Lucie Korecká

Cultural Memory in the Icelandic Contemporary Sagas

Memory and the Medieval North

Edited by
Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann, Stephen A. Mitchell
and Lena Rohrbach

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Constructing Continuity at a Time of Transformation

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Contents

Abbreviations

ASH	*Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*
ÁSB	*Árna saga biskups*
GS	*Guðmundar saga*
HSH	*Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*
HSS	*Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, the separate redaction
JS	*Jóns saga*
LSB	*Lárentíus saga biskups*
STU	*Sturlunga saga*
ÞS	*Þorláks saga*

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1 Introduction

The twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries were a time of intense social and political development in Iceland, as well as a period of crucial cultural significance, when the narrative accounts of medieval Icelandic history and myth were composed in written form. For this reason, an insight into the Icelanders' self-image at this time is necessary for the understanding of all medieval Icelandic texts. The best sources available for this purpose are narratives depicting this period from the perspective of a time when it was still quite recent. These include, firstly, the secular contemporary sagas (*samtíðarsögur*), recorded primarily in the compilation *Sturlunga saga*, which describes the gradual concentration of power in Iceland and the subsequent violent conflicts of the so-called Sturlung Age in 1220–1264. Secondly, this period is depicted in the bishops' sagas (*biskupa sögur*), biographies of eleventh- to fourteenth-century Icelandic bishops. Since these sagas not only record the events, but also interpret and evaluate them, their analysis can show how the Icelanders at the time of their origin perceived, or wished to perceive, their recent history. The central question then is what attitudes and values the narratives reflect and how they construct the identity of the community that produced them.

Due to the inherent intertextuality of medieval literature, a sufficiently complex understanding of the medieval Icelanders' interpretation of their recent past can only be achieved if the contemporary sagas are analysed in a broader context of texts including the sagas of Icelanders and other narrative accounts of Iceland's early history, because that is how they were received by their original audiences. Such an approach does not, however, require a detailed comparison of motifs, plots, and character portrayals in all extant sagas. It is rather based on the idea that the recipients' perception of texts is shaped by the structural and thematic characteristics of different *narrative types*. Furthermore, it will be argued here that the knowledge of certain culturally specific *narrative types* also shapes the community's interpretation of real events by determining what will be remembered and how. That is why this approach to the sources is closely connected with the theory of cultural memory.

The central idea behind the theory of cultural memory is that "remembrance weaves together current matters of concern with narratives about and from the past" (Rigney 2018, 242). In this sense, memory can be defined as "the contemporized past" (Assmann 1995, 129) or as "the interplay of present and past in sociocultural contexts" (Erll 2008, 2). This means that when we study the sagas from the perspective of cultural memory, we reveal the processes through which a saga endows a story about the past with meanings shaped by the values and con-

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cerns of its own present. At the same time, the past also shapes the perception of the present by providing models or patterns that frame the present and integrate it into the collective self-image. The past and the present are thus always interpreted in a mutual, dialogical connection (Vésteinn Ólason 1998). In the Icelandic saga corpus, all the texts "gave meaning to the present through their articulation of the past and created a common memory of the past for the Icelanders" (Long 2017, 36–37). In the contemporary sagas, recent events were transformed into a narrative discourse, and thus they were connected to the memories of the more distant past and integrated into the community's concept of its history.

In the study of Old Norse literature from the perspective of cultural memory, various approaches can be taken. Firstly, we can look for specific *sites of memory* contained in the narratives, such as placenames, personal names, or genealogies (Glauser 2000, 2007; Jørgensen 2010). Secondly, the texts can be analysed as sources of the medieval cultural concept of memory in the sense of the human ability to retain, process, and retrieve knowledge; it is possible to study direct or metaphorical textual references to memory and remembering, as well as matters concerning mnemonic practices (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2006; Hermann 2015, 2022). Thirdly, we can read the texts as *foundation narratives* that define collective identity by "explaining the origin and uniqueness of a society" and by "legitimizing the current social order" (Jørgensen 2010, 5). This is the approach predominantly taken in the present study. It is intended to serve as a theoretical basis for studying the contemporary sagas neither purely as literature, in the sense of focusing on the psychology of individual characters or on the literary quality of exciting dialogues and compelling scenes, nor purely as history, in the sense of attempting to filter out the literary elements in order to reveal facts. Instead, it allows us to interpret the texts as narrative discourses that record and construct the community's memories of its past by combining historical contents with a narrative form.

Since the analysis of medieval sources through the lens of modern theories poses specific problems, the rest of this introduction, after an overview of the sources, outlines some conceptual and methodological concerns. The study itself is divided into five chapters that explore different aspects of the narrative construction of medieval Icelandic identity.

Chapter 2 outlines the central themes that define the medieval Icelanders' collective identity in narratives describing the settlement and Christianization of Iceland. It then shows how these themes are accentuated in the introductory *þættir* of *Sturlunga saga*, so that thematic continuity is established between the accounts of the early history and this compilation. In the next chapters, the same themes are analysed in the contemporary sagas themselves, with an emphasis on the thematic unity of the entire immanent narrative of medieval Icelandic history.

Chapter 3 shows how one of these key themes, the importance of social mechanisms that strengthen internal unity, is developed in the depictions of internal Icelandic relations in the contemporary sagas. The predominant structural patterns in these narratives foreground the character types that embody these social mechanisms and counteract the disruptive forces in a decentralized society, so that even the tumultuous Sturlung Age is not presented as a time of a social downfall or disintegration. The texts thus construct a memory of the recent past from which the medieval Icelanders could proudly derive their collective identity.

Chapters 4–6 deal with the narrative accounts of contact between Iceland and Norway during and after their political integration. The chapter divisions are intended to make the discussion more clearly structured, not to imply that there were any sharply defined boundaries between the individual periods of the historical development. The chapters show how the narratives accentuate some of the other key themes that define medieval Icelandic collective identity, in particular the Icelanders' free will and active initiative in historically important decisions, as well as the deconstruction of the Icelanders' marginality within the Norse, European, and Christian cultural region. The individual historical persons depicted in the sagas are viewed as identity bearers who embody the various possible relationships between Iceland and the Norwegian monarchy and illustrate the gradual development of these relationships.

1.1 The sources

Most contemporary sagas with secular subject matter are not preserved individually, only as components of a compilation, *Sturlunga saga*.[1] *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* exists both individually and in a shortened version incorporated in *Sturlunga saga*. *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar* is not included in *Sturlunga saga* and is preserved separately. The bishops' sagas have a rich manuscript history, and most of them are extant in several different redactions. The king's saga, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, is not the primary object of analysis in the present study, but it provides some relevant material.

1 For details about its title, see Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, xii–xiv.

Sturlunga saga

Sturlunga saga is an extensive compilation of sagas dealing with twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic history. Its time span extends from 1117 to 1284 – with the exception of the introductory *þættir*, which depict earlier history. The compilation consists of nine longer narrative units, known as *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, *Sturlu saga*, *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*, *Guðmundar saga dýra*, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, *Íslendinga saga*, *Þórðar saga kakala*, *Svínfellinga saga*, and *Þorgils saga skarða*. It also contains shorter introductory, connective, and closing texts, including *Geirmundar þáttr heljarskinns*, *Haukdæla þáttr*, and *Sturlu þáttr*. The authorship and exact dating of most of the component sagas and *þættir* are not known with any certainty (Jón Jóhannesson 1946, xvi–xlix; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, xli–cxxii). An exception is *Íslendinga saga*, which is believed to have been written by Sturla Þórðarson the younger (1214–1284), probably in the last decade of his life.[2]

Sturlunga saga was probably compiled in the early fourteenth century. It is not sure who the compiler was; possible suggestions include the *lögmaðr* Þórðr Narfason of Skarð (d. 1308) or Þorsteinn Snorrason, canon and later abbot of the Helgafell monastery (d. 1353), in which case a somewhat later dating would be likely (Helgi Þorláksson 2012, 53–66; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, cxxix–cxlii). The compiler doubtlessly worked on behalf of some representatives of the ruling class, so the compilation presumably reflects attitudes that were dominant among the social elite, rather than the opinions of a specific individual.

The original redaction of *Sturlunga saga* is lost. Two later redactions are preserved in incomplete medieval vellum manuscripts – *Króksfjarðarbók* (AM 122a fol., ca. 1350–1370) and *Reykjarfjarðarbók* (AM 122b fol., ca. 1375–1400) – and in about forty seventeenth- to nineteenth-century paper copies (Úlfar Bragason 2005, 428–429; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, xx–xli). The extant manuscripts cannot be regarded as "reliable witnesses to the original compilation" (Guðrún Nordal 2010, 175); apart from multiple textual differences, each redaction contains some sections that are not included in the other (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, cxxii–cxxix). Nevertheless, Ólafía Einarsdóttir (1968, 52–80) has convincingly argued that many of the sections found only in one redaction were part of the original compilation, and the differences are caused by the individual redactors' choice to omit some mate-

2 Sturla Þórðarson may have played a role in the composition of other component texts and/or in the compilation of *Sturlunga saga* (Úlfar Bragason 1986a, 16–20; 2005, 429–430; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, cxlii–clv).

rial and retain other.[3] She thus disproves the previously dominant opinion that most of the differences are a result of interpolations composed by the redactors or taken from other sources. The main difference that probably actually resulted from interpolations by the redactor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* is the incorporation of *Þorgils saga skarða* and *Sturlu þáttr*; other additions in *Reykjarfjarðarbók* are the so-called *Jarteinasaga Guðmundar biskups* and *Árna saga biskups*, which follow after the compilation and are not incorporated into it.[4]

Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar

The separate *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, depicting the protagonist's skills, journeys, and conflict with his opponent Þorvaldr Snorrason around 1200, is more extensive than the abbreviated version incorporated in *Sturlunga saga*. However, it ends with Hrafn's death and its immediate aftermath, whereas his sons' subsequent vengeance and its political consequences are only described in other sections of *Sturlunga saga*.

Hrafns saga was probably composed around 1230–1250 (Úlfar Bragason 1988, 267). It is extant in two redactions; the longer redaction is preserved in fourteenth-century fragments and seventeenth-century paper copies (e.g. AM 155 fol.); the shorter redaction is preserved in an incomplete fifteenth-century manuscript (AM 557 4to) and its seventeenth-century paper copies (e.g. AM 552 n 4to) (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, clxxiii–clxxiv).[5] The compiler of *Sturlunga saga* probably used an older redaction that is not extant and that presumably contained somewhat longer formulations (Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1993, 67).

3 Ólafía Einarsdóttir bases her argumentation on several fourteenth-century Icelandic annals, which, as she shows, must have been derived from the original redaction of *Sturlunga saga* (1968, 46–49). According to Guðrún Nordal (2010, 184, 189), a key motivation for the redactors' different choices may have been their regional interests, as *Króksfjarðarbók* probably originated in the west and *Reykjarfjarðarbók* in the north of Iceland.

4 The edition used here (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 2021) is primarily based on *Króksfjarðarbók* but follows *Reykjarfjarðarbók* or its copies where the text of the former is lost or where the latter contains text not included in the former; both texts are printed where there are significant textual differences (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, xvii).

5 The present study follows the 2021 edition by Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir (*Sturlunga saga III*), which follows the 1987 edition by Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, based primarily on the copy of the longer redaction in AM 155 fol.

Arons saga Hjörleifssonar

Arons saga Hjörleifssonar tells the story of Aron Hjörleifsson (ca. 1200–1255), a supporter of Guðmundr Arason (Bishop of Hólar 1203–1237) in his conflicts with the secular leaders, primarily the Sturlungar. The dating of the saga's composition has been an object of debate. Its first editor Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1858, lxvii) has dated it as early as 1270, Jón Jóhannesson (1946, l) as late as 1350. Recent research has shown that *Arons saga* cannot be younger than 1320–1330, when *Elzta saga Guðmundar biskups*, which builds on it, was written (Stefán Karlsson 1983, clxvii–clxviii; Úlfar Bragason 2013, 128). It is presumably not much older either, because it was possibly related to the translation of Guðmundr Arason's relics in 1315 (Porter 1971, 144). Thus, *Arons saga* may have been composed around 1320.

No complete medieval manuscript of *Arons saga* is extant. In the editions the text is reconstructed from an early-fifteenth-century vellum fragment (AM 551 d β 4to), seventeenth-century paper copies (AM 212 fol., AM 426 fol.), and *Elzta saga Guðmundar biskups* in *Codex Resenianus* (AM 399 4to) and its copy (AM 394 4to) (Porter 1971, 139–141; 1993, 21).

Þorláks saga

Þorlákr Þórhallsson was Bishop of Skálholt in 1178–1193, and he is regarded as Iceland's most prominent saint, acknowledged by the Pope as its patron saint in 1984. Þorlákr's sanctity was first proclaimed shortly after his death, already at the Alþingi of 1198. The same year, his relics were translated to Skálholt, and an account of his miracles was read out at the Alþingi of 1199. Þorlákr's popularity as a saint in Iceland is documented by church dedications and texts. There is a fragment of a Latin hagiography from ca. 1200 (AM 386 4to), the likely source for the oldest liturgical texts and for the oldest version of *Þorláks saga*. The oldest extant miracle collection (AM 645 4to) dates from ca. 1220, and several fragments of Latin liturgical texts date from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries (Wolf 2008, 246–248).

Þorláks saga is, in terms of content and structure, a typical hagiography of a confessor. It consists of a description of the protagonist's life, in particular his ecclesiastical career, and an account of his death, burial, the translation of his relics, and his miracles. The portrayal does not dwell on details and presents the protagonist more as a type than as an individual (Ármann Jakobsson and Ásdís Egilsdóttir 1999, 92–93; Wolf 2008, 249–250).

Þorláks saga is extant in three medieval redactions. The A-redaction was probably composed before Bishop Páll Jónsson's death in 1211; its earliest textual

evidence is the fragment AM 383 4to I from around 1250, and its primary manuscript is Stock. Perg. fol. no. 5 from around 1360 (Wolf 2008, 249). The B-redaction was probably composed on the occasion of the second translation of Þorlákr's relics in 1292, and it is extant in the manuscript AM 382 4to from around 1350. The redactor points out in the prologue that the original saga neglects Bishop Þorlákr's struggles with his secular adversaries, and he adds interpolations focused on this aspect of the bishop's life – primarily *Oddaverja þáttr*. Due to its strong bias and relatedness to the politics of its time, the *þáttr* is more likely to be an ideologically motivated narrative than a reliable record of historical reality (Ármann Jakobsson and Ásdís Egilsdóttir 1999, 92–99; Wolf 2008, 249–250). The C-redaction was composed after 1325, and its oldest extant manuscript is AM 219 fol. from the late fourteenth century, but the text is preserved in its entirety only in seventeenth-century copies. It also contains *Oddaverja þáttr*, but its position in the text differs from the B-redaction. All three redactions end with accounts of miracles, which differ considerably in order, extent, and wording (Wolf 2008, 249–250).[6]

Jóns saga

Jón Ögmundarson was Bishop of Hólar in 1106–1121. The choice of Jón as Iceland's second saint canonized by the Alþingi may have originated from an initiative by Brandr Sæmundarson, Bishop of Hólar in 1163–1201, to establish a saint from his own diocese. Jón's relics were translated in 1200, and a Latin hagiography, preserved only in later Old Norse redactions, was written shortly after 1200 to substantiate his claim to sainthood (McCreesh 2007, 16).

Jóns saga follows the tradition of hagiographies of bishops and confessors, and some episodes probably stem rather from this tradition than from Jón Ögmundarson's real life, as the saga was written quite long after his death and could scarcely rely on trustworthy sources. Such borrowings were frequent in hagiography, where it was more important to create an ideal image than an accurate personal portrayal (see Grønlie 2017a, 7–8).

Jóns saga is extant in three main redactions from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Many identical formulations in all three redactions point to a common written source, while the differences are likely to be deliberate alterations motivated by the redactors' wish to emphasize specific ideas. The first redaction, known as S (Skálholt), probably originates from the first half of the

6 The present study follows the 2002 edition by Ásdís Egilsdóttir (*Biskupa sögur II*), A-redaction and B-redaction.

thirteenth century. Its oldest extant fragment is AM 221 fol., dated to around 1300; the oldest complete manuscript is AM 234 fol. from around 1340. The second redaction, known as H (Hólar), may have been written around 1230–1260. Its main manuscripts are both post-medieval: Stock. papp. 4to no. 4 from around 1630, and AM 392 4to from around 1640. The youngest redaction, probably composed in the early fourteenth century, is known as L (Latin), as its style is strongly influenced by Latin hagiographies. Its main medieval manuscript is the incomplete Stock. Perg. fol. no. 5, dated to around 1360; the complete text is extant only in post-medieval paper copies (Foote 2003, ccxiii–ccxxxvii).

Gísls þáttr Illugasonar is in some form included in all the extant redactions of *Jóns saga*, and it is also preserved independently in *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*,[7] a compilation of kings' sagas from around 1280. The S-redaction and the H-redaction of *Jóns saga* contain an abridged retelling of *Gísls þáttr*, but multiple formulations shared with the version preserved in *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* imply that the texts were derived from the same written source. The L-redaction contains a much longer version of *Gísls þáttr*, clearly based on a written source related to the version in *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, which nevertheless does not include the episode where Jón miraculously saves Gísl from the gallows. This episode was probably added by the redactor of the L-redaction[8] (Foote 2003, cclviii–cclxvii).

Guðmundar sögur

Guðmundr Arason was Bishop of Hólar in 1203–1237. He was never canonized, but a broad array of written and folkloric narratives documents his popularity as a saint in both medieval and post-medieval Iceland. He was regarded as a holy man already during his life, even before Þorlákr and Jón were declared saints at the Alþingi. At first, his veneration was opposed by the Icelandic Church and the secular leaders, which is probably the reason why no complete hagiographic saga about him is known from the thirteenth century. In the fourteenth century, however, these same authorities aimed for his canonization. This effort inspired the production of several redactions of a hagiographic saga, but it brought no results because the power of canonization had been restricted to the Pope already in 1234 (McCreesh 2007, 17–20).

7 This compilation is preserved in two sister manuscripts – *Hulda* (AM 66 fol.) from the fourteenth century and *Hrokkinskinna* (GkS 1010 fol.) from the fifteenth century. Both are copies of an original that is not extant.

8 There is no complete scholarly agreement on the origin of this episode and on the relative dating of the versions of *Gísls þáttr*; for an overview of the debate see Magnús Fjalldal 1986, 153–155.

The sagas of Guðmundr Arason deal with conflicts between Icelandic ecclesiastical and secular power in the first half of the thirteenth century. In comparison with *Þorláks saga* and *Jóns saga*, they contain more political subject matter and elements of secular biography, and yet they are hagiographic in essence (Skórzewska 2011, 25–28). In the light of such "hybridisation" and "extension of generic repertoires" (Grønlie 2017a, 259), it makes sense to approach the secular contemporary sagas and the bishops' sagas as a literary continuum.

Guðmundar saga biskups is extant in four redactions. All are partly based on *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*, which was the first written account of Guðmundr's early life, focused on his piety, asceticism, humility, and early miracles. It was written shortly after Guðmundr's death in 1237 by one of the clerics from his circle, probably Lambkárr Þorgilsson (d. 1249). *Prestssaga* is unfinished, ending abruptly with Guðmundr's consecration journey to Norway in 1202, and it is preserved only as a component of the later *Guðmundar sögur* and *Sturlunga saga*. The earliest extant account of Guðmundr's years as bishop is contained in the secular *Íslendinga saga*; its hagiographic counterpart is a miracle collection from the early fourteenth century (Stefán Karlsson 2000, 156–158; Úlfar Bragason 2003, 483–484).

The redactions A, B, and C are based on these and other sources, including *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* and *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*. They were probably composed around 1320–1330 in connection with canonization efforts after the first translation of Guðmundr's relics in 1315. The exact dating of the redactions is unknown, and the alphabetical order does not show the chronology of their composition, but rather the extent to which they differ from their sources. The A-redaction (preserved in *Codex Resenianus*, AM 399 4to, ca. 1330–1350), known as *Elzta saga Guðmundar biskups*, follows the sources rather closely. The B-redaction incorporates more hagiographic elements, but its structure and style do not fully follow hagiographic conventions; the C-redaction is closer to Latin hagiographies in terms of style. The D-redaction (preserved in Stock. Perg. fol. no. 5, ca. 1360) was written by Arngrímr Brandsson, the abbot of the Þingeyrar monastery in 1350–1361, in connection with renewed canonization attempts after the second translation of Guðmundr's relics in 1344. Its main source was the C-redaction, but the material was substantially revised: details from Guðmundr's youth were omitted, and additional miracles and parallels with foreign saints, as well as anecdotes of folkloric origin, were incorporated. The D-redaction seems to be primarily intended for foreign audiences, although it is not extant in any Latin version (Stefán Karlsson 2000, 158–169).[9]

9 References to the A-redaction follow the 1983 edition by Stefán Karlsson (*Guðmundar sögur biskups I*). References to the D-redaction follow the 1948 edition by Guðni Jónsson (*Byskupa sögur III: Hólabyskupar*).

Árna saga biskups

Árna saga biskups is a biography of Árni Þorláksson, Bishop of Skálholt in 1269–1298, focused on his struggle for increased ecclesiastical power, known as the *staðamál*. Since these events are not recorded in *Sturlunga saga*, *Árna saga* is the only long narrative source depicting them. While the narrative employs a learned style inspired by hagiographic literature, including biblical allusions, its subject matter is mainly political. It thus again illustrates the tendency of the bishops' sagas to intertwine hagiographic and historiographical elements.

Árna saga was written after the end of the *staðamál* in 1297 and probably before the fire at Skálholt in 1309, when most of its written sources were lost. It may have been composed during the episcopacy of Árni Helgason (1304–1320), Árni Þorláksson's friend and kinsman, or possibly in the bishopless years 1298–1304 as propaganda for Árni Helgason's election. Árni Helgason presumably took the initiative to create the saga, but the text does not seem to be the work of one author. *Árna saga* was included in *Reykjarfjarðarbók*, where it followed after *Sturlunga saga* and was clearly intended to serve as its continuation. The section containing *Árna saga* is only preserved in the seventeenth-century copies. The extant text ends abruptly in 1290–1291, and the end of the saga is lost (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998, v–vi, xxiii–xxxviii).

Lárentíus saga biskups

Lárentíus saga biskups is a biography of Lárentíus Kálfsson, Bishop of Hólar in 1324–1331. Before his election as bishop, Lárentíus spent much time in Norway; he often stayed with the Archbishop of Niðarós and worked as his emissary in Iceland. He was involved in serious conflicts within the ecclesiastical elite, which largely replaced the discord between ecclesiastical and secular power from the previous decades.

The text itself ascribes its authorship to an unnamed companion of Bishop Lárentíus; the likely author is the priest Einarr Hafliðason (1307–1393). He also wrote *Lögmannsannáll* (AM 420 b 4to), which records many of the same events, often using the same wording. Internal references in the saga suggest that it was composed after 1346. The narrative combines the typical biographical style with annalistic references to documents from the Hólar bishopric's archive, but also with unexpectedly humorous anecdotes from the bishop's everyday life, probably the author's own memories of him. This makes the saga unique within its genre.

Lárentíus saga is preserved in two redactions, A (AM 406 a I 4to, ca. 1530) and B (AM 180 b fol., ca. 1500), and in a paper copy commissioned by Þorlákur Skúla-

son, Bishop of Hólar in 1628–1656 (AM 404 4to, ca. 1640), which combines both redactions, and from which other copies are derived. The B-redaction was maybe written by Lárentíus's son, the monk Árni. The ending is missing in all the extant texts (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998, lviii–lx, lxiv–lxvii).[10]

Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar and *Magnúss saga Hákonarsonar*

Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar is a biography of Hákon Hákonarson, King of Norway in 1217–1263. It combines the style and themes of the classical kings' sagas with elements of continental royal biography. It was written by Sturla Þórðarson the younger (1214–1284), probably during his first stay in Norway in 1263–1265, when it was commissioned by Hákon's son Magnús. The saga is preserved in three redactions; the main respective manuscripts are *Eirspennill* (AM 47 fol., ca. 1325), *Codex Frisianus* (AM 45 fol., ca. 1330), and *Flateyjarbók* (GkS 1005 fol., ca. 1390) (Schach 1993, 259–260).[11]

Sturla Þórðarson was also the author of *Magnúss saga Hákonarsonar*, a biography of Hákon Hákonarson's son and successor Magnús Hákonarson, King of Norway in 1263–1280. The text was probably written partly during Sturla's second stay in Norway in 1266–1271, and partly after his return from his third visit to Norway in 1278. The saga is preserved only in two short fragments (AM 325 X 4to, ca. 1400), and some material from it is copied in fourteenth-century Icelandic annals (Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1993, 401–402).

1.2 Conceptual concerns in research on the contemporary sagas

The contemporary sagas have received little attention in the study of medieval Icelandic literature and cultural history. And, insofar as they have been studied, the research has largely been limited by the choice of approaches and perspec-

10 The present study follows the 1998 edition by Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir (*Biskupa sögur III*), which presents both the A- and B-redaction where both texts are preserved and is supplemented by text from the post-medieval copy (Þ). The chapter divisions and numbers differ in the redactions, so all references are marked with A, B, or Þ.

11 The edition used here (Sverrir Jakobsson, Þorleifur Hauksson, Tor Ulset, 2013) is primarily based on the *Flateyjarbók* redaction, as the older extant redactions contain abridged versions of the text.

tives. In this section, I will first outline some general research tendencies, and then turn to broader conceptual issues.

The first limitation in the study of the contemporary sagas is that their narrative substance was underrated in older research. If they were analysed at all, it was mainly from philological or historical perspectives. The likely reason is that traditional approaches to medieval sources were based on the dichotomy between historiography and literature, and the contemporary sagas, which deal with recent events and contain detailed accounts of political history, were predominantly categorized as the former. Another reason is that they are extensive and multi-stranded narratives, so their narrative nature may be less obvious at the first sight than it is in the case of most other types of sagas. Literary studies of the contemporary sagas were therefore scarce, and the few existing ones were focused on individual scenes or narrative features, rather than on the relationship between form and meaning.[12]

Nevertheless, an analysis of this relationship is necessary for a deeper understanding of any narrative source. In this respect, a groundbreaking step in research has been Úlfar Bragason's assertion that the contemporary sagas follow the same narrative principles as the sagas of Icelanders (1981; 1986a, 37–83; 2010, 67–91). He stresses the necessity of recognizing the sagas' narrativity before assessing their value as historiography, because their interpretation of history is determined by the selection and representation of events in a discourse (1986a, 80–82; 1988, 267–268; 2010, 265–266). In continuation of this research tendency, the objective of the present study is to provide a more extensive and comprehensive analysis of the narrative techniques employed in the contemporary sagas as means of interpretation and evaluation – on the level of individual narrative strands, *Sturlunga saga* as a compilation, as well as broader intertextual networks.

Sturlunga saga, as a medieval compilation, differs from many other manuscript collections of sagas, in which the component stories are only loosely connected or largely independent of each other. Research has shown that the compiler considerably changed his material, consciously shaping its structure and meaning (Úlfar Bragason 1986a, 124–181; 2010, 187–227, 264–265). It is therefore important to analyse *Sturlunga saga* with an awareness of its specificity as a compilation. However, older studies (Björn M. Ólsen 1902; Pétur Sigurðsson 1933–1935) focused too much on the possible origins of the component sagas, on what was original in the individual sagas, what was interpolated by the compiler, and what the sources of these interpolations were. This led to neglecting the questions of the compilation's meaning. The meaning of *Sturlunga saga* in its extant form has been analysed by

12 For an overview of research see Úlfar Bragason 1986a, 3–36; 2005, 427–446.

Úlfar Bragason (1986a, 2010), who nevertheless still pays much attention to comparing the available 'original' sagas with their versions in the compilation. Here the text will be studied in its present form and treated like other sagas – as a product of a changeable tradition including an inaccessible oral stage of narrativization and the work of several writers and redactors. For the purpose of detailed analyses of the relationship between structure and meaning, the compilation will be divided into the individual narrative strands, because a study of the whole compilation's structure at once would lead to undesirable simplifications and generalizations.[13] Nevertheless, the principles of meaning construction within *Sturlunga saga* as a systematically edited compilation will be taken into account, as well as the fact that it exists in two redactions.

It has been suggested that the differences between the redactions significantly alter the compilation's meaning (Úlfar Bragason 2010, 243, 267; Helgi Þorláksson 2012, 82–84). Here it will be argued, however, that the additions in *Reykjarfjarðarbók* reinforce the ideas expressed in the rest of the compilation. *Sturlunga saga* certainly "did not find a disinterested audience in the fourteenth century but an active one, which continued to shape and polish the depiction of the main political players of the previous century" (Guðrún Nordal 2010, 190). Nevertheless, the additions in *Reykjarfjarðarbók* imply that the memory of Icelandic history presented in *Sturlunga saga* remained predominant among the social elite throughout the whole fourteenth century, while most other competing memories were suppressed and gradually forgotten.

This is related to the question of the contemporary sagas' meaning in terms of their social significance. It has been suggested that the chief reason for composing *Sturlunga saga* was the Icelandic elite's need to substantiate its power claims after Iceland's incorporation into the Norwegian kingdom by referring to its ancestors' memorable deeds (Úlfar Bragason 2010, 259–261; Helgi Þorláksson 2012, 69–82). While I agree that the purpose of *Sturlunga saga* was to strengthen the position and identity of the Icelandic elite in the early fourteenth century, I believe that it is limiting to view it primarily as genealogical material documenting the activities of individual men's ancestors. I will argue that the compilation defines collective identity in a much broader sense, creating the *foundation narrative* of the Norwegian-Icelandic realm from the Icelanders' perspective. Together with other texts, it defines their position in this realm.

13 Where I refer to the component texts by their individual titles (*Svínfellinga saga*, *Þórðar saga kakala*, etc.), I do so for the sake of convenience, and I do not intend to imply that these narratives should be regarded as identical with their older, separate versions. Instead, I presume that even within the compilation, the individual storylines make sense as narrative units shaped by particular structural patterns.

Concerning the connections between *Sturlunga saga* and other related texts, the secular contemporary sagas have mostly been studied separately from the bishops' sagas.[14] These have sometimes been included in the category of the contemporary sagas (Clunies Ross 2010, 35–36), but they have mainly been analysed in the context of continental and translated hagiographic literature, as documents reflecting the saints' cults.[15] This approach has undeniably been fruitful, especially in the case of the saintly bishops Þorlákr and Guðmundr (Hunt 1985; Cormack 1994; Whaley 1994; Ciklamini 2004; McCreesh 2007; DuBois 2008; Wolf 2008; Skórzewska 2011). It has, however, limited our understanding of the corpus of the contemporary sagas as a unified whole, and it has left some of the texts overshadowed by others. That concerns first and foremost *Árna saga biskups* and *Lárentíus saga biskups*, which have largely been studied as purely factual sources, not as narrative discourses (Haug 2015; Boulhosa 2017). The likely reason is that their focus is political, rather than hagiographic, so they do not fit into the traditional approach to the bishops' sagas as hagiographies. They are, however, the only narrative sources depicting Iceland after the acceptance of royal rule, so they deserve attention as reflections of how this historical period was evaluated through narrativization. Other bishops' sagas, apart from documenting the saints' cults, express important ideas about medieval Icelandic society and identity as well. This calls for an emphasis on the similarities, rather than the differences, between the bishops' sagas and the secular contemporary sagas. In the present study, both groups of texts are treated as equally relevant sources of how the medieval Icelanders wished to remember their past.

In this context, it must be pointed out that the contemporary sagas have received little attention in memory-oriented research on the medieval North. Understandably, memory studies have focused on the dominant *foundation narratives* of Icelandic society – texts dealing with the settlement and the Saga Age, such as *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, and the sagas of Icelanders (Glauser 2000; Hermann 2010; Gísli Sigurðsson 2014; Long 2017). The perspective of memory studies has also proved fruitful in studying other sources of a broadly historiographical nature, such as the kings' sagas, chronicles, hagiographic sagas, or legal texts, as well as texts dealing directly or indirectly with mythology and the ancient past, such as Eddic poetry, skaldic poetry, *Snorra Edda*, and the legendary sagas (Hermann 2009;

14 Ásdís Egilsdóttir (1992) argues that the bishops' sagas can be regarded as a genre despite the differences in style and structure, but she does not extensively discuss their relationship with the secular contemporary sagas.

15 Siân Grønlie (2017a) studies hagiographic and secular sagas as a literary continuum based on "creative interplay" (2017a, ix), but she focuses on the sagas of Icelanders, only briefly mentioning the contemporary sagas.

Hermann et al. 2014; Glauser et al. 2018). Conversely, the contemporary sagas and the non-hagiographic sagas of the Icelandic bishops have not primarily been regarded as *foundation narratives* because they depict recent events that were not yet clearly defined as 'the past' at the time of writing. I believe, however, that for this very reason, they offer a unique opportunity to analyse the process through which the recent past is integrated into cultural memory, and to show how the narrative techniques available in the given literary culture are employed in this process.

Other issues related to research on the contemporary sagas are broader conceptual concerns that need to be addressed in greater detail. The first is the general approach to conflict, social stability, and social transformation, the other is the medieval concept of nationality.

1.2.1 Conflict and social development

The first conceptual problem underlying much research on the contemporary sagas is the assumption that conflict is inherently socially disruptive. This can lead to the perception of any process of social transformation, which inevitably temporarily intensifies conflicts, as a social disintegration. However, such a simplified notion does not accord with the political dynamics of most medieval societies, where violent confrontations were part of normal social interaction (Davies and Fouracre 1986, 233). Violence was an inevitable element of conflicts, but it was scarcely the sole means of dealing with a dispute, rather just one of the aspects that had to be taken into consideration. Moreover, far from being unrestricted, it followed certain rules set by the social institutions. The aim of these rules was not to completely eradicate violence, only to restrict its span, so that conflicts would not continue endlessly (Halsall 1999, 15–19).

Especially in societies with little developed centralized power, the social institutions actually derived their authority primarily from the regulation and resolution of conflicts (Davies and Fouracre 1986, 229). The existence of conflicts thus strengthened such institutions and motivated their development. Conflict can even be considered a structuring principle in societies that lack effective authority (Black-Michaud 1975, 16), which was not entirely the case in medieval Iceland with its complex legal system and social hierarchy, but even there, conflicts shaped the social relations to a considerable extent. They contributed to processes that increased social cohesion, because the constant threat of violent clashes motivated everyone to maintain social ties beyond the kin group. Although men were not involved in any conflict most of the time, it was always a possibility, so everybody needed to rely on a group of allies and a powerful chieftain. The need

for protection thus strengthened the alliances and the chieftains' power even during peaceful times. These social ties then regulated conflict when it occurred (Byock 1982, 25; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2007, 175–176). In practice, chieftains and other influential men could settle conflicts by participation in lawsuits, mediation, or arbitration. Mediation was usually carried out by somebody who was tied to both parties by alliance or kinship, whereas arbitration typically involved more authority and was carried out by somebody whose status was superior to that of the participants. It was important for the arbitrator's prestige to have his demands accepted and to reach a lasting reconciliation, so he had to come up with a solution that satisfied both parties. Such a successful intervention thus not only terminated the dispute at hand, but also strengthened the connections between its participants and the local leader (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999, 150–182).

In the first centuries of Icelandic history, when conflicts were largely personal,[16] the social structure itself contributed to the regulation of disputes as well. Whereas actual feuding societies are typically tribal, territorial, and characterized by unilineal kinship structures, medieval Iceland was a bilateral society where followers of different chieftains lived side by side. The termination of conflicts was thus not just a concern of the participants but was actively supported by the whole community (Helgi Þorláksson 2007, 73–74). And, since the main motivating factor underlying conflicts was a need to reclaim esteem in the eyes of the community, it was not in the participants' interest to break the generally accepted rules (Miller 1990, 180–181).

The increased concentration of power from the twelfth century led to the emergence of more serious, long-term power struggles. As power became more territorial, the overlap of supporter groups, which could previously prevent extensive conflicts, gradually decreased (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999, 129–132). As the involvement of the broader community in conflict resolution was reduced and the chieftains' power continued to grow, more and more influential arbitrators were needed for successful termination of conflicts. This situation can be perceived as a crisis (Tranter 1987, 132–133), but here it will be argued that the sources, without denying some degree of destabilization, show how the social system adapted to this development and responded to the increased tension by the evolution of more advanced social institutions. This process included an increase and transformation of international contacts.

16 Such personal conflicts could arise from situations such as murder, assault, abduction of women, paternity, divorce, inheritance, land boundaries, trade, theft, breach of agreement, etc. (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999, 160).

The most serious problem was the continuing absence of executive power, which was eventually solved by the Icelandic elite's initiative to establish a direct political contact with the Norwegian monarchy. That, in turn, led to the establishment of more efficient social mechanisms for regulating violence and more complex and permanent structures of government. Thus, although the Sturlung Age must certainly be regarded as a period of social instability, it brought about a social transformation that finally resulted in increased stability. In this sense, conflict continued to be a productive social element because it motivated the development of cohesive forces.

Accordingly, it is important not to automatically regard a transformation of the social system as a decline. It must be kept in mind that social resilience is not synonymous with resistance to change, but rather with adaptability. Keeping any social system unchanged is not only impossible, but also disadvantageous, because it inhibits progress. Social development inevitably involves periods of destabilization during the transformative stages, but such challenges can strengthen the social system if it adapts to the community's evolving needs on the political and structural level. On the cultural level, the temporary insecurity caused by the changes can be alleviated by finding a sense of continuity in the image of history, primarily through the construction of narratives. That is the central object of the present study.

1.2.2 Identity, independence, nationality

Another conceptual issue that extends far beyond the study of the contemporary sagas is the question to what extent it makes sense to apply the modern concept of *national independence* – or even *nation* as such – to medieval Iceland and Norway. This leads to the broader question of the historical development of the concept of nationality, which has been an object of debate in historical research and the social sciences. Since "collective memory became nationalized" in the nineteenth century (Rigney 2018, 249), it was assumed that every historical society that formed a political entity was a national state in the modern sense. Such views were later challenged by the modernist theorists, such as Eugen Weber (1976), Benedict Anderson (1983), Ernest Gellner (1983), or Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), who argued that the concept of nationality was created only around the turn of the nineteenth century, in connection with the French Revolution, industrialization, and urbanization. These scholars "regarded the nation as a cultural artefact, as a product of invention" (Confino 2011, 39), in the sense that "a shared national memory has always been a matter of forgetting the historical differences within the bounded nation" (Rigney 2018, 249). The importance of memory in the

construction of nations was emphasized mainly by Pierre Nora (1984–1992). Other theorists, however, have criticized this approach. Anthony D. Smith (1991) believes that it neglects the roots of modern nationality in cultural heritage and shared history; Adrian Hastings (1997) argues that national identity in a form comparable to the modern one existed, at least in England, from the Late Middle Ages.

These discussions have been reflected in the equally contradictory opinions on the development of nationhood in Scandinavia and Iceland. The authors of *Dansk identitetshistorie* (1991–1992) believe that the concept of national identity was not relevant in the North until the sixteenth century, whereas other historians claim that national identity mattered in the Scandinavian kingdoms from the Late Middle Ages at the latest (Lunden 1995; Brønserud Larsen 1998). Such different views stem from the researchers' varying definitions of the concept of *nation* – as 'a people' in the sense of ethnicity and shared origin, or as 'the citizens of a state' in a more political sense.[17] In this regard, it has been shown that the former applies to medieval Scandinavia much more than the latter. Sverre Bagge (1995, 6–11) has pointed out that the national identity expressed in the kings' sagas is mainly based on patriotic sentiments and pride of the Norwegians' characteristic personal qualities, rather than on the political aspects of belonging to a kingdom. Sverrir Jakobsson (1999a, 93–101) has argued that while some of the kings' sagas, such as *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*, express a connection between Norwegian collective identity and the kingdom as a state, these texts reflect only the 'public identity' constructed by the official royal ideology, whereas the generally established 'popular identity' seems to have been mainly regional or local.

In the case of Iceland, which was not a kingdom, the scholarly definition of a nation was traditionally based on the existence of one shared law and legal assembly (Jón Jónsson Aðils 1906, 29; Sigurður Nordal 1942, 150–152; Jakob Benediktsson 1974, 170). Later research has shown, however, that although a shared law could construct collective identity, the fact that Iceland, unlike Norway, had one common law from early on cannot automatically be perceived as a marker of a national state. The Norwegian provinces were similarly defined by their laws and legal assemblies, and legal and literary sources imply that the provinces were important identity units as well, although they simultaneously belonged to a kingdom. In this sense, Icelanders were 'a people' in the same way as the inhabi-

17 The Old Norse term *þjóð* can denote both, which makes it difficult to distinguish these concepts from each other in the sources (Gunnar Karlsson 1987, 131). In some contexts, the term *þjóð* can even denote any large crowd or 'the public', the inhabitants of one country or the people belonging to one legal assembly, but also all Norsemen, or even all Christians (Sverrir Jakobsson 1999b, 111–115; 2005, 114–124, 332–335).

tants of the Norwegian legal provinces (Hastrup 1984, 241; Gunnar Karlsson 1987, 129).[18] Accordingly, it has been shown that medieval Icelanders, just like medieval Scandinavians, defined themselves as a nation primarily in the sense of *ethnical identification* – an awareness of ethnical, cultural, geographical, and language identity, which was not based on the idea of a political national state (Gunnar Karlsson 1987, 132–133; 1999, 143–144). The *ethnical identification* of Icelanders was possibly formed in the twelfth century by the writing of *Íslendingabók* and *The First Grammatical Treatise* (Hastrup 1984, 239–240; Gunnar Karlsson 1987, 133–134), or at the latest around the time of saga writing, and it may have been unusually strong because of a well documented shared history with a clearly defined beginning (Mundal 1997, 14–15; 2010, 466–467, 472).

Recent research has further elaborated on these ideas, showing that the medieval Icelandic concept of nationality was derived from multiple factors, so it was broader and more variable than how it is understood today (Sverrir Jakobsson 1999b, 111–115; 2005, 328–332). Depending on the context, the definition of collective identity could include the inhabitants of smaller or larger areas. In legal terms, Iceland was perceived as a single unit, but the sources also show signs of local identity, related to the quarter (*fjórðungr*), region (*hérað*), or district (*hreppr*). Conversely, when the Norsemen travelled outside of the North, they could all be defined as one nation due to their shared language. In religious contexts, all Christians were regarded as one people, as Christian identity was more important than geographically or politically defined nationality. The medieval Icelanders' identity thus consisted of several layers: Christian, Norse, Icelandic, and regional. The relative significance of these categories varied, depending on the geographical or political environment with which the individual was interacting (1999b, 115–122, 134–135; 2005, 43–44, 279–303). This accords with the idea that "individuals possess various identities according to the various groups, communities, belief systems, political systems, etc. to which they belong" (Jan Assmann 2008, 113).

In the light of these findings, it does not make sense to assess the medieval Icelanders' relationships with the Norwegian kingdom in terms of the modern concept of national independence. Instead, it can be assumed that Icelandic identity always developed in relation to Norway and included elements of both individuation and relatedness. This premise is based on the concept of the medieval North as a unified cultural region, within which continental Scandinavia was viewed as the centre and Iceland, together with other non-continental Norse territories, as the periphery. Accordingly, it will be argued here that peripherality and

18 These ideas have recently been further developed by Sverrir Jakobsson (1999b, 122–126; 2005, 336–341).

the consequent feeling of marginality are some of the central themes of the contemporary sagas. Icelanders were doubtlessly aware of their peripheral position within the North and Europe ever since the settlement, but in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this awareness was presumably increased by the intensified political contact with Norway. The gradual integration into Scandinavian political structures probably broadened the Icelanders' cultural and social horizons; it did not contradict their individuality, but it motivated its clearer definition.

It is therefore likely that one of the main purposes of the narratives that describe this period of Icelandic history was to provide such a definition by asking and answering a set of questions that are essential for the formulation of collective identity. What makes the community unique among the other groups with which it interacts? What does it have in common with them? What determines its position among them? Which events from the community's history have defined what it has become? Which historical personages can be perceived as the bearers of the community's identity? These are also the central questions of the present study. Since the medieval concept of identity was multi-layered and its perception was situational, the objective is not to formulate a uniform and universal collective identity of medieval Icelanders that could be perceived as *national* in the modern sense. Instead, the aim is to describe the various levels and categories of their identity, as well as to present the diverse roles that they could assume in their contact with the Norwegian monarchy.

1.3 Methodological concerns: Medieval literature and modern theories of memory and narrative

1.3.1 Communicative and cultural memory

In modern memory studies, *memory* has been understood as "an umbrella term for all those processes of a biological, medial, or social nature which relate past and present (and future) in sociocultural contexts" (Erll 2011, 7). In the relationship between memory and culture, the individual (cognitive) level and the collective (social and medial) level continuously interact with each other. There is no such thing as "pre-cultural individual memory" or memory "detached from individuals and embodied only in media and institutions" (Erll 2008, 5). Until the twentieth century, however, "memory as a matter of the neuro-mental system" was the only form of memory that had been recognized as such (Jan Assmann 2008, 109).

The concept of social or collective memory was first systematically developed in the 1920s by the sociologist and anthropologist Maurice Halbwachs (see Marcel and Mucchielli 2008). He describes memory as a group reconstruction of the past,

in the sense that while only individuals can physically remember, it is social groups who determine what is *memorable* and *how* it will be remembered (see Burke 1997, 44). Thus, "no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (Halbwachs 1992, 43). Halbwachs's theory has been crucial for modern memory studies, but it has been criticized for presenting the social frameworks as too static and passive, ignoring the dynamic reciprocity between memory and society (Rigney 2008, 95; 2018, 251; Long 2017, 24–25). Later approaches have therefore been based on the idea that while memory is shaped by social frameworks, it can also redefine them (see Rigney 2018).

Since these processes can take different forms, the cultural historians Jan and Aleida Assmann have formulated the distinction between "two different *modi memorandi*, ways of remembering" (Jan Assmann 2008, 110): *communicative memory* and *cultural memory*. Communicative memory is "the area of memory confirmed by contemporary witnesses" (Assmann 2011, 35) in everyday communication and has a limited temporal horizon of up to eighty or a hundred years (Assmann 1995, 127). Cultural memory, by contrast, is "foundational memory that relates to origins" (2011, 37). It consists of *figures of memory*, which are "fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation" in the form of narratives, rites, or monuments (1995, 128–129). Nevertheless, communicative memory cannot be equated with oral tradition and cultural memory with written text, because "formation takes place long before the invention of writing" (1995, 131).

Recent interpretations of this theory have emphasized the idea that the relationship between these two modes of collective memory should not be regarded as a "diachronic opposition", because both can be "continuously interwoven" (Rigney 2016, 66–67). Thus, the same event can simultaneously be an object of both modes of memory. A narrative of a recent event, still current in communicative memory, can fulfil the function of "foundational history" just like narratives of the distant or mythical past. This means that the distinction between the modes is not defined in terms of the "chronological distance" between the remembered events and the act of remembering, but rather in terms of function – in the sense that cultural memory entails "political or ideological functionalizations of the past" (Erll 2011, 31–33).

Concerning medieval Icelandic culture, studies have indeed illustrated such intertwining of both modes of memory. Using *Íslendingabók* as an example, Ann-Marie Long (2017, 35–37) shows that the text contains elements of communicative memory because it is "deeply indebted to the testimony of witnesses", but it is simultaneously an artefact of cultural memory, Iceland's "earliest foundation narrative" that establishes "figures of memory". As for the contemporary sagas, how-

ever, it has been suggested that they represent solely communicative memory because they depict the recent past (Jørgensen 2010, 19, 22, 30).

Nevertheless, in the light of the theoretical framework outlined above, it seems limiting to make such a sharp chronological distinction between different types of texts. The sagas of Icelanders are further removed from communicative memory than the contemporary sagas, and yet they were never completely formalized or ritualized, so they fit the concept of "continuous interweaving", rather than "diachronic opposition", between both modes of memory. The contemporary sagas contain eyewitness accounts and describe events that were still current in communicative memory, but, as will be argued here, they present them as *foundational history*. For this purpose, they establish particular *figures of memory*, employing already existing elements of the community's cultural memory. The contemporary sagas are therefore likely to offer an exceptional insight into the processes of communicative and cultural memory melting together, which is what I will attempt to show in the present study.

1.3.2 Memory and history

The concept of the "political or ideological functionalizations of the past" is related to the question of the relationship between memory and history, which has been an inseparable part of the discussions on collective memory. Some earlier theorists perceived an opposition between collective memory as a social construct and modern history as an objective science. Thus, Maurice Halbwachs argued that historical knowledge is stable, unitary, and objective, whereas collective memory is fluid, fragmented, evaluative, and selective (Halbwachs 1980, 80–81; 1997, 97–142; see Burke 1997, 45; Erll 2011, 17; Tamm 2013, 463). Decades later, Pierre Nora, whose work can be regarded as "the starting point of present-day memory studies" (Confino 2011, 37), still saw a "fundamental opposition" between memory and history, because "memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present", whereas "history is a representation of the past" (Nora 1989, 8).

Such approaches have, however, been challenged because they underrate the influence of social groups on historians and ignore "the memorial function of historiography" and "the constructed nature, subjectivity, and perspectivity of all history writing" (Erll 2011, 25). Even modern historiography is shaped by "the process of selection, interpretation and distortion" (Burke 1997, 44); as such, instead of simply recording facts, it "constructs their meaning by framing them within a cultural memory" (Tamm 2008, 510). That makes historical writing one of the media of collective memory (Erll 2008, 7; Tamm 2013, 463; Hermann 2020, 165).

This applies to modern academic historiography, but even more so to pre-modern history writing. Aleida Assmann (2008, 57) even speaks of a pre-modern "identity between history and memory", as the central function of historiography before the emergence of critical scholarship was to preserve the memory of a group in order to legitimize its power. That complicates the distinction between history and fiction in pre-modern accounts of the past, which has posed a challenge to saga studies (see Vésteinn Ólason 2007; Mundal 2012; O'Connor 2017).

Traditionally, this debate foregrounded the differences between the saga genres. The kings' sagas or the contemporary sagas were typically regarded as historiography, albeit not in the sense of fulfilling the modern criteria of historical accuracy. Conversely, the sagas of Icelanders, alongside the legendary and chivalric sagas, were often associated with fictionality, although the definitions and implications of the concept could differ. Recent research, however, has acknowledged that the modern dichotomy between history and fiction is not applicable to medieval sources, which were not classified according to such criteria, since historiography was viewed as a branch of literature (O'Connor 2017, 88–92).

Thus, a major benefit of approaching the sagas from the perspective of cultural memory studies is that it helps us avoid "automatically placing the sagas in the straitjacket of the 'history versus fiction' argument" (Hermann 2015, 339). It provides a theoretical tool for viewing the sagas as neither documentary records of facts nor literary fiction, but as "founding narratives, a special type of myth,[19] that among their many other qualities have the capacity to offer orientation by invoking a sense of continuity and cultural stability" (Hermann 2010, 82–83).

This "sense of continuity and cultural stability" is closely related to the capacity of cultural memory not just to store facts about the past, but to shape identity. What distinguishes cultural memory from general historical knowledge is that it "preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity" and "always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation" (Assmann 1995, 130). It "transforms factual into remembered history" that can "illuminate the present from the standpoint of its origins" (Ass-

19 In this case, *myth* is understood in the broad sense as a story, not necessarily religious, that meaningfully connects the past, the present, and the future. Old Norse myth in the narrow sense has been studied as a component of cultural memory as well. It has been shown that the accounts of pagan myths, written in Christian times, do not just keep the mythology from being forgotten, but also integrate it into the Christian concept of world history, thus creating an ancient Nordic past that could be considered meaningful in Christian times (Hermann 2009). Mythic discourses can also be employed in historical narratives (Lindow 1997; Clunies Ross 1998; Hermann 2007), including the contemporary sagas (Clunies Ross 1994; 1998), but that is beyond the scope of the present study.

mann 2011, 37–38). The temporal horizon of cultural memory thus includes not just the past, but also the present and the future, as "the past is retrieved in the present with a view to providing some orientation for the future" (Caldicott and Fuchs 2003, 12). Through this process, identity is sustained by remembering, but it simultaneously determines what will be remembered (Gillis 1994, 3). At any point in history, the memory of the past – what is remembered and how, which memories are foregrounded or suppressed – thus depends on what elements of identity are relevant and desirable at the time.

These ideas have been productively employed mainly in the study of the sagas of Icelanders. It has been recognized that the sagas "reveal something of early Icelandic history" and simultaneously "are suggestive of how the Icelanders wanted to remember their history" (Long 2017, 37). As such, they should be understood according to "paradigms existing at the time of writing", rather than those that were dominant during the time depicted in them (Hermann 2007, 21–22). As retrospective interpretations of the past, the sagas "reveal social, political, and ideological aspects of their present" (Hermann 2017, 41).

The present study is based on the hypothesis that the same applies to the contemporary sagas, although the temporal gap between the events and the composition is narrower. On the one hand, the contemporary sagas depict events that could to some extent still be remembered by the writers themselves or reported by eyewitnesses or other carriers of communicative memory. On the other hand, they are not neutral records of facts, but rather narrative discourses that construct meaning from the perspective of their own present. They can thus be expected to "contain a relatively faithful chronicle of historical events", while they are also "indicative of the social and literary currents at play in thirteenth-century society in Iceland" (Guðrún Nordal 2000, 221). It therefore makes little sense to distinguish between the contemporary sagas as *history* and the sagas of Icelanders as *fiction*. Instead, both can be regarded as literary accounts of a memory of the past that contributes to the construction of collective identity. We can thus appreciate their social significance without ignoring their literary nature.

1.3.3 Memory and literature

With regard to the literary nature of the sagas, an important question to be asked in the study of sagas as sources of cultural memory is how the sagas – as literary narratives – are related to the community's memory of its past. Vésteinn Ólason (2007) has distinguished two main levels of this relation. Firstly, the sagas with a historical subject matter reflect real life – not primarily in the sense of individual personal experience, but rather of "the accumulated experiences and views of for-

mer generations of the community" (2007, 28). Secondly, each saga is in a dialogical relationship with other stories existing in the memory of the given culture, from which it derives the rules of what material should be included in a story and how it should be arranged (2007, 28). Accordingly, each saga responds to a textual world with a set of narrative conventions and to an extra-textual world with a set of norms and values (2007, 47). Finally, it is useful to define a third level of the relationship between saga literature and cultural memory, which lies between the other two and is related to the process of mediation that transforms lived memory into a literary discourse "indebted to its medium" (Hermann 2013, 351).

These three levels can be linked to the three concepts that have been used in research to describe the relationship between literature and memory: *memory in literature*, *literature as a medium of collective memory*, and *the memory of literature* (Erll and Nünning 2005). The first is connected with the idea that "literature refers to the extra-textual cultural reality and makes it observable in the medium of fiction" (2005, 280–281). The second refers to the capacity of texts to shape memory through mediation (2005, 284–286). The third refers to the "memory of previous texts" within literary works in the form of intertextuality and genre conventions (2005, 264). These concepts can describe how sagas *represent* memories, *mediate* memories, and *have* memories (Hermann 2013, 332). Here they will be combined with observations on the nature of narrative and the relationship between narrative and extra-textual contexts, in order to provide a theoretical background for an analysis of sagas as literary discourses of cultural memory.

1.3.4 Memory in literature: Narrative discourse and extra-narrative contexts

The concept of *memory in literature* refers to the "dialogical relationship between literature and extra-literary discourses" of memory (Erll and Nünning 2005, 280), which always involves both representation and construction. On the one hand, literature refers to various elements of a memory culture, such as the existing discourses about the past, values, norms, or stereotypes. On the other hand, the selected elements are not just neutrally recorded, but rather fitted into a narrative structure, in which every element has its place, and thus it receives meaning (Erll 2011, 153–155). Even in texts that depict real events and claim a high degree of truthfulness, this meaning is constructed only in the process of narrativization. Thus, although historical narrative refers to extra-textual reality, it always includes "an element of fiction or invention, which is inherent in the textualization of the material" (Vésteinn Ólason 2007, 28). Narrative discourse therefore cannot be regarded as "a neutral medium for the representation of historical events and processes", because it "endows them with an illusory coherence" (White 1987, ix).

Not every written account of events, however, can be regarded as a narrative discourse in this sense. Hayden White (1987) distinguishes three categories of medieval historiographical texts – annals, chronicle, and historical narrative – of which only the last is a fully developed discourse. Annals are not a discourse because they only record individual events in a chronological order without connecting them to each other (1987, 5–11). A chronicle is narrative in nature because it connects cause and effect or conflict and resolution, but it is not a fully developed discourse because it lacks a conclusion – it ends without summing up the meaning of the chain of events (1987, 20). Historical narrative, by contrast, "imposes a meaning on the events that make up its story level by revealing at the end a structure that was immanent in the events all along" – such as a moral message, an evaluation, or a notion of development. It is the plot of the narrative that decides what should be recorded or left out, and the end of the narrative is marked by a turn in the order, such as the establishment of a new system or a renewal of the system after a disruption. That is the only way of concluding a historical narrative, because history always goes on in time (1987, 20–23). Due to these characteristics, a narrative discourse allows for "discrete events to be interlinked into a meaningful history, rather than letting them appear as one odd thing after another" (Tamm 2008, 502). The past is then remembered as a narrative "of progress, or decline, or circularity, or continuity, or discontinuity; it depends on what best serves current interests" (Niven and Berger 2014, 8).

Medieval historiographical texts, including the sagas, can thus be regarded as fully developed narrative discourses insofar as they make a deeper sense of the past, instead of merely recording events or describing simple causal relations. This quality was traditionally ascribed to the sagas of Icelanders, whereas the contemporary sagas were regarded as chronological records without beginnings, endings, or plots (e.g. Finnur Jónsson 1901, 726–727). In the present study it will be argued, however, that the contemporary sagas do belong to this category, because their plot is shaped by an anticipation of a *turn in the order*. Just like the narratives of early Icelandic history are centred around the settlement and the conversion, the contemporary sagas are centred around Iceland's political integration with Norway. Thus, they retrospectively define a turning point in history, revealing "a structure that was immanent in the events all along". This structure connects the end of the narrative to its beginning, so that the notion of a *turn in the order* does not contradict a construction of a sense of continuity.

In this sense, the sagas that qualify as historical narratives can be considered *historical* not in terms of being strictly reliable records of past reality, but because they "organise Icelandic history spatially and temporally and by so doing they create a coherent vision of the relatively recent as well as the more distant past" (Hermann 2020, 169). Thus, the most important aspect of the relationship between

narrative discourse and memory is the capacity of narrative to not only record cultural memory, but also to construct and re-construct it. When texts "create a coherent vision" of the past, they determine how this past will be perceived and remembered in the future. As such, narrative can "change perceptions of reality", and so influence "cultural practice and thereby reality itself" (Erll 2011, 155).

1.3.5 Literature as a medium of memory

Since cultural memory is largely constructed through narrativization, and narrative is inevitably mediated, "a collective memory is necessarily a mediated memory" (Aleida Assmann 2008, 55). The mediality of narrative and the relationships between different media must therefore always be taken into consideration in the study of a memory culture. Concerning medieval narratives, this applies mainly to the relationship between oral storytelling and writing. While the present study is primarily focused on written texts, an awareness of the "ongoing fluid and reciprocal exchange between oral and written forms" (Long 2017, 29) in medieval Icelandic culture provides a necessary background for an understanding of the interplay between various narrative images of the past in different media of memory.

The discussion about the relationship between orality and writing in the sagas was long dominated by contrasting opinions on the process of their origin. The proponents of the *free-prose* (*Freiprosa*) theory stressed the role of oral tradition in the creation of sagas, whereas scholars following the *book-prose* (*Buchprosa*) theory emphasized the contribution of the individual author, the importance of literary borrowings, and the influence of continental European literary culture (Gísli Sigurðsson 2005, 285–286; see also Andersson 1964; Clover 1982; Gísli Sigurðsson 2004). Both approaches, however, associate orality with formless, artless transmission of raw historical knowledge, disregarding the fact that an anonymous oral tale can be just as creative, artistic, and historically unreliable as a written text (Gísli Sigurðsson 2005, 287). For this reason, they have largely been abandoned in recent research and replaced with the theory of *orally derived texts* (Foley 1991; Gísli Sigurðsson 2005, 292–295). The saga is thus understood as a narrative form derived partly from oral traditions, from which it took much of its subject matter and some of its stylistic elements, and partly from some medieval European literary genres (Vésteinn Ólason 2007, 29–34; Hermann 2017, 34).

On the one hand, the medium of writing provided "new possibilities for how to access the past" (Hermann 2013, 347). The saga writers did not simply conserve oral traditions as they were, but actively shaped the texts by choosing to prefer some traditions over others (Hermann 2005, 73) and by consciously employing

certain structural patterns and narrative techniques (Hermann 2017, 38). On the other hand, written sagas were reassociated with oral performance by public reading, and they still relied on the recipients' ability to supplement the text from their orally derived knowledge of characters and events. Their meaning thus "developed from their creative interplay with the oral tradition, in which the audience played an integral role" (Gísli Sigurðsson 2005, 294–295). The re-writing of texts in the manuscript tradition could then be influenced by the audience's reactions, so the boundary between oral and literary culture is blurred in the sagas (Hermann 2017, 41–42); "the voices of tradition are in constant interaction with the voices of literary culture" (Vésteinn Ólason 2007, 46).

This nature of the sagas as orally derived texts poses a challenge to research on authorial intent. A saga author's name and social background are often unknown, but even if they are known, the saga cannot be regarded as an individual author's work in the modern sense. Instead, the oral tradition that preceded its composition, as well as the manuscript tradition that followed it, must be taken into consideration. The sagas are shaped by creative invention, but they are likely to express values and ideas that were shared by the dominant social groups, rather than the individual opinions of an author, a compiler, or a commissioner. In analysing the meaning of a saga, all these layers should be considered simultaneously.

This methodological problem can be solved by adopting an approach based on the concept of *implied author*, which represents the set of values reflected in the work (Booth 1961, 73–74). The distinction between the real and implied author resolves the contradiction between the fact that no literary work can be entirely objective – in the sense of indifference toward any values – and that the work should not be regarded as a direct expression of the real author's personal biases (1961, 75). Although the theory of implied author is primarily designed for the study of modern literature, it can also contribute to solving the issue of authorial intent in medieval texts. The concept of implied author can involve all the persons who participated in shaping the work in its oral and written form, including the broader social environment in which a certain set of values was established. Such an approach can therefore help us reveal ideas and meanings in a narrative without neglecting its specificity as an orally derived text.[20]

This leads to the question of *how* ideas and meanings can be identified in texts that imitate the objectivity of oral storytelling, scarcely employing direct narratorial comments. Here it will be argued that apart from the more straightforward evaluative techniques available in the saga style, such as dialogues, stanzas, or references

20 For the use of the concept of implied author in saga analysis, see e.g. Ármann Jakobsson 2014, 328–331.

to public opinion, the most important narrative device employed in the sagas is the use of particular structural patterns, which endow the depicted events with meaning without the necessity of explicit commentary. These patterns construct emphases, parallels, and contrasts not just within individual sagas, but also across different texts. Such intertextual connections constitute the *memory of literature*.

1.3.6 The memory of literature: Intertextuality, genre, and the *narrative types* of sagas

Whereas the study of memory *in* literature foregrounds the synchronic relation between literature and extra-literary memory discourses (Erll 2011, 77), the concept of the memory *of* literature refers to intertextuality as "the diachronic dimension of literature" (Erll and Nünning 2005, 264). Intertextuality – not necessarily in terms of direct textual references to specific works, but rather in terms of "genre patterns, literary forms and tropes common to the culture" (2005, 272) – is an inherent characteristic of literature. Since all texts are composed and received in the context of a pre-existing literary corpus, every text is understood by its recipients within a *frame of reference* that develops from "the form and themes of already familiar works" (Jauss 1970, 11). This applies to all literature, but identifying the *frame of reference* is especially important for the study of older literature, because the circumstances of its origin are often unknown and the cultural environment in which it originated is not directly accessible to the researcher:

> Whenever the writer of a work is unknown, his intent not recorded, or his relationship to sources and models only indirectly accessible, the philological question of how the text is *properly* to be understood, that is according to its intention and its time, can best be answered if the text is considered in contrast to the background of the works which the author could expect his contemporary public to know either explicitly or implicitly. (Jauss 1970, 19)

Furthermore, medieval literature, which usually originated from fluid interactions between various written and oral narratives, is inherently intertextual to a greater degree than most modern literature. Whereas the modern reader typically perceives a literary text as a work – a unique product of its creator –, the nature of medieval literature entails that "the reader must negate the character of the individual text as a work" and understand the text as a part of an intertextual network (Jauss 1979, 189). That is why the *memory of literature* is a crucial aspect of the study of medieval texts.

In saga studies, one of the most important but most problematic issues in this context has been intertextuality in terms of *genre patterns*. Due to its diversity, saga literature has been divided into different subgenres in research, and while

such categories can be useful, they have also been limiting. The saga genres were traditionally defined by the subject matter; the characterization of genres by distinct literary features was mainly descriptive, and the literary quality of different genres was compared without paying sufficient attention to their social function.[21] More often than not, sagas assigned to the same genre were studied together and isolated from the rest of the saga corpus; consequently, intertextual relationships across the traditionally defined genres were often ignored. The sagas of Icelanders were mostly studied separately; if the contemporary sagas were analysed alongside them at all, it was often with an emphasis on differences, rather than connections (Andersson 1975, 441; Hallberg 1976; Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, 97–109; Ármann Jakobsson 1994a, 48–56) – with only a few noteworthy exceptions (Byock 1982; Úlfar Bragason 1986a; 2010). This is one of the many examples of genre classification obscuring the understanding of relationships between different types of sagas, and one that is most significant in the present context.

In recent saga research, the question of genre has received more theoretical attention (see Bampi 2017), much of which can be traced back to Jauss's assertion that the historical dimension of literary genres includes not only the intra-literary process, but also the "historical or lived-world situations that might have conditioned this process" (Jauss 1982, 90). Accordingly, genres should not be perceived as simple labels, but rather as "primarily social phenomena" that "depend on functions in the lived world" (1982, 100). This has increasingly been acknowledged in saga studies, which have subsequently paid more attention to the changeable dominance of different genres within the literary system and to the question of how these changes were influenced by extra-literary factors, such as social transformations and the emergence of new political elites (Bampi 2017, 9–11; 2020, 24–28). Moreover, the concept of genre has been re-evaluated. Whereas saga genres were previously understood as descriptive categories, they have recently rather been viewed as a means of communication between the author or storyteller and the audience (Bampi 2020, 17–18). These trends in research have reduced the interest in isolated analyses of sagas traditionally assigned to the same genre, because the *frame of reference* that shaped the original audiences' reception of texts can be assumed to transcend the boundaries of genres. Different types of written or oral sagas existed simultaneously, and their recipients were probably aware of intertextual connections between sagas that dealt with different subject matter but shared a similar modality, structure, or theme. With regard

21 For an overview of research on saga genre see for example Andersson 2010, 142–146; Bampi 2017, 4–7.

to this inherent intertextuality of saga literature, it makes sense to look for modalities shared by texts across the genres.

For the purpose of the present study, such a multi-genre group of sagas with a similar modality can be conceived of as containing all the sagas about the historical past of the North, as opposed to sagas dealing with the legendary past or with subject matter outside of the North. This group includes the sagas and *þættir* of Icelanders, the kings' sagas, the secular contemporary sagas, and the bishops' sagas. Despite being distinguishable from each other in terms of genre, these sagas are collectively characterized by a specific modality, which is based on a particular approach to the relationship between the past and the present – the time of the texts' origin. On the one hand, the past is depicted as differing from the present in some respects, which are mostly derived from transformative events, such as the settlement of Iceland, the (alleged) unification of the Norwegian kingdom, the conversion to Christianity, or the political integration of Iceland and Norway. On the other hand, the sagas create a strong sense of continuity between the past and the present, mainly in terms of genealogical lineage, the social significance of some geographical locations, and the stability or similarity of social institutions, norms, and values. This concept of history connects all the genres in this group. Within the group, individual sagas – or narrative strands of longer sagas – relate to each other across the traditional genres through shared structural patterns that shape not only the plot of the story, but also the interpretation of the depicted events.

The importance of narrative structure has received attention in saga studies since the 1960s, when some saga scholars adopted approaches based on the methodology of structuralist narratology.[22] In his influential study, Theodore Andersson (1967) argued that the sagas of Icelanders share a common structural pattern, which, together with specific principles of composition, gives them their unique form (1967, 23–64). This was a groundbreaking approach in the sense that it emphasized the fact that historical or traditional narrative material is interpreted in the sagas through the use of specific compositional techniques (1967, 93). It thus changed the direction of research from the sagas' origins to their form (1967, 308–309) and inspired other saga scholars to adopt similar methods. For instance, Joseph Harris (1972) similarly defined the structural features of the *útanferðar þættir*, stories of Icelanders' travels to the Norwegian royal court. Again, the impor-

22 These approaches were inspired by narratologists such as Claude Lévy-Strauss, A. J. Greimas, or Roland Barthes, by Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, and by the oral-formulaic theory of Milman Parry and Albert Lord (see Lönnroth 2007, 63; Ármann Jakobsson 2017, 127–128).

tance of his study lies in the fact that it accentuates the essential role of structure – not just subject matter – in Old Norse narratives.

The main contribution of the structuralist approach to saga studies is that it has brought attention to "the inner logic of the structure rather than merely its external features" (Ármann Jakobsson 2017, 128). The contrasting idea that the structure of sagas is shaped only by their content (Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, 107) fails to recognize the difference between story and discourse. The events described in the sagas make up their storylines, but the discourse is shaped by narrative patterns, which reflect certain thematic emphases. That is why their analysis is important for understanding a saga's meaning. Nevertheless, the purely structuralist research has been rightfully criticized for its rigidity (see Lönnroth 2007; Ármann Jakobsson 2017). The method employed in the present study, although it is based on structural analysis, therefore modifies some of its central elements in order to better serve the purpose of revealing the relationship between structure and meaning.

Firstly, to continue the discussion of genre, one of the frequently debated problems of structuralist saga studies has been the question of the link between structural patterns and saga genres. Both Andersson (1967) and Harris (1972) argue that the structural schemes identified by them define individual saga genres, but that is a problematic assertion because it disregards the genre fluidity of medieval literature. As Lars Lönnroth (1975) points out, the structural patterns are not exclusive to any given saga genre. He therefore suggests building up a new system of classification, based on the distinctions between different structural patterns, which define *types of stories* that cross the genre boundaries (1975, 420–425). The method developed in the present study is modelled on this idea, but apart from the literary characteristics of texts, it is also focused on the intertextual connections through which the broader saga corpus constructs interpretations of the past.

The categorization that is introduced here distinguishes between different *narrative types* of the sagas that describe the historical past of the North. Each narrative type can be either inherently tragic or optimistic; this category is derived from Northrop Frye's (1957, 35–52) definition of tragedy and comedy in the broadest sense: in tragedy, the initially socially successful protagonist is eventually isolated from society; in comedy, the protagonist begins as an outsider and is gradually incorporated into society. In saga studies, this theory was productively employed in Joseph Harris's (1976, 16–19) enlightening observation on the distinction between the sagas of Icelanders and the *útanferðar þættir* in terms of *tone* or *ethos*. Whereas the sagas foreground conflict and fate and their tone is predominantly tragic, the *þættir* foreground reconciliation and luck and their tone is optimistic. In the present study it will be shown that, especially in texts dealing with the recent past, this distinction is much more complex than a simple opposition

between sagas and *þættir*: both tragic and optimistic narrative types can be used in longer sagas and shape their interpretation of history.

Since the existing definition of one inherently tragic structural pattern – that of the sagas of Icelanders, described by Andersson – and one inherently optimistic pattern – that of the *útanferðar þættir*, described by Harris – does not sufficiently reflect the structural and thematic diversity of narratives dealing with the history of the North, I will formulate several narrative types in each category. The tragic narrative types identified here are termed the *conflict story*, the *peaceful chieftain's story*, the *outlaw's story*, and the *jarl's story*. The optimistic narrative types are termed the *travel story*, the *royal retainer's story*, and the *court poet's story*. Each will be described in the chapter where it is discussed. They are defined by a combination of a structural pattern and a thematic emphasis, as "particular structures and formal characteristics correspond to particular arguments and interpretative strategies, pointing to the integration of literary structure and meaning" (Hermann 2013, 339).

Significantly, the narrative types are not regarded here as descriptive categories, but as essential interpretative devices. That is an important modification of the traditional structuralist saga studies, which, because of their descriptive nature, have been criticized for their incapacity to adequately depict the complexity of saga narratives (Byock 1982, 49–58; Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 94; Clunies Ross 2010, 127–130). It has been argued that such a method "serves only to summarize the action rather than to tell us anything about the particular nature of Icelandic narrative", and that it tends to "isolate characters and events from their social context" (Byock 1982, 50). That can be true of purely structural analysis, based on mechanically fitting sagas into generalizing schemes. However, a subtler analysis of structural patterns, focused on the functions of individual elements in them, can in fact tell us more about the nature of the narrative than most other methods. Without it, we can only study the meaning of the sagas' content, not of their form. That can easily lead to oversimplified interpretations because content and form are not two mutually independent characteristics of a text, but rather interconnected aspects that always shape each other. The method employed in the present study is therefore based on the premise that every narrative type, characterized by its specific structural pattern, has its inherent meaning that extends beyond the meanings of the individual stories. Instead of simply stating that a story follows a particular pattern, the present analysis shows how the given pattern foregrounds some elements of the story that are important for the saga's meaning as social commentary. This leads to the opposite of just summarizing the action – abstracting the meaning of the story from the details of the action.

Another related limitation of the traditional structuralist approaches is that they view the structural patterns as normative categories and attempt to fit

whole sagas or *þættir* into them, regarding any deviations as random irregularities or variations without any specific meaning (Andersson 1967, 6, 29; Harris 1972, 15–20). They have been rightfully criticized for their insistence on such uniformity, which goes against the nature of medieval literature (Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, 98–99). Conversely, the present method acknowledges that whereas some sagas follow one narrative type from beginning to end, others combine different narrative types or modify them. Such modifications of the narrative types are not dismissed here as flaws or arbitrary variations but acknowledged as a consciously employed interpretative strategy that plays a decisive role in the construction of meaning. A combination of contrasting narrative types in a saga can draw attention to aspects of the story that are important for the interpretation of the depicted events. A modification of some elements of a narrative type can accentuate certain trends in historical development or the importance of certain social forces.

The aspects described in the preceding paragraphs make the concept of narrative types a productive tool for studying the contemporary sagas for several reasons. Firstly, the contemporary sagas, especially the extensive compilation *Sturlunga saga*, are, in comparison with most other Old Norse texts, highly complex narratives that combine multiple narrative strands, often intertwined with each other. The concept of narrative types allows for a structured, systematic analysis of individual narrative strands without disregarding the unity of the whole saga or compilation, as the parallels and contrasts constructed with the help of the structural patterns of the narrative types can be studied both within each narrative strand and across different parts of the text. A methodology based on this concept thus enables us to avoid an analysis of individual scenes or specific elements of the sagas' content, isolated from the rest of the text and its form, which has been frequent in literary studies of *Sturlunga saga*, but which often fails to create a convincing argumentation for the text's meaning.

Secondly, since the contemporary sagas deal with recent history and contain an immense amount of personal and political detail, it can be difficult to understand them as narrative images of collective identity, not just accounts of individual events and persons. A methodology that allows for a high degree of abstraction enables us to discern the interpretative strategies that transformed individual stories of real historical persons into figurative commentaries on the overall situation of Icelandic society. Such interpretative strategies can best be identified through an analysis of how some elements of the stories were emphasized and others were suppressed as the memories of recent events were gradually fitted into particular narrative types in the process of narrativization.

