

Bishop Guðmundr in Sturla Þórðarson's Íslendinga Saga: The Cult of Saints or the Cult of Personalities?

Guðmundr Arason, Bishop of Hólar (1203-1237), was a controversial figure for his contemporaries, church authorities and, possibly, saga writers. The facts of his life are well known to every student of Nordic history. Unlike most of his Icelandic predecessors, and like his great example, St. Thomas of Canterbury (d. 1170), Bishop Guðmundr was not satisfied with the role of a chieftain integrated in the laic society and tried to counterbalance the power of laymen. He got involved into feuds with mighty Icelandic chieftains Kolbeinn Túmason, Þorvaldr Gizurarson, later Sighvatr Sturluson, Túmi Sighvatsson, Sturla Sighvatsson and Arnórr Túmason. After his election in 1203 he was frequently supported by armed guards who were responsible for numerous abuses, plunders and even murders in Iceland; among their victims there were two chieftains – Kolbeinn Túmason, killed in the battle of Víðines in 1208, and Túmi Sighvatsson, killed during the raid to Hólar in 1222. In his lifetime, Bishop Guðmundr was both venerated by his followers for religious zeal, concern for the poor and stable reputation of miracle- and prophecies-making, and hated by his enemies who accused him of abuses, meddling in other people's business and commanding thoughts¹. He suffered from severe repressions, had to spend many years in exile, and, finally, was deprived of his office in 1232. In spite of it, Icelandic church made an attempt to canonize him: in 1315, his relics were translated and a bid for canonization – though unsuccessful – was submitted. These efforts renewed the interest in Guðmundr's life: the so called *Guðmundar Saga A (GA)*, i.e. the eldest saga of Bishop Guðmundr, and *Áróns saga Hjörleifssonar (Ár)* devoted to one of his firm supporters go back to that period. It is difficult to establish whether *GA* and *Ár* were composed before or after the translation of Guðmundr's relics had taken place, but, for textological reasons, these sagas should be written down close to that moment [Stefán Karlsson 1983: clxviii].

From survived sagas of Bishop Guðmundr, only the so called 'Priest-saga' (*Prestsaga Guðmundar Arasonar*) containing Guðmundr's biography up to 1203 could be written down in the first half of the XIIIth century in the bishop's lifetime. The 'Priest-saga' is attributed to Abbot Lambkár Þorgilsson (d. 1249), a Western Icelander who in his young years had been a member of Guðmundr's personal following [Jón Jóhannesson 1946: xxviii-xxix]. It is generally assumed that Lambkár also made some notes relating to Guðmundr's career as bishop, but it is difficult to say what kind of text it was – a narrative piece, a number of loose episodes or a list of miracles – and it is hard to prove that any of subsequent writers had access to these notes². Several episodes from Guðmundr's biography (his sea-journey and his consecration) are recorded in *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, devoted to his friend Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson (d. 1213); *Hrafn's saga* was written down in the 2nd fourth of the XIII-th. century, likely after 1228³. Abridged versions of both sagas were later included in the *Sturlunga* compilation; above it, two different versions of *Hrafn's saga* have survived. Our main source of information

¹ Cf. the famous place in Íslendinga saga, which tells about the last years of Guðmundr. The conflicting attitudes towards the bishop are here extremely well articulated: "Líkaði hann þá líkara hljóðlátum ok rólyndum einsetumanni heldr en harðlyndum ok hlutsömum ljóðbyskupi, sem óvinir hans höfðu orð á" (St II: 288). The same chapter contains two prophecies made by Bishop Guðmundr.

² Cf. [Magnús Jónsson 1940: 45; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987: xxxv]

³ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir argued that the author of *Hrafn's saga* was unaware of the 'Priest Saga'. According to her plausible hypothesis, *Hrafn's saga* was written down after 1238 by priest Tómas Þorárinsson in Selárdalur (d. 1253) [Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987: cxxx].

