and said he did not know how Þórður would take his words, and said he would think he had transgressed if Þórður took it badly. But Bárður said that he was willing to ask Þórður. Bárður went to meet with Þórður. They had talked for a little while before Bárður asked Þórður how he would take it if Aron wanted to address some words to him. And Þórður said he knew of no contention with Aron, said he thought that what he had done against his kinsmen was only what necessity had driven him to, - 'we have only disliked one thing about Aron.' Bárður asked what that would be. He had some words against me when I was made a retainer, and he did not want to be my messmate. After that they separated from their talk and Bárður went to Aron and repeated Þórður's words and responses. Aron granted little attention to this. Now night drew on and day dawned. Ragnhildur became aware that Þórður had sold the last piece of property he had to get some funds. It was a scarlet cloak lined with white skins. She told Aron where it had gone. They urged him on and not to delay if he wanted to do something. Aron sprang up and then went with Bárður to Þórður's loft. He was on his own apart from his servant. And when Aron came into the loft, Þórður stood up and

greeted Aron and took him in hand. Þórður talked with the servant in a low voice, and he went away, and then next came in the mead-tub and they drank gladly during the day. Þórður said that he wanted Aron to remain there during the day, if not longer. Aron said to this that he had come to invite him to his rooms, if that might be somewhat more pleasing than that which he had before, and they laid plans for that to happen. Þórður said then that he had no more honourable invitations, and said he would not wave it off, - 'I think now that entertainment has become dull.' Aron immediately sent someone to get the cloak from where it was in the marketplace. They all now went to Aron's house. There, Þórður had good hospitality. Þórður was there continuously for three weeks. And on top of that, Aron made to him the offer that one thing should befall them both, while Þórður wanted to accept it. He echoed that favourably and spoke many honourable words to Aron.)

Aron's kindness and generosity has served to end the bitter dispute with Þórður's family by peaceful means: there has been no need to recourse to violence and now the two are united with a strong bond of friendship.

Þórður's new friendship with Aron has a civilising effect on the former, with the archetypal royal retainer gently tutoring him in courtly manners such that he ends up with a positive relationship with the Norwegian king:

Og nokkrum tíma síðar gengu þeir til konungs og vildu koma Þórði í meiri kærleika við konung en áður hafði verið, og varð erfitt um það, og hurfu frá að sinni. En nokkru síðar talar Þórður við Aron, að hann muni ekki oftast þess í leit vera við konung. Aron sagði ekki svo vera skyldu, 'því að þar verður jafnan hinn lægri að lúta, sem minni mannamunur er, og verður það jafnan til mikillar sæmdar.' 'Þú skalt ráða, Aron,' segir Þórður, 'því að eg finn jafnan þinn sannan góðvilja við mig, og kannt margt gerla að sjá.' Og einn dag, er skammt var til jóla, gengu þeir á konungs fund og kvöddu hann. Tók Aron svo til orðs: 'Herra, hér er Þórður kominn á fund yðvarn, og vildim vér flytja hans mál til meiri blíðu en svo sem áður hefir verið, og viljum vér þess beiða, að þér gerið fyrir honum nokkuð ráð, það [er] honum sé til sæmdar.' Konungurinn þagði. Þá mælti Þórður: 'Það vilda eg, herra, að þér leyfðið mér að fara úr landi og leita til annarra höfðingja.' Konungur neitaði því, og við það fóru þeir í brott. Fám dögum síðar koma menn úr konungsgarði til Arons og

sögðu honum konungs orð, að hann bauð þeim Aroni til jólaveislu, að þeir skyldi drekka með honum um jólin, og það þágu þeir. Hóf upp brún við þetta, og hugðu, að hér myndi meiri sæmdir eftir koma. Drekkja nú þar um jólin. Og hinn næsta dag eftir ganga þeir fyrir konung og þakka fyrir góða veislu. Þá mælti konungur: 'mun ekki það sæmiligt, Aron, at eg taka undir með þér nokkuð, og mun Þórður hér eftir vera með oss.' Aron kveðst svo helst mundu kjósa, að væri. Og [skilja þeir] nú Þórður og Aron fyrst að sinni og voru jafnan góðir vinir. Var Þórður nokkra vetur síðan með konungi.³⁷⁰

(And some time after they went to the king and wanted Þórður to come into more friendly terms with the king than before had been, but about that it happened to be difficult, and they turned away from it for a time. And somewhat later Þórður said to Aron that he would not again bring this up with the king. Arons said that should not be so, 'because the lower always comes to give way when he is the comparatively lesser man, and great honours always come of that.' 'You shall advise, Aron,' said Þórður, 'because I always find confirmation of your goodwill to me, and you can see much fully.' And one day, which was shortly before Yule, they went to meet the king and greeted him. Aron took to speaking as such: 'lord, here Þórður had come to meet you, and we wish to bring his case to a more agreeable position that it has been before, and we want to ask this, that you make for him some plan, that which to him could be honourable.' The king was silent. Then Þórður said: 'it is my desire, lord, that you give me leave to go abroad and search for the other leaders.' The king refused that, and with that they went away. A few days after men came to Aron from the king's palace and told him a message from the king: he had invited Aron and the rest to a Yule feast, that they may drink with him during Yule and they accepted that. Their eyebrows raised at this, and they thought that from here would come more honour. Now they drank there during Yule. And the next day after they went before the king and thanked him for his good hospitality. Then the king spoke: 'would it not be seemly, Aron, that I second you somewhat and Þórður will be here with us after.' Aron said he still would choose that to be so. And Þórður and Aron now parted from each other for a while and they were always good friends. Þórður was with the king for some winters after.)

³⁷⁰ Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason & Kristján Eldjárn (eds.) *Sturlunga saga* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1946), pp. 276-7.

That behaving correctly in a royal court setting (especially, but not limited to, the possession of courtly manners) is a key attribute required by a royal retainers is attested by *Konungs skuggsjá*, which makes repeated reference to the need for the king's men to deport themselves well in his service and presence.³⁷¹ Aron clearly has the necessary attributes and behaviours, indicating that he is able to serve the king in a positive way.

Furthermore, Aron's teaching of courtly manners to Þórður, whom in retrospect should be designated one of the greatest figures in Icelandic history (and was indeed openly acknowledged as such during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries), serves to suggest that Aron reformed Þórður from a flawed individual of great potential into a better person who was capable of achieving the runaway success he did when he came to seize control of all Iceland during the 1240s. The pedagogical aspect to Aron and Þórður's friendship underscores Aron's representation as the ideal *chevalier* in *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar* because he is what is imitated.

3.1.6 – Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar

In the vast majority of royal depictions in all art forms – from portraiture to literature – produced throughout history, the king or queen who serves as the artistic subject is represented in an idealised form (in the Platonic sense of the word “ideal”). It should be of little surprise, therefore, to

³⁷¹ E.g., Oscar Brenner (ed.), *Speculum regale. Ein altnorwegischer Dialog nach Cod. Arnemagn. 243 Fol. B und den ältesten Fragmenten* (Munich, 1881), pp. 72-5 & 109-12.

find that the eponymous protagonists, the Kings Sverre and Håkon, in their respective sagas, *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, are little more than vessels for particular clusters of positive personal and vocational attributes.

Many of the literary Sverre's characteristics were covered in chapter 2 where we noted the similarities in the representations of he in *Sverris saga* and Þórður in *Pórðar saga kakala* (and, by extension, **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*). It is not worth repeating that discussion at length here; however, to summarise (and supplement) that discussion somewhat, *Sverris saga* presents Sverre as possessing a few key personal qualities: emotional intelligence, a charismatic style of leadership, rhetorical skill, and – importantly – royal blood which is important 'not primarily because it confers the *right* to rule, but because it is likely to produce men who are *able* to rule'.³⁷² Bagge claims that King Sverre's personal qualities shine through in *Sverris saga* when compared with King Håkon in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*; however, this does not mean that the depiction of Sverre is "more real" than Håkon: both characters are idealised in their respective sagas.

It is worth noting that the *Sverris saga* writing project was started at the behest of King Sverre himself, whom sat beside Abbot Karl Jónsson, the writer of *Grýla* (which was used as the basis – i.e., likely copied verbatim – for the first part of *Sverris saga*), as the latter worked.³⁷³ Considering

³⁷² Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense, 1996), pp. 86-7.

³⁷³ Þorleifur Hauksson (ed.), *Íslensk fornrit* vol. 30 (Reykjavík, 2007), p. 3.

Sverre's presence at the writing of the *Grýla* portion of *Sverris saga* alongside the fact that his speeches in the saga 'show... his propagandistic – not to say demagogical – skill', it is no great stretch to imagine that the idealised portrait of the exceptionally charismatic and skilful leader was intended as a propaganda piece designed to bolster Sverre's rule at a time in Norwegian history when 'the king could not expect obedience or respect because of his office or consecration but only through his personal ability, as demonstrated in an attractive personality and, above all, success'.³⁷⁴ Furthermore, it probably did not hurt Sverre's cause that *Sverris saga* immortalised his claim to royal birth in writing, especially given his dubious provenance as a pretender (a fact which he admits himself in his saga).³⁷⁵

As with *Sverris saga*, we were introduced to *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* back in chapter 2. It was noted there that *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* was written by Sturla Þórðarson at the royal court between 1263 and 1265; moreover, the contrast between Sturla's description of events in *Íslendinga saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* was also remarked upon. It is no stretch to suggest – as previous scholars have – that *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* was written from the perspective of and for the Norwegian Crown. But to what end was the character of King Hákon mobilised in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*?