Thirdly and most importantly, the concept of narrative types can contribute to revealing intertextual relationships between different stories about the past that are

not connected through direct genealogical or historical links, but rather through typological similarity. An approach based on an analysis of structural patterns and their meanings can therefore help us contextualize each saga as a component of a textual (and immanent oral) corpus without the necessity of taking all parts of that corpus into account individually and without implying direct textual influences between particular sagas. In an attempt to reconstruct the *frame of reference* within which a saga was created and understood in its original environment, we cannot be sure which particular sagas were known to each person composing, compiling, copying, or receiving our source texts, and we must suppose that they knew some sagas that are not extant today, but it is safe to assume that we know what *types* of narratives existed in the given culture. An identification of these types thus facilitates an understanding of how the sagas represent not only a memory of past events, but also of each other. In the study of the contemporary sagas and their literary context, it can help us find parallels and similarities in structure and meaning that may not be obvious at the first sight, such as between episodes in the bishops' sagas and in the kings' sagas, or between some narrative strands of the contemporary sagas and the *þættir* of skalds. Such a perception of intertextual relationships – in a broader sense than just direct textual references – is essential for an understanding of the contemporary sagas' position within a memory culture that was already shaped by its narrativized memories of events from more distant past.

Written texts about the distant and recent past were composed simultaneously, so the sagas and *þættir* about the Saga Age cannot be regarded as a preexisting model for the composition of the contemporary sagas, and the examples from them are not presented as such in the following chapters. Instead, they are intended to illustrate how the given narrative type functions as an interpretative device and how this function could contribute to the structural and thematic similarities between both groups of sagas that coexisted in medieval Icelandic culture as oral as well as written narratives. It can be assumed that the narrative types with their specific structural patterns existed in their basic form already in oral storytelling, and that they partly determined which elements of the stories would be selected to be remembered and which would be forgotten throughout the entire process of narrativization.

Narrativization is, in the context of memory studies, not understood as a purely textual process, the conscious shaping of a literary work. Instead, it is closely related to the process of remembering and to the construction of cultural memory (see 1.3.4, 1.3.5). Beyond the conscious creation of oral or written stories about the past, the way of remembering recent events must have been influenced by certain culturally conditioned frameworks that were shaped by memories of more distant past and by the central elements of collective identity (see 1.3.1, 1.3.2). These frameworks determined what was *memorable* and how it should be

interpreted; the mental patterns involved in this process were then reflected in the narrative structures of the verbal accounts of history. The concept of narrative types is therefore based on the hypothesis that their roots extend beyond literature. The narrative types that are accessible to us through written texts can be viewed as imprints of mental structures that shaped the understanding of reality and reflected the values and concerns of the society that produced the sagas. That means that we can possibly get a glimpse of those mental structures by analysing their imprints in the preserved texts – just like we can study extinct organisms by analysing their imprints in preserved materials.

It is thus important to keep in mind that the narrativization of individual events did not take place in isolation, but rather within an intertextual and extratextual network that included not only diverse oral and written stories about the distant and recent past, but also collective memory in a broader sense: an immanent narrative of history that was shared by the community. With this collective image of history always inherently present, individual stories were shaped in oral storytelling and in writing; the shared interpretation of history can thus be regarded as the broadest, both intra-literary and extra-literary, *frame of reference* for all sagas. At all stages of the narrativization of material that eventually produced written sagas, the culturally conditioned mental frameworks and interpretative patterns contributed to the selection of elements to be included or left out, emphasized or suppressed. That can explain why sagas that describe different historical periods and are unlikely to be directly textually related share so many similarities. The difference is just that the stories about the Saga Age were shaped by a longer process of narrativization already in oral storytelling, while the contemporary sagas represent an early stage of the narrativization of recent events. This makes them perfect material for studying the transformation of living memory into a narrative discourse. That is what will be attempted in the present study, which aims to show how the narrative types that predominate in the contemporary sagas reflect the themes and concerns that were essential for medieval Icelandic society at a time of intense social transformation.

2 Constructing identity: The beginning of Icelandic history

2.1 The early construction of collective identity

There were historical and cultural connections between Iceland and mainland Scandinavia, especially Norway, from the very beginning of the existence of Icelandic society, because the settlement of Iceland in the second half of the ninth century was part of the Scandinavians' expansion to new territories (see Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 10–15). However, Iceland began to develop as an individual society, characterized by a need for a collective identity that would define its relationship with the other societies to which it was related.

Since the settlement of a country does not immediately lead to "self-definition by reference to a shared identity" (Hastrup 1984, 237), it can be assumed that such a collective identity had to be constructed. The Norse settlers as a group shared the same language and probably most of the essential customs, beliefs, and social norms, but they needed a *foundation narrative* – an interpretation of the *story of origin* from which a shared identity could be derived (see Long 2017, 1). As the medieval Icelandic community possessed more detailed information about its origin than most other medieval European societies, it could find ideal material for its *foundation narrative* in stories about the settlement (see Mundal 2010, 467). In formulating this narrative, Icelanders had to find a balance between the continuation of their Norse identity and the discontinuity marked by the establishment of a new society.

Before this narrative could be fully formed, another highly significant *story of origin* was generated by the next decisive cultural transformation, the conversion, which took place only about 125 years after the settlement. In historical reality, Christianization was a gradual process that involved the establishment of ecclesiastical institutions and the implementation of new social norms into everyday life. In medieval Icelandic cultural memory, however, it is the conversion – the brief period of intense missionary activity that culminated in the official acceptance of the new faith on the political level – that is conceptualized as the transformative event. From the perspective of the later generations of Icelandic Christians who composed the narratives, this official conversion marked an essential transformation of identity – not only in the spiritual sense, but also in the sense that Icelanders had to re-evaluate their relationship with the rest of the world and with their history and cultural heritage. They had to "'reconstitute' their past in such a way as to assert a new Christian identity for themselves" (Grønlie 2017b, 125) without losing their Icelandic identity, which was still fresh

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and fragile. Thus, in the conversion narrative, "the strengthening of local identity" had to be "carefully balanced against the international and universalizing tendencies of Christianity" (2017b, 125).

This chapter will show how the stories of the settlement and the conversion are presented in the most important sources, which record and construct the collective identity of the society that created them. It will be argued here that the concise historiographical accounts of Iceland's early past establish the essential themes that are then developed in the sagas as a thread running through the whole narrative of medieval Icelandic history.

2.1.1 The construction of identity in *Íslendingabók*

During the first centuries after the settlement, some elements of the *foundation narrative* were doubtlessly formed in oral tradition. The central elements of such orally transmitted collective memory tend to be "the collective identity based on myths, and more particularly on myths of origin" and "the prestige of the leading families that is expressed by genealogies" (Le Goff 1992, 58). This is also what largely constitutes the first known written account of Iceland's past – *Íslendingabók*, composed by Ari Þorgilsson the Learned (1067–1148) around 1122–1133.[23] However, *Íslendingabók* does not simply conserve the existing oral stories (Hermann 2005, 78–79) and should not be regarded only as a work intended to keep the past from being forgotten. As the first Icelandic historiographical text, it "provided a platform for the historical, cultural and textual construction of the Icelanders" (Long 2017, 68). This process involved two complementary aspects: formulating an individual, separate history of the beginning and development of Icelandic society (Hastrup 1984, 239–243) and contextualizing Iceland's past within the known history of the world (Long 2017, 68; Sverrir Jakobsson 2017, 94–95).

Concerning the construction of a uniquely Icelandic history, *Íslendingabók* foregrounds the first settlers as identity bearers. They are presented as more than the forefathers of individual families; it is certainly not a coincidence that the four settlers who receive most attention in the narrative represent one Icelandic quarter each, and that they also are the ancestors of the first Icelandic bishops. The settlement is thus connected to the origin of the central social institutions: the legal system and the Icelandic Church (see Mundal 2011, 115; Long 2017, 68–69; Sverrir

23 *Íslendingabók* is extant only in two manuscripts from the seventeenth century (AM 113 a and b), copies of a manuscript from around 1200. How closely this manuscript represents Ari's original work is impossible to determine with certainty, but it is believed that the copies give a good picture of Ari's text (Mundal 2011, 113).

Jakobsson 2017, 78). This means that *Íslendingabók* constructs a sense of continuity in the social development from the settlement to the time of its composition.

This sense of continuity is further developed in *Íslendingabók*'s image of the relationship between the heathen past of Iceland and the Christian present at the time of its origin. In the text, "a continuity between them is established", so that both are "treated as parts of one and the same history" (Hermann 2007, 22–26). Firstly, the reference to the presence of Irish monks in Iceland before the Norse settlement marks the island as Christian territory and prefigures the later conversion. Secondly, the account of the conversion accentuates a continuation of the original social system by showing that it was the institutions established in heathen times – the Alþingi, the law, and the lawspeaker – that enabled the official Christianization of Iceland (Hermann 2007, 24–27; Mundal 2011, 115–117). The emphasis on continuity is also supported by the fact that already in the first chapter of *Íslendingabók*, important events in the pre-Christian history of the North are placed within the Christian chronology (Mundal 2010, 470; 2011, 115). Furthermore, unlike some later sources – mainly the *þættir* included in the sagas of the Christianizing Norwegian kings – the text purposefully avoids direct references to pagan religious practice, presenting heathenism rather as an absence of Christianity. In line with this, *Íslendingabók* also suppresses accounts of violence accompanying the conversion, although they are briefly mentioned for the sake of accuracy (Grønlie 2017b, 127–129). All these strategies are clearly deliberately employed for the purpose of creating a sense of continuity.

Apart from this focus on unifying the pre-Christian and Christian past, the account of the conversion emphasizes the importance of social cohesion. The conversion is presented from a political, rather than religious perspective, and the main concern is the threat posed by the disunity between the pagan and Christian faction at the Alþingi. The text highlights the social significance of a peaceful, diplomatic solution provided by a respectable social leader, the lawspeaker Þorgeirr Þorkelsson (Sverrir Jakobsson 2019, 11–12). As such, it can be understood as "an illustration of effective crisis management" (Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 18), an example of political prudence that can serve as a model for successful conflict resolution. Conflicts are, as will be discussed here, the central theme of almost all the sagas with an Icelandic subject matter; the threat of social instability is always highlighted, peaceful solutions are advocated, and the importance of capable social leaders is emphasized. In *Íslendingabók*, this theme is first established in a written narrative, and its central role in medieval Icelandic literature then continues all the way to the contemporary sagas and beyond.

As for the geographical and temporal contextualization of Iceland's past, *Íslendingabók* is not characterized by the closed, local perspective typical of oral cultures, but rather by a learned twelfth-century perspective (Hermann 2005,

82–83). Its spatial horizon includes Norway, Western Europe, and the centres of Christianity in Jerusalem and Rome. The temporal perspective combines local and international points of reference: the lawspeakers and relative dating of Icelandic events, the lives of Norwegian and foreign dignitaries, and even the birth of Christ (2005, 74–77). Due to this broad perspective, *Íslendingabók* can be viewed as "a statement defining Iceland as part of the Christian world" (2005, 84).

The relationship between Iceland and Norway receives much attention in *Íslendingabók*. Significantly, the settlers' relocation to Iceland is not explained by their conflicts with King Haraldr hárfagri, which is a widespread motif in later sources (Gísli Sigurðsson 2014, 181). Instead, the Norwegian kings are depicted either neutrally as chronological points of reference, or positively in connection with the introduction of Christianity (Sverrir Jakobsson 2017, 95). Furthermore, *Íslendingabók* accentuates the Norwegian origin and high social status of the settlers, as well as the fact that a cohesive Icelandic society was established due to a law-code brought from Norway (Long 2017, 69–73). However, the text also states that the laws were adapted to the specific needs of Icelandic society; the account thus creates a balanced image of relatedness and independence (2017, 123). An autonomous Icelandic cultural identity is constructed, but the idea of an affiliation with Norway is not rejected.

Similarly, the account of the conversion in *Íslendingabók* also pays equal attention to both external and local forces. On the one hand, the text admits that the Christian mission to Iceland was initiated by the Norwegian king Óláfr Tryggvason. A confrontation occurred due to the initial rejection of Christianity by most Icelanders, but the chieftains who had already accepted baptism brought about a diplomatic solution by volunteering to undertake missionary activity (Sverrir Jakobsson 2019, 10–13). Such confrontations between Icelanders and Norwegian monarchs, terminated in a peaceful manner by negotiation and agreement, are a recurring theme in the sagas. On the other hand, the account of Christianization also underlines the active initiative of the Icelandic chieftains, including an ancestor of the first bishops, so as to "present the Icelanders as choosing of their own free will to become a Christian people" (Mundal 2011, 111). *Íslendingabók* thus establishes an essential theme that extends beyond the depiction of the conversion: the importance of the Icelanders' active role in processes that shape their history. This theme significantly contributes to the construction of identity in the later narratives of Icelandic history, as will be shown in the following chapters.

All in all, *Íslendingabók* constructs an image of history with a balanced emphasis on continuity and change, contact and individuality. As the random group of settlers was gradually transformed into a cohesive society, they retained their ancestral and cultural identity, but it was complemented by their new identity as Ice-

landers. This collective identity was derived from a set of ideas that were first established as literary themes in *Íslendingabók*, the oldest written foundation narrative of Icelandic society and Icelandic Christianity. These themes are a thread running through most narrative accounts of Icelandic history up to the fourteenth century, and their prominence already in *Íslendingabók* is a sign of continuity in the construction of cultural memory throughout the medieval Icelandic historiography.

2.1.2 The construction of identity in *Landnámabók* and *Kristni saga*

Landnámabók, a text recording the origin, genealogies, and land claims of the first settlers, is believed to originate from the early twelfth century but is extant in redactions dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Long 2017, 53–54). It may be the first detailed written account of the settlement, and its importance is proven by the remarkable agreement between its descriptions of individual settlements and the sagas of Icelanders, which suggests that it was used as a model for the sagas (Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 2003, 144–145). What is even more significant, however, is that the sagas are related to *Landnámabók* – just like to *Íslendingabók* – on the thematic level as well. The text presents some of the essential themes that shape the narrative image of medieval Iceland. Thus, although it is focused on individual settlers, it contributes to the construction of collective identity.

The first central theme of *Landnámabók* is Iceland's relationship with Norway. The text reaffirms *Íslendingabók*'s emphasis on the Norwegian origin and high social status of the settlers (Long 2017, 83–86), which must have been meaningful for the whole community, not only for the individual families. The relationship with Norway is, however, not presented uncritically. *Landnámabók* states that a frequent reason for the settlers' emigration was oppression by King Haraldr Hálfdanarson hárfagri, who allegedly claimed rule of what was then perceived as the whole Norway. The unification of Norway by Haraldr hárfagri seems to be a narrative construct reflecting the twelfth-century political situation in the kingdom; this narrative may then have been employed by Icelanders as an explanation for why so many noble men left their homeland to settle the island (2017, 104–106).[24] Nevertheless, although especially the *Melabók* and *Sturlubók* redactions of *Landnámabók*

24 Apart from *Landnámabók*, this image of the settlement is presented in some – but not all – sagas of Icelanders, as well as in *Heimskringla* and other compilations of kings' sagas from the first half of the thirteenth century (see Byock 1988, 53–55; Ármann Jakobsson 1999, 52).

accentuate the settlers' conflicts with King Haraldr, they also present his positive relationship with some of the settlers. Furthermore, the *Hauksbók* redaction states that the first generations of Icelanders relied on the king as an arbitrator in internal conflicts, such as the division of land between the first settlers and those who arrived later. Such a depiction of the monarch's role is probably not an accurate account of royal authority in the ninth century, it rather reflects the contemporary perception of the monarchy (2017, 106–111). In the present context, it is noteworthy that a comparable portrayal of the Norwegian king as an arbitrator in Icelandic politics is essential for several contemporary sagas, which will be discussed in the next chapters. All these nuances in the depiction of Iceland's relationship with the monarchy connect *Landnámabók* with the broad array of narratives that reflect the medieval Icelanders' ambiguous attitude to Norway. They express a wish to reaffirm their historical relatedness to it, combined with the need to reinforce their individual identity as Icelanders.

Another important theme that is established in *Íslendingabók* and developed or revised in *Landnámabók* is the continuity between pagan and Christian history. The two sources describe the first introduction of Christianity differently, because *Íslendingabók* does not contain any reference to Christianity being brought to Iceland by some of the first settlers who arrived from the British Isles (Sverrir Jakobsson 2019, 16–17). This remarkable absence can be explained by Ari Þorgilsson's effort to emphasize the unity of Icelanders as a community with "one law and one religion", which made him ignore the different varieties of heathenism and Christianity that coexisted in early Iceland (Grønlie 2017b, 129–130). *Landnámabók*, by contrast, records the Christian belief of some settlers, implying that "a variety of local Christianities", different from the official Church practice introduced by the formal conversion, existed in Icelandic society from the very beginning. The text thus builds up a sense of continuity in terms of the presence of Christians in Iceland, which, in this case, is deemed more important than the image of the population's homogeneity (2017b, 132–138).

This revised image of the beginnings of Christianity then continues in the thirteenth-century *Kristni saga*, which is partly derived from *Íslendingabók* (Grønlie 2005, 154–156), but its emphases are changed in some respects. It was probably composed as a continuation of *Landnámabók*, with which it is combined in the early-fourteenth-century manuscript *Hauksbók* (Grønlie 2005, 146–147; Sverrir Jakobsson 2019, 15–16). In the context of *Landnámabók*, the Christian mission described in *Kristni saga* is not presented as the first introduction of the new faith, but rather as a renewal of a pre-existing Christian tradition.

Kristni saga's depiction of the political circumstances of the conversion closely follows *Íslendingabók*; the account of the agreement between pagans and Christians at the Alþingi is almost exactly copied. The Icelanders' confrontation

with the Norwegian king is described more extensively than in *Íslendingabók*, but with a comparable emphasis on diplomatic negotiation. However, the reworked narrative in *Kristni saga* foregrounds the role of a larger group of Icelanders in the Christian mission, so the conversion is increasingly presented as a collective initiative of Icelanders as a community (Sverrir Jakobsson 2019, 17–20).

Overall, *Landnámabók* and *Kristni saga* further develop the central themes introduced in *Íslendingabók*: continuity between the past and the present, peaceful resolution of internal conflicts, diplomatic negotiation with the Norwegian monarchy, and the Icelanders' active initiative in important decisions. Some of these elements are even taken a step further than in *Íslendingabók*. Firstly, the Norwegian monarchy receives increased attention in *Landnámabók*, which highlights the king's crucial role in the settlement and his influence on Icelandic politics. Secondly, whereas *Íslendingabók* connects the settlement to the Christian present by a reference to Irish monks unrelated to the Norse population, *Landnámabók* and *Kristni saga* attribute Christianity directly to the ancestors of some important Icelandic families, thus further increasing the emphasis on continuity. Thirdly, whereas *Íslendingabók* accentuates the active initiative of a few Icelandic chieftains and the lawspeaker, *Kristni saga* includes representatives of broader social circles, highlighting the collective initiative. All this implies that the social significance of these themes was not only retained, but even increased.

2.1.3 Early Icelandic bishops as identity bearers

When we turn to the construction of identity in narrative accounts of the time following the settlement period and the conversion, we notice that very little was written about secular Icelandic history from the end of the Saga Age around 1050 to the time described in the contemporary sagas. This period is, however, depicted in narratives dealing with the earliest Icelandic bishops: the latter part of *Íslendingabók*, the early-thirteenth-century *Hungrvaka* – a history of the Skálholt bishopric before the episcopacy of Þorlákr Þórhallsson,[25] and the second half of *Kristni saga*, which is partly derived from *Íslendingabók* (Grønlie 2005, 147) and partly from *Hungrvaka* (Wellendorf 2011, 124).

Although these texts differ in focus, they share an emphasis on the first Icelandic bishops, Ísleifr Gizurarson (1056–1080) and Gizurr Ísleifsson (1082–1118).

25 *Hungrvaka* is the only Old Icelandic text representing the genre of *gesta episcoporum*; it seems to be inspired by *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificium* by Adam of Bremen, and possibly by *Gesta archiepiscoporum Magdeburgensium* or some of the younger Saxon examples of this genre (Wellendorf 2011, 125–141).

Íslendingabók and *Hungrvaka* were both written in an environment connected to the Haukdælir family, so it is not surprising that they express a bias in favour of the family's famous ancestors (Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 19–20). I will argue, however, that these bishops played a crucial role in the construction of collective identity as well. They are portrayed not only in terms of their religious and spiritual significance, but also as important social and political figures in both internal and international relations. As such, they serve as the main identity bearers in texts describing this period of Icelandic history. Apart from forming the foundation narrative of the Icelandic Church, the stories of the early bishops are thus also an essential part of the history of Iceland as a whole, and they continue to develop the themes established in the accounts of the settlement and the conversion. Just like the previously discussed texts, they present this history with an emphasis on continuity. They connect the establishment of the first Icelandic diocese with the settlement and the conversion by means of genealogy, and with the later history by means of analogy between the first bishops and the native Icelandic saints, who are crucial as identity bearers.

The portrayal of Ísleifr in *Íslendingabók* (ix) and *Kristni saga* (xiv) emphasizes his clerical excellence and his role as a teacher who educates clerics, including the future first bishop of Hólar, Jón Ögmundarson. This teacher-student relationship constructs a sense of continuity in the early history of the Icelandic Church that extends beyond the genealogical line of the Haukdælir. Jón Ögmundarson was later venerated as a saint, but only after the time when *Íslendingabók* was written, so this aspect is not present in the text. *Kristni saga*, however, alludes to it by referring to Jón as "inn helgi". No more detail is needed, as the veneration of Jón must have been widely known at the time when *Kristni saga* was composed. Even the briefest reference to his sanctity may have added another dimension to the image of continuity: a connection between Iceland's earliest bishop and (chronologically) earliest saint. Such a connection may imply that the potential for sainthood was inherent in the Icelandic Church.

The much more detailed *Hungrvaka* describes the difficulties faced by Bishop Ísleifr due to the immorality of the local inhabitants (ii). This motif may have been intended to highlight the success of the next bishop, Gizurr Ísleifsson, by comparison (Wellendorf 2011, 134–135). More importantly, however, the motif has parallels in *Þorláks saga*, so it connects Ísleifr with Saint Þorlákr. This parallel is enhanced by the elements of sanctity in the portrayal of Ísleifr in *Hungrvaka*:

> Inn efra hlut ævi Ísleifs byskups bar marga hluti honum til handa, þá er mjǫk birti gœzku hans fyrir þeim mǫnnum er þat kunnu í skynja, af því at margir menn váru þeir óðir fœrðir honum til handa er heilir gengu frá hans fundi. Mungát blezaði hann, þat er skjaðak var í, ok var þaðan frá vel drekkanda, ok mart annat þessu líkt bar honum til handa, þótt ek greina nú

> ekki svá sér hvat þat sem hann gerði ok inum vitrustum mǫnnum þóttu inir mestu kraptar fylgja. (*Hungrvaka*, 2002, ch. 2, p. 10)
>
> (In the latter part of Bishop Ísleifr's life, many things happened that clearly revealed his goodness to those who were able to perceive it, since many insane people were brought to him and were healed when they left him. He blessed beer that was spoilt due to bad brewing, and it was good to drink afterwards, and many other such things happened to him, although I do not tell about every single thing that he did and that appeared to the wisest people to originate from extraordinary powers.)[26]

Ísleifr is not usually described as a saintly bishop elsewhere, but in *Hungrvaka*, which constitutes something like a prologue to *Þorláks saga*, it makes sense that this motif is used in order to present the first bishop's spiritual excellence as a prefiguration of Þorlákr's sanctity. The Icelandic bishops' sanctity was an important component of collective identity not only on the spiritual level, but also in the sense of proving the peripheral island's equality with other, more central Christian countries. This will be discussed later.

Another significant element in the narratives of early Icelandic history, as has been shown here, is an emphasis on social mechanisms that prevent internal disunity and on capable leaders who can advocate peaceful solutions if disagreement occurs. In the story of the conversion, this role is attributed to the lawspeaker, who prevents social disintegration due to his wisdom and the respect he enjoys among the population. Later on, the same sources ascribe a similar role to the second bishop of Skálholt, Gizurr Ísleifsson. Such a parallel between the lawspeaker and the bishop implies that strong leadership as a precondition of social stability was deemed more important than the differences between secular and ecclesiastical power.

Bishop Gizurr's portrayal in *Íslendingabók* foregrounds his authority, especially in connection with the introduction of the tithe. That is a potential source of social disunity, but discord is prevented by the respected leader who unites the population:

> Gizurr byskup vas ástsælli af ǫllum landsmǫnnum en hverr maðr annarra, þeira es vér vitim hér á landi hafa verit. […] Þat eru miklar jartegnir, hvat hlýðnir landsmenn váru þeim manni, es hann kom því fram, at fé allt vas virt með svardǫgum, þat es á Íslandi vas, ok landit sjalft ok tíundir af gørvar ok lǫg á lǫgð, at svá skal vesa, meðan Ísland es byggt. (*Íslendingabók*, 1986, ch. 10, p. 22)
>
> (Bishop Gizurr was more popular with all his countrymen than any other person we know to have been in this country. […] It is a great sign of how obedient the people of the country were to that man, that he brought it about that all property in Iceland was valued under oath, including the land itself, and tithes paid on it, and laws laid down that it should be so as long as Iceland is inhabited.) (*The Book of the Icelanders*, 2006, ch. 10, pp. 11–12)

26 All translations of primary texts are the author's unless specified otherwise.

Kristni saga presents an almost identical portrayal of Bishop Gizurr's social significance (xv), adding a short but important remark concerning his role in maintaining peace (xvii):

> Gizurr byskup friðaði svá vel landit at þá urðu engar stórdeilur með hǫfðingjum en vápnaburðr lagðisk mjǫk niðr. (*Kristni saga*, 2003, ch. 17, p. 42)
>
> (Bishop Gizurr made the land so peaceful, that no great conflicts arose between chieftains, and the carrying of weapons almost ceased.) (*The Story of the Conversion*, 2006, ch. 17, p. 53)

Such an image of absolute peace seems to be exaggerated, and the author presumably created it as a contrast to the social instability of his own time (Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 64–67), but that makes the inclusion of the theme in *Kristni saga* all the more socially significant. The connection between solid leadership and social stability is also an essential theme of many secular contemporary sagas, as will be shown, and its presence in an account of ecclesiastical history implies that it was an important concern, independent of genre conventions.

Hungrvaka (iv) goes even further in emphasizing the social significance of Bishop Gizurr as a leader respected and obeyed by everybody, even comparing him to a king:[27]

> Hann tók tign ok virðing svá mikla þegar snemmendis byskupsdóms síns, ok svá vildi hverr maðr sitja ok standa sem hann bauð, ungr ok gamall, sæll ok fátœkr, konur ok karlar, ok var rétt at segja at hann var bæði konungr ok byskup yfir landinu meðan hann lifði. (*Hungrvaka*, 2002, ch. 4, p. 16)
>
> (He received such a great esteem and respect already at the beginning of his time in office that everyone wished to sit and stand as he commanded, the young and the old, the rich and the poor, women and men, and it is right to say that he was both the king and the bishop of the country while he lived.)

This formulation emphasizes the importance of a powerful central authority, which is, in the absence of kings, represented by the bishop as the only institutionally established social leader (Wellendorf 2011, 124–128). Furthermore, the direct reference to kingship may imply that the question of central authority was not just a social concern, but also a matter of identity. By comparing a powerful Icelander to a king, the narrative accentuates his personal, if not formal, equality or similarity with Scandinavian and European monarchs (Ármann Jakobsson

27 The idea that the Icelandic bishop enjoys the social prestige of a 'king' first appears in *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificium* by Adam of Bremen (Wellendorf 2011, 125; Sverrir Jakobsson 2019, 5–6) and is also implied in *Morkinskinna* (Ármann Jakobsson 1994b, 33–36; 1999, 48; Wellendorf 2011, 136; Long 2017, 236–238).

1994b, 36–38; 1997, 290–300; 1999, 48–49). This emphasis on nobility may reflect the Icelanders' need to prove their cultural equality with other societies. Icelanders may have regarded their lack of royal rule as a peculiarity that increased their marginality in relation to other European countries, so they wished to compensate for it by portraying the local ecclesiastical dignitaries or secular leaders as royal figures (Ármann Jakobsson 1994b, 33–36; 2007a, 119–128). This interpretation is supported by *Hungrvaka*'s emphasis on Bishop Gizurr's international prestige:

> [Gizurr Ísleifsson] var jafnan mikils virðr hvar sem hann kom ok var þá tignum mǫnnum á hendi er hann var útanlands. Haraldr konungr Sigurðarson var þá konungr í Nóregi, ok mælti hann þeim orðum við Gizur at honum kvazk svá sýnask til at hann myndi bezt til fallinn at bera hvert tignarnafn sem hann hlyti. […] En páfinn sendi þá Gizur til handa Harðvíg erkibyskupi í Magaðaborg á Saxlandi ok bauð at hann skyldi gefa honum byskupsvígslu, en hann tók við honum með mikilli sœmð ok virðingu ok vígði hann til byskups fjórum nóttum fyrir Máríumessu ina síðari. (*Hungrvaka*, 2002, ch. 4, pp. 14–16)

> ([Gizurr Ísleifsson] was always greatly respected, wherever he went, and he stayed with noble men when he was abroad. Haraldr Sigurðarson was King of Norway at the time, and he said to Gizurr that he seemed to him to be best suited to bearing any noble title that he would receive. […] And the Pope sent Gizurr to Archbishop Harðvígr in Magaðaborg in Saxony, and he asked him to consecrate him as a bishop, and the archbishop accepted him with much honour and respect, and he consecrated him as a bishop four nights before the Feast of the Nativity of Mary.)

The text's focus on the international acknowledgement received by Bishop Gizurr constructs a desirable figurative image of Iceland's position in the world, which can be understood as a subversive reaction to the Icelanders' increasing awareness of their marginality. That is another central theme of the contemporary sagas that will be discussed in the following chapters, and its prominence in *Hungrvaka* may imply a change of emphasis in the construction of collective identity. However, the connection between a central authority and the collective merit of Icelanders is not presented as a new phenomenon that emerged only after the establishment of the Icelandic Church. It is a continuation of the lawspeaker's crucial role in the conversion, which – from the perspective of the medieval Christian authors and audiences – endowed the whole community with both spiritual and cultural worthiness. In this sense, the narrative admits development, but still constructs continuity.

2.2 The settlement narrative in *Sturlunga saga*

The time of the first bishops is followed by the period that is recorded in the contemporary sagas compiled in *Sturlunga saga*. These sagas depict intense social transformation, but the image of Icelandic history as a continuum is reinforced by the fact that a settlement narrative, *Geirmundar þáttr heljarskinns*, is directly incorporated into the compilation. This text differs in style from the rest of the compilation – its beginning resembles a *fornaldarsaga* or a fairy-tale (Krömmelbein 1994, 37), and its ending, probably derived from oral tradition, bears traits of a folktale (Seelow 1994, 710). It is not unusual that a compiler would borrow and rework narrative material in this manner,[28] but the question is why the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* decided to incorporate a settlement narrative at all, and, more importantly, why he chose *Geirmundar þáttr* specifically among the many other settlement stories.

The inclusion of a settlement narrative points to the compiler's interest in framing the contemporary sagas in the broader context of Icelandic history. Such a connection between the distant and recent past can be presented in terms of either contrast or continuity, and this has been an object of debate. Úlfar Bragason (1991b, 321; 2010, 237–241) and Stephen Tranter (1987, 239–241) argue that *Geirmundar þáttr* depicts an idealized settler and a golden age, contrasting with the description of the Sturlung Age as a period of moral decline and social disintegration. Conversely, Thomas Krömmelbein (1994, 40–48) claims that Geirmundr is not portrayed as an ideal settler at all, because his conduct, combining a Viking raider's manners with traits of feudalistic aspirations, leads to dysfunctional social relationships. In his opinion, the *þáttr* thus foreshadows the social instability of the Sturlung Age. Together with the epilogue of the compilation, *Sturlu þáttr*, it incorporates the contemporary sagas into the narrative of the Icelanders' origin from Norway and reintegration into the Norwegian kingdom after the acceptance of royal rule, thus accentuating the continuity of Icelandic history.[29]

28 Different versions of the narrative are known from other sources. Some parts of Geirmundr's story are narrated in *Landnámabók* and in a *fornaldarsaga*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*; the *þáttr* also refers to another *fornaldarsaga* that is not extant. Seelow (1994, 710–711) concludes that the extant versions share a common source that is not preserved, probably an older redaction of *Landnámabók*.

29 The fact that *Sturlu þáttr* is only included in the *Reykjarfjarðarbók* redaction of *Sturlunga saga* is not considered by Krömmelbein, who assumes that it was composed by the compiler of *Sturlunga saga*, but that is not a generally accepted opinion (see Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1968, 75; Úlfar Bragason 2010, 87–88; Guðrún Nordal 2010, 188; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, cxviii–cxix). This issue will be discussed in the chapter dealing with *Sturlu þáttr*.

I agree with Krömmelbein's emphasis on continuity, but his idea that *Geirmundar þáttr* foreshadows social instability seems to be a simplification that neglects the construction of continuity on a subtler level. Nor do I think that the inclusion of the *þáttr* in the compilation is sufficiently explained by its genealogical significance, as has been suggested. Firstly, it has been pointed out that there is a genealogical connection between Geirmundr and the protagonist of the following text in the compilation, *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* (Seelow 1994, 699). Secondly, the compilation has been attributed to Þórðr Narfason of Skarð, who derived his ancestry from Geirmundr (Jón Jóhannesson 1946, xxi–xxii). Lastly, the *þáttr* may have served a political purpose for the families descended from Geirmundr, who needed to legitimize their position in the new situation after the end of the Sturlung Age (Úlfar Bragason 1986a, 176–178; 1991b, 321; 2010, 241). All these assertions may be valid, but here it will be argued that *Geirmundar þáttr* plays a more significant role in the construction of meaning in *Sturlunga saga* due to its thematic emphases that establish some of the compilation's central themes.[30] I believe that these themes were the reason why the compiler chose *Geirmundar þáttr*, because its interpretation of the settlement story could not be replaced with any other settlement narrative.

First and foremost, an important feature of *Geirmundar þáttr* is the protagonist's royal descent, which prefigures the aristocratic perspective of the compilation (Guðrún Nordal 2000, 225–226). Significantly, however, the *þáttr* does not simply celebrate the protagonist's ancestry, it also involves the element of insecurity that is so important in the image of Icelandic identity. The first chapter tells the story of a Norwegian queen giving birth to twin boys, who are so ugly that she decides to exchange them for the handsome son of a slave. When the twins turn out to be bold and capable, whereas the slave's son is unassertive, the queen reveals the truth to the king and exchanges the children back. This temporary distortion of social hierarchy has been interpreted as a sign of "a social order in upheaval" (eine Gesellschaftsordnung im Umbruch, Krömmelbein 1994, 38), but I believe that in the context of the whole narrative, the focus is the marginalization of the brothers and their reclaim of social prestige through a demonstration of their abilities. The twins are marginalized because they do not fulfil the superficial criteria of nobility, but they overcome their marginality by proving their

30 An interpretation of the *þáttr*'s theme has been attempted by Marlene Ciklamini, who has suggested that "the *þáttr* presents the phases of history and of individual fate as god-willed and finite. Consonantly the bloodshed and cruelty recorded in *Sturlunga saga* are likewise god-willed and finite. The horrors will pass as surely as the pagan era had suddenly ended" (1981, 86–87). This reading is, however, not convincing and has been rejected in subsequent research (Úlfar Bragason 1986a, 171; Tranter 1987, 239; Krömmelbein 1994, 33–34).

worth in a confrontation with the alleged royal son. Since Geirmundr later becomes a settler, one of the founders of Icelandic society, the story can be interpreted as a prefiguration of the narratives that deconstruct the marginality of Icelanders. As will be shown in the following chapters, the protagonists of the contemporary sagas are often aware of their marginality because they do not fulfil the superficial criteria of nobility, but they actively earn social prestige by displaying their personal qualities. This can be regarded as one of the central themes of *Sturlunga saga*.

After an intermezzo describing the brothers' Viking expedition, the *þáttr* continues with another key episode, Geirmundr's settlement of Iceland, which is also found in *Landnámabók*, but the version in *Sturlunga saga* introduces some significant changes. In *Landnámabók*, it is the tyranny of King Haraldr hárfagri that is presented as Geirmundr's motivation for relocating to Iceland. The *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* redactions say that after King Haraldr's rise to power in Norway, "Geirmundr saw no other possibility but to leave, because he could not receive any esteem there. He then decided to seek Iceland".[31] The *Melabók* redaction even explicitly states that "Geirmundr went to Iceland because of the tyranny of King Haraldr hárfagri".[32] The version in *Sturlunga saga*, by contrast, dismisses this explanation and offers another:

> Þat vilja sumir menn segja at Geirmundr færi fyrir ofríki Haralds konungs til Íslands. En ek hefi þat heyrt at í þann tíma er þeir bræðr komu ór vestrvíking væri sem mest orð á at engin þætti vera frægðarför meiri en fara til Íslands, ok af því inu sama vildi Geirmundr sigla út þegar um sumarit, er þeir komu við Nóreg, því at þá væri hallat sumri. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 2, p. 6)
>
> (Some people want to say that Geirmundr went to Iceland because of the tyranny of King Haraldr. But I have heard that at the time when the brothers returned from their Viking expedition westward, the general opinion was that no journey seemed more glorious than going to Iceland, and for this same reason Geirmundr wished to set sail already the same summer when they had returned to Norway, although it was toward the end of summer.)

This change of interpretation clearly marks the compiler's intention to present the settlement as a voluntary undertaking and a quest for glory (Seelow 1994, 709–710; Krömmelbein 1994, 39–40; Úlfar Bragason 2010, 237–239). It is noteworthy that the compiler explicitly challenges the other existing interpretation and contrasts it with his own, instead of silently ignoring it. This deliberate decon-

31 Sá þá Geirmundr øngvan annan sinn kost en ráðask brutt, því at hann fekk þar øngvar sœmðir. Hann tók þá þat ráð at leita Íslands. (*Landnámabók*, 1986, ch. S 112/H 86, p. 152).

32 Geirmundr fór til Íslands fyrir ofríki Haralds konungs hins hárfagra. (*Landnámabók*, 1986, ch. M 30, p. 152).

struction is further underlined by the compiler's reference to himself in the first person, which is unusual in the saga style. In the context of *Sturlunga saga* as a whole, this emphasis on the settler's active initiative in a significant historical event can be understood as a hint to the audience to pay increased attention to this theme throughout the compilation. The theme is thus accentuated as an important element in the construction of collective identity.

Next, the *þáttr* turns to an account of Geirmundr's relations with his followers in Iceland, and then to the mysterious final episode:

> En sá var einn hvammr í landi Geirmundar at hann kvaðst vildu kjósa á brott ór landinu, ef hann mætti ráða, ok mest fyrir því „at sá er einn staðr í hvamminum at ávallt er ek lít þangat þá skrámir þat ljós fyrir augu mér er mér verðr ekki at skapi, ok þat ljós er ávallt yfir reynilundi þeim er þar er vaxinn einn samt undir brekkunni." (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 4, pp. 8–9)
>
> (There was a valley on Geirmundr's land that he said he would prefer not to have on his land if he had a choice, mainly because "there is one place in the valley, and every time I look there, a light shines in front of my eyes, and it is unpleasant to me, and this light is always above the rowan tree that grows alone by the hillside.")

Geirmundr is so apprehensive of the tree that when his cows stray to the valley, he has their milk poured out and punishes his cowherd for using a stick from the tree to drive the cattle away. The episode is then concluded with a remark in which the compiler again uses a first-person reference: "that was the only rowan tree on his land, growing in the same place where the church at Skarð stands now, as we have heard from trustworthy people".[33]

It has been pointed out that since the rowan tree is associated with the god Þórr in Norse mythology, it probably represents heathenism in the tale (Krömmelbein 1994, 42). Conversely, the light above the tree has been interpreted as an attribute of Christianity and a sign of the upcoming conversion of Iceland (Ciklamini 1981, 82). The heathen settler Geirmundr feels threatened by this unfamiliar divinity, but from the perspective of the Christian compiler, the conversion, just like the settlement, is a positive event, and this episode connects the two events (Krömmelbein 1994, 42). The connection is further highlighted by the remark that the church stands in the same place where the light was seen, and it underlines the idea of continuity between Iceland's pagan and Christian history. The text implies that 'the light of Christianity' ex-

33 […] þar at eins var þá reyniviðr vaxinn í hans landeign, í þeim sama stað er nú stendr kirkja at Skarði, at því er vér höfum heyrt sannfróða menn frá segja (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 4, p. 9).

isted in Iceland already before the formal conversion, so the Christianization can be regarded as a continuation of this immanent presence of divinity.

That brings us to the other key events in Iceland's early history – the conversion and the establishment of the Icelandic Church –, which are incorporated into *Sturlunga saga* by the inclusion of another short text, *Haukdœla þáttr*. It does not immediately follow *Geirmundar þáttr*, but it serves as its continuation in the sense that it develops the theme of Christianization, which is hinted at in the final section of *Geirmundar þáttr*, and bridges the gap between the conversion and the period depicted in the contemporary sagas. As such, it not only emphasizes the importance of the Haukdælir family (Úlfar Bragason 1986a, 172–173; 2010, 229–230), but also contributes to the narrative construction of historical continuity.

Haukdœla þáttr begins with the story of the settler Ketilbjörn Ketilsson, the forefather of the Haukdælir and of the first bishops, which is derived from *Landnámabók*, but Ketilbjörn is also mentioned in *Íslendingabók* and *Hungrvaka*. The settlement narrative is followed by the brief statement that Ketilbjörn's grandson Gizurr hvíti "brought the Christian mission to Iceland together with Hjalti Skeggjason from Þjórsárdalr".[34] This reference highlights the genealogical continuity between the settlement and the conversion, complementing *Geirmundar þáttr*'s image of geographical continuity. Together, the two texts thus integrate the heathen past into the Christian history recorded in the rest of the compilation. Since the conversion narrative must have been widely known, even such a brief allusion possibly evoked all the themes associated with it in *Íslendingabók* and *Kristni saga*. The short sentence in *Haukdœla þáttr* can thus incorporate these themes into *Sturlunga saga*. Moreover, one of these essential themes, the Icelanders' active initiative in decisive historical events, is emphasized in *Haukdœla þáttr* when the introduction of Christianity to Iceland is attributed to two local chieftains.

Haukdœla þáttr then continues with portrayals of the first bishops, Ísleifr and Gizurr, which are almost exactly quoted from *Íslendingabók*. Since these stories had already been written down and were doubtlessly widely known, they obviously do not have a primarily informative function in *Haukdœla þáttr*, but they construct meaning on a deeper level. As has been shown here, the early bishops were significant identity bearers, so their portrayal in *Haukdœla þáttr* incorporates the elements of identity embodied by them into *Sturlunga saga*. Firstly, the reference to the teacher-student relationship between the first bishop Ísleifr and Saint Jón Ögmundarson presents the beginning of the Icelandic Church as a pre-

34 […] fór út hegat til Íslands með kristniboð ok þeir Hjalti Skeggjason ór Þjórsárdali (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 126, p. 17).

figuration of the emergence of sanctity, which integrates the peripheral island into the Christian world. Secondly, the emphasis on Gizurr Ísleifsson's popularity and authority in Iceland accentuates the social importance of strong leadership in the absence of kings. Such allusions in *Haukdœla þáttr* connect the largely secular *Sturlunga saga* with the stories of the bishops. The image of continuity is then further underlined by the genealogical section of *Haukdœla þáttr*, which bridges the gap between the distant past and the contemporary sagas. All these references and connections imply that the narratives of Iceland's early past and *Sturlunga saga* were regarded as components of the same immanent narrative of Icelandic history.

2.3 The early history, cultural memory, and Icelandic identity

The brief historiographical accounts of Iceland's early past are not sagas proper, and their structure and meaning do not follow any of the narrative types that characterize the sagas. Nevertheless, they are more than just randomly gathered records of events, and they present images of history that create meaningful relationships between the early history and the time when the texts were composed. Such relationships always go in both directions: the memory of the past influences the community's perception of the present, and the current social issues shape the memory of the past. Consequently, the cultural significance of all narrative accounts of history arises from an understanding of the past and the present in the context of each other. In this sense, the most important element shared by all the narratives discussed here, despite their differing emphases, is that they connect individual events on deeper than just chronological levels, thus emphasizing the continuity of Icelandic history.

In *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*, genealogy and topography connect the settlement with the central social institutions of later times and with prominent Icelanders at the time of composition. Furthermore, both texts, together with *Kristni saga*, incorporate Iceland's heathen past into Christian history by showing the presence of some form of Christianity on the island before the formal conversion, as well as by highlighting the role of pre-Christian institutions in the conversion. This constructs an image of continuity, although the conversion is presented as a decisive transformation. Even *Hungrvaka*, which does not contain any detailed description of the settlement or the conversion, at least briefly mentions the settler Ketilbjörn the Old, who was the forefather of the first Icelandic bishops, and continues with a short account of the establishment of Skálholt and of Gizurr hvíti bringing Christianity to Iceland. Such brief references to stories that must have been known to the contemporary audience were probably enough to create a sense of

continuity. The texts also imply genealogical and institutional continuity between the settlement, the conversion, and the central identity bearers of the eleventh century, the earliest Icelandic bishops. Those texts that extend beyond the time when the native bishops were first venerated as saints, expand this continuity by presenting the lives of the first bishops as a prefiguration of the emergence of sanctity in Iceland. All these elements of continuity contribute to the presentation of the past and the present as a cohesive history.

Continuity is constructed on the thematic level as well – probably retrospectively, in the sense that social concerns that were relevant at the time of composition were projected onto the interpretation of past events. From the writing of *Íslendingabók* to the composition of the sagas of Icelanders and the contemporary sagas, the emphases developed, but the main themes remained the same. The first of these themes is the importance of mechanisms that strengthen social cohesion, such as the law and capable leaders who enjoy general respect in a society without centralized power. Secondly, a constant theme is the relationship between Iceland and Norway; a balance is sought between cultural or genealogical relatedness and individual Icelandic identity. The texts show that a connection with Norway was maintained through the settlers' family ties, the imported law, and the Norwegian king's role in the conversion, but Icelanders established their own institutions, adapted the law to their own needs, and showed their own initiative to convert to Christianity. Confrontations between Icelanders and Norwegian monarchs are admitted, but peaceful negotiation is advocated, and mutually beneficial relationships are emphasized. Finally, the third theme is the Icelanders' free will and active initiative in historically important decisions, together with various elements that deconstruct their marginality within the Norse and Christian cultural region. These include an emphasis on the settlers' noble ancestry and on the almost royal personal qualities of Icelandic social leaders; accounts of Icelandic dignitaries receiving prestige abroad; and the role of native saints in incorporating Iceland into the Christian world.

The thematic continuity between the narratives of the early and recent past is not just implicit – it is directly emphasized by the inclusion of *Geirmundar þáttr* and *Haukdœla þáttr* in *Sturlunga saga*. Through these texts, the themes established in the accounts of the early past are presented as the central themes of the compilation. *Geirmundar þáttr* accentuates the themes of overcoming marginality and of the Icelanders' active role in important historical events, and it connects the pagan past with the Christian present. *Haukdœla þáttr* expands this continuity by its focus on the genealogical connection between the settlement and the Icelandic Christian institutions, and it foregrounds the themes associated with the role of the first Icelandic bishops as identity bearers. Both *þættir* thus connect the accounts of the early history with the contemporary sagas contained in the

compilation, supporting the idea that both groups of texts were regarded as inseparable components of a coherent narrative of Iceland's past.

The idea that the narratives of the early Icelandic past emphasize continuity between Norwegian history and the settlement of the island, between the first settlers and later institutions, or between heathen and Christian history, is an essential starting point for the present analysis. It will be argued here that the literary accounts of later medieval Icelandic history similarly create a sense of continuity between the Free State period, the process of transformation in the thirteenth century, and the time after Iceland's formal integration into the Norwegian kingdom. While the settlement, the conversion, and the acceptance of royal rule were certainly regarded as significant transformative events (see Sørensen 1995, 79), the narratives imply that they were remembered with an emphasis on continuity. Whereas the image of continuity in the settlement and conversion narratives has been adequately acknowledged in research, the narratives of the political integration of Iceland and Norway have not been sufficiently re-evaluated in this respect. That is what will be attempted in the following chapters.

3 Constructing continuity: The Saga Age and the Sturlung Age

The Saga Age, which started with the settlement of Iceland and drew to an end a few decades after the conversion, was the time when the Icelandic social system with its chieftaincies, law, and assemblies was established and developed. Both the settlement and the conversion, as well as various important aspects of the social system, receive much attention in the sagas of Icelanders alongside their individual stories. Here it will be argued that the contemporary sagas are similarly focused on the key social mechanisms and the dynamics of power, depicting the transformation that they underwent before and during the Sturlung Age.

Between the settlement and the thirteenth century, medieval Icelandic society went through a complex process of social and political development, the main aspect of which was a gradual concentration of power. This was a consequence of the internal dynamics of the social system. Public authority was represented by a local hierarchy, which was flexible and changeable due to its situational and personal, rather than institutional character. The foundations of a chieftain's power were inherently fragile because they depended on the support he received from his followers, which again depended on his success in fulfilling his obligations to them: protection from violence, and, most importantly, resolution of conflicts. A chieftain's failure to fulfil these duties would thus lead to a loss of prestige and power, while popularity had a self-reinforcing effect (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999, 120–123, 149–150). This inherent instability of the system contributed to a gradual concentration of power in the hands of the most capable chieftains.

Another important factor in power concentration was the influence of the Church. The ecclesiastical and secular sphere were interconnected until the late twelfth century, so the Christian institutions affected the social structures and power strategies by providing new models of authority (Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 3–5; Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 19–30, 78–79). Early church building in Iceland was an initiative of the chieftains, who donated parts of their property to their church farms (*staðir*), which then consolidated the chieftain's authority in the area by tying it to a culturally important place. Power relations were thus gradually transformed from personal adherence to territorial authority (Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 112–115, 238–240; Sverrir Jakobsson 2012, 112). The wealthiest *staðir*, owned by influential families, became centres of power (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999, 102–115). Power concentration was then further intensified by the separation of secular and ecclesiastical power in the late twelfth century. When some chieftains' sons

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chose a clerical career and gave up their secular power, other chieftains could easily receive or inherit a larger share of influence (Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 145–146).

This means that power concentration was a natural process, rooted in the internal structure of medieval Icelandic society (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999, 205–209). As such, it should not be perceived as a disruption caused by abrupt transformations, but rather as a gradual development that involved elements of both change and continuity. Since the political structure was variable from the beginning, the process went on throughout the Free State period (Byock 1985; Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 7). It can be divided into three overlapping phases: the creation of the structure of chieftaincies (*goðorð*) before 1050; the development of territorial power in the form of domains (*héraðsríki*) in 1050–1220; and the competition for power in the domains from 1220 (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999, 82–83).

As there was a different degree of social complexity in different regions of Iceland, the development was faster in the regions where the chieftaincies were in the hands of dominant families early on – the Haukdælir and the Oddaverjar in the Southern Quarter, the Ásbirningar in Skagafjörðr, the Svínfellingar and the Austfirðingar in the Eastern Quarter. The development was slowest in Borgarfjörðr and the Westfjords, regions with scattered settlements and a lack of dominant families until around 1200 (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999, 67–68; Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 240–245). This geographical variability also indicates that power concentration should not be regarded as an abrupt transformation. Moreover, effective hierarchical administration or executive power were never established during the Free State period, and the inhabitants never abandoned their farmsteads to resettle in larger, more defensible communities, despite the increased violence of the Sturlung Age – so that both social structures and settlement patterns were characterized by continuity (Byock 1986, 28–36).

In the light of these recent perceptions of the contemporary sagas' historical background, it is necessary to revise the interpretation of the sagas' narrative images of history as well. The temporary destabilization that inevitably accompanied the social transformation was traditionally considered a sign of a moral downfall and a social disintegration (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1940, 1–5), and this view has continued to shape research until recent times. Úlfar Bragason (1991b, 316–321; 2000, 481–482; 2010, 228–240), Stephen Tranter (1987, 2–3, 224), and Lois Bragg (1994) argue that *Sturlunga saga* expresses dissatisfaction with the social situation at the time of its origin and portrays a decline from a golden age after the settlement to the miserable present, characterized by a disruption of the social system. Bragg argues that the text presents an "unrelievedly dark and disfigured reality" (1994, 19). Úlfar Bragason states that the compilation's "image of

history is tragic"[35] and that "it creates an apocalyptic image of how the magnates' immoderation in their greed for wealth and power leads to the only possible solution being the acceptance of the Norwegian king's rule".[36] The purpose of the compilation would then have been to reveal and explain the causes of the moral decline and social breakdown (2010, 240).

Similarly, Tranter analyses the compiler's work with the introductory sagas in the compilation and argues that their central theme is the gradual intensification of conflicts and the decreasing possibility of full reconciliation, which in his opinion mark an absence of moral values (1987, 52–54). He therefore states that the compilation presents the Sturlung Age and the preceding decades as a period of a social disintegration (1987, 127–128). As an explanation for why such a narrative was constructed, he suggests that *Sturlunga saga* was composed as a response to the allegedly increasingly threatening political situation after 1300, which in his opinion was characterized by a renewed decline after a period of optimism in the late thirteenth century. He believes that the message of *Sturlunga saga* was a warning to contemporary Icelanders against a repetition of the horrors of the Sturlung Age, which the compiler may have perceived as an imminent danger around the turn of the fourteenth century (1987, 226–235).

Helgi Þorláksson argues against this view by showing that by 1300, fights and physical violence had been effectively reduced by the new legislation, so war was hardly an imminent threat (2012, 67–68). Furthermore, the view of *Sturlunga saga*, or *Íslendinga saga* specifically, as an image of a decline has been challenged as well. While Guðrún Nordal (1998) agrees that brutal violence is criticized in *Íslendinga saga*, she argues that the narrative does not portray a deterioration of morality but reflects a complex set of moral values. Since the social dynamics became more complicated during the Sturlung Age – as the Church demanded political autonomy and chieftains swore allegiance to the king, while loyalty to kinsmen and allies continued to be binding –, contradictory obligations could cause moral dilemmas (1998, 19–29, 227). However, with a few exceptions, kinship ties remained surprisingly strong under such circumstances (1998, 28–29, 42–44, 220).

Similarly, Ármann Jakobsson (1994a) agrees that *Íslendinga saga* condemns violence by always criticizing the aggressors and praising the defenders in fight scenes (1994a, 44–75; see also Gunnar Karlsson 1988, 217–220; Guðrún Nordal 1998, 199–200). Nevertheless, he shows that instead of portraying the Sturlung Age as a time of an overall moral downfall, the saga criticizes individual aggres-

35 […] sögusýn hennar er tragísk (2010, 266).

36 […] þar er dregin upp spámannleg mynd af því hvernig hófleysi valdamanna í sókn til auðs ok valda leiðir til þess að eina lausnin er að játast undir Noregskonung (2010, 267).

sors, while emphasizing the positive values, such as fearlessness in protecting others or in striving for peace (1994a, 76–78). He argues that the saga praises the new political system after the acceptance of royal rule because it secures peace (1994a, 44).

In the present study I will attempt to expand this re-evaluation of the contemporary sagas. Firstly, I will analyse all the extant texts, not just *Íslendinga saga*, and I will pay attention to the structural patterns that shape the meaning of the sagas, instead of studying individual scenes. Secondly, I will attempt to reach a deeper understanding of the connections between the sagas' comments on moral issues and their function as identity-building narratives. The aim is to reassess the fourteenth-century Icelanders' perception of their recent past, with a focus on how they integrated recent events into the image of history from which they derived their collective identity. That can only be achieved by studying the contemporary sagas in the context of the broader saga corpus, especially the sagas of Icelanders, which played a key role in shaping medieval Icelandic identity (see Mundal 2010, 465–466).

It will be argued here that both the sagas of Icelanders and the contemporary sagas, just like the early historiographical texts that were discussed in the preceding chapter, construct an image of the continuity of Iceland's history. On the surface level, this continuity is accentuated in the sagas by specific narrative elements, such as placenames and genealogies. Placenames derived from past events or persons inscribe traces of the past in the landscape (Glauser 2000, 208–209; 2007, 20); genealogies link the present generation to its ancestors (2000, 210). These narrative elements could thus reinforce the original recipients' identity by connecting their environment and descent with memorable events from the past. On a deeper literary level, the image of continuity is emphasized by the use of the same structural patterns in the sagas of Icelanders and the contemporary sagas. Since both types of sagas were composed roughly simultaneously, the structural similarities were probably a conscious choice, intended to foreground the elements of the stories that were socially relevant at the time of the sagas' origin.

On a thematic level, the sagas of Iceland's distant and recent past are connected by their shared emphasis on the same social concerns and values, albeit in different historical situations. It can be assumed that this memory of continuity was to some extent deliberately constructed, as current concerns were projected onto the accounts of the distant past. The sagas of Icelanders were for the most part composed during or after the Sturlung Age, when people could perceive them as "a space within which it was possible to deal with aspects that preoccupied them in their present situations" (Hermann 2017, 40). This thematic connection between the narratives of the Saga Age and their present could serve several purposes. Firstly, the sagas could have a "legitimizing effect", as they could justify

the leaders' privilege, which was crucial in the power struggles of the Sturlung Age (Jørgensen 2010, 21). Secondly, the sagas of the distant past, characterized by a "strong honour code and sense of order", could serve as a narrative commentary on moral issues that had become a pressing concern in the tumultuous period of internal clashes, so "the past was constructed in a way to work as a model for the present" (2010, 29–30). Thirdly, this image of the Saga Age as "a period of legal and social integrity" (Hastrup 1984, 249) could serve a deeper purpose in the construction of collective identity as well because it accentuated the positive values with which Icelandic society could identify.

This should not, however, be understood as a narrative portrayal of a contrast between the Saga Age as an idealized past and the Sturlung Age as a period of downfall. It will be argued here that the contemporary sagas, like the accounts of older Icelandic history, create a balanced image of the past. They avoid excessive idealization and admit the inevitability of violent conflicts in a decentralized society, but they also emphasize the significance of the stabilizing forces. They foreground the social mechanisms that enable the termination of conflicts by agreement or arbitration, as well as the social leaders who actively reduce violence and restore peace. These thematic emphases are central to the narrative types that predominate in the sagas describing internal Icelandic relations, the *conflict story* and the *peaceful chieftain's story*. As has been shown in the preceding chapter, the importance of the internal mechanisms that uphold social cohesion was accentuated already in the early historiographical texts, especially in *Íslendingabók*. Through the emphases of the predominant narrative types, this theme is further developed in the sagas of Icelanders and the contemporary sagas.

3.1 The conflict story

3.1.1 The narrative type of the conflict story

As has been pointed out above, conflict and its resolution were some of the central concerns in medieval Icelandic society. Conflicts were inevitable and could not be prevented by internal social mechanisms, but they actually contributed to increasing cohesion in a society with little developed central power, because the constant possibility of violence motivated everyone to maintain alliances across kin groups and to rely on a powerful local leader (see 1.2.1). Thus, the primary function of the stabilizing mechanisms was not to completely eradicate conflicts, but rather to regulate violence and restore peace.

In the context of this historical situation, it is understandable that contradictory moral codes coexisted in medieval Iceland – not primarily due to its transitional position between heathen and Christian ethics, as has often been suggested in research, but rather because of the nature of the social system itself (Vilhjálmur Árnason 1991, 157–165). On the one hand, individuals were obliged to protect their kin or allies, even with weapons if necessary – not so much due to any abstract ideas of heroism, but rather because the loyalty and courage of one's kin and allies were the only thing one could rely on in situations where life and death were at stake. On the other hand, moderation and advocacy were necessary for securing a workable order in a society without centralized law enforcement (1991, 171–172).

These social concerns, which were relevant both to the Saga Age and to the time when most sagas were written, are a major theme of the most frequent narrative type in saga literature – the conflict story. This narrative type is shaped by a structural pattern centred around a conflict and its resolution, which is to say, a disruption and subsequent renewal of social harmony. Theodore Andersson (1967, 4–29) defines six stages of the plot: (1) an introduction of the protagonists, (2) a development of a conflict, (3) the violent culmination of the conflict, (4) a revenge, (5) a reconciliation, and (6) an aftermath.

Andersson's study shows how the recognition of this structural pattern can help us make sense of sagas that otherwise seem to be "diffuse, overcrowded with persons and details" (1967, 5). Nevertheless, the main drawback of Andersson's approach is that he does not pay enough attention to the meaning of the sagas' structure. Although he accentuates the renewal of social balance through the revenge and the subsequent reconciliation (1967, 23) and shows the importance of arbitrators for successful conflict resolution (1967, 25–26), he only discusses the literary function of these elements, neglecting their contribution to the construction of social commentary. He even states that "there is no guiding principle laid down by the author in order to give his material a specific import", so that "in this sense the saga is not interpretable" (1967, 32). Such a view hinders a deeper understanding of the sagas that could be reached with the help of structural analysis. In a later study, however, Andersson revises his view and argues that the sagas' theme is the importance of moderation and reconciliation (Andersson 1970).

This idea is then further developed by Jesse Byock (1982), who points out that the sagas "have often been characterized as a literature of conflict" but "are as much, if not more, a literature of resolution" (1982, x). Byock criticizes Andersson's structural analysis (1982, 49–58) and focuses on the structure of the conflicts described in the sagas, rather than on the literary structure of saga narrative. He divides individual episodes into segments representing small units of action – con-

flict, advocacy, and resolution –, which can be linked into longer chains in a variety of ways. This approach is not unproblematic either, mainly because it neglects the question of how the story is told and what elements are emphasized by the narrator (Lönnroth 2007, 70). Nevertheless, the essential contribution of Byock's study is that it emphasizes the significance of mediation for the resolution of conflicts in the sagas.

The present study combines and revises the approaches employed in previous research. I work with the six-stage structural pattern defined by Andersson, which has been shown to be shared by both the sagas of Icelanders and the contemporary sagas (Úlfar Bragason 1981, 164–170; 1986a, 56–63; 2010, 82–87), but not to always shape whole sagas from beginning to end (Lönnroth 1976, 68–82; Úlfar Bragason 1986a, 60–68; 2010, 89–91). However, instead of mechanically fitting the sagas' plots into a structural scheme, I pay attention to how the pattern can be modified in individual sagas. Typically, peace is renewed only after serious bloodshed, usually the killing of at least one of the main characters (Andersson 1967, 17). Nevertheless, some contemporary sagas depict events to which this does not apply, and yet they are structured as conflict stories. This is not regarded here as an arbitrary irregularity, but rather as a deliberately employed narrative device.

Even more importantly, I attempt to show that the pattern of the narrative type does not just shape the plot on the literary level but systematically foregrounds certain elements of the story that accentuate the significance of the cohesive forces in society. The main device employed in the conflict story for this purpose is a set of techniques, such as narrative perspective, contrast, or direct speech, which emphasize the mediation that accompanies the reconciliation. The details can vary from saga to saga. In some cases, the negotiation that terminates a conflict is initiated by one of the opponents or encouraged by 'the people' or 'good-willed men' as a collective unit. Often, however, the reconciliation is negotiated by a mediator – a specific, named person who stands outside of the conflict but intervenes in it and contributes to terminating violence. The mediator is not the main protagonist of the story, but he is deemed *memorable* because he is crucial for the meaning of the narrative. This character type embodies the stabilizing forces and illustrates the moral importance of peace through his action or expresses it in direct speech. The ideas thus receive directed attention, instead of being just inherently implied by the structural pattern.

An example from the sagas of Icelanders is the action of Snorri goði Þorgrímsson in the final part of *Laxdœla saga*. In this saga, the central conflict between Kjartan Óláfsson and Bolli Þorleiksson culminates with Bolli killing Kjartan. In revenge, Bolli is slain by Kjartan's brothers and a man named Helgi. At this point, Snorri offers to negotiate a reconciliation, but Bolli's widow Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir rejects it, clearly preferring the prospect of vengeance. Years later, Guðrún incites her

sons to kill Helgi, which they do, and they intend to attack Kjartan's brothers as well. However, Snorri persuades them to agree to a reconciliation instead, and he negotiates the conditions. Both parties accept his suggestions out of respect for him, compensation is paid, and this marks the final termination of the conflict. This example shows how mediation can break the circle of vengeance even after many years and multiple killings.

Snorri goði plays a similar role at the end of *Njáls saga*, in the aftermath of the burning of Njáll by Flosi and his companions. At the Alþingi, the legal prosecution of the arsonists by Kári Sölmundarson turns into a violent clash, in which several men are killed. The fight is then terminated by Snorri, who manages to persuade everyone but Kári and his ally Þorgeirr to accept a reconciliation. Snorri is asked to judge the case together with others, and the text underlines the esteem (*virðing*) that he gains by his arbitration. Kári and Þorgeirr are later reconciled with Flosi as well, but that would clearly not have been possible without the preceding agreement. This episode thus again accentuates the significance of mediation in a situation when bloodshed seems inevitable but can still be prevented by an influential arbitrator.

Finally, Snorri goði is also depicted as a mediator in *Heiðarvíga saga*. Initially, he participates in the central conflict, because he is related by marriage to one of the parties. He relies on legal means at first, but when they fail, he turns to a violent vengeance, which leads to an escalation of the conflict. After the main battle, however, Snorri ensures a truce, due to which the violence is terminated, and the case can then be settled at the Alþingi. The story thus shows a balance in Snorri's behaviour. He does not hesitate to support his in-laws when needed, but when the conflict escalates to the point where it could threaten social stability in the district, he is ready to intervene and bring about peace. His intervention is successful because he uses both his authority and his wit, qualities necessary for a mediator.

It may or may not be a coincidence that it is Snorri goði who is presented as the mediator in all these sagas. Snorri may have represented an ambiguous image of a chieftain in collective memory. That is best seen in the text where he is the main protagonist, *Eyrbyggja saga*: he is shown to be clever or even cunning, eager to compete for prestige and power, and good at gaining influential allies, but also selfish and neither too brave nor an outstanding fighter (Vermeyden 2015, 114–130). The narrator does not unambiguously side with Snorri or show admiration for him, and different narrative techniques are employed to express an ambivalent evaluation of him as a chieftain (2015, 124–133). Such a multifaceted person could be perfectly suited for portrayal in different roles in various sagas. Different aspects of Snorri's character are foregrounded in each saga because they are relevant to its meaning. In the cultural memory constructed in the indi-

vidual sagas, then, his portrayal reflects different concerns that were current at the time when the sagas were composed.

Eyrbyggja saga does not follow the structural pattern of the conflict story and is focused on the development of the protagonist's social position (Andersson 1967, 153–162; Vésteinn Ólason 1971). It shows Snorri neither as a heroic character, nor as an ideal peaceful chieftain, but rather as a man who is pressured to gain and retain power in his district because of his descent from the local leaders. His story thus illustrates the competition for power between men of equally high ancestry, who are all pressured by their descent to strive for prestige (Torfi Tulinius 2014, 196–200). Nevertheless, Snorri seems to fulfil all the necessary preconditions for being a respectable leader and a successful mediator: he is influential, decisive, clever, eloquent, and possesses a strong sense of diplomacy (Andersson 1970, 581–582). He sometimes acts as a mediator in *Eyrbyggja saga*, which praises his moderation but also points out some of his less praiseworthy traits (Vermeyden 2015, 124–128).

The role of a mediator is dominant in Snorri's portrayal in *Laxdæla saga* and *Njáls saga*, but even in these sagas, he is not always presented as being morally flawless. For instance, he frequently gets involved in others' disputes in order to further his own political interests, and he coerces men into switching sides in a conflict and participating in an attack (Miller 2012, 377–386). In the narratives, however, his role as a mediator in critical situations is more significant than the details of individual morality, because the termination of conflicts is crucial for the renewal of social stability and for upholding the social structure itself. The character type of the mediator thus embodies the importance of forces that can break the cycle of violence and restore peace after a series of fights in the absence of executive power.[37]

In the contemporary sagas, various characters can act as mediators. They are often clerics, because as clerical identity became more clearly defined in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, priests no longer got actively involved in violent conflicts, so they could act as neutral third parties (Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 37–41). Mediators can also be secular chieftains, especially the most powerful ones, who could successfully intervene in conflicts due to their supreme authority. What connects these characters is that they represent positive personal qualities, such as wisdom, moderation, and eloquence, and wield some type of authority, whether it is secular power or clerical dignity. A shared focus on this character type can connect

37 Examples of other important mediators in the sagas of Icelanders are Guðmundr inn ríki (*Valla-Ljóts saga*, *Heiðarvíga saga*), Þorkell krafla (*Hallfreðar saga*), Gestr Oddleifsson (*Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*), Gellir Þorkelsson (*Ljósvetninga saga*), or Skapti Þóroddsson (*Valla-Ljóts saga*) (Andersson 1967, 25–26).

otherwise unrelated stories and stimulate an intertextual dialogue that can include both the sagas of Icelanders and the contemporary sagas.

3.1.2 *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*: Troublemakers and peacemakers

Þorgils saga ok Hafliða, the first long narrative in *Sturlunga saga*, is a conflict story dealing with a dispute between Þorgils Oddason and Hafliði Másson in 1117–1121. The saga starts with outlining the causes of the disagreement and continues with a description of the gradually escalating conflict and the subsequent mediation and reconciliation. Within this structural pattern, the narrative is focused on the contrast between several peaceful characters and the central troublemaker. This contrast is introduced as the main theme of the saga at the very beginning by means of a direct characterization of Hafliði and his nephew Már Bergþórsson.

Hafliði's portrayal is brief, but all the clearer in defining the essential personal qualities of a good social leader – he is described as being "wise and righteous and a powerful chieftain".[38] Conversely, Már is presented as his opposite, the black sheep of the family:

> Hann var óvinsæll ok illa skapi farinn ok ólíkr góðum frændum sínum, hafði nakkvat fé ok helzt illa á. Hann var opt með Hafliða frænda sínum á vetrum ok var honum óskapuðr. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 6, p. 12)
>
> (He was unpopular and evil-minded and different from his good kinsmen. He owned some property but took bad care of it. He often spent the winters with his kinsman Hafliði, who was not fond of him.)

Hafliði's discord with Þorgils starts because they both feel obliged to support their kinsmen and adherents. Such an obligation was defined by the medieval Icelandic social structure, in which kinship ties and patron-client relationships were binding. Again, the narrative is focused on the troublemaker: it shows that the conflict starts because of Már's reckless behaviour. Már wounds his own foster-father, who is one of Þorgils's adherents; Þorgils prosecutes the case, and Már seeks Hafliði's support (STU viii). Már also mistreats a farmhand who is Þorgils's adherent (STU ix), and he later kills a commoner for a petty reason (STU x). His behaviour is criticized by Hafliði, and he is again called the black sheep of the family.[39] He does not, however, take Hafliði's reproaches seriously, continues to

38 […] forvitri ok góðgjarn ok inn mesti höfðingi (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 6, p. 12).

39 Hafliði lét illa yfir verkinu ok kvað Má lengi hafa verit mikinn ónytjung ok kallaði slíka menn helzt mega heita frændaskömm. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 10, p. 19) (Hafliði criticized the deed

mistreat the local farmers, and has one of them killed (STU xi). Hafliði condemns his behaviour again, constantly emphasizing that Már does not fit among his kinsmen.[40] Such repeated comments by the protagonist cannot be regarded as a random literary convention; they clearly are a narrative device that constructs the meaning of the story by building up a contrast between the troublemaker and the peaceful characters.

The conflict, caused by Már's misdeeds, continues with clashes between both chieftains' adherents, after which the chieftains fail to reach an agreement (STU xvi–xix). Both carry an axe to a lawsuit, and when Þorgils sees that Hafliði is armed, he swings his axe at him and cuts off one of his fingers (STU xx–xxii). Þorgils is outlawed for this attack but disregards his outlawry, and a fight seems to be imminent (STU xxii–xxiii). The storyline thus creates the expectation of the typical violent culmination of a conflict story. At this point, however, the focus of the saga turns from the troublemaker to the mediators. Their argumentation is described in detail and receives much attention. The importance of peacefulness and moderation for personal honour (*virðing, sómi*) is emphasized, not least in a direct speech by a mediator named Guðmundr, who dissuades Hafliði from an armed clash (STU xxiii):

> „[…] ok ger svá vel at þú far varliga, ok gæt virðingar þinnar ok sóma, af því at svá er mikit fjölmenni fyrir at þú hefir ekki liðs við, ok eigu menn mikit í hættu ef eigi gengr allvel til, ok er þér engin svívirðing í at búa þar mál þitt til er þú kemr framast at lögum ok yðr er óhætt. Mun ek ok með þeim ykkrum at snúa at mín orð virðir meira, með þá menn alla sem ek fæ til. Haf þú við ráð vina þinna at þú fylgir svá at eins málum þessum at þú gætir vel sóma þíns." (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 23, p. 45)

> ("[…] and please act prudently and think of your honour and esteem, for you are facing so large forces that your own troop cannot compare with them, and men will be in great danger if things do not turn out well. It is no dishonour for you to prepare your case in such a way that you can best apply the law and avoid danger. And I, with all the men I can get, will support the one of you who respects my words more. Follow your friends' advice and further your case only in such a way that you can retain your honour!")

Hafliði, the central voice of the saga, agrees with Guðmundr and expresses his gratitude for such advice. Similarly, when the priest Ketill tries to persuade Hafliði to agree to a reconciliation (STU xxxiii), he uses a story from his own life, in

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and said that Már had long been a very useless man and that such men can indeed be called a disgrace to the family.)

40 Hann lætr margt illt af honum standa ok kallaði hann mjök segjast ór sinni ætt […] (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 11, p. 21) ([Hafliði] told [Már] that he caused much evil and said that he differed much from his kin […].)

which he also accentuates the honour (*mannvirðing, sœmð, virðing*) connected with moderation:

> „[…] Ok sá ek þá at þat eitt var hjálpráðit til, at skjóta málinu á guðs miskunn, því at allt tókst þá áðr öðru þungligar til mannvirðingar of mitt ráð. Fann ek þá þat, alls ek hugða þá at mannvirðinginni, at ekki mundi þær bætr fyrir koma er mundi at sæmð verða. Gerða ek þá fyrir guðs sakir at gefa honum upp allt málit. Vissa ek at þá munda ek þat fyrir taka er mér væri haldkvæmst. Ok bauð ek honum til mín, ok var hann með mér lengi síðan. Ok þá snerist þegar orðrómrinn ok með virðing manna, ok lagðist mér síðan hverr hlutr meir til gæfu ok virðingar en áðr. Ok vænti ek ok af guði at þér muni svá fara. […]“ (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 33, p. 60)
>
> ("[…] Then I understood that the only helpful decision was to commit the matter to God's mercy, because everything concerning my honour had gone worse than ever so far. When I thought about my honour, I understood that I would never receive any compensation that would increase my esteem. I decided for God's sake to give up the whole case to [my opponent]. I knew that for that I would receive the reward that was most welcome to me. I also invited him to my home, and he stayed with me for a long time. My reputation and esteem among people changed soon, and since then everything has brought me better luck and more honour than before. And I assume that God will let it go the same way with you as well. […]")

This speech again expresses the idea that honour is based on wise decisions, guided by a sense of moderation (see Jørgensen 2017, 53). The mediators' monologues thus emphasize the importance of reconciliation, which is already inherently reflected in the structure of the conflict story. Whereas the opposition between the two chieftains is central to the saga's *plot*, it is another opposition, between peace and violence or moderation and aggression, that is central to the *discourse*. The question that the text asks on the level of discourse is not whether Þorgils or Hafliði will prevail in the conflict, but whether they will fight or be reconciled. The saga's ending then shows that in the absence of troublemakers and with the help of mediators, the chieftains choose to be reconciled and remain faithful allies ever since (STU xxxiv–xxxv).

Þorgils saga ok Hafliða thus modifies the narrative type. Contrary to the expectations built up by the structural pattern of the conflict story, in which reconciliation usually takes place only after the killing of a protagonist and the subsequent revenge, this saga shows a conflict that is terminated by the mediators already before the violence fully escalates. This reduction of the tragic element of the narrative type further increases its emphasis on the stabilizing forces in society. The saga implies that discord is caused by individual troublemakers, who behave violently and refuse to follow the social rules. They are, however, counterbalanced by the mediators and by the chieftains who may behave unwisely under pressure but make the right decisions in the end. Such a modification of the narrative type is

possible due to the intertextual relationships within the saga corpus that the original audiences knew in written or oral form. The narrative type connects *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* with a group of other similar sagas, and this intra-literary context contributes to the construction of meaning through similarities and differences between various sagas belonging to this group.