about Bishop Guðmundr's life in 1203-1237 is *Íslendinga saga*, the masterpiece of Sturla Þórðarson (1214-1284). Sturla knew Bishop Guðmundr personally and met him at least once, in summer 1231, when his father Þórðr Sturluson told him to accompany the bishop on the Snæfellsnes peninsula and help his men with lodging; this episode is recorded in *Íslendinga saga*⁴. There are reasons to think that young Sturla met Bishop Guðmundr during the latter's stay in Hvammr in winter 1227/1228, though he does not mention this: Sturla spent a lot of time with his father and overtook the farm in Eyrr after Þórðr's death in 1237. Sturla was acquainted with Lambkárri Þorgilsson – the latter for a period of time was his neighbor and in 1242 acted as Sturla's guarantor in the conciliation with Kolbeinn the Younger⁵ – and he might have borrowed much from Lambkárri's notes relating to Guðmundr's career as bishop. Unfortunately, *Íslendinga saga* normally does not refer to its sources as Bishop Guðmundr is concerned and it is difficult to distinguish information presumably taken from earlier written texts from information presumably based on oral sources and Sturla's own experience⁶. A stylistic expertise could theoretically solve this problem, but the opposition of the so-called 'saga' style and so-called 'clerical' or 'learned' style is not always clear-cut [Jónas Kristjánsson 1981]. Besides, Sturla left no obligation to conform to the purity of 'saga' style. Many prominent scholars tried to single out different layers in *Íslendinga saga* and proposed valuable hypotheses for the origin of the inserted passages in Sturla's text, the so called 'clauses'. Nevertheless, the statements about the authorship of these clauses are usually grounded not with stylistic considerations alone, but with a mixture of textological and other arguments: it is assumed that later clerical interpolations in Sturla's text have brought about a more enthusiastic account of Bishop Guðmundr. In this light, statements of the type 'Sturla was incapable of writing this clause because of its clerical style'⁷ by many scholars of the past actually mean 'Sturla did not write this clause because it differs in its style from other parts of his text and shows different attitude towards the bishop from what is assumed for Sturla'.

All subsequent biographers of Bishop Guðmundr made use of *Íslendinga saga*, though in a different way. There is little doubt that *GA* and *Áróns saga* were written by different persons. *GA* is a compilation, combining the 'Priest saga' with fragments of *Hrafnis saga*, fragments of *Íslendinga saga*, fragments of *Áróns saga* and annal entries⁸. The second half of *GA* combines Sturla's text with the text of *Ár* even there where they present conflicting views⁹. The author of *Ár* apparently did not check his text with *Íslendinga saga* and did not have any written version of it in front of his eyes. On the contrary, exact quotations of *Íslendinga saga* in *GA* indicate that the compiler of *GA* had the text of *Íslendinga saga*. Minor deviations from the *Sturlunga*-text of *Íslendinga saga* are more likely to be explained by

⁴ "En er Guðmundr byskup kom í sveit Þórðar Sturlusonar, fékk hann til Sturlu, son sinn at fara með byskupi ok skipa fólki hans á gistingar, því at þá var mannfjöldi mikill með honum. Hann var fluttur af Eyri til Bjarnarhafnar á því skipi, er Langhúfr hét, ok á annarri ferju mikilli var fluttur lið hans" (St II: 201). Cf. also the corresponding place in *GA*, (c. 248, 3-8) where the last line is misrepresented.

⁵ (St II: 405, 407, 409).

⁶ Quite exceptional is the episode with Monk Magnús who in winter 1236/1237 came from Hólar to Eyrr with a message from Bishop Guðmundr to Þórðr Sturluson. Sturla specially mentioned that he had heard their conversation (St II: 288).

⁷ Cf. Björn M. Ólsen's explanation of the clause about Bishop Guðmundr's funeral [1904: 294].

⁸ It is a mute question whether Lambkárri's 'Priest Saga' had annal entries from the very beginning, but there is little doubt that neither *Íslendinga saga* nor *Áróns saga* included them.

⁹ Cf., e.g., the episode with Eyjólf's and Áróns's raid to Hólar in 1222 and their returnal. Chapter 184 which is taken from *Íslendinga saga* tells that Túmi's men and the house-holders (*bændr*) chased the bishop's men and the latter escaped in a hurry; one of the bishop's men who missed the ship was killed and another one was later found frozen to death. Chapter 185 which is taken from *Áróns saga* opens with a sentence implying the passivity of Hólar's people: "Now it is time to say about people in Hólar that they took care of the dead and buried them".

interpolations made by the compiler of *Sturlunga* than by deliberate changes made by the compiler of *GA*, cf. [Stefán Karlsson 1983: clvii - clviii]. This conclusion is important for text studies since it is plausible that *GA* has preserved a more genuine form of *Íslendinga saga* than *Sturlunga*. Therefore, the comparison of *GA* and *Sturlunga* can provide the key to the original version of *Íslendinga saga*.¹⁰ This problem was set by Guðbrandur Vigfússon [1878] and Björn M. Ólsen [1902; 1910] who considered the famous passage about 'the wretched and sorrowful state of Christianity' in northern Iceland after Bishop Guðmundr had been driven from his bishopric to be a clerical interpolation into the body of *Íslendinga saga*. This passage is known both from *GA* (ch. 144.11-18) and from *Sturlunga* (St II: 44). It looks, indeed, very much like a personal outburst, which is unusual for texts connected with Sturla Þórðarson's name:

Aumlig ok hörmulig kristni var þar þá at sjá. Sumir prestar lögðu messusöng fyrir hræðslu sakir við guð, sumir fröndu fyrir hræðslu við höfðingja, sumir at sínum sjálfsvilja. (St II: 44)