³⁷⁴ Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense, 1996), pp. 87-8.

³⁷⁵ Þorleifur Hauksson (ed.), *Íslensk fornrit* vol. 30 (Reykjavík, 2007), p. 153.

In Sverre Bagge's view, the saga captures the fully developed royal ideology of thirteenth-century Norway.³⁷⁶ Nevertheless, I would add to this by suggesting that by showing King Håkon as the model of righteous kingship, it served to support the rule of his son, King Magnus (who ascended the throne in 1263), during a time when the crown was peacefully transiting from one head to another for only the second time in Norway since the accession of King Sigurd Jorsalfar in 1103 (the first time being the relatively peaceful accession of Magnus' father Håkon in 1217).

One might well ask how a saga about Magnus' father would have helped to bolster his position as the new king. Let us recall (from chapter 2) that by this point in the history of ideas in Norway (and Iceland), the (once exclusively protobiological) concept of heredity had expanded to accommodate a new theological-legal dimension of hereditary election (or succession) according to the laws of God and men. As the son of an archetypal *rex iustus*, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* would have suggested to the audience that Magnus would most likely have inherited the ability to rule well from Håkon (and, thus, that he was probably the best man for the job); furthermore, due to the evolution of the concept of heredity to include novel ideas about the right to rule by the time of King Magnus, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* would have further supported Magnus' right to be king after Håkon by materially preserving the memory of his father's rule. Magnus' command to Sturla to record his father's reign right at the start of his own shows that the new king was conscious of the fickleness and intangibility of

³⁷⁶ Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense, 1996), p. 158.

the memory of the old king; consequently, Magnus wanted something concrete to anchor his new kingship to, setting in stone (or, rather, on vellum) precisely where his right to rule stemmed from and what he had inherited. The latter point may explain the tediousness of *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (by virtue of its prolixity and unnecessary degree of detail provided) for, apart from showing a paragon of righteous kingship, the saga provides thorough coverage of the duties and privileges of the royal office as well as the extent of the Norwegian realm. This seems a better explanation than that provided by previous critics for the saga's dullness – that is – that Sturla deliberately made the saga as dry as possible because of his fraught relations with King Hákon.³⁷⁷

3.1.7 – The horizon of expectation

In this section, we have seen how biographical contemporary sagas mobilise their subjects to shape “policy” through satire, to legitimise authority, and to promote ethical leadership. Taking a bird's-eye view, it is clear that we have seen how the biographical contemporary sagas work to instil ideology by utilising the biographical subject as a concrete vessel for exploring particular ideas (or, at the very least, political stance).

This indicates that it was not the purpose of the biographical contemporary sagas to faithfully record the details of the subject's life. Rather, these sagas used historical individuals as examples – to give the

³⁷⁷ For a discussion of this, cf. Hans Jacob Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence: Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 42-3).

vener of facticity – in carefully selected and curated narratives to take advantage of the propensity of humans (as *homo narrans*) to seek and internalise stories. The internalisation of a narrative has an effect on behaviour and belief, which is why stories have a utility for those seeking to guide action in the present in order to shape the future.

This is unsurprising: it has long been held that the sagas (and not just biographical contemporary sagas at that) had significant political utility to their medieval authors and/ or sponsors, with scholars deploying a wide range of arguments from the materialistic (by considering the immense cost of producing vast codices of vellum) to the analytical (by considering the content of the texts in light of historical context).

While saga literature was used for political ends since the form's inception, there appears to have been a prioritisation of the deployment of the sagas for political communication – over against their use for instructing individuals in behavioural strategies for attaining power and honour in this life and the next – from shortly after 1264 (a “propagandistic turn” in saga literature), when the struggle for ultimate hegemony in Iceland during the Age of the Sturlungar gave way to a tussle over what meaning(s) should be drawn from the events of the recent past and, as a result, what direction Icelandic society and the government thereof should take going forward.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁸ Helgi Þorláksson, ‘The Bias and alleged impartiality of Sturla Þórðarson’ in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, chieftain and lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 200-11, p. 208.

3.2 – The political **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*

We must now turn to an historical analysis of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* itself. The historical-critical method applied in this section strives to intuit the contemporary significance of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* by exploring its main themes in light of the social context of the addressees, including the historical context (events and cultural conditions) at the time of writing.

In terms of the overarching thematic concerns of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, the literary analysis in chapter 2 (which took into account the formal elements of the text and the worldview of the saga's 1270s audience) shall constitute our point of departure.

The target audience of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* lived during the 1270s and – given its status as a written document – we may presume that the primary audience was composed of members of Iceland's (and, to a limited extent, Norway's) social and political élite, because these individuals were the most likely to be able to read with an interest in the saga's subject matter.

In terms of contextualisation, the “high” political history of the 1270s was treated in the introduction, and some cultural conditions (especially literary context) were covered there and in subsequent chapters. Our picture of cultural conditions was completed in the previous section of this chapter where a deep understanding of the subgeneric context of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* (i.e., as a biographical contemporary saga) was provided.

3.2.1 – Hrafn Oddsson versus Þorvarður Þórarinnsson: A power struggle fought in the field of symbolic capital

It is worth beginning by noting that Þórður's clash with Gissur Þorvaldsson (another royal retainer and prominent Icelandic chieftain), the second main conflict of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, clearly parallels the power struggle between the two top retainers in Iceland during the years 1273 to 1279, Hrafn Oddsson and Þorvarður Þórarinnsson. There is good reason to believe that the author of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was trying to get his audience to bear the conflict between Hrafn and Þorvarður in mind when reading the second half of the saga. To give an example, there is the comment made in chapter 49 of *Þórðar saga kakala* that Hálfðan and Steinvör (the parents in-law of Þorvarður) did not think much of Þórður's men, a group which included Hrafn (even if he had not been based in Eyjafjörður during Þórður's trip to Norway in 1246-7). However, let us recall a few choice details from the previous section of this chapter which show that the correspondence between the narrative past in **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* and the historical present of 1270s Iceland are not limited to this single episode in chapter 49.

Like Þórður, Hrafn effectively ruled Iceland alone for a period of three years (Þórður from 1247 to 1250; Hrafn from 1270 to 1273); this came to an end when the Norwegian king decided that he was to share power with Þorvarður, similarly to how Þórður was recalled to Norway and saw some areas of Iceland he had controlled – and left under the stewardship of his own men – handed out to a party of King Hákon's other Icelandic retainers,

headed by Gissur. The struggle between Þorvarður and Hrafn to rule all Iceland on the king's behalf would last until 1279, when the latter became leader of the retinue in Iceland and, thus, sole governor the country. However, in Þórður's case, this did not take place due to his untimely death in 1256; instead it was Gissur who became the Earl of Iceland in 1258.

Árna saga biskups reports that, during the course of the jostling between the two great magnates for ultimate authority within Iceland, Bishop Árni said that it would be best – if one man was to govern alone – for that individual to be Hrafn: 'Þar næst var talað um formenn og ríkisstjórn á Íslandi og segir biskup Hrafn Oddsson best fallinn af íslenskum mönnum til að ráða einn fyrir öllu landi' ('Next, he spoke of the prominent men and governance of Iceland, and the bishop said that Hrafn Oddsson was best suited of the Icelanders to rule alone overall in that land').³⁷⁹ Evidently, this appraisal stung Þorvarður's ego, for there is also a lot of bitterness towards Hrafn and Árni in a letter by Þorvarður to King Magnus which *Árna saga biskups* purports to record.³⁸⁰

Árni's appraisal of Hrafn and Þorvarður echoes what one might infer from Cardinal William's ambiguous judgment of Gissur and Þórður's case in *Þórðar saga kakala*. The question is: why would Árni (or anyone else for that matter) have believed Hrafn would be the best man for the job? As noted, we have read **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* as providing two necessary criteria

³⁷⁹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 800.

³⁸⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 798-9.

for a national leader: excellent personal qualities (which Þórður possessed) and membership of the royal family (which Gissur did).

In the first instance, Bishop Árni and others probably based their opinion on a perception of Hrafn having more commendable characteristics than Þorvarður. Although we ought be conservative with our use of *Árna saga biskups* for the account of the troubles between Árni and Þorvarður – there was undoubtedly a particularly poor relationship between the two during the 1270s.³⁸¹ It is important to stress, however, that this was not conflict of the intensity seen during the Age of the Sturlungar: ‘þar næst stóð sú klausa að biskup kvaðst nær við alla handgengna menn vel koma skapi utan við Þorvarð en segir þó engin sakferli þeirra í millum’ (‘the next thing that the bishop mentioned was that he had essentially good relations with all the king’s men except for Þorvarður; however, he noted that there was no lawsuit between them’).³⁸² Consequently, in Árni’s case, his negative impression of Þorvarður *vis-à-vis* Hrafn may have been exacerbated by his bitter conflict with the Þorvarður which came to a head in 1276.

Possibly to create the impression that Þorvarður was less eligible than Hrafn in the minds of contemporaries, the latter’s positive attributes were explored on two levels in **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*.

On the one hand, when read literally, *Þórðar saga kakala* provides an idealised portrait of Hrafn. Þórður’s first encounter with him in *Þórðar saga kakala* encourages the reader to seek out the many examples of the plucky

³⁸¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 796-8.