3.1.3 *Guðmundar saga dýra:* An influential chieftain as a mediator

Compared with *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, *Guðmundar saga dýra* follows the structural pattern of the conflict story more closely, without any significant modifications. Nevertheless, both sagas similarly emphasize the crucial role of mediators in conflicts. Whereas the mediators in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* are respectable but not too powerful, *Guðmundar saga* foregrounds the social importance of an influential leader who can wield supreme authority in mediation.

This theme is first introduced when the protagonist Guðmundr Þorvaldsson is presented as a powerful chieftain, capable of resolving local disputes by arbitration (STU xci).[41] His influence in the district illustrates the gradual establishment of territorial power (see Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 83–86). When Guðmundr later becomes one of the opponents in a conflict, he is replaced in the role of the arbitrator by Jón Loptsson of the powerful Oddaverjar clan. Jón's prestige is previously emphasized in the genealogical section of *Sturlunga saga* (*Ættartölur*):

> Loptr Sæmundarson fór útan ok fekk í Nóregi Þóru, en reyndist síðan at hon var dóttir Magnúss konungs berfætts. Jón var son þeira er mestr höfðingi ok vinsælastr hefir verit á Íslandi. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 36, p. 65)
>
> (Loptr Sæmundarson travelled from Iceland and married Þóra in Norway, and it was later discovered that she was the daughter of King Magnús Barefoot. Their son was Jón, the most powerful and most popular chieftain in Iceland.)

This focus on Jón's royal ancestry accentuates the compilation's emphasis on the Icelandic chieftains' noble, almost kingly qualities. It is thus implied that even the kingless Iceland is governed by leaders who do not differ much from monarchs. This idea is corroborated by *Guðmundar saga dýra*, where Jón arbitrates in the central conflict after the burning of Önundr Þorkelsson's farm by Guðmundr dýri

41 In this section there are considerable textual differences between the two extant redactions of *Sturlunga saga*. The text from the *Reykjarfjarðarbók* redaction, which is less abridged, is followed here, but the chapter numbers continue to follow the main redaction (*Króksfjarðarbók*).

and Kolbeinn Tumason (STU xcix–c). It is shown that nobody but Jón possesses the authority necessary for resolving such a serious conflict (STU c):

> Hann [Jón Loptsson] ætlaði ekki til þings at fara, áðr Eyjólfr sagði honum at þar var helzt til sætta stofnat at hann gerði um mál þessi. Jón svarar: „Eigi er ek til þessa færr," segir hann, „því at ek hefi aldrei fyrr átt um þetta at mæla." Eyjólfr svarar: „Þat man þó til liggja at leita við at menn sættist, ok eigi sýnt hverr þá má gera, ef þú þykkist eigi til færr." Þá bað Eyjólfr fyrir guðs sakir at hann skyldi eigi undan skerast. En þat varð um síðir at Jón fór til þings. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 100, pp. 246–247)

> ([Jón Loptsson] did not intend to go to the assembly until Eyjólfr told him that a reconciliation was most likely if he arbitrated in the case. Jón answered: "I am not capable of that because I have never judged such a case before." Eyjólfr answered: "It is nevertheless necessary to aim for a reconciliation. And I cannot see who could arbitrate if you do not consider yourself capable of it." Eyjólfr begged Jón not to avoid the task for God's sake. And it finally turned out that Jón attended the assembly.)

Jón's arbitration leads to an agreement because his authority is respected by everyone. Jón dies soon after, however, and there is no dominant chieftain after his death (STU c). In the absence of a strong leader, the reconciliation is broken when Önundr's daughter urges her brothers and her husband Þorgrímr to take revenge (STU cii). The avengers kill several men who participated in the burning of Önundr (STU ciii). This situation is commented on by Jón's son Ormr:

> „[...] Vér áttum föður þann er hafði mikil metorð hér á landi, svá at eigi var sá maðr er eigi þótti sínu máli vel komit ef hann skyldi um gera. Nú veit ek eigi," segir hann, „hvárt meir er frá dæmum um málefni þessi er seld voru eðr sættir þær er hann gerði nú síðast. Nú hafa þeir þat upp goldit," segir Ormr, „ófin þau er ger voru er menn hugðu at aldrei mundu goldin verða ok þat mundi at sættabrigðum verða. En þeir er við tóku gjaldinu hafa nú rofit ok bakferlat allt þat er hann mælti um, ok er mér óskapfellt at veita Þorgrími ok svívirða orð föður várs ok hann sjálfan ok alla oss sonu hans." (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 103, p. 264)

> ("[...] Our father enjoyed great respect in this country, so nobody was dissatisfied with his case if it was judged by our father. And I do not know," he said, "what is more extraordinary – the dispute that was committed to him the last time, or the reconciliation he brought about. Now the compensation has been paid," said Ormr, "although it was so high that people thought it would never be paid and the reconciliation would be broken for that reason. But now his whole judgement has been broken and disregarded by those who have accepted the compensation. I disapprove of supporting Þorgrímr and dishonouring our father's decision, as well as him and all of us, his sons.")

This monologue underlines the importance of the powerful chieftain for conflict resolution, and the story shows that peace becomes fragile in the absence of such a leader. The tension escalates again until the avengers attack Guðmundr, who

then retaliates with a much larger force, but the conflict is finally terminated after that (STU cviii). When Guðmundr gives up his chieftaincy and becomes a monk soon after (STU cxii), it can be perceived as a morally positive aftermath that highlights the rejection of violence by the previously belligerent protagonist. At the same time, it is Jón Loptsson who is the most important character in the central part of the saga on the level of discourse, although he is not the main protagonist on the level of plot.

In its interpretation of the past, *Guðmundar saga dýra* reflects the new conditions resulting from the historical development of Icelandic society. The action is therefore characterized by mobilization of large forces for aggressive and defensive purposes (Tranter 1987, 174) and personal disputes are increasingly replaced with rivalry for territorial power (Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 90). These are historical facts that cannot be denied in the saga. The narrative, however, does not present this social development as a downfall. Instead, it shows that the stabilizing forces evolve in line with the changing nature of conflicts. By emphasizing the importance of arbitration by a powerful chieftain and implying that peace is threatened in the absence of an authority that can keep aggressors under control, the saga promotes centralized power in the hands of influential leaders.

3.1.4 *Svínfellinga saga:* Mediation and morality

Svínfellinga saga has a simple structure, consisting of a single conflict story. The protagonists, Sæmundr Ormsson and Ögmundr Helgason, become enemies after the death of Sæmundr's father in 1241 because of a struggle for regional power (STU ccclvi). Ögmundr is not a chieftain but is popular in the district, and his influence increases when the young and inexperienced chieftain Sæmundr replaces his father.[42] After an insignificant disagreement, which serves as a pretext in their competition for power, Sæmundr summons Ögmundr to a lawsuit, but Ögmundr prefers to solve the case through arbitration by Abbot Brandr Jónsson (STU ccclvii).

Like in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, the meaning of the saga is shaped by a contrast between a mediator and an instigator. With the exception of scenes that depict direct clashes, these characters almost receive more attention than the protagonists from the very beginning of the saga. The introductory chapter does not contain any

42 This resembles the situation before the Sturlung Age (especially the events described in *Sturlu saga*, see 3.2.2), although *Svínfellinga saga* takes place several decades later. This shows that the concentration of power in Iceland was a gradual process with diverse phases taking place at different times in different regions.

characterization of the two protagonists, but it does contain a portrayal of the central mediator, Abbot Brandr (STU ccclv):

> [Brandr Jónsson] var ágætr höfðingi, klerkr góðr, vitr ok vinsæll, ríkr ok góðgjarn. Ok í þann tíma hafði hann mest mannheill þeira manna er þá voru á Íslandi. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 355, p. 514)[43]
>
> ([Brandr Jónsson] was a great chieftain, a good cleric, wise and popular, influential, and benevolent. And at that time, he enjoyed the greatest popularity of all the men in Iceland.)

Brandr contributes to preventing strife by his wise advice, which is described in detail. He warns Ögmundr against immoderately supporting his friends in unjust cases and disapproves of Sæmundr's actions against Ögmundr, although he understands his reasons (STU ccclvii). Brandr's authority is clearly shown in the first arbitration, when both opponents willingly accept his decision despite their uncompromising personalities (STU ccclvii). Brandr is also praised for his mediation by a reference to public opinion:

> Af þinginu ríða þeir ábóti heim, ok þótti þá sem jafnan at Brandr ábóti hafði sér inn bezta hlut af deildan. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 357, p. 521)
>
> (The abbot and the others rode home after the assembly, and as always, it was believed that Abbot Brandr had chosen the best option.)

Brandr's role in the saga is contrasted with the behaviour of the instigator Þórðr Sighvatsson, who is a side character, but his intervention is of crucial importance to the story. First, he convinces Sæmundr not to accept the agreement reached through Brandr's mediation:

> Þórðr segir Sæmundi at hann vill at hann leggi hvergi sinn hlut fyrir Ögmundi, kvað hvárki til skorta fjölmenni né mægðir. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 357, p. 521)
>
> (Þórðr tells Sæmundr that he does not want him to back away from Ögmundr because he lacks neither supporters nor powerful in-laws.)

Consequently, Sæmundr and his brother Guðmundr decide to attack Ögmundr. A violent clash is prevented only because Ögmundr manages to gather the local men, so Sæmundr's troop is outnumbered and forced to retreat (STU ccclviii). Þórðr Sighvatsson now goads Ögmundr into continuing the hostilities, just like he previously goaded Sæmundr:

43 The text from the *Króksfjarðarbók* redaction is followed in all the references in this section.

> Þórðr kvað Ögmundi sjálfrátt í hvern stað at láta hlut sinn fyri Sæmundi, „því at þú hefir fjárkost meira. Þú ert ok vinsælli af bóndum. Þótt þú hafir eigi goðorð þá heyri ek ok at bændr vili þér eigi verr en Sæmundi. Ok þótt ek sé mægðr við Sæmund þá mæli ek þat eigi at hann ofsæki né einn mann. […]" (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 358, pp. 528–529)
>
> (Þórðr told Ögmundr that it was his own choice to what extent he would back away from Sæmundr, "because you have better resources and are more popular among the farmers. Although you do not have a chieftaincy, I hear that the farmers do not want a worse position for you than for Sæmundr. And although Sæmundr and I are in-laws, I do not approve of his oppression of anybody. […]")

In the narrative, Þórðr is criticized by a reference to public opinion, and the results of his goading are condemned by his positive counterpart in the saga, Abbot Brandr:

> Ok þat sumar ferr hann [Þórðr] útan, ok er þat mál manna at hann skilði harðliga við þetta mál. En er Brandr ábóti spyrr þessi tíðindi lætr hann illa yfir. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 359, p. 532)
>
> (And the same summer he [Þórðr] sailed abroad, and people said that he left the case after having made it difficult. And when Abbot Brandr heard this news, he expressed his dissatisfaction.)

Interestingly, the role of an instigator is attributed to Þórðr Sighvatsson only in *Svínfellinga saga*. Conversely, *Þórðar saga kakala* states that he mediated between Sæmundr and Ögmundr in order to secure peace (STU cccliv):

> Þetta sumar urðu þeir nökkut missáttir Sæmundr Ormsson ok Ögmundr Helgason. Kærðu þeir þat fyrir Þórði, ok setti hann þær greinir þá niðr er voru á milli þeira ok þeim bar á. Mælti þá ok engi maðr á móti því er Þórðr vildi at væri. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 354, p. 511)
>
> (The same summer [1249] some disagreements occurred between Sæmundr Ormsson and Ögmundr Helgason. They complained to Þórðr, and he settled the matters that were between them and that they argued about. Nobody opposed Þórðr's decisions at the time.)

This is an illustrative example of how the same situation can be treated differently in different sagas. That does not necessarily mean that the truth is deliberately twisted in the texts. In communicative memory, Þórðr's involvement in the conflict was probably remembered as including some degree of goading and some degree of mediation, and different evaluations of his actions could exist simultaneously. As the material was transformed into cultural memory, the process of narrativization led to a selection of individual aspects that were significant for the construction of meaning in each saga.

In *Svínfellinga saga*, the selection of narrative material was guided by the fact that its meaning depends on the contrast between the instigator Þórðr and the

mediator Brandr. The saga shows how Þórðr's goading intensifies the strife, whereas Brandr constantly tries to resolve the conflict peacefully. After Sæmundr has had Ögmundr outlawed and has confiscated his property, Brandr persuades Sæmundr to let him mediate an agreement, and his mediation is again praised in the text (STU ccclix). There is still much mistrust between the two parties, so Brandr continues with his effort to maintain peace and encourages Sæmundr to trust Ögmundr and to keep to the agreement, which Sæmundr promises him (STU ccclix).

In the end, it is Ögmundr who breaks the agreement and attacks Sæmundr and his brother (STU ccclxi). At this point, the contrast between the instigator and the mediator is replaced with a contrast between the aggressor and the victims. The moral perspective in this episode is based on a condemnation of violence, underlined by a focus on the defenders, which is first enhanced by a foreshadowing of their killing (STU ccclx). In the description of the assault itself, it is emphasized that the brothers are outnumbered, caught unaware, and given no chance to defend themselves (STU ccclxi). The three priests who arrive at Sæmundr's request beg for Sæmundr's life and condemn Ögmundr's misdeed (*glæp*), but he does not heed it. The spiritual aspect is underlined in the death scene, when Sæmundr falls on his knees and repents his sins before his beheading. The narrative is then focused on the brothers' wounds, while also stressing that they faced death with courage and dignity. Guðmundr's plea for mercy is not presented as a sign of cowardice, but rather as an attempt at avoiding unnecessary bloodshed. This impression is strengthened by Guðmundr's statement that he prefers dying to living after his brother's death:

> Guðmundr Ormsson ok prestarnir lásu þá sjau sálma, ok fann engi maðr at hann brygði sér nökkut við þessi tíðindi. Þá var hann átján vetra. Guðmundr mælti til Ögmundar þá er þeir höfðu lesit psálmana: „Gott væri enn at lifa, ok vildi ek grið, fóstri." Ögmundur leit frá ok mælti: „Eigi þorum vér nú þat, fóstri minn," segir hann. Var hann þá rauðr sem blóð. Guðmundr svarar þá: „Sá liggr heðan nú skammt í brott at eigi er betra at sæma við yðr ok lifa eptir hann dauðan." (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 361, pp. 549–550)
>
> (Guðmundr Ormsson and the priests then recited seven psalms, and nobody noticed him being affected by what had happened. He was eighteen years old at the time. When they had finished the psalms, Guðmundr said to Ögmundr: "It would be good to stay alive, and I would like to ask for mercy, foster-father." Ögmundr looked away and said: "I dare not let you have it now, foster-son." He was as red as blood. Guðmundr replied: "There lies the man not far from here, for whose sake it is better for me not to be reconciled with you and not to live when he is dead.")

The defenders' moderation and fearlessness are contrasted with the attacker's brutality, which is presented without any notion of heroism. The condemnation

of violence is also underlined by statements about the reluctance of Ögmundr's followers to perform the killings (STU ccclxi).

The case is again arbitrated by Abbot Brandr, who decides that Ögmundr must give up much of his property and leave the district; Ögmundr willingly accepts his sentence, so the judgement marks the end of the conflict (STU ccclxii). Following the typical structural pattern of the conflict story, the saga thus ends with a successful termination of the cycle of violence by the mediator. The final arbitration again highlights Brandr's importance and authority; the narrative thus foregrounds the social mechanisms that re-establish peace after the conflict, and the saga emphasizes the continuing significance of these stabilizing forces during the Sturlung Age. The saga's ending shows that Ögmundr's acts are not only morally unacceptable, but that the aggressor, by disrupting social harmony, also loses his own social position. This image of the mediator's superiority over the aggressor endows the saga with a morally positive tone. Instead of depicting a moral decline, the saga thus contrasts socially disruptive behaviour with a positive image of cohesive forces, embodied by the mediator Brandr.

3.2 The peaceful chieftain's story

3.2.1 The narrative type of the peaceful chieftain's story

While the central theme of many sagas dealing with internal Icelandic relations is the renewal of peace after a conflict, some sagas take this theme a step further by introducing a protagonist who embodies peacefulness throughout the story and attempts to prevent violence from the very beginning of the conflict. This is the character type of the peaceful chieftain, usually contrasted in the narrative with excessively ambitious men who refuse to terminate conflicts by reconciliation and prefer violent clashes. They can be the protagonist's friends or kinsmen, who cause their own downfall by their excessive belligerence. They can also be his opponents, who often mock him for being unmanly because he rejects violence, but there is a clearly marked difference between their mockery and the narrative voice of the saga. In the narrative, peacefulness is not presented as a sign of weakness or cowardice, but rather as a strong moral code – to apply his moral principles in practice, the protagonist must be decisive, determined, and courageous, because the morally right solutions are usually not the easiest ones. The protagonist's moral superiority is emphasized in contrast with the aggressive characters.

The peaceful chieftain is characterized not only by avoiding violence himself, but also by his effort to prevent the aggression of others by active interventions

and to dissuade them from violent behaviour by warning them about its consequences. The inherently tragic element of the narrative type is that the protagonist is usually unable to fulfil his peaceful intentions because others disregard his advice. The hope of a peaceful solution is thus implied and then thwarted; the bloodshed is presented as unnecessary because it could have been prevented if everyone had obeyed the peacemaker. The tragedy is finally completed when the peaceful chieftain himself, after his failed attempts at terminating violence, falls victim to a violent act. Nevertheless, the account of his death also emphasizes his integrity, fearlessness, and dignity, although it is usually not a heroic last stand. The protagonist typically chooses to die, rather than to leave his kinsmen and companions or to let them risk their lives for him. This emphasis on his selflessness accentuates the positive values that are embodied by him as the central character of this narrative type.

The structural pattern of the peaceful chieftain's story can be summarized as follows: (1) the protagonist's characterization in contrast with an aggressor; (2) the protagonist's involvement in a conflict, in which he attempts to prevent violence from the beginning; (3) the failure of the peaceful efforts; (4) the protagonist's violent death. A typical example of the peaceful chieftain is the protagonist of *Njáls saga*. Njáll Þorgeirsson is presented as a wise man who knows the law and aims for peaceful, legal solutions of disputes. He repeatedly brings about reconciliation on behalf of his closest friend, Gunnarr Hámundarson, and he agrees on settlement by negotiation with Gunnarr multiple times during a prolonged dispute between their wives. Njáll also warns Gunnarr against violent behaviour and predicts that it will lead to his downfall, but Gunnarr disregards his warning and is eventually outlawed and killed. Then we see Njáll's own sons in the role of aggressors when they thoughtlessly start a conflict with Gunnarr's kinsman Þráinn and kill him. Njáll arranges a reconciliation again in his effort to prevent further bloodshed, and he takes care of Þráinn's son Höskuldr, but Njáll's sons later kill Höskuldr because of envy. The efforts at reconciliation fail, and Flosi, a kinsman of Höskuldr's wife, takes revenge by burning Njáll's farm. Njáll refuses to leave his sons and chooses to die together with them. This ending accords with the inherently tragic tone of the narrative type, and researchers have rightfully perceived the text as a "tragic saga" (Torfi Tulinius 2015, 100).

Throughout the saga, Njáll is contrasted with Gunnarr and his own sons, who are aggressive, although they are not presented as villains. This contrast shows that violence is encouraged by some social norms, which are criticized in the saga, while Njáll embodies their positive counterparts (Andersson 1970, 587–588). Njáll is also mocked by his opponents, who consider him unmanly, and yet the narrative voice evaluates him positively; the saga thus implies that excessively heroic masculinity is not a desirable social norm (Ármann Jakobsson 2000, 31–32,

40–41; 2007b, 194–200). Instead, it presents a different image of the ideal man: the character type of the peaceful chieftain, defined by integrity, intelligence, authority, restraint, and moderation (Ármann Jakobsson 2007b, 209–212).

Understandably, the central characters in a complex narrative like *Njáls saga* are not portrayed stereotypically, so they have some ambiguous traits as well. Gunnarr is aggressive yet noble, heroic yet consumed with doubt; even the wise Njáll sometimes acts imprudently or his motivations seem confusing, and he even intentionally gives bad advice to those who seek his assistance; both are honourable but occasionally shown to participate in deceit (Ármann Jakobsson 2000, 33–34, 41; 2004, 48–49; 2007b, 199, 212; Tirosh 2014, 213–214). However, these ambiguities do not overshadow the persons' function as representatives of particular character types. As Ármann Jakobsson has pointed out, apparent incongruities or contradictions can be a narrative device employed in the sagas to make their recipients think more deeply about the story and "to involve their audience in the creation of the meaning" (2004, 51). In *Njáls saga*, the ambiguities in the characters' behaviour show that contrasting forces exist in every individual's mind. What matters is not that a person must be absolutely morally flawless, but rather that they manage to keep the darker side of their personality under control and choose socially beneficial behaviour in most, if not all, situations. If the text is read as social commentary, this can serve as a small-scale image of the tension between cohesive and disruptive forces in society.

Another ambiguity in *Njáls saga* is that whereas Njáll's loyalty to Gunnarr does not seem to falter, his relationship with his sons is problematic (Tirosh 2014, 216–222). On the level of social commentary, the tension between Njáll and his sons can again be understood as a narrative device that emphasizes the differences between their character types, which figuratively embody contrasting forces in society. Their tragic fate then accentuates the fragility of peace in a society where conflict resolution is not an institutional procedure but a private matter, influenced by personal grudges and emotions. This tragedy culminates when Njáll chooses to die alongside his kinsmen and willingly accepts death, as do several other characters in the saga (see Torfi Tulinius 2015). And yet, his fearless approach to death corroborates the idea that he is mentally stronger than many of the belligerent heroes, so his peacefulness is definitely not a sign of weakness. As such, he can be regarded as the model chieftain both in life and in death, with whom the audience was intended to sympathize and identify (Ármann Jakobsson 2007b, 195–197, 212).

The importance of this character type is further emphasized through parallels between different sagas, where similar portrayals of peaceful chieftains repeatedly foreground the same values. For instance, the type is represented by Ingimundr Þorsteinsson, the protagonist of the first half of *Vatnsdœla saga*. He is a raider and a fighter in his youth before he moves to Iceland as a settler, but as

an Icelandic chieftain, he protects harmony in his district and never employs or incites violence. He is contrasted with the local troublemaker Hrolleifr, who transgresses multiple social norms. When Hrolleifr is exiled from his home district for his misdeeds, Ingimundr shows goodwill by providing him with a new home. Instead of showing gratitude, Hrolleifr mistreats the local people and initiates a conflict with Ingimundr's sons. A fight breaks out and the aged Ingimundr intervenes in order to stop the battle, but Hrolleifr pierces him with a spear. This tragic ending shows the peaceful chieftain as a victim of the same violence that he was trying to prevent, and his moral integrity is contrasted with the aggressor's recklessness. Although the structural pattern of the peaceful chieftain's story does not shape the whole saga, it significantly contributes to the construction of meaning in the section dealing with Ingimundr.

Another typical peaceful chieftain is Áskell Eyvindarson in *Reykdæla saga*, who repeatedly regulates violence and encourages reconciliation in a prolonged dispute between his aggressive nephew Vémundr and his opponent. He usually achieves a temporary settlement, but then the conflict is renewed again. Finally, Áskell himself falls victim to violence when his kinsmen are attacked by their enemy. He is mortally wounded but conceals his wound and advises his kinsmen to be reconciled with their opponents, which they do out of respect for him, but his son does not participate and later takes revenge. The tragedy of Áskell's killing is underlined by his unswerving commitment to peace immediately before his death, which highlights his moral strength. Throughout the saga, Áskell is praised for his honourable behaviour (*drengskapr*), justice (*réttdœmi*), and peaceful efforts by the narrator's voice and by references to public opinion (Andersson 1970, 583–584). He is contrasted with the socially disruptive Vémundr, "the most unprovoked and most unmotivated agitator on record" (Andersson 1967, 270). After Áskell's death, the second half of the saga, describing the revenge and counter-revenge, shows how violence escalates in the absence of a peaceful chieftain.

Overall, the peaceful chieftains' stories in the sagas of Icelanders reveal the flaws of the medieval Icelandic social system – its internal instability and the social norms that encourage violence –, while simultaneously foregrounding the positive values that uphold social cohesion, which are embodied by the central character. Here it will be argued that the same applies to the interpretation of the recent past in the contemporary sagas, which are equally critical but also accentuate the cohesive forces by their emphasis on peaceful chieftains. *Sturlunga saga* constructs sophisticated parallels between several protagonists representing this character type, thus highlighting its importance for the compilation's meaning. The tragic tone of the narrative type shapes some parts of *Sturlunga saga* but is modified in others; their unexpectedly optimistic endings then emphasize the continuing social superiority of the morally positive values represented by the peaceful chieftains.

3.2.2 *Sturlu saga:* The moral and political superiority of the peaceful chieftain

Sturlu saga deals with a dispute that took place in the years 1148–1183 between Sturla Þórðarson the elder and Einarr Þorgilsson, son of Þorgils Oddason from *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*. The saga is shaped by the structural pattern of the peaceful chieftain's story, and its central focus is the contrast between Sturla and his negative counterpart Einarr.

Einarr Þorgilsson inherits his social position from his father, the leading chieftain in the district, but Einarr is far less capable and disregards some essential social norms. He frees a rover and killer from captivity and assists him in escaping, and the saga is quite direct in expressing the condemnation of such behaviour by references to public opinion (STU xlviii). When Einarr is not only unable, but clearly also unwilling, to rid his district of a rover band, his reputation worsens, and the loss of popularity leads to a loss of power (STU xlix):

> Eptir þessa atburði lagðist sá orðrómr á at annarr háttr þótti á um heraðsstjórnina en þá er Þorgils hafði. Ok tóku þá margir þeir er mikit þóttust at sér eiga at ráða sér til eigna í aðra staði, þar sem þeim þótti trausts at ván. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 49, p. 85)
>
> (After these events, the general opinion was that the leadership in the district seemed very different from how it had been when Þorgils was in charge. Many of those who felt that much was at stake, started to seek property in other districts, where they believed they could expect support.)

Sturla Þórðarson comes from a less powerful family than his adversary but is more capable and more honourable; he is characterized positively from the beginning of the saga (STU xlvi). The two chieftains get into a dispute while protecting their adherents' interests (STU xlvi), as well as due to more personal matters (STU l). Einarr behaves dishonourably in his conflict with Sturla, attacking and burning his farm while Sturla is away and cannot defend his property (STU li). Sturla, by contrast, shows goodwill by accepting arbitration after this attack in order to prevent further hostilities. Einarr and his followers generally act aggressively and recklessly, while Sturla's party turns to violence only in necessary defence (STU lii–lxi).

When the decisive fight takes place, the structural pattern of the peaceful chieftain's story leads to the expectation of Sturla's violent death, but this expectation is not fulfilled in the saga. Instead, Einarr is severely wounded in the battle and must ask for quarter, which Sturla grants him (STU lxii). Sturla not only survives the battle but even gains the local power that previously belonged to his opponent. Thus, instead of presenting a contrast between the peaceful chieftain's moral superiority and his tragic death, the saga combines the protagonist's moral

and political victory. The idea that a rightful victory, accompanied by magnanimity towards the defeated opponent, increases a chieftain's esteem much more than a killing of the opponent, is supported by a reference to public opinion (STU lxiii). This modification of the narrative type emphasizes the saga's overall positive image of a society in which the disruptive forces are counterbalanced by the peacefulness and moral integrity of some of its most successful leaders.

Sturla is, however, not a sufficiently strong chieftain yet – he possesses all the necessary personal qualities, but his position is not fully established. For this reason, a lasting reconciliation between him and his adversary cannot be reached without the intervention of a more powerful leader, whose authority is practically undisputed. The influential chieftain Jón Loptsson is therefore asked to arbitrate between Sturla and Einarr after the fight, and the reconciliation has a lasting effect (STU lxiii). Thus, the saga, apart from portraying a peaceful chieftain, emphasizes the importance of a strong leader.

Sturla then continues to defend his adherents, as well as his social position, against other rivals (STU lxiv–lxxiv). In the descriptions of these disputes, it is again Jón Loptsson's role as an arbitrator that receives much of the narrator's attention:

> Voru þá sem mestar virðingar Jóns, ok var þangat skotit öllum stórmálum sem hann var. […] ok koma þessi mál öll undir Jón Loptsson á þingi ok réð einn sem hann vildi ok skipaði svá at flestum líkaði vel. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 69, pp. 125–126)

> (Jón's esteem was then greater than ever, and all the important cases were committed to him. […] and all these matters were committed to Jón Loptsson at the assembly, and he decided everything alone as he wished, and he solved the matters in such a way that most people were satisfied.)

> Ok ganga menn nú meðal þeira ok beiða at Sturla játaði í dóm Jóns um málit, kváðu þess ván at honum mundi í því aukast mestr sæmðarhlutr […]. [Sturla] kvað nú svá at orði: „Kunnigt man mönnum vera um málaferli vár Páls ok um þá svívirðing er mér var ætluð at gera […]. En þeir menn er sik binda nú við málit, nefni ek fyrst til þess Jón Loptsson er dýrstr maðr er á landi þessu ok allir skjóta sínum málaferlum til, þá veit eigi ek hvárt annat er nú virðingarvænna en reyna hvern sóma hann vill minn gera. […]" (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 74, pp. 136–137)

> (And people mediated between them and asked Sturla to agree to Jón's judgement on the matter; they said it was likely to greatly increase his esteem […]. [Sturla] uttered these words: "People certainly know about my dispute with Páll and about how he intended to dishonour me […]. But of the men who will now be involved in the case, I name Jón Loptsson first, the most powerful man in the country, to whom everyone commits their disputes. I do not know what could be more likely to increase my esteem than trying what he will do for my honour. […]")

In Sturla's conflict with Páll Sölvason, Jón manages to moderate Sturla's ambition without impeding his honour; to increase Sturla's esteem even more, Jón offers to

foster his son Snorri (STU lxxiv). Everyone is satisfied with his solution, nobody suffers a loss of honour, and no serious bloodshed is committed. The narrative shows that this would not be possible without Jón's intervention, so he becomes a highly important character in the second half of the saga. He represents the character type of the peaceful chieftain, while also being portrayed as an embodiment of centralized power – a leader whose decisions are accepted by everybody due to his authority, which enables him to arbitrate in conflicts and prevent violence. The saga thus evaluates the concentration of power positively and emphasizes its importance for peace and stability through its image of Jón as an excellent leader.

3.2.3 *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*: The portrayal of the ideal peaceful chieftain

Unlike *Sturlu saga*, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, which deals with the conflict between Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson and Þorvaldr Snorrason around the turn of the thirteenth century, follows the structural pattern of the peaceful chieftain's story without any significant modifications. In accordance with its narrative type, the saga presents a contrast between a peaceful chieftain and his aggressive opponent. Þorvaldr is portrayed as a man who treats others unjustly but refuses to tolerate even the slightest injustice against himself and always prefers violent retaliation. He assaults Hrafn's adherents and repeatedly attempts to attack Hrafn. Conversely, Hrafn is shown to be decisive in legal cases but opposed to any form of aggression. He defends himself when necessary but refuses to attack Þorvaldr in response. The structural pattern of the narrative type leads to the expectation of the protagonist's violent death, which is fulfilled in this case. When Þorvaldr finally succeeds in attacking Hrafn's farm, Hrafn gives himself up, so that his companions' lives can be spared, and is beheaded on Þorvaldr's command. The case is then settled by arbitration; Þorvaldr must pay compensation and leave Iceland for three years.

Hrafns saga is preserved both in the *Sturlunga* compilation and in a separate redaction. Compared with other secular contemporary sagas, the separate version is characterized by a stronger religious undertone. It has been described as a narrative portrayal of Christian ethics, or even as a text combining secular biography with hagiography (Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, xx–xxxi, lxi–lxxxi; Úlfar Bragason 1988, 269–284; Cormack 1993, 210–216; Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2004, 29–39; Grønlie 2017a, 18). The *Sturlunga* redaction omits the long introduction of *Hrafns saga*, which most directly foregrounds the moral aspects of Hrafn's story, as well as some other material with a strongly religious emphasis or a miraculous undertone. Scholars have agreed that whereas the separate saga is more biographical and focused on the dichotomy between good and evil or on the spiritual aspects of the

protagonist's decisions, the redaction in *Sturlunga saga* turns the narrative into a more typical saga story focused on a conflict between two opponents (Úlfar Bragason 1986a, 152–169; 1988, 285–289; Tranter 1987, 31–50; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1993, 68–74; Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2004, 29).

While that is doubtlessly true, I will argue that Úlfar Bragason (1988, 277–289) places too much emphasis on the difference between the two versions in terms of meaning. In his opinion, the question of the boundary between peacefulness and weakness remains open in the *Sturlunga* redaction because the text without the morally oriented introduction does not replace the secular code of honour with the religious moral code (1988, 288–289). This interpretation does not seem accurate, however, because aggression is never presented as honourable behaviour in *Sturlunga saga*. On the contrary, condemnation of violence and the contrast between peacefulness and aggression are recurrent themes in the compilation, as has been shown here. The *Sturlunga* redaction of *Hrafns saga* is centred around the same themes and underlines their moral implications by multiple narrative devices.

The first of these devices is a contrast between the overall positive evaluation of Hrafn in the narrative and the opinion of some characters who criticize his peacefulness as cowardice. The separate saga contains a more detailed account of Hrafn's argumentation and places a greater emphasis on religious concerns, but both versions express the same evaluation, underlined by a stanza:

> Þeir voru sumir at þess fýstu at ríða skyldi eptir þeim Þorvaldi ok drepa hann, svá berr sem hann varð at fjörráðum við Hrafn. Þat vildi Hrafn eigi. Hér af fekk Hrafn mikit ámæli, svá sem Guðmundr Galtason sagði Guðrúnu, systur hans, er hon spurði hvat hann heyrði rætt of málaferli Hrafns:
>
> Heyri ek Hrafni fjarða / hyrtælendr ámæla, / þjóð er til lymsk á láði, / línspöng, um atgöngu. Raun man segja sína / seimhrjóðandi góða: / Vígs er Ullr at öllu / eitrþvengs fyrirleitinn.
>
> Þá er Þorvaldr kom til Ísafjarðar sagði hann allt annat frá fundi þeira Hrafns en verit hafði. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 172, p. 87)
>
> (Some of them suggested that they should pursue Þorvaldr and kill him, as he had so clearly plotted against Hrafn's life. Hrafn refused to do that. He was severely criticized for this, as Guðmundr Galtason said to Guðrún, his sister, when she asked what he had heard about Hrafn's case:
>
> I hear that the destroyers of the bay-fire [men] reprove Hrafn for his conduct, plate of linen [woman]; the people of the country are too wily. The scatterer of gold [man: the poet] will describe his good experience: the Ullr of the poison-strap of battle [man: Hrafn] is always prudent.
>
> When Þorvaldr arrived in Ísafjörðr, he described his confrontation with Hrafn very differently from how it had been.)

> Þeir váru margir vinir Hrafns er mæltu at þá skyldi gøra eptir Þorvaldi ok drepa hann, svá berr sem hann gørðisk í fjörráðum við Hrafn er hann vildi brenna hann inni. En þat sýndisk opt at Hrafn var ógrimmr maðr ok hann vildi heldr deyja fyrir tryggðar sakir en fyrir ótryggðar. Nú vildi hann eigi gøra eptir þeim Þorvaldi né drepa hann, svá sem hann átti kost, ef hann vildi, því at hann vildi eigi vinna þat til fára vetra virðingar, sem opt kunnu manna ráð verða, heldr vildi Hrafn hafa svívirðing af mönnum í orðalagi fyrir guðs sakir ok hætta svá lífi sínu til eilífrar miskunnar almáttigs guðs. Fyrir þessa tryggð Hrafns ámæltu honum margir menn, fyrir þat er hann hafði Þorvald látit undan ganga, svá sem Guðmundr skáld Galtason segir Guðrúnu, systur Hrafns, þá er hon spurði hvat hann heyrði rætt of málaferli þeira Hrafns. Hann sagði ok kvað vísu: Heyri ek […].[44] Þá er Þorvaldr kom í Ísafjörð þá sagði hann allt annat frá fundi þeira ok hver sætt verit hafði en var. (*Hrafns saga*, 2021, ch. 15, pp. 349–350)
>
> (Many of Hrafn's friends said that they should pursue Þorvaldr and kill him, as he had so clearly plotted against Hrafn's life when he tried to burn his farm. And yet it was shown as usual that Hrafn was not a ferocious man and would rather die to bring about a truce than to break a truce. He did not want to pursue Þorvaldr or kill him, although he had the chance to do so if he wished. He would not do what others could often suggest just to gain esteem for a few years. He would rather be dishonoured by men's speech for the sake of God and risk his life to earn the eternal mercy of God Almighty. Many men reproved Hrafn for this truce and for letting Þorvaldr escape, as the skald Guðmundr Galtason said to Guðrún, Hrafn's sister, when she asked what he had heard about Hrafn's case. He recited a stanza: I hear […]. When Þorvaldr arrived in Ísafjörðr, he described their confrontation and reconciliation very differently from how it had been.)

The omission of the spiritual argumentation changes the emphasis of the scene but not its overall meaning. In both versions, the stanza and the comment on Þorvaldr's untrue description of the confrontation clearly imply that the slander against Hrafn is unjustified. This dichotomy between the criticism of peacefulness on the story level and its praise on the discourse level is typical of this narrative type.

The moral aspects of the story are further emphasized by an extraordinary abundance of predictions and omens, which are, with some exceptions, included in both redactions. This implies that the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* was aware of the moral framework created by the foreshadowing and deemed it important for the meaning of the narrative – otherwise he could have omitted this material, as it is not indispensable for the description of the events. Þorvaldr's first attack on Hrafn is preceded by a series of prophetic dreams and visions, including dreams of ominous figures reciting stanzas (HSS xiv; STU clxxii). These predictions not only build up tension in the story, but, more importantly, contribute to building up the moral contrast between Þorvaldr as the aggressor and Hrafn as the peaceful chieftain.

44 The stanza is the same as in the *Sturlunga saga* redaction.

Another series of predictions precedes Hrafn's death (HSS xvii–xix; STU clxxii). Several people see a mysterious fire, others see blood without knowing where it came from. There is also a vision of three riders armed with long spears, a vision of a large man armed with a sword, and several visions of light. This is followed by an account of an actual miracle (HSS xx; STU clxxii): when Þorvaldr prepares the attack on Hrafn, he binds all the people on the nearby farms, so that they cannot warn Hrafn. A man invokes Saint Þorlákr and his bonds break, so he can free everyone else. They fail to warn Hrafn in time, but the event clearly qualifies as miraculous. Such occurrences are not usual in *Sturlunga saga* otherwise, but the scene is not omitted in the *Sturlunga* redaction because it accentuates the overall moral framework of *Hrafns saga*.

The supernatural elements contained in the predictions, both in the form of pre-Christian symbolism and Christian allusions, endow the foreshadowing with a meaning that transcends the given situation and expresses a universal condemnation of violence. The emotional intensity of the predictions draws attention to Hrafn's upcoming suffering and marks a narrative focus on the protagonist's undeservedly tragic end.

The spiritual aspect of the story is then also accentuated by allusions to a saint. The death scene is immediately preceded by a scene in which a poem about Saint Andrew is recited to Hrafn, who comments on the saint's martyrdom after each stanza; it is also mentioned that a priest dreams about Saint Andrew's death the same night. These allusions, which are included in both redactions, construct a parallel between Hrafn and the saint. This parallel highlights the evaluation of Hrafn as a model to be followed, just like he followed the example of saints.

The death scene itself shows that Hrafn faces danger bravely and is more concerned for others' safety than his own. The reason why he surrenders is not that he dares not fight Þorvaldr, but rather that he does not want his companions to risk their lives for him:

> Hrafn spurði ef Þorvaldr vildi taka sættum nökkurum af þeim, kvað Þorvald ráða skyldu sjálfan fyrir sættum, ef hann vildi gefa mönnum grið, þeim er þar voru fyrir. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 172, p. 94)

> Hrafn spurði ef Þorvaldr vildi nökkurar sættir af þeim taka, kvað hann ráða skyldu sjálfan fyrir sættum, ef hann gæfi bœnum frið, en þeim öllum grið er þar váru fyrir með honum. (*Hrafns saga*, 2021, ch. 20, p. 361)

> (Hrafn asked whether Þorvaldr would agree to a settlement and said that Þorvaldr would set the conditions himself if he /left the farm in peace and/ gave quarter to those who were there.)

Hrafn sacrifices his own life, so that others can be spared; his selfless, morally motivated courage is contrasted with Þorvaldr's ruthless aggression. Thus, al-

though the description of both opponents is less openly biased in the *Sturlunga* redaction than in the separate *Hrafns saga* (Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1993, 68), the text still expresses a clear evaluation. Hrafn is presented as an innocent victim of violence, who nevertheless cannot be regarded as being passive or weak, as he makes important decisions motivated by a clearly defined moral code.

The most important interpretative devices and morally significant scenes are thus retained in the *Sturlunga* redaction of *Hrafns saga*. Moreover, the *Sturlunga* compilation as a whole accentuates the meaning of the individual story by its overall emphasis on the character type of the peaceful chieftain, which shapes the structure and meaning of the entire narrative. Its importance is underlined by parallels between several characters: apart from Hrafn, this type is also represented by Sturla Þórðarson the elder, Þórðr Sturluson, who appears in the role of an arbitrator in *Hrafns saga* as well, Þorgils skarði Böðvarsson, and others. All the peaceful chieftains in *Sturlunga saga*, in sections preceding and following *Hrafns saga*, are contrasted with the opposite character type, the aggressor. The stories clearly show the protagonists' moral superiority over their opponents and present them as embodiments of beneficial social forces. Furthermore, as will be shown later, the narratives of Þórðr Sturluson, and especially of Þorgils Böðvarsson, share *Hrafns saga*'s focus on similarities between peaceful chieftains and saints or bishops. The whole compilation thus foregrounds the moral and spiritual significance of the values embodied by this character type.

These parallels between peaceful chieftains throughout the compilation highlight the moral implications of Hrafn's story, so its overall meaning is not lost when the introduction is omitted. Although the *Sturlunga* redaction is characterized by a more secular perspective, whereas the separate *Hrafns saga* has a stronger religious emphasis, both versions express the same ideas. Despite its tragic ending, the saga accentuates the continuing presence of morally positive values in Icelandic society during a time of inevitable internal destabilization. It thus presents the recent past as a time of difficulty but not of a downfall.

3.2.4 *Íslendinga saga*: Þórðr Sturluson as the perfect peaceful chieftain

Íslendinga saga, the longest and chronologically broadest part of *Sturlunga saga*, begins around the year 1180 and continues until the end of the Sturlung Age in the 1260s. The extensive saga can be divided into three main sections. The first section describes the gradual rise of the Sturlungar to power and their subsequent downfall, caused by mutual discord. The second section deals with the conflict between the Sturlungar and their rival Gizurr Þorvaldsson; the third section shows Gizurr's rise to power after his defeat of the Sturlungar.

The first section, the account of the rise and fall of the Sturlungar, is a continuation of *Sturlu saga*, where Sturla Þórðarson the elder secures his local power, while the supremacy of the leading clans, the Oddaverjar and the Haukdælir, is still unshakeable. Sturla's sons, by contrast, already have the ambition to assume a position among Iceland's leaders. The beginning of *Íslendinga saga* is focused on the Sturlung brothers Þórðr, Sighvatr, and Snorri, showing their gradual ascent to power by various means, such as successful resolution of local conflicts, marriages to women from the leading families, and challenging the power of the previously invincible chieftains in legal cases. While there is no central conflict, the rivalry between the Sturlungar, the Oddaverjar, and the Haukdælir is clearly described in the narrative. The brothers' success is eventually thwarted by a combination of this rivalry and internal conflicts within the clan, caused by some of its members' immoderate greed for power.

Íslendinga saga depicts political intrigue and does not avoid direct portrayal of brutal bloodshed, but it does not present the Sturlung Age as a time without moral values. It criticizes individuals for their excessive aggression, which is nevertheless counterbalanced by other characters' moderation or morally motivated heroism in defence. As Gunnar Karlsson (1988, 213–215) and Ármann Jakobsson (1994a) have pointed out, the fight scenes in *Íslendinga saga* always condemn the attacker and praise the defender, even if the same persons are alternately presented in both roles. Here it will be argued that apart from this contrast between attackers and defenders, another crucial element of *Íslendinga saga* is its emphasis on the character type of the peaceful chieftain, who is never presented in the role of an attacker and always attempts to prevent bloodshed, so he embodies the stabilizing forces in society.

This type is represented first and foremost by Þórðr Sturluson, who is primarily characterized by his active effort to prevent or reduce violence. He is portrayed as a man who lacks neither skills nor noble descent and could compete for the highest position in the power hierarchy but chooses to reject the violence that the power struggle entails and to focus instead on attempting to moderate his brothers' and nephews' aggression. The narrative contrasts Þórðr with his belligerent kinsmen, thus figuratively depicting the dichotomy between disruptive forces and positive moral values in medieval Icelandic society.

The contrast between the brothers is shown already at the beginning of *Íslendinga saga*, in a scene that foreshadows the upcoming development (STU cxviii). Þórðr defends one of his adherents in a lawsuit and wishes to stick to legal means and avoid violence. One of the plaintiffs, however, hurls his axe at Þórðr's back, but Þórðr stays unharmed despite wearing no armour. His brother Sighvatr wants to avenge the attack, and several men are wounded before the fight is interrupted, but Þórðr then pays compensation for the harm caused by Sighvatr in

order to avoid the cycle of revenge. Although there is no overt reference to divine intervention protecting Þórðr, the scene creates the impression that he was protected by his good intentions alone. The same protection later becomes an option for those who agree to follow Þórðr's wise advice. Þórðr is consistently portrayed as a chieftain committed to lessening the cruelty of the power struggle by always choosing peaceful solutions.

This portrayal is contrasted with the image of Þórðr's kinsmen, in particular his brother Snorri Sturluson and nephew Sturla Sighvatsson, who disrupt the clan's unity by their mutual rivalry. The dispute begins due to their participation in the conflict between Þorvaldr Snorrason and the sons of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson,[45] in which they end up on the opposite sides (STU clxxxv–cxcvi). The discord is then further intensified by disagreements about the family's chieftaincy (STU cxcviii). At this point, Þórðr Sturluson is involuntarily drawn into the conflict when Sturla Sighvatsson attacks his farm with an armed force (STU cxcix). However, the saga now presents another image of Þórðr being protected by his moral integrity. During the attack, Sturla suddenly realizes how inappropriate it is and decides to stop the fight:

> Gengu þeir út ok sögðu Sturlu hvat í hafði gjörzt ok spurðu hvárt hann vildi láta ganga at skálanum. Sturla lézt þat eigi vilja ok kvað ærit at gert. Sendi hann þá Árna Auðunarson til loptsins ok bauð Þórði grið ok öllum mönnum. Sagði Árni svá síðan at honum þótti sem Sturla sæi þá þegar missmíði á för sinni. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 199, p. 174)
>
> (They went out and told Sturla what had happened and asked him whether he wanted them to attack the hall. Sturla said he did not want them to do that because they had already done enough. He then sent Árni Auðunarson to the loft to give quarter to Þórðr and all his men. Árni later said that he thought Sturla had already realized how misguided his expedition was.)

This scene indicates that Þórðr's morality motivates Sturla to suppress his own ferocity and follow Þórðr's example, at least for the moment. Þórðr rejects Snorri's incitement to attack Sturla in revenge and insists on a peaceful settlement (STU cxcix); this clearly illustrates the contrast between his peacefulness and his kinsmen's belligerence, and he is shown to be at least temporarily successful in preventing a tragic outcome of their aggression.

Nevertheless, the conflicts between the Sturlungar continue, although Þórðr always does his best to dissuade his kinsmen from violence. He keeps Snorri from attacking Sturla, offers to mediate between them, and prevents a meeting while

45 This is a continuation of the central conflict in *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, which ends with Hrafn's death, while the second part of the conflict, the revenge of Hrafn's sons, is depicted only in *Íslendinga saga*.

both opponents are in a fierce mood (STU cci). The clashes then subside during Sturla's journey to Norway (STU ccxxii, ccxxvi), but after his return, he and Sighvatr continue their violent conflict with Snorri, his son Órækja, and their ally Þorleifr Þórðarson (STU ccli–cclxxviii). This time, Þórðr is unable to prevent bloodshed, but his peaceful attitude still receives much attention in the narrative. When Sighvatr and Sturla intend to attack Snorri (STU ccli–cclii), Þórðr criticizes his brother and predicts the downfall of the Sturlungar, suggesting that it will be caused by their own greed for power:

> Veitti hann Sighvati átölur miklar um þat er hann fór at bróður sínum á hátíðum ok sagði at hann mundi stór gjöld fyrir slíkt taka af guði, gamall maðr. Sighvatr tók undir í gamni ok með nökkurri svá græð: „Hvárrgi okkar þarf nú at bregða öðrum elli, eðr hvárt gjörist þú nú spámaðr, frændi?" Þórðr svarar: „Engi em ek spámaðr, en þó mun ek þér verða spámaðr. Svá mikill sem þú þykkist nú ok trúir á mátt þinn ok sona þinna, þá munu fáir vetr líða áðr þat mun mælt at þar sé mest eptir sik orðit." (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 253, p. 279)
>
> (He strongly reproached Sighvatr for intending to attack his brother during the feast days. He said that Sighvatr would pay dearly to God for such an act, an old man as he was. Sighvatr answered jokingly, and yet with some malice: "Neither of us needs to remind the other of his age. And are you pretending to be a prophet now, brother?" Þórðr replied: "I am not a prophet, and yet I will make a prophecy for you. As influential as you now consider yourself, believing in your own and your sons' power, few winters will pass before people say that most of your power is gone.")

Þórðr's prediction accentuates the destructive effect of the discord between the Sturlungar, which contrasts with their preceding rise to power. This is one of the typical tragic elements of the peaceful chieftain's story: the protagonist is unable to prevent disaster because others disregard his advice. However, the narrative type is modified in the saga by the absence of its typical tragic ending. The structure of the peaceful chieftain's story builds up the expectation of the protagonist's violent death, but Þórðr dies peacefully of old age instead (STU cclxiv):

> Eptir þat var hann óleaðr er hann hafði til skipat. En hann andaðist föstudag fyrir pálmsunnudag at miðjum degi ok söng í andlátinu *Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum* eptir Hauki presti. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 264, p. 294)
>
> (When he had proclaimed his decisions, he was anointed. He died on Friday before Palm Sunday in the middle of the day, and in the moment of his death he sang *Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum,* repeating the words after the priest Haukr.)

This modification of the inherently tragic narrative type emphasizes the superiority of the morally positive and socially beneficial values represented by Þórðr. The storyline is of course determined by historical reality, but the way the story is narrated endows the real events with additional meaning. As Úlfar Bragason has

pointed out, the death scene can highlight the essence of a protagonist's character and the overall interpretation of his life, and its meaning can be emphasized by narrative symmetry. The technique of symmetry is used in the death scene of Þórðr Sturluson: the peacefulness of his death is underlined by a parallel with the death of Bishop Guðmundr Arason, which mirrors the deaths of other saintly bishops (1991a, 453–455). According to Guðrún Nordal, Þórðr's peaceful death is presented as a reward for his efforts at peace throughout his life, and it underlines his moral righteousness (1998, 182–183). At the same time, the saga transcends this individual dimension of the story: in the context of *Íslendinga saga* as a whole, Þórðr's peaceful death contrasts with the bloodshed of the Sturlung Age, contributing to a balanced image of this turbulent period of social transformation.

The whole narrative arc of Þórðr's life – from his youth, when he is almost miraculously protected from an attack, to his peaceful death in his old age – unifies the structure of this section of *Íslendinga saga* and endows it with moral significance. If we interpret Þórðr as the key figure of this section of the saga, which is an interpretation encouraged by the structural pattern of the peaceful chieftain's story, we see that the saga, instead of portraying the Sturlung Age as a time of a moral downfall, presents a positive model of behaviour, based on a clearly defined set of moral values. The inevitable accounts of conflicts are counterbalanced by the emphasis on Þórðr's peacefulness, which foregrounds the cohesive forces that uphold society even during a period of increased violence. The saga could thus provide Icelanders with a past that they could be proud of, as well as with a sense of continuity in terms of the values that defined Icelandic society from the settlement and the Saga Age throughout the Sturlung Age.

3.2.5 *Íslendinga saga*: Sturla Sighvatsson and Gizurr Þorvaldsson as fighters

We now turn to the second section of *Íslendinga saga*, which is centred around the conflict between Sturla Sighvatsson and Gizurr Þorvaldsson. By the time it begins, the strife between the Sturlungar has forced Snorri Sturluson and his allies to escape to Norway (STU ccli–cclxxviii). The peaceful chieftain Þórðr Sturluson is dead and Sturla's and Sighvatr's awareness of their weakened position probably makes them all the more eager to confront their rivals.

An open conflict between Sturla and Gizurr and his ally Kolbeinn Arnórsson starts in the spring of 1238 (STU cclxxxiii–cclxxxv). After Sturla's imprudent capture of Gizurr by Lake Apavatn (STU cclxxxiv), the tension turns into armed clashes (STU cclxxxvi–ccxcii). It is directly expressed in the narrative that the conflict is motivated by rivalry in the power struggle – both parties clearly understand that the winner will attain the position they both strive for:

> Gizurr spyrr Sturlu þá hví hann léti leggja hendr á hann. Sturla bað hann ekki efast í því at hann ætlaði sér meira hlut en öðrum mönnum á Íslandi, „en mér þykkir sem þá sé allir yfirkomnir er þú ert, því at ek uggi þik einn manna á Íslandi ef eigi ferr vel með okkr." (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 284, p. 313)
>
> (Gizurr asked Sturla why he had him captured. Sturla told him not to doubt that he intended to attain a higher position than anyone else in Iceland. "And I believe that everyone will be defeated if you are, because you are the only Icelander I fear, if we do not get along.")
>
> Þeir Kolbeinn frændr réðu þat á Kilinum at þeir skyldu flokka uppi hafa ok slíta eigi fyrr en aðrir hvárir væri í helju, Sturla eðr þeir. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 285, p. 315)
>
> (Kolbeinn and his kinsmen decided at Kjölr to gather forces and not to dissolve them until either Sturla or they were in Hell.)

The Sturlungar, weakened by the conflict within their clan, are finally defeated by Gizurr and Kolbeinn in the battle of Örlygsstaðir on 21 August 1238 (STU ccxciii–ccxciv). This is a decisive event in the Sturlungar's downfall, as Gizurr now becomes the most powerful chieftain in Iceland. It is admitted in the text that he attains this position by partly unfair means, but he cannot be regarded as the undisputed villain of this section of the saga, because his opponents do not always behave much better. Overall, the moral interpretation of this section is ambiguous and must be sought in the deeper layers of the text's meaning.

The portrayal of Gizurr Þorvaldsson is so ambivalent that it has been considered inconsistent. Some scholars have even argued that the sections in which Gizurr is evaluated positively cannot have been original parts of Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga* but were interpolated by *Sturlunga saga*'s compiler from a separate, now lost saga of Gizurr (Björn M. Ólsen 1902, 311–325; Kålund 1904, iv; Pétur Sigurðsson 1933–1935, 42; Nedrelid 1994, 615–616; Helgi Þorláksson 2012, 60–61; 2017, 209). While the origin of the individual sections cannot be determined with certainty, I will attempt to show that their selection is neither inconsistent nor arbitrary and that this ambiguity is an important component of the saga's overall pattern of evaluating its protagonists, which is based on a remarkable narrative symmetry between the portrayals of Gizurr and Sturla.

This symmetry has been noticed by scholars, but the existing interpretations have not been convincing. Guðrún Nordal suggests that the two opponents are presented as contrasting characters, with Sturla representing recklessness and Gizurr representing moderation (1998, 53–61). She shows how the negative portrayal of Sturla is emphasized by the symbolism of the wolf (1998, 163–171), but her analysis of symbolism overshadows various other aspects of Sturla's personality that are depicted in the saga. Furthermore, Gizurr's behaviour can hardly be regarded as a model of moderation at this point, as he often acts much more vio-

lently than necessary. Conversely, Úlfar Bragason states that both the birth scene and the death scene mark Sturla Sighvatsson as the positive hero of the saga (1986b, 68–76). However, drawing such a conclusion on account of two individual scenes is too limiting because it isolates these scenes from the saga's overall portrayal of Sturla and his opponent. Here it will be attempted to shed better light on the meaning of the narrative parallel between Sturla and Gizurr.

The two protagonists are directly characterized by the narrator, and such direct characterization is strikingly positive. In the description of Sturla Sighvatsson, it is emphasized that he gives useful advice and is a popular chieftain and a good troop leader:

> […] engi flokkr þótti betr siðaðr vera en sá er Sturla hafði. Lagði hann vel til ok allgegnliga þessa mála ok fekk af því mikla vinsæld suðr þar. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 179, p. 132)
>
> ([…] no troop seemed to have better manners than the one led by Sturla. He gave good and very useful advice in these matters, so he gained much popularity there in the south.)

Similarly, the direct characterization of Gizurr Þorvaldsson is entirely positive and portrays him as a popular, capable chieftain. Above all, it emphasizes that he does not behave immoderately:

> Hann gerðist höfðingi mikill ok vitr maðr. […] Gizurr var meðalmaðr at vexti ok allra manna bezt á sik kominn, vel limaðr, snareygðr, ok lágu fast augun, ok skýrligr í viðbragði, betr talaðr en flestir menn hér á landi, blíðmæltr ok mikill rómrinn, engi ákafamaðr ok þótti jafnan inn drjúgligsti til ráðagerðar. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 265, p. 295)
>
> (He became an influential chieftain and a wise man. […] Gizurr was a man of average height but extremely well-built, with strong arms and legs and keen eyes with a firm look – and he answered cleverly, was more eloquent than most men in this country, and spoke kindly but with a strong voice. He did not behave immoderately and seemed to always stick to his decisions.)

In contrast to this directly expressed praise, the indirect characterization of both protagonists in individual episodes shows that they often act immoderately and turn to excessive violence. The criticism of such behaviour is expressed either by a narrative focus on the defender (see Ármann Jakobsson 1994a), or more directly in dialogues and in the characters' comments.

Sturla Sighvatsson's personality is revealed in several key scenes, which are not an essential part of the saga's account of the historical events but are important as a means of character portrayal. In an introductory scene from his youth, Sturla wants to try a precious sword owned by a farmer and takes it without permission, which leads to a fight. Sturla fights carelessly, hurts the farmer more than he intends to, and is criticized by his father, who then brings about a reconciliation (STU clxxiii). Later in the saga, Sturla fights for power ruthlessly and is

again criticized by Sighvatr, who is a rather aggressive man himself but understands that his son's ambition is excessive. He ridicules Sturla's greed for power in a long monologue, in which he lists the most influential chieftains as Sturla's future farm servants (STU cclxxvi). Sturla's hot temper is reflected in his response: he jumps up in anger and leaves his father's farm. Sighvatr then implies a prediction of Sturla's fall:

> Þá tók Sighvatr til orða: „Hvé lengi mun haldast ofsi sjá inn mikli er Sturla hefir umfram alla frændr vára?" Már svarar: „Þat þykkir líkligt at lengi haldist fyrir þínar sakir ok annarra frænda yðvarra göfugra, en þó muntu slíku næst geta, bóndi, ok vilda ek heyra hvers þú gætir til eða hversu þér segði hugr um þetta." Sighvatr svarar: „Ekki kann ek til slíks at sjá, en fá eru óhóf alllangæ. En þó má vera at þetta sé langætt ef hann drepr eigi fæti fyrr, en ef hann drepr þá mun hann drepa eigi sem minnst." (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 280, p. 309)
>
> (Sighvatr said: "How long will this huge immoderation, which characterizes Sturla more than any other of our kinsmen, last?" Már answered: "I deem it likely that it will last long due to you and your other noble kinsmen. But you would surely make a better guess, franklin, and I would like to hear what you expect or how you feel about this." Sighvatr replied: "I am not able to predict such things, but immoderation seldom lasts too long. And yet it is possible that it will last long this time, if he does not stumble soon, but if he stumbles, he will not stumble too little.")

This prediction, just like the previously discussed prediction by Þórðr Sturluson, serves as a comment that guides the interpretation of the story. It expresses the idea that immoderation causes the downfall of capable men, which is here applied to Sturla Sighvatsson but can also be understood as a universally valid norm.

Sighvatr continues to criticize Sturla's decisions and Sturla's responses gradually become more ambivalent. At first, he jumps up in anger again, but then he comes back and sits humbly by his father's feet (STU cclxxxi). This probably shows that Sturla understands that he is going too far, and that he feels uncertain about his actions. Such uncertainty seems to be caused by moral concerns, so Sturla is not portrayed as an entirely ruthless man, rather as a promising chieftain blinded by his excessive greed for power.

Sighvatr's comments throughout this section of the saga serve as a narrative device for evaluating Sturla's behaviour. They contradict the narrator's direct characterization of Sturla, but it would be a simplification to suspect the saga's writer of failing to create consistent personal portrayals or of unsuccessfully trying to conceal his personal bias. Instead, this contrast can be understood as implying a comparison between the ideal chieftain, portrayed in the direct characterization, and Sturla's actual behaviour, which is criticized in the saga. This becomes even clearer when we notice the same pattern in the portrayal of Gizurr Þorvaldsson.

The first negative perception of Gizurr is also expressed by Sighvatr Sturluson. When he is asked about his opinion of the boy, he answers: "I do not like

that frowning brow",[46] indicating that Gizurr appears to be fierce and stubborn. This is followed by a dialogue in which Gizurr's father Þorvaldr predicts the future conflict:

> Þá mælti Sighvatr: „Þess vil ek biðja þik, Þorvaldr, at vit gætim svá til með sonum okkrum at þeir heldi vel vináttu með frændsemi." Þorvaldr leit niðr fyrir sik ok heldr áhyggjusamliga ok mælti: „Gætt man meðan vit lifum báðir." Þetta virðist mönnum in mesta spásaga at því sem síðar varð, því at Þorvaldr var sálaðr þá er Apavatnsför var. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 189, p. 152)

> (Then Sighvatr said: "I want to ask a favour of you, Þorvaldr, that we both keep an eye on our sons, so they keep their friendship and respect their kinship." Þorvaldr looked down, somewhat worried, and said: "It will be so while we both live." People thought that this was a significant prediction, with regard to what happened later, for Þorvaldr was dead when the meeting by Apavatn took place.)

Like the aforementioned predictions, this dialogue foreshadows the upcoming violence and its tragic consequences. It highlights the contrast between the fathers, who are concerned for peace – although Sighvatr is a fighter himself, but at least his ambition has some limits – and the sons, whose greed for power is stronger than any moral concerns. As such, the dialogue contributes to constructing the moral framework of the narrative.

The contrast between the positive direct characterization and the indirect portrayal of Gizurr is even more striking in the key scenes that depict his action. The description of Gizurr's brutality in the battle of Örlygsstaðir speaks for itself (STU ccxciv):

> Þat segja menn þeir er hjá voru at Gizurr hljóp báðum fótum upp við er hann hjó Sturlu, svá at lopt sá milli fótanna ok jarðarinnar. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 294, pp. 342–343)

> (Those who were there say that when Gizurr hewed at Sturla, he jumped up with both legs, so one could see air between his feet and the ground.)

Within the terse saga style, this unusually vivid depiction emphasizes the impression of Gizurr taking pleasure in killing his opponent. After this merciless killing, Gizurr also plunders Sturla's body and steals his money, jewellery, and weapons. No direct commentary is needed for understanding the moral evaluation of such acts.

Some of the remaining Sturlungar, Órækja Snorrason and Sturla Þórðarson the younger, later take revenge by killing Gizurr's kinsman Klængr Bjarnarson (STU cccxi). They fight Gizurr at the Skálholt bishopric, but the outcome of the battle is not decisive (STU cccxiv). Both parties then arrange a meeting, but de-

46 „Ekki er mér um ygglibrún þá." (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 189, p. 152).

spite the promises of a peaceful negotiation, Gizurr and Kolbeinn capture Órækja and Sturla in a treacherous manner (STU cccxv). Their treachery is sharply criticized by the two clerics who witness it and even by some of their own men:

> Byskup ok Brandr ábóti bregðast mjök reiðir við þetta ok kalla in mestu svik við sik gjör ok alla þá er hlut áttu at þessum málum. […] Bændr nökkurir ór flokki Kolbeins gengu þá til Órækju ok kváðust skyldu berjast með honum ok kváðu þetta in mestu svik. […] Sigvarðr byskup ok Brandr ábóti ámæltu Gizuri mjök um þessar málalyktir at honum hefði illa farit. Gizurr svarar svá, kvað á öllu öðru meiri mein sjá en þessu. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 315, pp. 387–388)
>
> (The bishop and Abbot Brandr were enraged by this and called it the worst betrayal of themselves and of everyone who was involved in the case. […] Some farmers from Kolbeinn's troop went over to Órækja and offered to fight for him, because they deemed this the worst betrayal. […] Bishop Sigvarðr and Abbot Brandr strongly reproached Gizurr for his decision, saying that he had committed a misdeed. Gizurr answered that he saw more harm in everything else than in this.)

The structure of this scene follows the same pattern as some of the episodes dealing with Sturla: the protagonist behaves immoderately, is criticized, and responds arrogantly. The clerics' opinion serves as a means of evaluation, and there is again a sharp contrast between this evaluation and the direct characterization. The protagonist is thus compared with an ideal.

This means that there is not an opposition between the depiction of Sturla and Gizurr, but rather a parallel. The similarity of the pattern is too striking to be a coincidence, and both portrayals together make sense as a narrative device for expressing ideas about the behaviour of chieftains. The text portrays neither Sturla nor Gizurr one-sidedly as a villain but contrasts their occasional recklessness with the image of the ideal chieftain. This ideal is not presented as something unattainable, however, but rather as a set of qualities that both protagonists inherently possess but do not fully develop due to their excessive greed for power, pride, and belligerence. The saga thus shows that individual chieftains possess both desirable and disruptive qualities. On the level of individual morals, this highlights the idea that everyone's actions are guided by their own decision to behave either moderately or immoderately. On a more universal level, it can be understood as an image of the inevitable presence of both disruptive and beneficial forces in any society. In this sense, Icelandic society of the Sturlung Age is neither better nor worse than any other.

Both Sturla and Gizurr are also contrasted with the ideal peaceful chieftain Þórðr Sturluson, who embodies the personal qualities that are praised in the direct characterizations. The tragic aspect of the story is the peaceful chieftain's inability to dissuade his kinsmen from their violent intentions, but his central position in the narrative emphasizes the morally positive values that uphold soci-

ety. The narrative thus creates a figurative image of Icelandic society with its various aspects, implying that the positive elements counterbalance the flaws and prevent social disintegration, although they cannot always prevent individual acts of violence.

3.3 Constructing a memory of continuity

The present chapter has shown that the contemporary sagas dealing with internal Icelandic relations share some of their central themes with the narratives of the distant past, such as the early historiographical texts or the sagas of Icelanders. This thematic continuity accentuates the image of Icelandic history as a coherent process and foregrounds some of the values with which the community identified. Among these themes, the central focus is the importance of stabilizing forces in society, embodied by decisive peaceful leaders or other influential persons who strive to regulate or terminate conflicts by non-violent means.

In the sagas – both those dealing with the settlement period and with the recent past – this theme shapes not only their content, but also their structure, as it determines the form of the predominant narrative types, the conflict story and the peaceful chieftain's story. Their structural patterns construct the meaning of the sagas by emphasizing certain aspects of the events, foregrounding specific character types, and creating parallels or contrasts within individual sagas or across different sagas. It has been argued here that the narrative types thus play an important role in transforming accounts of the recent past from communicative memory into coherent stories in the contemporary sagas, and that they endow the complex chains of events with additional layers of meaning that transcend the events themselves. As recipients of the texts, we need to reveal the narrative types and their inherent meanings in order to fully appreciate the interpretations of history that are hidden beneath the surface of the seemingly straightforward historiographical style of *Sturlunga saga*.

The narrative type of the conflict story is centred around an evolution from the initial escalation of discord to the final reconciliation. As such, it admits that violence is inevitable in a decentralized society, but it foregrounds the social mechanisms that enable the renewal of peace with the help of the community, its most respectable representatives, and its institutions. These mechanisms are embodied by the character type of the mediator, which has a crucial position in the conflict story. The mediators are not the main characters on the level of plot, but they are essential for the expression of values and ideas on the level of discourse. They accentuate the importance of peaceful reconciliation by their action, as well

as by their speeches, in which they emphasize the connection between moderation and honour.

In the conflict story, the mediator is typically contrasted with his negative counterpart, an aggressor who disrupts social harmony by his violent behaviour or an instigator who goads others into aggression. Such pairs, Ketill and Már in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* or Abbot Brandr and Þórðr Sighvatsson in *Svínfellinga saga*, embody the presence of both stabilizing and disruptive forces in society. The moral and social superiority of the mediators in the sagas shows that despite the presence of disruptive forces, the past depicted in the contemporary sagas is not presented as a period of social disintegration and moral downfall, because the negative elements are counterbalanced by the positive forces.

The importance of an influential leader who strives to maintain peace in his district is foregrounded even more in the peaceful chieftain's story. This narrative type is centred around the portrayal of its protagonist, who embodies the social mechanisms that prevent fights and promote non-violent resolution of conflicts. Its inherently tragic plot accentuates the disruptive effects of excessive aggression, while its emphasis on the protagonist's moral integrity underlines the constant presence of cohesive forces in Icelandic society. Just like the conflict story, this narrative type contributes to an interpretation and evaluation of the recent past in the contemporary sagas by accentuating a specific character type and creating contrasts and parallels. Firstly, the peaceful chieftains' stories are characterized by a contrast between the protagonist and his negative counterpart, an aggressive chieftain. This contrast draws increased attention to the peaceful chieftains as representatives of the positive values that uphold society. Secondly, *Sturlunga saga* as a compilation builds up parallels between several noteworthy peaceful chieftains: the ambitious but moderate Sturla Þórðarson the elder, the morally perfect tragic hero Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, the wise Þórðr Sturluson as the positive counterpart of his power-greedy kinsmen, and others in its later sections (see chapter 5). The compilation thus emphasizes the peaceful chieftains' importance for the interpretation of the past.

Furthermore, it has been shown here how the compilation's overall focus on the character type of the peaceful chieftain serves as an interpretative device that can replace other narrative means. The analysis of *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* has revealed how the meaning constructed in *Sturlunga saga* by the typological similarity between Hrafn and other peaceful chieftains replaces the introductory section of the separate *Hrafns saga*, which draws attention to the dichotomy between good and evil. The overall meaning of the story is thus not changed by the omission of the introductory section in the *Sturlunga* redaction, although the separate version reflects a more spiritual perspective and the *Sturlunga* redaction a more social perspective. Another function of these parallels in the compilation is

that as the other peaceful chieftains' stories in *Sturlunga saga* modify the inherently tragic tone of this narrative type, the recipient is reminded that the gloomy ending of *Hrafns saga* is not the only possible option, and that the overall image of the recent past in *Sturlunga saga* is more optimistic. Such intertextual interpretation is only possible due to the typological connections between several sagas that share the same narrative type.

*

The focus on mediators or peaceful chieftains in these sagas shows how the collective knowledge of the narrative types with their given ensemble of character types and their inherent meanings shaped the stories during the narrativization of recent events. Furthermore, it seems likely that the predominant narrative types with their specific thematic emphases even contributed to the selection of stories to be narrativized and written down or of persons to be remembered. It can be assumed that many historical events and persons were remembered in communicative memory, but whether they would be incorporated into cultural memory or gradually forgotten, depended mainly on whether their importance in the stories transcended their individual historical significance and could contribute to a broader interpretation of history, from which the community could derive its collective identity. It was therefore not just political importance, but also typological characteristics that determined whether an event or a person would be remembered and *how* they would be remembered.

For instance, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson was probably not as politically significant as most other central characters in the contemporary sagas, and yet his story was remembered beyond communicative memory. In the separate *Hrafns saga*, he is portrayed as a potential saint (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2004, 33–39), which doubtlessly made him an important bearer of collective identity. In the *Sturlunga* redaction, however, this aspect of his portrayal is suppressed, albeit not completely removed. Instead, the reason why *Hrafns saga* was incorporated into *Sturlunga saga* was presumably Hrafn's role as a model peaceful chieftain, an embodiment of values that defined the Icelanders' preferred image of their past.[47] Similarly, Þórðr Sturluson was probably mostly overshadowed by his more ambitious brothers and nephews on the political level, but he can be regarded as the key character of a section of *Sturlunga saga* on the level of discourse, as his portrayal contributes to the compilation's interpretation of the recent past alongside other peaceful chieftains' stories. These stories are more than just moralistic tales intended to illustrate the dichot-

47 The events described in *Hrafns saga* are also important as causes of later conflicts involving the Sturlungar (see 3.2.4), but a brief outline of the events would have sufficed as an introduction to these conflicts.

omy between virtue and sin. The peaceful chieftains, apart from representing individual morality, embody the evolving ideals of government and public authority.

As Torfi Tulinius has pointed out, the increased focus on peaceful chieftains in thirteenth-century Iceland was part of a trend in western civilization at the time (2016, 92). A significant aspect of the Church's rise to power in Europe was its insistence on the link between government and service. This may have affected the perception of the gradually changing, and possibly debated, role of the Icelandic chieftains (2016, 92, 99–100). The new ideology may have influenced not only the current political thinking, but also the memory of the past. It could be important for the collective identity of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelanders to possess stories showing that although the currently popular ideology was not dogmatically formulated in the past, its central values naturally existed in society. Icelanders could thus derive their identity and a sense of historical continuity from an image of the past that mirrored ideas that were socially or ideologically relevant to the present.

The same importance for the interpretation of history presumably shaped the portrayals of individuals who receive attention in the conflict stories as mediators. These persons, such as the clerics Ketill and Brandr, probably enjoyed a good reputation as mediators in real life, which made them *memorable* in communicative memory. However, they were side characters in the respective stories, so they would hardly have received so much attention in the sagas if they had not been regarded as essential for the sagas' meaning as embodiments of the stabilizing forces in society. Another influential mediator, the chieftain Jón Loptsson, was doubtlessly a historically significant person, so it can seem surprising that he is not the central protagonist of any extant saga. However, he is presented in several contemporary sagas, primarily in *Sturlu saga* and *Guðmundar saga dýra*, as the main arbitrator – a side character who nevertheless has a crucial position in the sagas. This social role of Jón Loptsson is essential in cultural memory because it is associated with an important theme of the narrative of medieval Icelandic history: the significance of a strong social leader who can effectively terminate serious conflicts that could not be resolved without the intervention of such a superior authority.

As has been shown in the preceding chapter, the importance of strong social leaders is a theme that appears already in the early Icelandic historiographical texts. The theme is then further developed in the contemporary sagas that praise powerful arbitrators or peaceful chieftains, illustrate the dire consequences of their absence, and depict the desirable personal qualities of an ideal leader. These sagas reflect the political transformation of Icelandic society and show that the nature and extent of the chieftains' power changed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Nevertheless, the social significance of strong leadership is

equally emphasized in texts dealing with all periods of medieval Icelandic history. That can be understood as a comment on the entire process of power concentration from the perspective of the time when the narratives were composed. The positive portrayal of powerful social leaders throughout different sources indicates that power concentration was probably generally regarded as a beneficial development that increased social stability in the long term, although some aspects of the process inevitably had a temporarily destabilizing effect. As the memory of this process was narrativized, the structure of the narrative types enabled an interpretation that foregrounds the positive evaluation without entirely concealing the negative aspects.

Since the sagas accentuate the mechanisms and values that unite a society in the absence of a central unifying figure, such as a monarch, they are an essential component of the medieval Icelanders' collective memory of their pre-monarchic past. Nevertheless, even the sagas that primarily depict internal Icelandic relations construct collective identity with an awareness of the relationship between Iceland and the Norwegian monarchy, which was an inseparable part of their extra-textual context. What is important in this respect is that it would be misleading to assume that the sagas, by emphasizing the positive aspects of the original Icelandic kingless society, express a rejection of royal rule. What they do reject, however, is an interpretation of Iceland as a failed, disintegrated society that is unable to resist a submission to external forces. Instead, the texts present a society that is solidly anchored in its own authentic set of values but is open to political contact with the monarchy. This contact is the focus of other contemporary sagas, which pay much more attention to the process of establishing deeper political connections between Iceland and Norway. Their interpretation of these connections is built upon the image of Icelandic society that has been presented here, and it further develops some of its aspects. These sagas will be the object of the following chapters.