Even more remarkable is the account of Bishop Guðmundr's last years and death. It contains a description of his funeral, the miracle with church bells, a list of Bishop Guðmundr's everyday prayers and a catholic formula revealing the belief that he 'accepted paradise and eternal joy' and joined 'all saints selected by God':

Vánum hann meðtekit hafa himnaríki ok eilífa gleði með öllum heilögum guðs útvöldum mönnum. Amen. (St II: 291)

This formula is preserved in paper copies of *Sturlunga* made in the XVII century. Unfortunately, the corresponding parts of two main skin manuscripts of *Sturlunga*, AM 122 a fol. 'Króksfjarðarbók' and AM 122 b fol. 'Reykjarfjarðarbók', have not survived and the conclusion of *GA* got lost as well¹¹. At the same time, the formula is recorded in a later version of Guðmundr's saga, *Guðmundar Saga B (GB)*, though in a slightly different place¹². Again, it is difficult to determine whether Sturla himself was responsible for this open demonstration of feelings towards the bishop. If the formula were in *GA*, a text reflecting the earliest available version of *Íslendinga saga*, it would indicate that the formula had already been in Sturla's text. It is implausible that *Íslendinga saga* has been copied many times between ca. 1280 (the approximate date of its composition) and ca. 1300 (when it has been included in *Sturlunga* compilation¹³) and that the scribe was bold enough to make serious changes in the text. Since, however, the conclusion of *GA* is lost and nobody can check this issue, we are left with indirect and rather vague considerations, such as 'stylistic incompatibility' or 'collision of folk style and clerical style'. This returns us to the question whether Sturla was so well disposed towards Bishop Guðmundr to be capable of praising him as a saint, but this question cannot be solved unless we establish which parts of *Íslendinga*

¹⁰ A similar assumption can be made for *Áróns saga*: given that the compiler of *GA* quoted the text of the text *Íslendinga saga* literally, it is dubious that he chose a more creative attitude towards *Áróns saga* and made deliberate changes in it.

¹¹ The catholic formula is placed in *GB* directly after the description of Guðmundr's funeral, whereas in *Sturlunga* it stands in the end of the chapter, after the list of Guðmundr's prayers. For discussion see [Stefán Karlsson 1983: xxxv-xxxvi].

¹² The problem of text variation in different manuscripts of *Sturlunga saga* is discussed by Stefán Karlsson who arrives at the conclusion that the formula about the 'saints selected by God' goes back to the text of *Króksfjarðarbók*, but not to the protograph (*erkit*) of *Sturlunga saga* and certainly not to the original version of *Íslendinga saga* [Stefán Karlsson 1983: xxxv-xxxvi].

¹³ In spite of the fact that the name of the compiler is unknown, there is a well established opinion in Icelandic studies that *Sturlunga saga* was compiled by lagmaðr Þórðr Narfason (d. 1308) who composed *Geirmundar þáttur heljarstíms* and rewrote the 'Prologue' (*Formáli*) written by Sturla Þórðarson [Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1988].

saga go back to Sturla and which do not. Thus, textological methods (reconstruction of *Íslendinga saga* through comparison of *Sturlunga* with *GA* and other sources) and, sociological methods (reconstruction of Sturla's attitude towards Bishop Guðmundr on the basis of *Íslendinga saga*) appear to be somewhat circular. The majority of scholars cf. Guðbrandur Vigfússon [1878], Kr. Kálund [1911], Björn M. Ólsen [1902; 1910], Pétur Sigurðsson [1933], Jón Jóhannesson [1946] argued for that the clauses about the 'wretched state of Christianity', about the bishop's funeral and about Guðmundr's status with 'selected saints' were late clerical interpolations. The main argument, however, was the conviction that Sturla was 'incapable of such a clerical manner' as Björn M. Ólsen once put it¹⁴ [1902: 294-295]. In more recent years, Stefán Karlsson has shown that such arbitrary statements make little sense and provided a close parallel to the scene of Bishop Guðmundr's funeral – the description of King Hákon funeral in *Hákonar saga gamla* written by Sturla Þórðarson [Stefán Karlsson 1985: xxxiv].

Many scholars, including those who denied Sturla's authorship of the clauses, accepted for possible that Sturla's account of Bishop Guðmundr was partly based on records made by Lambkár Þorgilsson or another cleric who had been close to the bishop. Pétur Sigurðsson [1935: 169-177], following the footsteps of Finnur Jónson [1924: 729], even ventured to reconstruct a **Proto-Guðmundar saga* as Sturla's source, while more realistic philologists only accepted that Sturla had had access to some collection of loose episodes from Bishop Guðmundr's life. It is impossible to discuss all theories in detail here, but it is reasonable to outline three major approaches to the problem.