³⁸² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 800).

young man's worthy conduct (and, thus, personal qualities) throughout the narrative. To give one example, consider the underscoring of Hrafn's largesse and loyalty in the following passage:

Hrafn Oddsson bauð honum þá að taka við búi á Eyri. Þórður þekktist það og þakkaði honum með mörgum orðum sem aðra vinsamlega hluti þá er Hrafn veitti honum.³⁸³

(Hrafn Oddsson offered him management of the farm of Hrafnseyri. Þórður accepted this and thanked him with many words for this and Hrafn's service to him, as he did all his friends who helped him.³⁸⁴)

On the other hand, one can also view the contrast between Þórður's positive and Kolbeinn's negative qualities in the first main conflict of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* from a figurative standpoint as a tacit comparison of Hrafn's and Þorvarður's personal attributes. This nonliteral reading would have been encouraged by two convenient historical facts. Firstly, much like Kolbeinn *ungi* (after the Battle of Örlygsstaðir), Þorvarður had taken advantage of a power vacuum in Eyjafjörður after the slaying of one of the Sturlungar (Eyjólfur *ofsi* Þorsteinsson) at the Battle of Þverá (1255), killing another prominent member of the family – Þorgils *skarði* Böðvarsson (in 1258) – during his attempt between 1256 and 1258 to assert control over northeastern Iceland. Secondly, much like Þórður *kakali* (after the Battle of Haugsnes), Hrafn defeated a sometime leader of Skagafjörður – Oddur Þórarinsson (the brother of Þorvarður) – in 1254 and annexed the region.

³⁸³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 511.

³⁸⁴ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 193.

Furthermore, the judgment of Bishop Árni and others between Hrafn and Porvarður was likely also based on a consideration of their family ties. Hrafn and Porvarður were both married to blood relatives of the Norwegian king. Yet, one had a better claim to royal status than the other. Hrafn was married to Puríður, the legitimate daughter of Solveig, the legitimate daughter of Sæmundur, the legitimate son Jón Loftsson, the legitimate son of Póra, the illegitimate daughter of King Magnus Berrføtt. It is worth noting that *Pórðar saga kakala* makes a point of noting Hrafn's marriage to Puríður Sturludóttir:

Það er að segja frá þeim vestur í sveitunum að í þenna tíma það Hrafn Oddsson Puríðar Sturludóttur. Flutti Pórður það mjög og var brúðlaup þeirra að Sauðafelli um sumarið.³⁸⁵

(Concerning those living in the western districts, it is to be reported that at this time Hrafn Oddsson wooed Puríður Sturludóttir. Pórður strongly supported this, and their wedding was held during the summer at Sauðafell.³⁸⁶)

Hrafn's rival Porvarður was married to Solveig, the legitimate daughter of Hálfðan, the illegitimate son of Sæmundur Jónsson. Hrafn's connection with the royal family – like Gissur's – was therefore suggested by **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* as a second reason why he should come out the victor in his conflict with Porvarður (and so succeed where Pórður, with excellent personal qualities but no membership of the royal family, had failed against his political rival).

³⁸⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 532.

³⁸⁶ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 257.

To those present living through the 1273-9 power struggle between Hrafn and Þorvarður, **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* would have had interesting implications: it served to support the claim of the former to govern Iceland alone on behalf of the Norwegian king, on account of both his superb personal qualities and closer connection to the Norwegian royal family (making Hrafn's qualifications a synthesis of the necessary qualities possessed by Þórður and Gissur). The fit with this power struggle is excellent: **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* put forward a view on what kind of person should govern Iceland whilst marshalling evidence to show how Hrafn fit the mould.

It is important to note that if **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was related to the power struggle between Hrafn and Þorvarður, that this narrows down further the dating of the saga, revising our judgment earlier in this thesis that it was written during the 1270s to a more precise period of 1273-9 (or even as tight a timeframe as 1273-7, given that 1277 was the year that Sturla, Hrafn, and Þorvarður set off to Norway). I take the view that Hrafn's promotion more-or-less marked the end of (or, at least, was the penultimate act of resolution in) the conflict between Hrafn and Þorvarður. Haki Antonsson also takes this view: amongst his discussion about the cause to have Oddur Þórarinsson's double excommunication posthumously lifted, he characterises Hrafn's rendering of 'a considerable fortune to the bishopric of Hólar to cover the outstanding worldly debt that Oddur had owed', which

facilitated Oddur's reinterment in consecrated ground, as 'a gesture of reconciliation of sorts' with Þorvarður.³⁸⁷

I think it is unlikely that Hrafn became involved in the matter of Oddur's immortal soul as early as 1273, because he and Þorvarður were to spend the next six years vying (albeit peacefully by the standards of thirteenth-century Iceland) for overall governorship of the country. It seems more likely to me that Hrafn only involved himself in the issue in 1279, after having secured the top job, as an effort to finally make peace with Þorvarður (who was now to be his underling and, therefore, would be useful to have friendly relations with; for, let us remember, vertical bonds of friendship were of great importance in medieval Icelandic political life). It is clear that the damned state of Oddur's soul would have proved politically useful to Hrafn while the power struggle between he and Þorvarður was ongoing; consequently, it does not make much sense for him to have been involved in the submission of the petition (which produced a letter granting absolution from the pope in 1277 and thus must have taken place prior to 1279). Incidentally, it appears probable that Þorvarður himself would have submitted the petition during the power struggle with Hrafn to attempt to remove this useful propaganda weapon from his opponent's arsenal.

When it came to reinter Oddur's corpse in consecrated ground in 1279, a squabble erupted between the two Icelandic bishops (Jörundur and Árni). According to Haki Antonsson, Jörundur was either ignorant or ignored the 'shift in the Church's stance towards those who died in a state of

³⁸⁷ Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and salvation in Old Norse literature* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 48.

excommunication'.³⁸⁸ I suspect that the historical Jörundur was reticent to reinter Oddur without the funds owed by him to the See of Hólar and was not protesting to the proceedings out of any theological concerns.

If the theological pretense given in *Árna saga biskups* was a fabrication on the part of the saga's author, the intention was likely to bolster Árne's reputation by showing him outclassing the other Icelandic bishop. Simultaneously, the framing of the dispute as a theological one served to obscure Jörundur's real and very worldly complaint relating to the unpaid funds. The denial of a sacrament on the basis of such a base motive as unpaid funds would have brought the office of bishop into disrepute; consequently, it is of little surprise that a text as supportive of ecclesiastical institutions as *Árna saga biskups* would present this as a theological dispute and not a petty squabble over money. The impression of authorial meddling in the narrativisation of these events is augmented by the fact that the chronology is rearranged to suggest that the debt was paid off in 1278 when it cannot have been. In 1278, Hrafn was still in Norway; consequently, the repayment must have happened in 1279 and, furthermore, was probably made to facilitate the reinterment.

By the date of the reinterment in 1279, Hrafn had won the power struggle with Þorvarður so he did not need the state of Oddur's immortal soul to be available to him as a tool of propaganda in a power struggle. Hrafn did, however, need his brand new deputy (who was a long-time enemy) to be

³⁸⁸ Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and salvation in Old Norse literature* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 49.

won over, and what better way to guarantee this than by ensuring his brother's body made it into consecrated ground.

3.2.2 – Hrafn Oddsson versus Bishop Árni Þorláksson: The opening shots in an ideological conflict

If **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was, indeed, propaganda intended to support Hrafn Oddsson politically, we should be able to find further signs of this in *Pórðar saga kakala*. These can be found by reading *Pórðar saga kakala* (and, by extension, **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*) in light of the disputes Bishop Árni and lay magnates in Iceland which revolved around the control of church estates (*Staðamál síðari*; 1269-97) and the respective roles of *regnum et sacerdotium*. Immediately, we find parallels.

One is the account in chapter 9 of *Pórðar saga kakala* where Hallur of Möðruvellir – who, incidentally, is referred to as the second greatest householder in the Northern Quarter (after Brandur Kolbeinsson) – prevents Einar *langadjákn* Jónsson and Kolbeinn's other men from attacking Börkur.³⁸⁹ This short, easily forgettable episode echoes the intercession of Hallur's son, Þórður, in a dispute between Guðlaugur Tannason and Bishop Árni in 1273 after the former's assault on Marteinn with an axe in vengeance for the slaying of his father Tanni Gunnlaugsson in 1252, as described in *Porgils saga skarða*:

Eftir Marteinsmessu komu norðan af Eyri Marteinn Ívarsson og Hallur son Páls prests af Eyri. Þetta vor áður höfðu orðið víg í Dölum vestur. Hafði Marteinn vegið Tanna Gunnlaugsson. Þar

³⁸⁹ Cf. chapter 2 of the present thesis.

var og veginn Páll Ívarsson, bróðir Marteins. Tók Porgils við Marteini að orðsendingu Páls prests.³⁹⁰

(After the mass of Saint Martin, Marteinn Ívarsson and Hallur, the son of Páll the priest of Eyri, came north from Eyri. They had previously been involved in killing in Dalir in the west. Marteinn had slain Tanni Gunnlaugsson. There was killed Páll Ívarsson, Marteinn's brother also. Porgils took Marteinn following a message from Páll the priest.)