4 Continuity and contact: Mutual influences between Iceland and Norway

The narrative accounts of medieval Icelandic history depict not only the internal development of the Icelandic social system, power structures, and institutions, but also the process of defining Iceland's relationship with other Nordic countries, especially Norway. It has been shown here that while the narratives of early Icelandic history show the importance of Iceland's relatedness to Norway, they simultaneously accentuate the importance of the Icelanders' active decisions and of finding balance between interaction and individuation. In this and the following chapters, it will be argued that the contemporary sagas express similar themes and attitudes, albeit in different contexts, determined by the historical development and by the nature of the sources.

The previous chapter has shown that the secular contemporary sagas dealing with the period before the Sturlung Age are focused on internal power relations in Iceland and pay little attention to contact with Norway. Nevertheless, the narrative image of this contact is recorded in the sagas of the three bishops who were venerated as saints in medieval Iceland. These sagas were modelled on Latin hagiographies, which were known in Iceland and some of them had been translated into Old Norse, but they also depict political relationships and significant elements of medieval Icelandic collective identity. Their wider geographical scope is understandable, as Church matters were inherently international and Christianity increased the Icelanders' awareness of their connection with a broader cultural region. As Sverrir Jakobsson has pointed out, Icelanders probably perceived their own peripherality mainly in the context of the Christian world: the Christian history had happened elsewhere, and the centres of the Church were far away (2005, 160–166; 2009). This feeling of marginality could be deconstructed by narratives of the spiritual and intellectual accomplishments of Icelandic ecclesiastical dignitaries, in which Icelanders "declared their arrival in the Christian world through the appropriation of the cult of saints" (Grønlie 2017a, 1). The Icelandic saintly bishops were thus even more important identity bearers than their predecessors.

Contact between Iceland and Norway is then foregrounded even more in the secular contemporary sagas dealing with the beginning of the Sturlung Age, the time of a significant transformation of the political relationship between the two countries. Although there had always been a political, economic, and cultural contact (see Wærdahl 2011, 1–8), which is a strong element of continuity, the character of the relationship between Icelanders and the Norwegian monarchy changed in the early thirteenth century. Icelanders had always visited the Norwegian

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royal court as travellers, court poets, or royal retainers, but direct political alliances between Icelandic chieftains and Norwegian rulers became a reality only when the chieftains started seeking the rulers' support in the Icelandic power struggle. That was a consequence of the power concentration in Iceland and of the intense internal conflicts during its final stage, when the chieftains needed a higher authority that they could turn to for support or arbitration.

A process of power concentration was simultaneously taking place in Norway as well, and it involved strife between different factions no less than in Iceland. After Sverrir Sigurðarson's (1184–1202) decisive victory over Magnús Erlingsson (1161–1184), his faction gained the throne and managed to retain it even after the death of Sverrir in 1202 and of his son Hákon in 1204. During the short reign of Sverrir's underage grandson Guttormr Sigurðarson (1204), the power was in the hands of the regent, Jarl Hákon Fólkviðarson galinn, who then held the position of jarl also during the reign of Sverrir's nephew Ingi Bárðarson (1204–1217). After Jarl Hákon's death in 1214, King Ingi appointed his own brother Skúli Bárðarson to the office of jarl. Skúli then claimed the throne after Ingi's death in 1217, but it was Sverrir's thirteen-year-old grandson Hákon Hákonarson who was elected king instead, while Skúli retained his position as jarl (see Bagge 2010, 40–67).

The scholarly assessment of the development after 1217 has varied. It has been suggested that there was little rivalry between Hákon and Skúli until 1238, with the exception of a few crises (Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1992, 99–104). Conversely, other scholars have argued that there was a constant power struggle between Hákon and Skúli (Bagge 1996, 107–111; Orning 2018, 206–215). At the beginning of their co-rule, Skúli refused to swear allegiance to Hákon until he had received a sufficient share of the country to govern (Bagge 1996, 108; HSH xxv).[48] Skúli's daughter Margrét was betrothed to Hákon already in 1219, but in *Hákonar saga*, Hákon expresses his opinion that the betrothal will not change anything (HSH lvii). After Skúli's defeat of other rebelling factions, the relationship between the co-rulers was partly stabilized by an agreement at the assembly in Björgyn in 1223, where they divided the country between themselves, but their rivalry was not entirely terminated (Bagge 1996, 108–109). This rivalry, however, does not contradict Ólafía Einarsdóttir's assertion that Hákon and Skúli issued documents together and frequently stayed together without any open strife in the 1220s and 1230s (1992, 99–104). The sources imply that Skúli, as a skilled politician, waited with open opposition to Hákon until he had secured himself enough support.

48 The references to *Hákonar saga* here follow the 2013 edition by Sverrir Jakobsson, Þorleifur Hauksson, and Tor Ulset, in which the chapter numbers differ from the edition used by Bagge.

Only in the late 1230s, he attempted to seize the throne by military means and was defeated (Bagge 1996, 111–119).

This political tension in Norway seems to have played an important role in intensifying the political contact with Iceland, which has often been neglected in research. The predominant tendency has been to study the political development in Iceland during the early Sturlung Age as an isolated process, since most scholars have believed that the internal strife in Norway did not allow the Norwegian rulers to focus on Iceland until the conflict was terminated by the defeat of Skúli Bárðarson in 1240 (see Wærdahl 2011, 103; Long 2017, 230). Here it will be argued, however, that the sagas present just this internal strife in Norway as the incentive that initiated the Norwegian rulers' active interest in Iceland already around 1220, because they sought the Icelanders' support in their mutual competition. One of Skúli's strategies for strengthening his power base seems to have been an effort to gain influential Icelandic allies, and King Hákon soon followed suit and sought political alliances with Icelanders as well. At the same time, the Icelandic chieftains sought both rulers' support in their own power struggles. Icelanders are thus described as a significant power unit in Norwegian politics at a time of intense conflicts in both countries, and the narratives accentuate the idea that the political ties that were established at this time stemmed from both sides' initiative.

The presentation of this historical period in the sources was shaped by various deliberate choices in the process of narrativization. As the stories of the recent past were transformed from communicative into cultural memory, some aspects were suppressed and others were foregrounded, so that certain themes were emphasized. Here it will be attempted to show how this interpretation was achieved in the contemporary sagas with the help of specific structural patterns and sets of motifs, through which the accounts of recent events were fitted into particular narrative types. This process endowed the stories with meanings that were significant for the construction of collective identity.

4.1 Þorlákr Þórhallsson, Jón Ögmundarson, Guðmundr Arason: Saints from the periphery

The sagas of the Icelandic saintly bishops construct identity on two levels, spiritual and social, which are not mutually contradictory and are interconnected in the narratives, reflecting the medieval perception of multi-layered identity. On the spiritual level, the sagas emphasize the genuine holiness and clerical virtues of the local saints. Due to these qualities, the saintly bishops can not only serve as role models for their successors and other Christians, but they are also compared to the foreign saints portrayed in the Latin hagiographies on which the bishops'

sagas are modelled. Such narrative parallels emphasize Iceland's spiritual equality with the rest of the Christian world despite its peripheral position.

On the social level, the bishops' sagas, in the stories of both the saintly bishops and other characters, present different types of relationships between Icelanders and Norwegian rulers. In their accounts of the Icelanders' contact with the monarchs, the bishops' sagas employ narrative types that they share with many secular sagas: the travel story and the royal retainer's story, which thematically connect them with the immanent narrative of Icelandic history.

4.1.1 The narrative type of the travel story

The story of an Icelander who arrives at the Norwegian royal court, faces derision, rejection, or a conflict, and finally proves his worth and gains social prestige, is best known from the *útanferðar þættir* that are incorporated in the kings' sagas, especially in *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók*.[49] The travel story also constitutes parts of some sagas of Icelanders (Lönnroth 1976, 71–72; Boulhosa 2005, 182–183) and plays a significant role in the contemporary sagas, including the bishops' sagas, as will be shown here.

The structure of the *útanferðar þættir* has been described by Joseph Harris, who defines six stages of the plot: (1) an introduction of the protagonist, (2) a journey out of Iceland, (3) an alienation between the king and the Icelander, followed by (4) a reconciliation, (5) a journey back to Iceland, and (6) a conclusion (Harris 1972, 7–14). Significantly, the journey to Norway is not just a physical relocation, but also a "movement into the king's sphere of authority" (1972, 10). It thus entails an acceptance of royal power and of different social norms, which can initially pose a challenge to the Icelander and cause disagreements. The reason for the alienation can be the breaking of a rule, the killing of a royal retainer, or slander by jealous courtiers; the reconciliation is then usually preceded by a test or an intervention of friends (1972, 11–13). Despite possible variations in the stories, this structural pattern, centred around the transition from estrangement to acceptance, defines the plot of all the *útanferðar þættir* (1972, 20).

In another study, Harris identifies the typical themes of the *útanferðar þættir*. A central theme is the reciprocity of friendship and the connection between gen-

49 The function of *þættir* in these compilations has been discussed in detail by Ármann Jakobsson (2014) and Stefanie Würth (1991) respectively. William Sayers sums it up (2021, 43): "The *þættir* incorporated in the Norwegian kings' sagas offer the compiler the opportunity to shift from the general biographical arc of the royal subject to more specific thematics, realized through the presence of an Icelander at the royal or other court."

erosity and loyalty (Harris 1976, 7–8). As for personal characterization, the Icelander is usually appreciated for his wit and eloquence, whereas the kings are often presented in contrasting pairs: heathen and Christian, generous and stingy, kind and overbearing (1976, 8–10). Concerning the central values, most *þættir* foreground Christian ethics, such as the importance of magnanimity and forgiveness, and some present conversion or divine intervention as a decisive plot element (1976, 10–14). As for the protagonist's condition, there is a sharp contrast between his initial position as a poor and awkward outsider, subjected to prejudice or hostility in Norway, and his later success after he has proven his cleverness and courage (1976, 16–17). Thus, the *þættir*, unlike the sagas of Icelanders, are characterized by an inherently optimistic tone (1976, 16–19).

Harris aptly characterizes the *útanferðar þættir* as a group, but his analysis tends to be descriptive and limited to the content of the stories, failing to capture their meaning. He does not sufficiently elaborate on how the narrative foregrounding of the reconciliation (1972, 11) or the dominant themes of the *þættir* (1976) reflect the social context of the texts' origin and contribute to their function as social commentary. Nevertheless, his focus on the *þættir* has served as a starting point for other studies that have paid more attention to their meaning.

Vésteinn Ólason (1985) shows that the *þættir* accentuate the mutuality of relationships between Icelanders and kings: the Icelander must deserve the king's favour, but the king must deserve the Icelander's loyalty as well. Thus, the central concept of the *þættir* is a hierarchical but reciprocal and voluntary relationship between the Icelander and the monarch, based on an exchange of service and allegiance for prestige and patronage. The popularity of this narrative type implies that it reflects attitudes towards the monarchy that were widespread among the thirteenth-century Icelanders who wrote down these stories in the decades before and after the formal acceptance of royal rule (1985, 64–70).

Else Mundal (1997) focuses on the perception of Icelanders by Norwegians and analyses the *þættir* as images of the Icelanders' position within the Norse cultural region. She shows that the typical protagonist is an inexperienced newcomer at the royal court, who is unfamiliar with the courtly manners and is used to more straightforward behaviour, so his conduct is perceived as awkward or eccentric. The Norwegian courtiers therefore ridicule the protagonist because they deem him simple-minded or ignorant, or because of his insufficient material resources and plain clothing, and such derision can lead to conflicts. The Icelander's unconventional behaviour can also cause an alienation from the king, so their relationship is initially characterized by mutual distrust. Nevertheless, the Icelander eventually proves to be no less clever or capable than the courtiers; he is appreciated by the king and reconciled with him, so his journey increases his prestige in the end (1997, 22–23).

A recent detailed study by Ármann Jakobsson (2014) shows that the Icelandic self-image presented in the *útanferðar þættir* is twofold, containing an inferiority complex as well as self-assurance, and relatedness to Norway as well as a sense of individuality (2014, 291–292). The travel story admits that Norwegians may stereotypically regard Icelanders as foolish and awkward, but the structure of the story emphasizes the Icelanders' positive personal qualities, such as integrity, courage, cleverness, or diplomatic eloquence, due to which they eventually gain appreciation (2014, 284–286; see also 2003, 45–47). The king is often presented as a righteous monarch who successfully terminates conflicts and protects the Icelanders if they are bullied by envious Norwegian courtiers (2014, 181–184). Overall, the travel stories foreground the idea that despite possible initial distrust or disagreements, contact between Icelanders and Norwegian kings is beneficial for both parties (2014, 281–283; 2003, 48–49).

All these thematic emphases can be illustrated by examples of *útanferðar þættir*. Some *þættir* depict individual conflicts between the Icelander and the king, caused by a particular disagreement. The alienation is typically followed either by a task undertaken by the Icelander to regain the king's favour, or by an influential Norwegian's intercession on the Icelander's behalf. In *Egils þáttr Síðu-Hallssonar*, the protagonist angers the king by disobedience on a military expedition; he then regains the king's favour by persuading a heathen jarl to convert to Christianity. In *Þorsteins þáttr Síðu-Hallssonar*, which deals with Egill's brother, the Icelander is outlawed by King Magnús Óláfsson for undertaking a trade journey without the king's permission and without paying the travel tax. Einarr þambarskelfir, the king's foster-father, intercedes on Þorsteinn's behalf, and the king finally agrees to pardon Þorsteinn out of respect for Einarr. These stories are less focused on the Icelander's position as a socially awkward newcomer and more on the dynamics of his relationship with the king, which is shown to be changeable and to depend on various circumstances, including the Icelander's contacts with other Norwegians. The central idea is that the conflicts can be resolved and should not be regarded as a sign of any lasting enmity between Icelanders and the monarchy.

Other *þættir* accentuate the Icelander's conflicts with Norwegian aristocrats or royal retainers and the king's role as the Icelander's protector. The disagreements are typically not just personal but reflect the Norwegians' jealousy of the capable Icelander. In *Gull-Ásu-Þórðar þáttr*, for instance, the protagonist arrives in Norway as a poor and insignificant newcomer but earns the favour of the wealthy Norwegian woman Ása by his wit and his success as a merchant. A conflict develops between Þórðr and the king's vassal Ingimarr because of a theft; the law is on Þórðr's side, but Ingimarr is much more powerful. Ingimarr confronts Þórðr three times, but Þórðr stands his ground and is defended by Ása's

influential kinsman and finally by the king himself. Þórðr is called *stafkarl einn íslenzkr* (an Icelandic beggar) and *mörlandi* (suet-eater) by his Norwegian enemy, so his regional identity is clearly a source of antipathy (Ármann Jakobsson 2014, 283). The king, however, willingly protects the Icelander's interests; Ingimarr falls into disfavour with the king and must leave Norway because of this incident, whereas Þórðr marries Ása and enjoys prestige in Norway for the rest of his life. The story thus emphasizes not only the Icelander's skills and integrity, but also the king's fairness in judging the case objectively and not marginalizing the Icelander.[50]

The reciprocity of relationships between Icelanders and kings is foregrounded in *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka*. It tells the story of a poor Icelander who travels to Greenland and spends all his money on a polar bear, which he wants to bring as a gift to King Sveinn Úlfsson of Denmark. In Norway, Auðunn daringly opposes King Haraldr Sigurðarson's wish to gain the bear; the king is angered by Auðunn's intention to give the bear to his enemy but decides to let him continue his journey in peace. King Sveinn rewards Auðunn for the bear by giving him provisions for a pilgrimage to Rome. When Auðunn returns in a poor condition, the retainers laugh at him, but the king replies to them that Auðunn takes better care of his soul than they do. As a parting gift, King Sveinn gives Auðunn a ship, a bag of silver, and a ring. Back in Norway, Auðunn gives the ring to King Haraldr as a token of his gratitude and receives gifts in return.

Auðunar þáttr thus shows how every gift, material or immaterial, is repaid, and the Icelander's determination, daring, and generosity are rewarded with respect and esteem. Auðunn's success can be interpreted as a result of his luck (Miller 2008, 71–77), but "there is a strong sense in *Audun's Story* that Audun deserves his good luck, because he generates so much of it for himself as a consequence of his virtue, his intelligence and integrity, and manifest charm" (2008, 75). The story thus foregrounds the Icelander's personal qualities as a precondition of his prestige. At the same time, apart from its obvious religious overtones

50 The king is similarly presented as the Icelander's protector in *Þorgríms þáttr Hallasonar*, in which King Magnús Óláfsson intervenes on the Icelanders' behalf in their conflict with the magnate Kálfr Árnason, caused by slander and political disagreements. The king pardons the imprisoned Icelander because he acknowledges that his action was justified. This again shows how the king protects the insignificant but honest Icelander from a powerful aristocrat regardless of the difference in their origin and social status.

In *Þorsteins þáttr Austfirðings*, the protagonist saves a young man's life without knowing that the man is in fact King Magnús. The king's retainers later laugh at Þorsteinn, implying that Icelanders are simple-minded and uncivilized. King Magnús, by contrast, praises Þorsteinn's selfless bravery; he thus implies that the Icelander, despite his humble origin, has done more to deserve his esteem than those who claim prestige with empty words.

(Rey-Radlińska 2010, 103–106, 109), the *þáttr* also presents "a conception of an ideal king shown in parabolic form" (2010, 108). Although King Haraldr and King Sveinn are opponents and rivals on the level of plot, on the level of discourse they both embody the same essential royal virtues, such as magnanimity, justice, nobility, and generosity (2010, 106–107). The reciprocity of the relationship with the Icelander is significant in this context as well: the kings test Auðunn, but he also tests their kingly qualities. That is a deeper level of reciprocity, which can refer to the relationship between Icelanders and the monarchy in general.

Another tale, *Hreiðars þáttr*,[51] accentuates the protagonist's role as an outsider. It tells the story of an eccentric Icelander who is considered foolish even at home. Upon his arrival at the royal court, his straightforward behaviour towards King Magnús borders on insolence, but it is not a sign of disrespect, rather a lack of refined manners. The king invites him into his retinue and predicts that his skills will be revealed at some point. Hreiðarr is ridiculed by the retainers at first but eventually earns respect by his wit, eloquence, and physical prowess. However, the retainers of Magnús's co-ruler, King Haraldr, treat Hreiðarr disrespectfully, so he gets angry and kills one of them, thus incurring King Haraldr's wrath. Hreiðarr then daringly addresses King Haraldr and gives him a mocking gift, angering him even more. King Magnús protects him and tells him that he found him strange at first but has come to like him. Hreiðarr finally returns to Iceland and enjoys a much better reputation there than before. Thus, the main idea of the story seems to be the increase of social prestige through contact with the monarch.

When the protagonist is initially presented as an outsider, the story offers much space for his social advancement; Hreiðarr eventually gets the opportunity to show that he is smarter and more capable than he seems to be at first (Hermann Pálsson 1992, 156–160). As Richard Harris has pointed out, Hreiðarr's speech and behaviour in the *þáttr* are rooted in the traditional, ancient wisdom that is represented by Old Icelandic proverbs and the Eddic poem *Hávamál* (2020, 22–25). Harris does not discuss the function of this literary feature as social commentary, but it can reflect the idea that such timeless, pragmatic cleverness, figuratively attributed to Icelanders collectively, is more important than the superficial courtly manners that are only a passing trend. However, the story implies that such differences should not discourage Icelanders from interaction with the royal court, where they can be appreciated by the open-minded kings, although they may be rejected by the overbearing ones. The narrative thus reflects the ambiguous Icelandic self-

51 The commonly used title, *Hreiðars þáttr heimska* (*The Tale of Hreiðarr the Foolish*), is actually not attested in *Morkinskinna*, which contains only the introductory phrase "frá Hreiðari" (Harris 2020, 20).

image, in which taking pride in distinctive qualities is combined with a need to overcome marginality. According to Ármann Jakobsson, Hreiðarr can be viewed as "a personification of the Icelandic nation" in the sense that although the king sees how inexperienced the newcomer is, he acknowledges his potential and encourages him to discover and develop his skills (2014, 282). The *þáttr* can thus have a significant figurative meaning.

These thematic emphases and inherent meanings of the travel story also shape the accounts of events in the contemporary sagas and the bishops' sagas, as I will show in this and the following chapters. I will argue that this narrative type is essential for the interpretation of relationships between Iceland and the rest of the North, so it significantly contributes to the construction of collective identity. In the secular sagas, it can be combined with contrasting, inherently tragic narrative types, so it modifies the tone and meaning of the whole story. In the bishops' sagas, it adds a new layer of meaning to the otherwise predominantly hagiographic narratives, thus enhancing their function as identity-building texts.

4.1.2 The saintly bishops and the narrative type of the travel story

The hagiographic sagas of the first Icelandic saintly bishops, *Jóns saga* and *Þorláks saga*, primarily follow the model of the Latin hagiographies, so they are focused on the saints' moral virtues, consecration, work for the Church, death, and miracles. However, they also deal with some of the social and political aspects of the bishops' careers, and they contain accounts of the protagonists' contact with continental Scandinavia.

In *Jóns saga*, Jón Ögmundarson's glorious ecclesiastical career is first predicted long before his birth, when his mother meets King Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway, who expresses his belief that her future child will be blessed with great glory (JS i). Later, when Jón stays at the Danish royal court with his parents in his childhood, the queen predicts that he will become a bishop (JS i). Next, the saga gives an account of Jón proving his worth abroad in his youth. While returning from a pilgrimage to Rome, he visits the king of Denmark and attends mass with him, but the priest reads poorly. Jón replaces him, and his performance is so impressive that the king then seats him by his side as a sign of respect (JS ii). Still at the king's court, Jón has a dream about King David playing the harp; Jón remembers the melody and plays it for the king and the courtiers, who are all deeply impressed (JS iii). Finally, during his consecration journey to Archbishop Özurr, Jón sings mass so beautifully that the archbishop compares his voice to the voice of angels (JS vii). All these episodes imply that the Icelander possesses excellent clerical qualities, although he comes from the periphery of the Christian world.

These scenes contextualize an episode dealing with the relationship between Icelanders and the Norwegian king, which is unexpectedly political for a hagiographic saga and is structured by the narrative pattern of the travel story. It begins when the Icelander Gísl Illugason kills a retainer of King Magnús Barefoot in revenge for his father, is captured and imprisoned, and the Icelanders in town break into the prison and set him free. In the earlier redactions of *Jóns saga*, the tale is brief: the angry king forbids the Icelanders to speak to their defence, but the priest Jón is allowed to speak and persuades the king to forgive Gísl (JS v). This version thus foregrounds Jón's eloquence that turns the monarch from vengeance to reconciliation.

In the later L-redaction, the story is more complex. It intertwines political and religious elements in a noteworthy manner, combining an utterly miraculous event with rivalry between the Icelandic cleric and a Norwegian retainer. During the lawsuit with Gísl, a retainer named Sigurðr speaks hatefully of Icelanders and claims that "it would not be too great a redress if ten Icelanders were killed for one Norwegian as a punishment for their insolence, as they freed a man who was in the king's power".[52] The priest Jón condemns Sigurðr's vengeful speech, but he also reminds the king of the Icelanders' allegiance to him:

> „[…] fjándinn mælti fyrir munn þeim er í fyrstu talaði, svá segjandi: ‚Nú er veginn einn konungs maðr, en makligt væri at drepnir væri tíu íslenzkir fyrir einn norrœnan.' En hugsið um þat, góðr herra, at svá erum vér íslenzkir menn yðrir þegnar sem þeir er hér eru innan lands. […]" (*Gísls þáttr Illugasonar*, 2003, p. 324)

> ("[…] the devil talked through the mouth of the man who spoke first, saying: 'Since one royal retainer has been killed, it would be fitting if ten Icelanders were killed for one Norwegian.' But keep in mind, my lord, that we Icelanders are your subjects, just like those who live here in this country. […]")

This conciliatory ending of the utterance is intended to discourage the king from heeding the retainer's evil words. The formulation that Icelanders are the king's subjects (*þegnar*) is used in a positive context, with the purpose of reminding the king of his duties as a protector and righteous judge of his subjects (see Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, 343–345). Icelanders were not the king's subjects at the time of Jón Ögmundarson's life, but they were his subjects when the L-redaction was composed. The projection of this situation onto a historical event can be regarded as an acknowledgement and approval of the situation, implying that Icelanders did not oppose royal rule, but emphasized their expectation of the king's justice in his dealings with them.

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52 […] eigi er at bœttra at tíu sé drepnir af íslenskum mǫnnum fyrir einn norrœnan, ok refsi þeim svá sína ofdirfð er þeir tóku mann ór konungs valdi (*Gísls þáttr Illugasonar*, 2003, p. 323).

In the story, however, the king is not persuaded by Jón's speech and has Gísl hanged on the gallows. Jón gives Gísl a cloak that protects him together with Jón's prayers, so he stays alive on the gallows and is taken down after three days. The retainer Sigurðr becomes mortally ill and asks Jón to heal him by his prayers. Jón does so, but only when the retainer has promised to establish a monastery and donate his property to it. The king is impressed by the miracles and shows Jón deep respect:

> Ok er konungr sá Jón prest, rétti hann báðar hendr á móti honum blíðliga ok mælti: „Gakk hér undir borð hjá oss, Jón prestr, inn kærasti Guðs vinr, ok svá vilda ek at þú værir várr inn bezti vinr, því at ek veit fyrir víst at saman ferr Guðs vili ok þinn, ok þat vilda ek gjarna at saman fœri okkar vili." Inn heilagi Jón svarar þá: „Nú munu þér vilja vel til Íslendinga, kumpána minna, því at þat þykir mér allmiklu varða." (*Gísls þáttr Illugasonar*, 2003, pp. 332–333)
>
> (And when the king saw the priest Jón, he stretched out both arms to him in a friendly gesture and said: "Come to our table, priest Jón, the dearest friend of God. I would like you to be our best friend, because I know for sure that God's will and yours are the same, and I would like our will to be the same as well." Saint Jón replied: "Now you should be kind to Icelanders, my companions, because that is very important to me.")

The king then offers Gísl a reconciliation and the same prestige that the slain retainer enjoyed before.[53] This is a conciliatory ending, focused on the mutual respect between the king and the Icelandic cleric and his companion. At the same time, however, the episode shows that the cleric clearly has the upper hand – he makes the proud retainer give up most of his property, and he makes the king almost beg for his friendship. He is helped by miraculous divine interventions, which mark his spiritual superiority. This combination of an emphasis on reconciliation and on the protagonist's accomplishment is typical of the travel story, which reflects the medieval Icelanders' wish to overcome their marginality within the Norse cultural region.

A similar concern with the Icelanders' position in the North characterizes an episode in *Þorláks saga* (ÞS-A x). Þorlákr Þórhallsson is elected as the Bishop of Skálholt in 1174, but before his consecration, the relationship between Norway and Iceland worsens due to conflicts that are mentioned, but not specified, in the saga.[54] The cause of the tension was probably a dispute between a Norwegian mer-

53 […] gakk til sætis Gjafvalds ok haf slíka virðing af oss sem hann hafði um alla sína daga. (*Gísls þáttr Illugasonar*, 2003, p. 333) (Go to Gjafvaldr's seat and have the same esteem from me as he had all his life.)

54 Menn vildu eigi at hann fœri útan fyrir sakir ófriðar þess er þá var millum Nóregs ok Íslands, er málum var ósett þeim er gǫrzk hǫfðu landa í millum af vígum ok fjárupptekðum. (*Þorláks saga* A, 2002, ch. 10, p. 64) (People did not want him to go abroad because of the hostilities that were taking place between Norway and Iceland while the conflicts that had occurred between the countries due to killings and confiscation of property were unresolved.)

chant named Brennu-Páll and the Icelandic priest Helgi Skaptason. Helgi's farm was burned in 1174; in revenge, Helgi burned the ship of Brennu-Páll, which was then avenged by the killing of Helgi in 1175.[55] *Þorláks saga* does not dwell on this story and focuses instead on Þorlákr's contact with the Norwegian authorities.

In the summer of 1177, Þorlákr insists on undertaking the consecration journey despite the discord, because he cannot bear the absence of a bishop at Skálholt after his predecessor's death (ÞS-A x). King Magnús Erlingsson opposes Þorlákr's consecration at first, although Þorlákr is clearly not personally involved in the conflict (ÞS-A xi); scholars believe that the reason may have been Þorlákr's connection to the Oddaverjar, who were probably involved in the conflict (Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 153–154; Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 67–68). Instead of discussing the causes of the enmity, which were probably known to the intended audience, the saga foregrounds the central structural elements of the travel story: the alienation and subsequent reconciliation between the Icelander and the king. In the account of the initial disagreement, Þorlákr's vulnerable position in Norway is contrasted with his mental strength, which is emphasized by a biblical quotation:

> Þeir hǫfðu þá ríki yfir Nóregi feðgar, Magnús konungr ok Erlingr jarl, faðir hans, ok tóku þeir þungliga ǫllu Þorláks máli, ok kómu þaðan hót fyrir hœgendi at hvárki myndi óhætt fé né mǫnnum. En Þorlákr lét sér lítit um þat finnask ok sýndi þar sinn alhuga vera allan sem Davíð kennir í psaltara, at betra sé Guði at treystask en hǫfðingjum, ok lét hann þetta af því hjá sér líða. (*Þorláks saga* A, 2002, ch. 11, pp. 64–65)
>
> (Norway was then ruled by King Magnús and his father, Jarl Erlingr, and they showed reluctance in Þorlákr's matter, and threats came from them instead of favour, that neither property nor people would stay safe. But Þorlákr was little affected by it, in which he showed his steadfastness, as David teaches us in his psalm that it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes, and so he did not let this affect him.)

This contrast accentuates Þorlákr's clerical virtue, which outweighs his marginality in Norway. The focus on his trust in God foreshadows a satisfactory solution,

55 A brief account of this conflict is found in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* (STU lxxix). The beginning of this conflict may also be referred to in Archbishop Eysteinn's letter to the Icelanders from 1173. If the dating is correct, the letter was written before the events depicted in *Prestssaga*, which implies that the Icelanders must have mistreated the Norwegians in some way before the clash between Helgi and Brennu-Páll broke out: "Svá ok þat sem þér hafit af gert við konunginn ok við landslýð hans, þá leiðréttisk þat við hann, þótt margir verði við bótina skipask, þar sem fáir hafa misgert." (*Diplomatarium Islandicum, I,* 1857, p. 223) (And your misdeeds against the king and his people must be redressed, even if many people must contribute to the compensation, although few people have committed the misdeed.)

and the account is indeed immediately followed by a description of the reconciliation that is brought about by Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson:

> En erkibyskup þóttisk sitja í miklum vanda er hann vildi hvártveggja elska, ok vildi hann þess gæta er Páll postoli kennir í sínum pistli: „Óttizk þér Guð," segir hann, „en vegsamið konung." Mátti þat ok á ǫllu sjá at hann vildi hér hvárstveggja vandliga gæta í þeirra máli. Bar erkibyskup þá boð á millum þeira ok aðrir góðgjarnir menn, ok kom þar at konungrinn ok jarlinn samþykkðu því at Þorlákr tœki byskupsvígslu, ok gerðisk þá vingunarsvipr þeira á milli, ok gáfusk þeir gjǫfum áðr þeir skilði. (*Þorláks saga* A, 2002, ch. 11, p. 65)

> (But the archbishop found himself in a great difficulty because he wished to love both parties, and he wanted to follow what the apostle Paul teaches us in his epistle: "Fear God," he says, "and honour the king." It was obvious from all his acts that he wished to carefully assist both parties in this matter. The archbishop then mediated between them together with other goodwilled men, and it came about that the king and the jarl consented to Þorlákr's consecration, and they appeared to be friends from then on, and they exchanged gifts before they parted.)

The two biblical quotations, "þetra sé Guði at treystask en hǫfðingjum" and "óttizk þér Guð, en vegsamið konung", seem to contradict each other, but they make sense together within the structural pattern of the travel story. The former is linked to the alienation between Þorlákr and the monarch, expressing the idea that while the Icelandic cleric lacks political power in Norway, he can hope for God's help. The latter is related to the agreement mediated by the archbishop; it accentuates the connection between secular and ecclesiastical power despite the temporary discord. The contradiction between the quotations emphasizes the contrast between the initial conflict and the subsequent agreement; it thus highlights the importance of reconciliation.

This emphasis on the final reconciliation underlines the overall message of the episode structured by the narrative pattern of the travel story, which expresses a positive attitude to the relationship between Iceland and Norway despite an awareness of inevitable conflicts. The Icelander faces the king's distrust when he first arrives in Norway, but due to his own intellectual and spiritual qualities, he overcomes the alienation with the help of a mediator. His relationship with the king eventually turns from enmity into mutual respect, and his social prestige is increased, so his initial marginality is overcome.

The focus on Þorlákr's prestige is further accentuated by the ending of the episode, which describes the archbishop's appreciation of Þorlákr, showing that the archbishop himself considers the Icelandic bishop an ideal embodiment of clerical virtues:

> En er Þorlákr byskup var skiliðr at samvistu viðr erkibyskup þá spurðu þeir byskuparnir hversu honum hefði þokkazk Þorlákr byskup. Hann sagði svá at hann þóttisk øngan byskup þann hafa vígt er honum þótti jafn gǫrla með sér hafa alla þá mannkosti er byskupum er skylt at hafa […]. „Má ek yðr svá nǫkkut segja helzt hve vitrligir mér hafa virzk hans hættir,"

> sagði erkibyskup, „at ek munda þvílíkt kjósa mitt lífsdœgr it efsta sem ek sá hans hvert.“ (*Þorláks saga* A, 2002, ch. 11, p. 66)
>
> (And when Bishop Þorlákr had left the archbishop's company, the other bishops asked how he had felt about Bishop Þorlákr. He said he felt that he had never consecrated a bishop who seemed to equally possess all the virtues that befit bishops […]. "The best way to express how wise I find his behaviour," said the archbishop, "is that I would choose the last day of my life to be like I saw each of his days to be.")

As has been shown above (2.1.3), such emphasis on the appreciation of Icelandic bishops by foreign dignitaries significantly contributes to the narrative image of Iceland's position within the Christian world. *Þorláks saga*, due to its protagonist's sainthood, subverts the idea of Iceland's spiritual marginality even more than the portrayals of his predecessors.

Overall, the episodes discussed in this section show how interpretations of individual stories as figurative comments on medieval Icelandic society are enabled by the intertextual connections of the bishops' sagas with the Latin hagiographies and with the secular *útanferðar þættir*. An image of the bishops' double role as saints and political dignitaries may have existed already in communicative memory, but the integration of this image into cultural memory through the intertextual processes in a literary discourse strengthened the bishops' function as identity bearers representing the whole community. The hagiographic elements establish the idea of Iceland's spiritual equality with other Christian countries, while the elements shared with the secular *útanferðar þættir* evaluate the Icelanders' position in their relationship with the Norwegian royal court. Such a thematic variety would not be possible without the sagas' intertextuality, which shapes the meaning of the bishops' sagas not just as religious texts, but also as identity-building narratives.

4.1.3 Ingimundr Þorgeirsson's travel story in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*

Unlike *Þorláks saga* and *Jóns saga*, *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*, in the version preserved as a part of *Sturlunga saga*, is not primarily hagiographic, although it accentuates spiritual values more than the rest of the compilation. It presents a balanced image of Guðmundr's development into a saintly cleric and of his kinsmen's contact with the Norwegian rulers.

The main traveller in *Prestssaga* is the priest Ingimundr Þorgeirsson, a brother of Guðmundr's father Ari. The saga underlines his significance for the future bishop's upbringing after Ari's death, but it also depicts his regular contact with Norway. Ingimundr sails there first with his brother Ari (STU lxxviii), then with Guðmundr (STU lxxx), and finally with his nephew Ögmundr Þorvarðsson (STU lxxxii–lxxxvi). Al-

ready the account of his second journey contains some elements of the travel story, as the Icelandic protagonist faces disagreements with Norwegians on the ship, is scorned for his alleged lack of knowledge, and must prove his worth. It is, however, mainly the third journey that is narrated as a fully developed travel story, structured by a conflict and a reconciliation between the Icelander and the royal court.[56]

After Ingimundr's arrival in Norway, the king's men confiscate some of his merchandise, including some valuable cloth, despite the king's promise to protect his property (STU lxxxv). Ingimundr nevertheless decides not to complain, because – due to his clerical peacefulness – he does not wish to cause a dispute.[57] When he recognizes his own cloth on the garments of the king's courtiers, he still chooses not to cause a conflict and asks his nephew Ögmundr to keep peace.[58] Ögmundr and his companions, however, insist on taking action, so they attack and kill four of the courtiers who are wearing the confiscated cloth (STU lxxxvi). When the king judges the case, he takes into account the ancestry of Ögmundr's companions and believes that they are telling the truth. He decides that the revenge was justified, dismisses all those who participated in stealing the merchandise, and lets Ingimundr and his nephew receive the clothes:

> Þá koma þessi tíðindi fyrir Jón kuflung, ok kvað þá við hirðmannalúðr, ok sögðu hvárir tveggju Jóni kuflungi sögu sína. En þeir Bárðr ok Pétr voru náfrændr Eysteins erkibyskups, ok virðir Jón þá svá mikils í þessu máli at hann gerir í brott sveit þá alla frá fylgð við sik. En þeir Ögmundr tóku klæðin til sín, ok um þetta mál var kyrrt síðan. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 86, p. 173)
>
> (Then this news gets to Jón kuflungr, and the retainers were summoned by the trumpet, and both parties presented their version of the story to Jón kuflungr. Bárðr and Pétr were closely related to Archbishop Eysteinn, and Jón trusted them so much in this matter that he dismissed the whole group from his service. Ögmundr and his men took the clothes and the case remained undisputed from then on.)

56 The saga takes place during a period of civil wars between several royal pretenders in Norway. Ingimundr was in Norway during the reign of Sverrir Sigurðarson (1184–1202), but the supporters of the previous king Magnús Erlingsson continued to rival Sverrir. Their leader was a former monk, Jón kuflungr, allegedly an illegitimate son of King Ingi Haraldsson (1136–1161). Jón kuflungr ruled the region of Vík in Eastern Norway, and in the story of Ingimundr, it is he who is presented as the king. The rivalry between King Sverrir and Jón kuflungr is not important for Ingimundr's story, in which the king rather represents the monarchy as an institution.

57 […] hann […] vildi heldr missa en þá skilði á. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 85, p. 172) (He […] rather wished to lose [his property] than argue with them.)

58 […] [Ingimundr] bað hann þó vera láta kyrrt ok kvaðst eigi vilja at nakkvat hark stæðist af honum. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 85, p. 172) ([Ingimundr] still asked him to keep peace and said he did not want any struggles to be caused by him.)

This episode shows the king's justice in the conflict between his men and Ingimundr, caused by their greed and his vulnerability as a traveller who cannot rely on his kin or allies. The king could easily choose to punish the Icelanders and protect his own men, but he makes no differences between them and judges the case objectively. The Icelanders are morally superior to the courtiers – Ingimundr due to his moderation and Ögmundr due to his determination, and the king appreciates them and avoids marginalizing them. They thus regain their esteem and overcome their initial marginality.

Finally, the episode has a noteworthy epilogue. The saga describes how Ingimundr's return to Iceland fails and he perishes in Greenland, but his body is later found undecayed:

> Skip þeira kom í óbyggð á Grænlandi, ok týndust menn allir. En þess varð svá víst at fjórtán vetrum síðar fannst skip þeira ok sjau menn í hellisskúta einum. Þar var Ingimundr prestr. Hann var heill ok ófúinn ok svá klæði hans, en sex manna bein voru þar hjá honum. Vax var ok þar hjá honum ok rúnar þær er sögðu atburð um líflát þeira. En þetta þótti mönnum mikil merki, hvé guði hafði líkat atferð Ingimundar prests, er hann skyldi svá lengi legit hafa úti með heilum líkam ok ósköddum. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 86, p. 174)
>
> (Their ship was driven to the uninhabited part of Greenland and all the men perished. And this became known because fourteen years later, their ship was discovered and seven men were found in a cave. The priest Ingimundr was there. His body was whole and undecayed, and so were his clothes, but only bones were left of the other six men next to him. There was also wax with runes describing the circumstances of their death. Everybody thought that it was a great sign of how pleased God had been by Ingimundr's behaviour that he had lain outside for such a long time, and yet his body remained whole and undamaged.)

Such a description presents Ingimundr almost as a saint. That is not surprising in the context of the saga that portrays him as the key figure in the upbringing of a future saintly bishop, but it can also be compared with the previously discussed motif of divine intervention in the travel stories in the hagiographic sagas. This motif serves as the ultimate proof of the Icelandic clerics' spiritual excellence, which is not only appreciated by the Norwegian secular and ecclesiastical authorities, but its significance in God's eyes is demonstrated through miraculous occurrences, which leave no doubt as to Iceland's spiritual equality with the rest of the Christian world. In the context of Ingimundr's tale in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*, with its significant elements of the travel story, I believe that this interpretation of the motif makes sense also here. The meaning of the narrative thus extends beyond the story of Guðmundr Arason's family and contributes to the construction of collective identity.

4.2 Ari Þorgeirsson: The jarl's sword and shield

4.2.1 The narrative type of the royal retainer's story

Another significant narrative type is the story of an Icelandic retainer at the Norwegian royal court, which foregrounds the connection between service to a monarch and increased social prestige. Royal service as a source of prestige is a widespread cultural concept in medieval Icelandic literature (Mundal 1997, 17–18). The likely reason why Icelanders associated the Norwegian king with a specific type of social status is that "where their power was personal, his had a more abstract and therefore more absolute provenance" (Long 2017, 241).

The essential quality accentuated in the narrative portrayals of royal retainers is their loyalty to the monarch, which is shown to be deeply appreciated and generously rewarded (Ármann Jakobsson 2003, 47–48; 2014, 280–281). In this context, however, the narrative type emphasizes the difference between active allegiance and passive subordination. The retainer is not presented as being forced into unconditional obedience to the king; instead, it is shown that he decides to remain faithful to the monarch of his own free will, motivated by his respect and admiration for him, as well as by his appreciation of the values represented by the king.

This is related to another central theme of the royal retainer's story: the contrast between purposeful courage and meaningless aggression. The story is centred around the protagonist's transformation from an aggressor into a courageous defender of the king. The Icelander, portrayed as a brave fighter, is an embodiment of confidence and fearlessness, but the narrative type shows that such an image of strength is not associated with a desire for independence exaggerated to the point of isolation. On the contrary, what distinguishes the noble warrior from a barbaric killer is his loyalty to a monarch that gives his courage a purpose and a direction, without which it would be nothing but brutality. It provides him with a sense of responsibility for the social order that unites society and transcends individual interests or conflicts. The essential difference is that courage in a monarch's service contributes to maintaining peace and order, whereas aggression motivated by personal gain disrupts them.

The structural pattern of the royal retainer's story consists of four main stages: (1) an introduction of the protagonist as a belligerent man, whose ferocity threatens social harmony; (2) the protagonist's decision to enter the royal service, whereby his ferocity is given a meaningful purpose; (3) the protagonist proves his worth in a task or mission; (4) the protagonist is appreciated by the monarch for completing his task. An optional fifth stage is the protagonist's death in battle together with the monarch or in protecting the monarch's life. Even then, however, the story should not be considered as being inherently tragic, because death by

the monarch's side is presented as a glorious deed motivated by a noble purpose. The narrative type can thus be regarded as an inherently optimistic story of the protagonist's transformation from a troublemaker into a defender of peace and order.

This narrative type can be found in some *þættir* in the kings' sagas. In *Hrafns þáttr Guðrúnarsonar*, for instance, the protagonist is outlawed in both Iceland and Norway because of his killings. Although he is aware of being in disfavour with the king, he insists on joining the king in battle and fights bravely on the king's behalf, thus showing his devotion to royal service. The king has a dream in which Saint Óláfr intercedes on Hrafn's behalf, so he decides to pardon him. Hrafn then stays with the king for the rest of his life and continues to show courage in his service but never disrupts social harmony again. The story thus foregrounds the Icelander's voluntary decision to remain loyal to the king, as well as the positive change in his behaviour, motivated by royal service. The motif of the saint's intervention accentuates the idea that the king is morally obliged to forgive the faithful and courageous man. The protagonist is shown to receive prestige and appreciation after changing his behaviour, which implies that his moral transformation is socially beneficial for him as well.

The narrative type also shapes a large section of *Fóstbræðra saga*, which contains two interconnected stories of Icelandic royal retainers. The sworn brothers Þorgeirr Hávarsson and Þormóðr Bersason are introduced as ruthless men, unpopular in Iceland because of their violent, overbearing behaviour that causes unrest in their district. When Þorgeirr sails to Norway and joins the retinue of King Óláfr Haraldsson, he earns the king's respect by demonstrating his qualities.[59] In royal service, he learns to put his courage to a meaningful use and proves himself in two missions: first a trade journey to Vindland, where the conditions for Norse merchants are difficult, and then a journey to join Jarl Rögnvaldr of Orkney in fights against raiders. King Óláfr warns Þorgeirr against returning to Iceland, but Þorgeirr leaves anyway and is soon killed in an armed clash. This implies that his position as a retainer gives him not only a purpose, but also protection by the king's luck, which he loses by disregarding the king's advice.

After Þorgeirr's death, his equally belligerent sworn brother Þormóðr joins King Óláfr's retinue as well. His mission is a journey to Greenland to avenge Þorgeirr on the king's behalf, because the king regards his retainer's death as his per-

59 Konungr lagði mikla virðing á Þorgeir, því at hann reyndisk í öllum mannraunum inn röskvasti maðr ok góðr drengr. (*Fóstbræðra saga*, 1943, ch. 8, p. 159) (The king held Þorgeirr in high esteem because he proved himself to be the bravest man and a worthy fellow in all trials.)

sonal loss. While Þormóðr is carrying out his mission, the king's luck protects him even when the king is not physically present.[60] Þormóðr is finally saved by the king's luck when he is pursued by his enemies in Greenland and almost dies of exhaustion and wounds but is rescued by a man who has seen King Óláfr in a dream. Þormóðr proves his worth by avenging his sworn brother in Greenland, returns to King Óláfr, and is praised for his accomplishment. Afterwards, Þormóðr follows the king even to exile and to battle because "he finds it better to die with him than to outlive him".[61] He dies together with the king in the battle of Stiklastaðir and is called "King Saint Óláfr's champion"[62] at the end of the saga. This underlines the idea that Þormóðr's identity is defined by his loyalty to the king, because in royal service, the fighter can use his bravery in a useful manner. Instead of being an aggressor and a threat to social harmony, he becomes a defender of the social order represented by the monarch (see Ciklamini 1988, 228; Arnold 2003, 159–172).

Here it will be shown how the structural pattern and thematic emphasis of the royal retainer's story shape the interpretation of recent history in the contemporary sagas. In the primarily biographical *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*, it contributes to the construction of a broader political meaning by turning the portrayals of side characters into a comprehensive narrative. Its function is thus comparable to that of the travel story of Ingimundr Þorgeirsson.

4.2.2 Þorvarðr and Ari Þorgeirsson as ideal royal retainers

The portrayal of Guðmundr's father Ari Þorgeirsson and his brother Þorvarðr in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* presents the two men as ideal royal retainers in the sense defined above. The story takes place during a period of civil wars in Norway, when the rulers' position was unstable and not everybody remained faithful to one faction, but these Icelandic brothers are portrayed as a model of genuine loyalty to King Ingi Haraldsson and his allies.[63]

60 […] rennir þá hugnum þangat, er var Óláfr konungr, ok vætti hans hamingju, at honum myndi duga. (*Fóstbræðra saga*, 1943, ch. 23, p. 240) ([he] then turned his thoughts to King Óláfr and hoped that his luck would help him.)

61 […] honum þótti betra at deyja með honum en lifa eptir hann (*Fóstbræðra saga,* 1943, ch. 24, p. 260).

62 […] kappa ins helga Óláfs konungs (*Fóstbræðra saga*, 1943, ch. 24, p. 276).

63 King Ingi Haraldsson ruled Norway in 1136–1161, partly in co-rule with his brothers and other pretenders. His successor was Magnús Erlingsson (1161–1184), son of Ingi's ally, Jarl Erlingr Ormsson. Both Ingi Haraldsson and Magnús with his father Erlingr faced the opposition of other royal pretenders.

Þorvarðr is first introduced as a violent man: he attacks and mortally wounds a royal retainer soon after his arrival in Norway (STU lxxvii). King Ingi nevertheless forgives Þorvarðr and accepts him into his retinue, where the young Icelander gets a chance to refine his behaviour and find useful purposes for his ferocity. The text does not provide much detail of Þorvarðr's life as a retainer, but it implies that he fought alongside the king in the battles of the civil war, which means that he used his belligerence to protect the monarch. The saga emphasizes his loyalty to King Ingi by stating that Þorvarðr returns to Iceland after the king's death in battle because he does not believe that any other monarch could be King Ingi's equal, but he encourages his brother Ari to join King Ingi's allies (STU lxxviii):

> Nú er þar til máls at taka er Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson kom út eptir fall Inga konungs ok lýsti því at hann vildi engum jarðligum konungi þjóna eptir Inga konung, því at honum þótti sem engi mundi hans jafningi verða. Ok þess bað hann Ara, bróður sinn, ef hann kæmi til Nóregs, at hann byndist eigi við þann flokk er fellt hafði Inga konung, kallaði ván at flokkr myndi hefjast í Vík austr at leita eptir hefndum ok bað hann ráðast í þann flokk ok setjast í rúm sitt. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 78, p. 143)
>
> (Now it will be said that Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson returned to Iceland after King Ingi's fall and proclaimed that he did not wish to serve any earthly king after King Ingi, because he felt that none of them would be his equal. And he told his brother Ari that if he ever came to Norway, he should not join the faction that had killed King Ingi. He said he expected that a force would arise in Vík in the east to seek vengeance and asked him to join that faction and to stand in his place.)

Ari obeys his brother, sails to Norway, and joins King Ingi's ally, Jarl Erlingr Ormsson, in three battles until their adversary is defeated – this is the mission in which Ari proves his worth. The ruler's appreciation of his retainer's loyalty is accentuated by the formulation that "Jarl Erlingr honoured Ari greatly for his support"[64] and by a celebratory stanza by Þorvarðr that is quoted in the text to highlight the significance of Ari's service to the rulers.

Jarl Erlingr and his son Magnús then defeat another enemy with Ari's help. Ari briefly returns to Iceland, but he soon joins Jarl Erlingr again. Later, Ari intends to return to Iceland once more, but Erlingr's other retainers dissuade him (STU lxxviii):

> Ari bjó skip sitt of várit til Íslands ok voru albúnir til hafs. En þeir er helzt voru öfundarmenn Ara lögðu honum til ámælis at hann legði svá fylgð sína við Erling jarl at fara frá honum er jarl þyrfti helzt manna við ok ófriðar at ván. En er Ari heyrði þessa umræðu þá

64 Erlingr jarl lagði mikla virðing á Ara fyrir fylgð sína (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 78, p. 144).

> lét hann þegar bera föt sín af skipi ok ræðst þá enn til hirðvistar með konungi ok jarli. (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 78, p. 146)
>
> (In the spring Ari prepared his ship to sail to Iceland and they were fully ready to put out to sea. But those who envied Ari most reproached him for showing only such loyalty to Jarl Erlingr that he would leave him when the jarl was in the greatest need of men and a fight was imminent. And when Ari heard their talk, he had his belongings brought back from the ship and joined the king's and the jarl's retinue again.)

This shows that Ari's responsibility to the retinue has become stronger than his personal concerns about his family and property in Iceland. His identity as a retainer and his loyalty to the ruler are his priority, so he chooses to stay with Jarl Erlingr, although he knows that he will probably have to risk his life for him, which is what finally happens. In an unexpected attack by the enemy, Ari sacrifices his life to save Erlingr, whose praise of his courage and extraordinary loyalty is then quoted in direct speech (STU lxxviii):

> En Ari hljóp á milli jarls ok ófriðarmanna, sem hann setti sik skjöld fyrir jarl, ok sneri í mót hernum ok gaf svá jarli líf at hann fann sik fyrir, því at hann var áðr ekki sárr. En þá var hann skotinn gaflaki í óstinn ok nistr svá við garðinn, ok lét Ari þar líf sitt. En jarl komst undan ok var skotinn í lærit áðr hann komst yfir garðinn. [...] Ok er jarl komst yfir garðinn ok í nakkvat hlé þá spurði hann hvar Ari Íslendingr væri, en þeir sögðu at hann dvalðist þar eptir við garðinn líflátinn. Jarl svarar: „Þat er víst at þar fór sá maðr er oss hefir bezt fylgt, ok höfum vér engan jafnhvatan eptir. Ok varð hann einn búinn til af yðr at gefa sjálfviljandi líf sitt fyrir mitt líf. Nú man ek eigi hans frændum launat fá þann skaða sem þeir hafa beðit fyrir mínar sakir." (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 78, pp. 147–148)
>
> (And Ari cast himself between the jarl and the attackers to serve as a shield for the jarl. He turned against the troop, and thus he saved the jarl's life by giving up his own, because he had not been wounded before, but now his neck was pierced by a javelin that pinned him to the fence, so Ari lost his life there. But the jarl escaped, although he was shot in his thigh before he got to the other side of the fence. [...] And when the jarl got behind the fence and was somewhat safe, he asked where Ari the Icelander was, and they told him that he had stayed by the fence and had lost his life. The jarl replied: "It is certain that we have lost the man who has served us best, and we have nobody else as bold as him. Out of all of you, he was the only one ready to voluntarily give his own life for mine. I will never be able to repay his kinsmen for the loss they have suffered for my sake.")

Significantly, the scene is unambiguous about the sacrifice being Ari's deliberate act, not an accident in the chaos of battle. It is described how he intentionally positions himself in front of Jarl Erlingr as a shield, and it is underlined in the jarl's speech that Ari gave up his life voluntarily (*sjálfviljandi*) to protect his lord. This depiction of Ari's devotion to the ruler as an active choice emphasizes the main theme of the royal retainer's story: service to a monarch is not presented as a passive subordination, but as an act motivated by courage and loyalty, which is

rewarded with glory even after the fighter's death. This focus is also reflected in the text's style: the episode is narrated in unusual detail and more emotionally than is typical of the terse saga style. Moreover, the episode ends with a reference to a memorial poem that Þorvarðr composes about his brother because he wishes to "depict his courage in poetry that will be spread far and wide".[65] This remark emphasizes Ari's prestige, because such celebratory poetry is usually reserved for the praise of kings and jarls, so it suggests that Ari gained a share of aristocratic glory by his alliance with the Norwegian rulers.

Through the narrative type of the royal retainer's story that shapes this episode, the saga with an ecclesiastical protagonist is connected to the other, predominantly secular sagas that construct the narrative image of medieval Icelandic collective identity. It expresses various concerns related to the Icelanders' relationship with the Norwegian monarchy. Firstly, it shows that allegiance to a monarch is not a loss of freedom, but rather an honourable decision that can increase the Icelander's prestige. Secondly, it illustrates the monarch's positive influence on the Icelander's behaviour, as loyalty to the ruler transforms socially disruptive belligerence into socially beneficial courage. Both ideas can be figuratively applied to Icelandic society as a whole: by a voluntary alliance with the monarchy, it can overcome its marginality and moderate the disruptive violence that threatens social cohesion. The narrative type thus endows the individual story with a socially significant meaning.

4.3 Aron Hjörleifsson: The outlaw

Aron Hjörleifsson was one of the participants in the conflict between the secular chieftains and Bishop Guðmundr Arason in the first decades of the thirteenth century. His story is narrated in two texts, *Íslendinga saga* and *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, which was probably composed four or five decades later (see 1.1). The former foregrounds the political context of the conflict in Iceland and Aron's role as a warrior, whereas the latter is more biographical and adds a section depicting the second half of Aron's life, which he spent at the Norwegian royal court.

The two sagas contain both similarities and differences in their description of events and characters (Glendinning 1969, 41; Porter 1971, 137; 1993, 21–22). The textual relationship between them has long been an object of a scholarly debate, in which different and often contradictory opinions have been presented (see Úlfar Bragason 2013, 129–131). Björn M. Ólsen (1902, 254–272) poses several hypotheses

65 […] láta hreysti hans koma í kvæði þau er víða væri borin (*Sturlunga saga, I*, 2021, ch. 78, p. 148).

but concludes that neither saga directly copies the other, so they must be independent of each other and based on oral traditions. Conversely, Jón Jóhannesson (1946, l) suggests that some subject matter in *Arons saga* can be derived from *Íslendinga saga*. John Porter (1971) argues, however, that direct textual influence is unlikely and that the similarities in wording rather imply that both sagas shared some written sources, possibly some records or documents (*bréf*) – such as those mentioned in the prologue to *Sturlunga saga* or the *Miðsaga* version of *Guðmundar saga* (1971, 144–160). Nevertheless, the author of *Arons saga*, an educated fourteenth-century Icelander, must have been familiar with the existing contemporary sagas (1971, 152, 159). According to Úlfar Bragason (2013, 130), this means that even if he did not use *Íslendinga saga* as a direct textual source, he probably composed his text in the context of the narrative presented in *Íslendinga saga* and expected the recipients to understand *Arons saga* in this context as well. That is much more important for the present study than the exact textual relationship between the two sagas.

Considering that *Arons saga* was probably composed with the knowledge of *Íslendinga saga* and partly derived from the same sources, whether written or oral, it seems likely that the differences between them are a result of the narratives' different emphases, rather than the authors' lack of information. As Porter (1971, 159) has pointed out, both authors clearly used their sources selectively, modifying the meaning of the resulting narratives. On the surface level, some of the differences can be explained by the fact that *Íslendinga saga* clearly favours the Sturlungar, albeit without excessively idealizing them, while *Arons saga* is biased towards Aron and the bishop, as its composition was probably motivated by the increasing veneration of Guðmundr Arason as a saint and the attempts at his canonization (Porter 1971, 144). It thus makes sense that *Arons saga* modifies the scenes that shed a negative light on Aron or create sympathy with his opponents, while it includes several scenes that morally discredit the Sturlungar and their allies, which are either completely left out in *Íslendinga saga* or narrated from a different perspective (Porter 1971, 146–148; Ciklamini 1988, 236). The account of Aron's life is thus endowed with moral significance as a model story of a Christian champion (Ciklamini 1988; Úlfar Bragason 2013, 138–139).

On a deeper level, both sagas express more complex interpretations of history, which determine how the events are narrated and how the characters are portrayed. In this respect, Úlfar Bragason (2013) has argued that *Arons saga* is favourable towards the king, who is portrayed as Aron's benefactor, possibly because Aron's kinsmen were among the new Icelandic aristocracy at the time of the saga's origin. *Sturlunga saga*, by contrast, in his opinion expresses the Icelanders' dissatisfaction with royal rule (2013, 143–144). In the present study, however, it is argued that *Sturlunga saga* is not an anti-monarchic narrative, so it will

be suggested here that the two texts do not express contradictory interpretations of the relationship between Iceland and Norway, they just differ in emphasis.

Íslendinga saga presents the conflict in which Aron participates in a broader political context. Aron is only a side character in it, so his story does not form a fully developed narrative pattern and its meaning is limited to an illustration of individual personal qualities, while other characters carry the central meaning of the narrative. In *Sturlunga saga* as a compilation, Iceland's relationship with the monarchy is thematized in some of the preceding and following sections, such as the stories of the Þorgeirsson brothers or of Snorri Sturluson, whereas the section that includes Aron's story is focused on internal Icelandic power relations. That may be the reason why the compiler did not include an account of Aron's career at the royal court, although he may have known it from the orally transmitted communicative memory.

Conversely, *Arons saga* presents a coherent biography consisting of two contrasting but interrelated narrative patterns, which endow the text with meanings pertaining to the interpretation of Iceland's relationship with Norway. That is the object of the following analysis.

4.3.1 The narrative type of the outlaw's story

Arons saga Hjörleifssonar is the only contemporary saga that is predominantly structured by the pattern of the outlaw's story. This narrative type is known from several sagas of Icelanders, with which *Arons saga* has been compared in research (Aðalgeir Kristjánsson 1965; Heller 1966; Porter 1971, 161–165; Danielsson 2008). These so-called outlaw sagas are *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, and *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*; the same structural pattern also shapes some sections of other sagas (Ahola 2014, 105–138).

The typical outlaw's story deals with the protagonist's struggle to survive while he is excluded from society; it usually ends with his heroic last stand and violent death. It inherently thematizes marginality, with which outlawry as a literary motif is associated: in the sagas, outlaws dwell in remote, uninhabited places, and they are often connected with the supernatural, prophetic dreams, and witchcraft. The structural pattern of the outlaw's story, defined by Joonas Ahola (2014, 189), consists of (1) the offense committed by the protagonist, (2) an attempt at arbitration, (3) the sentence of outlawry, (4) the pursuit of the outlaw by his adversaries, (5) the protagonist's death, and frequently (6) a revenge for the killing.

Beside this structural pattern, the outlaws' stories share some specific narrative principles. They are characterized by an increased focus on one individual protagonist, whereas the narrative focus in other sagas of Icelanders usually shifts

between both rivals. There are three main techniques that are employed in the outlaws' stories to accentuate their inherently tragic tone and to create sympathy with the protagonist. Firstly, the narrative emphasizes the protagonist's mental and physical suffering, unlike the conflict story, which tends to highlight the protagonist's heroism by implying that he is not affected by pain, fear, or grief. Secondly, the outlaw's story employs dreams to illustrate the protagonist's mental state, whereas they usually serve as a means of foreshadowing in the conflict story. In *Gísla saga*, Gísli describes his dreams about two ominous women in his verse, which provides the audience with an insight into the insecurities that lurk behind his seemingly unshakeable courage (see Poilvez 2012, 126–129). Thirdly, accounts of sorcery or supernatural occurrences emphasize the protagonist's tragedy in the outlaw's story, whereas in the conflict story they mostly serve as explanations of events for which no natural causes can be found. Gísli Súrsson is affected by a sorcerer's spell that prevents him from receiving aid; in *Grettis saga* and *Harðar saga*, the protagonist is cursed by a revenant. The spell or curse underlines the tragedy of the outlaw's fate, as he is expelled from society despite being a courageous and capable man. Due to all these elements, the outlaw sagas differ from most other sagas of Icelanders in the portrayal of their protagonist, making him appear more vulnerable than the typical central characters of the conflict stories, and yet more morally ambiguous than the ideal peaceful chieftain.

Arons saga is structured by the narrative pattern of the inherently tragic outlaw's story but combines it with the contrasting, optimistic travel story. The former shows the protagonist's exclusion from society, whereas the latter portrays an outsider who is gradually integrated into society. The two narrative types thus correspond to the aforementioned principles of tragedy and comedy, defined by Northrop Frye (1957, 35–52). The combination of these narrative types endows *Arons saga* with meanings that transcend the individual story and can be understood as comments on the situation of Icelandic society as a whole. The travel story also contextualizes the whole saga as a narrative of contact between Iceland and Norway.

4.3.2 Aron Hjörleifsson's escape and journey

Arons saga begins with a conflict between the Sturlungar and Bishop Guðmundr Arason, who remains in the background and is represented by his two champions, Aron Hjörleifsson and Eyjólfr Kársson (ASH ii–ix). This section is structured by the narrative pattern of the conflict story with its focus on the gradually increasing enmity between the two parties. The hostilities culminate with the kill-

ing of Sighvatr Sturluson's oldest son Tumi, followed by a revenge when Eyjólfr is killed and Aron is severely wounded in the battle of Grímsey in 1222.

This initial section is followed by the outlaw's story (ASH ix–xv). Aron is not formally outlawed yet, but after the lost battle he must flee and hide from his pursuers. A typical feature of the outlaw's story is the focus on the individual protagonist and on the courage of those who help him during his escape. The selflessness of these helpers is underlined, as some of them are even willing to face the anger of their kinsmen or chieftains for Aron's sake. When Aron is imprisoned by Ormr Jónsson of Svínafell (ASH xi), Ormr is reproached by his brother Þórarinn for mistreating a young, wounded man who is seeking shelter. Þórarinn even proclaims himself willing to defend Aron with weapons if necessary. The narrative expresses a positive evaluation of Þórarinn's selfless help: it is stated that Þórarinn gained lasting good reputation (*orðrómr*) by this deed, and stanzas praising him are quoted in the chapter (ASH xi).

Aron, who has now been formally outlawed by Sturla Sighvatsson at the legal assembly, then hides with various kinsmen and with his friends, the sons of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson (ASH xi–xii). At this point he is again aided by selfless strangers, who defend him in a fight, although they have no obligations toward Aron and are followers of Þorvaldr Snorrason, an enemy of Hrafn's sons (ASH xii). They state that helping Aron is a matter of honour, because it would be a shame not to assist a defenceless man.[66] Their defence is praised in stanzas included in the narrative, and their chieftain Þorvaldr is even said later to approve of their honourable behaviour, despite his personal enmity toward Aron's allies.

The narrative also refers to supernatural signs, which are typical of the outlaw's story. In the outlaw sagas, such elements – curses and ominous dreams – usually have negative implications and underline the tragedy of the outlaw's fate. In *Arons saga*, by contrast, the dreams and supernatural signs are positive for the protagonist, so they foreshadow the upcoming modification of the tragic tone of the narrative type. Before the aforementioned fight, Aron tells his helpers about a dream in which Bishop Guðmundr hid him under his cloak (ASH xii). This dream can be perceived as a sign of the bishop protecting Aron even at a distance, both in a spiritual sense and in the sense of granting him luck for the fight.

One of the dramatic peaks of the saga is a scene where Aron, outnumbered and surrounded by Sturla Sighvatsson and his followers, manages to fight his way out, runs away and is saved by a snowstorm that conceals him from his pur-

66 „Ámæli mun til okkar falla […] ef vit skiljumst báðir við hann svá búit." (*Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, 2021, ch. 12, p. 398) (We will be reproved […] if we both abandon him in this situation.)

suers (ASH xiv–xv). The narrator's direct commentary implies that Aron freed himself due to his own courage, but that the snowstorm may have been caused by a divine intervention:

> Ok er þat allra manna mál at Áron þykkir manna sköruligast hafa undan komizt við slíka garpa sem eiga var. […] Áron hefir nú harða útivist, vötn öll ill yfirferðar, ok kemr frost í sárit. […] Má þat sýnast skipat með guðs miskunn at þegar Áron komst ór mannhringinum rak á kafahríð svá sterka at þegar skiliði með þeim. Höfðu menn þá hríð lengi í minnum. (*Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, 2021, chs. 14–15, pp. 405–407)

> (And people say that Aron seems to be the bravest of men, when he escaped, although he had to deal with such warriors. […] Aron now faces difficulties in the wilderness, struggling to cross all the rivers, and frost gets into his wound. […] It may seem arranged by God's grace that when Aron escaped from the ring of men, such a heavy snowstorm broke out that he was immediately separated from them. People remembered that storm for a long time.)

This scene clearly illustrates Aron's physical suffering when he wanders through the wilderness, severely wounded and exhausted. When he finally finds shelter at a friend's farm, he lies down, spreads his arms, and sings prayers in the manner that he learned from Bishop Guðmundr (ASH xv). This motif emphasizes Aron's mental suffering, as he is completely helpless and cannot expect any other relief than God's mercy; his religious faith, however, makes his struggles more bearable.

At this point, the expectations built up by the structural pattern of the outlaw's story lead the audience to awaiting Aron's death. Instead, however, the narrative shifts into the structural pattern of the travel story when the protagonist is saved from his outlawry by undertaking a journey to Norway (ASH xv). The saga thus modifies the inherently tragic outlaw's story by combining it with an optimistic narrative type. The outlaw's story highlights the protagonist's marginal position, which is then gradually deconstructed in the travel story.

In line with the typical structure of the travel story, Aron first arrives in Norway as a young man in trouble, lacking both property and allies. As such, he is comparable to the inexperienced newcomers in the *útanferðar þættir*. Another typical element is a conflict with a Norwegian aristocrat. Aron joins the retinue of Jarl Skúli Bárðarson at first; the text mentions three possible reasons (ASH xv). Firstly, Skúli rules the third of Norway around Þrándheimr, where the ship lands. Secondly, Skúli is known to be friendly toward Icelanders. Thirdly, he appreciates Aron's courage and invites him to his retinue. The latter two reasons imply that Skúli probably intends to broaden his Icelandic power base by gaining the support of Aron's Icelandic patrons, although Aron himself is not powerful. A conflict occurs, however, when Aron wishes to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem as he has promised, but Skúli refuses to give him leave. In this sense, Skúli represents the typical overbearing Norwegian aristocrat from the travel stories: instead of ap-

preciating Aron's determination, he insists on demonstrating his power. As an explanation for Skúli's obstinacy, the saga mentions that "he believed that Aron was not worse off near him than further from him".[67] This may refer to Skúli's intention to keep his Icelandic retainers within reach in order to secure that they would not neglect his interests.

Aron decides to fulfil his promise to God and undertake the pilgrimage despite Skúli's prohibition (ASH xv). The journey to Jerusalem serves as an opportunity for the young man to prove his worth. When Aron returns to Norway, he visits King Hákon Hákonarson first, probably because he fears Skúli's wrath. The king welcomes him kindly and asks Skúli to forgive Aron's disobedience, since he made the pilgrimage for the salvation of his soul. Skúli, however, refuses to accept Aron back into his retinue because he does not trust him.[68] It is not directly stated in the text that the reason for this mistrust is related to the strife between Skúli and Hákon, but the circumstances imply that it is likely. Aron's unforgivable breach of loyalty is probably not the pilgrimage itself, but rather his decision to visit Skúli's rival, King Hákon, immediately after his return.

When Skúli rejects Aron, King Hákon accepts Aron into his own retinue, arranges a good marriage for him, and provides him with land and a source of income (ASH xv–xvi). The saga thus emphasizes the monarch's crucial role in the protagonist's re-integration into society. In this context, the narrative illustrates two types of rulers and their different approach to contact with Icelanders. Skúli Bárðarson attempts to establish a political connection with Aron, but his effort is thwarted by his distrust and his demand of unconditional obedience. King Hákon, by contrast, succeeds because he appreciates the Icelander's determination and respects his freedom to make his own decisions. The episode thus expresses the idea that the relationship between Icelanders and the Norwegian monarch should not be based on blind obedience, but rather on mutual respect. This applies not only to the account of Aron Hjörleifsson's life, but also to the whole Icelandic society's situation during and after the Sturlung Age.[69]

67 […] honum þætti Áron eigi kominn verr nær sér en firr (*Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, 2021, ch. 15, p. 408).

68 [Skúli] kvað Áron svá tafli teflt hafa við sik „at okkur sambúð mun skömm vera." (*Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, 2021, ch. 15, p. 410) ([Skúli] said that Aron had played such a game with him "that our time together must be short.")

69 Among the *útanferðar þættir*, a similar contrast between two rulers' approach to the Icelandic protagonist is found in *Hreiðars þáttr* or *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds* (Harris 1972, 17–18; Vésteinn Ólason 1985, 64–65). It thus seems to have been an established motif, which corroborates the hypothesis that it reflects general ideas that transcend the meaning of the individual stories.

The rest of the saga shows that Aron stays at the royal court for almost thirty years until his death in 1255, faithfully serving King Hákon and receiving esteem in return. The king personally visits Aron when he falls ill, which "seems to men to be the greatest honour".[70] When Aron dies, the king gives a speech at his grave, praising his secular qualities, such as courage and travelling experience. The following direct commentary by the narrator refers to Aron's spiritual merits, including his devoted service to Bishop Guðmundr (ASH xxii). The saga thus implies that Aron's loyalty and courage brought him both secular esteem and spiritual grace, and that he had powerful protectors in both spheres – King Hákon and Bishop Guðmundr. In the outlaw's story, the bishop provides Aron with divine protection and mental strength. In the travel story, the king helps Aron overcome his marginal position and gain the social prestige that he deserves due to his personal qualities. If Aron's story is interpreted as a comment on the development of Icelandic society as a whole, this implies that institutionalized power – the Church and royal rule – can help Iceland overcome its marginality and attain a more prestigious position in the Norse cultural region.

The way in which the protagonist's life is narrated thus contributes to an interpretation of his story in a broader social and literary context, endowing the text with a deeper coherence. *Arons saga* has been criticized in research for its fragmentary structure, especially in its second half, which is indeed episodic on the level of plot (Porter 1971, 161–162). Here it has been shown, however, that the saga's meaning connects the episodes into a coherent narrative. The text is focused on the scenes that are essential for the structural pattern of the travel story: the Icelander's arrival in Norway, his conflict with a Norwegian aristocrat, and his subsequent integration into the royal court with the king's assistance. The rest of his life in Norway is only briefly outlined, because it is less significant for the meaning of the narrative, while the funeral scene sums up the whole saga's message. While it can be difficult to find "a dominant and purposeful theme in the saga of Aron's life" (Porter 1971, 162) on the story level alone, the present analysis has revealed how specific elements were selected from communicative memory in the process of narrativization with an emphasis on certain themes: the overcoming of marginality and the ideal relationship between Icelanders and the monarchy. These themes transform "the saga of Aron's life" into a complex narrative commentary on Icelandic history.

The potential of Aron's story to construct such complex meanings is probably the reason why a side character from *Íslendinga saga* becomes the central protagonist in *Arons saga*, although Aron Hjörleifsson was certainly less politically sig-

70 […] hefir mönnum þat þótt in mesta sæmð (*Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, 2021, ch. 22, p. 420).

nificant than most other protagonists of the contemporary sagas. Part of the motivation may have been the intention to portray a 'Christian hero', as has been suggested in the research outlined above. It is, however, unlikely that such a portrayal of an individual would have motivated the composition of a new saga if its meaning had not extended even further beyond the story – especially since Aron's life was already partly depicted in a written text and he was only a side character in Guðmundr Arason's story as well. Instead, the writing of *Arons saga* was presumably motivated by the intention to develop a figurative interpretation of Aron's life as a narrative representation of collective identity. As the character type of the outlaw, Aron could perfectly embody the Icelanders' inherent marginality – that is why this aspect of his life, which is only briefly outlined in *Íslendinga saga*, is foregrounded in *Arons saga*. At the same time, due to Aron's successful integration into the royal court, his story could be regarded as a narrative of overcoming this marginality. For this reason, the second half of his life, which is almost completely ignored in *Íslendinga saga*, is narrated as a typical travel story in *Arons saga*. If the original recipients understood *Arons saga* in the context of *Íslendinga saga*, these differences between the two texts may have drawn their attention to *Arons saga*'s deeper meaning.

4.4 Snorri Sturluson: The court poet

Even more sophisticated intertextual connections can be found between *Íslendinga saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, especially in the story of Snorri Sturluson. Both texts were written by the same author, Sturla Þórðarson the younger, whose detailed knowledge of the material enabled him to build up a complex image of history across the boundaries of the sagas. The two power struggles – between multiple rivalling chieftains in Iceland and between King Hákon Hákonarson and Skúli Bárðarson in Norway – are presented as being closely intertwined, although each saga is focused on one of them. In *Íslendinga saga*, this connection is built up more consciously, as the text repeatedly refers to events or situations described in *Hákonar saga*. The recipients, who are doubtlessly supposed to know *Hákonar saga*, are thus reminded to keep the Norwegian power struggle in mind as a background to the political relations in Iceland. Some Icelandic key events are also briefly referred to in *Hákonar saga*, while *Íslendinga saga* explains more thoroughly how the political rivalry in Iceland influenced the Icelanders' decisions to join the Norwegian power game. Due to such intertextual connections, both texts together present a more coherent image of the past than each of them could present separately. Intertextuality is thus not just a literary

phenomenon; it also contributes to an interpretation of history by showing that Icelandic and Norwegian power relations were regarded as being inseparably connected.