- A. *Íslendinga saga* in its parts devoted to Guðmundr presents heterogeneous layers: some of the fragments had existed before Sturla; another fragments were added after his death. There is no common concept behind these layers.
- B. *Íslendinga saga* presents a carefully harmonized account of Guðmundr's life made by a single person – either by Sturla himself or by someone else who managed to make a creative copy of Sturla's text in 1280 – 1300, before the *saga* has been included in the *Sturlunga* compilation.
- C. The account of Guðmundr's life in *Íslendinga saga* is not uniform. Sturla had one attitude to the bishop and wrote within certain stylistic conventions, while later compilers and interpolators did not obey these conventions and were more biased towards the bishop than Sturla.

The choice between A., B. and C. is a matter of trends in Icelandic studies. In the beginning of the XX-th century *Íslendinga saga* was analyzed primarily as historic document and considered to be a rather dry and objectivistic synopsis of basic events. In our days the scholars emphasize poetic merits of the *saga* and are inclined to find the author's concept behind minor details such as citation of skaldic stanzas and even speech portrayal of characters, cf. [Taylor 1994]. At the same time some specialists still find conflicting layers in the *saga*; for instance, Gudrun Nedrelid following the footsteps of Björn M. Ólsen concludes that the description of Gizurr Þorvaldsson (St II: 293) was taken from the lost **Gizurar Saga*, since Sturla 'was unlikely to describe the enemy of his family in that way' [Nedrelid 1994: 616]. The degree of Sturla's engagement towards particular historic figures, however, is not a reliable basis to judge upon unless one has established the composition principles of the whole *saga*. It is worth trying to classify *Íslendinga saga* with two types of texts that are

¹⁴ Björn M. Ólsen did not provide a uniform explanation for these clauses. He defended the view that the short clause about the 'wretched state of Christianity' was taken by the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* from a hypothetical **Proto-Guðmundar saga*, but rejected the possibility that the longish clauses about the bishop's funeral and the 'selected saints' could be written by the compiler of *Sturlunga*.

widespread both in family sagas and in contemporary sagas and to follow Sturla's attitude to these types of saga writing.

The first type can be labeled partial sagas: the author is devoted to the protagonist and strongly biased to him. If we turn to *Bjarnar saga Hítödelakappa* and *Sturlu saga*, Björn and Sturla appear to be 'heroes of the book', while their antagonists (Þórðr Kolbeinsson and Einnarr Þorgilsson respectively) are 'villains of the book'. The same is true for *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* (Hrafn is almost a saint, while Þorvaldr is evil and ungrateful) and the long version of *Böglunga sögur*, written down by some supporter of King Ingi Bárðarson (the *Baglar* are more treacherous than the *Birkibeinar*). In *Áróns saga Hjörleifssonar* (and *GA*), Árónn and Eijólfur Kársson are noble brave hearts ready to sacrifice their lives for the holy Bishop of Hólar, while Sturla Sighvatsson is a monster possessed by the idea to catch and kill all goodwill people in Iceland. As for texts written down immediately before *Íslendinga saga*, *Þorgils saga skarða* is a fine example of partial sagas: this saga was almost certainly written in 1275-1280 by Þórðr Hítnesingr who was so well disposed to his brother-in-law Þorgils skarði that he almost made a martyr from this ruffian¹⁵. There is little doubt that Sturla did not favor this type of sagas. He fought side by side with his cousin Þorgils skarði in the battle on Þverá (1255) and composed a funeral poem after Þorgils's killing in 1258¹⁶, but he also branded him as 'disgusting bird that makes dirty in its nest' (St II: 491). Árónn Hjörleifsson (d. 1255) was indeed an outstanding man, and Sturla's brother Óláfr Hvitaskáld is told to be Árónn's friend in *Ár*¹⁷, but Sturla nevertheless recorded episodes where Árónn's conduct was less appealing¹⁸.

Another type can be labeled balanced sagas: the author assumes that both fighting parties were in their right and does not blame them openly for acts of violence. In sagas of this type a number of characters are equally good, i.e., obey to some moral obligations, or equally bad, i.e., follow only their egoistical interest. The second situation is less common, but it is attested both in family sagas and in contemporary sagas. In *Bandamanna saga*, written down in the second half of the XIIIth century, there is no positive character at all¹⁹, and *Þórðar saga kakala*, written down in 1271-1280, contains an apology of such an objectivistic manner. The author reports in detail about the meeting in Prandheimr (winter 1246/1247) where an attempt to reconcile Þórðr kakali with Gizurr Þorvaldsson was made. Þórðr let read a long list (*rollu langa*) about the feuds of *Haukdælir* ok *Sturlungar* that he himself had ordered to write. The king then asked Gizurr whether he wanted to object to this, and Gizurr answered that he had not recorded his own stories, though he was able to add something, - "But I admit that the account of our feuds has been told openheartedly"²⁰. The author then praises the enemies for the fact that none of them pursued to object or falsify each other's account, in spite of hard losses from both sides²¹.