Árna saga biskups relates that events unfolded as follows in 1273:

Á þeim degi varð sá atburður að sá maður er Marteinn hét og var Ívarsson og ráðamaður var lengi á Helgafelli með herra Ólafi ábóta Hjörleifssyni reið á aðra hönd herra Árna biskupi og stórlega nær honum. En er þeir voru komnir fram um bæinn í Kálfanesi hjó voveiflega með mikilli öxi til þessa manns, Marteins, sá maður er Guðlaugur hét og var Tannason. Kom höggið á hanglegginn nær öxlinni og varð mikill áverkinn svo að blóð það sem af undinni sprændi hljóp stórlega mjög á klæði Árna biskups. En sú var sök millum Marteins og Guðlaugs að Marteinn hafði í vopnaskipti vegið í Dölum Tanna föður Guðlaugs en í hefnd hans var þegar veginn Páll bróðir Marteins ei fyrir aðra sök en hann skaut undir fyrrnefndan bróður sinn skjótara hesti en þeim sem áður reið hann og kom honum svo undan bana en flýði ei sjálfur sem hann ætti ei um að vera. Málin voru í dóm lagið og féllust vígin í faðma. Enn því að þessi sami Guðlaugur var þá barn að aldri og ekki að spurður að sættum þóttist hann missa föðurbóta við Martein. Herra biskups varð af tveimur sökum framast reiður þessum sama Guðlaugi. Var sú hin fyrri að hann þóttist að fjölhöggi hafður nálega og mikil von á að á hann mundi komið hafa höggið ef af honum Marteini hefði stokkið þar sem drjúgum lágu saman axlir þeirra. En sú önnur að honum þótti fyrir sína návist hafa tekið verið frekt til óhappsins því að Marteinn hafði ei varast umsátir. Hann kallaði og Martein sýknan þar sem áður var dæmt málið og veittar tryggðir. En Guðlaugur mat lítils þykkju biskups um þetta því að hann hafði á sér stórar skriftir um stund og stórmæli Árna biskups þar til er hann gekk til sættar við hann bæði fyrir þann ósóma er biskupi þótti til sín ger og þann áverka er Marteinn fékk af honum. Voru mál þeirra dæmd á alþingi en þó stóð Guðlaugur undir skriftum hörðum um stundar sakir. Hafði hann og tveim sinnum öðrum leitað mein að gera Marteini. En

³⁹⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 592.

um síðir líknaði herra biskups Guðlaugi fyrir bæn herra Þórðar Hallssonar á Möðruvöllum og tók af honum sína óblíðu.³⁹¹

(In those days, the following events transpired. That man who was named Marteinn Ívarsson (and who was for a long time the manager at Helgafell with the Lord Abbot Ólafur Hjörleifsson) rode to one side of the Lord Bishop Árni and very near to him. And when they had passed above the farm at Kálfanes, the man named Guðlaugur Tannason struck violently with a great axe at Marteinn; the blow struck his arm near to the should and was such a profound wound that a great deal of blood spurted from it and onto the clothes of Bishop Árni. The source of the conflict between Marteinn and Guðlaugur was because Marteinn had killed Tanni (Guðlaugur's father) in a bout in Dalir; however, in vengeance for him, Marteinn's brother Páll was immediately slain. But before the second incident took place, Marteinn had rushed to his aforementioned brother who gave him a fast horse. Marteinn rode away before those who were after him arrived and so escaped death; however, his brother had not fled as he was not involved in this dispute. The cases were judged such that the killings cancelled each other out. Yet, because this same Guðlaugur was then a child in years and did not participate in the settlement, he thought that he had been deprived of compensation for his father from Marteinn. The Lord Bishop became completely infuriated with Guðlaugur on two counts. The first was because he thought that he had nearly been on the chopping block and was greatly aware of the fact that the blow would have struck him where their shoulders were placed considerably close together if Marteinn had leapt away from him. The second was because he thought that his presence would have prevented the mishap because Marteinn had not been expecting the attack. He also claimed that Marteinn was now blameless due to the earlier judgment of the case and a truce given. But Guðlaugur gave little heed to the bishop's feelings about this because he had to make great penance for a while and had been placed under the great excommunication by Bishop Árni until they both arrived at a settlement about the unseemliness the bishop thought himself to have suffered and the injury which Marteinn received from him. Their case was judged at the General Assembly; nevertheless, Guðlaugur continued making hard penance for a while on account of it. Moreover, he had twice before attempted to attack Marteinn. But, eventually, the Lord Bishop took mercy on Guðlaugur at the request of Lord Þórður Hallsson of Möðruvellir and relented in his harshness towards him.)

³⁹¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), pp. 788-9.

Árni attempted to impose “religious” penalties on Guðlaugur on top of the punishment handed out by the “secular” court, suggesting disdain for the temporal judicial institution, appears to have leveraged church law to embroil himself in a wordly dispute, and effectively annulled the earlier judgment of Marteinn’s guilt for the slaying of Tanni: all these actions were in direct defiance of lay jurisdiction. Moreover, they were also a challenge to Hrafn Oddsson’s authority. Hrafn appears to have despised Marteinn and it is reported in *Porgils saga skarða* that he had himself previously tried to kill him as retribution for the slaying of Tanni: ‘Hrafn svarar: Öngum griðum mun eg þér heita og fáum þínum mönnum. Eða hvort er Marteinn hér Ívarsson, fjandinn?’ (‘Hrafn responded: “to no-one will I promise mercy and few of your men. And is the fiend, Marteinn Ívarsson, here?”’).³⁹² Tanni had probably lived within Hrafn’s domain, and – considering the situation in light of the traditional roles of Icelandic chieftains – was consequently under his protection, with the consequence that Marteinn needed to be slain in vengeance. Alternatively – viewing matters through the lens of the novel lordship-esque system of the thirteenth century – the crime had been committed on Hrafn’s territory, meaning that Marteinn was his to punish. Hrafn would have been most grateful for Guðlaugur’s attack on Marteinn.

A second is the account in chapter of Þórður’s clash with Bishop Sigvard Tettmarsson of Skálholt in 1242. In this episode, which is among the narrative which tells of Þórður’s raid against the south in 1242, he rebukes

³⁹² Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 597.

Bishop Sigvard for inviting the Árnésingar to take shelter in the episcopal see:

Suður frá Auðsholti kom biskup í móti Þórði og bauð allt hið sama af bænda hendi sem fyrr. Þórður var þá hinn styggvasti við biskup, sagði hann allt draga til óliðs sér. Biskup kallaðist jafnframt skyldi bannsetja Þórð og alla menn hans sem hann riði á staðinn. Þórður bað hann að hann léti þá bændur brott fara af staðnum, kvað það ósannlegt að hann drægi þá í kirkjugarð, slíkir hernaðarmenn sem þeir væru þá er þeir brutu kirkjuna á Miklabæ laugarkveldið og leiddu út sex menn og létu hvern höggva á fætur öðrum.³⁹³

(The bishop came south from Auðsholt to meet Þórður, and made the same offer as before on behalf of the householders. Þórður was very peevish towards the bishop, and stated that he had done all he could to harm him. The bishop responded that he would excommunicate Þórður and all of his men who rode against the episcopal See. Þórður asked that the bishop have the householders leave the See, saying that it was improper that he had drawn them into the churchyard, such warriors as had violated the church at Miklabær one Saturday evening, led out six men, and had each of them killed in front of the others.³⁹⁴)

To begin with, the most obvious parallel is that Sigvard and Árni were both bishops of Skálholt; however, the opposition here is to the Church protecting common criminals from the justice chieftains sought to deliver. It represents a desire for chieftains to retain the customary rights, responsibilities, and privileges to which the Church was an acute threat during the episcopacy of Bishop Árni Porláksson.

³⁹³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 475.

³⁹⁴ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 73.

A third parallel is the found in chapter 49 of *Pórðar saga kakala* (which almost definitely preserves content – although certainly not verbatim – from **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*) where the following is reported:

Kom þá sunnan Sigvarður biskup og urðu þeir Pórður ekki mjög sáttir í fyrstu sín á milli en greiddu þó vel. Gaf Pórður til staðarins í Skálaholti Skógtjörn á Álftanesi fyrir sál föður síns og móður.³⁹⁵

(Following this, Bishop Sigvard came from the south, and he and Pórður were not at all agreeable with each other at first, but they settled well though. Pórður gave Skógtjörn on Álftanes to the see at Skálholt for the souls of his father and mother.³⁹⁶)

Bishop Sigvard of Skálholt (incidentally, the same bishopric that Árni had) does not get along well with Pórður until he donates land to the Church. Although there is a serious sentiment expressed here in Pórður caring for the souls of his parents, it seems to me that there is a satiristic subtext: the bishop of Skálholt gets on well with people only after they give land over to him.

Before closing this subsection, it is important to note that Hrafn Oddsson only became Bishop Árni's main adversary in the dispute over church estates after 1280. Previously, during the 1270s, Árni's principal antagonist had been Þorvarður Þórarinsson. One might well question why Hrafn and Þorvarður changed places and why it happened at this time. My speculation would be that during the 1270s (especially during the power struggle in the period 1273-9), Hrafn was not content to take the lead against

³⁹⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 548.

³⁹⁶ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Pórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 309.

the bishop concerning the issue of church estates because it would risk the bishop not favouring him (or, at least, preferring him over Þorvarður) should the prelate be asked for his opinion on which of the two leading men should have overall governance of Iceland. Indeed, Bishop Árni did eventually end up expressing his view that, of the two candidates, Hrafn would make a better governor than Þorvarður; consequently, if Hrafn was consciously making a tactical withdrawal into the background of the debate during the 1270s then it evidently worked in his favour. Additionally, the fact that during the 1270s, Þorvarður's opposition to the encroaching Church establishment (represented by Árni) was open, while Hrafn – despite sharing Þorvarður's stance – was more reserved at this time, probably provided further opportunities for the latter to score a propaganda victory. Let us recall that Þorvarður's brother Oddur had died a double excommunicant: by allowing Þorvarður to take the lead on the opposition to the bishop, the impression was further broadcast that the Svínfellingar were a godless family and so a member of that kingroup would not be suitable to govern the country (it is worth noting two points here: firstly, the familial contaminativity of liability in medieval Iceland and, secondly, the then-current political paradigm of the *rex iustus* versus the *rex iniquus* and the attendant consequences for the land under their control). Following Hrafn's ascent in 1279, however, he no longer had to be concerned with securing the bishop's support (regardless of how lukewarm it may have been) or winning hearts and minds in his struggle against Þorvarður because he had now succeeded in that contest for power.