4.4.1 The narrative type of the court poet's story

The narrative type of the court poet's story was, like the travel story, primarily developed in *þættir* contained in the kings' sagas. Both narrative types also share a similar structural pattern. The typical court poet's story portrays an Icelander who arrives at the royal court, lacking both property and appropriate courtly manners. His behaviour is usually excessively self-assured, even impudent, which irritates the courtiers and often alienates the skald from the king. Eventually, however, the Icelander proves his abilities – in this case his poetic art and often also diplomatic eloquence, so he earns the king's favour and a prestigious position. The central element of the structural pattern is thus again the transition from alienation to acceptance. This pattern accentuates the notion of a positive, conciliatory relationship between Icelanders and Norwegian kings that ends in mutual respect despite some initial disagreement or distrust.

All the narrative types that are centred around the protagonist's journey show a specific type of social advancement that depends on individual skills, rather than on family or social ties, and that an Icelander can achieve only abroad (Morawiec 2017, 51). In comparison with the travel story, however, the court poet's story presents a more self-confident image of the Icelander (Finlay 1997, 164–165). The character type of the skald best represents "the figure of the young, upwardly mobile Icelandic male who wants to venture into the big, wide world" and who masters the "courtly and elitist art of skaldic poetry" despite his meagre, provincial origin and often coarse personality (Clunies Ross 1997, 551). Some sources directly comment on the special favour enjoyed by court poets,[71] others illustrate it by their portrayal of skalds. They show that the skald's special position at the royal court gives him privileges that allow him to bypass the standard hierarchy of the retinue (Finlay 1997, 166). He is presented as being formally subordinate to the monarch but often acting as the king's mentor; it is sometimes implied that he can be intellectually superior to him. The king tolerates the court poet's behaviour that would not be acceptable otherwise – a skald can for in-

71 For example "af öllum hirðmönnum virði konungr mest skáld sín" (*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, 1933, ch. 8, p. 19) (of all his retainers, the king respected his skalds most).

stance criticize the monarch much more openly than anyone else (Ármann Jakobsson 2003, 45–47).

The overall image of the skalds' role at the royal courts can be loosely based on the historical reality of the Saga Age, when the rulers of the preliterate Norse kingdoms depended on poetry for promoting their ideology and power (Morawiec 2017, 51–52). Poetry was crucial for the kings' reputation because praise or criticism in poetic form could be ingrained in collective memory and outlive the monarch (Sayers 2021, 43–44). It is therefore likely that poetry was indeed an important social means for ambitious Icelanders in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Finlay 1997, 161). As for later development, it has been argued that the thirteenth-century *þættir* may have rekindled an awareness of skaldic poetry as a political tool in real life (Gade 2000, 69–70). A more moderate approach suggests that poetry no longer actually shaped political relations in the thirteenth century, but the *þættir* may have provided certain formal codes of behaviour, which could be consciously imitated by the Icelanders and the monarchs (Wanner 2008, 72–73). That seems to be more likely, as will be shown below.

In any case, the literary image of the court poets is most probably exaggerated beyond the skalds' real privileges at the royal courts in any period of history. The narrative type is centred around "the traditional and cultural implications of the role of skald" (Finlay 1997, 161), which probably played an important role in cultural memory because they could serve as a means of deconstructing the Icelanders' perception of their own marginality in their relationship with Norway. The court poet's story accentuates the Icelander's active initiative to establish contact with the king and earn social prestige even more than most travel stories. This aspect was doubtlessly essential for the construction of collective identity because it figuratively referred to the whole Icelandic society's relationship with the monarchy.

An example that aptly illustrates this narrative type is *Stúfs þáttr*.[72] Its protagonist travels to Norway to collect his inheritance and meets King Haraldr Sigurðarson. The king enjoys their conversation and appreciates Stúfr's wit and eloquence. Stúfr alludes to a joke about the king's father's nickname, but the king is not offended and accepts the humour. The king then asks Stúfr to recite poetry and is impressed by how many poems he knows. In return, Stúfr asks the king to grant him three wishes: to give him a letter confirming his claim to the inheritance, to let him compose a praise poem, and to accept him into his retinue. The king comments that it is unusual for men to present their requests so directly, but he eventually

72 The content and structure of the shorter redaction in *Morkinskinna* and the separate longer redaction are similar.

grants him all three wishes. Stúfr then becomes a popular royal retainer and court poet. In this case, the initial disagreement between the king and the Icelander is not fully developed. The possibility of a conflict is implied when the Icelander makes inappropriate jokes and boldly presents his requests to the king, but he is forgiven before the conflict even begins. The story thus shows that the skald can speak to the king more daringly than others, and it emphasizes the Icelander's active approach to establishing contact with the king. He does not wait for the king to offer him a place in the retinue but asks for it himself. He then proves that he is worthy of such a position, so his ambitious request is shown to be justified. The *þáttr* thus accentuates the Icelander's success in actively increasing his social prestige.

Other court poets' stories place more emphasis on a disagreement between the king and the skald, which can be both caused and resolved by poetry or other verbal means. In *Óttars þáttr svarta*, the protagonist first stays at the court of King Óláfr Eiríksson of Sweden and composes a love poem about the king's daughter Ástríðr. Later in Norway, this poem incurs the wrath of King Óláfr Haraldsson because Ástríðr is now his wife. The king has Óttarr imprisoned and intends to have him killed. On the advice of the court poet Sighvatr Þórðarson, Óttarr composes a praise poem about the king. He then presents the poem to the king, who grants him a pardon as a reward. Despite the initial conflict, the optimistic ending of the story thus emphasizes the Icelander's ability to overcome the alienation.

In some cases, the optimistic tone of the court poet's story is exaggerated to the point of humorous light-heartedness. In *Þórarins þáttr stuttfeldar*, the protagonist becomes involved in rivalry between two courtiers and composes derisive stanzas about them, but the conflict does not lead to any long-term hostilities and the skald is rewarded by the king for a more serious poem. The protagonist of the famous *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*[73] is openly cheeky and deliberately ignores the social norms at the royal court but gets away with his eccentricities due to his charming wit and extraordinary eloquence. The king tolerates his rude sexual jokes, complaints about the lack of food for the retainers, rivalry with the experienced court poet Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, success in outwitting an overbearing Norwegian magnate, and other ploys.

73 *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* is extant in two redactions, incorporated in *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* respectively; the *Flateyjarbók* redaction has been described as coarser and more explicit (Tirosh 2017, 3, 8–9; Sayers 2021, 34–40). The research referenced here is mostly based on the *Morkinskinna* redaction; Hermann Pálsson's study works with the *Flateyjarbók* redaction but is applicable to both; my own interpretation is applicable to both redactions as well.

Sneglu-Halla þáttr can be regarded as a parodic imitation of the more serious court poets' stories (Hermann Pálsson 1992, 149–150).[74] Everything in the story, including the conflicts, is presented as a game (Ármann Jakobsson 2014, 177–178); "the tone of the narrative is such that everything appears comic rather than serious" (2014, 178).[75] The *þáttr* thus clearly parodies the narrative type's already exaggerated image of the court poet who can get away with almost anything. Typical motifs of the court poet's story, such as the skald's freedom to criticize the king, his rivalry with other courtiers, or the contrast between his humble origin and the aristocratic nature of court poetry, are wittily mocked in *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*.[76]

Its existence does not, however, undermine the validity of the narrative type. It rather corroborates it because the presupposition of a conscious parody is a clear awareness of the story type that is being parodied. Nor is *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* likely to seriously challenge the ideas expressed in the typical court poets' stories; it may rather mock the fact that some of them seem to go a bit too far in their exaggeration of the skald's privileged position. Even this parodic *þáttr* can still "reflect the kind of relationship that Icelandic elites hoped to enjoy with the Norwegian throne" (Sayers 2021, 45). Nevertheless, it simultaneously reveals this image as a narrative construct. Due to its self-reflective nature, it thus presents the court poet's story and other narrative types as means of a conscious construction of cultural memory.

Some narratives that portray skalds lack the form of a coherent *þáttr* and consist of multiple episodes scattered throughout a king's saga, and yet they contain all the defining features of the court poet's story. An illustrative example is the portrayal of Sighvatr Þórðarson in *Óláfs saga helga* and *Magnúss saga góða* in *Heimskringla*. These sagas not only quote Sighvatr's stanzas, but also depict episodes from the poet's career in royal service. *Óláfs saga* shows how Sighvatr first

74 Hermann Pálsson uses the terms "skopsögur" (1992, 149) (comic tales) and "ýkjusaga" (1992, 154) (a tall tale).

75 Similarly, William Sayers (2021, 27) speaks of a "gaming context" that clearly marks Halli's verbal exchange with the king as a joke and precludes serious defamation.

76 *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* has also been interpreted as a genuinely positive, albeit comically exaggerated, narrative image of authentic Icelandicness that could serve as a source of collective identity (Tirosh 2017). From this perspective, Halli can be viewed as "independence personified" (2017, 11), "worthy of imitating" (2017, 12) – because, unlike his rival Þjóðólfr, he does not show any "uneasiness with his meager background" (2017, 14). I believe, however, that this interpretation does not accord with the overall message of the narrative type. In the context of the typical court poets' stories, and considering the frivolous tone of the *þáttr*, it seems unlikely that Sneglu-Halli could be regarded as an embodiment of how the thirteenth-century Icelanders actually wished the skalds of the past to be remembered, let alone as "an Icelandic role model" (2017, 19). Instead, *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* indeed seems to be a deliberate satirical imitation of the court poet's story.

arrives at the royal court with the intention of reciting a celebratory poem to King Óláfr Haraldsson. The monarch rejects him, but Sighvatr recites a stanza anyway, and the king rewards him and accepts him into his service. This episode thus highlights the skald's self-confidence and active approach to forming a relationship with the king, as well as his determination when he is not discouraged by the monarch's initial lack of interest. In another episode, Sighvatr is presented in a diplomatic role in a negotiation between King Óláfr Haraldsson and King Óláfr Eiríksson of Sweden. During a long-term conflict between the two monarchs, Óláfr Haraldsson plans an armed attack on Sweden, but Sighvatr brings about a reconciliation with the help of a Swedish jarl. This shows his active role in Scandinavian politics, in which he can use his eloquence in other ways than just composing poetry.

In *Magnúss saga*, Sighvatr is portrayed as a counsellor of King Óláfr's son Magnús. When Magnús Óláfsson punishes his father's former opponents too harshly and treats the farmers ruthlessly, he risks that his own people might turn against him. Sighvatr composes the poem *Bersöglisvísur*, in which he encourages the young king to be kinder and to follow the law. The king takes his advice seriously and becomes a popular monarch, nicknamed Magnús the Good. This episode shows that the skald is also the king's advisor and mentor, from whom the king is willing to accept even open criticism. That is yet another way in which the Icelander can use his intelligence and verbal skills to directly influence Scandinavian politics.[77]

Apart from the kings' sagas, the structural pattern of the court poet's story shapes some episodes in the skalds' sagas. For instance, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* contains a story of a conflict and reconciliation brought about by verbal exchanges alone, similar to *Óttars þáttr svarta*. Gunnlaugr offends Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson by reminding him of his father's disgraceful death and is expelled from Norway. He then visits multiple kings and noblemen in other countries and earns their favour by composing praise poetry about them, which implies that he is more concerned with gaining social prestige than with loyalty to one individual

77 A comparably political role of another skald, Þórarinn loftunga, and his poetry in the service of King Knútr inn ríki and his son Sveinn has been analysed in detail by Jakub Morawiec (2020; 2021). He shows how Þórarinn's poetry contributed to building up the image of the king's supreme authority as God's representative on earth (2020, 40–49) and of Knútr as a formidable and courageous conqueror who nevertheless maintains peace in his dominion and protects it once he has gained power over it (2021, 44–56). Morawiec convincingly argues that this reveals Þórarinn's awareness of and participation in the construction of the king's complex royal ideology. At the same time, the portrayal of Þórarinn in *Heimskringla* and *Knýtlinga saga* emphasizes his success gained in royal service despite an initial disagreement with the king (2020, 34–35).

ruler. However, he also praises Jarl Eiríkr in his speech and verse despite their disagreement. When the jarl hears about it, he allows Gunnlaugr to return to Norway, gives him a warm welcome, and assists him with his journey back to Iceland.

Although the main theme of the skalds' sagas is a love triangle, not the protagonist's position as a court poet,[78] this episode seems to be shaped by the "familiar *þáttr* pattern" (Finlay 1997, 166; see also Whaley 1997, 665–667). It is likely that "the author developed the story along conventional lines in order to align his hero with the outspoken, inelegant but courageous figures familiar in stories of poets in foreign courts" (Finlay 1997, 166).[79] This corroborates the idea that the structural and thematic pattern that characterizes these stories does not define a genre but a narrative type that crosses the boundaries of genres: the episodes share the same structure and meaning, whether they are incorporated into a king's saga, a skald's saga, or a contemporary saga.[80]

As will be shown here, the contemporary sagas can use the narrative type of the court poet's story as a means of justifying or concealing some political aspects of the relations between Icelanders and Norwegian rulers. First and foremost, however, the structural pattern of the court poet's story serves as a means of interpretation and evaluation, transforming individual stories into narratives with a more universal meaning. By connecting recent events to an idealized memory of the distant past, it enables the texts to reflect contemporary attitudes to Icelandic identity and to the political relationships between Iceland and the Norwegian kingdom. In this context, the most significant aspect of the court poet's story is its emphasis on the Icelanders' active role in establishing their contacts with the kings, their assertive behaviour at the royal court, and their diplomatic skills and active participation in Scandinavian politics.

78 For a discussion of the relationship between the skalds' sagas and *þættir*, see Finlay 1997.

79 The motif of a journey abroad, including some of the typical elements of court poets' stories – primarily the protagonist's active effort to seek prestige and to establish contact with a monarch – plays an important role in other skalds' sagas as well; for analyses see Whaley 1997, 667–670; Morawiec 2017, 38–48.

80 The overall plot of the skalds' sagas does not share the optimistic tone of the court poets' stories, as it is typically characterized by a tragic ending (Morawiec 2017, 51). The tragedy is, however, a consequence of the protagonist's conflict with his Icelandic rival, whereas episodes depicting the Icelander's contact with the royal court highlight his successful effort at actively increasing his prestige even in the skalds' sagas. I therefore do not quite agree with Morawiec's opinion that the skalds' sagas question the cultural concept of esteem gained abroad (2017, 51).

4.4.2 Snorri Sturluson's first journey to Norway

The account of Snorri Sturluson's life in *Íslendinga saga* begins with an outline of how the ambitious young chieftain establishes his position by acquiring property through marriage, inheritance, or agreement, and by demonstrating his authority in legal cases and arbitration. He is initially supported by his powerful foster-brother, Sæmundr Jónsson of the Oddaverjar, who is openly described in the text as the noblest (*göfgastr*) man in Iceland at the time (STU cliv). Eventually, however, the relationship between the two ambitious chieftains inevitably turns into rivalry. Snorri is reluctant to directly attack his foster-brother, so he uses petty conflicts and lawsuits as a pretext for trying to gain superiority over him. In one of such scenes (STU clxxv), Sæmundr's awareness of the threat to his status is emphasized in a dialogue:

> Þá er Sæmundr kom i búð sína þá talaði einn hans maðr at enn færi sem optar at Sæmunðr hefði enn einn virðing af málum þessum. Sæmundr svarar: „Hvat tjóir slíkt at mæla, því at bræðr þessir draga sik svá fram at nær engir menn halda sik til fulls við þá." (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 175, p. 108)
>
> (When Sæmundr entered his booth, one of his companions said that it had again turned out as usual and Sæmundr had again been the only one to gain honour from the case. Sæmundr answered: "What is the point of saying such things, when these brothers are so eager to increase their power that almost nobody can fully hold his ground against them?")

This direct emphasis on the rivalry between Snorri and Sæmundr implies that their competition for power is an important component of the story. When Snorri wins a legal case against one of Sæmundr's kinsmen, the open commentary continues with the formulation that "Snorri gained esteem from this case, and this case increased his esteem more than anything else in this country".[81] Such a comment highlights Snorri's paradoxical situation: his strategy of improving his status through legal competition has proven successful, but he has also reached its limits. If he wishes to further increase his power, he can hardly do so in Iceland (*hér á landi*) by legal means alone. That leaves him with two options: to start an open armed conflict with Sæmundr, or to travel to Norway and increase his prestige by seeking an alliance with the Norwegian rulers. Snorri chooses the latter.

The connection between Snorri's first journey to Norway and his rivalry with Sæmundr is emphasized in the saga by the fact that the account of their legal confrontation is immediately followed by a description of Snorri's first contact with a Norwegian aristocrat on the one hand, and of a dispute between Sæmundr and

81 Snorri hafði virðing af málum þessum. Ok í þessum málum gekk mest virðing hans við hér á landi (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 175, p. 109).

Norwegian merchants on the other hand. Snorri, still in Iceland, is said to have actively established contact with Jarl Hákon galinn (STU clxxv):

> Hann orti kvæði um Hákon galin, ok sendi jarlinn gjafir út á mót, sverð ok skjöld ok brynju. […] Jarlinn ritaði til Snorra at hann skyldi fara útan ok lézt til hans gera miklar sæmðir, ok mjök var þat í skapi Snorra. En jarlinn andaðist í þann tíma, ok brá þat útanferð hans um nökkurra vetra sakir, en þó hafði hann ráðit för sína þegar tími væri til. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 175, p. 109)
>
> (He composed a poem about Hákon galinn and the jarl sent him gifts in return, a sword, a shield, and a coat of mail. […] The jarl wrote to Snorri and asked him to come to Norway, promising that he would enhance his esteem. That was much to Snorri's liking, but the jarl died at that time, so Snorri's journey was delayed by several winters, yet he had decided to undertake the journey as soon as the time was right.)

This account clearly states that Snorri intends to establish contact with a powerful Norwegian aristocrat who can "enhance his esteem", and its placement in the saga implies that the reason is Snorri's rivalry with Sæmundr. Significantly, the text draws attention to Snorri's poetry, thus revealing that its continuation will be shaped by the narrative pattern of the court poet's story.

Next, the saga turns to Sæmundr's conflict with the Norwegians. He blames them for causing his son's death in a shipwreck and requests compensation from the Norwegian merchants who are in Iceland at the time. They refuse to pay, because they have nothing to do with the matter, so Sæmundr confiscates some of their property. The merchants respond by killing Sæmundr's brother Ormr, his son, and two other men (STU clxxvi). The description of these events is intertwined with the account of Snorri's decision to travel to Norway and of his journey in the summer of 1218. This implies that the journey is interpreted in the saga as part of his effort to gain superiority over the Oddaverjar; their disadvantaged position in Norway can help him become the first Icelandic chieftain to establish the new type of a direct political relationship with the Norwegian rulers.

Nevertheless, although Snorri's journey is presented as a political move, its depiction in *Íslendinga saga* is shaped by the narrative type of the court poet's story. Snorri's poetry and the reward that he receives for it is the main focus of the description of his first year in Scandinavia:

> Þá er Snorri kom til Nóregs voru höfðingjar orðnir Hákon konungr ok Skúli jarl. Tók jarl forkunnar vel við Snorra, ok fór hann til jarls. […] Snorri var um vetrinn með jarli. En um sumarit eptir fór hann austr á Gautland á fund Áskels lögmanns ok frú Kristínar er átt hafði áðr Hákon galinn. Snorri hafði ort um hana kvæði þat er *Andvaka* heitir, fyrir Hákon jarl at bæn hans, ok tók hon sæmiliga við Snorra ok veitti honum margar gjafir sæmiligar. Hon gaf honum merki þat er átt hafði Eiríkr Svíakonungr Knútsson. Þat hafði hann þá er hann felldi

> Sörkvi konung á Gestilsreini. Snorri fór um haustit aptr til Skúla jarls ok var þar annan vetr í allgóðu yfirlæti. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 176, pp. 112–113)
>
> (When Snorri arrived in Norway, King Hákon and Jarl Skúli had become the rulers. The jarl gave Snorri a very warm welcome and Snorri stayed with him. […] Snorri spent the winter with Skúli. The following summer he went east to Gautland to visit the lawman Áskell and Lady Kristín, who had been married to Hákon galinn. Snorri had composed a poem named *Andvaka* about her for Jarl Hákon at his request. She gave Snorri an honourable welcome and many honourable gifts. She gave him the banner that had belonged to the Swedish king Eiríkr Knútsson, who had carried it when he defeated King Sörkvir at Gestilrein. In the autumn Snorri returned to Jarl Skúli, spent another winter with him, and was very well treated.)

The emphasis on poetry partly covers up Snorri's political relationship with Skúli Bárðarson, Jarl Hákon's successor and King Hákon Hákonarson's co-ruler, but it does not entirely conceal it. It primarily serves as an interpretative framework for the whole episode, a reference to the cultural concepts associated with the court poets' stories, such as the Icelander's intellectual excellence and active initiative to establish his contact with the Norwegian monarchs.

After having established this framework, the saga turns to the political matters (STU clxxviii). Jarl Skúli uses the Norwegian merchants' conflict with the Oddaverjar as a pretext for suggesting a military expedition to Iceland, probably in order to strengthen his influence there and involve the chieftains in his power struggle with King Hákon. However, Snorri averts the expedition by convincing Skúli and Hákon to establish political cooperation through peaceful negotiation instead. He promises to promote royal rule in Iceland with the help of his brothers:

> En þó voru Nóregsmenn miklir óvinir Íslendinga ok mestir Oddaverja af ránum þeim er urðu á Eyrum. Þó kom því svá at ráðit var at herja skyldi til Íslands um sumarit. […] Snorri latti mjök ferðarinnar ok kallaði þat ráð at gera sér at vinum ina beztu menn á Íslandi ok kallaðist skjótt mega svá koma sínum orðum at mönnum mundi sýnast at snúast til hlýðni við Nóregshöfðingja. Hann sagði ok svá at þá voru aðrir eigi meiri menn á Íslandi en bræðr hans er Sæmund leið, en kallaði þá mundu mjök eptir sínum orðum víkja þá er hann kæmi til. En við slíkar fortölur slævaðist heldr skap jarlsins, ok lagði hann þat ráð til at Íslendingar bæði konunginn at hann bæði fyrir þeim at eigi yrði herferðin. Konungrinn var þá ungr, en Dagfinnr lögmaðr var ráðgjafi konungsins. Hann var inn mesti vin Íslendinga. Ok var þat af gert at konungr réð at eigi varð herförin. En þeir Hákon konungr ok Skúli jarl gerðu Snorra lendan mann sinn. Var þat mest ráð þeira jarls ok Snorra. En Snorri skyldi leita við Íslendinga at þeir snerist til hlýðni við Nóregshöfðingja. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 178, pp. 121–122)
>
> (But the Norwegians were fierce opponents of Icelanders and mainly of the Oddaverjar because of the confiscation that had taken place at Eyrar. It thus happened that an armed attack on Iceland was planned for the summer. […] Snorri strongly dissuaded the rulers from the expedition and recommended them instead to establish friendship with Iceland's most influential men. He said that his words could soon persuade the people to willingly accept the Norwegian rulers' authority. He also said that with the exception of Sæmundr, nobody

> was more influential in Iceland than his brothers, and he promised that they would follow his advice when he returned. The jarl was mollified by his intercessions and advised the Icelanders to ask King Hákon to intercede on their behalf, so the expedition would be revoked. The king was young at the time, and the lawman Dagfinnr, his counsellor, was a great friend of Icelanders. And it turned out that the king decided to cancel the expedition. King Hákon and Jarl Skúli made Snorri their vassal, and this was mainly the jarl's and Snorri's initiative. Snorri was meant to convince the Icelanders to accept the Norwegian rulers' authority.)

This scene depicts the transition from a conflict to an agreement with the help of the protagonist's verbal skills, which is a key component of the court poet's story. As has been shown here, the skald's diplomatic intervention into politics is a typical element of this narrative type as well; the skald usually excels not only in poetry, but also in eloquence and negotiation skills. Above all, the text emphasizes the Icelander's active role in his relationship with the Norwegian rulers, which is the central theme of the court poet's story. Everything from Snorri's journey to Norway to his effort at averting the military expedition and his suggestion to promote Norwegian rule in Iceland is presented as his own decision, and it is stated that the establishment of a formal political relationship was "mainly the jarl's and Snorri's initiative".

This formulation also accentuates Skúli's role in the matter. The text implies that at this point, Skúli wields more power in practice than the underage King Hákon, who relies mainly on his counsellors. In this context, it is also noteworthy that the plural form "Norway's rulers" (*Nóregshöfðingjar*) is used twice in the account of Snorri's promise to promote the monarchy in Iceland, which suggests that he does not necessarily refer to King Hákon, but maybe rather to Skúli. This foreshadows the latter section of Snorri's story, in which he gets fatefully involved in the conflict between Skúli and King Hákon.

At this point, however, the saga foregrounds the peaceful agreement and Snorri's active approach to it. It admits that the Norwegian rulers, mainly Skúli, show interest in direct political contact with Icelanders, but Snorri is not presented as passively tolerating their expansive intentions. On the contrary, the text implies that Snorri actively initiates the connection between Icelandic and Norwegian politics and suggests a solution that can be beneficial for both parties. He presumably perceives it as an opportunity to secure the Sturlungar's position in Iceland, as suggested by yet another reference to their rivalry with Sæmundr Jónsson and by the aftermath of this episode (STU clxxviii), which depicts Snorri's return to Iceland and accentuates the Oddaverjar's disapproval of his alliance with Skúli:

> Jarlinn hafði gefit honum skipit, þat er hann fór á, ok fimmtán stórgjafir. Snorri hafði ort um jarl tvau kvæði [...]. En er Snorri kom í Vestmannaeyjar þá spurðist brátt inn á land útkváma hans ok svá með hverjum sæmðum hann var út kominn. Ýfðust Sunnlendingar þá

> mjök við honum ok mest tengðamenn Orms Jónssonar. Þótti þeim sem hann mundi vera settr til af Nóregsmönnum at standa á móti, svá at þeir mætti engu eptirmáli fram koma um víg Orms. Var mest fyrir því Björn Þorvaldsson er þá bjó á Breiðabólstað ok þótti vænn til höfðingja. Sunnlendingar drógu spott mikit at kvæðum þeim er Snorri hafði ort um jarlinn ok sneru afleiðis. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 178, pp. 122–123)
>
> (The jarl had given him the ship that he sailed on and fifteen valuable gifts. Snorri had composed two poems about the jarl. […] And when Snorri arrived in Vestmannaeyjar, the news of his arrival and of the honour he had received soon spread across the country. The southerners, especially Ormr Jónsson's kinsmen, became very angry with him. They believed that the Norwegians had commissioned him to prevent them from successfully prosecuting Ormr's killer. This idea was most supported by Björn Þorvaldsson, who then lived at Breiðabólstaðr and seemed to be a promising chieftain. The southerners ridiculed the poems composed by Snorri about the jarl and twisted them.)

Here the text returns to the conflict between the Oddaverjar and the Norwegian merchants, but the narrative is once again shaped by an emphasis on Snorri's poetic activity. It is implicitly but rather convincingly suggested that Skúli's gifts are a reward for Snorri's poetry, while it is much more likely that the gifts were in fact intended to strengthen Snorri's loyalty to Skúli – not only in the establishment of Norwegian rule in Iceland, but also in the internal Norwegian political struggles. Through the poetic parody that Snorri's opponents use to ridicule him, they thus discredit his political alliance with the Norwegian rulers as well.[82]

Nevertheless, there is nothing in the text to imply that the Icelanders collectively condemn Snorri's support of the monarchy as a betrayal of the 'Icelandic nation'; it is mainly the Oddaverjar and their allies who disapprove of Snorri's political contacts in Norway. It is, however, unlikely that Snorri's aim was to prevent Ormr's family from receiving compensation; he presumably intended to gain political superiority over the Oddaverjar in a much broader sense. The likely reason why the Oddaverjar and the Haukdælir opposed his cooperation with the Norwegian rulers was therefore neither their opposition to the monarchy, nor the individual case of Ormr's killing, but rather the competition for power in Iceland. The most powerful Icelandic clans probably resented having missed the opportunity to enhance their power by such a direct contact with the monarchy, just because they were stuck in petty conflicts with the Norwegian merchants.

The renewed emphasis on poetry at the end of the episode contributes to the construction of the whole account of Snorri's first journey to Norway as the court poet's story, which has an interpretative function because of its confident image

82 This element is also present in the court poets' stories in the kings' sagas. In *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*, for instance, Halli and his rival Þjóðólfr ridicule each other's poems, while the real purpose is to discredit one's rival and challenge his social position (Hermann Pálsson 1992, 154–155).

of the Icelander. This image then also shapes the perception of the following section of the account of Snorri's life, which is structured by the contrasting, inherently tragic narrative type of the jarl's story.

4.4.3 The narrative type of the jarl's story

The narrative type of the jarl's story portrays a jarl who is too ambitious to accept his subordination to the king, so his greed for power leads to a conflict between them. Its structure is similar to that of the conflict story, beginning with gradually developing rivalry and continuing with an open power struggle and finally an armed clash. Social cohesion is then renewed after the jarl's defeat, when the king's power is consolidated. Unlike the conflict story, however, the jarl's story is not focused on mediation and reconciliation. When the conflict takes place on the highest level of the social hierarchy and the king is one of its participants, there is no supreme authority that could arbitrate, and the internal disunity caused by the strife threatens the whole kingdom's stability. The jarl's defeat and death are therefore presented as necessary preconditions of the renewal of social stability. For this reason, the jarl's story can be regarded as the most tragic of all the narrative types.

The jarl's story was established in texts dealing with the thirteenth century, which are characterized by an increased typological difference between kings and jarls. In the kings' sagas about earlier times, both kings and jarls are typically portrayed as the same character type – the traditional Norse ruler, who is primarily a military leader, appreciated for his battle prowess, strategic skills, and extraordinary eloquence that enables him to motivate his warriors (Bagge 1996, 20–33, 65, 86–88; Coroban 2018, 108). The political relations between jarls and kings depicted in these sagas can vary – sometimes they cooperate, sometimes they compete for power, and sometimes a jarl replaces the king. Conversely, the portrayal of thirteenth-century kings is shaped by the newly introduced ideal of *rex iustus*: the monarch as a representative of divine will, a guardian of justice and peace, and a protector of the weak (Bagge 1996, 118–119, 147–155; Coroban 2018, 108–109). Alongside this new royal ideology, the focus on the concept of unconditional obedience to the monarch and on centralized royal rule was intensified (Orning 2008, 69–108; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2011, 84–85). In narratives that are predominantly shaped by this ideology, the jarl usually represents the old type of ruler, and his conflict with the king can be understood as an image of the social transformation. That is why the jarl's story foregrounds the contrast between the character types of the king and the jarl.

The best example of the jarl's story is the account of the relationship between Jarl Skúli Bárðarson and King Hákon Hákonarson in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, which builds up a contrast between the portrayal of Skúli and Hákon. Skúli is depicted as the traditional Norse warrior-aristocrat, and the text presents an ambivalent image of this character type. It highlights his positive qualities, such as courage, decisiveness, battle prowess, cleverness in politics, and diplomatic skills. Nevertheless, it also shows his excessive greed for power, which leads to his rivalry with the king that threatens social stability in the whole realm. King Hákon, by contrast, embodies the ideal of *rex iustus*, the peaceful representative of centralized power. In the saga, Skúli's defeat figuratively reflects the replacement of the old type of ruler with the new one.

4.4.4 Snorri Sturluson's second journey to Norway

In the latter section of the account of Snorri Sturluson's life, his story is so closely intertwined with Skúli's that it is shaped by the inherently tragic narrative type of the jarl's story, established in the account of the rivalry between Skúli and Hákon in *Hákonar saga*. This conflict is not presented in *Íslendinga saga* in its entirety, but it is alluded to, and Snorri's connections with Skúli are repeatedly emphasized. This accentuates the story's intertextual relationship with *Hákonar saga*.

Snorri returns to Iceland in 1220 as Skúli's ally and formally as King Hákon's vassal, but despite such a reinforcement of his position, his situation in the Icelandic power struggle is not easy. Apart from his original rivals, the Oddaverjar, he now also competes with his extremely ambitious nephew, Sturla Sighvatsson. When the Oddaverjar are weakened by the death of Sæmundr Jónsson in 1222, Sturla uses the opportunity to gain some of their power by marrying Sæmundr's daughter Sólveig (STU clxxxix). The tension between Snorri and Sturla gradually escalates into open enmity (see 3.2.5), and in the prolonged power struggle, Sturla uses the strategy previously used by Snorri: he travels to Norway in 1233 in order to gain more powerful allies than those he can get in his homeland (STU ccxxii, ccxxvi).

In the meantime, the conflict between the king and the jarl, depicted in *Hákonar saga*, is intensified. In the winter of 1232–1233, Skúli is suspected of preparing an assault on Hákon. After a confrontation at the assembly in Björgyn in the autumn of 1233, Skúli eventually accepts an agreement on the king's terms (HSH clxxxviii–cxciii). The tension is clearly not terminated by this formal reconciliation, as the text admits that "those who believed they knew both rulers' thoughts

said that there was never full trust between them again".[83] The saga blames the disagreements on evil men's calumny, but in fact there were probably other reasons. Until 1229, Skúli believed that he had no sons, so he accepted the plan that his daughter's sons with Hákon would inherit the kingdom, but then he found out that he had an illegitimate son, Pétr. The saga states that in 1236, he requested the right for his son to inherit his part of the country, which the king rejected (HSH ccvi). Another reason for Skúli's dissatisfaction may have been the new division of the country between him and Hákon (HSH ccxi), which was probably established when he was given the title of duke in 1237. The title itself must have been intended as a conciliatory gesture, but it probably had little real significance (Bagge 1996, 110–111).

Mistrust and forced agreements are important components of the jarl's story, because they accentuate the impossibility of a genuine, lasting reconciliation between the opposing parties. *Íslendinga saga* refers to these events in connection with Sturla Sighvatsson's arrival in Norway in 1233 and his contact with Skúli's kinsman Álfr Erlingsson of Þornberg (STU ccxxvi):

> [Álfr] tók allvel við Sturlu ok bað hann þar bíða þess er hertoginn kæmi norðan ok sagðist vilja koma honum í vináttu við hertogann. Sagði Álfr Sturlu at hertoginn mundi gjöra hann at inum mesta manni, slíkt afbragð sem hann væri annarra manna, en kallaði hertogann vera inn mesta vin Íslendinga ok þó mestan Sturlunga. Sturla vildi ekki annat en fara suðr til Björgynjar á fund Hákonar konungs, en þá var sundrþykki mikit með þeim mágum, ok drógu þeir þá lið saman, slíkt er þeir fengu. Þeir fundust um haustit í Björgyn ok sættust, ok þótti hertoganum sér þá heldr erfitt veita sættin. […] Fann Sturla Hákon konung í Túnsbergi, ok tók hann allvel við honum. Dvalði hann þar lengi inn síðasta vetr er hann var í Nóregi, ok töluðu þeir konungrinn ok Sturla jafnan. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 226, pp. 241–242)

> ([Álfr] gave Sturla a very warm welcome and asked him to wait there for the duke[84] to return from the north. He said that he wished to establish friendship between him and the duke. He also said to Sturla that the duke would make him a highly important man, because Sturla was so much more excellent than other men, and he called the duke a true friend of Icelanders and mainly of the Sturlungar. Sturla insisted on going south to Björgyn and meeting King Hákon. There was then a sharp conflict between Hákon and his father-in-law Skúli, and they both gathered as many men as they could. In the autumn they met in Björgyn and were reconciled, but the duke felt that the agreement was difficult to accept for him. […] Sturla met King Hákon in Túnsberg, and the king gave him a very warm welcome. Sturla spent most of his last winter in Norway there, and the king and Sturla often talked to each other.)

83 […] þat hafa þeir menn sagt er vita þóttusk hvárstveggja skaplyndi at aldri hafi síðan orðit fullr trúnaðr milli þeira (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 193, p. 23).

84 Skúli was in fact not a duke at this time, but he was clearly best known by that title when the saga was written.

The text shows that Álfr is quite eager to persuade Sturla to accept an alliance with Skúli, thus implying that the support of powerful Icelanders is regarded as an important factor in Norwegian politics. Álfr calls Skúli "a true friend of Icelanders and mainly of the Sturlungar", probably referring to Skúli's alliance with Snorri.[85] That may imply that the reason for Sturla's rejection of the alliance with Skúli is the strife between Sturla and Snorri at the time (see 3.2.5) and Sturla's intention to enter into an alliance with King Hákon against Skúli and Snorri. This is supported by the direct reference to the conflict between Skúli and Hákon and to their confrontation in Björgyn, which reminds the audience that by choosing an alliance with the king, Sturla joins the Norwegian power struggle. All these aspects emphasize the connection between the political conflicts in Iceland and Norway.

This is further accentuated in both *Íslendinga saga*'s and *Hákonar saga*'s account of King Hákon's negotiations with Sturla Sighvatsson. They show that the king is eager to establish an alliance with Sturla at the time of an intense rivalry with Skúli, but he cannot expect the Icelander's unconditional devotion, so he must appeal to Sturla's own interests in the Icelandic power struggle. It is thus underlined that the connection between Icelandic and Norwegian politics goes in both directions. These texts, just like the account of Snorri's first agreement with the rulers, admit the king's interest in ruling Iceland, but there is nothing to imply that the Icelandic chieftain is opposed to it. Instead, he is presented as an active participant in the arrangements, who thinks of his own political gains. Both sagas also highlight the king's efforts to reduce violence in Iceland, thus foregrounding the positive impact of centralized rule:

> Hákon konungr var ok mikill vin Sturlu, því at þat var mjök talat at þeir Sturla hefði þau ráð gjört at hann skyldi vinna land undir Hákon konung, en konungr skyldi gera hann höfðingja yfir landinu. Hafði Hákon konungr þar mest varaðan Sturlu við at hann skyldi eigi auka manndráp á landinu ok reka menn heldr útan. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 295, p. 347)
>
> (King Hákon was also a true friend of Sturla, because many people said that the king and Sturla had decided that Sturla should make the country submit to King Hákon, who would then let him rule the country. King Hákon had then mainly warned Sturla against adding to the killings in Iceland; he should rather expel men from the country.)
>
> Konungr hafði Sturlu í boði sínu ok talaði við hann marga hluti. Lét konungr illa yfir því er Sturla sagði honum ófrið mikinn af Íslandi. Konungr spurði hversu mikið fyrir mundi verða at koma einvaldi á landit ok lét þá mundu verða friðbetra ef einn réði mestu. Sturla tók

85 A very similar account is found in *Elzta saga Guðmundar biskups* (ccl), which mentions Álfr of Þornberg, Skúli's friendship with Icelanders and with the Sturlungar, and the conflict between Hákon and Skúli. The idea that Skúli is friendly towards Icelanders is also expressed in *Arons saga* (xv).

> þessu líkliga ok kallaði lítit mundu fyrir verða ef sá væri harðyrkr ok ráðugr er við tæki. Konungr spurði ef hann vildi taka þat ráð. Hann kvezk til mundu hætta með konungs ráði ok forsjá ok eiga slíkra sæmða ván af konungi sem honum þætti verðugt ef hann fengi þessu á leið komið. Konungr sagði svá at eigi skyldi með manndrápum vinna landit, en bað hann taka menn ok senda útan eða fá ríki þeira með öðru móti ef hann mætti. Sturla var oftliga fyrir konunginum um vetrinn, ok töluðu þeir um þetta mál. (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 196, pp. 24–25)
>
> (The king invited Sturla to his court and discussed many matters with him. He was displeased when Sturla told him about the fierce fights in Iceland. The king asked how difficult it would be to establish monarchy in the country, and he said that there would be better peace if one man decided on most matters. Sturla agreed and said that it would not be difficult if the man who took up the task was determined and resolute. The king asked him whether he wished to take up the task himself. Sturla answered that he would try it with the king's approval and support, and that if he succeeds, he expects to receive as much honour from the king as he feels he deserves. The king told him not to conquer the country by killing his opponents, but rather by capturing them and expelling them from the country, or by gaining their domains by other means if he could. Sturla was often with the king that winter, and they talked about this matter.)

As it turns out, however, Sturla's methods after his return to Iceland are far less peaceful than the king would have wished;[86] Sturla violently opposes Snorri, his son Órækja, and their ally Þorleifr Þórðarson (see 3.2.5). He partly follows the king's advice when he eventually expels all three opponents from Iceland, but then he turns to violence again in his decisive clash with his foremost rivals, Gizurr Þorvaldsson and Kolbeinn Arnórsson. This conflict leads to the death of Sturla, his father, and several brothers in the battle of Örlygsstaðir in 1238 (see 3.2.5). The sagas' emphasis on the king's peaceful instructions implies that Sturla causes his own downfall by disregarding the monarch's advice and immoderately turning to violence. The king's influence is thus depicted positively, and the tragic ending is presented as the Icelander's fault.

Snorri Sturluson is in Norway with Duke Skúli at the time of Sturla's death. In the narrative, his fate is linked to Skúli's conflict with King Hákon (STU ccci):

> Um vetrinn eptir Örlygsstaðafund voru þeir með Skúla hertuga í Niðarósi Snorri Sturluson ok Órækja, son hans, ok Þorleifr Þórðarson, en Þórðr kakali var í Björgyn með Hákoni konungi. En um várit fengu þeir skip er átti Guðleikr á Skartastöðum, vinr Snorra, ok bjöggu þat til hafs með ráði hertugans. En er þeir voru búnir ok höfðu lagt út undir Hólm, þá komu

86 Þetta sumar kom Órækja Snorrason af Íslandi ok sagði þaðan mikinn ófrið af Sturlu frænda sínum, ok virði konungr svá sem Sturla hefði harðara at farit en hann hafði honum ráð fyrir gert. (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 206, p. 36) (That summer Órækja Snorrason came from Iceland and brought news about his kinsman Sturla's fierce violence. The king believed that Sturla had behaved more ferociously than he had advised him.)

> menn sunnan frá konungi ok með bréfum, ok stóð þat á at konungr bannaði þeim öllum Íslendingum at fara út á því sumri. Þeir sýndu Snorra bréfin, ok svarar hann svá: „Út vil ek.“ Ok þá er þeir voru búnir hafði hertuginn þá í boði sínu áðr þeir tóku orlof. Voru þá fáir menn við tal þeira hertugans ok Snorra. Arnfinnr Þjófsson ok Óláfr hvítaskáld voru með hertuganum, en Órækja ok Þorleifr með Snorra. Ok var þat sögn Arnfinns at hertuginn gæfi Snorra jarlsnafn, ok svá hefir Styrmir inn fróði ritat: „Ártíð Snorra fólgsnarjarls,“ en engi þeira Íslendinganna lét þat á sannast. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 301, p. 355)
>
> (Snorri Sturluson, his son Órækja, and Þorleifr Þórðarson spent the winter after the battle of Örlygsstaðir with Duke Skúli in Niðarós, while Þórðr kakali was in Björgyn with King Hákon. In the spring, they took the ship owned by Snorri's friend Guðleikr of Skartastaðir and prepared it for departure with the duke's approval. But when they were prepared and had sailed out past Hólmr, the king's men came from the south with letters stating that the king forbade all Icelanders to leave Norway that summer. They showed Snorri the letters and he replied: "I will sail." And when they were ready, the duke invited them to his court before they took leave. There were few men present when the duke talked to Snorri – Arnfinnr Þjófsson and Óláfr hvítaskáld were there with the duke, and Órækja and Þorleifr with Snorri. And Arnfinnr later said that the duke gave Snorri the title of jarl, and Styrmir the Learned has written "the anniversary of Snorri the Secret Jarl's death,"[87] but none of the other Icelanders confirmed it.)

The king forbids Snorri and his companions to return to Iceland, possibly because he fears that Snorri could easily gain power on Skúli's behalf after the death of the king's chief Icelandic ally, Sturla Sighvatsson. However, Snorri decides to disregard the ban, thus showing his allegiance to Skúli, who clearly regards him as an important ally. It is even implied that Skúli may have secretly granted Snorri the title of jarl, which would mean that Snorri was intended to become the sole leader of Iceland in the case of Skúli's conquest of the throne. Snorri is thus presented as a direct participant in the Norwegian power struggle, one of the leading characters in the jarl's story. Skúli plays a decisive role in Snorri's political career: if Skúli rules Norway, Snorri will rule Iceland; if Skúli falls, it will lead to Snorri's downfall as well. The Norwegian and Icelandic power struggles have become so closely intertwined that they can no longer continue independently of each other. That is, however, not depicted as a negative development – it is only Snorri's decision to support the losing side that leads to his fall.

Hákonar saga (ccxiv) does not mention Snorri's title of jarl, but otherwise it presents a similar image. It sets the episode in the context of Skúli's rivalry with Hákon by referring to their plans to meet and negotiate, which are pervaded by mistrust. A reference to the defeat of the Sturlungar suggests a connection be-

87 Styrmir Kárason the Learned was a priest, *lögsögumaðr*, and later the prior of the Viðey monastery. He probably wrote this note in a calendar belonging to a church, so that the death would be commemorated during mass.

tween Sturla Sighvatsson's death and the king's decision to forbid Snorri to return to Iceland – this means that the king's loss of his most powerful Icelandic ally is regarded as an event that can affect the power balance in Norway:

> [Hákon konungr] sendi orð um vetrinn norðr til hertugans at þeir skyldu finnask um sumarit í Björgyn ok bað hann fara norðan með léttiskipum ok óhægja eigi bóndum til þessar ferðar. Íslenzka menn, þá sem með hertuga váru, bað konungr ekki út fara fyrr en þeir hefði ráð fyrir gert með hverjum erendum þeir skyldu fara, því at áðr um haustit hafði spurzk at þeir höfðu barizk í Skagafirði, Kolbeinn ungi ok Gizurr, við Sturlunga ok Sturlungar höfðu fallit. […] Hann frétti at hertugi hafði gefið orlof Snorra Sturlusyni ok Órækju syni hans ok Þorleifi til Íslands ok fengit skip þat er hann átti hálft en hálft Guðleikr af Skartastöðum. Þegar sem konungr frétti þetta þá gerði hann norðr bréf ok bannaði at þeir færi. Þessi bréf kómu til þeira er þeir lágu við haf, ok fóru þeir eigi at síðr í banni konungs. (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 214, p. 43)
>
> (In winter [King Hákon] sent a message north to the duke that they should meet in Björgyn the following summer and asked him to arrive from the north on light ships and not to trouble the farmers with the journey.[88] The king asked the Icelanders who were staying with the duke not to leave Norway before it was decided what their mission should be, because the previous autumn the news had arrived of a battle in Skagafjörðr, in which Kolbeinn the Young and Gizurr had fought against the Sturlungar, and the Sturlungar had been defeated. […] He [the king] found out that the duke had given Snorri Sturluson, his son Órækja, and Þorleifr permission to return to Iceland and to use the ship that he owned together with Guðleikr of Skartastaðir. As soon as the king found out about this, he sent letters to the north and forbade them to depart. They received these letters when they were ready to sail and left Norway despite the king's ban.)

The mention of the Icelanders' "mission" (*erendi*) presumably refers to the king's provisions concerning his political relations with Icelanders after Sturla's fall, possibly the king's intention to prevent Snorri from gaining power in Iceland on behalf of Skúli, and instead to persuade him to act on behalf of the king. Snorri's choice to disregard the king's ban is a sign of his determination to support Skúli, so he is again presented as a participant in the jarl's story.

Hákonar saga eventually turns to the culmination of the conflict between Skúli and Hákon, the final section of the jarl's story. Skúli finally stops hiding his plan to dethrone Hákon and publicly claims the crown (HSH ccxix–ccxxi). This leads to violent clashes, in which Skúli first wins a battle against King Hákon's allies (HSH ccxlvii–ccxlviii) but then loses the decisive battle of Oslo in the spring of 1240 and flees from it (HSH cclxvi–cclxxii). After the battle, King Hákon gives mercy to those of Skúli's adherents who give themselves up to him (HSH cclxxiii); Skúli hides in a monastery but is killed by Hákon's men on 24 May 1240 (HSH cclxxx). This is a typical ending of the jarl's story: a reconciliation is unattainable

88 This implies that the king is afraid of an armed clash if Skúli arrives with a larger force.

once the jarl has crossed a line in the power struggle, so the only possible option is the jarl's defeat by violent means. The king magnanimously spares his defeated opponent's soldiers, but the defiant jarl must be killed because he has seriously threatened the internal unity of the kingdom.

Íslendinga saga refers to Skúli's fall only briefly (STU cccv),[89] but this sufficiently contextualizes the rest of Snorri's story. When he has ended up on the losing side in the power struggle, the structural pattern of the jarl's story leads to the expectation of his fall. The saga reveals the king's command that Snorri must be either sent to Norway or killed by the king's new chief Icelandic ally, Gizurr Þorvaldsson (STU cccx):

> Var þar á at Gizurr skyldi Snorra láta útan fara, hvárt er honum þætti ljúft eða leitt, eða drepa hann at öðrum kosti fyrir þat er hann hafði farit út i bani konungs. Kallaði Hákon konungr Snorra landráðamann við sik. Sagði Gizurr at hann vildi með öngu móti brjóta bréf konungs, en kveðst vita at Snorri mundi eigi ónauðigr útan fara. Kveðst Gizurr þá vildu til fara ok taka Snorra. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 310, p. 368)
>
> (It was written there that Gizurr should make Snorri travel to Norway, whether Snorri agreed with it or not, or else, if there was no other way, he should kill him for having left Norway despite the king's ban. King Hákon proclaimed Snorri guilty of high treason. Gizurr said that he did not wish to disregard the king's letter in any way, but he said he knew that Snorri would never travel to Norway unless he was forced to do so. He said he intended to go and capture Snorri.)

The preceding narrative has already clearly connected the king's ban of Snorri's return to Iceland with Snorri's support of Skúli, so the reference to the ban in this chapter must be understood in this context. It is thus Snorri's involvement in Skúli's efforts to dethrone King Hákon that can be regarded as the main reason for the accusation of high treason.[90] This connects the king's command concerning Snorri to the jarl's story. Nevertheless, the king's preferred solution is for Snorri

89 Þetta sumar kom Eyvindr brattr ok Árni óreiða út með bréfum Hákonar konungs, ok var þeim lítt upp haldit. Þeir sögðu ok ófrið þann er verit hafði um vetrinn í Nóregi ok fall Skúla hertuga. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 305, p. 359) (This summer, Eyvindr brattr and Árni óreiða arrived in Iceland with King Hákon's letters, which were little regarded. They also brought the news of the war that had occurred in Norway the previous winter and of Duke Skúli's fall.)

90 Admittedly, according to *Hirðskrá*, vassals who leave Norway against the king's will are traitors and forfeit their rights and property (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999, 72). *Hákonar saga* shows, however, that the king is not so uncompromising in practice. He is, for instance, willing to forgive Snorri's son Órækja for the same misdeed: "Hann kom á vald Hákonar konungs í Björgyn, ok gaf hann honum skjótt upp reiði sína er hann hafði á honum fyrir þat er hann fór út í banni hans." (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 285, p. 119) ([Órækja] gave himself up to King Hákon in Björgyn and the king soon gave up the wrath [Órækja] had incurred by leaving Norway despite his ban.)

to come to Norway, where they could possibly be reconciled.[91] Snorri's death is presented first and foremost as a consequence of internal Icelandic competition for power. Gizurr is furthering his own interests when he uses the king's command as a welcome excuse to get rid of his major rival. Accordingly, Gizurr makes no attempt at the peaceful solution suggested by the king and has Snorri killed on 23 September 1241 (STU cccx). This again shows how closely intertwined Icelandic and Norwegian politics have become: when Snorri is weakened by his choice of the defeated party in the Norwegian power struggle, his chief opponent in Iceland uses it as an opportunity to eliminate him. Snorri's conflict with King Hákon is thus not interpreted in the narrative as a sign of enmity between Iceland and Norway, but rather as an episode in the process through which both countries were connected.

However, what is most important for the interpretation of these events is that despite the tragic tone of the jarl's story, Snorri is never portrayed as a passive victim. Both he and Sturla Sighvatsson are depicted as active participants in Norwegian politics, who voluntarily decide to join the conflict between King Hákon and Skúli Bárðarson, well aware of the potential gains and possible risk. They are willing to negotiate with the rulers and serve their interests, but they never blindly obey Hákon or Skúli. This interpretation is achieved not only by the individual scenes depicting their contact with the rulers in *Íslendinga saga* and *Hákonar saga*, but also by the interplay between the narrative type of the court poet's story and the jarl's story in the former and latter section of the account of Snorri's life in both sagas. The court poet's story foregrounds the Icelander's confident initiative to establish his contact with the royal court, and this positive image then modifies even the perception of the less optimistic jarl's story. The emphasis on the Icelandic chieftains' important and active role in Norwegian politics then influences the whole evaluation of the relationship between Icelanders and the monarchy, from which the medieval recipients of the sagas could derive a positive self-image.

4.5 Constructing a memory of contact

The texts analysed in this chapter pay much attention to the beginning of Iceland's direct political contact with the Norwegian monarchy, presumably because this relationship was still in the process of negotiation at the time of their origin and compilation. The Icelanders' perception of their own marginality probably

91 The king expressly says to Órækja Snorrason that "eigi mundi faðir hans dáit hafa ef hann hefði komit á minn fund" (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 285, p. 119) (his father would not have died if he had come to meet me).

became an increasingly pressing issue due to the current political development, so they presumably felt the need to reaffirm their position within the Norse and Christian cultural region more than ever before. This doubtlessly influenced the way in which they chose to narrativize their recent history, in particular the selection of themes that are foregrounded in the narratives.

It has been argued here that the sagas were primarily intended to deconstruct the notion of Iceland's social marginality by presenting it as equal to the more central areas in terms of important intellectual, cultural, or spiritual aspects. Another, closely related theme is the emphasis on the Icelanders' active initiative to establish and negotiate their relationship with the monarchy. They are presented as being open to acknowledging royal power but refusing to be passively subordinated to the king. The sagas also express the idea that contact with Norway can contribute to developing the positive aspects of Icelandic identity, as opposed to isolation, which would hinder Iceland's dynamic social and cultural evolution. These themes connect the contemporary sagas, including the bishops' sagas, with the narratives of the distant past, thus reinforcing the sense of continuity in the presentation of Icelandic history.

This thematic continuity is also reflected in the narrative types shared by the contemporary sagas and the sagas or *þættir* about the distant past. This typological similarity creates parallels between recent historical persons and comparable characters from the Saga Age. The recent narratives are thus integrated into the audience's cultural memory, so that they transcend their meaning as accounts of specific individuals' lives and participate in the construction of collective identity.

The main narrative type in the depiction of contact between Icelanders and the Norwegian royal court is the travel story. Its structural pattern is centred around a transition from the protagonist's initial low status in Norway and alienation from the court to his social integration and prestigious position. An important element of the travel story is the Norwegians' prejudice against Icelandic newcomers. This prejudice is based on a sense of regional, rather than national identity; it is comparable to the way in which the inhabitants of central regions or cities have tended to mock villagers from remote regions in many cultures throughout history. The provincial origin of Icelanders is, however, counterbalanced by their skills and personal qualities, which are eventually discovered and appreciated by the king. The travel story thus shows not only the protagonist's actual travels, but also his 'journey' from alienation to acceptance.

In the construction of collective identity, this narrative type reflects some of the insecurities related to the medieval Icelanders' geographical and economic peripherality, but it shows that they can be overcome. It expresses the idea that Icelanders prefer contact with Scandinavia to isolation from it and believe in their potential for a positive relationship with the monarchy despite possible ini-

tial difficulties. In the sagas of the Icelandic saintly bishops, this otherwise secular narrative type accentuates their function as identity-building texts. The protagonists, just like their secular counterparts, face conflicts in Norway but eventually reach a satisfactory reconciliation and prove their mental strength, integrity, and spiritual excellence. These hagiographic sagas thus deconstruct Iceland's social marginality not only by portraying native saints, but also by showing specific examples of the protagonists overcoming alienation on their journeys abroad.

The image of Icelandic identity in contact with the monarchy is further developed in the royal retainer's story, which pays less attention to the Icelanders' marginality and more to the inherently hierarchical nature of their relationships with the rulers. The narrative type is therefore focused on the boundaries between service and freedom, loyalty and subordination, or courage and aggression. The compatibility of service and freedom is foregrounded by an emphasis on the protagonist's voluntary decision to enter the ruler's service, or even to sacrifice his life for him. The retainer is rewarded for his loyalty with a unique type of prestige that is more absolute and permanent than the changeable personal status offered by Icelandic society, so the royal service improves his reputation and social position. Moreover, it also increases his personal integrity, as his belligerence receives a meaningful purpose and his disruptive ferocity is transformed into socially beneficial courage.

The focus on voluntary loyalty is related to the theme of the Icelanders' active initiative in important situations, which is established already in the narratives of early Icelandic history and receives even more significance in the contemporary sagas. Despite its inevitably hierarchical nature, the Icelanders' relationship with the monarch is thus not presented as a loss of freedom. When this narrative type is employed in the story of Þorvarðr and Ari in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*, it adds an important political dimension to the saga, turning an individual biography into a text that contributes to the construction of collective identity.

The image of the Icelander's confidence and active initiative reaches its peak in the court poet's story. Whereas the travel story highlights the Icelander's initial marginality, the court poet's story emphasizes his extraordinary intellectual skills, his freedom in deciding to enter a king's service, his ability to negotiate the conditions of his relationship with the monarch, and his special privileges at the royal court. This narrative type probably exaggerates the skalds' privileges far beyond historical reality – in any case that of the thirteenth century – but it is all the more important for the narrative construction of collective identity. Its excessively glamorous image of the Icelander at the royal court contributes to a socially relevant interpretation of real-life relationships between Icelanders and the Norwegian monarchy.

Moreover, apart from portraying the protagonist as something like a medieval celebrity, the court poet's story also accentuates the skald's diplomatic role in Scandinavian politics. This element of the narrative type seems to accord quite well with the thirteenth-century historical reality, and it emphasizes the Icelanders' active participation in Norwegian power relations during the Sturlung Age. The Icelanders are thus not presented as powerless pawns caught in the intricacies of the high political game, but rather as determined politicians seeking to promote their position and willing to take risks.

The emphasis on the confident image of the Icelander is most obvious in the narrative portrayal of Snorri Sturluson. Whereas the skalds in the kings' sagas usually arrive at the royal court poor and socially insignificant, Snorri is an influential, wealthy chieftain already before his arrival in Norway. This removes the initial contrast between the poet's sharp intellect and low social position. In this case, however, the modification of the narrative type does not change its overall tone but rather strengthens it. The structure and themes of the court poet's story enable the presentation of Snorri as an active participant in establishing the political relationship between Iceland and the Norwegian monarchy despite his tenuous political success; the narrative thus rejects any notion of passive subordination.

⁎

All these narrative types shaped the meaning of the sagas' accounts of recent history. The facts that existed in communicative memory were given, but the way of narrating them was open to choice. The process of narrativization enabled the selection of what would be foregrounded, what would be forgotten, and which persons and events would be incorporated into cultural memory. That depended on what the preferred interpretation of history was.

There is little doubt that an effort to interpret the past motivated the portrayal of some noteworthy side characters in the sagas. The brothers Ingimundr, Þorvarðr, and Ari Þorgeirsson were doubtlessly known in communicative memory for their kinship with the saintly bishop Guðmundr Arason, but also for their own accomplishments. During the transition to cultural memory, the bishop's life inspired the production of several sagas due to his importance as a historical personage and as an identity bearer. The historical significance of the brothers could not compare with that of Guðmundr, so they did not receive their own saga. However, their stories served as suitable material for the construction of collective identity because they could illustrate important aspects of the Icelanders' contact with the Norwegian rulers. That is probably the reason why *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* does not just mention the brothers in passing as the protagonist's kinsmen, but the accounts of their lives are developed into brief but carefully structured stories that follow some of the predominant narrative types. Due to the collective knowledge of these

narrative types among the original recipients of the saga, the structure of these stories could reveal the deeper layers of their meaning.

The narrative types play an essential role in shaping the meaning of the sagas' main storylines as well; they enable sophisticated interpretative strategies, especially if two contrasting narrative types are combined in the account of a protagonist's life. It has been shown here how the optimistic tone of the travel story can be further emphasized in combination with an inherently tragic narrative type, such as the outlaw's story in *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*. The outlaw's story represents the tragic state of social marginality, but then the saga modifies this narrative type through a combination with the travel story, thus accentuating the unexpectedly optimistic ending and the deconstruction of the initial marginality. The protagonist's marginality as an outlaw is contrasted with the prestige he enjoys at the royal court, and the tragedy of isolation is contrasted with the benefits of integration. The protagonist's physical transfer to Norway is followed by his appointment to a respectable position, which represents a mental and social incorporation into the centre. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem can be regarded as a completion of this process, as it establishes the Icelander's contact with the centre of the Christian world. Such a gradual transition from absolute marginality to the ultimate integration underlines the central ideas of the travel story.

An optimistic narrative type similarly modifies the meaning of a tragic narrative type in the story of Snorri Sturluson. The account of Snorri's first journey to Norway is structured by the pattern of the court poet's story. His first international contacts are depicted with a focus on poetry composed for Scandinavian aristocrats, which was probably not actually politically significant, but it receives much attention in the saga because it builds up the interpretative framework of the narrative type. The protagonist is alienated from the monarchs when they plan a military expedition to Iceland, but a reconciliation follows when Snorri averts the armed clash by his diplomatic eloquence and clever negotiation, typical of the narrative image of skalds. On the surface of the narrative, the prestige and gifts received by Snorri are also presented as a reward for his poetry. At the end of the episode, the text again emphasizes Snorri's poem and its parody, thus drawing attention to the court poet's story as the framework of the whole narrative's meaning. When the account of Snorri's first contact with the monarchy is fitted into the structural pattern of the narrative type that presents the most self-confident image of Icelandic identity, the text accentuates his voluntary decision to enter the Norwegian power game and his assertive negotiation with the rulers. It thus expresses the idea that the Icelanders' relationship with the monarchy is not based on passive obedience but on open debate.

This part of Snorri's story is followed by the latter section, shaped by the contrasting narrative type of the inherently tragic jarl's story, because Snorri's fate is inseparably intertwined with the fate of his Norwegian ally, Skúli Bárðarson. Snor-

ri's tragic end is presented as a result of his decision to support Skúli, the defeated party in the Norwegian power struggle, instead of the victorious King Hákon. Nevertheless, although the jarl's story contrasts with the optimistic tone of the court poet's story, it does not negate its meaning. The court poet's story, with its focus on the Icelander's active approach to establishing political alliances with the monarchy, shapes even the meaning of the second part of the narrative about Snorri. He is thus not presented as a passive victim, but rather as a player in the political game who deliberately enters the power struggle, actively chooses a side, and willingly accepts the inevitable risk. On a more universal level, this implies that Icelandic society is not viewed as a passive victim either; the political contact with Norway is presented as the Icelanders' own initiative. The tragic ending of Snorri's story could have given the Icelanders an opportunity to create a narrative image of their opposition to Norway if such a narrative had been desirable for the construction of their collective identity. Instead, however, the existing portrayal of Snorri serves as a figurative image of the Icelanders' active role in their relationships with the Norwegian kingdom, while the inevitable difficulties are not concealed.

These examples show how the meaning can be modified when recent historical events are fitted into the structural patterns of the narrative types. The resulting texts are not essentially historically inaccurate, but they are not neutral records of events either – they offer a balanced combination of fact and interpretation, which is enabled by their narrative nature. The textuality and intertextuality of the sagas contribute to an interpretation of history and a construction of collective identity from the perspective of the time of their origin. Apart from intra-literary connections, the sagas thus also reflect their extra-literary contexts. They describe the past but figuratively comment on present concerns, which affect the selection of themes and narrative types. This means that the memory of the past is shaped by its relationship with the present, but the present identity is simultaneously derived from the remembered past.

Due to this constant interaction between memory and identity, it makes little sense to divide one from the other or to categorize the sagas as either *history* or *fiction*. The original audiences doubtlessly perceived both the secular and hagiographic contemporary sagas as history in the broad medieval sense but also understood them as interpretations of the past and sources of collective identity. Moreover, some of the sagas contain elements of divinity and miracle, which in the medieval understanding transcend the boundary between reality and belief. All these aspects of the sagas construct their meaning together, contributing to their function as narrative images of the medieval Icelanders' worldview and perception of their own position in the world. The same applies to the texts analysed in the following chapter, which may appear to be more strictly historiographical, but textuality and intertextuality are just as important for their meaning.

5 The time of transformation: Iceland's political integration with Norway

It has been argued here that the Norwegian power struggle was the primary impulse for Hákon Hákonarson's and Skúli Bárðarson's active interest in Iceland. It was Snorri Sturluson's own initiative to seek Norwegian alliances, but his action may not have created such firm political bonds between the two countries if it had not been for the rivalry between the co-rulers. Due to this rivalry, Skúli aimed for gaining the support of influential Icelanders already during Snorri's first visit to Norway in 1218–1220; King Hákon soon followed suit because he understood that Icelanders had become a significant force in Norwegian politics. If one of the chieftains had managed to gain decisive power in Iceland on behalf of one of the rulers, it could have affected the power balance in Norway. Because of the highly unstable political situation in Iceland, however, none of the chieftains achieved such a position. Nevertheless, the direct political relationships between the leading Icelanders and the Norwegian monarchy had a significant impact on the development of power structures in Iceland.

After Skúli's fall, King Hákon no longer needed the Icelanders' support in internal power struggles, but a direct political contact with Iceland was already firmly established. Influential Icelanders continued to actively seek the king's support because they needed centralized rule due to the political developments in the preceding decades. When King Hákon's internal position was stabilized after Skúli's defeat and he had established personal alliances with some of the most powerful Icelanders, the next step was the formal establishment of royal rule in Iceland, which took place on two levels. Firstly, the king acquired control over the chieftaincies through confiscation and transfers; secondly, the royal representatives worked on securing the Icelanders' formal acceptance of the monarchy (Wærdahl 2011, 89).

By 1250, King Hákon had gained most chieftaincies, mainly through direct contact with the chieftains, who were nevertheless too busy competing against each other to fully concentrate on furthering the king's case. From 1254, the king therefore employed Norwegian emissaries who had no personal political ambitions in Iceland. Their task was to persuade Icelanders to formally accept the monarchy, but they were not appointed to govern any territories because they lacked a local power base, which was necessary for the royal representatives in their patron-client relationships with the farmers. The Norwegian kingdom had also once been established through the kings' political relationships with the local magnates, and the establishment of royal rule in Iceland followed the same principles (Wærdahl 2011, 95–103).

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This gradual process was formally completed in 1262, when the leading Icelandic chieftains and representatives of the farmers swore allegiance to the Norwegian kings. The acceptance of royal rule in Iceland has been presented in research as a crucial transformative event, and its evaluation has ranged from ideas of the Icelanders' sheer opposition to the monarchy to more balanced perceptions of constant mutual negotiation.

Earlier Icelandic researchers presented a strikingly negative assessment of Iceland's integration into the Norwegian kingdom. It was regarded as a loss of national independence, caused by the king's unilateral expansive politics, in which he deliberately increased the strife between Icelanders in order to weaken them (Jón Jónsson Aðils 1903, 101–102; Sigurður Nordal 1942, 340–341; Jón Jóhannesson 1956, 291). This negative perception of the monarchy was connected with the idea that King Hákon was a foreigner to Icelanders, and the complicated political circumstances in both countries were often ignored in the evaluation of the king's treatment of Icelanders (Jón Helgason 1925, 132–133; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1940, 23).

Such interpretations were based on a lack of comparison with the processes of power centralization in other medieval European states; they also ignored the historical, economic, and cultural connections between medieval Iceland and Norway. They were shaped by the political climate at the time of their origin, when the Icelandic historians' perception of the past was influenced by Iceland's struggle for political independence from Denmark, so they applied modern ideas of national independence to medieval history (Gunnar Karlsson 1980; Byock 1992; Halink 2018).[92] This is understandable in the light of memory theories, as the modern historiographical works, just like the medieval sources themselves, were media of memory that served "particular interests and ideological positions" (Gillis 1994, 4).

However, the negative perception of medieval Iceland's relationship with the Norwegian monarchy still continues to shape research on Icelandic history and culture. This has probably been caused partly by the overall cultural prominence of the modern concepts of nationality and freedom, and partly by the insufficient

92 In the 1830s, Icelandic intellectuals in Copenhagen raised the claim of re-establishing the Alþingi as a national parliament, which was fulfilled in the early 1840s. This started the political movement led by Jón Sigurðsson, who argued that after the end of absolutism in 1848, power over Iceland could only be given to the Icelandic people, not to the Danish people. After intense political efforts, the Alþingi was granted a legislative function in 1874. In 1904, Iceland received home rule with a local minister, and in 1918, a separate Icelandic state in a personal union with Denmark was established. The Second World War then re-opened a debate that brought about the establishment of the Republic of Iceland in 1944 (Byock 1992, 50–56).

scholarly interest in the contemporary sagas as sources reflecting cultural memory and collective identity.

Ann-Marie Long (2017), in her otherwise excellent analysis of selected historiographical and legal sources from the perspective of cultural memory studies, speaks of the Icelanders' "deep-seated and persistent resentment towards their ancestral homeland and its monarch" (2017, 4), whom she characterizes as "the ominous ever-present figure of a distant king who had the potential to threaten unwanted intervention in the island's domestic affairs" (2017, 101). Nicolas Meylan (2014) foregrounds the presumed opposition to the Norwegian monarchy in medieval Iceland in his study on the motifs of magic in selected Old Norse texts, which he regards as a narrative means of expressing the "Icelandic polemics against the kings of Norway" (2014, 47). He speaks of "the Norwegian Crown's encroachment on [the] kingless and armyless island" (2014, 126) and of "an Icelandic subtext of political resistance" (2014, 198).

While certain anti-royal attitudes may have existed in medieval Iceland and may be reflected in some of the sources discussed in these studies, the authors seem to take the idea of the medieval Icelanders' opposition to royal rule for granted. I believe that a more nuanced view can be achieved through an analysis of the contemporary sagas, which are a major source of the medieval Icelanders' predominant interpretations of their political contact with the Norwegian monarchy in the thirteenth century.

A thorough reassessment has been presented in some studies with a primarily historical focus, which use the contemporary sagas as sources but foreground the political aspects of the relationship between medieval Iceland and Norway, rather than the questions of collective identity. Gunnar Karlsson has concluded that King Hákon "never did anything to force Icelanders to accept his rule"[93] and that "it can certainly be assumed that many thirteenth-century Icelanders wished to become a king's subjects like other civilized people in the world".[94] Similarly, Ármann Jakobsson has pointed out that *Íslendinga saga* expresses approval of royal rule as a solution to the violence of the Sturlung Age.[95] He has also empha-

93 […] gerði aldrei neitt sem neyddi Íslendinga til að játast undir yfirráð hans (1975, 52).

94 […] víst má gera ráð fyrir að margir 13. aldar Íslendingar hafi viljað komast í tölu konungsþegna eins og annað siðað fólk heimsbyggðarinnar (1975, 53).

95 Það er einmitt konungurinn sem heggur á þann hnút ættvíga og ófriðar sem lýst er í bókinni. Í *Íslendinga sögu* er hvergi efast um að sú leið út úr ófriðarvítahringnum sem Íslendingar völdu með því að gangast undir skattgjald til Noregskonungs 1262–1264 hafi verið sú eina rétta. (1994b, 31) (It is the king who cuts the knot of killings and hostility that is depicted in the text. *Íslendinga saga* expresses no doubt that the way out of the vicious circle of violence that the Icelanders chose by their agreement to pay tax to the Norwegian king in 1262–1264 was the only right one.)

sized that the king's interventions into Icelandic politics were a result of the chieftains' own initiative and that the king never intentionally increased the internal strife in Iceland (1995, 176–178). Orri Vésteinsson has shown that the acceptance of royal rule was a step in the process of power concentration in Iceland, rather than a collapse of the system (2000, 8). This idea has been further developed by Sverrir Jakobsson, who describes the formation of domains (*héraðsríki*) in Iceland as a decisive step in establishing a foundation for royal rule (2012, 116).

This is related to a more general reassessment of the traditional image of medieval Iceland and Norway as contrasting societies with strikingly different political systems. It has been shown that despite the absence of a monarch in Iceland, there were considerable similarities between the internal power relations in both countries. Even in Norway, royal rule before the reign of Magnús Hákonarson (1263–1280) was not as stable in practice as it is presented in some kings' sagas (Wærdahl 2011, 14–15, 64–67). These sagas are shaped by the new royal ideology, introduced in Norway around the beginning of the thirteenth century, which implies that the monarch is omnipresent in the whole kingdom in the form of consistently administered justice, so that royal power is based on internalized obedience, independent of the king's personal presence (Orning 2008, 2, 46). However, the practical exercise of power in fact depended on the king's personal contact with the local leaders; the monarch was more powerful than the magnates but not powerful enough to be independent of their support. His relationships with them were typically characterized by conflict and compromise (2008, 102–105, 189–192).

Disagreements between the kings and the Icelandic chieftains therefore cannot be viewed as a unique antagonism, caused by the Icelanders' unusually strong desire for independence. Instead, this tension stemmed from the chieftains' dual role as local leaders and as royal representatives, and it was just as characteristic of the Norwegian magnates' relationships with the kings (2008, 227–229). The magnates derived their local authority from their patron-client relationships with the peasants; the kings were thus primarily the most powerful patrons in a society where patron-client relationships were still the strongest social ties (2008, 334–336) – just like they were in Iceland. This similarity of social structures disproves the idea of political contacts between Iceland and Norway as a collision between two contrasting systems.

Lastly, medieval Icelandic identity in the context of interaction with Norway has been re-evaluated in some recent studies as well, but the contemporary sagas are again largely left out as sources. Ármann Jakobsson focuses on the sagas of Icelanders (2002) and the kings' sagas (2014), showing that these sources do not associate Icelandic individuality with isolation but highlight the importance of interaction with Norwegian kings. Patricia Boulhosa (2005) builds on legal sources and the sagas of Icelanders; she challenges the notion of the acceptance of royal

rule as a radical event and suggests that the relationship between Iceland and Norway was formed by a constant process of negotiation (2005, 1–4, 209–213). Sverrir Jakobsson's study on the medieval Icelanders' worldview (2005) shows that they perceived themselves as a specific group in their contact with foreigners; mutual distrust or tests of intellect and courage can occur in the accounts of their contacts with the Norwegian royal court, but the overall relationship is not presented as opposition or enmity (2005, 343–346). These studies thus contribute to uprooting the ideas of the Icelanders' defensive attitude to the monarchy.

The objective of this chapter is to complement the findings outlined here by an analysis of how collective identity is presented in the contemporary sagas that depict Iceland's political integration with Norway and the process of accepting royal rule. The analysis is focused on the narrative portrayals of the leading participants in this process: Þórðr kakali Sighvatsson, Þorgils skarði Böðvarsson, Gizurr Þorvaldsson, and Sturla Þórðarson the younger. The chapter is intended to show how these portrayals are shaped by the saga tradition on the one hand and by newly introduced ideologies on the other hand. It will be argued here that these narratives further develop the themes established in texts dealing with the preceding periods of Icelandic history and that this thematic continuity is accentuated by complex intertextual connections both within and beyond *Sturlunga saga*.

5.1 Þórðr kakali Sighvatsson: The fighter

After both Sturla Sighvatsson's and Snorri Sturluson's death, the leading position among the Sturlungar passed to Sturla's brother Þórðr kakali Sighvatsson, who is portrayed in *Þórðar saga kakala*. At the time of the battle of Örlygsstaðir, Þórðr was in Norway, which was a lucky circumstance that probably saved his life. Nevertheless, the battle weakened the Sturlungar's position in Iceland, so Þórðr faced fierce opposition when he attempted to regain power.

These power struggles constitute the main storyline of *Þórðar saga*. The historical reality of the events is fitted into a structural pattern that consists of two subsequent conflict stories, each depicting the protagonist's dispute with one major opponent.[96] The narrative type of the conflict story is essential both for the composition of the storyline and for the construction of meaning in *Þórðar saga*. It creates a set of expectations, which are then partly fulfilled and partly modified in the saga.

96 The original separate *Þórðar saga* probably also described the preceding decades of the protagonist's life. The compiler of *Sturlunga saga* presumably omitted this part because the same events are depicted in *Íslendinga saga* (Jón Jóhannesson 1946, xli).