¹⁵ *Þorgils saga skarða* contains a lot of information about Sturla Þórðarson who is reported to have saved the author of the saga, Þórðr Hítnesingr, from Hrafn Oddsson's revenge (St III: 264).

¹⁶ (St II: 484).

¹⁷ This detail is absent in *GA*. Cf. [Finnur Jónsson 1923: 762-763; Stefán Karlsson 1983: ckvj].

¹⁸ According to Sturla, Árónn in 1249 deceived his former patron Haraldr Sæmundarson (St II: 412). His conduct in the episode with killing of Sigmundur snagi (St II: 135) was not heroic either, contrary to the account of *Ár*.

¹⁹ The allied chieftains (*bandamenn*, *goðar*) in this saga are greedy and treacherous, *Oddr*, a rich merchant, is stupid and rough and incapable of solving any problem with law suits, while his father *Ófeigr* who is clever and cynical cannot manage his own farm. The judges are corrupted and *Oddr*'s enemy, *Óspakr*, is a complete villain, murderer and thief. Hallvard Magerøy [1981: xxi-xxiii] nevertheless treats *Ófeigr* as a positive character.

²⁰ "Ekki hefi ek skrásett sagnir minar, en þó kann ek hér nökkuru í mót at svara. En þó kalla ek hér etnaröfuga frá sagt várum skiptum." (St III: 130).

²¹ "Ok þann orðróm fengu þeir báðir, at menn kváðust eigi heyrta hafa einaröfuga flutt en hvarr flutti sitt mál, svá margt sem í hafði orðit. Mælti ok hvarrgi þórum í mót eða ósannaði annars sögn" (St III: 130).

This attitude exemplified by Þórðr and Gizurr should be prototypical for many sagas since they addressed an audience, which had large background knowledge and was capable of proposing an alternative version. But it is incredible that Sturla Þórðarson could be satisfied with an idea of giving just a long list consisting only of murders, raids and losses suffered by fighting parts. Modern scholars warn from the fallacy of treating the whole *Sturlunga* compilation as history of Icelandic people rather than as chieftains' chronicle [Úlfar Bragason 1994: 794], and this is, of course, true. Yet the scope of *Íslendinga saga* is exceptionally wide (1183 – ca. 1264) and since Sturla decided to make a saga of this entire period – an astonishing and bold design – he needed a more ambitious conception than the author of *Þórðar saga kakala* had in mind: this period was associated with 2-3 generations of chieftains, decline of Iceland – a motive that reaches its highest point towards the end in the famous 'Dreams of Jóreiðr in Miðjumdalr' – and personal tragedy of the author's family.

We propose here a hypothesis that Bishop Guðmundr, Gizurr Þorvaldsson and Sturla Sighvatsson have a special role in Sturla's narrative. All these figures are controversial and none of them is treated apologetically – Sturla did not belong to the bishop's personal following, disapproved the riots of bishop's men and suffered both from Sturla and Gizurr – but they rise above the average flow of successful or unsuccessful actions of ordinary people and set the perspective of the saga. Each of the three aimed to change the existing social order, and though their efforts brought about destructive consequences, they succeeded in doing that. Their way of life and their experience was instructive and deserving a saga. If a reader looks back to them from a future perspective, as Sturla did, he will get the impression that outstanding personalities represent the most valuable and memorable in the gone epoch.

Sturla normally avoided direct evaluation of ordinary people²² and reserved indirect means of characterization, such as dream stories, skaldic stanzas, reports of prophecies and miracles for introducing or resuming major events. The references to verdicts of Norwegian archbishops concerning Bishop Guðmundr²³ and references to signs of esteem from Scandinavian kings and earls towards Icelandic chieftains²⁴ have a similar function – they characterize Icelanders as from outer world lying beyond the narrow world of their local feuds. The same function can arguably be assigned to two clauses expressing the belief that certain deeds cannot be justified in any circumstances and always call forth the wrath of God. Remarkably, one of these clauses – discussed earlier – is provoked with repressions against Bishop Guðmundr when the priests were made to sing masses, while the other is placed after the burning of Gizurr's family at Flugumýri in 1254, so the episodes from Guðmundr's and Gizurr's life are treated in a similar way. In the first case the author speaks of the 'wretched state of Christianity', in the second case he says that 'all wise men agreed that this was one of the worst crimes in Iceland' and begs God 'to forgive them who committed it, in his great mercy and grace' (St II: 444). Both clauses confirm the image of Sturla as a good Christian

²² The sentences like "Þorálfr Bjarnason was rather unpopular between his neighbors" (St II: 360), which are common in *Íslendinga saga*, certainly imply that the author had some view of saga characters. Nevertheless, they should be treated as statements referring to positive facts. The bad reputation of the mentioned Icelandic, e.g., was an advantage for his enemies who might have hoped to kill him without serious risk of revenge. This happened in winter 1240/1241.