Moreover, as the leading man in Iceland, Hrafn could not have been seen to be playing second fiddle to Þorvarður (now his deputy).

3.2.3 – Hrafn Oddsson versus *Járnsíða*: Protonationalism after the Icelanders' submission to the Norwegian king

There were yet further links between **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* and the politics of the 1270s. To show this, let us first recall the legislative reforms which took place in Iceland during the opening years of this decade.

Traditionally, it has been assumed that *Járnsíða* took a few years to pass into law in Iceland because the Icelanders were not delighted with the new lawcode. Patricia Pires Boulhosa has proposed a revisionist interpretation of the rationale for the delay in *Járnsíða*'s ratification by noting how the appropriation of property during the *staðamál* ran counter to 'the inheritance rights... guaranteed in the new [and old] laws'.³⁹⁷ In additional support of Boulhosa's argument, there is evidence that other contemporaries were aware that Bishop Árni's attempted reforms to the ownership of church property were preventing the passing of the new lawcode: for example, Hrafn Oddsson is alleged in *Árna saga biskups* to have accused Árni of disloyalty to the Crown.

Nonetheless, I am not entirely convinced that Bishop Árni's efforts to secure control of church estates during the 1270s was the only reason for the glacial rate at which *Járnsíða* was brought into law in Iceland (though, I

³⁹⁷ Patricia Pires Boulhosa, 'Narrative, Evidence and the Reception of *Járnsíða*' in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 223-32, p. 229.

concede it was a contributory factor). Boulhosa presents the archbishop's judgment of the church estates dispute in 1273 as a watershed moment, in that the Inheritance Section of *Járnsíða* was accepted more-or-less immediately after the ruling.

While it is true to say that *Járnsíða* did pass fully and formally into law in 1273, the lawcode clearly did not sit comfortably with the Icelanders; otherwise, what would have motivated the issuing of a new lawcode – *Jónsbók* – in 1280 (ratified 1281)? Moreover, Boulhosa herself admits that just because the bishop's dispute with landowners stalled part of *Járnsíða*'s acceptance, this does not exclude laymen from having had a problem with the new lawcode: 'the events described in [*Árna saga biskups*] seem to describe some level of discontent (or perhaps bewilderment) with the new laws'.³⁹⁸

It may possibly be worth carrying out a close reading of *Járnsíða* to identify specific issues Icelanders may have had with it, apart from the Inheritance Section (which, as identified, was problematic in the context of the dispute over church estates); however, it seems unquestionable, given the arrival of *Jónsbók* in 1280, that the overarching reason for their distaste for *Járnsíða* was due to how Norwegian it was (compared with *Jónsbók* which was far more Icelandic in character).

There has been some controversy as to whether *Gissurarsáttmáli* (1262) and other declarations in 1263 and 1264 created a personal union

³⁹⁸ Patricia Pires Boulhosa, 'Narrative, Evidence and the Reception of *Járnsíða*' in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Sverrir Jakobsson (eds.) *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 223-32, p. 230.

between Iceland and the Norwegian king or made the country a tributary state of Norway.³⁹⁹ *Gamli Sáttmáli* (agreed 1302) ratified the covenant established between the two countries in 1262-4. We have medieval accounts of Icelanders submitting themselves to the Norwegian king's rule in *Sturlunga saga*, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, and the annals. The earliest surviving document purporting to preserve the text of *Gissurarsáttmáli* is AM 45 8vo (on 10r-v) has an Early Modern origin, dating to between 1550 and 1600, while *Gamli Sáttmáli*'s earliest supposed witnesses come from the fifteenth century. Patricia Boulhosa has argued the agreements as they are found in extant manuscripts are forgeries of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century provenance.⁴⁰⁰

However, if we leave aside for the moment the doubts which have been expressed over the purported records of the covenant agreed to by the Icelanders at the end of the Commonwealth period, this document clearly states that one of the clauses the agreement was conditional upon was for the Icelanders to retain Icelandic laws: 'hér í mót skal konungur láta oss ná friði og íslenskum lögum' ('in exchange, the king shall permit us to enjoy peace and Icelandic laws').⁴⁰¹ Thus – doubts over the veracity of the

³⁹⁹ Cf. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (London, 2000), p. 95.

⁴⁰⁰ Patricia Boulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway: Mediaeval Sagas and Legal Texts* (Leiden, 2005), p. 144.

⁴⁰¹ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga. Skýringar og fræði – Íslendingabók – Ynglingatal – Veraldar saga – Leiðarvísir Nikuláss Bergssonar – Samþykktir og sáttmálar – Ættir og átök – Kort – Töflur – Orðasafn – Nafnaskrá – Staðanafnaskrá* [*Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 3] (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 67.

covenant aside – the Icelanders would have seen *Járnsíða* as a violation of the terms of submission to the Norwegian Crown.

Hrafn Oddsson – having been closely involved in the final ceding of sovereignty to the Norwegian king – would have been *au fait* with the promises made by the Crown to the Icelanders in exchange for their obedience. Consequently, Hrafn may not have seen a problem with accusing Árni of disloyalty to King Magnus due to the obstruction caused to the passing of the Inheritance Section (which in essence upheld the same rights as in *Grágás* and so was not controversial to laymen) whilst simultaneously being unhappy with the lawcode.

Of course, there is no substantive evidence to suggest that Hrafn had an issue with *Járnsíða*: Jón Viðar Sigurðsson puts it well when he suggests that one of the reasons for his later elevation to standard-bearer may have been his stronger support for (or rather less vocal opposition to) the new lawcode than Þorvarður.⁴⁰²

Nevertheless, Hrafn's reserved approach to expounding policy is a political strategy of his we have noticed already in relation to the church estates dispute: he was more than happy to let Þorvarður be the main belligerent against Bishop Árni during the 1270s, but as soon as he secured the position of leading man in Iceland, he took the lead on the side of the lay landholders in the church estate dispute. For Hrafn, letting his rival scupper

⁴⁰² Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'The making of a skattland: Iceland 1247-1450' in Steinar Imsen (ed.) *Rex Insularum: The King of Norway and his skattlands as a political system c. 1260-c. 1450* (Bergen, 2014), pp. 187-9.

his relationship with the king, as with the bishop, would have cleared the path to sole governorship of Iceland.

If correct, we ought to find evidence from after Hrafn's ascent to standard-bearer in 1279 which may indicate his antipathy towards *Járnsíða*. Indeed, we find it in the form of *Jónsbók*, which arrived in Iceland the year after the newly elevated Hrafn returned from Norway. It may well be that *Jónsbók* was produced as a compromise following discussions Hrafn had with King Magnus before leaving for Iceland.

It seems unlikely that the lawman Sturla Þórðarson had much of a part – if any – in *Jónsbók*'s construction given his involvement in drafting *Járnsíða* as well as the poor review Árni gave of him to the king (as opposed to his colleague, Jón *gelgja* Einarsson), and, indeed, Sturla left Norway for Iceland fairly soon after being given the title 'lord'. Jón *gelgja*, the other lawman in Iceland at the time, almost definitely wrote the lawcode (hence the name of the lawcode: 'Jón's book'). It is worth noting that although Jón often attempted to mediate between the bishop and lay leaders during the church estates dispute, he was on the side of the latter given his large personal fortune, most of which would have been held in property. It seems likely – given that Hrafn and he were part of the same interest group (i.e., the Icelandic landowning "aristocracy") – that the two collaborated: with Hrafn proposing a new lawcode following his elevation and Jón delivering upon it.

This proposition is strengthened by the notion that **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was propaganda for Hrafn. There is a distinct antipathy towards Sturla Þórðarson in *Þórðar saga kakala*, which may indicate that the

text is an indirect means for Hrafn's political faction to support Jón in the context of a hypothetical rivalry (or even just a poor working relationship) between the two lawmen. Sturla was evidently none too pleased with his portrayal in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*: this becomes apparent when one compares, for example, the conflicting accounts in *Íslendinga saga* and *Pórðar saga kakala* of his initial meeting with Þórður in 1242.

Apart from the fact that Sturla is not particularly forthcoming with his support in *Pórðar saga kakala*, he is presented as ineffectual (in line with Bishop Árni's appraisal). Firstly, there is the pointless offer which Sturla makes to accompany Þórður for part of his journey south in 1242 rather than provide him with any support:

En Sturla kvaðst eigi nenna að svo búnu að brjóta eiða sína og svo margra manna sem í voru með honum 'en skammt mun líða áður Norðlendingar brjóta við mig og skal mín þá eigi á bak að leita. En ríða mun ég með þér suður til Borgarfjarðar ef þú vilt.' Þórði fannst fátt um og kvaðst eigi vita hverju hann skipti það.⁴⁰³

(Sturla replied that he would not be prepared to break his oath and those of the many others whose fates were entangled with his 'but it will not be long before the Northerners break with me and when that happens, I will not hold back. However, I will ride with you south to Borgarfjörður if you want.' Þórður thought little of that offer and said he did not know how that would help him.⁴⁰⁴)

Secondly, there is the product of the poor effort Sturla put into troop raising during the skirmishes between Þórður's and Kolbeinn's men in Dalir:

⁴⁰³ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 471.