As a typical protagonist of a conflict story, Þórðr is portrayed first and foremost as a fighter but not as a ruthless aggressor. The narrative presents a balanced image of his positive qualities, such as courage, prowess, and determination, as well as his faults, mainly immoderate belligerence. It is the contrast between the protagonist's ferocity and the stabilizing forces in society that is decisive for the meaning of the conflict story. Its structural pattern accentuates the arbitration that terminates the conflict, thus emphasizing the importance of increasingly powerful mediators. In *Þórðar saga*, the character type of the mediator, who intervenes in the dispute as a neutral third party and advocates peace, is represented by the Norwegian king. As has been shown here, local Icelandic mediators could still actively intervene in individual conflicts during the Sturlung Age, as in *Svínfellinga saga*. There was, however, no authority strong enough to resolve extensive political rivalry, so external intervention became necessary, and the most powerful chieftains turned to the Norwegian king for arbitration. In *Þórðar saga*, the protagonist repeatedly decides to refrain from violence and rely on arbitration by the king; this element of the story transcends its individual meaning and figuratively illustrates the importance of royal rule for peace.

5.1.1 The first conflict story: Þórðr Sighvatsson and Kolbeinn Arnórsson

Around 1240, the most influential Icelandic chieftains had already become leaders of large, territorially defined domains. The first all-quarter domain was established in the Eastern Quarter by the Svínfellingar around 1220, but the family was divided and there was never one individual controlling the whole quarter. The second all-quarter domain was the result of the expansive politics of Snorri Sturluson in the years 1220–1232 and Sturla Sighvatsson after 1235, when the Sturlungar controlled almost all the Western Quarter and a part of the Northern Quarter. After the battle of Örlygsstaðir in 1238, Kolbeinn Arnórsson of the Ásbirningar gained all the Northern Quarter, which became the third all-quarter domain (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999, 71–75). After defeating Órækja Snorrason in 1242, Kolbeinn seized most of the Western Quarter as well. This led to his enmity with Þórðr Sighvatsson, which constitutes the first conflict story in the account of Þórðr's life in *Sturlunga saga*.

The conflict story begins with gradually increasing tension when Þórðr returns from Norway in 1242 and the Sturlungar's domain is governed by their opponent Kolbeinn Arnórsson, who has received forced oaths of loyalty from the local farmers. Kolbeinn's men pursue Þórðr with the intention of capturing and subduing him, while Þórðr attempts to gain support and gather followers (STU cccxvii–cccxxiv). Violent clashes and occasional killings occur (STU cccxxv–cccxxxv) and increasingly important men are killed, including Þórðr's brother Tumi Sighvatsson the

younger (STU cccxxxiii). The culmination of the conflict is the battle of Húnaflói on 25 June 1244, in which Þórðr is successful at first but then is forced to flee (STU cccxxxvi–cccxlii). The battle does not bring any decisive result and is followed by Þórðr's failed attempt to attack Kolbeinn in revenge (STU cccxliii).

This is where *Þórðar saga* modifies its narrative type. The structural pattern of the conflict story leads to the expectation of one of the leaders' violent death, but both leaders decide to seek reconciliation instead. Kolbeinn, who is seriously ill, negotiates with Þórðr, and they agree to travel to Norway and accept the king's judgement (STU cccxliii). That is a sign of respect for the king's authority, which alone can peacefully terminate the power struggle.

The journey does not take place, however, because Kolbeinn is unable to travel due to his illness. Before his death in 1245, Kolbeinn promises to give Þórðr the Sturlungar's inheritance but gives the rest of his domain to his kinsman Brandr Kolbeinsson, Gizurr Þorvaldsson's ally (STU cccxliii–cccxliv). That is why the power struggle continues even after Kolbeinn's death – without the king's arbitration, the reconciliation that is now expected is not carried through. The structure of the narrative thus emphasizes the importance of mediation, which is presented as the only possible means of terminating violence.

5.1.2 The second conflict story: Þórðr Sighvatsson and Gizurr Þorvaldsson

The account of Þórðr's second power struggle again follows the structural pattern of the conflict story, this time with an even stronger focus on the king's role as a mediator. Þórðr's rivalry with Brandr Kolbeinsson develops due to competition for power, and preparations for an armed clash take place (STU cccxlviii–cccxlix). The culmination of the conflict is the battle of Haugsnes on 19 April 1246, in which Brandr is killed and Þórðr gains his domain consisting of the Northern Quarter and the Westfjords (STU cccl). Gizurr Þorvaldsson attempts to reunite Brandr's supporters and attack Þórðr in revenge, but both opponents eventually agree to travel to Norway and accept the king's judgement (STU cccl–ccliii).

This section fulfils the expectation of a central character's violent death, as Brandr is killed in battle. The structural pattern of the conflict story is, however, modified at the following stage, when a violent vengeance is averted by an agreement. The condition of the agreement is that the case will be judged by the king as a supreme authority; the story thus shows that external mediation can terminate the cycle of violence even when a chieftain has already been killed.

When Þórðr and Gizurr arrive at the royal court in 1246 and present their case to the king (STU cccli), a brief reference to Snorri Sturluson alludes to the king's recent conflict with Skúli Bárðarson, which resulted in the king's mistrust

of the Sturlungar. The audience is thus reminded of the interrelatedness between the Norwegian and Icelandic power struggle:

> En þat þóttust menn skilja at konungrinn mundi heldr áleiðis víkja fyrir Gizuri allt þat er honum þótti svá mega. Ok höfðu menn þat fyrir satt at þat mundi mjök vera fyrir sakir mála Snorra Sturlusonar er lát hans hafði nakkvat af konunginum leitt. [...] En er Þórðr kærði á um málit Snorra Sturlusonar svaraði konungrinn þar fyrir ok sagði at hann átti þat at bæta, en bað Gizur svara öðrum málum. Þótti mönnum þá sem Hákon konungr mundi liðsinna Gizuri um allt þat er honum þætti sér sóma eptir honum at mæla. (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 351, p. 505)

> (People believed that the king would prefer to decide in favour of Gizurr in everything if he felt he could. And they assumed that it was so mainly due to the matters concerning Snorri Sturluson, as his death had to some extent been caused by the king. [...] When Þórðr prosecuted Snorri Sturluson's case, the king answered that it was his responsibility to pay compensation, but he asked Gizurr to answer to the other matters. People believed that King Hákon would support Gizurr in everything, as long as he deemed it honourable to speak up for him.)

By showing that the king's judgement depends rather on his relationship with specific individuals than on abstract principles of justice, this description emphasizes the personal character of the dealings between the king and the Icelandic chieftains, which is also typical of political relations in Iceland. The saga thus highlights the similarity, rather than the difference, between Norwegian and Icelandic politics. This means that the king is not presented as a representative of a foreign system but as the highest authority in a structure of patron-client relationships, powerful enough to arbitrate between the most influential Icelanders.

Þórðar saga nevertheless shows that despite his personal bias, the king does not immediately decide in favour of Gizurr but takes time to carefully consider the matter (STU cccli). A change in the negotiations then occurs when Cardinal Vilhjálmr arrives in Norway in 1247 and is asked to arbitrate (STU ccccliii). Significantly, his decision to support Þórðr is also explained by personal motivations – by Þórðr's friendship with Bishop Heinrekr Kársson of Hólar, who "interceded much on Þórðr's behalf with the cardinal and with the king".[97] Even the foreign dignitary is thus not portrayed as a representative of absolute, impersonal justice. The main point of the cardinal's argumentation, however, is that he "recommended appointing one man to govern the country for the sake of peace".[98] Such a connection between centralized rule and peace is a constant theme throughout

97 [...] dró hann mjök fram hlut Þórðar við kardinálem ok svá við konunginn (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 353, p. 508).

98 [...] kvað þat ok ráð at einn maðr væri skipaðr yfir landit ef friðr skyldi vera (*Sturlunga saga, II,* 2021, ch. 353, p. 508).

Sturlunga saga, and the cardinal's utterance endows this idea with a more universal value.[99]

The negotiation ends with Þórðr being chosen as the royal representative and "appointed to govern the whole country".[100] Gizurr must stay in Norway and is "very displeased with it",[101] but the king compensates him by appointing him to govern a district in Norway. Thus, the saga does not imply that the king incites conflicts between the Icelandic chieftains, as has been suggested by some scholars. Instead, it shows the king's honest effort to establish peace. He keeps the opponents apart in order to prevent a continuation of armed clashes, and he incorporates Gizurr into the Norwegian power structures in order to mitigate his resentment.

When Þórðr returns to Iceland in 1247, he gains control of Borgarfjörðr, the Westfjords, and the Northern Quarter without opposition as he has influential adherents there, including Hrafn Oddsson, Sturla Þórðarson, and Eyjólfr Þorsteinsson; he also has allies in the Eastern Quarter, Þorvarðr and Oddr Þórarinsson and Sæmundr Ormsson (Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 217–218). It is only due to this power base that Þórðr firmly establishes his leadership.

Everybody obeys Þórðr at the Alþingi of 1248, except for Gizurr's adherents from the Southern Quarter (STU cccliv). When Gizurr does not return in the autumn, Þórðr forces these men to accept him as their leader against their will but without armed clashes, as nobody dares to actively oppose him.[102] The experienced fighter can thus refrain from using violent means because his authority has reached the point where he no longer needs weapons. Nevertheless, he is never entirely transformed into a peaceful royal official; his ambition to wield power remains his chief motivation, and he is always ready to defend his power by the sword if needed.

Due to the personal character of the king's relationships with the Icelandic leaders, Þórðr's position as a royal representative is unstable. When his friend-

99 *Hákonar saga* (ccci) adds the cardinal's famous praise of monarchy. Whether the speech is authentic or not, it clearly expresses the idea that royal rule is an important sign of civilized societies: "Þá var ok sú skipan ger til Íslands með ráði kardinála at sú þjóð er þar byggði þjónaði til Hákonar konungs, því at hann kallaði þat ósannligt at land þat þjónaði eigi undir einhvern konung sem öll önnur í veröldinni." (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 301, p. 136) (With the cardinal's contribution, the decision was made concerning Iceland that the people who lived there should serve King Hákon, because the cardinal found it inappropriate that this country did not serve any king like all other countries in the world.) Neither *Hákonar saga* nor *Þórðar saga* suggests that Icelanders opposed this idea as such, only that they debated the conditions of royal rule.

100 […] skipaðr yfir allt landit til forráða (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 353, p. 508).

101 […] þótti honum þat allþungt (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 353, p. 508).

102 […] mæltu þá flestir menn ekki í móti at þjóna honum (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 354, p. 511).

ship with Bishop Heinrekr is thwarted in 1249, the bishop complains to the king, accusing Þórðr of disloyalty (STU cccliv):

> En byskup flutti ekki mjök mál Þórðar ok kvað hann eigi efna þat er hann hefði heitit, kvað konungs vilja aldri mundu við ganga á Íslandi meðan Þórðr réði svá miklu. Byskup var með konungi um vetrinn, ok hlýddi konungr allmjök á hans sagnir. En þá var fátt þeira manna í Nóregi er mjök drægi fram hlut Þórðar, nema nökkurir lögunautar hans.[103] (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 354, p. 512)

> (But the bishop did not support Þórðr much and said that Þórðr did not keep his promises. He said that the king's will would never be accepted in Iceland as long as Þórðr was in charge. The bishop spent the winter with the king, who often listened to his speech. But there were few men in Norway who supported Þórðr, except for some of his fellow retainers.)

This account again accentuates the personal character of the relations at the royal court. The king's decisions are thus not presented as a result of impersonal, absolute principles, but rather of what Hans Jacob Orning calls a "dual contextual foundation" – the king is influenced by those who are physically close to him, and these men also have highly personal grounds for their assessment of the situation (Orning 2008, 252).

The personal character of these relations is also depicted in *Hákonar saga* (HSH ccci), where the bishop's sudden enmity towards Þórðr is explained by the fact that "Þórðr's worst enemies had complained to the bishop, who had taken their case into his hands".[104] This means that both the secular and ecclesiastical Icelandic leaders continue to derive their power from supporting their followers. The bishop "was Þórðr's worst enemy ever since but formed an alliance with Gizurr, and they told the king that his interests would be better furthered in Iceland if they were sent there".[105] Þórðr is summoned to the royal court in 1250 (HSH cccxvii), and "the bishop said that Þórðr had furthered his own interests instead of the king's esteem in all matters, and this time the king believed him much".[106]

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103 In *Króksfjarðarbók*, *Þórðar saga* ends here, but an empty space is left on the page, indicating that the scribe probably intended to add a section about the end of Þórðr's life (see *Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, 512, footnote 4). This section is only found in copies derived from *Reykjarfjarðarbók*, where it is incorporated into the chronology of the compilation and separated from the rest of *Þórðar saga* by accounts of other events (STU ccccl, see below).

104 […] þá höfðu þeir menn er helzt váru óvinir Þórðar kært sín mál fyrir byskupi, ok hafði hann tekit þeira mál á sinn varnað (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 301, p. 137).

105 […] var hinn mesti óvin Þórðar jafnan síðan. En þeir slógu sér þá saman í vináttu, Heinrekr byskup ok Gizurr, ok fluttu þat fyrir konungi at hans mál mundi betr fara á Íslandi ef þeir væri til sendir (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 301, p. 137).

106 Sagði byskup at Þórðr hafði í öllu sinn hlut fram dregit en ekki sæmð konungs, ok var því meirr trúat at sinni (*Hákonar saga, II,* 2013, ch. 317, p. 153).

The motif of calumny creates a narrative parallel between this episode and the account of King Hákon's conflict with Skúli Bárðarson: it is emphasized in *Hákonar saga* that when the two co-rulers were apart, dishonest men spread mistrust and suspicion between them (HSH ccxiii and elsewhere). Through this parallel, the Norwegian and Icelandic power struggles are connected in *Hákonar saga* as well.

The result of these political turns is that the king sends Gizurr Þorvaldsson and Þorgils Böðvarsson to Iceland as royal representatives in 1252 together with Bishop Heinrekr; Gizurr receives power over almost all the Northern Quarter and Þorgils over Borgarfjörðr (STU ccclxiv). Þórðr Sighvatsson is kept in Norway and receives an office in local administration (*sýsla*) as a sign of respect and a source of income (HSH cccxxvii). However, Þórðr's supporters remain loyal even in his absence and gather forces to attack Gizurr and Þorgils (STU ccclxv). This is an internal conflict in Iceland, which cannot be prevented by the king. Þórðr's chief supporter Eyjólfr Þorsteinsson unsuccessfully attempts to kill Gizurr by burning his farm in the autumn of 1253; Gizurr loses his wife and sons in the attack and leaves for Norway, where he hopes to regain his prestige (STU cccxci–ccccciii). Gizurr and Þórðr are then both in Norway and their relationship remains cold (STU ccccl):

> Litlu síðar fór Þórðr kakali austr til Túnsbergs, ok tók konungr honum eigi margliga. Gizurr var þar fyrir. Ok er Þórðr hafði þar skamma hríð verit biðr hann konung at hann léti Gizur í brott fara ok segir eigi örvænt at vandræði aukist af ef þeir væri í einum kaupstað báðir. Konungr svarar: „Hver ván er þér þess at ek reka Gizur, frænda minn, frá mér fyrir þessi ummæli þín? Eðr mundir þú eigi vilja vera í himnaríki ef Gizurr væri þar fyrir?" „Vera gjarna, herra," segir Þórðr, „ok væri þó langt í milli okkar." En þó gjörði konungr þat at hann fekk hvárum tveggja þeira sýslu. Hafði Þórðr sýslu í Skíðunni. […] Þórðr var vinsæll í sýslu sinni, ok þykkir þeim sem fáir íslenzkir menn hafi slíkir verit af sjálfum sér sem Þórðr. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 450, p. 224)[107]
>
> (After some time, Þórðr went east to Túnsberg, but the king did not give him a warm welcome. Gizurr was also there. And when Þórðr had been there a short time, he asked the king to send Gizurr away and said that it was not unlikely that it would lead to trouble if they were both in the same town. The king answered: "How likely do you think it is that I will send my kinsman[108] Gizurr away just because you ask for it? Or would you not wish to be in heaven if Gizurr was there?" "I would wish to be there, lord," Þórðr replied, "but I would keep a distance from him." And yet the king made an arrangement to appoint each

107 This chapter is only found in copies derived from *Reykjarfjarðarbók* (see *Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, 223, footnote 3). A lacuna in *Króksfjarðarbók* between the years 1255–1258 makes it unclear what the text looked like there (Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1968, 64–66), but the ending of *Þórðar saga* may have been intended to follow immediately after its preceding chapters, where the scribe left an empty space (see footnote 103 above).

108 Gizurr Þorvaldsson is referred to as King Hákon's kinsman because his mother was related to Jón Loptsson, who was a son of King Magnús Barefoot's daughter.

> of them to govern a district in Norway. Þórðr governed the district of Skíða. […] He was popular in his office and people felt that few Icelanders had been as capable as Þórðr.)

This humorous dialogue can be regarded as an evaluation of the king's attitude to discord between Icelanders. He is not portrayed as a power-greedy ruler, eager to weaken the chieftains by increasing their mutual strife, but rather as a peaceful monarch who does his best to prevent violence. That is illustrated by his practical solution to Þórðr's enmity with Gizurr by sending them to different regions of Norway. He also shows them trust and respect by granting them prestigious positions in the Norwegian administration, and it is emphasized in the text that Þórðr lives up to all the expectations and becomes a popular local leader in Norway.

It may be this success in Norwegian politics that convinces the king to give Þórðr another chance in Iceland. *Sturlunga saga* does not explain the king's motivation for his decision but states that he intends to send Þórðr to Iceland as a royal representative again in 1256. The text pauses on Þórðr's reaction to the news, followed by his sudden death (STU ccccl):

> Svá segir Kolfinna Þorvaldsdóttir, ok var hon þá með Þórði, at bréf Hákonar konungs komu til hans síð um kveld, er hann sat við drykk, þat er Þórðr váttaði at konungr hafði gefit honum orlof til Íslands ok gera hann þar mestan mann. Varð hann svá glaðr við at hann kvað öngan hlut þann til bera at honum þætti þá betri. Þakkaði hann konunginum mikilliga. Drukku menn þá ok voru allkátir. Litlu síðar talaði Þórðr, sagðist ok eigi fara skyldu af Íslandi ef honum yrði auðit út at koma. Litlu síðar segir Þórðr at svifi yfir hann. Var honum þá fylgt út til hvílu sinnar. Tók hann þá sóttinni svá fast at hann lá skamma stund, ok leiddi hann til bana. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 450, pp. 224–225)

> (Kolfinna Þorvaldsdóttir,[109] who stayed with Þórðr at the time, says that he received letters from King Hákon late one evening when he was sitting and drinking. Þórðr then proclaimed that the king had given him permission to return to Iceland and intended to make him the most powerful man there. He was so happy about it that he said that nothing else could have happened that he would have deemed better. He thanked the king very much. Men drank then and were extremely joyful. After a while Þórðr said that if he was fortunate enough to get to Iceland, he would never leave again. A little later he said that he was feeling dizzy. He was then led to his bed. The disease affected him so fiercely that he lay only a short while before it caused his death.)

This brief, emotive scene is significant for the interpretation of Þórðr's story in *Sturlunga saga*. The old fighter, who never gained lasting power over Iceland by the sword, finally sees his dream fulfilled by non-violent political means, but his hope is thwarted by his sudden death, as if he were not destined to govern Iceland because of his inherent warrior nature. This is a tragic ending from the pro-

109 Probably a daughter of Snorri Sturluson's daughter Þórdís and Þorvaldr Snorrason.

tagonist's perspective, but from a broader historical perspective, Þórðr's death receives a deeper meaning in the text. Although *Sturlunga saga* depicts real events and the death has not been invented for a narrative effect, the structure of the story influences the recipients' perception of the events and invites a particular interpretation. As the narrative type of the conflict story foregrounds the protagonist's portrayal as a fighter, his death may be understood as representing the end of the era of warrior-chieftains, who are replaced by royal officials. This is presented as a positive development in the compilation despite the sorrowful ending of Þórðr's story on the individual level.

5.2 Þorgils skarði Böðvarsson: The royal retainer

Þorgils skarði Böðvarsson was Þórðr Sighvatsson's kinsman and their stories mostly take place simultaneously, but there is a considerable difference in their portrayal in *Sturlunga saga*. Þórðr is presented as a warrior-chieftain of the old type; although he refrains from violence in his later years, his action is still primarily motivated by his greed for power. The portrayal of Þorgils, by contrast, is characterized by a development from an aggressive youth to a peaceful royal representative who values social cohesion above his personal ambition. The first section of his saga is structured by the narrative type of the royal retainer's story, which emphasizes his transformation from a belligerent troublemaker into a noble courtier whose courage gets a meaningful purpose in defending the social order represented by the monarch. In the second section, *Þorgils saga* modifies this narrative type by combining it with the peaceful chieftain's story. Unlike the typical royal retainer's story, in which the protagonist fights on behalf of the monarch, *Þorgils saga* depicts the protagonist's transformation into a royal representative who uses the king's authority as a means of non-violent conflict resolution. This development accentuates the difference between the traditional Icelandic warrior-chieftains and the new type of peaceful representatives of centralized rule.

It has been suggested in research that *Þorgils saga*, which is only included in the *Reykjarfjarðarbók* redaction of *Sturlunga saga*,[110] is more focused on the Icelanders' opposition to royal rule than the rest of the compilation (Helgi Þorláksson 2012, 82–84). I will argue, however, that while *Þorgils saga* openly depicts conflicts between the supporters of different royal representatives in Iceland in the 1250s, its overall presentation of the relationship between the Icelandic elite and the monar-

110 Ólafía Einarsdóttir (1968, 63) has shown that *Þorgils saga* was not included in the original compilation.

chy is even more positive than in the other parts of *Sturlunga saga*. For instance, Sturla and Þórðr Sighvatsson are formally royal representatives, but they hardly ever put their loyalty to the king before their own ambition. Þorgils Böðvarsson, by contrast, is presented as a truly loyal representative of royal rule. Nevertheless, opposition to him is not depicted as a rejection of the monarchy, but rather as a power struggle in which the supporters of other chieftains refuse to accept Þorgils because they wish to remain faithful to their leaders.

5.2.1 The royal retainer's story and Þorgils at the royal court

Þorgils saga begins with a detailed account of the protagonist's youth (STU ccclxvii–ccclxxiv), which highlights Þorgils's fierce, aggressive personality. This is first shown when Þorgils gets into a conflict with another boy over a game and stubbornly refuses to compromise or apologize (STU ccclxvii). This episode is not historically significant, but it is essential as a key scene in the characterization of the protagonist and as the introduction of the royal retainer's story.

When the young Þorgils sails to Norway, he is still unable to control his ferocity at first. He joins in a brawl at a feast, followed by a debate about honour and shame (STU ccclxviii):

> Eiríkr mælti til Brynjólfs: „Geymið til, bóndi, at hark þetta semist, ok er þat yður sæmð ok allra þeira er hér eigu hlut at.“ […] Björn mælti: „Þat kann ek þér segja, Árni, þótt yðr þykki mín skömm lítils verð, at vera skal annat hvárt at ek skal hafa fyrir fulla sæmð eðr hefna mín sjálfr.“ Þorgils segir: „Ef þú heitist við, Björn, mjök at gera mér eina skömm þá skal ek gera þér tvær skammir, þat er þú skalt mega báðar hendr á festa.“ (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 368, pp. 8–9)
>
> (Eiríkr said to Brynjólfr: "Householder, take care of calming down this uproar, for it is a matter of your honour and the honour of all those who are involved." […] Björn said: "I can tell you, Árni, that although you deem my shame insignificant, it will either be so that I shall receive full compensation, or I will take revenge." Þorgils said: "If you, Björn, threaten to cause me some shame, I will cause you a double shame that you will be able to hold with both hands.")

The scene shows the contrast between the overall lack of dignity in drunken brawls and the seriousness of the key concepts of the Norse social norms, such as honour, shame, and revenge. In the context of these serious concepts, it is significant that the episode ends with an agreement:

> En þeir lögðu þar bezt til hirðmennirnir Árni ok Ketill ok Eiríkr ok Bergr. Báðu þeir Þorgils vægja til fyrir Brynjólfi bónda ok ráði þeira manna er þar voru mest virðir. En Þorgils þagði sem hann var vanr ef hann reiddist. Allmisjafnt lögðu menn til, en þessi varð lykt á með

> atkvæði Brynjólfs bónda ok ráði þeira manna er þar voru mest virðir í hjá ok bezt vildu til leggja at mál þessi fellust í faðma ok skyldi enginn öðrum fé bæta. Seldi þá hverr öðrum grið, en síðan settust þeir niðr ok drukku. Var bóndi þá allkátr ok hverr við annan. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 368, p. 9)
>
> (The best suggestions came from the retainers Árni, Ketill, Eiríkr, and Bergr. They asked Þorgils to yield to the householder Brynjólfr and to follow the advice of the men who were most respected there. But Þorgils was silent, as was his habit when he was angry. Men came up with various suggestions, but by Brynjólfr's decision and on the initiative of those who were most respected there and wished to give the best advice, the end was that the complaints were proclaimed equal, and nobody had to pay compensation. Everybody then promised each other truce, and after that they sat down to drink. The householder was then very cheerful, and so were all the others.)

The conciliatory solution is praised in the text through a characterization of those who bring it about as "those who were most respected there and wished to give the best advice". Significantly, those who come up with "the best suggestions" are the king's retainers (*hirðmenn*). The scene thus shows that unity between the royal retainers is worth giving up some personal pride for, because real honour is gained by respecting this unity and keeping peace. Everyone therefore feels obliged to put the group's honour before his individual pride, and the aggressive youth Þorgils must learn to adapt to this concept of group unity.

An important step in this process is Þorgils's admission to the royal retinue through the intercession of respected retainers (STU ccclxx), which shows him that these men put trust in him despite his reckless personality. The king treats Þorgils with respect but refuses to give him permission to return to Iceland. This, however, cannot be perceived as oppression, but rather as a sign of the typical duality of the relationships between retainers and kings. Þorgils has entered the king's service voluntarily and agreed to establish a relationship of obligation. He can gain social prestige at the royal court, but the king rightfully requires loyalty and cooperation in return; the relationship is mutually beneficial as long as both parties follow the rules.

At this point, the upcoming change in Þorgils's behaviour is foreshadowed when the queen excuses his ferocity with his youth (STU ccclxxi). In this context, it is also pointed out that "the queen was the Sturlungar's best friend, just like her father Skúli had been".[111] This allusion to Skúli Bárðarson's alliance with Snorri Sturluson accentuates the Icelanders' role in Norwegian politics, thus implying that the two countries are not viewed as foreign to each other.

111 Dróttning var inn mesti vinr Sturlunga, svá sem verit hafði Skúli, faðir hennar (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 371, p. 14).

Þorgils's position at the royal court is improved when he is accepted into the king's retinue, but he still needs to prove his worth and show that he deserves the prestige he has received. That happens when he shows great courage in extinguishing a fire in Björgyn, gaining glory and the king's special favour (STU ccclxxii):

> Konungr kvað á hvar Þorgils skyldi standa, en hann vildi fram ganga miklu lengra. Fekk hann svá mikinn háska við þat at þat þótti með ólíkindum er hann helt lífi meiðingarlaust. Um síðir lét konungr taka langskipssegl ok gera alvátt ok bera at eldinum. Varð þat þá um síðir at eldrinn slokknaði með guðs miskunn ok hamingju konungs. En Þorgils fekk þann orðróm af konungi sjálfum ok öllum öðrum er vissu at engi maðr hefði þar jafnvel borit sik ok borgizt sem hann í jafnmiklum háska, svá sem Sturla Þórðarson hefir kveðit í erfidrápu þeiri er hann orti um Þorgils. Ok þessa naut Þorgils jafnan síðan hjá konungi, svá at hann þoldi honum betr en flestum öðrum jafnar tilgerðir. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 372, pp. 15–16)
>
> (The king decided where Þorgils should stand, but he wanted to go much further. He put himself in so much danger that it seemed unlikely that he would stay alive and unhurt. The king eventually let his men take a sail from a longship, make it all wet and throw it over the fire. Then the fire was finally quenched with God's mercy and due to the king's luck. The king himself and all others who knew about it said that no other man had performed greater deeds there or held his ground better than Þorgils in such a great danger, as Sturla Þórðarson says in the memorial poem that he composed about Þorgils. Afterwards, this always served Þorgils well when he was with the king, who was more tolerant of his misdeeds than other men's.)

This is a typical component of the royal retainer's story: the retainer risks his own life bravely and selflessly for a useful purpose, and the monarch praises his extraordinary prowess. It is thus shown that the retainer has transformed his originally disruptive ferocity into beneficial courage. The episode has parallels in *Fóstbræðra saga* or in the stories of Þorvarðr and Ari Þorgeirsson in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*. Like in these cases, it is also accompanied by stanzas in the style of traditional praise poetry, which allude to the narrative conventions of the kings' sagas, thus emphasizing the Icelander's aristocratic qualities. An important difference is, however, that whereas the other retainers fight alongside the monarchs, Þorgils's brave act is entirely non-violent, so it foreshadows his transformation into a peaceful chieftain.

This episode is followed by another typical element of the royal retainer's story: a quest in which the retainer shows his abilities in the king's absence. Þorgils is staying in Niðarós, which is managed by Jarl Knútr Hákonarson.[112] Knútr insults the Sturlungar at a feast, so a conflict breaks out between him and Þorgils.

112 Ca. 1208–1261, son of Jarl Hákon galinn.

Significantly, the scene again alludes to the Sturlungar's role in the recent power struggle in Norway, specifically to Snorri Sturluson's and his companions' support of Skúli Bárðarson (STU ccclxxiv):

> Mælti Knútr jarl heldr háðuliga til Íslendinga, talaði til Snorra Sturlusonar ok annarra íslenzkra manna er verit höfðu með Skúla hertoga. Tók jarl á þeim öllum heldr lítilmannliga. En Þorgils svarar svá í móti at þeir frændr hans mundi verit hafa at eigi mundi sik allmikit vanta þykkja á við hann fyrir útan nafnbót. Þetta líkaði jarli stórilla, urðu af þessu mjök sundrorða. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 374, p. 18)
>
> (Jarl Knútr spoke quite mockingly about Icelanders, referring to Snorri Sturluson and other Icelandic men who had supported Duke Skúli. He pointed out that they were all rather unworthy. Þorgils replied that some of his kinsmen may have felt that they lacked nothing but the title in comparison with Knútr. The jarl disliked this greatly, and they got into a fierce argument because of it.)

It is thus the memory of the conflict between King Hákon and Skúli that is presented as the main reason for the discord between Jarl Knútr and Þorgils. The cause of Knútr's derision may be the fact that these Icelanders were on the losing side together with Skúli, and Knútr's intense interest in this matter may be a sign of his personal resentment towards the adherents of King Hákon's rival.[113] His focus on Icelanders in this context implies that he deems their role in the Norwegian power struggle quite substantial, so the saga again accentuates the interrelatedness between Norwegian and Icelandic politics.

The episode shares some features with Þorgils's first conflict at a feast, which is nevertheless terminated by the royal retainers' mutual loyalty. Here, by contrast, Knútr represents an independent power unit – he is the king's vassal, but the royal retainers are not bound by allegiance to him, and they tend to compete with his men. That may be the reason why, although an immediate violent clash at the feast is prevented, the conflict later continues on a more collective level (STU ccclxxiv). A royal retainer wounds one of the jarl's followers and is imprisoned by the jarl's men. The royal retainers, led by Þorgils, set him free and wound several guards. The jarl then summons a force against the king's men, who intend to defend themselves, again led by Þorgils. Although this conflict is now collective, Þorgils reminds the jarl of their previous personal disagreement. He also speaks both on behalf of the royal retainers and of Icelanders, which sug-

113 *Hákonar saga* shows Knútr's role in the Norwegian power struggle. At first, in 1226–1227, he was the leader of the Ribbungar, a revolt group against King Hákon, but after their defeat he was reconciled with the king (HSH cliv–clxx). He rejected Skúli's offers of alliance, including the offer of a jarl's title (HSH ccxxviii). He later received this title from King Hákon and was among the king's foremost supporters in his conflict with Skúli (HSH ccxxxviii–cclxiv, cclxxii).

gests that a double dichotomy can be perceived in the conflict: between the king's and the jarl's followers, and between Icelanders and Norwegians:

> Þorgils heitr nú á menn sína at þeir skuli ganga út í vígin er þeir höfðu gert ok verja hendr sínar röskliga, „ef þess þarf við, ok látum konung þat spyrja at hann hefir hér drengjum skipat, en ekki dáðleysingjum." […] „[…] Er nú vel at þú reynir þat í dag hvárt Íslendingar eru svá linir ok lítils háttar sem þér sögðuð í vetr." (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 374, p. 20)
>
> (Now Þorgils encourages his men to go out on the ramparts that they had built and to defend themselves bravely "if it is necessary, and let the king know that he has worthy men here, not idle cowards." […] "[…] It is good that you can try today whether Icelanders are as weak and insignificant as you said last winter.")

This double dichotomy suggests that Þorgils feels obliged to defend both the king's and the Icelanders' honour. Icelanders are, however, defined in the sense of regional, rather than national identity. They have been mentioned in the saga as active participants in Norwegian politics, so they are presented as members of a unified Norwegian-Icelandic realm.

The opponents threaten each other, but kinsmen and friends in both groups are reluctant to start the attack. When negotiations begin, Þorgils refuses to give the jarl self-judgement but accepts the king's arbitration. This shows that he has learnt to control his ferocity and found the right balance between moderation and decisiveness – he does not insist on violence but refuses to submit the decision to his opponent. In the saga it is underlined that "people thought that Þorgils had dealt well with this, and he gained a good reputation for it" and that "the king was satisfied with this solution".[114] This implies that by preferring a peaceful solution, he upholds the king's and the Icelanders' honour better than he would by victory in a fight.[115]

The saga thus modifies its narrative type. In the typical royal retainer's story, the protagonist improves his reputation by fighting on behalf of the king, but Þorgils is instead praised for showing moderation and averting bloodshed with the help of the king's authority. The saga thus illustrates not only the transformation of Þorgils's personality, as his ferocity has been refined into useful, controlled bravery and has found a direction and purpose in royal service, but also the values shared by the entire society, where the king's arbitration is regarded as a

114 Þótti Þorgils þessu hafa vel fylgt, ok fekk hann hér fyrir gott orð. […] Líkaði konungi vel þessi málalok (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 374, p. 21).

115 As Hans Jacob Orning (2008, 340–341) has pointed out, retaining esteem and a good reputation was in this case crucial not just for Þorgils, but also for the king. Even for the monarch, according to Orning, the primary concern was not to resolve conflicts in accordance with the absolute principles of law, but rather to uphold his own esteem and authority in the Norwegian regions where he was not physically present.

more honourable means of conflict resolution than violence. This modification of the royal retainer's story is then further developed in the second section of the saga, where Þorgils, after his return to Iceland, is portrayed as the character type of the peaceful chieftain.

5.2.2 The peaceful chieftain's story and Þorgils as a royal representative in Iceland

Þorgils is presented as the king's retainer who is primarily interested in royal service, not in acquiring power in Iceland. Paradoxically, that may be the reason why the king chooses him as his Icelandic representative, because he needs a devoted man who is not greedy for power and whose personal ambition is not higher than his loyalty to the monarch. Þorgils is sent to Iceland in 1252 to claim Snorri Sturluson's heritage on behalf of the king; Þórðr Sighvatsson is held back in Norway and is dissatisfied because he claimed this region and appointed his adherents to govern it for him before his departure in 1249 (STU ccclxxiv).

However, this is not presented in the saga as the king's intention to increase strife between the Icelandic chieftains, but rather as his effort to choose a representative who has the best chance of success and who seems most reliable at the time. By holding Þórðr back in Norway, the king probably attempts to prevent further escalation of conflict in Iceland. The narrative emphasizes that the king insists on cooperation between his Icelandic representatives, especially between Þorgils and Gizurr Þorvaldsson. Despite the prolonged rivalry between their families, their obligation to the king is meant to at least prevent them from continuing their open enmity:

> Gizurr hafði ríki sitt fyrir sunnan land, ok skyldi hvárr þeira veita öðrum, Gizurr ok Þorgils. It sama var Finnbjörn skyldaðr at veita þeim ok svá þeir honum. Hét Heinrekr byskup konungi ok öllum þeim sínu trausti. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 374, p. 22)
>
> (Gizurr had his domain in the south of the country, and Gizurr and Þorgils were both obliged to support each other. Likewise, Finnbjörn [Helgason] was also obliged to support them, and they were obliged to support him. Bishop Heinrekr promised his support to the king and to all of them.)

Þorgils is likely to gain support in Iceland due to his ancestry and his decisiveness, and yet the saga shows that his rise to power is not easy. Þórðr Sighvatsson's allies refuse to acknowledge Þorgils's authority as a royal representative when he claims Borgarfjörðr on the king's behalf, because they still regard Þórðr as their only rightful leader (STU ccclxxvi). The chapter is full of dialogues about royal rule, which sum up the Icelanders' ambivalent attitude to the monarchy that is expressed throughout

the latter part of *Sturlunga saga*. The Icelanders are not opposed to royal rule, and they practically already acknowledge King Hákon's authority, but they insist on open negotiation and refuse to accept the king's decisions unconditionally.

The importance of centralized rule for peace is emphasized by the fact that the portrayal of the royal representative Þorgils is shaped by the narrative type of the peaceful chieftain's story in this section of the saga. Þorgils embodies the ideal balance between decisiveness and peacefulness, and he is contrasted with his excessively violent opponents. Þorgils is determined to fulfil his tasks as the king's representative, so he is uncompromising in his opposition to Þórðr Sighvatsson's adherents. He is, however, never in the role of the aggressor in the violent clashes with his adversaries, but always in the role of the defender.

Þorgils's opponents Hrafn Oddsson and Sturla Þórðarson attack him at night, threaten him with death, and force him to promise to participate in their planned assault on Gizurr Þorvaldsson (STU ccclxxviii). Þorgils personally hates his clan's rival Gizurr but is bound by an oath to the king not to turn against his fellow royal representatives. The narrative implies that a promise to the king as the supreme authority is generally acknowledged as being binding:

> „Meiri nauðsyn þykkir mér," segir Þórðr, „at þú haldir þann eið er þú svarðir konungi til sæmðar þér, heldr en þann er þú vannt nauðigr til lífs þér." (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 378, p. 44)
>
> ("I deem it more necessary," Þórðr said, "that you keep the oath that you swore to the king to increase your honour, rather than the one that you swore involuntarily to save your life.")

Þorgils therefore breaks the forced promise and refuses to attack Gizurr, showing loyalty to his fellow royal retainer, who would otherwise be his enemy. That is a result of the king's peace efforts. Although Þorgils has left the royal court, he has fully accepted the identity of a royal retainer, which makes him value his obligations to the king above his private conflicts. That distinguishes him, for example, from Sturla Sighvatsson, who also entered the king's service but whose personal ambition remained stronger than his identity of a royal retainer.

A reconciliation between Þorgils, Sturla, and Hrafn is advocated by two mediators, Bishop Heinrekr and Abbot Brandr, albeit only with partial success. The decisive initiative comes from the peaceful chieftain Þorgils himself, who forgives his opponents for their attack and actively seeks an agreement in spite of constant mistrust, multiple minor clashes, and failed negotiations (STU ccclxxx–ccclxxxviii, cccxciv, cccxcvii, ccccii, ccccv–ccccvi, ccccxii–ccccxv). Þorgils is finally reconciled with both Sturla (STU ccclxxxvii) and Hrafn (STU cccxcvii); his motivation is doubtlessly both moral and political, as it is beneficial for him to have these influential chieftains on his side.

At this point, Þorgils enters into an alliance with Þorvarðr Þórarinsson, whose aggressive and treacherous behaviour sharply contrasts with Þorgils's ever improving personality. Þorvarðr asks Þorgils for help in the prosecution of Hrafn Oddsson and Eyjólfr Þorsteinsson for the killing of his brother Oddr (STU ccccxiii, ccccxvi), which leads to a renewal of Þorgils's conflict with Hrafn. Þorvarðr's case is justified, but his attitude is socially disruptive because he refuses reconciliation and prefers a violent solution. Abbot Brandr predicts Þorvarðr's betrayal of Þorgils long before it occurs (STU ccccxvii); such foreshadowing accentuates the moral structure of the story and the contrast between Þorgils and Þorvarðr:

> „[…] Vilda ek nú at guð væri yðr fyrir vápn ok vörð ok hyljanarmaðr Thomas erkibyskup. En treystið lítt á drengskap Þorvarðs, því at mér segir eigi mjök hugr um hversu til enda ganga skipti þeira Þorgils ok Þorvarðs, ok ætla ek Þorvarðr valdi afbrigðum. […]" (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 417, p. 152)
>
> ("[…] I hope that God will be your weapon and shield and Archbishop Thomas will be your protector. But put little trust in Þorvarðr's honesty because I have a premonition of how the dealings between Þorgils and Þorvarðr will end, and I believe that Þorvarðr will commit a transgression. […]")

This is the first reference to Thomas of Canterbury, who has a special meaning later in the saga. The allusions to the saint highlight the moral significance of Þorgils's personal development.

Since Þorvarðr rejects peaceful solutions, he and Þorgils prepare for an armed clash with their adversaries (STU ccccxvi–ccccxxi). Þorgils does not wish to act as an aggressor, but he must support Þorvarðr due to their promises of loyalty. The battle takes place by the river Þverá on 19 July 1255, and Eyjólfr Þorsteinsson is killed in it (STU ccccxxii–ccccxxiv). Þorvarðr aims for becoming the new chieftain of Eyjólfr's domain, but the farmers refuse to accept him because of his violent tendencies (STU ccccxxvi):

> Þorvarðr ór Saurbæ svarar fyrst, lézt eigi ráð eiga meir en eins manns, „má ek vel sæma við þann sem er, en bezt at engi sé." […] [Bændr] sögðu Þorvarði at þat var samþykki bænda at þeir vildu eigi taka við honum í herað, „er oss Þorvarðr sagðr inn mesti ofsamaðr, en févani mjök, en eiga þó at svara stórum vandræðum. Viljum vér bíða þess er Hákon konungr ok Þórðr Sighvatsson gera ráð fyrir." (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 426, p. 174)
>
> (Þorvarðr of Saurbær answered first but said that he could not decide for anyone but himself: "I may accept whomever [as chieftain], but it would be best if there was none." […] [The farmers] said to Þorvarðr that they had all agreed that they would not accept him as the chieftain of their district – "it has been said to us that Þorvarðr is a very violent man, and that he lacks property, and that he is responsible for serious conflicts. We wish to wait for King Hákon and Þórðr Sighvatsson to decide.")

The meaning of the statement that the farmers would prefer having no chieftain at all must be assessed in the context of the given situation when Icelandic society is torn by relentless fights between the chieftains. The same scene shows that the farmers agree to accept King Hákon's and the royal representative Þórðr Sighvatsson's decision, which implies that they do not oppose centralized rule as such, they are only tired of the prolonged power struggles. When the king later assigns Eyjólfr's district to Þorgils (STU ccccxxxvi), "all the farmers agreed to obey Þorgils and accepted him as their chieftain".[116] This means that they do not reject the king's decisions in general; they willingly accept them if they are beneficial – for instance when the king appoints a royal representative whom the locals regard as a righteous chieftain.

Þorvarðr is jealous of Þorgils's success and reluctant to provide Þorgils with the support that he has promised him in their alliance. He finds excuses and repeats his promises, but it becomes obvious that he cannot be trusted. In the meantime, Þorgils's peacefulness continues to increase. He agrees to accept a reconciliation with Hrafn, although he is not forced to it by the circumstances, as he was on the winning side in the battle. Hrafn, however, breaks the settlement by attacking Sturla Þórðarson, who has now become Þorgils's faithful adherent. Þorgils feels obliged to defend his ally, but violence is prevented by mediation, and a new agreement terminates the conflict (STU ccccxxxix–ccccxl).

At this point, the mistrust between the former allies Þorgils and Þorvarðr escalates into an open conflict and its violent ending is predicted by foreshadowing. The first omen is a dream containing verse about a chair that is falling over and blood seems to appear on it (STU ccccxxxviii); this motif may underline the instability of Þorgils's alliance with Þorvarðr. The second omen is a drop of blood that Þorgils sees on a loaf of bread at a feast, but nobody knows where it comes from (STU cccxlii). The image of blood on food served to a friend alludes to betrayal by a man whom Þorgils trusts.

The confrontation culminates when Þorvarðr claims Þorgils's domain in Eyjafjörðr on the basis of inheritance rights received from Steinvör Sighvatsdóttir after the death of Þórðr Sighvatsson, but Þorgils refuses to give up the domain that he has received from the king with the farmers' approval (STU ccccxliv–ccccxlv). Þorvarðr then resorts to an attack on Þorgils, and the narrative focus on the contrast between the peaceful defender and the aggressive attacker is intensified. Þorvarðr's action is criticized even by his own adherent:

116 Gengu þá allir bændr undir Þorgils ok játtu honum til yfirmanns (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 436, p. 196).

> Þá mælti Jörundr gestr: „Þat kann ek frá mér at segja at fyrir sakir míns herra, Hákonar konungs, ok löguneytis við Þorgils, þá mun ek frá ríða ok kalla þetta it mesta níðingsverk ok óráð sem þér hafið með höndum." (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 445, p. 212)
>
> (Jörundr the Retainer said: "I can say for myself that for the sake of my lord King Hákon and due to my companionship with Þorgils, I will ride away and call this act that you intend to commit the worst villainy and an ill-advised decision.")

This argumentation resembles the references to the king in the context of Þorgils's previously discussed decision to refrain from an attack on Gizurr Þorvaldsson. Such formulations imply that the former royal retainers regard the king as their lord even after returning to Iceland. The narrative thus presents allegiance to the monarch as a natural aspect of life in Iceland even before the official acceptance of royal rule. The unity and loyalty between the king's retainers are contrasted with the ruthless violence committed by some of the chieftains who have not accepted this concept. In this case, Þorvarðr represents the old type of the immoderate warrior-chieftain, to whom his greed for power matters more than social cohesion.

On 22 January 1258, Þorvarðr attacks Þorgils at night without giving him any chance to defend himself, rejects his plea for mercy, and has him killed (STU ccccxlv–ccccxlvi). This ending fulfils the expectations created by the inherently tragic peaceful chieftain's story. Its moral significance is accentuated by allusions to Saint Thomas of Canterbury immediately before and after the death scene. First, the text expresses Þorgils's feelings about the saint and his indirect wish to die in a similar way:

> Honum var kostr á boðinn hvat til gamans skyldi hafa, sögur eða dans, um kveldit. Hann spurði hverjar sögur í vali væri. Honum var sagt at til væri saga Thomasar erkibyskups, ok kaus hann hana, því at hann elskaði hann framar en aðra helga menn. Var þá lesin sagan ok allt þar til er unnit var á erkibyskupi í kirkjunni ok höggvin af honum krónan. Segja menn at Þorgils hætti þá ok mælti: „Þat mundi vera allfagr dauði." (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 445, pp. 210–211)
>
> ([Þorgils] was offered to choose what kind of entertainment they should have in the evening, sagas or dance. He asked which sagas there were to choose from. He was told that there was the saga of Archbishop Thomas, and he chose it, because he loved Thomas more than any other saint. The saga was then read out, up to the scene when the archbishop was attacked in the church and the crown of his head was hewed off. People say that Þorgils stopped the reading then and said: "That would be a beautiful death.")

After the killing, the parallel with the saint is further highlighted by a detailed description of Þorgils's dead body and of his wounds:

> Nú hafa þeir svá sagt er þar stóðu yfir at Þorgils hafði tuttugu ok tvau sár ok sjau ein af þeim höfðu blætt. Eitt af þessum var þat á hjarnskálinni er af var höggvin hausinum. Veittist

> Þorgilsi þat at hann hafði þvílíkt sár sem sagt var um kveldit at inn heilagi Thomas erkibyskup hafði særðr verit í kirkjunni í Cantia, ok Þorgilsi þótti um kveldit fagrligast vera mundu at taka slíkan dauða. Lét ábóti þá sveipa líkit ok segir svá, sem margir hafa heyrt, at hann kvaðst engis manns líkama hafa sét þekkiligra en Þorgils, þar sem sjá mátti fyrir sárum. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 446, p. 214)
>
> (Those who were present have said that Þorgils had twenty-two wounds, but only seven of them had been bleeding. One of these was the wound on his skull, where the crown of his head had been hewed off. It had been granted to Þorgils that he received the same wound that the archbishop Saint Thomas had received in his church in Canterbury, as had been told that evening. Þorgils had felt that it would be most beautiful to die in the same manner. The abbot then had Þorgils's body wrapped in cloth and said what many people have now heard: that he had never seen any dead body as good-looking as Þorgils's, as far as he could see it for all the wounds.)

The extensive parallel with the saint, together with the emphasis on the unusual beauty of the body, implies that Þorgils's killing resembles a martyr's death (see Grønlie 2017a, 21). This connects the narrative account with other death scenes in peaceful chieftains' stories that allude to martyrdom, such as those in *Njáls saga* (see Ármann Jakobsson 2000, 43) or the previously discussed *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*. Just like these other stories, the narrative accentuates the idea that the protagonist is an innocent victim of violence, but not in the sense of being weak, cowardly, or passive, because he actively seeks peace and advocates morally positive, socially beneficial values. As such, he can be regarded as a role model in a similar manner as the saints. This is further highlighted by a reference to public opinion, which serves as a narrative voice that provides an unequivocal evaluation of the killing:

> Lét ábóti þá aka líkinu upp til Munkaþverár ok jarða þar sæmiliga. Stóð þar margr maðr yfir með harmi miklum. Þorvarðr var mjök óþokkaðr af verki þessu um öll þau heruð sem Þorgils hafði yfirsókn haft. Mæltist þetta verk illa fyrir. Tala flestir menn er vissu at eigi vissi nökkurn mann hafa launat verr ok ómannligar en Þorvarðr slíka liðveizlu sem Þorgils hafði veitt honum. Er nú lokit at segja frá Þorgilsi. Riðu fylgðarmenn Þorgils þá vestr til Skagafjarðar, ok spurðust tíðindi þessi um allt land. Létu menn illa yfir þessum tíðindum hvárt sem verit höfðu menn Þorgils eðr eigi. Víg Þorgils var, þá er liðit var frá holdgan várs herra Jesu Christi þúsund ára ok tvau hundruð fimmtíu ok átta ár, ellifta kal. februarii, Vincentiusmessudag djákns. Þorvarðr brauzt nú til heraðs af nýju ok fekk ekki af heraði. Vildu bændr nú því síðr játast undir hann sem öllum þótti hann nú verri maðr en áðr af verki þessu. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 446, pp. 214–215)
>
> (The abbot had his body moved to Munkaþverá and buried honourably. Many people were present and grieved deeply. Þorvarðr was much hated for this misdeed in all the regions that Þorgils had controlled. The misdeed was condemned by everyone, and the majority of those who knew about it said that nobody had ever repaid such support as that provided by Þorgils in a worse and more unmanly manner than Þorvarðr. This is the end of Þorgils's

> story. Þorgils's companions rode west to Skagafjörðr and the news spread across the whole country. People disapproved of the news, whether they had been Þorgils's adherents or not. The killing of Þorgils took place when a thousand two hundred and fifty-eight years had passed since the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, eleventh *calendas februarii* (22 January), on the holiday of the deacon Vincentius. Þorvarðr now made another attempt at claiming the district but did not gain any part of it. The farmers were now even less willing to accept him, because everybody deemed him a worse man than before due to his misdeed.)

The contrast between the grief for Þorgils and the condemnation of Þorvarðr accentuates the dichotomy between the peaceful chieftain and his aggressive opponent. Moreover, Þorvarðr's moral inferiority to Þorgils is also matched by his failure in the social and political relations – he is criticized even by those who did not support Þorgils, and he fails to achieve his goal in the power struggle. The dating of Þorgils's death by reference to the birth of Christ, which is otherwise not frequent in *Sturlunga saga*, implies that this is the death of a man who is not only politically important, but also significant for the moral message of the narrative.

Despite the protagonist's violent death, which is typical of the inherently tragic peaceful chieftain's story, *Þorgils saga* ends with a reconciliation. After a failed attempt at revenge by Þorgils's brothers and Sturla Þórðarson, a negotiation is offered by Þorvarðr (STU ccclii), who then accepts the judgement unreservedly (STU ccccliv). Although the saga shows the instability of alliances, it thus accentuates the social mechanisms that restore order.[117] Moreover, it is surely not a coincidence that the end of the saga is focused on Þorgils's brother Sighvatr Böðvarsson and his sincere loyalty to King Hákon (STU cccclv). The text thus creates a parallel between Sighvatr and the royal retainer Þorgils, who both enter the king's service of their own free will, motivated by their interest in a career at the royal court, rather than by greed for power. The saga's ending thus again foregrounds the optimistic royal retainer's story.

As has been shown here previously, the peaceful chieftains' stories are essential for the meaning of *Sturlunga saga* because their protagonists embody the central values that uphold Icelandic society. In combination with the royal retainer's story, which is centred around the royal court's positive influence on the Icelanders' behaviour and priorities, the peaceful chieftain's story in *Þorgils saga* figu-

117 Apart from this reconciliation, Þorvarðr is later reconciled with the king as well. This is not mentioned in *Þorgils saga*, only in *Magnúss saga Hákonarsonar*, according to which Þorvarðr sailed to Norway in 1264 and "gekk hann á vald Magnúss konungs ok gaf allt sitt ríki í hans vald fyrir þá hluti er hann hafði brotit við konungdóminn í aftöku Þorgils skarða ok Bergs, hirðmanna konungs Hákonar" (*Magnúss saga*, 2013, ch. 3, p. 273) (gave himself up to King Magnús and gave up his domain to the king as compensation for the misdeed he had committed against the kingdom by killing Þorgils skarði and Bergr, King Hákon's retainers).

ratively illustrates the monarchy's role in the transformation of Icelandic society. The saga admits that the process of change was tumultuous, but its overall direction is evaluated positively because the royal representatives derive their authority from more socially beneficial norms than the traditional warrior-chieftains.

When the redactor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* decided to include *Þorgils saga*, the reason was therefore probably not just that the saga offers a more detailed account of events from the years 1252–1258 (Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1968, 63), but also that it supports the interpretation of the past that was already expressed in the original compilation but was further emphasized by the addition. The saga accentuates one of *Sturlunga saga*'s central themes, the monarchy's contribution to peace, and its focus on the peaceful chieftain further highlights the importance of this character type for the meaning of the entire compilation. The incorporation of *Þorgils saga* into *Reykjarfjarðarbók* thus implies that the Icelandic elite in the second half of the fourteenth century recognized the centrality of these themes in the compilation and acknowledged their continuing importance for the construction of collective identity. This means that *Sturlunga saga*'s image of the past was presumably still as meaningful to Icelanders as it had been at the time when the original compilation was composed.

5.3 Gizurr Þorvaldsson: The jarl

Gizurr Þorvaldsson of the Haukdælir is a central character in two sections of *Sturlunga saga*, and it has even been suggested that he is presented as the 'hero' of the compilation (Guðrún Nordal 2000, 224, 231). However, as I have attempted to show so far, I believe that *Sturlunga saga*, unlike some sagas of the distant past, does not have any heroes in the conventional sense. Instead, some of its characters can be regarded as *key figures* in the sense that they represent the key values that define the medieval Icelandic collective identity. I have argued that the immanent *key figure* of the compilation is the character type of the peaceful chieftain, which embodies the cohesive social forces and morally positive personal qualities.

In this context, the essential aspect of the narrative portrayal of Gizurr Þorvaldsson in *Sturlunga saga* is that he represents a different character type in each of the two sections where he plays a central role. In the previously discussed account of his conflict with Sturla Sighvatsson, Gizurr is portrayed as a warrior-chieftain who ruthlessly enforces his claim to power by violent means. In the final part of the saga that deals with Gizurr's last power struggles and with his years as the jarl of Iceland, by contrast, he is depicted as the highest representative of royal power, who embodies qualities that reflect the current royal ideol-

ogy. His portrayal follows the character type of the peaceful chieftain and even contains elements of the ideal of *rex iustus*, the righteous monarch, as it is presented in the image of the king in *Hákonar saga*. Gizurr is described as a righteous social leader, determined to end his conflicts with individual opponents so as to prevent long-term strife that would affect the whole community. The text emphasizes his popularity among the farmers, as well as the extraordinary luck and God's mercy that protect his life and help him protect others. It is this development from a warrior to a protector that endows Gizurr's portrayal in the compilation with meaning transcending the individual story. The contrast between the different images of Gizurr in the two sections of *Sturlunga saga* can be understood as a reflection of the social transformation of Iceland.

Yet another portrayal of Gizurr is found in *Hákonar saga*. This account is structured by the narrative pattern of the inherently tragic jarl's story, which is nevertheless modified. In his relations with King Hákon, Gizurr is shown to claim more power than he is rightfully entitled to; he also refuses to fulfil the obligations established by his voluntary alliance with the monarch. However, he eventually tames his excessive ambition and accepts a compromise; his choice of moderation thus averts the tragic ending that is anticipated in the jarl's story.

The combination of these different images of Gizurr constitutes an interesting twist on the narrative type of the jarl's story, as it is known from the account of Skúli Bárðarson's life in *Hákonar saga*. The description of Skúli's rivalry with the king in *Hákonar saga* emphasizes the contrast between the excessively ambitious jarl and the ideal of *rex iustus*. Conversely, the two portrayals of Gizurr Þorvaldsson – in the latter section of *Sturlunga saga* and in *Hákonar saga* – employ elements of these contrasting character types in the depiction of the same person. I will argue that both portrayals make sense in the respective sagas because they contribute to the construction of their meaning. This shows how the process through which knowledge about the past is transformed from communicative to cultural memory depends on the contextualization of this knowledge in narratives representing different perspectives.

5.3.1 Gizurr Þorvaldsson as the peaceful chieftain in *Sturlunga saga*

As has been shown here, *Sturlunga saga* does not conceal the fact that Gizurr Þorvaldsson often behaved violently and sometimes dishonestly in the confrontations with his adversaries (see 3.2.5). In the latter section of his story, however, the saga gradually builds up his image as a peaceful chieftain. In his conflict with Þórðr Sighvatsson, he refrains from violence and agrees to accept the king's arbitration (see 5.1.2). In the following years, he shows moderation and waits patiently

until he is appointed to the position of royal representative together with Þorgils Böðvarsson in 1252. At this point (STU ccclxiv), the saga emphasizes that "everybody eagerly agreed to accept Gizurr as their chieftain";[118] his popularity then becomes a central motif. However, Gizurr is popular only in the regions that he governs and where he already has a strong power base from before, while he is still opposed by his rivals elsewhere. Þórðr Sighvatsson is in Norway at the time, but his adherents Eyjólfr Þorsteinsson, Hrafn Oddsson, and Sturla Þórðarson the younger oppose Gizurr by violent means. In this section of the saga, Gizurr is portrayed as a chieftain who strives for peace but faces violence – just like the other peaceful chieftains, such as Njáll, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, or Þorgils Böðvarsson.

In 1253, Gizurr is reconciled with Hrafn and Sturla, and they wish to seal the reconciliation by a marriage between Gizurr's son Hallr and Sturla's daughter Ingibjörg (STU ccclxxxix). Gizurr hosts the wedding at his farm Flugumýri, and Eyjólfr Þorsteinsson decides to use the feast as an opportunity to attack Gizurr and his kinsmen and allies (STU cccxci). The brutality of the assault is sharply contrasted with the peaceful intentions at the wedding, which are further emphasized by Gizurr's speech at the feast:

> „Guð sé með oss nú ok jafnan. Hér er gott mannval saman komit, þess er kostr er á landi voru. Kunnigt er flestum mönnum, þeim er hér eru, um málaferli þau er orðit hafa milli manna hér á landi, þat er nú berr oss næst. Nú er þeim málum, er betr er, til góðra lykta snúit með öllum þeim beztum mönnum er hér eru nú saman komnir, Sturlu bónda ok Hrafni Oddssyni. Vil ek vænta nú með guðs miskunn at várar sættir fari vel af hendi. Ætla ek at þessi samkundu skyli vér binda með fullu góðu várn félagsskap með mágsemð þeiri er til er hugat. En til varhygðar vil ek grið setja allra manna í milli, þeira er hér eru saman komnir, at hverr sé í góðum huga til annars í orði ok verki." Síðan mælti Gizurr fyrir griðum ok talaði þá enn vel ok sköruliga ok lauk vel sínu máli. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 391, p. 81)
>
> ("May God be with us now and always. A great company is gathered here, as great as can be in our country. Most of you who are here know about the disputes that have taken place between the men of this country, as they concern us greatly. Now those matters have fortunately turned to a good end due to the most significant men who are present here, the franklin Sturla and Hrafn Oddsson. I wish to assume that our reconciliation will now go well with God's mercy. I expect that at this meeting we shall sincerely bind our alliance by the intended marriage. But so as to be cautious, I want to proclaim a truce between everyone who is gathered here, so that each and every one of you will treat the others well in word and deed." He then recited the truce formula and continued to speak eloquently and resolutely and ended his speech well.)

118 […] játtu allir fúsliga at taka við Gizuri at höfðingja yfir sik (*Sturlunga saga, II*, 2021, ch. 364, p. 559).

The references to God underline the moral framework of the scene in a similar manner as the references to saints in the other stories of peaceful chieftains in *Hrafns saga* or *Þorgils saga*.

The fight scene is narrated from the defenders' point of view, which foregrounds its moral perspective. The defenders' courage, unlike the aggression of the attackers, is praised (STU cccxcii). When the attackers fail to enter the houses, they decide to set them on fire. Gizurr prays ardently and is no longer concerned for his power, only for the lives of his family (STU cccxcii). His misery is underlined, but without casting a shadow on his endurance and bravery. He hides in a tub of sour milk, where the attackers look for him but fail to find him; he stops shaking with cold just when they arrive (STU cccxcii). That can almost be viewed as a sign of divine protection, although it is not directly stated in the text, but it is implied by the emphasis on Gizurr's prayers. Such extraordinary luck, connected with God's will, is an important element of the ideal of *rex iustus*,[119] which now begins to surface in the text.

Gizurr survives but loses his wife and all sons. After the burning he is depicted as a broken and grieving man; it is admitted that "he looked away and tears ran down his face like hail".[120] He expresses his grief in a stanza, which nevertheless also expresses a desire for revenge (STU cccxciii). As Torfi Tulinius (2017) has pointed out, revenge here works as a means of relieving the mental suffering; after achieving retribution by killing some of the arsonists (STU cccxcv), Gizurr can finally recover from the trauma and refocus on his public life as a chieftain (2017, 83–86). In this sense, vengeance is not presented here as a sign of excessive aggression, but rather as a process necessary even for a peaceful chieftain. Furthermore, the narrative again foregrounds Gizurr's popularity, which is another central element of the ideal of *rex iustus*. The text states that the most influential farmers in the district voluntarily join Gizurr in his vengeance and contribute to his household to compensate for his material loss (STU cccxciii).

Gizurr travels to Norway to regain his prestige (*sæmðir*) by visiting the king (STU cccxcviii). After the death of Þórðr Sighvatsson, whom the king intended to appoint as the Icelandic royal representative, Gizurr receives the title of jarl and power over all the Icelandic regions controlled by the king at the time:

119 Extraordinary luck protecting the king and other representatives of royal power is a concept known also from the kings' sagas dealing with the distant past (see Ármann Jakobsson 1994b, 31–33; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2011, 69–70; Coroban 2018, 108).

120 […] hann leit frá, ok stökk ór andlitinu sem haglkorn væri (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 392, p. 96).

> Tók hann [Þórðr Sighvatsson] þá sóttinni svá fast at hann lá skamma stund, ok leiddi hann til bana. Er frá honum mikil saga. Hafði Gizurr síðan meiri metorð en áðr af Hákoni konungi. Ok þat sumar er nú var frá sagt gaf Hákon konungr Gizuri jarlsnafn ok skipaði honum allan Sunnlendingafjórðung ok Norðlendingafjórðung ok allan Borgarfjörð. Hákon konungr gaf Gizuri jarli stórgjafir áðr hann fór út um sumarit. Hann fekk honum merki ok lúðr ok setti hann í hásæti hjá sér ok lét skutilsveina sína skenkja honum sem sjálfum sér. Gizurr jarl var mjök heitbundinn við Hákon konung at skattr skyldi við ganga á Íslandi. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 450, p. 225)
>
> ([Þórðr Sighvatsson] was affected by this illness so severely that little time passed before it led to his death. There is a long saga about him. After that, Gizurr was more respected by King Hákon than before. And this summer that has now been told about, King Hákon gave Gizurr the title of jarl and appointed him to govern all the Southern Quarter and the Northern Quarter and Borgarfjörðr. King Hákon gave Jarl Gizurr valuable gifts before he left that summer. He gave him a banner and a trumpet and seated him in the place of honour by his side and let his pages serve drinks to Gizurr just like to himself. Jarl Gizurr was strongly obliged to the king by the oath that tax would be agreed to in Iceland.)

This account emphasizes the mutuality of the relationship between the king and the jarl. Gizurr receives a title, prestige, and status symbols that no chieftain could gain in Iceland, but this position entails duties and obligations. However, these aspects receive little further attention in *Sturlunga saga* and are much more prominent in *Hákonar saga* (see 5.3.2). Instead, *Sturlunga saga* again accentuates Gizurr's popularity as a newly appointed jarl by stating that "people gave him a warm welcome" in Skagafjörðr and "the people of Eyjafjörðr accepted him gladly and many gave him money".[121] His popularity presumably originates from his established power base, so his title is only an institutionalization of the existing situation. Gizurr's rivals continue to oppose him; among them are the Oddaverjar, Þórðr Andreasson and his brothers, grandsons of Sæmundr Jónsson, who possibly still claim the right to rule Iceland as the descendants of the former leading clan. In fact, however, the Oddaverjar lost their privileged position long before, and their power constantly decreased since Sæmundr's death in 1222.

Þórðr Andreasson attempts to goad his kinsmen, the sons of Brandr Kolbeinsson, into an attack on Gizurr (STU cccclvi). In his argumentation, he states that Gizurr "occupied their father's hereditary land and did not offer them any compensation for it".[122] However, Þórðr's kinsmen are loyal to Gizurr and follow their mother's advice that they "should not participate in any plans that could lead to a betrayal of Jarl Gizurr", although "they did not find it easy to deal with the situa-

121 […] tóku menn vel við honum […] gengu menn vel í móti honum í Eyjafirði ok gáfu honum margir fé (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 453, p. 229).

122 […] hann sat á föðurleifð þeira, en unni þeim engis góðs fyrir (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 456, p. 235).

tion because their kinsmen were involved".[123] This formulation alludes to the dilemma of choosing between family obligations and political loyalty; the concept of allegiance is emphasized by the use of the term *betrayal* (*svik*). However, the brothers are determined to remain faithful to the jarl; there is nothing in the text to suggest that their loyalty is forced, it seems to be voluntary and genuine. This implies that they do not regard Gizurr's rule as a loss of their hereditary land and believe that he rules their district rightfully.

When Þórðr Andreasson's intentions are revealed, a formal reconciliation is arranged between him and Gizurr. Þórðr then accompanies Gizurr to the Oddaverjar's original domain, where "the men of Rangárþing then swore allegiance to King Hákon and Jarl Gizurr".[124] The formulation suggests that the jarl directly represents the king, as the same oath is sworn to both. Apart from that, the text does not describe the formal aspects of the oaths. Instead, it is focused on a symbolic approval of Gizurr, the king's representative, as the protector of the country. It states that during the extremely harsh winter, the weather improves when Gizurr promises to God that the whole population will fast on a holiday (STU cccclviii). This episode echoes similar accounts of divine intervention in the portrayal of *rex iustus* in *Hákonar saga*.

Similarly, *Sturlunga saga*'s account of the formal acceptance of royal rule (STU cccclxi) provides surprisingly little information about the content of the oaths. It lists the names of the chieftains and farmers who swore the oaths and the numbers of their followers, but apart from that, it only states that "at that assembly, tax was sworn to the king by all the Northern Quarter and the Southern Quarter west of Þjórsá; tax was also sworn by all the Western Quarter".[125] The oaths sworn later by representatives of the remaining regions are not even mentioned in *Sturlunga saga*.[126] The compilation's lack of interest in such an important event seems unexpected, but it may suggest that the formal acceptance of royal rule was not perceived as a dramatic change, and that there was little debate about the content of the oaths. According to the available sources, the tax

123 […] at þit séuð í öngvum ráðum þeim er til svika megi verða við Gizur jarl […] en þótti eigi gott til órráða er frændr þeira áttu hlut at (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 456, p. 235).

124 Sóru Rangæingar þá trúnaðareiða Hákoni konungi ok Gizuri jarli (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 458, p. 238).

125 Var á því þingi svarinn skattr Hákoni konungi um allan Norðlendingafjórðung ok Sunnlendingafjórðung fyrir vestan Þjórsá. Skattr var þá ok svarinn um allan Vestfirðingafjórðung (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 461, p. 240). The same term (*skattr*) is also used in the fourteenth-century Icelandic annals (Boulhosa 2005, 105–106).

126 Brief information about them is found in the annals and in the extant fragment of *Magnúss saga Hákonarsonar* (iii), according to which the Oddaverjar and the Austfirðingar had sworn allegiance to the king by the summer of 1264 (Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 254–255).

was approximately as high as the *þingfararkaup* (Byock 1986, 39–40), so the farmers did not have to pay more than they were used to. It has also been shown here that Icelandic and Norwegian politics were interconnected in practice already from the beginning of the Sturlung Age. If the formal oaths of allegiance were perceived as a matter of ceremony that did not abruptly transform the existing power relations, it is understandable that they receive little attention in the saga.

Instead, *Sturlunga saga* continues to depict Gizurr's confrontations with his Icelandic rivals.[127] Despite their formal reconciliation, Gizurr is attacked by Þórðr Andreasson's brothers (STU cccclxxii). The scene is narrated from the defenders' perspective, and their courage is praised. Apart from bravery, it is again Gizurr's luck that almost miraculously protects him when the attackers' weapons simply fail to hurt him; this again alludes to the ideal of *rex iustus*. The scene also echoes a similar semi-miraculous episode from the story of the ideal peaceful chieftain Þórðr Sturluson; such a narrative parallel highlights the scene's meaning as an image of a righteous leader. Moreover, Gizurr is protected by the support of the public as well. When he reaches the church at the nearest farm and the attackers surround it, the people's support of the jarl is represented by the farmer and his wife, who even happens to be the attackers' sister:

> Nú komu Andreassynir at kirkjunni ok hlupu af baki. Ásta húsfreyja Andreasdóttir hljóp at Eyjólfi, bróður sínum, ok laust hann með tré miklu, ok kom þat á stálhúfubarðit, ok varð því höggit minna, en hon varð tekin af förunaut þeira bræðra hennar. Klængr bað þá mága sína vel fyrir sjá ok gera Gizuri jarli ekkert grand, þar sem hann var þá kominn. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 472, p. 264)
>
> (Now the sons of Andreas arrived at the church and dismounted. The mistress of the house, Ásta Andreasdóttir, ran at her brother Eyjólfr and hit him with a large stick. The blow caught the rim of his helmet but was lighter than she intended because one of her brothers' companions had held her back. Klængr asked his brothers-in-law to be careful and do Jarl Gizurr no harm [in the church] where he was.)

When the reconciliation has been broken by this attack, Gizurr gathers men under the threat of an accusation of high treason (STU cccclxxiii). The use of this term (*landráðasök*) implies that the jarl holds a special position of power, but there is nothing to suggest that many people apart from Þórðr Andreasson's sup-

127 The chapters describing Gizurr's final clashes with his opponents (STU cccclxxii–cccclxxiv) are extant only in the so-called *Supplement* (*Viðauki*) in some of the copies derived from *Reykjarfjarðarbók*. After the end of the *Reykjarfjarðarbók* redaction, the scribe added this material, which probably originally constituted the ending of the *Króksfjarðarbók* redaction (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, cxix–cxxii). According to Ólafía Einarsdóttir (1968, 72–74), these chapters were probably included in the original compilation.

porters wish to oppose the jarl. Gizurr gathers a large force, both sides behave violently, and it is admitted that "many innocent people were affected by this struggle and trouble".[128] This is a less idealized image of Jarl Gizurr, but the mention of innocent victims does not mean that the people are oppressed by the jarl. The harm is caused by a personal conflict between the jarl and an individual chieftain, and the reference to the victims is likely to be a general criticism of violence, which is common throughout *Sturlunga saga*. The narrative implies that centralized rule, which can terminate such violent conflicts, is a welcome alternative for the common people. It shows how Gizurr chooses the lesser evil – having Andreas's sons captured during a seemingly peaceful negotiation – over the greater evil, a continuation of the clashes that threaten innocent people (STU cccclxxiv). He first intends to have all the brothers executed but eventually spares all except his chief rival Þórðr:

> Þórðr mælti þá: „Þess vil ek biðja þik, Gizurr jarl, at þú fyrirgefir mér þat er ek hefi af gert við þik." Gizurr jarl svarar: „Þat vil ek gera þegar þú ert dauðr." (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 474, p. 268)
>
> (Then Þórðr said: "I want to ask you, Jarl Gizurr, to forgive me for what I have done against you." Jarl Gizurr replied: "I will do that when you are dead.")

This dialogue shows that Jarl Gizurr is willing to forgive his opponent on the personal level, but as the political leader of Iceland, he cannot spare the life of a man who disrupts peace. For this reason, Þórðr Andreasson is executed on 27 September 1264. That is a violent termination of the conflict, but in comparison with the battles of the Sturlung Age, it seems much closer to the image of a righteous ruler defeating an individual opponent so as to restore social stability; a comparable episode is King Hákon's defeat of Skúli Bárðarson in *Hákonar saga*. And indeed, this is the last bloodshed in the Icelandic power struggle. The Sturlung Age is over.

5.3.2 Gizurr Þorvaldsson as the jarl in *Hákonar saga*

Hákonar saga, understandably, is less focused on internal relations in Iceland – although it does not completely ignore them – and foregrounds the relationship between Jarl Gizurr and King Hákon, which is shown to be seemingly polite but full of mistrust and deceit beneath the surface:

> Konungrinn gerði þá skipan til Íslands at hann sendi Gizur út til Íslands ok gaf honum jarlsnafn. Hét Gizurr því í mót at friða landit ok láta alla bændr gjalda skatt konungi, svá sem

128 […] galt margr óverðr þessa ófriðar ok ófagnaðar (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 473, p. 265).

hann hafði áðr beitt. Bar Gizurr þar mikil mál á at hann mundi því auðveldliga á leið koma. Konungr gaf honum með jarlsnafninu margar sæmiligar gjafir ok leysti hann vel ok sæmiliga sér af hendi. Hann sendi út með honum Þóralda hvíta, hirðmann sinn, at skynja hversu jarl færi með konungs trúnaði. Margir trúnaðarmenn konungsins fóru út á öðrum skipum þat sumar at skynja konungs erendi, hvárt jarl færi með þeim eftir því er hann hafði heitit. En er Gizurr kom til Íslands þá helt hann því vel upp sem vera ætti, er Hákon konungr hafði gert meiri sæmð hans en nökkurs manns annars á Íslandi í þeiri nafnbót er hann hafði gefit honum ok mörgum öðrum sæmðum. Þat lét hann ok fylgja at Hákon konungr hafði svá gefit honum þessa nafnbót at hann skyldi þat engan penning kosta, ok engi skattr skyldi við þat leggjask á landit. Sagði hann ok um þá menn er honum gerðusk handgengnir, hirðmenn eða skutilsveinar, at þeir skyldu þvílíkar nafnbætr hafa í Nóregi af Hákoni konungi. Urðu við þetta margir góðir menn til at gerask honum handgengnir ok sóru honum eið en Hákoni konungi trúnað. Brátt urðu menn þess varir at þat var fals er hann sagði frá orðum konungsins. En allt at einu heldu menn trúnað við hann ok Hákon konung. (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, chs. 356–357, pp. 203–204)

(The king made the decision concerning Iceland that he sent Gizurr to Iceland and gave him the title of jarl. Gizurr promised him in return to establish peace in the country and to make the farmers pay tax to the king, as he had requested before. Gizurr eagerly assured the king that he would achieve that easily. Together with the title, the king gave him many honourable gifts and bid him farewell properly and honourably. He sent his retainer Þóraldi the White to Iceland with him, so that he would check how loyal Gizurr was to the king. Many of the king's confidants sailed to Iceland on other ships that summer so as to supervise the king's matters and make sure that the jarl took care of them as he had promised. But when Gizurr arrived in Iceland, he boasted a lot, and rightfully so, that King Hákon had honoured him more than any other Icelander by giving him the title and many other signs of honour. He added that King Hákon had given him the title in such a way that it would not cost him anything and no tax would be imposed on the country. He also said that the men who would become his vassals, retainers, or pages, would have the same titles at King Hákon's court in Norway. This made many influential men become his vassals and swear oaths to him and allegiance to King Hákon. Soon, people realized that what he said about the king's words was a lie, and yet they remained loyal to him and to King Hákon.)