²³ They appear twice, first time by 1211 when letters from Archbishop Þórir to Icelandic chieftains are cited (St II: 46-48), and second time by 1237, in the bishop's necrology (St II: 290). The GA-text does not have the corresponding passages and there is no independent evidence of Sturla's authorship of them.

²⁴ This motif emerges first time in the description of Snorri Sturluson who is reported to have from Earl Hákon galinn (St II: 69) and occurs repeatedly in the description of Snorri's visit to lagmann Áskell of Gautland in 1218 and the merits achieved by Snorri from King Hákon and Earl Skúli (St II: 85) in 1220 and in the description of Sturla Sighvatsson's contacts with King Hákon and King Valdimarr of Denmark in 1233 (St II: 230). Similar wording is later resumed in Sturla Sighvatsson's necrology (St II: 354).

and at the same time fit his narrative purpose by resuming extraordinary events in a manner that differs from his usual prosaic style. It is therefore highly probable that the clause about Bishop Guðmundr's funeral was written by Sturla, too, as Stefán Karlsson suggested [Stefán Karlsson 1985: xxxiv]. The clause with the bishop's prayers and the formula about Guðmundr's place among 'the saints selected by God' is less clear because of large text variation in the manuscripts, but nothing in its content and style contradicts Sturla's method of marking extraordinary events. Bishop Guðmundr's death in 1237 is one of the turning points in *Íslendinga saga*. The chapter devoted to Bishop Guðmundr's illness and death is included in the same block with two episodes where Sturla himself was the source of information. The immediately preceding chapter contains two prophecies – that both Guðmundr and Þórðr, Sturla's father, will die within few months and that the bishop's enemies will soon kill each other as wolves. These prophecies are told by Bishop Guðmundr's messenger in the presence of Sturla Þórðarson (St II: 289). The immediately following chapter describes the death of Þórðr Sturluson: Sturla even cites the last Latin prayer sung by his father (St II: 292)²⁵. It would be very strange to think that anyone falsified Sturla's account of the death of his own father or invented the story with the bishop's messenger and ascribed it to Sturla. The episodes with Þórðr Sturluson' death and Bishop Guðmundr's death have a number of features in common and some list of bishop' prayers could be in *Íslendinga saga* from the very beginning though we now cannot establish how much has been added by the compiler of *Sturlunga* or later scribes.

We would like to sum up with a collection of features common for Bishop Guðmundr, Gizurr and other outstanding figures in *Íslendinga saga*.

(i) *Necrologies and evaluations*. Most characters in *Íslendinga saga*, including Snorri, Sighvatr and Þórðr, lack necrologies²⁶. The only persons who get them are Bishop Guðmundr (St II: 290) and Sturla Sighvatsson (St II: 354). It is unclear whether the saga reached to 1268, the year of Gizurr's death, but a 'hidden necrology' with Gizurr's approval is found in Jóreiðr's Dream (St II: 490-91)²⁷. Direct evaluations of extraordinary events are reserved only for condemnation of Gizurr's enemies (*brennumenn* 'the burners') who burned his family at Flugumýri in 1254 and for worries about the 'wretched state of Christianity' after repressions against Bishop Guðmundr.

(ii) *Prophecies*. The ability to make prophecies is an important feature in *Íslendinga saga*. Deep natures such as Þórðr Sturluson and Þorvaldr Gizurarson could do this and foresee future²⁸. They and other far-sighted characters often pronounce anticipating statements, worry about hasty decisions or warn other people²⁹. The contemporaries considered Sturla Þórðarson himself to be a prophet: it is noted in *Borgils saga skarða* (St III: 271) and *Sturlu þáttr* (St III: 382-383). It is not certain that Sturla would approve such a picture of himself. Probably he would respond with a phrase ascribed in *Íslendinga saga* to his father Þórðr Sturluson: "I am not a prophet. But I'll be your prophet"³⁰ (St II: 277). This phrase is found in a remarkable

²⁵ Þórðr Sturluson was deacon by ordination.

²⁶ Sentences of the type "Arnórr [Túmasson] was a great loss for his men" (St II: 99) cannot count as necrologies or posthumous evaluations of characters. On the contrary, they imply that the author dissociated himself from the supporters of X and did not acknowledge that X's death was a loss for everybody in Iceland. A similar phrase referring to the death of Arnórr's son, Kolbeinn the Younger, is recorded in *Þórðar saga kakala* (St II: 107).

²⁷ This necrology is certainly most unusual in Iceland literature: an Eddic figure, Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, wishes her disposal towards Gizurr and recites a stanza about him.

²⁸ Note that neither Snorri Sturluson nor Sturla Sighvatsson had this ability, according to *Íslendinga saga*.