⁴⁰⁴ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 61.

Ekki varð af liðsafnaði Sturlu og undu þeir Kolbeinn illa við það. Hafði hann verið kyrr meðan í Fagurey og hafst ekki að.⁴⁰⁵

(Nothing had come of Sturla's attempt to raise troops, which Kolbeinn and the others found most dissatisfying. He had remained quietly on Fagurey and not taken any action.⁴⁰⁶)

Thirdly, he wastes the time of Þórður's forces in an attempt to save face for an earlier occasion where he proved himself to be less than useful:

Gerðist þá kurr í liðinu að óráðlegt væri að ríða lengra. Var þá um rætt að Sturla skyldi eiga um við Þórð að aftur væri snúið. Sturla vildi það eigi því að honum þótti þeir hafa á mælt sér um sumarið að þeir hefðu slælega riðið að þeim Brandi Kolbeinssyni. Riðu þeir þar til er þeir komu til Giljár. Þá ræddi Þórður um að þeir skyldu aftur snúa: 'sé ég nú að þér metið við mig atkvæði'.⁴⁰⁷

(Then many in the army deemed it was inadvisable to ride any further, and they asked Sturla to convince Þórður to turn around. But Sturla would not do this, because he thought that they had criticised him for not attacking Brandur Kolbeinsson and his forces with sufficient vigour when he was in command in the summer. They continued on until they came to Giljá. Now Þórður declared that they would turn back: 'I see that it is up to me to decide'.⁴⁰⁸)

There are indications that **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* contained an "Icelandic law for the Icelanders" type attitude within it. Let us recall chapters 49 and 50 of *Þórðar saga kakala*.

⁴⁰⁵ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 489.

⁴⁰⁶ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 117.

⁴⁰⁷ Örnólfur Thorsson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga – Árna saga biskups – Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 2010), p. 530.

⁴⁰⁸ Daniel White (trans.), *The Saga of Þórður kakali* (New York, 2020), p. 247.

In chapter 49,⁴⁰⁹ King Hákon is unhappy with the degree of autonomy that Pórður appears to have established for himself while he governed Iceland and, based on implied slanders by political rivals in “exile” in Norway, a pretext is provided for the king to summon him to the royal court. That the king listens to this dubious counsel suggests that the immediate cause of Pórður’s summoning to Norway was seen by the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* as unjust. This in turn suggests that Bishop Henrik’s subsequent damning report to the king – which resulted in Pórður being detained in Norway from 1250 – was also viewed as unjust.

The Norwegian king was situated far away from Iceland and consequently relied on second-hand information about goings-on there. It is worth noting that while there is a critique of the bishop here (and the unnamed political “exiles”), the king’s action would not have been viewed as consciously unjust for, as Elizabeth Ashman-Rowe notes: ‘it could be dangerous for medieval authors to criticise their rulers... directly’ and, moreover, the king was supposed to be the personification of justice, so there was a ‘strategy of declaring the king to be blameless but insulated from the truth’.⁴¹⁰

Henrik was a bishop, which provides yet another instance of the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* criticising episcopal attempts to interfere with lay affairs. Incidentally, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* tells that

⁴⁰⁹ It is worth recalling, as noted in chapter 1, that chapter 49 of *Pórðar saga kakala* is not a direct/ verbatim quotation from **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*: it was the creation of the compiler of **Sturlunga saga* using content from **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*.

⁴¹⁰ Elizabeth Ashman-Rowe (*The Development of Flateyjarbók: Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389* (Gylling, 2005), p. 50).

in 1254, Gissur was recalled from Iceland based on a negative report from Bishop Henrik concerning his activities promoting the Norwegian king's cause.⁴¹¹ If chapter 50 of *Pórðar saga kakala* is anything to go on, this detail does not appear to have been mentioned in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*; nevertheless, if it was, it would have provided yet another example in the saga of unreasonable clerical involvement in lay affairs.

According to the primary material covering this period, chaos reigned in Iceland during the years following 1252 as vassals of the Norwegian king clashed with the men Pórður had appointed as deputies. As mentioned in chapter 1, this was probably mentioned in brief in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. The apparent mayhem in Iceland during the 1250s would have served as a contrast to the relative peace under Pórður's sole leadership in the late 1240s. Henrik's dual status as a Norwegian and a bishop indicates that the saga was presenting the chaos of the early to mid 1250s as a consequence of too much intervention by distant Norwegians in the politics of Iceland, *especially* when guided by episcopal advice. The solution implied is that authority over the country should be delegated to a *single governor from the lay political élite with a significant degree of autonomy to act on behalf of the king*. Interestingly, in *Árna saga biskups*, it is reported that Bishop Árni qualified his recommendation for Hrafn to be sole governor of Iceland by saying that the best option would be for multiple men to share governance. The chaos of the years 1252-4 in Iceland – likely to have been described in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* – during which multiple leaders struggled to

⁴¹¹ Sverrir Jakobsson, Þorleifur Hauksson & Tor Ulset (eds.), *Íslenzk fornrit* vol. 32 (Reykjavík, 2013), p. 161.

dominate each other despite there having been peace under Þórður governing alone a few years prior would have stood as a counterargument to the position presented by Bishop Árni.

In chapter 50, after hearing that King Hákon intends to send him back to Iceland, Þórður makes a declaration that he would never again leave: this is an evident expression of patriotism and intention to control Iceland with a degree of autonomy from the Norwegian king. Einar Ól. Sveinsson has interpreted this as a treasonous act of defiance against King Hákon by Þórður:

Snorri's nephew Þórður *kakali* shows his feelings when on his dying day he voices his determination never again to go abroad if it should be his lot to return once more to Iceland; his words imply open revolt against the king.⁴¹²

Einar Ól. Sveinsson presumably would have viewed the description of Þórður's death immediately following this statement as the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* writing in the spirit of *guðveldi* (theocracy/ divine justice) in the context of an era of Norwegian royal domination: under this rubric, if Þórður betrayed God's annointed, he deserved divine retribution.⁴¹³ Needless to say, I retain the position argued in chapter 2 of the present thesis that the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was not-so-subtly

⁴¹² Einar Ól. Sveinsson (& Jóhann S. Hannesson (trans.)), *The Age of the Sturlungs: Icelandic Civilization in the Thirteenth Century* (New York, 1953), p. 13.

⁴¹³ For a discussion of this theme in *Íslendinga saga*, cf. Helgi Þorláksson, 'Guðveldi og samtímasögur á 13. öld' in Rudolf Simek & Judith Meurer (eds.) *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages* (Bonn, 2005), pp. 229-37.

suggesting that Þórður's death in 1256 was divinely willed to enable the royal-blooded Gissur to ascend to earldom.

The interpretation of Þórður's words as advocacy for total independence (and/ or republicanism?) over against rule by a foreign king appears to be motivated by the nationalistic sentiment of Einar's time and is facilitated by close reading of a single line of text in isolation. The proposition that **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla's* final depiction of Þórður was as a traitor to the Crown is not consistent with the presentation of his character in the rest of *Þórðar saga kakala* (and thus **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*). The text suggests that he was a loyal vassal of the Norwegian king; otherwise, why would he have agreed to submit his dispute with Gissur to the Norwegian king's judgment in 1246 when he was in a position to destroy him, why would he have surrendered complete control of Iceland and obediently complied following the king's summons in 1249, and, indeed, why would he have asked the king to send Gissur away from the royal presence than request early leave for himself in 1254? One could argue that the author of **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was attempting to present Þórður as resentful after having spent six years in Norway at the king's bidding; however, the text claims that Þórður regarded the news joyfully (which does not indicate resentment) and – what is more – even though he wanted to go home, he never imitated Snorri Sturluson's decision to depart Norway without the king's permission. Consequently, **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla's* position was that autonomy is not an expression of disloyalty and that the king should trust in the fidelity of his subordinates of Iceland, even if they were to have a

considerable degree of independence (which would be necessary anyway given Iceland's geographical situation with respect to Norway).

3.3 – Summary

In this chapter, we have subjected **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* to historical analysis. However, before proceeding with this, we began by showing how the biographical contemporary sagas used their subjects' lives as a "sandbox" for concretising ideas related to an immediate historical contingency at the time of writing. This indicated that it was not the purpose of the biographical contemporary sagas to faithfully record the details of the subject's life (in the past), but rather to guide behaviour and belief (in the present). The political implications of all of this were emphasised.

In the second half of the chapter, we turned to **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* itself. The literary reading from chapter 2 was taken and placed in the political context of the 1270s. Given the élite nature of textual production in thirteenth-century Iceland, the political context in particular was deemed to be the "high" politics of Iceland (and Norway). Application of the historical-critical method with these parameters indicated a political-propagandistic function for **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. Specifically, this political propaganda would have favoured Hrafn Oddsson in his tussle with Þorvarður Þórarinnsson for overall leadership of the king's retinue in Iceland (and, thus, governorship of the island) between 1273 and 1279.

On adopting the conclusion that, in this political-historical context, **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* supported Hrafn's candidacy to govern Iceland

over Þorvarður's (on account of the former's superb personal qualities and superior connection to the Norwegian royal family), we saw how the saga reflected other elements of Hrafn's political platform during the period 1273-9. This was because *Þórðar saga kakala* lends itself quite readily to a reading critical of Hrafn's other adversaries during the 1270s, namely: Bishop Árni and the *Járnsíða* lawcode.