This account shares many similarities with the description of the relationship between King Hákon and Skúli Bárðarson, who are also depicted as treating each other politely but secretly mistrusting each other. Skúli is criticized for deceiving the king; such behaviour is regarded as unacceptable in the narrative because *Hákonar saga* is shaped by the official royal ideology with its strict definition of loyalty. Instead of contextual loyalty that is not based on any absolute principles (Orning 2008, 5–6, 33, 321–322), *Hákonar saga* advocates the concepts of absolute loyalty and obedience (2008, 231–236). The saga is a narrative declaration of this ideology, applying it to the evaluation of both jarls, Skúli and Gizurr. Both receive power over a large territory, and yet they oppose King Hákon because they refuse to accept any limitations of their power, and they are criticized for it in the saga. The accounts of both Skúli's and Gizurr's action in *Hákonar saga* are structured

by the narrative pattern of the inherently tragic jarl's story, but this parallel only emphasizes the different endings of the two stories.

Moreover, the narrative parallel between Skúli and Gizurr implies that no decisive difference was perceived between the Norwegian and Icelandic jarl. Gizurr is not depicted as a chieftain who wishes to protect Iceland's freedom and independence from foreign rule. Instead, it is suggested that his behaviour is motivated by his pride and greed for power. He is portrayed as an extremely ambitious magnate who boasts about his prestige as a jarl but conceals his obligations to the king because he wants to emphasize his own power over Iceland.[129] Although the text shows that King Hákon puts pressure on Gizurr, it is not presented as the king's unilateral intervention into foreign matters, because Gizurr has voluntarily entered into an alliance with the king but now refuses to fulfil the obligations established by this alliance. This interpretation is underlined by the parallel between Gizurr and Skúli, who was Norwegian, so his rivalry with the king could not involve any nationalistic sentiments.

Hákonar saga describes the king's dissatisfaction with Gizurr's action as a royal representative. In 1259, the king receives news of Gizurr's negligence,[130] and in 1260, he sends two emissaries to Iceland with the task to go to the Alþingi and read out royal letters about how much tax Icelanders should pay to the king and how much the jarl should receive:

> Þeir kómu út fyrir alþingi ok fóru til þings. Var þar fyrir Gizurr jarl ok formenn flestir. Þá váru flutt bréf Hákonar konungs, ok var þar mikil manndeild á hversu þeim var tekit. Flutti jarl konungs erendi ok þó nökkut með öðrum útveg en á bréfum stóð. En Sunnlendingar, þeir sem mestir vinir váru jarls, mæltu mest í mót skattinum, ok svá þeir sem komnir váru austan um Þjórsá. Ok fellu þær lykðir á at erendi þeira Ívars varð ekki, ok fóru þeir útan hit sama sumar á konungs fund. Var þat þeira flutningr at Sunnlendingar mundi eigi svá djarfliga hafa neitat skattinum ef þeir vissi at þat væri í móti vilja jarls. (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 360, p. 207)
>
> ([The emissaries] arrived in Iceland before the Alþingi and went to the assembly. There was Jarl Gizurr and many chieftains. King Hákon's letters were presented there, and there were great differences in how people responded to them. The jarl supported the king's requirements, albeit in a slightly different way than the letters stated. But the southerners, who were the jarl's most loyal friends, opposed the tax more than others, together with those who lived east of Þjórsá. And it ended with Ívarr's requests not being accepted, and the emissaries returned to Norway the same summer and went to the king. They said that the

129 In fact, the jarl's title did not give Gizurr power over all Iceland, only over about half of it, and the king probably did not intend to ever give him more territory (Jón Samsonarson 1958, 338–340).

130 Gizurr jarl hafði lítinn hug á lagt at flytja mál hans við Íslendinga. (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 360, p. 207) (Jarl Gizurr had put little effort into advancing [the king's] cause among Icelanders.)

southerners would not have opposed the tax so stubbornly if they had known that such opposition was against the jarl's will.)

These formulations imply that the farmers' opposition to the tax is not ascribed to their own initiative, but rather to their personal loyalty to Gizurr, who opposes the tax because of his ambition to claim unlimited power over Iceland. Accordingly, *Hákonar saga* depicts the king's resentment towards Gizurr after the emissaries' return from Iceland in 1260 (HSH ccclxiii). The following year, the king sends another emissary, Hallvarðr gullskór, to encourage Gizurr to fulfil his promises (HSH ccclxxiv). In the saga, Gizurr does not openly oppose Hallvarðr but secretly debates with the men of the Northern Quarter, trying to find a way to increase his power, and "then the whole truth was revealed about what he had promised to the king".[131] This again accentuates the motif of Gizurr's deceit, which is essential for the narrative type of the jarl's story. The farmers then suggest that they will pay a large sum of money once, instead of a regular tax.[132] This must again be understood as a sign of their loyalty to Gizurr and their support of his power ambitions. Hallvarðr refuses this, however, and explains that "the king wished for the farmers' obedience and such a tax from the country that would not be difficult for them to pay; in return, he promised them benefits and legal improvements".[133]

Nevertheless, the saga implies that the decisive force in the acceptance of royal rule in Iceland is not Hallvarðr, but rather Gizurr's rivals: Hrafn Oddsson from the Westfjords, the Andreassons from Rangárþing, and Þorvarðr Þórarinsson from the Eastern Quarter (HSH ccclxxiv). These chieftains join forces to put pressure on Gizurr at the Alþingi of 1262, threatening to assert the king's requirements by force if necessary; Hallvarðr now functions as a mediator between the two parties.[134] The disagreement is thus presented primarily as an internal Icelan-

131 Fór þá upp allt hit sanna, hverju hann hafði konunginum játtat (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 374, p. 222).

132 […] bændr hétu jarli stórfé at leysa þat gjald er á var kallat. (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 374, p. 222) (the farmers promised the jarl a large sum of money to release him from the payment that was requested.)

133 […] konungrinn vildi hafa hlýðni af bóndum ok slíkan skatt af landi sem þeim yrði engir afarkostir í at gjalda ok hét þó þar í mót hlunnendum ok réttarbótum (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 374, p. 222).

134 Kom Hallvarðr þá vestan ok sagði at flokkar váru saman dregnir fyrir vestan heiðar, ok höfðu allir heitit at ganga undir skatt ok konungs mál ok ætluðu at ríða til þings ok flytja þar konungs erendi ef ekki gengisk ella við. (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 374, p. 223) (Then Hallvarðr arrived from the west and said that troops were gathered west of the heath, and they had all agreed to accept the tax and the king's conditions and intended to ride to the assembly and assert the king's requirements there if they could not be accepted otherwise.)

dic conflict, so the narrative foregrounds the Icelanders' active role in the events. However, the context makes it clear that the king is an important force in this conflict, although he is not physically present. The narrative is thus still structured by the pattern of the jarl's story: one party in the dispute consists of the supporters of royal rule, who indirectly represent the king, the other party consists of the defiant jarl and his adherents. The story now reaches its decisive point – the conflict can either lead to a violent clash, which is anticipated in this narrative type, or be resolved peacefully. That depends mainly on the jarl's decision.

Due to the pressure from his Icelandic rivals, Gizurr asks his followers to accept the king's requests, "pleading with them by kind words and calling it plotting against his life if they do not comply".[135] The inhabitants of the regions governed by Gizurr, together with the adherents of Hrafn Oddsson, therefore swear tax and allegiance to the king at the Alþingi of 1262:

> Eftir þetta var skipuð lögrétta, ok sóru flestir hinir beztu bændr ór Norðlendingafjórðungi ok af Sunnlendingafjórðungi fyrir útan Þjórsá Hákoni konungi land ok þegna ok ævinligan skatt með slíkum skildaga sem bréf þat váttar er þar var eftir gert. […] Gengu þá Vestfirðingar undir þvílíka eiða sem aðrir. […] Eftir þessa fundi höfðu allir Íslendingar gengit undir skatt við Hákon konung ór þrim fjórðungum, útan Sunnlendingar fyrir austan Þjórsá ok Austfirðingar. (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 374, p. 223)
>
> (Then the legislative assembly was gathered and most of the important farmers from the Northern Quarter and the Southern Quarter up to Þjórsá swore allegiance and eternal tax to King Hákon on the conditions stated in the letter that was then written. […] Then the inhabitants of the Westfjords agreed to the same oaths as others. […] After these meetings, all Icelanders from three quarters had agreed to pay tax to King Hákon, except for the men of the Southern Quarter east of Þjórsá and the men of the Eastfjords.)[136]

Because of his decision to show moderation, Gizurr retains his prestigious position as a jarl for the rest of his life, so his compromise is not presented as a loss of esteem. This ending of the episode modifies the narrative type of the jarl's story. The structural pattern leads to an expectation of the defiant jarl's violent death, but instead, Gizurr upholds peace by making a decision that averts the tragic end-

135 […] bað þá til góðum orðum, en kallaði fjörráð við sik ef þeir gengi eigi undir (*Hákonar saga, II*, 2013, ch. 374, p. 223).

136 The account of these events, from Hallvarðr's arrival to the acceptance of royal rule at the Alþingi, is also included in the *Supplement* (*Viðauki*, STU cccclxxv) that probably originally constituted the ending of the *Króksfjarðarbók* redaction of *Sturlunga saga* (see footnote 127), into which it was presumably incorporated from *Hákonar saga* (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, cxx–cxxi).

ing. This modification of the inherently tragic jarl's story emphasizes the idea that social cohesion is more important than individual ambition.

After Jarl Gizurr's death on 12 January 1268, the administration in Iceland was in the hands of royal officials from influential families who had managed to overcome their mutual enmity due to shared obligations to the king. *Gottskálks-annáll*, possibly based on chapters of *Magnúss saga* that are now lost, shows that Hrafn Oddsson and Þorvarðr Þórarinsson visited the royal court together in 1273, swore "oaths of loyalty and fellowship" to each other, and King Magnús "gave them power over all Iceland on his behalf".[137] The former opponents from the battle of Þverá now governed Iceland together. That can be understood as a continuation of the peaceful unification of the country under the auspices of the monarchy.

5.3.3 The different narrativizations of Gizurr Þorvaldsson's life

This analysis has shown that the depictions of Gizurr Þorvaldsson in *Sturlunga saga* and *Hákonar saga* contrast with each other, but it has been argued here that although they differ considerably in emphasis, they are not contradictory. The differences can be explained by the respective sagas' perspectives and ideologies, and neither account must be regarded as being essentially untrue, although some degree of exaggeration is likely to occur in the saga narratives. It can be assumed that some elements of both portrayals existed in communicative memory – Gizurr may have been known simultaneously for his popularity among the farmers, his extraordinary luck in surviving violent attacks, his rivalry with other chieftains, and his tense relationship with the king. In the process of narrativization, different elements were selected in each saga because they were important for its meaning.

Sturlunga saga is focused on internal Icelandic politics and shows that the relationships between the chieftains depend on personal alliances, popularity, and frequently conflicting loyalties. The portrayal of Gizurr as a peaceful chieftain with elements of *rex iustus* is a culmination of this character type's central position in the compilation. The account of Gizurr's action in *Hákonar saga*, by contrast, is centred around his relationship with King Hákon, which is evaluated according to the newly introduced royal ideology of unconditional allegiance. From this perspective, Gizurr is depicted as an excessively ambitious chieftain,

137 Þá lét Magnús konungr Þorvarð ok Hrafn sverja hvárn öðrum trúnaðareiða ok félagsskapar [...] ok fekk þeim allt Ísland til stjórnar undir hans valdi (*Magnúss saga*, 2013, p. 285).

ready to employ lies and deceit to increase his own power. However, his final decision to accept a compromise for the sake of peace modifies the inherently tragic jarl's story and connects this image of Gizurr with his portrayal as a peaceful chieftain in the latter section of *Sturlunga saga*. Furthermore, the text shows that Gizurr is not persuaded to make this decision primarily by the royal emissaries, but rather by other Icelandic chieftains, so the monarchy is not described as something that is forced upon the Icelanders against their will. The narrative thus presents an image of the Icelanders actively making their own decisions in this significant matter.

The meanings of both narratives transcend the individual portrayal of Gizurr and contribute to an interpretation of the tumultuous events that marked the end of the Sturlung Age. Gizurr's depiction in the final section of *Sturlunga saga* emphasizes the positive values that uphold Icelandic society and shows how elements of the Norwegian royal ideology were naturally adopted by Icelandic leaders. His image in *Hákonar saga* shows the importance of moderation and compromise, but without denying that Icelanders made important political decisions on their own terms. All these aspects were doubtlessly crucial for collective identity at the time of the sagas' composition, so it probably was mainly the need to construct a particular identity that determined how the same person would be presented in each saga.

5.4 Sturla Þórðarson: The last skald

King Hákon Hákonarson died before he could really take up the government of Iceland, so a more important role in the social transformation was doubtlessly played by his successor, the renowned lawmaker Magnús Hákonarson. The main narrative account of Magnús's life is not extant, but his role in the relationship between Norway and Iceland can at least be studied in *Sturlu þáttr*, the story of Sturla Þórðarson the younger. This short but significant text is believed to be of a later origin than most other parts of *Sturlunga saga* (Jón Jóhannesson 1946, xlviii–xlix) and is included only in the *Reykjarfjarðarbók* redaction.[138]

138 Ólafía Einarsdóttir (1968, 74–77) argues that, based on the evidence of fourteenth-century Icelandic annals, at least the first section of *Sturlu þáttr*, depicting the conflict between Sturla Þórðarson and Hrafn Oddsson, was with all probability included in the original *Sturlunga saga*. That is, however, not decisive for the present argument, which is centred around the latter section, describing Sturla's journey to the royal court. Assuming that this section was added by the redactor of *Reykjarfjarðarbók*, its meaning can be regarded as a reflection of the views that were dominant at the time when *Reykjarfjarðarbók* was composed. This approach will be taken in the present study.

It has been suggested that *Sturlu þáttr*, just like *Þorgils saga skarða*, expresses opposition to the monarchy, thus making *Reykjarfjarðarbók* expressly anti-monarchic in comparison with *Króksfjarðarbók* (Helgi Þorláksson 2012, 82–84). I will argue, however, that Sturla Þórðarson is not presented in the text as an opponent of royal rule, and that the *þáttr*, by employing the narrative type of the court poet's story, constructs a positive evaluation of the relationship between Icelanders and the monarchy.[139] Its addition to *Reykjarfjarðarbók* should then be understood as a reinforcement of the interpretation of history presented in the preceding sections of *Sturlunga saga*, where the narrative of Iceland's direct political relationship with Norway is introduced by another court poet's story, the tale of Snorri Sturluson.

5.4.1 The interpretative function of the court poet's story

Sturlu þáttr states that when Sturla first arrived in Norway in 1263, expelled from Iceland by his opponent Hrafn Oddsson, he was afraid of his encounter with King Hákon Hákonarson, whose "enmity he feared most".[140] In research, this has often been explained by the assumption that Sturla had opposed royal rule in Iceland from the 1240s; he was thus regarded as a heroic defender of national independence. Finnur Jónsson argued that Sturla's behaviour was characterized by "his constant and consequent opposition to the king and to the more or less open royal intervention into Icelandic matters and relations" and that he "struggled against King Hákon's efforts as long as he could".[141] According to Björn Þorsteinsson, Sturla was "one of the most resolute opponents of the monarchy among the Icelandic chieftains", who "worked purposefully to turn Icelanders away from loyalty to Hákon the Old".[142] Similarly, Gunnar Benediktsson assumed that Sturla was "expelled from the country as the king's offender because of his opposition

139 Another, primarily religious interpretation of *Sturlu þáttr* has been suggested by Marlene Ciklamini (1984). While her focus on Christian motifs seems exaggerated, she rightly points out that the *þáttr* is shaped by "the selection and arrangements of facts" (1984, 139), and thus endowed with a meaning that "transcends personal lives and the historical moment" (1984, 141), so it "illustrates the allusive power of medieval narrative" (1984, 146).

140 […] hann uggði hans fjandskap mest (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 462, p. 245).

141 Den modstand, han altid og konsekvent havde gjort mod kongen og hans mere eller mindre åbenlyse indblanding i islandske sager og forhold […]. […] stred så længe som muligt mod kong Hakons bestræbelser (1901, 720–721).

142 Sturla Þórðarson sagnaritari hefur verið einna eindregnasti andstæðingur konungvaldsins allra íslenzkra höfðingja. Hann vinnur markvíst að því að draga Íslendinga frá trúnaði við Hákon gamla […] (1956, 26).

to royal rule in Iceland".[143] Paul Schach claimed that "Sturla rightly regarded Hákon as his most dangerous enemy, for he had steadfastly resisted the king's subjugation of Iceland to Norway" (1993, 259). Even in recent years, Hans Jacob Orning has stated that Sturla "had opposed King Haakon in the final days of Iceland's independence" and "came to Norway as a delinquent to receive the king's verdict for opposing him" (2018, 203).

Such ideas do not, however, accord with the image presented in *Sturlunga saga*. It does not seem likely that Sturla ever decidedly opposed royal rule, and even if some elements of opposition occurred in his real-life behaviour, the narrative shows that Icelanders did not choose to remember Sturla as an opponent of the monarchy. Instead, he is portrayed as a pragmatic chieftain who fights for his own political position and refuses to unconditionally obey the king because he has his own interests and alliances in mind (see Magnús Stefánsson 1988, 149; Helgi Þorláksson 1988, 143–145; 2017, 202). *Sturlunga saga* depicts Sturla as a loyal supporter of Þórðr Sighvatsson, who was a royal representative since 1247. Due to his loyalty to Þórðr, Sturla is dissatisfied with the king's decision to replace Þórðr with Þorgils Böðvarsson in this position. According to *Þorgils saga skarða*, "Sturla and everyone else who governed Þórðr Sighvatsson's domain said that they strongly disapproved of all King Hákon's decisions".[144] This shows that Sturla refuses to blindly obey the king, but the text does not mention any ideas of national independence. Instead, Sturla's opposition to the decision is explained by his loyalty to his ally and the fact that he "governed Þórðr Sighvatsson's domain".

Other sections of *Sturlunga saga* also present Sturla primarily as a participant in the Icelandic power struggle, not least by introducing his complicated power relations with Hrafn Oddsson (see Helgi Þorláksson 1988, 138–141). They begin as fellow supporters of Þórðr Sighvatsson, but different alliances later bring them to opposing sides. This leads to violent clashes, including the battle of Þverá (STU ccccxxii–ccccxxiv) and failed attempts at individual attacks (STU ccccxxxv, ccccxxxix). Moreover, their enmity is also motivated by rivalry for local power in the Borgarfjörðr region. Sturla first receives control of the region from Jarl Gizurr Þorvaldsson (STU cccclvii), but in 1261, the king takes Borgarfjörðr from Gizurr and gives it to Hrafn instead (STU cccclix). This situation leads to the conflict described in *Sturlu þáttr*. The rivalry between Sturla and Hrafn is intensified by Hrafn's dissatisfaction with the reckless behaviour of Sturla's son Snorri in the district (STU cccclxii), so that "there was a complete

143 […] flæmdur utan sem sakamaður við konung vegna andstöðu gegn yfirráðum hans á Íslandi (1961, 143).

144 Sagði Sturla sem allir þeir er ríki heldu af Þórði kakala at þeim var óþokki mikill á allri skipan Hákonar konungs (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 377, p. 30).

enmity between Sturla and Hrafn".[145] Snorri and his allies then initiate an armed attack on Hrafn because "they assumed that they would not enjoy any success if Hrafn's power remained as it was".[146] These formulations imply that the conflict is motivated by personal enmity and competition for power. After Sturla's failed attempt at an assault, Hrafn decides to retaliate; Sturla flees from the attackers but is captured. Hrafn spares his life and pronounces a judgement that Sturla must travel to Norway. This shows that Hrafn, as a royal representative, has accepted this peaceful method of conflict resolution, promoted by the king.

It is in the context of these events that *Sturlu þáttr* mentions Sturla's fear of King Hákon's enmity, so his fear is clearly interpreted as a consequence of his conflict with Hrafn.[147] This makes sense as Hrafn, a royal representative, is doubtlessly protected by the king. Moreover, both Hrafn and Sturla are royal vassals after having sworn allegiance to the king in 1262, and hostility towards a fellow royal vassal is regarded as high treason (Jón Jóhannesson 1956, 330; Magnús Stefánsson 1988, 151–160). Hrafn is clearly responsible for the clashes as well, but since he enjoys the king's trust, he can put the blame on Sturla when he describes the conflict to the royal emissaries. This is probably referred to by the formulation that Sturla has been "slandered in front of King Magnús, and even more in front of King Hákon".[148] Sturla then confirms in direct speech that "Hrafn may have slandered me much here".[149]

When Sturla finds out that King Hákon is on a military expedition and the kingdom is ruled by King Magnús, the queen, and the counsellor Gautr Jónsson, he "decides to gain their favour".[150] This formulation marks the beginning of the structural pattern of the court poet's story, which is focused on the Icelander's effort to overcome a conflict with the monarch. This narrative type is introduced

145 […] var þá fullr fjandskapr með þeim Sturlu ok Hrafni (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 462, p. 241).

146 […] þóttu þeir skilja at engi varð uppgangr þeira ef svá búit stæði ríki Hrafns (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 462, p. 242).

147 The other available sources do not present any contrasting interpretation either. *Hákonar saga* does not mention Sturla's arrival at the royal court in 1263 at all, and the Icelandic annals mostly contain only the brief formulation "útanferð Sturlu Þórðarsonar" (*Islandske annaler*, 1888, pp. 135, 330) (Sturla Þórðarson's journey from Iceland). The only longer entry reads "útanferð Sturlu Þórðarsonar ok var tekinn með valdi af Hrafni Oddssyni" (*Islandske annaler*, 1888, p. 67) (Sturla Þórðarson's journey and he was captured by Hrafn Oddsson); this formulation accords with the interpretation suggested here.

148 […] affluttr við Magnús konung, en þó meir við Hákon konung (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 463, p. 246).

149 […] Hrafn mun mik hér mjök afflutt hafa (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 463, p. 247).

150 […] barst Sturla þat fyrir at koma sér í kærleika við þau (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 462, p. 245).

by Sturla's half-stanza quoted in the text; the verse draws attention to Sturla's poetic art and thereby to the court poet's story.[151] The next typical component is the initial distrust between the king and the Icelander when King Magnús treats Sturla coldly due to the reports of his misdeeds. The text also shows that Sturla lacks property in Norway, which is another standard element of this narrative type; the story of Snorri Sturluson is an exception.

This first segment of the structural pattern is followed by the account of Sturla's gradual reconciliation with the king, which accentuates his verbal skills. The title "Sturla skáld" is used when he is first presented to the king, and he is also called "it mesta skáld" (the greatest poet) by the queen (STU cccclxiii). He first gains popularity among the king's men by telling a saga, which also motivates the queen to intercede on his behalf because she and others "believed that he was a knowledgeable and clever man".[152] Sturla then receives the king's permission to recite his poems about him and King Hákon, which are praised by the king.[153] Sturla explains that he has been "slandered in front of your father and you by my adversaries, but not truthfully";[154] according to the text, however, he gains the king's favour as a reward for his poetry:

> „Nú hefi ek heyrt kvæði þín, Sturla, ok hygg ek at þú munir vera it bezta skáld. Nú man ek þat at launum leggja at þú skalt heim kominn með mér í náðum ok góðum friði. En faðir minn á sök á sínum málum, er þit finnizt, en gott mun ek til leggja." (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 463, p. 250)
>
> ("I have now heard your poems, Sturla, and I think you might be the best of poets. I will give you this as a reward: you will follow me home and receive mercy and truce. My father will judge his own conflicts with you when you two meet, but I will intercede on your behalf.")

By focusing on the motif of a poem that saves the skald from the king's anger, the narrative openly imitates some of the skalds' stories about the distant past. It then continues by mentioning Sturla's assignment to write *Hákonar saga* and *Magnúss saga* (STU cccclxiii), a fitting task for a thirteenth-century skald,[155] along-

151 The same *lausavísa* is quoted on another occasion in the compilation (STU cccclix), so it seems to be borrowed from there for the specific purpose of foregrounding Sturla's poetic art.

152 […] þóttust skilja at hann var fróðr maðr ok vitr (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 463, p. 248).

153 Þat ætla ek at þú kveðir betr en páfinn. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 463, p. 249) (I think that you compose better poetry than the Pope.)

154 […] at ek hefi affluttr verit við föður yðvarn ok yðr af óvinum mínum ok eigi með sönnu efni (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 463, p. 250).

155 In the thirteenth century, written sagas were increasingly replacing skaldic poetry as the predominant verbal accounts of monarchs' lives. Sturla also incorporated much of his own poetry into *Hákonar saga.*

side the fact that "he composed many poems about King Magnús and gained great esteem by it".[156] It is also stated that Sturla recites two poems to the Swedish jarl Birgir and receives a reward for them (STU cccclxiii). The chronology of the events is somewhat mixed up in this section of the *þáttr*, which implies that the intention was not to record facts as precisely as possible but to gather diverse information that contributed to the protagonist's portrayal as the character type of the court poet.

While the information about Sturla's poetic activity is probably historically accurate,[157] the notion of his poetry as a decisive tool in his political career is clearly not. The poetic art was no longer regarded as a political device in the thirteenth century; instead of referring to the contemporary Norwegian social hierarchy, the protagonist's role as a skald alludes to traditional cultural concepts that were important for the construction of Icelandic identity, such as intellectual excellence and freedom in the relationship with kings (Sørensen 1995, 102). The openly exaggerated focus on poetry and the use of popular narrative motifs indicate the constructed nature of the *þáttr*, showing that it is intended to "fictionalize the encounter between King Magnús and Sturla, thereby informing the historical and biographical scene with a suprapersonal meaning" (Ciklamini 1984, 148). In this sense, Úlfar Bragason (2010, 185) even calls *Sturlu þáttr* a "parable" (*dæmisaga*). Its focus on the poetic art is therefore best understood as a narrative device that contributes to an indirect interpretation of the events.

Although the political aspects of Sturla's negotiations with the king remain in the background due to the structural pattern of the court poet's story, the *þáttr* briefly alludes to two likely political reasons for King Magnús's magnanimity towards Sturla. The first is Sturla's formal plea for a pardon with the intercession of the high-ranking courtier Gautr Jónsson (STU cccclxiii).[158] The main reason, however, is probably the king's interest in cooperation with a chieftain of noble ancestry who already has an established power base in Iceland and is ambitious but not excessively greedy for power. This motivation is not directly described in the text, but it is stated that Sturla receives the high-ranking position of *lögmaðr*,

156 Hann orti mörg kvæði um Magnús konung ok þá margfalda sæmð þar fyrir (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 463, p. 251).

157 According to *Skáldatal* (*The Uppsala Edda*, 2012, 108), Sturla was the only documented court poet (*hirðskáld*) of King Magnús Hákonarson. As such, he probably used his poetry to formally present himself at the royal court.

158 Examples from *Hákonar saga* show that after an accusation of high treason, a necessary condition of a pardon was to visit the king personally and ask for mercy (Magnús Stefánsson 1988, 167–168). The importance of intermediaries in dealing with the king is discussed by Wærdahl 2013 and 2015; the various historical roles of Gautr Jónsson are discussed by Wærdahl 2017.

which implies that his contact with King Magnús is primarily political.[159] The prestigious office of *lögmaðr* can be regarded as Sturla's final political success after years of power struggles that did not bring him any decisive victory. This brief mention of political reality in *Sturlu þáttr* is presented within the framework of the court poet's story, which endows it with a more abstract meaning. The focus on social prestige gained by the Icelander through his contact with the monarch is an important component of the deconstruction of Iceland's marginality in this narrative type.

This interpretative effect of the court poet's story functions on two levels. On an individual level, it reflects an effort to show how Sturla used his cleverness and eloquence to gain prestige at the royal court, although his first contact with the king was involuntary. Such an image of Sturla may have been of importance to his kinsmen and their adherents, or it may have served as a source of inspiration for other members of the Icelandic elite who felt uncertain in their dealings with the monarchy. On a more universal level, the narrative type shapes the image of the first years after the formal acceptance of royal rule and of the relationship between Icelanders and King Magnús Hákonarson. In this context, as has been shown here before, the court poet's story foregrounds the Icelanders' determination, intellectual skills, and active initiative to increase their esteem within the kingdom.

The focus on these values in *Sturlu þáttr*, the epilogue of *Reykjarfjarðarbók*, emphasizes their significance for the construction of collective identity. However, the presence or absence of this epilogue in the individual redactions does not change the meaning of the compilation, because the same values permeate the whole narrative of Iceland's contact with Norway in *Sturlunga saga*. The compilation's image of the Icelanders' active interest in developing a direct political relationship with the Norwegian monarchy in spite of inevitable complications is only reinforced by the addition of a court poet's story at the end.

Just like in the case of *Þorgils saga skarða*, the incorporation of *Sturlu þáttr* into *Reykjarfjarðarbók* thus implies that the central themes and ideas of the origi-

159 Þat er frá Sturlu sagt at hann fór til Íslands með lögbók þá er Magnús konungr hafði skipat. Var hann þá skipaðr lögmaðr yfir allt Ísland. (*Sturlunga saga, III*, 2021, ch. 464, pp. 252–253) (It is told that Sturla returned to Iceland with the lawbook that King Magnús had introduced. He was appointed as *lögmaðr* for all Iceland.) Sturla probably participated in the production of this lawbook, *Járnsíða*, before his return to Iceland in 1271 (Magnús Stefánsson 1988, 179; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1988, 196–197; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson 2017, 1, 5). In 1271, Sturla became the first *lögmaðr* appointed by the king. When Iceland was divided into two *lögdæmi* in 1277, Sturla continued as *lögmaðr* in the Northern and Western Quarter in 1277–1282, while Jón Einarsson was *lögmaðr* in the Southern and Eastern Quarter in 1277–1294 (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson 2017, 6).

nal compilation were still acknowledged at the time when *Reykjarfjarðarbók* was composed. The new redaction opened the compilation to changes, but the preferred choice was to emphasize the significance of ideas that were already expressed in the text. This means that although *Sturlunga saga* as a narrative interpretation of the recent past was not a static object of passive reception, but rather a living reflection of the currently predominant views, these views seem to have remained relatively constant from the time of the compilation's origin to the composition of *Reykjarfjarðarbók*. The practical politics in the Norwegian-Icelandic kingdom had doubtlessly evolved, but the construction of collective identity through the memory of the past seems to have been characterized by a strong element of continuity.

5.5 Constructing a memory of transformation

The present chapter has shown how the same narrative types that were discussed before shape the meaning of the sections of *Sturlunga saga* that depict the most intense stage of Iceland's political transformation. These sagas appear to be more strictly historiographical than the preceding ones because they pay more attention to the political situation, although they are still centred around the portrayal of their protagonists. Nevertheless, I have argued here that they employ the same interpretative techniques and connect the depicted events with the narratives of older Icelandic history in the same manner, albeit with different emphases. Within the *Sturlunga* compilation, a balanced image of transformation and continuity is constructed not least through intertextual connections with sagas describing the preceding decades.

The narrative type of the conflict story connects *Þórðar saga kakala* with *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, *Guðmundar saga dýra*, and *Svínfellinga saga*. What they all share is their emphasis on the character type of the mediator, which is highlighted by the structural parallels between these stories in the compilation. What differs is the social position of the mediators, since the sagas describe different historical situations. The intertextual connections between the conflict stories facilitate an indirect narrative evaluation of this historical development. In *Þórðar saga kakala*, both sections are structured by the narrative pattern of the conflict story, but with important modifications. In the first section, the expected violent death of one of the main characters is averted by their agreement to accept the king's judgement. In the second section, the king's arbitration prevents a violent revenge for the death of a chieftain. *Þórðar saga* thus replaces the expected tragic element of the conflict story with a more optimistic alternative. This modification could be recognized by the original recipients due to their knowledge of the narrative type from other sagas. Consequently, they could understand the underlying positive evalua-

tion of the social development depicted in *Þórðar saga* even without direct narratorial comments or an excessive idealization of the events.

By foregrounding the king's role as a mediator, *Þórðar saga* advocates monarchy as a political system that upholds peace and order. The king is unable to prevent all violent clashes in Iceland because he cannot fully control the local leaders. However, it is repeatedly accentuated in the saga that whenever the king has the opportunity to influence Icelandic politics through direct contact with the chieftains, he attempts to establish peace by appointing the best possible royal representative and retaining his chief opponent in Norway so as to prevent fights. There is no sign of the king deliberately increasing the political instability in Iceland in order to strengthen his own influence there. The saga thus creates a balanced portrayal of the king: he is not presented as an almighty monarch who can immediately terminate all conflicts, but the beneficial influence of royal rule is emphasized.

Þórðar saga underlines the similarity between the personal character of Norwegian and Icelandic politics by showing that the power dynamics at the Norwegian royal court are still largely based on individual relationships. The king's participation in the Icelandic power struggle is thus not presented as a foreign element, but rather as a higher level of Iceland's own system of patron-client relationships. The interrelatedness of Icelandic and Norwegian politics is also emphasized by references to the Icelanders' role in the recent Norwegian power struggle. *Þórðar saga* alludes to it only briefly, but since the theme was already established in *Sturlunga saga* in the story of Snorri Sturluson, such short mentions are enough to remind the recipients of it. The compilation thus presents Iceland and Norway as a unified realm, characterized by constant debates between the monarch, the local leaders, and the ecclesiastical dignitaries. Disagreements are not ascribed to an opposition between two separate nations, but rather to a tension between the king and the magnates. On the one hand, the magnates – both Icelandic and Norwegian – refuse to passively submit to the king; on the other hand, they are aware of the importance of centralized executive power. The relationship is therefore described as a constant process of negotiation.

What is most important in this context is that the king's interventions in the Icelandic power struggle are not presented in *Þórðar saga* as an unwanted interference, but rather as a result of the chieftains' own initiative to seek the king's arbitration. The saga thus emphasizes the Icelanders' active participation in the political integration with Norway. This process was a historical fact, but its interpretation was largely constructed through the narrativization of the recent past from the perspective of the time when the raw, living memory of the events was transformed into a coherent history, from which the community could derive its collective identity. The integration could have been remembered as a result of

foreign oppression if the social elite that composed or commissioned the sagas had preferred such an image. Instead, however, the image that was chosen to be remembered was one of a voluntary contact.

This perception is centred around the theme of the Icelanders' active initiative in decisive historical events, which, as has been shown here, was established already in *Íslendingabók*. In *Sturlunga saga*, the focus on voluntary decisions in international relations is introduced in the story of Ari Þorgeirsson, which is characterized by some degree of heroic idealization, and then developed in the story of Snorri Sturluson, which is much more complex and ambiguous. *Þórðar saga* then shows an even more detailed image of the Icelandic-Norwegian power networks, but still with the same emphasis on the Icelanders' active role in these political relationships. This theme thus intertextually connects sagas even across different narrative types. The combination of several kinds of intertextual relationships, based on typological similarity or thematic relatedness, deepens the multilayered connections that construct the immanent coherent narrative of Icelandic history.

Intertextual connections are equally important for the construction of meaning in *Þorgils saga skarða* in the *Reykjarfjarðarbók* redaction of *Sturlunga saga*. The saga is primarily structured by the narrative pattern of the royal retainer's story, but it modifies its outcome and emphasis. The protagonist's behaviour is shown to receive a meaningful purpose in royal service when he realizes that he will gain more esteem by loyalty to the retinue and the monarch than by stubbornly furthering his individual ambition. He proves his worth at the royal court and in a quest away from it, which are typical elements of the royal retainer's story. However, the saga modifies the narrative type by showing that the protagonist does not earn prestige in royal service by fighting on the king's behalf, but rather by preventing destruction or bloodshed. Within *Sturlunga saga*, this modification is particularly noticeable in contrast with the story of Ari Þorgeirsson in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*, who is portrayed almost exclusively as a warrior. This contrast reflects the historical development from warrior-chieftains to peaceful royal representatives; the account of the protagonist's life thus transcends its individual meaning and contributes to shaping the overall memory of Icelandic-Norwegian history.

The modification of the royal retainer's story is further developed by its combination with the peaceful chieftain's story in the second section of *Þorgils saga*. Þorgils, who has learnt to control his ferocity by adopting the concept of unity and loyalty as a member of the royal retinue, promotes non-violent power relations with the help of the king's authority also after returning to Iceland. He embodies the right balance between decisiveness and moderation, as he is determined to carry out his tasks as a royal representative but seeks peaceful solutions whenever

they are possible. He refrains from attacking his fellow retainer Gizurr Þorvaldsson despite his personal hatred of him; he also forgives Hrafn Oddsson and Sturla Þórðarson for their attack because social stability matters more to him than personal grudges. The portrayal of Þorgils as an ideal peaceful chieftain is underlined in the saga by a contrast with his aggressive counterpart, Þorvarðr Þórarinsson. When Þorvarðr stubbornly fights for power against his former ally, his behaviour represents the opposite of the social unity that is promoted in the saga; this contrast emphasizes the moral message of the peaceful chieftain's story.

Within *Sturlunga saga*, the significance of this narrative type is accentuated by structural and thematic connections between multiple peaceful chieftains' stories. It has been argued here that this can be regarded as the most important intertextual relationship that shapes the meaning of the compilation. The parallels between these stories foreground the values represented by their protagonists, while the differences in emphasis illustrate the gradual historical development. In the sagas dealing with internal Icelandic relations, the portrayals of Sturla Þórðarson the elder, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, and Þórðr Sturluson embody the cohesive forces that regulate the inevitable violence in a pre-monarchic state. In the sagas that depict contact with the Norwegian monarchy, the stories of Þorgils Böðvarsson and Gizurr Þorvaldsson illustrate the king's positive influence on the development of Icelandic society. The similarities between both groups of peaceful chieftains' stories emphasize the continuity of medieval Icelandic history by showing that the essential values that define collective identity are retained despite the transformation of the social system.

The strongest parallel is the one between Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, the ideal yet tragic peaceful chieftain, and Þorgils Böðvarsson. The deaths of both Hrafn and Þorgils are predicted by foreshadowing, including mysterious appearances of blood and dreams of ominous figures reciting stanzas. Moreover, both characters read or listen to a saga or poem about their favourite saint the evening before their killing and comment on the saint's martyrdom. These similarities are so extensive that they seem to be a deliberately constructed parallel, intended to compare Þorgils to Hrafn. This implies that Hrafn's story had already become a well-integrated part of cultural memory; as such, it could shape the perception of more recent events and contribute to their interpretation in a narrative discourse. Unlike *Hrafns saga*, however, *Þorgils saga* accentuates the development of the protagonist's personality. Whereas Hrafn is portrayed as an unusually peaceful man from the beginning, Þorgils gradually changes from a ferocious youth to a refined royal retainer and then to a peaceful chieftain; this evolution is emphasized by the combination of the two narrative types in *Þorgils saga*.

A similar personal development is presented in the story of Gizurr Þorvaldsson, which is divided into several sections in *Sturlunga saga*. In the first section,

the account of his conflict with Sturla Sighvatsson, Gizurr is portrayed as a warrior-chieftain and contrasted with the ideal peaceful chieftain Þórðr Sturluson. The middle section, which consists of the events described in *Þórðar saga kakala*, illustrates the influence of the monarchy on the Icelanders' behaviour. Although Gizurr was formally the king's retainer long before, his conflict with Þórðr Sighvatsson, in which they voluntarily decide to accept the king's judgement, can be viewed as the decisive moment when his attitude changes. Then, in the final section, it is Gizurr himself who is portrayed as a peaceful chieftain with elements of the ideal of *rex iustus*. His popularity is repeatedly accentuated, he is presented as a bearer of extraordinary luck and God's mercy and as a protector of the country, and it is shown that he only turns to violence when it is necessary for terminating individual conflicts that disrupt social stability. These elements of the royal ideal in the narrative portrayal of an Icelander imply that the Icelanders perceived royal power as neither foreign nor distant and identified with the values associated with this concept.

Beyond the level of personal characterization, the emphasis on development in the stories of both Þorgils and Gizurr illustrates the general direction of Iceland's transformation from a society governed by warrior-chieftains to a state where violence is regulated by centralized executive power. The young Þorgils and Gizurr embody the Icelandic leading class of the Sturlung Age with its weak sense of collective unity in the absence of a unifying authority that could prevent constant power struggles. The older Þorgils and Gizurr, by contrast, represent the ever-growing group of Icelandic chieftains who chose to accept the values carried by the monarch and to further the community's shared interests. Although the political relations in the monarchy were still largely based on individual obligations and trust, the king did not represent just an individual on top of the social hierarchy, but rather an institution that transcended individuality. Thus, an acceptance of the monarchy could transcend individual rivalry and strengthen the sense of unity; this process eventually terminated the tumultuous Sturlung Age. Since the whole *Sturlunga saga* is centred around an anticipation of this turning point, its positive image of the social development counterbalances the inherently tragic tone of the peaceful chieftains' stories in its final part.

Finally, the *Reykjarfjarðarbók* redaction of *Sturlunga saga* presents an interesting contrast between its epilogue, *Sturlu þáttr*, which is structured by the narrative pattern of the court poet's story, and the depiction of Sturla Þórðarson the younger in *Íslendinga saga*. In the latter, Sturla inevitably participates in the endless violent power struggles of the Sturlung Age; in the former, he enjoys social prestige despite his precarious initial position. This difference corresponds to the aforementioned contrast between the tragic tone of the sagas of Icelanders and the optimistic tone of the *útanferðar þættir*, which was pointed out by Joseph Har-

ris (1976, 16–19). In *Sturlunga saga*, however, the difference clearly extends beyond the simple literary distinction between sagas and *þættir*, as it has been shown here that the same narrative types can be used in both groups of texts. Instead, this contrast again reflects the positive impact of the monarchy on Icelandic politics. Before establishing a direct contact with the monarchy, Sturla is stuck in the relentless competition for power in Iceland, in which he cannot rely on any central authority. When this contact is established, albeit with initial difficulties, Sturla's political career receives a clear direction. The formal acceptance of royal rule stabilizes the social system by introducing executive power, and the Sturlung Age is finally terminated.

The account of Sturla's life is of course primarily determined by historical reality, but the optimistic image in *Sturlu þáttr* was to some extent probably deliberately constructed in the process of narrativization, with the purpose of shaping collective Icelandic identity in the transitional period after the formal acceptance of royal rule. In communicative memory, the story of Sturla's contact with the royal court was presumably ambivalent. On the one hand, his political success and social prestige after his journey to Norway were probably a fact. On the other hand, there was doubtlessly an initial discord between Sturla and the king, although he possibly never directly opposed royal rule. In the process of transformation into cultural memory, each of these diverse elements could have been emphasized, suppressed, or interpreted in different ways without the resulting narrative being essentially untrue.

Due to the undeniable elements of conflict, Sturla's story could have been easily turned into a discourse of enmity between Icelanders and the Norwegian monarchy if such an interpretation had been preferred. However, the extant text shows that it was the opposite discourse that became dominant in collective memory – a narrative that truthfully admits the initial disagreement between the Icelander and the king but accentuates the reconciliation and the Icelander's successful political cooperation with the royal court. This selected memory of the recent past, shaped by the optimistic, even somewhat idealizing narrative type of the court poet's story, could significantly contribute to the construction of collective identity.

Together, these analyses show how *Sturlunga saga* connects its component sagas not just through chronology and direct causal relationships, but also through typological and thematic similarities. The narrative types and thematic emphases also connect the contemporary sagas with other narratives of Icelandic history. Apart from the texts discussed here so far, one final group of sources completes the image of medieval Iceland's transformation from the Free State to the monarchy: the late sagas of the Icelandic bishops. Although they differ considerably from *Sturlunga saga* in style and content, it will be argued here that there are significant structural and thematic parallels. This will be the object of the following chapter.

6 Integration and integrity: Iceland as a part of the Norwegian kingdom

After the formal acceptance of royal rule in Iceland, the most important step towards an actual, rather than just formal integration into the Norwegian kingdom was the introduction of a new code of law for the whole realm by King Magnús Hákonarson (1263–1280). A new lawbook for Iceland, *Járnsíða*, was introduced in 1271–1274, and then replaced by an improved version, *Jónsbók*, in 1280–1281. The innovations contained in these lawbooks, related to the formalized presence of the monarchy in Iceland, were the most significant elements of change in the late thirteenth century. Legislative authority was taken up by the king, while the Alþingi was transformed into a judicial institution, although it retained some legislative functions in local matters. The lawspeaker (*lögsögumaðr/lögmaðr*) became a royal official, whose main task was to pronounce judgement on legal cases, either alone or in cooperation with a jury (Wærdahl 2011, 123–131; Beck 2011, 67–68). The most radical innovation was that prosecution and punishment were no longer private matters, as the royal officials possessed the right of public prosecution and executive authority (Wærdahl 2011, 154–158). In practice, the introduction of executive power significantly reduced violence in personal conflicts. Some cases of private violence and vengeance still occurred (Helgi Þorláksson 1997; 2015; Orning 2013), but armed clashes between kin groups were no longer a defining feature of Icelandic society.

The chieftains were transformed into royal officials, and their contact with the king was intensified and formalized (Sverrir Jakobsson 2010, 68–80). However, the government of Iceland stayed almost completely in the hands of the original Icelandic elite, who still used the power base that they had built up as chieftains (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1995, 156; Wærdahl 2011, 283–288). The officials' positions were quite stable in the first decades, and they mostly administered the same districts that they had controlled as chieftains. After the death of the most influential leaders, Hrafn Oddsson (1289) and Þorvarðr Þórarinsson (1296), the new officials derived their power more directly from their service to the king, and the established families were partly replaced by new ones, but they were still related to the old chieftain clans (Wærdahl 2011, 177–183; Beck 2011, 109–111).[160]

160 According to *Hirðskrá*, officials had to be recruited from 'good families', which in Iceland almost always meant being descended from chieftains in the second, third, or fourth generation (Beck 2011, 191–192).

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Access to the offices was thus mostly socially hereditary, although there was some chance for new wealthy families (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1995, 157–158).[161] This stable position of the local elite in the government was an essential element of continuity between the old and new political system (Wærdahl 2011, 202–205).

After the termination of the secular power struggles of the Sturlung Age, Icelandic politics in the last third of the thirteenth century were affected by an extensive conflict between secular and ecclesiastical power. It was related to similar tendencies in Europe and Norway, which had started already in the preceding century. The Church claimed freedom from secular intervention in matters of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, law, and elections since the acceptance of the Gregorian doctrine at the Lateran council of 1139, and this trend was adopted by the Norwegian archdiocese of Niðarós, established in 1152 (Jón Jóhannesson 1956, 212–213). The Norwegian Church attained a strong position during the reign of Magnús Erlingsson (1161–1184), who gave Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson (1161–1188) great privileges in return for his support in the conflict with his opponent Sverrir Sigurðarson (Bagge 1996, 83–85; 2010, 59–60). The most significant privilege was *ius patronatus* (2010, 296), which made the secular owners of churches responsible for renewing the church property in the case of damage, with the purpose of ensuring more stable pastoral care (Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 115–119). In Iceland, *ius patronatus* was probably introduced by Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson of Skálholt (1178–1193); its impact is attested in the *Old Christian Law* from 1199–1217 (2000, 119–121).

A more decisive struggle for complete independence of ecclesiastical property in Iceland started only a hundred years later, when Bishop Árni Þorláksson of Skálholt (1269–1298) introduced the archbishop's request that all churches must be given under the bishops' control.[162] Árni failed to enforce this request at first,

161 When Icelanders swore allegiance to King Hákon Magnússon in 1302, they requested that only Icelanders from the chieftain families should receive high royal offices (Wærdahl 2011, 133–141) – probably successfully, as the officials known from this period were descended from chieftains (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1995, 160). It has been suggested that this demand was a protest against four Norwegian officials sent to Iceland in 1301 (Jón Jóhannesson 1958, 232–255), but there is no evidence of any direct opposition to Norwegians. The demand was presumably rather intended to ensure that the descendants of chieftains, instead of other wealthy Icelanders of less noble lineage, would receive the prestigious offices (Gunnar Karlsson 1987, 134; Wærdahl 2011, 198–201). As such, it defined the Icelandic aristocracy, protected its privileged position, and strengthened its collective identity – but it was class identity, rather than national identity (Beck 2011, 94–97, 142–143). The request thus hardly reflected the idea that "þjóðin missti frelsi sitt og hafa sárindin af þeim atburði ekki verið með öllu horfin" (Jón Jóhannesson 1958, 226) (the nation lost its freedom, and the dissatisfaction with that event was not yet completely gone).

162 […] gefaz í byskups vald (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 9, p. 16).

because the owners of the wealthiest land-owning churches (*staðir*),[163] royal officials from the old chieftain clans, refused to give up their hereditary control of the *staðir* (Magnús Stefánsson 1978, 123–125; Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 128–130). The dispute, known in Icelandic sources as the *staðamál*, could not be resolved without external intervention, so Bishop Árni and his secular opponents travelled to Norway to meet King Magnús Hákonarson and the archbishop in 1272. The archbishop decided that all churches must be controlled by the bishops, and King Magnús showed much benevolence towards ecclesiastical power by acknowledging this decision. Bishop Árni, whose position was strengthened by the king's support, took the churches from their secular owners and gave them as a fief (*lén*) to priests (Magnús Stefánsson 1978, 138–146).

King Magnús, however, died on 9 May 1280. His son Eiríkr was only twelve years old, so Norway was governed by the royal council. Whereas the king had supported the Church, the counsellors renewed the conflict, and the Church temporarily lost almost all the rights that it had acquired in the preceding decades. In 1282, the archbishop was outlawed together with two Norwegian bishops and died in Sweden (1978, 174–181). A letter from 1282/1283, issued by the royal council, ordered all church property in Iceland back into the hands of the previous secular owners. The letter distinguished sharply between loyalty to the monarchy and to the bishops, as if they were contradictory. After a long discussion, Bishop Árni agreed to tolerate the letter for the sake of peace until the consecration of a new archbishop (1978, 187–197).

The new archbishop, Jörundr of Hamar, was consecrated in 1288 and acknowledged his predecessor's decision that all churches must be controlled by the bishops (1978, 198). King Eiríkr Magnússon was now of age, and his active participation in the government increased. He was willing to compromise, but not to accept older decisions automatically (1978, 210–219). It then took several years to reach a compromise. In the Treaty of Ögvaldsnes from 13 September 1297, King Eiríkr, Archbishop Jörundr, and Bishop Árni agreed to grant the Church absolute control of all *staðir*, while *bændakirkjur* remained private property.[164] Bishop Árni died soon after, on 17 April 1298 (1978, 223–225; Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 128–132).

163 *Staðir* were churches that owned a half or more of the land on the farm to which they belonged; those that owned less were *bændakirkjur* (Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 295).

164 Out of about 220 churches in the Skálholt diocese, about 80 were *staðir*. While ensuring the continuation of private ownership of some churches, the Treaty of Ögvaldsnes marked the end of the power structure that had developed with the introduction of *staðir*. The wealthiest *staðir* had served as power centres, but after the *staðamál* they were replaced with large, wealthy farms known as manors (*höfuðból*); the term was introduced into Icelandic inheritance laws in *Jónsbók*. 24 of the 30 known manors were *bændakirkjur*, so there was some continuity in the link between secular power and religious institutions (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1995, 163).

After the end of the *staðamál*, Icelandic politics continued to develop as a combination of internal processes and influences from continental Scandinavia. The Norwegian kingdom entered into a personal union with Sweden in 1319, but the resulting political innovations were not abrupt, because they were a continuation of processes that had started already during the reign of Hákon Magnússon in 1299–1319 (Wærdahl 2011, 207). The most significant change in the government of Iceland was the establishment of the office of governor (*hirðstjóri*) around 1320. He was the top official in regional administration, who presented internal conflicts to the king for judgement and functioned as an intermediary between the royal officials, ecclesiastical power, and the people (Wærdahl 2011, 214–218; Beck 2011, 82–87). However, a similar position without the title had in fact been held before by Hrafn Oddsson, Þorvarðr Þórarinsson, Erlendr Óláfsson, or Álfr of Krókr (Wærdahl 2011, 212–214), so the change was a formalization of the position, rather than a dramatic transformation of the power structure.

A crisis in the relationship between Icelanders and the monarchy occurred in 1354–1364, when one to four governors held all or part of Iceland as a fief on lease and were constantly replaced, which caused instability. The people were dissatisfied, and the conflict became so fierce that a Norwegian fief-holder was killed (Beck 2011, 62, 90–92; Wærdahl 2011, 250–253; Rohrbach 2013, 202–203). Nevertheless, the discord was of a practical, rather than ideological character. The written sources from this time show – indirectly, as they are non-narrative – that even during this period of instability, the predominant view of royal rule remained positive (Rohrbach 2013, 192–193, 204–205).[165] After 1370, the fief system was revoked, and one *hirðstjóri* for all Iceland was appointed by the king for three years at a time (Beck 2011, 92). In the late fourteenth century, power was in practice still in the hands of the local elite, who still retained a personal power base in addition to their office (Wærdahl 2011, 268–269).

This political elite, together with the Church, also continued to commission the production of written materials. In the cultural sphere, however, the integration of Iceland into a centrally administered monarchy led to a gradual decline of interest in writing long narratives about recent secular history. There are no sagas about secular events after the death of King Magnús Hákonarson, so the only available sources are the extant documents, the lawbooks, and the brief records in the annals. The only long narratives dealing with Icelandic events in the decades around 1300 are *Árna saga biskups* and *Lárentíus saga biskups*, which primarily record ec-

165 Rohrbach shows that this is reflected for instance in the legal manuscript *Skarðsbók* from 1363. It expresses support of royal rule through its distinctive emphasis on royal authority and its image of the Icelandic law as part of the Norwegian king's legislation, presented as part of the history of salvation.

clesiastical history. They nevertheless also provide an insight into secular politics, general social tendencies, and the development of Icelandic collective identity. Their style is shaped by the tradition of Latin hagiography and historiography and is quite annalistic due to frequent quotations from administrative documents (Vésteinn Ólason and Sverrir Tómasson 2006, 80). However, their structural patterns and narrative types share many similarities with the secular contemporary sagas, so the construction of meaning in the texts is comparable.

Nevertheless, a significant and decidedly not arbitrary difference is that the bishops' sagas approach history from a broader perspective than the secular contemporary sagas, which are mostly focused on Iceland and its contact with the Norwegian kingdom, but not on its relationship with the rest of the world. They "narrate history in a local conceptual framework. Events abroad, pontificates, reigns, and deaths of foreign dignitaries are not called upon for contextualization and dating. […] The Norwegian court forms the only setting abroad, but this setting […] was part of the microspace of the Icelandic male elite in the thirteenth century" (Rohrbach 2017, 355–356). Conversely, many of the bishops' sagas, especially the late ones, pay much more attention to the Christian world outside of the Norwegian-Icelandic realm.

This broadening of the perspective probably reflects the fact that once the incorporation of Iceland into the Norwegian kingdom was at least formally completed, the attention turned to this realm's position within the cultural region beyond its political boundaries. However, the late bishops' sagas also continue to show interest in the power dynamics between the Icelandic elite, including the ecclesiastical dignitaries, and the Norwegian centres of power. The narratives thus construct an image of Iceland's position within broader areas on several levels. As such, they contribute to a redefinition of the Icelandic collective identity, which was presumably much needed at this time of intense social transformation.

Although Iceland's incorporation into the kingdom did not lead to a loss of its own identity, as has been argued in the preceding chapters, that does not mean that the Icelanders' perception of their identity remained entirely unchanged by the new political and social situation. For this reason, the theme of marginality and integration probably gained increased significance in the social debate among the Icelandic elites, and this was doubtlessly reflected in the literature produced by these elites. The aim of the present chapter is to analyse the late sagas of the Icelandic bishops, composed in the fourteenth century, as images of that time's relationship between Icelanders and the monarchy on the one hand, and between the Norwegian-Icelandic realm and the broader Christian world on the other.

6.1 Árni Þorláksson: The statesman and the saint's successor

6.1.1 *Árna saga biskups* as a conflict story

Árna saga biskups is an account of the late-thirteenth-century conflict between secular and ecclesiastical power in Iceland (*staðamál*). The main confrontation takes place between Árni Þorláksson, bishop of Skálholt in 1269–1298, and the Icelandic royal officials, who replaced the chieftain class after Iceland's integration into the Norwegian kingdom.

As Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir (1998, xvi–xx) has pointed out, *Árna saga* is a political narrative written shortly after the events, so it has a narrower perspective than the bishops' sagas about older times. It does not conceal its propagandist tone – the saga's purpose clearly was to secure the continuation of Bishop Árni's agenda in his diocese. The bias is expressed through parallels between Bishop Árni and Saint Augustine, as well as through the selection of quotations from documents, which play a role comparable to that of stanzas in other sagas: they corroborate the historicity of the facts, while also highlighting selected aspects of the narrative. The saga is characterized by an episodic structure and a historiographical style with a strict chronology and annalistic references to foreign events, popes, and monarchs.

Nevertheless, if we follow the saga's individual narrative threads, rather than the given order of the chapters, a relatively clear pattern is revealed. Structurally, this pattern follows the narrative type of the conflict story. The plot of the saga is based on the protagonist's gradually escalating conflict with his adversaries, although physical violence is very limited. Bishop Árni first negotiates with the church owners but gives up when he fails to gain Oddastaðr (ÁSB ix). Later, he renews his claim at the Alþingi, requests a public judgement, and wins the lawsuit (ÁSB x). Eventually, as other major *staðir* become the object of disagreements, it is decided that the matter must be judged by the king and the archbishop (ÁSB xvi–xvii). The structural pattern thus accentuates the role of the king as a mediator who can terminate the discord and re-establish peace and order. Like in *Þórðar saga kakala*, the king represents a superior authority, capable of solving conflicts that nobody in Iceland is powerful enough to terminate.

The saga introduces the king as a positive character even before the beginning of the conflict, in an account of Árni's first journey to Norway in 1263, when Bishop Brandr Jónsson of Hólar is consecrated. The statement that "a close relationship developed between King Magnús and this same Árni already then and

never ended while they both lived"[166] foreshadows the monarch's role in the upcoming conflict. In the *staðamál*, Bishop Árni relies on the king's support and considers him "a true and perfect friend of the Church".[167] He therefore willingly undertakes a journey to Norway to negotiate with the king for the benefit of the Church, "so that the crucified one's matter would not be disregarded because of his own negligence".[168] The reference to Christ evokes ideas of the bishop and the king as God's representatives.

King Magnús promises to support Bishop Árni, but in return he asks him to encourage Icelanders to accept the new lawbook *Járnsíða*.[169] The episode thus foregrounds the reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationship between the king and the bishop, accentuating the ideal of harmony between royal and ecclesiastical power.[170] In the negotiation about the *staðamál*, the king acknowledges the archbishop's decision that the *staðir* should be owned by the Church (ÁSB xxiii). This decision marks Bishop Árni's temporary victory and a break in the conflict, so the episode illustrates the king's positive role. This image is further underlined by the saga's focus on how the king treats Bishop Árni with respect (ÁSB xxi) and how Árni takes leave of the king in great friendship (ÁSB xxvi). This overall tone of the episode makes it clear that it does not express a negative attitude to the monarchy, although it admits that disagreements concerning the ratification of laws and other political matters existed in the newly established, still not fully stabilized Norwegian-Icelandic realm.

It is the internal disunity between the Church and the secular leaders that is presented in the saga as the most pressing problem of Icelandic society, and royal power is depicted as the only authority capable of mitigating this conflict. The saga therefore implies that the reason for the renewal of the discord is King Magnús's death, which is described as a heavy loss for the clerics, and this statement is even emphasized by a biblical parallel:

166 […] gerðiz þá þegar mikill kunnleiki milli Magnúss konungs ok þessa sama Árna sá er aldrei þraut meðal þeir lifðu báðir (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 4, p. 8).

167 […] sannan ok fullkominn vin kirkjunnar (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 20, p. 28).

168 […] at eigi væri fyrir hans leti í salt lagit sök hins krossfesta (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 21, p. 30).

169 […] það væri byskuplig skylda at eggja fólk á þá hluti sem þeim var bæði í sæmð ok uppreist, siðbót ok nauðsyn. (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 20, p. 29) ([…] it is the bishop's duty to encourage the people to accept things that bring them both honour and improvement and are morally right and necessary.)

170 Even King Magnús's lawbooks state that the king and the bishop are both representatives of God and are obliged to cooperate (*Norges gamle love*, 1846–1895, I, p. 262; II, p. 193; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998, xxix–xxx).

> At liðnum þessum vetri fekk Árni byskup þann skaða sem sameiginligr var allri Nóregs kristni at hinn himneski faðir Jesus Christus kallaði til sín virðuligan herra Magnús konung in adventu beati Nicholai í Barin. Var sá skaði svá mikill öllu landsbúinu, en einkanliga klerkunum, sem forðum var fráfall hins ágæta Jósúa konungs. (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 55, p. 78)
>
> (After the end of this winter, Bishop Árni suffered the loss that was shared by all the Christians in Norway, that the heavenly father Jesus Christ summoned the noble lord, King Magnús, on the day of Saint Nicholas's arrival in Bari.[171] It was a heavy loss for all the inhabitants of the country, but especially for the clerics, like the decease of the great King Joshua had been before.)

The ideal of a strong king supporting the Church continues to be emphasized further on:

> Vóru ok þær einar fréttir af Nóregi at þar skeikaði mjök stjórnin sem líkligt var at slökknuðum svá björtum landsins lampa sem var Magnús konungr, þeim sem sanna raun sanns góðvila sýndi at um sína daga var mjök í loga af eldi tvennar elsku sjálfs Guðs ok sinna náunga […] (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 71, p. 105)
>
> (The only news from Norway was that the governance went much askew there, as could be expected after the extinguishing of such a bright lantern of the country as King Magnús, who had shown by a true proof of true goodwill that he had been much aflame in the fire of the double love of God and his neighbours […])

The absence of a strong monarch after King Magnús's death, when his son Eiríkr is still a child, leads to a renewed conflict between the Church and the royal council in Norway, in which the archbishop and two bishops are exiled. The conflict reaches Iceland when a declaration issued by the royal council states that the *staðir* must be returned to their secular owners (ÁSB lxxiii). After this, the discord gradually increases again. At first, Bishop Árni agrees to a compromise for the sake of peace (ÁSB lxxvii), but then he renews his claims and is accused of breaking the agreement (ÁSB lxxxi–lxxxii). The matter is discussed at the Alþingi (ÁSB lxxxiii–lxxxvi) and a written agreement is produced (ÁSB lxxxvii–lxxxviii), but it does not terminate the strife.

Some sections of the conflict are presented as being highly personal, like the typical conflict stories dealing with the Free State period. First, the text focuses on Bishop Árni's dispute with the officials Ásgrímr Þorsteinsson and Ormr Klængsson (ÁSB lxiv–xcv), which ends only when the bishop's opponents ask for forgiveness on their deathbeds (ÁSB xcvii, cxviii). The temporary termination of a conflict due to a non-violent death resembles Þórðr Sighvatsson's power struggle with Kolbeinn Arnórsson in *Þórðar saga*. Just like in *Þórðar saga*, however, the discord cannot be terminated completely without the king's arbitration. Bishop

171 On the day when Saint Nicholas's relics were translated – 9 May.

Árni continues to argue with the royal official Hrafn Oddsson and accepts the suggested agreement only reluctantly for the sake of peace (ÁSB cvii–cviii), so there is little chance of a lasting reconciliation without external intervention.

While King Eiríkr is underage, direct narratorial comments in the saga point out that he is not decisive enough, although he has a noble personality (ÁSB xci). The text states that God has sent a burden (*þyngð*) in the form of illness, starvation, and cattle plague to Norway to turn the inhabitants back to the right ways. Queen Margrét dies, and King Eiríkr is severely wounded while riding, but God heals him through the intercession of Saint Óláfr (ÁSB xci). This interpretation implies that the patron saint of Norway allows the young king to survive because a strong monarch is crucial for the kingdom. Bishop Árni can expect a positive development only when King Eiríkr is old enough to actively govern the kingdom.

Just like his predecessor Magnús, Eiríkr asks Bishop Árni to support his agenda in return for help in the *staðamál*. When a war with Sweden is imminent in 1286, the king summons forty men from each quarter and all the retainers from Iceland to join the army (ÁSB cix). He asks Bishop Árni to encourage the acceptance of this request and to provide the army with goods, promising him his support in return (ÁSB cx). This again illustrates the reciprocity of the relationship – the king does not expect the bishop to obey him unconditionally but is open to negotiation. Paradoxically, then, the bishop advances the king's cause, while the royal officials reject the request. Árni supports it in his public speeches, emphasizing the mutual obligation between the king and the farmers, who are actually shown to agree with Árni's argumentation and acknowledge their duties to the king (ÁSB cx–cxi). The bishop is thus presented as an intermediary between the king and the people, whereas the royal officials mainly promote their own interests. The bishop's attitude reflects the idea that the relationship between the people and the monarchy must be based neither on stubborn opposition nor on blind obedience, but rather on debate and compromise.

The war with Sweden does not take place after all, but the negotiation intensifies the contact between the king and Bishop Árni. The text emphasizes the fact that the king now rules more independently than before[172] and feels obliged to help the Church to its rights.[173] This sums up the saga's central message: the importance of strong royal rule and of cooperation between the king and the

172 […] fréttiz ok gott frá konunginum at hann réði meira en fyrrum. (*Árna saga,* 1998, ch. 122, p. 171) ([…] and there was the good news of the king that he decided in more [matters] than before.)

173 […] sagðiz ok konungrinn kenna sik skyldugan með erkibyskups ráði at fylgja kirkjunni til síns réttar sem öðrum. (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 127, p. 178) ([…] and the king said he felt obliged to help the Church to its rights in cooperation with the archbishop, just like [he helped] others.)

Church. The same ideas are also reflected in the actual events – the newly appointed archbishop confirms his predecessor's conclusion concerning the *staðamál* and the king acknowledges this decision (ÁSB cxxxi–cxxxii). Bishop Árni and his adversaries then finally hold a meeting with the king and the archbishop (ÁSB cxliv), and it is concluded that the secular owners of the *staðir* must accept the archbishop's decision (ÁSB cxlvi). The end of the saga is lost, so the final agreement of 1297 is not found in the extant text, but it would make a logical conclusion of the well-structured conflict story.

The saga deals with tension between secular and ecclesiastical power, but it is important that it never presents a direct conflict between the Church and the king, only discord between the Church and the secular leaders in the absence of a strong king. It shows that when royal rule works as it should, the king can efficiently regulate such disagreements and terminate conflicts. The saga thus expresses the idea that a stable monarchy is a precondition of peace and order in the kingdom and of harmony and mutual support between ecclesiastical and secular power.

Nevertheless, while the overall structure of *Árna saga* emphasizes the importance of strong royal rule, many episodes show that Bishop Árni still uses the traditional Icelandic methods of upholding his power, which were used by chieftains in the Free State period – such as generosity and efficient conflict resolution on the local level. These social mechanisms are thus presented as being compatible with royal rule. Árni hosts big feasts and arbitrates in disputes (ÁSB xiii); the continuity is further emphasized by a direct comparison with the most influential twelfth-century chieftain, Jón Loptsson:

> […] hann gerði sér vini af óvinum í því at hann helt þeira hluta langt fram þótt vinir hans væri í móti sem forðum gerði Jón Loptsson, ok endrtryggði þá óvinina með sæmðum eðr fégjöfum. (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 13, pp. 22–23)
>
> ([…] he turned his enemies into his friends by persistently supporting their cases, even though his friends were against it, like Jón Loptsson had done before, and he appeased his enemies by increasing their honour or by material gifts.)

Such a parallel constructs a direct link to the past. The text also makes a connection – underlined by alliteration – between prudence, power, and popularity, the same values that are appreciated in chieftains in the sagas of Icelanders and the secular contemporary sagas:

> […] en því at byskup hafði lögunum jafnan at fylgt urðu fleiri fylgjendr þess at hann tók upp ok varð þungt við hann at skipta bæði sakir vizku, valds ok vinsælda. (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 41, p. 62)

([…] and because the bishop had always followed the law, he gained more and more supporters for the cases he took up. He became a difficult opponent due to his prudence, power, and popularity.)

Although the principles of conflict resolution have formally changed, the saga shows that many local disputes still follow the model known from the Free State period. The enmity between Bishop Árni and the royal official Þorvarðr Þórarinsson begins with a petty disagreement between two farmers, who turn for support to Þorvarðr and Árni respectively (ÁSB xl). In another similar case, Árni protects a farmer from Þorvarðr's accusation of theft (ÁSB xli). Later, Árni helps a certain Ketill, who is facing legal accusations, while Þorvarðr supports Ketill's opponents (ÁSB xli). This shows that the farmers still rely on the local leaders, who in turn use conflict resolution as a means of reinforcing their power. *Árna saga* thus expresses the idea that the traditional Icelandic social mechanisms are not distorted by royal rule, only modified. This can be regarded as the final stage of the contemporary sagas' image of Iceland's political development as a gradual process, characterized primarily by continuity.

6.1.2 Saint Þorlákr in *Árna saga*

Apart from its emphasis on the importance of a strong monarchy, *Árna saga* is characterized by an openly admitted ecclesiastical perspective; both elements are intertwined in the narrative and do not contradict each other. Bishop Árni is portrayed with a focus on his clerical identity, which, as will be argued here, is derived not only from the authority of the Church as an international institution, but also from the local Christian history of Iceland. An essential narrative device employed in his portrayal is the construction of parallels with Saint Þorlákr.

Bishop Árni is compared primarily to the image of Saint Þorlákr that is constructed in *Oddaverja þáttr* in the B-redaction of *Þorláks saga*, a set of episodes dealing with Bishop Þorlákr's conflicts with the secular chieftains. *Oddaverja þáttr* depicts power struggles and political issues, but it is strongly hagiographic. It explicitly refers to miracles when Þorlákr is protected from violent assaults or his opponents are punished by circumstances that are interpreted in the text as divine interventions. The hagiographic tendency is accentuated by parallels between Þorlákr and Saint Ambrose, a saintly bishop who opposed secular power. These parallels underline both Þorlákr's sanctity and his conflict with the chieftains, which is probably exaggerated in the *þáttr* (Ármann Jakobsson and Ásdís Egilsdóttir 1999, 96–99; Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 68–72).

The author of *Árna saga* creates the impression that Árni's actions are modelled on Þorlákr's life, but it is in fact this specific account of Þorlákr's actions,

Oddaverja þáttr, that is probably modelled on Árni's agenda. *Oddaverja þáttr* is not found in the older A-redaction of *Þorláks saga*; it is an addition to the B-redaction, which was written at the time of Bishop Árni. It was presumably added to the saga for the purpose of supporting Árni's argumentation in the *staðamál* by references to the authority of Iceland's most prominent saint (Ármann Jakobsson and Ásdís Egilsdóttir 1999, 92–99; Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 112–123; Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 75–77). That is implied in the prologue of the B-redaction (*Þorláks saga* B, 2002, pp. 143–144), where it is stated that the purpose of the saga is to serve as an example to be followed, and that the reason for its rewriting is the need to emphasize the hardships that Saint Þorlákr suffered in his conflict with secular power. This portrayal of Þorlákr thus seems to have been constructed as a reflection of the problems faced by Bishop Árni, as a source of parallels that could then be purposefully employed in *Árna saga* as a means of interpretation and evaluation.

The first parallel concerns the bishop's conflict with the secular owner of Oddastaðr. According to *Árna saga* (ix), Bishop Árni fails to gain Oddastaðr, gives up, and returns home. Þorlákr is depicted in the same situation in *Oddaverja þáttr* (ÞS-B xxii), but this account is in fact probably modelled on Árni's action. The parallel is emphasized in *Árna saga* by a direct reference to Þorlákr's disagreement with another chieftain, Sigurðr Ormsson of Svínafell, which is also described in *Oddaverja þáttr*:

> Þat sumar reið Árni byskup fyrir norðan Sólheimajökul ok rak byskupligt embætti um Austfirðingafjórðung, ok eptir tilskipan herra Jóns erkibyskups hóf hann tilkall á alla staði, þá sem þar vóru. En þótt þat yrði með nokkurum mótmælum af þeira hendi sem heldu þess kyns eignir fekk hann vald yfir flestum öllum stöðum utan Þváttá ok Hallormsstöðum. Gengu því Austfirðingar léttligar at þessu en aðrir menn at hinn sæli Þorlákr með ráði Eysteinns erkibyskups hóf þat sama tilkall at Svínafelli við Sigurð Ormsson, ok hann jáði byskupi þeiri kyrkjueign; vóru ok eptir þessu dæmi velflestir staðir í hans vald gefnir í Austfirðingafjórðungi. En eptir kirkjuvígslu ok messu skipaði byskup Sigurði staðinn í lén, ok af þessu tiltæki byskups hófz sá vandi at höfðingjar í Austfjörðum skipuðu staði [með ráði] byskupa allt til Árna byskups. (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 12, pp. 20–21)

> (That summer, Bishop Árni rode north of Sólheimajökull to perform his official duties in the Eastern Quarter, and on Archbishop Jón's orders, he claimed all the *staðir* that were there. And despite some protests from those who held such property, he gained control of almost all *staðir* except Þváttá and Hallormsstaðir. The Easterners accepted this more easily than others because Saint Þorlákr had on Archbishop Eysteinn's orders claimed Svínafell from Sigurðr Ormsson in the same way, and Sigurðr had given the church property to the bishop, and after his example, most of the *staðir* in the Eastern Quarter had been given under the bishop's control. And after the consecration and the mass, the bishop gave the *staðr* to Sigurðr as a fief, and from this achievement of the bishop there originated the custom that the chieftains in the Eastfjords submitted their *staðir* under the bishops' control up to Árni's time.)

> Þorlákr byskup inn helgi [...] bar fram boðskap herra Eysteins erkibyskups, þann sem hann bauð honum undir sitt vald at heimta allar kirkjur ok kirknafé í sínu byskupsdœmi. [...] Leið þá á daginn svá at bóndi sá at kirkjuvígslan myndi engi verða nema hann léti af sínu máli. Snøri hann nú á svinn ráðinu ok leggr máldaga kirkjunnar ok sjálfa hana í vald byskups. Vígði hann þá kirkjuna ok sǫng messu. Ok eptir messuna skipaði hann Sigurði staðinn í lén um stundar sakir, ok hann jár honum at halda. [...] En þó at margir væri tregir til at já undan sér sínar erfðir þá kom þó í einn stað niðr at Þorlákr byskup fékk forræði á ǫllum stǫðum fyrir austan Hjǫrleifshǫfða útan at Þváttá ok Hallormsstǫðum, ok þat hefir þar haldizk jafnan síðan. (*Þorláks saga* B, 2002, ch. 21, pp. 164–165)
>
> (Bishop Saint Þorlákr [...] presented the message of Archbishop Eysteinn, in which the archbishop asked him to gain power over all the churches and church property in his diocese. [...] As the day went on, the landowner [Sigurðr Ormsson] understood that the church would not be consecrated unless he gave up his case, so he made the wise decision to give the charter of endowment and the church itself under the bishop's control. Then the bishop consecrated the church and sang mass. And after the mass, he gave the *staðr* to Sigurðr as a fief for the time being, and Sigurðr accepted it. [...] And although many were reluctant to give up their hereditary property, it finally came about that Bishop Þorlákr gained control of all the *staðir* east of Hjörleifshöfði, except for Þváttá and Hallormsstaðir, and it has been so ever since.)