²⁹ For instance, Ásgrímur Bergþórsson, Sturla's relative, is told to have warned about the dangerous plans of Eyjólfur Þorsteinsson (St II: 423).

³⁰ "Engi em ek spámaðr. En þó mun ek þér verða spámaðr" (St II: 277).

context: pious Þórðr warns aggressive Sighvatr from attacking their brother Snorri on Palm Sunday and tells him that such things are punishable; when Sighvatr mockingly calls him a prophet, Þórðr gets angry and makes a prophecy that the power of Sighvatr and his sons will soon be crashed, 'and people will say that they themselves have deserved it'. The expression "to be X's prophet" meant "to have a more right vision of things than X" and possibly "to be guided by God in one's dispute with X". Bishop Guðmundr pronounces many prophecies in *Íslendinga saga*, and nearly all of them can be classified with the group "to be X's prophet". The instances are numerous: Guðmundr cursed his tormentors and appealed to God for revenge; soon after that a storm broke out and 32 people died (St II: 109); Guðmundr gave the Eucharist to Kolbeinn's men and told them that they won't have a battle that day, but their enemy Sighvatr will nevertheless die 'the death of King Haraldr Sigurðarson' (St II: 244) etc. The same is true for Gizurr Þorvaldsson: he warned his enemy Gísli Markússon that the latter 'is not fated to become his killer' (St II: 399); he at first glance knew that Krákr was a spy though other people failed to understand that (St III: 387)³¹ etc. Gizurr's revenge on 'the burners' was extremely successful: all *brennimenn* who escaped from Gizurr found their death in the shipwreck on board of Hólmðæla in 1258 – it is specially mentioned in the saga (St II: 493). Taking into account Sturla's indignation about the *brennimenn*, there is little doubt that Sturla believed that Gizurr was helped by the God in his plans to exterminate these 'dogs in men's clothing' (*mannhundar*)³². Thus, the narrative parallel of this episode with the episode with Bishop Guðmundr's curse is almost exact.

(iii) *Nicknames and titles*. Neither Gizurr nor Guðmundr have nicknames in the saga. They are referred to by their titles – 'Bishop' and 'Earl'³³. The nickname 'Guðmundr the Good' is not used at all³⁴. The Bishop's men lack a special name either, though one can learn from the text that such a name existed. Guðmundr Oddsson, a skald from Sturla Sighvatsson's camp, in a stanza composed during the raid to Grimsey in 1222 called the Bishop's men *Baglar* i.e. 'insurgents', literally – 'Crosiers' as the Anti-King's party in Norway was called³⁵. It is unclear whether Bishop Guðmundr's men used this politically biased name themselves, since we have no evidence from their camp confirming it³⁶. *Íslendinga saga* does not save harsh notes for excesses and riots committed by Bishop's men³⁷ (the usual term for this is *áspektir*), but it is dubious that Sturla Þórðarson was happy with the stylistics of Civil War applied to Icelanders and enjoyed the company of Guðmundr Oddsson and the like who imagined themselves the ruling party, the *Birkibeinar*. The saga mentions an unpleasant fellow from Sturla Sighvatsson's camp, by name *Eiríkr Birkibeinn*, either a Norwegian or an Icelander of low origin³⁸. Sturla Þórðarson who knew this *Eiríkr* personally (the latter took

³¹ This episode is recorded in Reykjavíjarbók.

³² Note that fifty men survived in that shipwreck, but 'all Icelanders lost their lives' (St II: 493).

³³ Gizurr became the Earl in 1258.

³⁴ Sturla Sighvatsson's nickname *Dala-Freyrr* is used in the saga only in direct speech of his enemies Þórðr Þorvaldsson (St II: 166) and Snorri Þorvaldsson (St II: 212) who are clearly provoking Sturla.

³⁵ Norðr bera gæti Gunnar/Geira stígs at vígi! Hamðis væðr, á heiðar/ Hagl snýr, á vír Bagla (St II: 105). This stanza is known both from Sturlunga and from GA, cf. (GA, c. 191, 12-19).

³⁶ At least two stanzas from Bishop's camp have survived in *Aróns saga* and GA. Finnur Jónsson made a conjecture *hjaldrþungir böglungar*, i.e., "Crosiers, hard in battle" in one of them and printed the emended text in the 2.nd volume of his edition of skaldic poetry, but this is most likely a phantom reading: all manuscripts give the line as *hjaldrþungir buðlungar*, i.e., "Offsprings of Buðli, hard in battle".

³⁷ The saga lets one of them, Jón Birnison, urge his fellow Knútr 'to stop doing disgraceful things and making trouble' since 'it gives the Bishop ill turn for his good deeds' (St II: 185/ GA, c. 239, 19-22). This attempt led to even worse consequences. Both Jón Birnison and Knútr were, of course, *unpopular* and had a stable reputation as *troublemakers*.