Conclusion

The objective set out in the introduction to this thesis was to encapsulate and extend our knowledge of *Pórðar saga kakala*'s origins. There, I stated the importance of treating this topic, namely, to facilitate appropriate use of the saga as a primary source. After a literature review in chapter 1, the further research necessary to fill the identified gap in scholarship was presented across chapters 2 and 3.

This conclusion is comprised of four sections. Firstly, the results of the analyses in chapters 2-3 are synthesised with the pre-existent scholarship reviewed in chapter 1; in doing this, a comprehensive overview of the origins of *Pórðar saga kakala* is provided. Secondly, the extent to which it has been possible to attend to this topic and consequently to achieve the objective of the thesis is evaluated. Thirdly, the limitations of this thesis are discussed. Finally, areas in need of further research following the thesis are indicated.

C.1 – Synthesis of conclusions

Chapter 1 reviewed the scholarly literature on *Pórðar saga kakala*'s origins in depth. The goal of the chapter was to summarise and evidence what we know about **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* as well as to identify the gaps in current knowledge. We saw there how it is fair to carry forward the scholarly conclusions that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was written during

the 1270s in the Western Quarter, possibly by Svarthöfði Dufgusson, and that the saga originally covered a longer period of time (c. 1233-56) than it does in its extant form (1242-50 and 1254-6).

Chapter 2 subjected **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* to literary analysis using a variety of techniques. It began by noting that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* contained a number of divergent narrative strands which served to amplify the biography of one man – Pórður *kakali* – and in such wise, drew the audience's attention to this individual and his attributes. We saw in the subsequent discussion of characterisation in *Pórðar saga kakala* (and thus **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*) that the intertextual references therein suggest(ed) to the reader that Pórður's personal qualities were what enabled him to achieve vengeance against Kolbeinn, to reclaim his birthright to wield power over Eyjafjörður, and – for a time – to rule all Iceland. Chapter 2 next considered the bipartite structure of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* and evaluated the main plot from a thirteenth-century Icelandic perspective. This analysis showed that, beyond the requirement for a national leader to possess excellent personal qualities, God also needed to have chosen the candidate by preordaining his destiny through the assignation of royal blood (or not, as the case may be). Chapter 2 closed by noting the unifying role of hereditarianism in constructing **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*'s compatibilist view of the respective roles of God and Pórður in the unfolding of the latter's career, concluding that the saga construed human destiny as a product of heredity. The political-ideological implications of this were emphasised.

Chapter 3 subjected **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* to historical analysis. Before proceeding with this, we began by showing how the biographical contemporary sagas used their subjects' lives as a "sandbox" for concretising ideas related to an immediate historical (political) contingency at the time of writing. This indicated that it was not the purpose of the biographical contemporary sagas to faithfully record the details of the subject's life (in the past), but rather to guide behaviour and belief (in the present). The political implications of all of this were emphasised. In the second half of the chapter, we turned to **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* itself. The literary reading from chapter 2 was taken and placed in the political context of the 1270s. Given the élite nature of textual production in thirteenth-century Iceland, the political context in particular was deemed to be the "high" politics of Iceland (and Norway). Application of the historical-critical method with these parameters indicated a political-propagandistic function for **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. Specifically, this political propaganda would have favoured Hrafn Oddsson in his tussle with Þorvarður Þórarinnsson for overall leadership of the king's retinue in Iceland (and, thus, governorship of the island) between 1273 and 1279. On adopting the conclusion that, in this political-historical context, **Þórðar saga kakala hin mikla* supported Hrafn's candidacy to govern Iceland over Þorvarður's (on account of the former's superb personal qualities and superior connection to the Norwegian royal family), we saw how the saga reflected other elements of Hrafn's political platform during the period 1273-9. This was because *Þórðar saga kakala* lends itself quite readily to a reading critical of Hrafn's

other adversaries during the 1270s, namely: Bishop Árni and the *Járnsíða* lawcode. If **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was written in the context of the conflict between Hrafn and Þorvarður during the years 1273-9 (as the historical analysis in chapter 3 suggests), then it naturally follows that the dating of the saga should more accurately be identified with this period (as opposed to the vaguer – but more certain – dating of ‘the 1270s’ given in chapter 1). Moreover, whilst it is apparent that we cannot prove that Svarthöfði Dufgusson was the author of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* (as was argued for in chapter 1), the historical analysis in chapter 3 strongly suggests that it was written by someone in Hrafn Oddsson’s inner circle, such as Svarthöfði.

That an ostensibly historical biography was probably used to promote a political cause is not an uncontroversial one to make, after all: ‘who controls the past... controls the future’.⁴¹⁴ Furthermore, it is worth noting that the notion that **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* was intended as a work of propaganda is hardly an original idea: Einar Már Jónsson believes that the saga was commissioned by Þórður himself and that it was intended as a propaganda piece to provide Þórður with political legitimacy and justify his use of force during his rise to power, while Axel Kristinsson has argued the saga may have been an attempt by Þórður, or a successor of his, to establish ‘unity and common identity’ in his domain by ordering the creation of a ‘common history’ which used a heroic figure as a ‘unifying symbol’.⁴¹⁵ It

⁴¹⁴ George Orwell, *1984* (New York, 2017), p. 33.

⁴¹⁵ Einar Már Jónsson, ‘La saga de Thórdur kakali: Une œuvre de propaganda?’, *Médiévales* 50 (2006), pp. 47-57, pp. 49 & 54-5; Axel

is clear from the dating of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* that neither Einar Már Jónsson nor Axel Kristinsson (the latter to a lesser extent) can be correct in their theories about the contemporary significance of the text. However, despite my disagreement with the specific interpretations of these previous scholars on account of their early dating of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*, I hope to have vindicated their general view that this saga was intended as a work of propaganda.

C.2 – Evaluation of objectives

In sum, the present thesis has provided the following overall profile of *Pórðar saga kakala*'s origins:

Dating	<i>*Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla</i> was composed during the 1270s (potentially during the period 1273-9).
Place of origin	<i>*Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla</i> was produced in the Western Quarter of Iceland.
Authorship	<i>*Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla</i> was written by one of Hrafn Oddsson's supporters (plausibly this could have been Svarthöfði Dufgusson).
Contents	<i>*Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla</i> was a "biography" of Pórður kakali, probably covering the years c. 1233-1256.
Contemporary significance	<i>*Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla</i> appears to have been a work of propaganda written to provide political support to Hrafn Oddsson during the 1270s.

Let us recall that the aim set at the beginning of the thesis was to provide a comprehensive study of *Pórðar saga kakala*'s origins. The table above makes it self-evident that this has been achieved.

Nevertheless, it is worth recalling the reason why this aim was chosen. At the beginning of the thesis, I noted that the lack, hitherto, of a rounded view of *Pórðar saga kakala*'s origins was problematic, because lacking understanding of the conditions of a prospective primary source's genesis impedes historians seeking to cite its account of the past. I rationalised this by explaining that, in the historical method, the origins of a primary source need be known to carry out the source-critical analysis which is a requisite in modern historiographical practice.

Therefore, in order to properly evaluate whether the objective of this thesis has been achieved, one must determine whether the thesis' *telos* has been fulfilled, that is, to make *Pórðar saga kakala* more useful as a primary source by enabling historians to make informed judgments as to the historicity of its contents. Evidently, this will only become clear once this thesis' findings are made available for use by historians.⁴¹⁶

Beyond the historiographic utility of the thesis, it also provides a basis for future debate on the literary dimension of the ostensibly historical *Pórðar saga kakala*. This is important as the contemporary sagas have only recently

⁴¹⁶ Following initial submission of the thesis, I became aware that Sverrir Jakobsson ('1277: Um sjónarhorn í veraldlegri sagnaritun á 13. öld' in Guðmundur Jónsson, Gunnar Karlsson, Ólöf Garðardóttir & Þórður Helgason (eds.) *Nýtt Helgakver. Rit til heiðurs Helga Skúla Kjartanssyni sjötugum 1. febrúar 2019* (Reykjavík, 2019), pp. 1-13, pp. 6-12) had recently written a volume chapter detailing his thoughts about the geneses of particular contemporary sagas. Sverrir's views on the origins of *Pórðar saga kakala* are along similar lines to the analysis presented in this thesis.

begun to be approached from an aesthetic, rather than merely historiographic, perspective.

Moving beyond topic-centric contributions, from a methodological perspective, the thesis deploys and demonstrates the efficacy of several novel approaches, such as stylometry. Still further, the thesis pragmatically combines tried and tested methods in revivifying and transdisciplinarily integrative ways. For instance, the synthesis of formalist and new historicist approaches in chapter 2 – based on a pragmatic dismissal of the theoretical conflict of the two – accords with and complements the understanding of human cognition presented by scientific disciplines.⁴¹⁷

At a disciplinary level, this thesis works to rehabilitate the aims of traditional Philology, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the stemmatic method in textual criticism, as well as the methodological and theoretical contributions of New Philology to the study of Old Icelandic texts. This kind of “metaxic” Philology is of significance going forward due to its concordance with an ongoing turn in Literary Studies: scholars of pre-Modern literature are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of integrating lost texts into literary history.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁷ Stefka G. Eriksen and Mark Turner, ‘Cognitive Approaches to Old Norse Literature’ in Stefka G. Eriksen, Karen Langshold Holmqvist & Bjørn Bandlien (eds.) *Approaches to the Medieval Self: Representations and Conceptualizations of the Self in the Textual and Material Culture of Western Scandinavia, c. 800-1500* (Berlin, 2020), pp. 41-62, p. 59.