Such striking parallels were doubtlessly created intentionally. It is noteworthy that Árni is said to have gained control of churches in the same area as Þorlákr, with the exception of the same two churches. Moreover, the fact that a church was under Þorlákr's control in the past is also mentioned elsewhere in *Árna saga* as a part of Árni's argumentation, and Þorlákr is referred to as "blessed" or "holy" (*hinn sœli*) in these instances:

> Hann [Eiríkr Marðarson] tók Holtskirkju í Önundarfirði, ónýtandi skipun Árna byskups ok vitni þeira er með eiðum sönnuðu at þessi kirkja var á dögum Hákonar konungs ok Sigurðar erkibyskups undir valdi Skálaholtsbyskups, ok svá sögðu þeim þeira fyrirmenn at hún var á dögum hins sæla Þorláks byskups undir hans skipan. (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 113, p. 160)
>
> (He [Eiríkr Marðarson] took the church at Holt in Önundarfjörðr, disregarding Bishop Árni's decision and the testimony of those who confirmed by oath that this church had been under the Skálholt bishop's control in the days of King Hákon and Archbishop Sigurðr, and that their ancestors told them that in the days of the blessed Bishop Þorlákr it had been under his control.)
>
> Hann [Hrafn Oddsson] skyldaði ok til sóknarmenn at taka Holtsstað í Önundarfirði móti eiðum prestanna Steinþórs, Árna, Finns, Snorra, Jóns, er þann stað sóru jafnan frá dögum hins sæla Þorláks byskups hafa undir Skálaholtsbyskupi verit, til þess er Hrafn Oddsson tók hann á dögum Árna byskups. (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 120, p. 169)
>
> (He [Hrafn Oddsson] also commanded the officials to take the church at Holt in Önundarfjörðr despite the oaths of the priests Steinþórr, Árni, Finnr, Snorri, and Jón, who swore that the church had always been under the Skálholt bishop's control since the days of the blessed Bishop Þorlákr until Hrafn Oddsson took it in the days of Bishop Árni.)

Þorlákr's sanctity is clearly intended to justify Árni's claim and corroborate his authority. This is further supported by the similarity of the argumentation used in *Árna saga* and *Oddaverja þáttr*, which both refer to the apostles and the Pope as sources of the bishops' authority:

> […] vóru enn sumir menn hærri vizku, þeir sem kunnu sjá ok lesit höfðu lögtekna skipan postulanna, páfanna ok kennara kristninnar, at allt þat sem guði var gefit ok helgat eptir sameiginligum lögum á at vera undir vernd ok valdi, skipan ok forsjá byskupa ok lærðra manna […] (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 80, p. 117)

> ([…] yet there were some people of higher wisdom, who could understand and had read the lawful decision of the apostles, Popes, and Church Fathers that all that was given to God and consecrated according to the common law must be under the protection and authority, control and administration of the bishops and clerics […])

> Því bauð ek þeim prestum sem af kirkjum gengu at segja at þeir léti þær utan sína vild, at páfinn, sá sem sitr í Guðs sæti, segir klerkum öll kirkna forráð ok honum á öll kristni með réttu at hlýða. (*Árna saga*, 1998, ch. 86, pp. 128–129)

> (I asked the priests who gave up their churches to say that they gave them up against their will, because the Pope, who sits in God's seat, gives all control of churches to clerics, and the Pope must be lawfully obeyed by all Christendom.)

> Byskup sagði at skipan sjálfra postolanna gaf honum vald yfir ǫllum Guðs eignum fyrir útan alla grein. „Heilagir feðr kristninnar ok páfarnir, postolanna eptirkomendr, hafa þetta sama boðit ok skipat í kirkjunnar lǫgum um alla kristnina. […]" (*Þorláks saga* B, 2002, ch. 21, p. 164)

> (The bishop said that the ordinance of the apostles themselves gave him power over all God's property without distinction. "The holy Church Fathers and the Popes, the successors of the apostles, have determined and ordained the same throughout all Christendom in the laws of the Church.")

Árna saga thus uses a twofold argumentation, referring both to the authority of the apostles and the Pope and to the authority of Árni's role model, the Icelandic saintly bishop Þorlákr. Þorlákr is portrayed as a significant local historical personage, whose example should be followed by his successors, but also as a saint, whose holiness is timeless and universal. His authority is therefore not only local and historical but is validated by an element of eternity.

The obvious purpose of the references to Saint Þorlákr in *Árna saga* is to corroborate Bishop Árni's clerical authority and claim on the *staðir*. However, their meaning may also extend beyond the narrow context of the *staðamál* and participate in the construction of collective identity. Medieval Icelanders always defined their identity by references to their own history, primarily in narratives describing the settlement and the Saga Age. Here it has been shown that the same may apply to

narratives dealing with the saintly bishops. Saint Þorlákr can thus be regarded not only as an embodiment of universal, international ecclesiastical authority; by referring to a local saint as a source of authority, the saga also makes a statement about Iceland as a country with a significant Christian history of its own. It thus integrates Iceland into the Christian world and declares its equality within it.

This theme probably gained importance at the time of Bishop Árni, when Norwegian influence in Iceland became much more direct than before, both in secular and ecclesiastical politics. As has been argued here, the saga does not suggest that Icelanders opposed this influence, but they presumably felt a need to redefine their collective identity in the light of the new situation. Integration into the Norwegian kingdom may have intensified the Icelanders' interest in their international position, which probably increased their desire to negotiate their equality within the broader Christian world despite their geographical peripherality. The emphasis on Saint Þorlákr in *Árna saga* can be interpreted as a part of this endeavour.

6.2 Lárentíus Kálfsson: The loyal cleric

6.2.1 *Lárentíus saga biskups* as a travel story

Bishop Lárentíus Kálfsson of Hólar (1267–1331, in office 1324–1331) was a younger contemporary of Árni Þorláksson. Like *Árna saga*, *Lárentíus saga* was written shortly after the bishop's death, so it is a detailed account of events that were still fresh in people's memory, and yet it is already shaped by the saga tradition, in this case primarily by the narrative type of the travel story. Its structural pattern begins with the inexperienced Icelander's journey to Norway: the young priest Lárentíus undertakes the voyage together with the royal official Petr, who makes friendly jokes when he is seasick on the ship, and Lárentíus is upset (LSB-B ix). This scene foregrounds the Icelander's initial insecurity, which contrasts with the following demonstration of his skills.

Lárentíus is well received from the start because he accompanies the king's official, but he gradually gains prestige of his own by proving his abilities. When Petr asks Lárentíus to write a letter in Latin, King Eiríkr Magnússon admires it so much that he invites Lárentíus to spend the winter at the royal court (LSB-B x). The archbishop praises Lárentíus's writing skills and poetic talent but advises him to focus on law instead of poetry (LSB-Þ xi). Lárentíus then studies law and arbitrates in disputes between the archbishop and the canons; the archbishop appreciates his learning and grants him control of a church as a sign of respect (LSB-Þ xii). Due to the emphasis on Lárentíus's verbal and poetic skills, the account, shaped by the structural pattern of the travel story, also bears some traits of the court poet's

story. Although the ancient art of skaldic poetry is replaced with new intellectual values, such as Latin writing and legal learning, the message remains the same: the text accentuates the Icelander's development from a newcomer to a respected person through his own active effort and intellectual abilities.

On the level of content, the main difference from *Árna saga* is that the conflicts in which Lárentíus participates occur within the Church, rather than between secular and ecclesiastical power.[174] The plot is centred around the prolonged strife between Archbishop Jörundr of Niðarós and the canons, who request increased independence in legal matters and in control of property. Conversely, an essential similarity between the two sagas is that the central conflict illustrates the significance of strong royal rule. In *Lárentíus saga*, the king's authority is shown to play a decisive role even in a conflict that takes place in the ecclesiastical circles. At first, King Hákon Magnússon brings about an agreement between the archbishop and the canons, but the discord is soon renewed in the king's absence (LSB-A xiii). This indicates that the king's physical presence and personal authority, rather than the system of royal administration, are important in such a serious dispute. The king steadily supports the archbishop, and the canons fear his wrath when he rebukes them for disobeying their leader (LSB-A xv). Finally, the king threatens the canons with outlawry and forces them to yield to the archbishop and accept an agreement that is then held for two years (LSB-A xvi). The whole episode accentuates the king's authority, as well as his determination to support the archbishop, who is the rightful representative of ecclesiastical power in the case of disputes within the Church.

On the background of these political issues, the saga presents the next stage of Lárentíus's travel story: a conflict with Norwegians, in this case the canons. This situation in the ecclesiastical environment resembles similar situations at the royal court in the secular travel stories, in which the jealous courtiers are hostile towards the Icelander and point out his alleged marginality because they envy the capable newcomer. The canons refer to Lárentíus's origin in their verbal confrontations – when he reads out the archbishop's letter, one of them replies "you do not need to yell so loudly, Icelander, we hear what you are saying".[175] They even attempt to

174 *Lárentíus saga* presents a positive relationship between secular power and the Church, which is reflected not least in the coronation scenes. When Eiríkr Magnússon's brother Hákon is crowned, he grants the Church new privileges (LSB-A xvi). When the three-year-old Magnús Eiríksson is elected king, the regent Erlendr Viðkunsson rules "með ráði herra Eilífs erkibyskups ok allra voldugustu herra í Noregi" (*Lárentíus saga* A, 1998, ch. 31, p. 337) (with the advice of Archbishop Eilífr and all the most powerful lords in Norway). This implies that this regent, unlike those depicted in *Árna saga*, contributes to harmony between the monarchy and the Church.

175 „Eigi þarftú, Íslendingr, svá hátt at æpa, því vér heyrum hvat þú segir." (*Lárentíus saga* A, 1998, ch. 14, p. 248).

attack and imprison Lárentíus, causing him "many offences, mockeries, and adversities".[176] The archbishop's men help Lárentíus, which shows that the archbishop repays loyalty with protection, just like kings do in the travel stories. When the canons see how much Lárentíus is appreciated by the archbishop, it only increases their envy, so they respond by having him sent back to Iceland on a visitation. The archbishop supports him again, this time by writing positive letters about him to the Icelandic bishops (LSB-A xvii).

When Lárentíus later returns to Norway, however, the archbishop is unable to protect him because he is weakened by illness. The canons have seized the power, dismissing all the archbishop's adherents (LSB-A xxii). They confiscate Lárentíus's property, falsely accuse him of falsifying letters, imprison him without a lawsuit, and finally force him to return to Iceland (LSB-A xxiv–xxvi). This illustrates the importance of a Norwegian authority as the Icelander's protector; the emphasis on this motif connects Lárentíus's story with the *útanferðar þættir* and the stories of Ingimundr Þorgeirsson or Aron Hjörleifsson. Such narrative parallels contribute to the construction of meaning in *Lárentíus saga*. The central message is that although some envious Norwegians disadvantage the Icelander due to his origin, the central authorities, the king and the archbishop, do not make differences between Norwegians and Icelanders but always appreciate those who are capable, loyal, brave, and steadfast.

The narrative type of the travel story also shapes the account of Lárentíus's consecration journey. The structural pattern begins with a troublesome voyage when Lárentíus is shipwrecked (LSB-A xxxviii). Archbishop Jörundr has died and been replaced by Eilífr, his former adversary, but Lárentíus's relationship with the new archbishop develops from an initial alienation to a reconciliation: they ask each other for forgiveness and spend the winter discussing the disagreements (LSB-A xxxviii). The archbishop then consecrates Lárentíus, gives him gifts, and bids him farewell on amicable terms (LSB-A xxxix–xl), so Lárentíus's esteem is increased by the journey.

This return to the structural pattern of the travel story foregrounds its importance for the construction of meaning in the saga. Just like in the *útanferðar þættir* or the secular contemporary sagas, the narrative type reflects the Icelanders' awareness of their marginality. Its optimistic tone, however, implies a positive evaluation of the process of integration, through which Icelanders overcome their marginality and gain respect and prestige. This may not always have been the reality in the fourteenth century, but the saga shows that this was the image that the Icelanders wanted to be remembered.

176 […] margar meingjörðir, athlátr ok mótgang (*Lárentíus saga* B, 1998, ch. 18, p. 252).

6.2.2 Icelandic saints in *Lárentíus saga*

Apart from this narrative type, which connects *Lárentíus saga* to sagas with secular subject matter, the text also employs another element in its narrative deconstruction of Iceland's marginality, related specifically to its clerical perspective. The image of native saints as identity bearers, which was established in the earlier bishops' sagas, is further developed in *Lárentíus saga* by a direct comparison between Iceland and other countries, primarily Norway, in terms of their spiritual excellence, measured by the glory of their saints. *Lárentíus saga* mostly depicts Icelandic saints in scenes of confrontation between Icelandic clerics and Norwegians. Just like the Norwegians challenge the Icelanders' intellectual skills in the travel stories, here they challenge the Icelandic holy bishops' genuine sanctity, and thus also Iceland's spiritual equality with the rest of the Christian world. The bishops' sanctity is then proven by miraculous signs, and this confirms Iceland's spiritual excellence.

In the first scene, King Eiríkr Magnússon of Norway invokes saints to get good wind for sailing (LSB-B vi). A priest recommends him to invoke Saint Jón of Hólar, and the king replies that he hopes Jón is not as half-hearted (*seinlátr*) as most Icelanders. He does not reject the saint entirely but doubts his power because he is sceptical about the Icelanders' abilities in general. Then he invokes Saint Jón anyway, gets good wind, and sends a gift to the saint. The effect of the invocation proves the saint's power, and thus also Iceland's worthiness.

A more serious confrontation occurs in an episode with a Norwegian monk who challenges Saint Þorlákr's sanctity and is miraculously punished (LSB-A xviii). Lárentíus asks the monk Björn to prepare a sermon for the mass of Saint Þorlákr, but Björn criticizes Icelanders for the veneration of a saint who is not acknowledged by the archbishop:

> „Undarligir menn eru þér Íslendingar, því at þér kallið þá marga heilaga menn sem hér hafa vaxit upp hjá yðr ok í öðrum löndum vita menn engin skyn á, því er mikil dirfð yðar Íslendinga at þér haldið þennan mann helgan sem erkibyskupsstóllinn í Niðarósi heldr enga minning af. […]“ (*Lárentíus saga* A, 1998, ch. 18, p. 269)
>
> ("You Icelanders are strange people when you regard many men who grew up here in your country as saints, although people in other countries have no idea about them. Great is the impudence of you Icelanders when you venerate this man as a saint, as he is not commemorated by the archbishopric of Niðarós. […]")

The formulations in the speech imply that the monk is aware of the Icelanders' effort to consciously improve their status by referring to their native saints, and that by opposing this, he advocates the Norwegians' superiority. He wants to forbid the veneration of Þorlákr until it is acknowledged (*lögtekit*) by the archbishop, but Lárentíus asks him to refrain from such silliness (*fólska*) because Þorlákr is a

saint, performs miracles, and will punish Björn for his doubt. Björn nevertheless decides to eat meat on Þorlákr's holiday and suddenly falls mortally ill. Lárentíus says that it is not surprising when Björn has doubted the sanctity of Þorlákr, who is merciful to the needy, but also vengeful to those who dishonour him.

The episode's effect is enhanced by the extraordinary structural pattern of a story within a story when Lárentíus tells Björn the tale of an Englishman who ridiculed Þorlákr:

> At því gafz einum dára í Englandi at hann þóttiz gjöra til háðungar ok spotts viðr hinn heilaga Þorlák byskup takandi eitt mörbjúga, fram berandi fyrir líkneski Þorláks byskups þessum orðum talandi: „Viltú, mörlandi,[177] því at þú ert utan af Íslandi?" (*Lárentíus saga* A, 1998, ch. 18, pp. 271–272)
>
> (One foolish man in England turned to dishonouring and ridiculing the saintly Bishop Þorlákr by taking a suet sausage and bringing it to a statue of Bishop Þorlákr with these words: "Do you want this, suet-lander, as you come from Iceland?")

The saint punished this Englishman by making him unable to move his hand until he repented. The monk Björn repents as well and acknowledges Þorlákr's sanctity, so his illness subsides. The next day, Björn preaches about Þorlákr and tells the truth about what happened to him, so the story brings the saint fame, praise, and glory (*frægð, lof ok dýrð*). This scene is only loosely connected with the saga's main storyline, so its function is clearly ideological. Þorlákr, just like in *Árna saga*, embodies Icelandic identity. The difference is that in *Lárentíus saga*, the saint's authority serves as a proof of Iceland's spiritual excellence in a direct confrontation with a Norwegian cleric, who is reluctant to acknowledge Iceland's spiritual equality. The Icelander is, however, aided by a divine intervention, and the ending is conciliatory.

At the same time, *Lárentíus saga* also uses the motif of Icelandic saints to create a positive image of Norwegians who appreciate them. The Norwegian-born Bishop Auðunn Þorbergsson of Hólar has Guðmundr Arason's relics placed in a shrine in order to support his cult, and this is followed by pilgrimages, veneration, and miracles (LSB-A xxix–xxx). Bishop Auðunn also introduces the day of the translation of Saint Jón's relics as an official holiday in Iceland (LSB-A xxx). The saga praises him for such acts.[178] Later, Bishop Auðunn prays to Saint Jón for an improvement of the weather, and his invocation takes effect immediately (LSB-A xxxiii).

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177 *Mörlandi*, 'suet-lander' or suet eater, is a deprecatory term for medieval Icelanders used by foreigners, who regarded the Icelanders' peculiar diet as a sign of their poverty and cultural inferiority.

178 Mátti af slíkum hlutum merkja at Auðun byskup var mikilsháttar höfðingi. (*Lárentíus saga* A, 1998, ch. 30, p. 326) (Due to such acts, one could recognize that Bishop Auðunn was a distinguished leader.)

These scenes show that *Lárentíus saga* does not primarily express a negative attitude to Norwegians. Instead, it emphasizes Iceland's spiritual excellence, which is embodied by the native saints. Norwegians who are willing to acknowledge the saints, and thus also Iceland's equality, are shown in a positive light in the saga. Others are convinced by miraculous signs, so their scepticism subsides, and the ending of the confrontation is conciliatory. Icelandic identity is thus not based on an opposition to Norway, but rather on the Icelanders' need to constantly negotiate their position within the Norwegian kingdom and the Christian world. This probably reflects the Icelanders' increased awareness of their marginality in the realm into which they were already politically integrated, but the process of social integration was still not completed.

6.2.3 Language and the perception of identity in *Lárentíus saga*

While *Lárentíus saga* still thematizes the Icelanders' marginality within the Norwegian-Icelandic realm, especially in the episodes with the saints, it also emphasizes the unity of the North and recognizes – and deconstructs – the marginality of the North as a whole in the broader context of Europe and the Christian world. It thus implies that the context of the perception of identity was broadened. This development can indicate that a feeling of Norwegian-Icelandic social unity was growing strong due to the political integration, or that the perception of cultural boundaries was changed by more frequent and more direct contact with foreigners in the fourteenth century, which increased the Norsemen's awareness of the cultural contrasts between them and other Europeans.

So as to further reinforce the image of shared identity, the saga turns to the motif of language identity. It has been shown in research that the idea of a connection between identity and language had a long history in Iceland, as it is attested already in the *First Grammatical Treatise* (ca. 1150). This text formulates the idea of different peoples (*þjóðir*) speaking different languages and presents a distinct language as a defining aspect of individual Icelandic identity. It also contains the phrase "us, the Icelanders", the first documented example of conscious self-identification (Hastrup 1984, 237–243). *Lárentíus saga*, however, does not present the Icelandic language identity as a mark of individuality within the North. Instead, it emphasizes the unity of the North by creating the image of a Norse language identity, which is contrasted with the identity of foreigners of non-Norse origin. Nevertheless, it is not a contrast in the sense of enmity, but rather an awareness of a culturally defined difference.

The episodes that concern language identity deal with the Flemish cleric Jón and are of little importance to the central events of *Lárentíus saga*, so they are

clearly included specifically for the purpose of thematizing identity. Their extraordinarily humorous tone, which contrasts with the otherwise serious tone of the saga, draws increased attention to them. In the first episode (LSB-Þ xiv), Jón expresses a wish to receive control of a church, but Lárentíus disagrees, because Jón cannot speak Norse fluently enough. Jón insists that he can say what he needs, so Lárentíus tests him, and Jón replies in comically imperfect Norse:

> Nú er þar til at taka at Laurentius var með Jörundi erkibyskupi í Niðarósi ok studeraði jafnan í kirkjunnar lögum er meistari Jóhannes flæmingi las honum; vóru þeir ok miklir vinir sín í millum. Laurentio þótti mikil skemmtan at hann brauz við at tala norrænu en komz þó lítt at. Einn tíma mælti Jón flæmingi við Laurentium: „Ek vildi at þú flyttir við minn herra at hann veitti mér Maríukirkju hér í býnum, því at hún er nú vacans.“ Laurentius svarar: „Hversu má þat vera þar sem þér kunnið ekki norrænu at tala?“ „Kann ek sem mér þarfar,“ sagði Jón, „ok þat sem mér liggr á at tala.“ „Skipum nú þá,“ sagði Laurentius, „sem kominn sé föstuinngangr, þá verðr at tala fyrir sóknarfólki yðru hversu þat skal halda langföstuna.“ „Á þenna máta,“ sagði Jón flæmingi, „nú er komin lentin, hvern mann kristinn komi til kirkju, gjöri sína skripin, kasti burt konu sinni, maki engi sukk, nonne sufficit, domine?“ Þá hló Laurentius ok mælti: „Ekki skilr fólkit hvat lentin er.“ Sagði hann erkibyskupi ok gjörðu þeir at mikit gaman, en fengu Jóni nokkorn afdeiling sinnar beizlu því at hann var mjök brályndr ef ei var svá gjört sem hann vildi. (*Lárentíus saga* Þ, 1998, ch. 14, pp. 243–244)
>
> (Now it will be told that Lárentíus stayed with Archbishop Jörundr in Niðarós and constantly studied the Church law that Master Jóhannes the Flemish read out to him. They were also good friends. Lárentíus was much amused when Jóhannes strove to speak Norse but made little progress. One day, Jón the Flemish said to Lárentíus: “I would like you to intercede with my lord, so he would let me have the Marian church here in town, because it is now *vacans*.” Lárentíus answered: “How could that be possible when you cannot speak Norse?” “I can say what I need,” said Jón, “and what I am supposed to say.” “Then let us assume,” said Lárentíus, “that it is the beginning of Lent and you must tell your parishioners how they shall observe the Lenten fast.” “In this way,” said Jón the Flemish: “*Lentin* has come, every Christian shall go to church, do his confessing, throw out his wife, make no mess, *nonne sufficit, domine*?” Lárentíus laughed and said: “People do not understand what *lentin* means.” He told the archbishop, and they were much amused, but they granted Jón his wish to some degree because he was very short-tempered when people did not do what he wanted.)

In this unusually comic chapter, the Icelander Lárentíus and the Norwegian archbishop laugh together at the foreigner who struggles with speaking their common language. Significantly, the text emphasizes that Lárentíus and Jón are friends, and that the archbishop wants to prevent any disagreements with Jón, so the laughter does not indicate any hostility towards the foreigner; it nevertheless marks an awareness of a different cultural identity.[179]

179 For a discussion of this episode from a linguistic and sociolinguistic perspective see Hall 2013, 6–14.

In the other episode (LSB-Þ xv), Jón wishes to greet an Icelander and asks Lárentíus to teach him a phrase. Lárentíus intentionally teaches him a curse instead, but Jón believes that it is a polite greeting. The humour is based on wordplay between Norse and Latin:

> Einn tíma kómu mörg Íslandsför til Niðaróss ok vóru á margir íslenzkir menn; vildi síra Laurentius þeim öllum nokkot til góða gjöra. Þar kom millum annarra sá maðr er Klængr steypir hét ok frændi Laurentii ok honum heimuligr. En sem Jón flæmingi sá þat, vildi hann gjöra honum nokkot athvarf ok talaði einn tíma við Laurentium á latínu ok mælti: „Kennið mér at heilsa á þennan yðar kompán upp á norrænu.“ Laurentio þótti mikit gaman at Jóni ok sagði: „Heilsaðu honum svá: Fagnaðarlauss kompán!“ „Ek undirstend,“ sagði Jón, „at þetta mun vera fögr heilsan, því at gaudium er fögnuðr, en laus er lof.“ Gengr síðan at Klængi steypir, klappandi honum á hans herðar ok mælti: „Fagnaðarlauss kompán!“ Hinn hvessti augun í móti ok þótti heilsunin ei vera svá fögr sem hinn ætlaði. Nú mælti Jón flæmingi við Laurentium: „Ek forstend nú at þú hefir dárat mik, því at þessi maðr varð reiðr við mik.“ (*Lárentíus saga* Þ, 1998, ch. 15, p. 244)
>
> (One day, many Icelandic ships arrived in Niðarós with many Icelanders on board. The priest Lárentíus wished to do something good for them all. There was among others a man called Klængr the Caster, he was Lárentíus's kinsman, and they were very close. When Jón the Flemish found out, he wanted to pay him a compliment, so he talked to Lárentíus in Latin and said: "Teach me how to greet your friend in Norse." Lárentíus wanted to make fun of Jón, so he said: "Greet him so: *Fagnaðarlauss kompán* (joyless fellow)!" "I understand," said Jón, "that this must be a beautiful greeting, because *gaudium* is *fögnuðr* (joy), and *laus* is *lof* (praise)." He then approached Klængr the Caster, clapped him on his shoulders, and said: "*Fagnaðarlauss kompán*!" The man frowned at him and did not find the greeting as lovely as Jón assumed. Jón the Flemish then said to Lárentíus: "I understand now that you have fooled me, because this man got angry with me.")

In the context of the previous scene, it is obvious that this is a friendly joke that does not imply any hatred or hostility towards foreigners. Instead, both episodes illustrate the strong cultural bond that existed between Icelanders and Norwegians because they shared the same language (see Hall 2013, 22–23).[180]

The perception of language must have been closely connected with the perception of identity, as there were hardly any clearly defined linguistic criteria for what were different languages and what were regional dialects. Some sources present the Norse language (*dönsk tunga, norrænt mál*) as largely unified until about 1400; that does not mean that there were no dialects, but that the language was *perceived* as unified (Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, 195–196, 320–321; 2007, 151). Other sources, such

180 Similarly, as Sverrir Jakobsson (2007, 152) has pointed out, other Icelandic texts also accentuate the differences between Norse and other related languages, such as those of the British Isles or Germany, often in a humorous manner, or contain jokes about people who speak Norse badly because they come from abroad.

as the *Third Grammatical Treatise* by Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld, seem to make a distinction between West Norse (*norrœna*), spoken by Icelanders and Norwegians, and East Norse (*danska*) (Leonard 2012, 210–211, 217–218). This distinction may have been motivated by increasing linguistic differences between the dialects, but also by a growing awareness of a social unity between Icelanders and Norwegians, which presumably became much stronger in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries than the overall cultural unity between all Norsemen had been before.

It was probably a combination of both linguistic and social factors that brought about the distinction, but *Lárentíus saga* implies that it was the cultural unity of the Norsemen and their position in relation to other Europeans, rather than the question of West Norse versus East Norse identity, that was the centre of attention in fourteenth-century Iceland. The actual linguistic unity of the Icelandic and Norwegian variety of *norrœna*, as Alaric Hall has pointed out, began to decrease in the fourteenth century, as the Norwegian variety was developing faster and more intensely than the Icelandic variety both lexicologically, phonologically, and morphologically; this development gradually brought the Norwegian language closer to the originally East Norse varieties. The awareness of this process probably increased the need for a narrative construction of the unity of *norrœna* in a social environment where shared Norwegian-Icelandic identity was important for the collective self-image (Hall 2013, 20–23). That may be the reason why the theme of language identity re-emerges in the fourteenth-century *Lárentíus saga*.

For comparison, *Lárentíus saga* offers another humorous scene, in which a Flemish man presents entertainment pyrotechnics at the Norwegian royal court (LSB-B x). This episode foregrounds cultural differences other than language:

> Vóru þá með konungi Eiríki margir mikilsháttar men af ýmissum löndum þeir sem margs vóru kunnandi, millum hverra var einn maðr, Þrándr fisiler at nafni, ok kunni margt klókt at leika meir með náttúrligri list en með nokkors kyns galdr; var hann flæmskr at kyni. Viðr þenna mann lagði síra Laurentius kærleika; sagði hann honum marga hluti, því at hann fór mjök eftir at nema fróðleik meðan hann var ungr, en fór þó aldri með galdr eðr forneskju. Í jólum lék Þrándr fisiler herbrest. Hann verðr svá skjallr at fáir einir menn standaz at heyra hann, með konum leysiz burðr, þeim sem með barni eru ok heyra hann, en karlmenn falla ór sætum á gólf niðr eðr verða ýmislig viðbrögð. (*Lárentíus saga* B, 1998, ch. 10, pp. 237–238)
>
> (At King Eiríkr's court there were many extraordinary men from various countries who had all kinds of talents. Among them was a man called Þrándr the Marksman, who could perform many clever tricks with natural arts, rather than with any kind of sorcery; he was of Flemish origin. The priest Lárentíus was fond of this man, who told him many things, because he was very eager to acquire knowledge in his youth, but he never practised magic or witchcraft. At Christmas, Þrándr the Marksman performed an explosion. It was so loud that few people could bear hearing it, women went into labour if they were pregnant when they heard it, and men fell on the floor from their seats or lurched in various ways.)

Significantly, the text again emphasizes the friendship between Lárentíus and the foreigner but simultaneously accentuates the foreigner's *otherness* by comically exaggerating the effect of his tricks. The foreigner and his arts are presented as being exotic and strange, which subverts the standard perception of mainland Europe as the centre that defines *normality* and the North as the culturally peculiar periphery. The text is of course written from the Norsemen's point of view, so their perception of foreigners as exotic is understandable, but the episode may also be a conscious attempt to deconstruct the idea of the Norsemen's marginality. The Icelanders' effort to overcome their marginality in relation to Norway is thus complemented – but not replaced – by the Norsemen's collective effort to overcome their marginality in relation to mainland Europe.

The idea of a shared Norse or West-Norse identity does not mean, however, that Icelanders lost their individual identity by being integrated into the Norwegian kingdom. Their individuality is emphasized by the previously discussed references to native Icelandic saints, whereas the unity of the Norwegian-Icelandic realm is underlined by the image of a shared language identity. These elements are intertwined without any contradiction in the narrative, which thus implies that integration and individuality are not mutually exclusive.

6.3 Icelandic saints in *Guðmundar sögur*

We can now return to the image of native saints as identity bearers and its evolution in *Guðmundar sögur*, which deal with older events than *Árna saga* and *Lárentíus saga* but were composed around the same time, so they can be expected to represent a comparable stage of the development of the concept.[181] There are also subtle differences between the redactions, which illustrate the changing emphases in the construction of identity. While the A-redaction continues to emphasize Iceland's spiritual equality with Norway, the D-redaction foregrounds Iceland's position within the broader Christian world. One of the factors that possibly contributed to this is that the D-redaction was probably intended for an international audience (Stefán Karlsson 2000, 166–169). However, this was presumably not the only reason, since the broadened horizon of identity accords with some aspects of the other, previously discussed sagas composed around the same time, especially *Lárentíus saga*. In any case, the varying emphases should be perceived as a continuation, not a contradiction, of each other.

181 The A-redaction was probably composed around the same time as *Árna saga*, and the D-redaction around the same time as *Lárentíus saga*.

The focus on Iceland's international position is accentuated already in the introduction of the D-redaction, where the landscape and climate of Iceland are described as appearing exotic to foreigners, and Iceland is explicitly depicted as a periphery of the Christian world:

> Fyrir þá skynsemd höfum vér nokkut greint af þessu fátæku landi, at ef þessi frásögn verðr í fjarska lesin, lofist því framar vors herra nafn, er engan jarðar enda firrir sinni miskunn, sem þá sýndist enn, er hann gaf greindum útskaga svo ríkan gimstein sem heilög von diktar, at Guðmundr inn góði sé í hans konungligri höll at eilífu. (*Guðmundar saga* D, 1948, ch. 2, p. 161)
>
> (We have described this poor country a bit for the reason that if this narrative will be read in distant lands, there will be an all the greater praise of the name of our Lord, who does not deprive any end of the world of His mercy, which was yet again shown when He provided the aforementioned remote outpost with such a precious gem, as the holy hope implies, that Guðmundr the Good is in His kingly hall for all eternity.)

The D-redaction thus admits Iceland's marginality, while also assertively declaring its spiritual excellence, embodied by the native saint.

Although the A-redaction does not contain such utterances, both redactions present native saints as identity bearers. The key episode in this respect is Rannveig's vision of the Otherworld (GS-A lviii–lix; GS-D iv). The woman experiences a horrifying vision of Hell and turns to invoking the Virgin Mary, the apostle Peter, and the Norway-related saints Óláfr, Magnús, and Hallvarðr,[182] who save her from the flames of Hell. In the A-redaction, Saint Óláfr praises Iceland for its saints but also points out that the Norwegian saints uphold Iceland as well:

> [...] skaltu na at sea uerðleik heilagra manna. er her ero a yðro landi bèðe lifendr ok andaðir. þui at eigi ero a øðrom løndum at iafn miclum maN fiolða. fleire heil(agir) menn enn aIslandi. ok hallda bènir þeira ok uarar landino upp. eN ella munde firi faraz landit. (*Guðmundar saga* A, 1983, ch. 58, p. 96)
>
> ([...] you shall behold the greatness of the saints who are here in your country, both living and deceased, because other countries with the same number of inhabitants do not have as many saints as Iceland, and their prayers and ours uphold the country, for otherwise it would perish.)

This formulation implies that Iceland acknowledges its partial spiritual dependence on Norway with its powerful saints. It is, however, also emphasized that

182 Saint Óláfr Haraldsson, the king of Norway in 1015–1028, was the patron saint of Norway. Saint Magnús Erlendsson, the jarl of Orkney in 1106–1117, was proclaimed a saintly martyr in 1136 by Bishop William of Orkney. Orkney was part of the Norwegian sphere of power, so Magnús can be regarded as a Norway-related saint. Saint Hallvarðr Vébjörnsson (ca. 1020–1043) was the patron saint of Oslo.

Iceland has an unusually high proportion of native saints, so it is not inferior to other Christian countries. The scene thus expresses an ambivalent attitude to Norway, in which pride of belonging into the Norwegian realm is combined with a self-assertive need to prove Iceland's equality within this realm.

The A-redaction then further elaborates on this theme in its references to the Icelandic saints and other bishops who are regarded as holy men. Such a focus on local saints may imply an intention to counterbalance the preceding ambivalent section by a more self-assured statement of Iceland's spiritual accomplishments:

> Nu ser þu her staðe þa er eigu helgir menn. bèðe lifendr ok dauðir. eN her ero hus eigi øll iafn føgr. þui at þeir ero helgir menn allir ok ero þo helgazstir af þeim Jon byskup ok Thorl(akr) byskup enn yngri. eN þa nèst Biørn byskup ok Isleifr byskup ok Thorl(akr) byskup enn ellre. (*Guðmundar saga* A, 1983, ch. 59, pp. 97–98)

> (Here you see the abodes owned by the saints, both living and deceased, but not all the houses here are equally beautiful, because all these men are saints, but the saintliest of them are Bishop Jón and Bishop Þorlákr the younger, and then Bishop Björn and Bishop Ísleifr and Bishop Þorlákr the elder.)

None of these formulations are present in the D-redaction, where the episode otherwise mostly includes the same motifs as in the A-redaction. The omission thus seems to be deliberate, suggesting that the later version reflects a more confident view, in which the question of Iceland's spiritual equality with Norway is deemed less ambiguous, so it receives less attention.

The placement of the episode in the texts follows similar tendencies. In the A-redaction, it is placed between the revelation of Saint Þorlákr's sanctity and the translation of his relics. Such a placement accentuates the significance of Iceland's native saints in a context where the Norwegian saints enjoy a prominent position. In the D-redaction, the vision is moved to the introductory section depicting Guðmundr's birth and childhood, and it is preceded by parallels between Guðmundr and the foreign saints Ambrose, Athanasius, and Thomas of Canterbury. This placement suggests a parallel between Guðmundr's worldly family and his 'spiritual family', the saints in heaven. The interest in comparing Icelandic and Norwegian saints is thus replaced with a focus on the Icelandic saintly bishops' position among the international saints.

The next section of the episode is a description of Guðmundr's heavenly abode, which is narrated similarly in both redactions:

> EN annat hus þar hea hatt ok gøfuglict. þangat mantu heyra søng fagran ok hlioð mikit. ok dyrðlict. Þat á G(uðmundr) prestr A(ra) s(on). þui at sua hallda bènir hans upp lande þesso. sem uarar bènir hallda upp Nor(ege) ok Orkneyium. ok man hann uerða mestr upp halldz maðr landi þesso. ok sitea eige í lègra sète. enn Thomas ercHibyskup a Englandi. (*Guðmundar saga* A, 1983, ch. 60, p. 98)

(Next there is another house, high and magnificent, from where you can hear beautiful singing and loud and glorious music. That is owned by the priest Guðmundr Arason, because his prayers uphold this country, just like our prayers uphold Norway and the Orkney Islands, and he will become the greatest upholder of this country and sit in a seat no lower than that of Archbishop Thomas in England.)

„Sér þú herbergi þetta, svo signat ok sæmiligt, er jafnan stendr án flekk ok fölnan ok með sama ríkdómi ok ólíðandi gleði? Sjá er eignarjörð ok óðal Guðmundar Arasonar, er fá mun um síðir eigi lægra sess en Tómas í Kantia, ok svo sem vér fullting veitum Nóregi ok Orkneyjum, svo mun hann hjálpa Ísland með sínum bænum.“ (*Guðmundar saga* D, 1948, ch. 4, p. 170)

(“Do you see this abode, so blessed and glorious, that stands forever without any blemish or imperfection and with the same magnificence and eternal joy? That is the possession and property of Guðmundr Arason, who will eventually take a seat no lower that that of Thomas of Canterbury, and just like we protect Norway and the Orkney Islands, he will help Iceland through his prayers.”)

The assertive declaration of Iceland’s spiritual excellence reaches its peak here. Guðmundr is presented as equal not only to the Norwegian saints, as he protects his country in the same manner as they protect theirs, but also to a famous saint from England. This parallel shapes Guðmundr’s characterization in other parts of the saga as well. Especially the D-redaction portrays him “as an Icelandic Thomas Becket” (Grønlie 2017a, 19) – the characterization is modelled on this specific foreign saintly bishop, rather than just on stereotypical hagiographic motifs. Guðmundr thus embodies Iceland’s spiritual equality not just within Scandinavia, but also within Europe. The likely reason for this increased emphasis on international context in the relatively late *Guðmundar sögur* is that Icelanders, due to their integration into the European political structures, became more aware of their marginal position within the Christian world, so they felt a growing need to deconstruct this marginality in the sagas.

6.4 Integration, integrity, identity

In accordance with the medieval perception of multiple layers of identity, the late sagas of the Icelandic bishops contribute to the construction of collective identity on two intertwined levels. Firstly, they define Iceland’s position within the Christian world in a spiritual sense; secondly, they interpret the political relationships between Iceland and the Norwegian monarchy by fitting the events into the most common narrative types known from the sagas of Icelanders and the secular contemporary sagas. The choice of these narrative types connects recent events to the memory of typologically similar events from the past, and so it endows them with additional layers of meaning. The bishops’ sagas thus complete the interpre-

tation of Iceland's contact with the Norwegian kingdom that is presented in the secular contemporary sagas.

Árna saga fits recent history into the structural pattern of the conflict story with its focus on the mediator, thus foregrounding the king as a guardian of peace and stability. The central conflict first develops and escalates in the indirect absence of royal power – when the king is not personally involved in the dispute between the bishop and the church owners in Iceland. A temporary agreement is then reached due to King Magnús's royal authority, but the conflict is renewed in the absence of a strong monarch after King Magnús's death. Finally, the conflict is terminated when the new king comes of age and strong royal power is re-established. The stages of escalation and termination of conflict are thus directly related to the absence or presence of strong royal rule. This implies that the monarch has become irreplaceable in the role of mediator. The same idea is already expressed in *Þórðar saga kakala* and other secular contemporary sagas dealing with the Sturlung Age, which means that according to the sagas, the decisive stage of the development took place before the formal acceptance of royal rule in Iceland. The situation after this formal transformation, described in *Árna saga*, can thus be understood as a gradual continuation of processes that started during the Sturlung Age, so the formal political integration is presented as an official confirmation of conditions that resulted from a natural social evolution. This continuity is emphasized on the level of discourse by the use of the same narrative type in sagas describing all stages of the development.

Furthermore, significant elements of continuity can be found in the accounts of political practice in Iceland on the level of content as well. Even after the acceptance of the new laws and centralized executive power, many aspects of the relations between the leaders and the farmers are described as remaining largely unchanged. In local conflicts, the farmers still rely on the secular or ecclesiastical leaders, who then turn to the king for advice and arbitration. The politics thus consist of two layers: on the one hand, the leaders can gain popularity and increase their power by conflict resolution in local matters; on the other hand, they rely on the king as a source of justice and order. The first layer shows a strong continuity with the old system, whereas the second layer is based on new impulses, which nevertheless also appeared already before the formal acceptance of royal rule, so they do not mark an abrupt change either.

Lárentíus saga is structured by the pattern of the travel story, which is focused on the protagonist using his own skills to overcome his initial marginality and to gradually attain a prestigious position and the favour of the highest authorities in Norway. Due to the saga's ecclesiastical subject matter, the jealous courtiers from the typical travel stories are replaced by the canons, and the supreme authority is represented mainly by the archbishop, although the text also

underlines the king's significant role in solving serious internal conflicts. The values, however, remain similar, with the Icelander's intellectual abilities, courage, and loyalty in the forefront; the structural parallels with the typical travel stories imply that the central message of the narrative also remains the same as in the secular sagas. The saga expresses the idea that despite the Icelanders' conflicts with some individual Norwegians, their relationship with the central Norwegian authorities is generally positive and beneficial. The unity of the Norwegian-Icelandic realm is reflected in Lárentíus's direct involvement in the internal dispute within the Norwegian Church, which is to some extent similar to the involvement of Icelanders in the Norwegian power struggle during the Sturlung Age, but the connection is shown to be more immediate in *Lárentíus saga*. That is a sign of an actual, not just formal, integration.

On the spiritual level, the bishops' sagas present the native saints as important identity bearers who embody Iceland's spiritual excellence. This was probably crucial around the time of the formal acceptance of royal rule, when Iceland's position in the kingdom was intensely negotiated. Integration into the broader political structures was an important step towards overcoming marginality, but its immediate effect may have been the Icelanders' increased awareness of their marginality, which presumably caused a need to reconstruct the collective identity. In this context, the narratives of the saintly bishops subvert the idea of Iceland's marginality by emphasizing its spiritual equality with Norway and the Christian world.

The focus on the Christian world distinguishes the bishops' sagas from the secular contemporary sagas, which construct Icelandic identity either within the boundaries of Iceland alone, or in the context of Iceland's relationship with Norway. The bishops' sagas also contain these layers but add a third layer, the position of Iceland and Scandinavia among the more central Christian countries. In the resulting discourse, the effort to overcome marginality remains an essential concern, but the horizon is broadened. It is not just Iceland, but the North as a whole, that aims for increased integration into the Christian world. However, integration does not mark a loss of individuality but adds new layers of identity to the existing ones.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Narrative and memory

The contemporary sagas are valuable narrative sources that not only record events from an important period of social transformation in Iceland, but also interpret and evaluate these events from the perspective of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century social elite. They deal with various aspects of power, as well as with more abstract concepts of identity and with the medieval Icelanders' position in the world. The aim of the present study has been a detailed analysis of how these sagas' images of the recent past are shaped by narrative techniques; literary characteristics and historiographical contents are treated here as inseparably intertwined components of the texts' meaning. This objective requires an approach based on the theory of cultural memory, which liberates the study from the limiting dichotomy between history and fiction. Instead of being perceived either as documentary accounts of facts or as literary inventions, the sagas are viewed as *foundation narratives* that explain the origins of the present situation and endow the past with a social, political, or ideological significance for the present.

This approach rests on the idea that the meaning of a historical narrative is shaped by a dialogical relationship between the past depicted in the text and the text's own present. On the one hand, the meaning of the past, whether distant or recent, is always assessed from the perspective of the present; on the other hand, the memory of the past influences the perception of the present. When the memory of the past is narrativized in oral tradition or in writing, it is shaped both by the remembered images of historical events and by current ideas and concerns. The resulting narrative provides the community with a history from which it can derive an understanding of its origin, as well as with models for interpreting its present situation.

In this context, narrative is not regarded as a neutral means of recording collective memory, but rather as a discourse that actively shapes this memory. During the gradual process of narrativization – including an initial oral stage, the first composition of written texts, and the manuscript history –, some memories of the past are suppressed and forgotten, while others are selected to be remembered and shaped by interpretative means. Narrativization should thus not be viewed solely as a matter of textual practice, but also as a transition from the communicative mode to the cultural mode of collective memory, or from factual history to *foundational history*. In this process, the accounts of events which initially constituted the living memory of contemporary witnesses gain meanings

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that transcend the level of individual stories and acquire the function of *foundational memory* that illuminates the present through explaining its origins.

This evolution is, however, not understood in terms of a diachronic opposition, but rather of a simultaneous coexistence of various interrelated functions of a narrative. It can thus be recognized that all medieval Icelandic historiographical texts contain elements of both communicative memory – how the events were remembered among the people, and cultural memory – how the past was interpreted from the perspective of later times and employed as a source of collective identity. None of these narratives are neutral records of eyewitness accounts, but none of them are entirely formalized or ritualized either. Due to this duality, they can serve as ideal material for the study of the relationship between communicative and cultural memory in the construction of meaning in a narrative discourse.

This applies to all medieval Icelandic historiographical texts, but first and foremost to the contemporary sagas, in which the temporal distance between the events and the time of writing is shorter. The stories about the Saga Age were composed in written form around the same time, but the memory of the distant past was already narrativized – endowed with meanings and interpretations that extended beyond simple chronological or causal relations – in oral tradition before it was put to writing. Conversely, the narrativization of the recent past started only shortly before it was written down in the contemporary sagas. In this process, events that were still fresh in the communicative memory, or even attested by eyewitness accounts, were transformed into *foundational history* and received the same identity-building function as the memory of the distant past. Since the transition from communicative to cultural memory was still at its early stage at the time of writing, the contemporary sagas are likely to reveal the conditions and circumstances of this transition more clearly than other texts.

The present study has shown that while the contemporary sagas are based on the living memory of the recent past, they can also be viewed as intertextual dialogues with narrative accounts of the distant past. Through these intertextual connections, individual stories are integrated into a coherent narrative of the past, which is characterized by a thematic unity constructed through a shared emphasis on particular concerns and values. These central themes, first established in the early historiographical texts that are not sagas proper, are further developed in the sagas dealing with the historical past of the North through the use of specific structural patterns that foreground certain components of the stories or types of characters.

Due to such connections between form and meaning, an analysis of the sagas' structural patterns can contribute to a contextualization of the sagas as components of a broader corpus of narratives. The connection between a certain narrative structure, theme, and meaning has in literary research typically been associated with the

concept of genre. However, since the saga genres have been defined too narrowly, the present analysis is instead based on the concept of *narrative types*, which are characterized by their structural patterns and character types, rather than by their subject matter or the historical period in which the story is situated. Through the narrative types, sagas can be interconnected in terms of typological similarity. This concept thus enables a more systematic study of intertextual relationships across the saga genres.

An inherent function of the narrative types is that each of them establishes a set of expectations, which a saga can either fulfil or modify by diverging from the given structural pattern or by combining two or more narrative types within one text. Such modifications should not be viewed as flaws or arbitrary exceptions, but rather as a narrative technique that contributes to the construction of meaning. A necessary precondition of this function is that the recipients of the sagas are familiar with the narrative types, which is why it is culturally conditioned and related to the concept of cultural memory.

The narrative types can be regarded as much more than simple literary conventions, rather as interpretative devices that shape the perception of the past by foregrounding some elements that existed in communicative memory and suppressing others. This approach is based on the idea that when an event takes place, its meaning is not evident yet – the event can be endowed with various possible meanings only in the process of narrativization. This process shapes the interpretation of individual events or persons and even involves the selection of events and persons to be remembered. It can be assumed that many individuals were deemed memorable in communicative memory because of their actions or character traits, and various events were remembered because of their short-term local importance. In the transition to cultural memory, however, the significance of a person or event depended on their function as a source of collective identity. A story that could express a socially relevant meaning was thus more likely to be remembered beyond communicative memory, regardless of its immediate historical importance. This deeper level of meaning, which transcends the historical importance of individual events and contributes to a broader interpretation of the past, can be reinforced by the structural pattern of a narrative type because the narrative types emphasize particular key components of collective identity. The selection of material and the structure of the narrative are thus decisive for how the past is remembered and evaluated.

Moreover, the narrative types create parallels, connections, and contrasts between stories that take place in different times and situations, so they enable the recipients of the texts to view the past not just as a chain of events but as a coherent history with elements of both continuity and development. That is what constitutes the difference between a simple account of historical knowledge and

cultural memory, which is characterized by its capacity to contextualize the present and shape identity. The interpretation of history in the contemporary sagas through the narrative types shows how the social elites that composed or commissioned the sagas perceived – or rather wished to perceive – their recent past from the perspective of their present.

They were clearly aware of the political transformations that had taken place in the recent decades. The concentration of power had changed the extent and causes of conflicts, and this had led to an evolution of the stabilizing mechanisms. The extent and nature of contacts with the Norwegian monarchy had developed, and the social system had been transformed. An awareness of these changes existed alongside a wish to accentuate historical continuity; a recognition of the negative aspects of the development existed alongside a desire for an image of the past from which the community could proudly derive its identity and its understanding of the present. The retrospective evaluation of the past therefore emphasizes its positive elements, yet without denying the negative ones. The present is shown to be a result of a gradual development, which is a perception that constructs a sense of continuity.

7.2 Constructing continuity: Internal Icelandic relations

The present analysis has shown that an emphasis on continuity is an essential element of the whole immanent narrative of the origin, development, and identity of medieval Icelandic society, which is accessible to us through multiple texts dealing with Icelandic history. Although these texts are not gathered in a single manuscript, it can be assumed that they were intertwined in collective memory. It has been argued here that this narrative presents Icelandic history from its beginning to the fourteenth century as a coherent development, structured by three central turning points: the settlement, the conversion, and the acceptance of royal rule. While these historical moments are acknowledged as crucial transformative events, they are all narrativized in a way that creates a sense of continuity.

The settlement is described with an emphasis on genealogical continuity between influential Norwegian families and the settlers, as well as institutional continuity in terms of the law and the system of local assemblies. The accounts of the conversion incorporate Iceland's heathen past into Christian history by accentuating the role of pre-Christian institutions in the conversion and the genealogical connection between important settlers and the first Icelandic Christians and bishops. Comparably, the narratives of the social development that eventually led to the acceptance of royal rule in Iceland emphasize the continuing importance of the leading families and the established social mechanisms. The concentration of

power before and during the Sturlung Age is not presented in the contemporary sagas as a disintegration of the existing social system, but rather as a gradual continuation of long-term internal processes.

Even more importantly, it has been shown here that the immanent narrative of medieval Icelandic history expresses a strong sense of continuity in terms of a constant emphasis on a set of themes that were essential for the Icelanders' interpretation of their past. In the accounts of internal relations, the central theme is the social significance of the stabilizing mechanisms that uphold order in a decentralized society and renew peace after the inevitable conflicts. The forces that strengthen internal unity – primarily the law and the function of powerful social leaders as arbitrators – are foregrounded already in *Íslendingabók* and other early historiographical texts. This theme is then further developed in the sagas of Icelanders and the contemporary sagas, where it shapes not only the content of the texts, but also their structure. The structural patterns of both predominant narrative types in these sagas, the conflict story and the peaceful chieftain's story, are centred around the contrast between violence and reconciliation or aggression and peacefulness. This contrast accentuates the moral significance of the cohesive forces, as well as their continuing presence in Icelandic society. The use of these narrative types thus enables the sagas to foreground selected aspects of history without radically distorting the accounts of actual events as they were remembered in communicative memory.

The central narrative type in sagas dealing with internal Icelandic relations is the conflict story, which depicts the development of a conflict from an escalation of violence to a reconciliation, often achieved through the intervention of mediators. By emphasizing the reconciliation and foregrounding the character type of the mediator, the conflict story accentuates the social mechanisms that reinforce or restore order and reflects the cyclical renewal of peace that was an important social concern in medieval Iceland.

When the memory of historical reality is narrativized in the sagas, the typological similarities between different conflict stories deepen the meaning of each saga by creating intertextual connections between sagas describing various periods of Icelandic history. In sagas dealing with different stages of Iceland's social development, the stabilizing forces gradually become increasingly powerful: anonymous 'good men' or local chieftains in the sagas of Icelanders, influential leaders wielding territorial authority in the contemporary sagas depicting local conflicts, such as *Guðmundar saga dýra*, and the king in accounts of extensive power struggles, mainly *Þórðar saga kakala*. In the latter, the narrative of internal relations is thus interconnected with the narrative of Iceland's political contact with the Norwegian monarchy, and the stabilizing function of centralized power is accentuated. Finally, the last stage of the development is depicted in

Árna saga biskups, which takes place after Iceland's formal incorporation into the kingdom and shows the importance of strong royal rule for internal unity.

Together, these sagas illustrate the dynamic interplay between conflict and social development. The narratives do not present conflict as an inherently disruptive social element; they create a more nuanced image, showing both the cohesive and destabilizing aspects of conflict. The destructive aspects are presented as an inevitable but temporary concomitant of social changes: the system must be partly destabilized during its transformation. On the story level, the disruptive forces are primarily depicted as consequences of specific individuals' character flaws: excessive aggression, immoderate greed for power, a lack of political prudence, or a tendency to disregard social norms. The task of society, its leaders, and its institutions is to keep such disruptive individuals under control. The texts show that on this broader social level, conflict can strengthen the social ties that uphold various relationships beyond the kin group. Moreover, it can reinforce the power of capable, righteous leaders and undermine the position of aggressors or instigators, thus contributing to increased social stability in the long term.

What is most important is that conflicts contribute to a development in which the stabilizing forces are dynamically adapted to the gradual changes of the social structure. Concentration of power, which is a natural process in a medieval society, leads to more extensive conflicts but also encourages the evolution of more advanced methods of conflict resolution and strengthens the authority of social leaders who can regulate or terminate conflicts. The sum of all the conflict stories in the sagas, instead of presenting a social disintegration, thus expresses a positive evaluation of the gradual transformation from decentralized to centralized society, although the difficulties of this turbulent process are admitted. The overall image implies that after the tumultuous period of transformation, social stability can be not just renewed, but even strengthened by the introduction of more efficient stabilizing mechanisms, centralized authority, and eventually also executive power and a hierarchical administrative structure. This emphasis on the benefits of centralized power is probably a comment on the social reality at the time of the sagas' origin, rather than on the events described in the stories.

The other related narrative type, the peaceful chieftain's story, is inherently tragic because the protagonist usually fails to dissuade others from aggression and falls victim to violence despite his efforts at peace. Nevertheless, its emphasis on the protagonist's moral integrity foregrounds the positive values that define medieval Icelandic collective identity. The sagas thus imply that these values continued to shape Icelandic society even during the difficult period of transformation, not just in terms of individual morality, but also of social integrity.

In the *Sturlunga* compilation, the importance of this narrative type is emphasized by the typological similarity between the peaceful chieftains' stories in

Sturlu saga, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, the story of Þórðr Sturluson in *Íslendinga saga*, the second half of *Þorgils saga skarða*, and the final section of Gizurr Þorvaldsson's story. Due to these parallels, stories about different periods of Icelandic history can be interpreted in the context of each other, so they can construct meaning without the necessity of employing more direct interpretative devices. For instance, *Sturlu saga* and the story of Þórðr Sturluson increase the focus on the cohesive forces by reducing the tragic aspects of the narrative type; this modification can only be understood in comparison with other similar stories. In the *Sturlunga saga* redaction of *Hrafns saga*, intertextual connections with other typologically similar stories in the compilation replace the evaluative function of the original introduction of the separate version.

Furthermore, such typological connections allow the discourse to construct meanings that transcend the historical significance of individual stories. Together, the sagas representing this narrative type illustrate the evolution of Icelandic political leaders from the peaceful but individualistic and excessively ambitious Sturla Þórðarson the elder to Þorgils Böðvarsson, who values social cohesion above his personal ambition, and Gizurr Þorvaldsson, whose portrayal contains features of *rex iustus*. This development is not presented as a loss of the original values; peacefulness and moderation remain essential but are complemented by a new set of values, derived from the newly introduced royal ideology. The sum of the peaceful chieftains' stories, despite their inherently tragic tone, thus presents a positive evaluation of the social transformation and a model of desirable behaviour that counterbalances the accounts of increased violence and instability during the Sturlung Age.

Through the use of the narrative types discussed here, the sagas could significantly shape the memory of the recent past by accentuating particular themes. These thematic emphases were probably also the reason why certain local events, such as the conflicts described in *Guðmundar saga dýra*, *Svínfellinga saga*, or *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, were integrated into cultural memory, although they cannot be deemed crucial for the overall historical development of Icelandic society. Many more comparable stories of individual events and persons must have existed in communicative memory, but they were forgotten – probably not because they were not 'good stories', but rather because they were considered less suitable for the creation of narratives that could construct collective identity.

The narratives that were selected to be remembered not only recorded the past, but also connected the past with their own present. The thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelanders could identify with the values that are foregrounded in the sagas and perceive them as a counterweight to the less positive aspects of their society and its history. They could appreciate the strong elements of continuity alongside the elements of change, the beneficial aspects of power concentration, and the complex connections between political conflicts and social development.

Thus, contrary to the common scholarly perception of the contemporary sagas as images of a moral decline and social breakdown, the present analysis has shown that the image of the past constructed in the sagas could be accepted by medieval Icelanders as a source of a positive self-image.

7.3 Continuity and contact: Iceland and Norway

Apart from its focus on the internal social development, the immanent narrative of Icelandic history from the settlement to the fourteenth century also deals with the relationship between Iceland and Norway. It has been argued here that this relationship is not primarily presented as an opposition, but rather as a cultural, social, and political relatedness, which nevertheless does not contradict Icelandic individuality. Contact with Norway plays a crucial role in all the central events of this narrative: the settlement, the conversion, and the acceptance of royal rule. However, although these events can be understood as results of crises, their narrative accounts do not predominantly show Icelanders being passively subjected to external pressure. Quite the opposite, they accentuate their active initiative in these historically important decisions and in different types of contact with the Norwegian kings. This emphasis is shared by the depictions of the settlement, the conversion, and the early Icelanders' visits to the Norwegian royal court in the early historiographical texts and the sagas and *þættir* of Icelanders, as well as the contemporary sagas, which describe the formation of direct political contacts between Icelandic elites and the Norwegian monarchy.

The contemporary sagas show that during the Sturlung Age, the Icelanders' contact with the Norwegian royal court changed from adventurous journeys undertaken by young ambitious men into the chieftains' effort to gain the Norwegian rulers' direct support in their power struggles. This eventually led to the acceptance of royal rule, which strengthened the state institutions and introduced centralized executive power. This development was a historical fact, but its perception was open to interpretation. Iceland's incorporation into the Norwegian kingdom could have been presented as a tragic loss of independence or as a passive submission to a foreign monarch if the Icelanders of the following decades had wished it to be remembered that way. Instead, however, the narratives emphasize the Icelanders' active interest in establishing political contact with the monarchy, and this process is portrayed as Iceland's integration into Scandinavian social structures.

This integration is not depicted as the Icelanders' loss of their individuality, but it may have motivated a redefinition of this individuality through the narrativization of stories that could serve as sources of collective identity. The present

study has shown that the main concern pervading these narratives is not the question of political independence, but rather the Icelanders' increased awareness of their marginality within the North, both in geographical, economic, and social terms. Thus, another central theme of the contemporary sagas, alongside the Icelanders' active approach to political contact, is the deconstruction of Iceland's cultural and social marginality – as the geographical and economic aspects could not be changed.

These themes are reflected in the narrative types that shape the presentation of contact between Iceland and Norway and create a thematic continuity in the immanent narrative of Icelandic history. The travel story, the royal retainer's story, and the court poet's story are all inherently optimistic and share a similar structure and meaning. They express a generally positive evaluation of the Icelanders' relationship with the Norwegian monarchy, foreground the protagonists' active effort to increase their prestige by demonstrating their skills and qualities during their journeys abroad, and construct an image of Iceland's equality within the Norse cultural region. In some contemporary sagas, they are combined with primarily tragic narrative types, such as the outlaw's story or the jarl's story, but even then, their optimistic elements either reduce or counterbalance the tragic aspects and thus modify the saga's meaning.

The central narrative type in the portrayal of contact between Iceland and Norway is the travel story, which depicts the protagonist's transition from estrangement to acceptance. The initial alienation is based on cultural stereotypes, which are related to regional, rather than national identity – Norwegians and Icelanders are regarded respectively as central and peripheral members of the same group. At first, the Norwegians deem the Icelandic traveller primitive due to his poverty and lack of courtly manners, but he eventually disproves such assumptions by demonstrating his cleverness, eloquence, courage, and integrity. The travel story thus reveals the Icelanders' insecurities but shows that they can be overcome. As the conflict that develops after the Icelander's arrival in Norway typically ends with a reconciliation, the story inherently expresses a positive attitude to the relationship between Icelanders and the monarchy despite possible initial disagreements.

The focus on these themes connects the *útanferðar þættir* from the kings' sagas of the distant past, the travel stories in the sagas of the twelfth-century Icelandic saintly bishops, *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, which deals with the beginning of the Sturlung Age, and the story of the fourteenth-century bishop Lárentíus Kálfsson. These narratives can receive additional meaning through being interpreted in the context of each other: the sum of all the travel stories, interlinked in cultural memory by their narrative type, emphasizes the continuing significance of deconstructing the Icelanders' position as outsiders in their contact with the monarchy.

The emphasis on the positive aspects of royal rule is even stronger in the royal retainer's story, which also presents a more confident image of the Icelander than the travel story. Instead of highlighting his initial marginality in Norway, it accentuates the development of his personality during his stay at the royal court. It shows how his ferocity and courage gain a meaningful purpose in his service to the monarch, so he is transformed from a disruptive aggressor into a protector of order. This can be understood as a figurative image of Iceland's transformation from a feuding society into a state where order is upheld by centralized rule. The narrative type presents allegiance to the monarch as a chief value but clearly marks the difference between active loyalty and passive subordination by highlighting the Icelander's voluntary decision to serve the king, motivated by the prestige and unity of the royal retinue. This can be interpreted as a comment on Iceland's integration into the Norwegian kingdom: the protagonist's voluntary service to the monarch can represent the Icelanders' active decision to accept royal rule, motivated by the benefits of centralized executive power.

The narrative type of the royal retainer's story connects some sagas of the distant past, such as *Fóstbræðra saga*, with the story of the twelfth-century brothers in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*, as well as *Þorgils saga skarða*, dealing with the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, while the former two instances share an ending featuring the retainer's heroic death in battle alongside the monarch, this element is modified in *Þorgils saga*, where the royal retainer's story is combined with the peaceful chieftain's story. Instead of fighting on the king's behalf, Þorgils proves his courage in extinguishing a fire, and armed clashes with his opponent in Norway are averted with the help of the king's authority. As a royal representative in Iceland, he puts the community's interests before his ambition and actively attempts to reduce violence in conflicts. The character development depicted in *Þorgils saga* thus takes the retainer's transformation, which is central to this narrative type, one step further. The saga, together with a similar description of personal development in the story of Gizurr Þorvaldsson, can therefore be regarded as a culmination of the narrative image of Iceland's evolution from constant rivalry between aggressive chieftains to centralized rule in the hands of peaceful royal representatives, whose collective allegiance to the monarch unites the realm despite individual disagreements.

Finally, the most confident portrayal of the Icelander is presented in the court poet's story, which foregrounds the skald's cleverness and eloquence, active approach to forming a relationship with the monarch, and special privileges in this relationship. The skald enters a king's service on his own initiative because he wishes to make full use of his abilities – both poetic and diplomatic. He can speak to the king more openly than anyone else and often uses his rhetorical skills to terminate conflicts. On a figurative level, the court poet's story can be

perceived as an image of how the Icelanders envisioned their ideal relationship with the monarchy. In this sense, the skald can embody the whole Icelandic society and its active role in establishing a direct political connection with the Norwegian kingdom.

This narrative type shapes the stories of Snorri Sturluson and Sturla Þórðarson the younger, which are thus typologically interconnected with the court poets' stories about the Saga Age. It has been argued here that these sections of *Sturlunga saga* are not likely to show any considerable political importance of poetry in the historical reality of the thirteenth century. When Snorri and Sturla composed skaldic poems, they probably imitated old cultural traditions that were no longer politically significant; the structural pattern of the court poet's story in the narrative accounts of their lives mainly has an interpretative and evaluative function. The two Sturlungar were presumably known in communicative memory for their ambiguous relationships with the kings, involving both an active political contact and a serious conflict. Their stories could therefore be interpreted by accentuating one of these elements and suppressing the other in the narrative. Snorri's unlucky end and Sturla's involuntary journey to the royal court could have served as a basis for a narrative of Iceland's opposition to the Norwegian monarchy if such an interpretation had been dominant or preferred. Instead, the narrative type that was chosen is the one that inherently expresses the most positive attitude to the monarchy. It is hardly a coincidence that – at least in one of the redactions of *Sturlunga saga* – this narrative type shapes the stories that constitute the very beginning and end of the account of Iceland's political integration into the Norwegian kingdom. Its structural pattern thus serves as an interpretative framework of this whole narrative.

All these narrative types contributed to the construction of collective identity by interpreting the stories, and they probably even motivated the narrativization and writing down of some of them. For instance, the importance of the travel story for the interpretation of history was possibly the reason why the stories of Ingimundr Þorgeirsson or Aron Hjörleifsson were not gradually forgotten. They were culturally significant because of the protagonists' function as identity bearers, although their political importance could not compare with that of the social leaders who played a central role in the decisive historical events of their time.

Furthermore, the way of narrating the events accentuates the aspects that are significant for the meaning of the stories, although the storylines – especially in the contemporary sagas – are determined by historical facts. For example, Þorgils Böðvarsson may have been known in communicative memory for his ferocity in his youth and the contrasting peacefulness in his later years. His early recklessness could have been suppressed in the narrative if the purpose had been to present an idealized image of Þorgils as an individual person. Instead, it has been

emphasized, because it is an important component of the narrative type of the royal retainer's story, which is combined with the peaceful chieftain's story to construct an account of Þorgils's life as a figurative image of the development of Icelandic society.

In other instances, the same historical person can be interpreted differently in different texts, as in the case of Þórðr Sighvatsson in *Þórðar saga kakala* and *Svínfellinga saga* or Gizurr Þorvaldsson in *Sturlunga saga* and *Hákonar saga*. It would be a misleading simplification to ascribe these differences to the authors' personal bias or to automatically regard such accounts as essentially untrue. As has been shown here, the individuals' images in communicative memory may have contained heterogenous elements, and the particular interpretative choices were motivated by the persons' roles as different character types in the individual sagas. It is the character types, rather than the portrayals of individuals, which are important for a deeper interpretation of history that can serve as a source of collective identity.

In this context, it is significant that all the predominant character types in the narrative accounts of contact between Iceland and Norway are Icelanders who seek social prestige abroad and proudly demonstrate the qualities that the medieval Icelanders probably wished to attribute to themselves collectively: courage, integrity, cleverness, eloquence, decisiveness, and determination that borders on fierceness but can be useful if it is given a purpose. Each story presents a protagonist whose contact with Norway refines his behaviour and fully develops the qualities that he already possesses. The sum of all the stories can then figuratively express the idea that the whole Icelandic society can be integrated into Scandinavian social structures without losing its identity, and that it can be appreciated for its own individual qualities, which can be refined and developed through contact with other environments. The overall narrative is thus not a story of losing independence but of overcoming marginality.

7.4 Memory and identity

When historiographical texts are perceived as narratives that construct identity through presenting a specific memory of the past, it must be kept in mind that the relationship between memory and identity goes both ways – identity is sustained by remembering, and what is remembered is determined by the present identity. The narratives of medieval Icelandic history – not only of the recent past, but of the whole period from the settlement to the fourteenth century – can therefore reveal the predominant aspects of collective identity at the time of the texts' origin. As has been pointed out here, the main concern seems to have been

the Icelanders' awareness of their own marginality within the Norse and Christian cultural region, as they showed increasing interest in their position and reputation in international relations. Apart from the broad themes associated with the individual narrative types, this concern is also reflected in various subtler motifs that are shared by multiple narratives of Icelandic history.

The first of these motifs is a focus on the Icelanders' noble ancestry. Texts including *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, many sagas of Icelanders, or *Geirmundar þáttr* in *Sturlunga saga* foreground the settlers' origin from influential and honourable families, or even royal families. In the contemporary sagas, some of the later Icelandic social leaders are also presented as kinsmen of the Norwegian kings: Jón Loptsson is said to be related to the kings through his mother's royal ancestry, and Gizurr Þorvaldsson is referred to as Hákon Hákonarson's kinsman (*frændi*) due to his mother's descent from Jón Loptsson. This emphasis on aristocratic origin possibly served a double purpose in collective memory. Firstly, it was certainly intended to corroborate the prestige of the individual leading families, so it could function as a tool in the competition for power in the thirteenth century. Secondly, it probably transcended this individual significance and contributed to a more confident collective self-image of Icelandic society as a whole. These functions are not mutually exclusive and may have existed alongside each other, while the latter function presumably gradually became dominant as the stories were transformed from communicative to cultural memory.

Significantly, this focus on nobility is not limited to ancestry. Even more emphasis is placed on the noble, almost royal personal qualities ascribed to Icelandic social leaders, including those who are not related to royal families. Saga characters like Snorri goði or Njáll Þorgeirsson are portrayed as chieftains who enjoy natural authority, respect, and esteem because of their wisdom, knowledge of the law, and ability to make decisions that benefit the entire community. Similarly, Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson is presented in *Íslendingabók* and *Kristni saga* not only as an important ecclesiastical dignitary, but also as a popular and respected leader who can unify society and prevent discord; in *Hungrvaka* he is even compared to a king.

Such portrayals of social leaders are then further developed in the contemporary sagas, with a gradually increasing emphasis on the royal ideal of *rex iustus*. Jón Loptsson is portrayed as a respected arbitrator who plays a central role in upholding justice and peace. The same element of the royal ideal shapes the depiction of Þórðr Sturluson, in which it is accentuated by the accounts of Þórðr being almost miraculously protected from violence and by the emphasis on his peaceful death. Similarly, the portrayal of Þorgils Böðvarsson presents an ideally balanced combination of courage and peacefulness, together with magnanimity towards his opponents. These qualities make him an almost kingly character, and

the magnificence of his personality is accentuated by hagiographic motifs in the description of his death. Even more striking elements of the ideal of *rex iustus* characterize the latter section of Gizurr Þorvaldsson's portrayal in *Sturlunga saga*, which completes the image of Icelandic chieftains as European-style aristocrats. This gradually increasing emphasis on the ideal of *rex iustus* mirrors the evolution of royal and aristocratic ideals in the Norse cultural region, while the focus on the existence of such ideals in Iceland remains constant. It expresses the idea that the kingless Iceland is not inferior to the European kingdoms. This is, however, not presented in the sources as an anti-monarchic tendency, but rather as a deconstruction of Iceland's marginality.

Apart from this emphasis on the chieftains' noble qualities manifested in their behaviour in Iceland, the texts are rich in accounts of Icelanders receiving prestige and appreciation abroad. This can apply to skalds, such as Sighvatr Þórðarson or Snorri Sturluson, fighters, such as the protagonists of *Fóstbræðra saga* or Ari Þorgeirsson, or even lower-class travellers in the *útanferðar þættir* or *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*. International acclaim is also important in the portrayal of Icelandic clerics: Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson in *Hungrvaka*, the saintly bishops in *Þorláks saga* and *Jóns saga*, the priest Ingimundr Þorgeirsson, or Lárentíus Kálfsson. Prestige is often connected with allegiance to the monarch, which is not presented as a loss of freedom, but rather as an increase of esteem – as in the stories of Þormóðr in *Fóstbræðra saga*, Ari Þorgeirsson, Aron Hjörleifsson, or Þorgils Böðvarsson. The image of the Icelanders' marginality is further deconstructed by an emphasis on their important roles in Norwegian secular and ecclesiastical politics, both before Iceland's official incorporation into the kingdom, as in the case of Snorri Sturluson, and after, as in the case of Lárentíus Kálfsson. The similarities between the secular contemporary sagas and the bishops' sagas in the presentation of this theme corroborate its crucial role in the construction of collective identity.

In the ecclesiastical biographies specifically, this theme is further developed by their focus on the local bishops' role in incorporating Iceland into the Christian cultural region. Already in the narrative portrayals of the earliest Icelandic bishops, the emphasis on their clerical virtues and spiritual excellence expresses the idea that Iceland, despite its peripheral position in the Christian world, is not spiritually inferior to the more central Christian countries. This deconstruction of Iceland's spiritual marginality is then deepened in the hagiographic sagas of the Icelandic saintly bishops, in particular *Þorláks saga* and *Jóns saga*, which incorporate Iceland into Christian history by creating parallels between local Icelandic saints and the foreign saints portrayed in Latin hagiographies. In the later bishops' sagas, these native saints are then presented both as a source of their successors' authority and as embodiments of Iceland's spiritual equality within the

Christian cultural region. This motif gradually evolves from an emphasis on Iceland's spiritual excellence in the context of the Norwegian-Icelandic realm to an increased focus on Iceland's position within the broader Christian world. Such a development probably reflects the Icelanders' growing interest in constructing their identity within a broader international framework, which was presumably a result of their integration into a larger political unit.

All these components of medieval Icelandic collective identity are significant elements of continuity between the early historiographical texts, the sagas and *þættir* of Icelanders, the contemporary sagas, and the bishops' sagas. At the same time, some degree of development can be seen in the conceptualization of the individual aspects: there is a growing emphasis on the royal ideal of *rex iustus* in the portrayals of Icelandic chieftains, the political aspects become increasingly important in the depictions of their contact with the royal court, and the saintly bishops' position of equality among the European saints is more and more directly foregrounded. This evolution does not, however, negate the meaning of these components of identity, it rather adds new layers of meaning to the original ones.

A similar continuity can also be perceived on the broadest level of collective identity that is reflected in the narratives, as the various layers of identity are all retained throughout the different texts. The sources show that the medieval Icelanders defined their identity socially, geographically, and culturally on several levels that existed parallelly and their relative importance could vary depending on the situation and the context. Social identity defined each person as a member of a kin group, a network of alliances and patron-client relationships, a social class, and a community sharing the same law and social norms. Geographically, every Icelander belonged to a certain district, region, quarter, Iceland as a whole, and the Nordic area as a whole. Culturally, Icelanders identified as Christians and as inhabitants of the Norse cultural region with its language and history. These cultural elements were shared with Norway, but Iceland also had its individual history and cultural identity with its own narrative traditions. All these layers of identity were constantly reformulated in the narratives of the past, but all in all, they remained the same from the twelfth to the fourteenth century. When new elements of identity were added due to Iceland's increased contact with the Norwegian kingdom, they did not disrupt, suppress, contradict, or replace the existing ones but coexisted with them.

All the aspects that have been discussed here show that the texts in which the medieval Icelanders depicted their past can be interpreted together as a coherent narrative of Icelandic history from the settlement to the fourteenth century. This narrative does not deny the social development that took place throughout the centuries, but it accentuates the themes and values that continued to define medieval

Icelandic collective identity. As such, it presents a past that explains the origin of the present and answers the essential questions of what unites the Icelanders and makes them unique and how they relate to the rest of the Norse, European, and Christian cultural region. It has been argued here that this function of the immanent narrative may have been decisive for the selection of what would be remembered and how it would be narrativized. Some aspects of this process have not received as much attention in the present analysis as they would deserve, so I hope that this study will contribute to an increased interest in this topic and encourage the search for answers that fall beyond its scope.

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