³⁸ Cf. the wording *Var hann einn unrenningr* (St II: 133). In the episode with killing of Þorvaldr's sons (1232) *Eiríkr Birkibeinn* is found in the company of the above mentioned Guðmundr Oddsson (St II: 213).

part in the raid to Skálholt led by Sturla and Órækja Snorrason), seems to emphasize his baseless conduct and comical failures in several episodes³⁹. The echo of the war between *Baglar* and *Birkibeinar* was still discernable in Iceland by 1239. Sturla mentions certain Hákon Botólfsson (d. 1246), a half-Norwegian that came to Iceland with Órækja Snorrason⁴⁰; this Hákon was called *Hákon galinn*, obviously in honor of the famous leader of *Birkibeinar*, Earl *Hákon Folkviðarson galinn* (d. 1214) and had similar habits as *Eiríkr Birkibeinn*. Probably we deal with a widespread negative attitude to both *Birkibeinar*, i.e. armed supporters of Norwegian kings, and *Baglar*, i.e. armed supporters of (Norwegian) bishops, in all mentioned cases. This issue needs further investigation.

Real Bishop Guðmundr was an enemy of Gizurr's family – the saga itself due to its method of characterization generates the alleged parallels between them. *Íslendinga saga* is a reliable source, but it must be analyzed properly. Sturla wanted to be reliable and knew how to provide such an expression on his readers: he exploited all his narrative skill and applied to both traditional and individual means. We gain more from his text if we understand the principles of its composition. The delicacy of Sturla's writing can be demonstrated on the episode with Monk Magnús where Sturla refers to himself as source of information.

Certain Magnús the Rhetorician (*töfusveinn*) in winter 1236/1237 came from Hólar to Eyrr with a message from Bishop Guðmundr to Þórðr Sturluson. Sturla deliberately mentions that his father told him to approach them and hear their conversation (St II: 288). The excerpts of the conversation cited by Sturla don't tell any particular detail from Bishop Guðmundr's life up to that moment. On the contrary, they introduce two Guðmundr's prophecies about the future – a) both Þórðr and the Bishop will die and 'encounter each other next spring', and b) Bishop's enemies will soon kill each other and there will be taken revenge on Sighvatr and Sturla Sighvatsson. Both prophecies were born out, the first one in 1237, the second one in 1238, and the readers, of course, knew that. The conversation with Monk Magnús anticipates Sturla's thorough account of well-known events central to the saga and its role is not just to refer once more to them, but also to confirm the idea of Bishop Guðmundr as a prophet and a man of divine power. It may seem strange that Sturla placed the accent on the fact that the messenger, Monk Magnús, was 'not that remarkable' (*ekki merkr*) and otherwise 'not very reliable' (*miðlungi réttorðr*), but this was done with purpose. At the end of the chapter we learn that Magnús 'also said a lot of other things, but this is not recorded in this saga' (*margr sagði hann annat, þótt hér sé eigi ritat í þessi sögu*). Hence, the readers get the impression that the author has carefully selected the information acquired from Magnús – a very clever move for a writer who was both positive (*réttorðr*) and remarkable (*merkr*)!

But whom are we to thank for this extraordinary text? Was it really lagmaðr Sturla Þórðarson, son of Þórðr Sturluson? Or was it Þórðr Narfason, the compiler of *Sturlunga*, or maybe some unknown scribe? Icelandic sagas were traditional narrative pieces that were rewritten and changed by scribes as long as they were interesting: even "The saga of Icelanders" was to some degree unprotected against changes and distortions. It is perhaps best to use a traditional argument and claim that if *Íslendinga saga* had not been composed by Sturla Þórðarson, another man that had the same name should have composed it.

Eiríkr followed Sturla Sighvatsson in his shameful raid to Hvanmúr (1227), the farm of Þórðr Sturluson. Sturla was absent, but his elder brother Óláfr was in there (St II: 148)

³⁹ For instance, in the battle at Skálholt Eiríkr did not want to stop and 'his shouting was most loud'. Then he was hit with a stone, fell and 'his legs were thrown higher than his head' (St II: 395). Quite the same thing is said about his fellow Guðmundr Oddsson who, in addition, is told to be a coward (St II: 213).

⁴⁰ Later he belonged to the personal following of Þórðr kakali and was killed in the battle at Hangsness (St III:121).

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Abbreviations

St – *Sturlunga saga*. Guðni Jónsson bjó til prentunar. 3 bindi. Reykjavík: Íslendingaútgáfan. Haukdalsútgáfan, 1981.

GA– *Guðmundar Sögur Biskups I: Ævi Guðmundar Biskups. Guðmundar Saga A*. Stefán Karlsson bjó til prentunar. (Editiones Amarnagæanæ, Series B., Vol. 6). Kaupmannahöfn 1983. C.A. Reitzels Forlag.

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