⁴¹⁸ Alastair Matthews, ‘Narrative Form and Literary Adaptation in the Medieval North. The Old Swedish *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* and Its Lost German Source’ *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 142(2) (2020), pp. 214-35, p. 230.

C.3 – Limitations of the present thesis

Though the investigations presented in this thesis have ultimately proved successful, there are some limitations herein which ought to be borne in mind by any reader. The limitations noted here are in addition to the limitations identified in chapter 1 of the present thesis concerning the methodological approaches to localising the Icelandic sagas (which are addressed in that same chapter).

There are epistemological roadblocks issues surrounding our identification of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla's* author and contemporary significance, as well as the reconstruction of the contents of the saga. Uncovering any of these elements is problematic, primarily due to the fact that the conclusions of such enquiries are not necessarily falsifiable, unless new evidence is unearthed.

In these sorts of circumstances, one must be very careful not to stray from seeking knowledge into the presenting opinion as fact. I deployed two strategies to mitigate the risk of this. The first was to make use of as much of the available evidence as possible and, having deployed it, by avoiding fallacious creeping assertion. The avoidance of this fallacy in my reasoning played a role in the second strategy, which was to utilise the conditional and subjunctive moods to acknowledge the degree of uncertainty present in my conclusions.

To some extent, one could argue that creeping assertion is evident in taking the results of chapter 2 as a provisionally assumed point of departure for arriving at the conclusion in chapter 3; however, I would counter that the

strength of my evidence base as well as my acknowledgment of doubt would make this an unfair criticism.

There are also three topics I would have liked to have discussed in greater depth had I had the space necessary to do so. The first is the manuscript tradition of *Sturlunga saga*: space permitted us only a whistle-stop tour of the two vellums and key paper manuscripts (with more attention focused on the former). There are numerous “less important” manuscripts of *Sturlunga saga* which may have produced interesting insights relevant to the present thesis. Moreover, these are also critically understudied and, consequently, merit scrutiny for their own sake.

The second topic I would have liked to have covered more fully is the literary milieu of **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*. To give an example of an intriguing matter I would have liked to have looked into further, consider the ambiguous oath given by Gísli Markússon in chapter 1 of *Pórðar saga kakala*. The ambiguous oath is a motif in numerous Icelandic sagas (e.g., *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Grettis saga*) which appears to have originated in continental chivalric romances such as that of Tristan and Isolde. *Tristans saga* was certainly in circulation in one form or another in medieval Scandinavia (it was translated at the court of King Hákon in 1226); possibly, we may have been able to pass comment on the chivalric dimension in **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla*.

The third topic I would have liked to cover in more detail is *Járnsíða* and its reception by the Icelanders. In particular, it would have been interesting to identify the specific provisions in *Járnsíða* which the Icelanders

of the 1270s may not have been happy with. This would have necessitated a close reading of *Járnsíða* and comparison with *Jónsbók* which was simply impractical for inclusion on account of space limitations.

C.4 – Further research

Following on from the present thesis, there are a handful of matters in need of future study.

The first, and most obvious, work that needs to be carried out is to attend to those of the limitations identified above which reasonably can be.

The second is to apply what we now know of *Pórðar saga kakala*'s origins to revising history of Iceland during the 1240s and/or writing the first modern scholarly biography of Pórður *kakali*. From 1982 through 1984, Ásgeir Jakobsson, a sailor turned writer, published a series of twenty-three articles on Pórður in the literary supplement to the Icelandic national daily newspaper, *Morgunblaðið*. A few years after in 1988, he published a book-length account of Pórður's life, *Pórður kakali*. As of 2018, Ásgeir's book was out of print, which was unfortunate as it is the only post-medieval biography of Pórður in existence; however, 2019 has seen a posthumous second edition published. Although Ásgeir hardly produced a scholarly biography, this indicates that a text of this kind about Pórður *kakali* is needed in general, beyond the academy.

The third is to examine fully the origins of other medieval Icelandic texts, specifically those contemporary sagas (other than *Pórðar saga kakala*)

that have suffered from a paucity of scholarly attention, many of which have been noted of throughout this thesis.

The fourth is that a textbook on the methodology of identifying saga authors – similar to Einar Ól. Sveinsson’s book on dating the sagas – is needed as there has been no rigorous or agreed set of criteria established for attribution. I would also argue that there needs to be more written on approaches to localising the Icelandic sagas. More broadly than these two specific topics, there is evidently room for more methodological and theoretical pieces to be written on literary genesis in medieval Iceland beyond the scope of the so-called “saga origins debate”.

The fifth task is to consider whether or not *Porgils saga skarða* – which was written at a similar time to **Pórðar saga kakala hin mikla* and which by no means shows either Hrafn Oddsson or Þorvarður Þórarinnsson in a positive light – was composed (possibly by Þórður Hítningur) as part of a propaganda campaign against both of the top leaders in Iceland during the 1270s. This prospective project could scale up, as there are a few further texts which may have played a propagandistic role in the political history of 1270s Iceland.

Hrafnkatla and *Svínfellinga saga* are obvious choices given Þorvarður Þórarinnsson’s origins in the Eastern Quarter and his family ties to the principals of those sagas. *Hrafnkatla* has previously been proposed by Hermann Pálsson to have been written by Bishop Brandur Jónsson –

Porvarður's uncle – during the early 1260s;⁴¹⁹ nonetheless, Kirsten Wolf has noted that the evidence marshalled for Brandur's authorship is inconclusive and, therefore, that there is no good reason to believe that it must have been written prior to his death in 1264.⁴²⁰ Could it be, therefore, that *Hrafnkatla* was produced the following decade?

Beyond *Hrafnkatla* and *Svínfellinga saga* – which clearly have some connection to eastern Iceland –, Barði Guðmundsson has suggested that Porvarður Þórarinsson was connected with the authorship of *Njála*, while *Ljósvetninga saga* was Þórður Þorvarðsson's retort.⁴²¹ It is far from clear whether or not Barði's argument holds water;⁴²² however, while there are no doubt issues with Barði's argument, the fact that Porvarður Þórarinsson was a descendent of the allegedly homosexual Guðmundur *ríki* was a fact that was used to insult him during the thirteenth century.

The final piece of further research which could be performed would be an experiment in transmission history. Even though Þórður's remarkable underdog story is not well-known outside of Iceland, it has endured in attracting interest there into modern times. We should limit ourselves to just a few prominent examples.

⁴¹⁹ Hermann Pálsson, *Hrafnkels saga og Freysgyðlingar* (Reykjavík, 1962), *inter alia*.

⁴²⁰ Kirsten Wolf, 'On the Authorship of *Hrafnkels saga*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 106 (1991), pp. 104-24, p. 122.

⁴²¹ Barði Guðmundsson, *Ljósvetninga saga og Saurbæingar* (Reykjavík, 1953), p. 25 & 114.

⁴²² Cf. Yoav Tirosh, *On the Receiving End: The Role of Scholarship, Memory, and Genre in Constructing *Ljósvetninga saga** (PhD dissertation: University of Iceland, 2019), pp. 67, 81, 137-41, 175-82 & 269-70.

During the early nineteenth century, the folklorist Gísli Konráðsson penned the poetic *Rímur af Þórði kakala*, based on *Þórðar saga kakala*. That same century, Hannes Hafstein wrote the poem *Þá Kakali gerðist konungsbjónn*, which as recently as 2003 was recorded, preserved, and published by the Icelandic state broadcaster, Ríkisútvarpið (RÚV), for posterity. In 1899, Indriði Einarsson wrote *Sverð og bagall*, a play which tells part of the feud between Þórður and the Ásbirningar from the perspective of the latter. 2001 brought the publication by the novelist Einar Kárason of *Óvinafagnaður*, an account of Þórður's feud with Kolbeinn cast in historical fiction. The book spawned a tetralogy as well as plans for a televisual adaptation dubbed *Sturlungar* (to be released in English as *The Last Vikings*) which the Icelandic production company Truenorth is scheduled to begin filming in 2020. In 2012, Sigurður Hansen of Kringlumýri set up a hall on his farm in honour of Þórður *kakali* (calling it Kakalaskáli) and erected standing stones to commemorate the Battle of Haugsnes which took place nearby. Sigurður has sought to celebrate the life of Þórður by filming and publishing informational videos in several languages; hosting academic conferences and talks at Kakalaskáli; and commissioning and holding an exhibition of works of art in the hall entitled 'Á söguslóð Þórðar kakala' ('On the saga-trail of Þórður kakali'). In 2013, a year after the opening of Kakalaskáli, a Reykjavík clothing company named Saga Kakala was established by the fashion designer Ingibjörg Gréta Gísladóttir who thinks Þórður a uniquely inspirational historical Icelander.

Whilst *Pórðar saga kakala* continued to be copied in *Sturlunga saga* manuscripts well into modernity, new art forms aside from the saga were introduced into Iceland as time marched towards the present. The experiment in transmission history would consider the ways in which Icelanders (and a minority of foreigners) have translated *Pórðar saga kakala* into different forms and media. Through close reading of this material, the project would analyse how these later generations of Icelanders (and others) have reshaped and interpreted the material to make it their own.

This proposed research is framed as an experiment in transmission history because contemporary debates over the nature of authorship have eroded the definition of both author as well as the boundaries between source and adaptation. Whilst adaptations would not be included in manuscript stemmata, traditional accounts of transmission history, in a review of scholarly literature, or – indeed – in the process of producing editions, they do also impact how the sources of their material are read: this has implications for the study of *Pórðar saga kakala* by historians, literary scholars and philologists.

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