

History and *Þórðar saga kakala*

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This paper has its origins in another which I gave at a conference where the question was raised whether *Þórðar saga kakala* should be regarded as fact or fiction. The following discussion attempts to answer that within the limits available. For much of the information recorded in *Þórðar saga kakala* there is no comparable source available, which is why the saga is important for our knowledge of the history of Iceland in the thirteenth century. It describes deeds and battles which are not set down elsewhere. For example, the sea-battle of Flói which is also the only description of a battle taking place at sea in Iceland. Although a few of the episodes recorded in *Þórðar saga kakala* were also written about by Sturla Þórðarson in *Íslendinga saga*, some factual differences can be found between the accounts (see Carron, 1988, 20-6). A way to approach the question of whether the saga is fact or fiction is to compare it to history writing in Iceland and elsewhere in medieval Europe and identify possible parallels.

This paper therefore considers how *Þórðar saga kakala* fits into the tradition of Icelandic history writing. The saga's place and possible reason for inclusion in the compilation known as *Sturlunga saga*, and its date of composition are discussed. The manner in which the saga compiler treated his material and subject are examined mainly against the background of two of the saga's most important episodes. The type of sources used by the saga compiler are identified and compared to sources used in the kings' sagas and other European chronicle writing.

Þórðar saga kakala is one of a number of texts in *Sturlunga saga* which together chronicle the period ca. 1117-1264. *Dorgils saga skarða* and *Sturla þáttur*, the texts of which are only found in class II manuscripts, are generally considered not to have formed part of the original compilation. In modern editions of *Sturlunga saga* *Þórðar saga kakala* is placed in chronological order between *Íslendinga saga* and *Svinfellinga saga*. In the extant manuscripts the distinction between where *Íslendinga saga* ends in relation to *Þórðar saga kakala* and *Svinfellinga saga* is not as clear cut. Chapters which come after *Svinfellinga saga* are included as part of *Íslendinga saga* in modern editions although there is disagreement over whether these chapters once formed part of *Íslendinga saga* or not (see St II, 1946, xxxiv-v). *Sturlunga saga* is extant in two surviving vellum manuscripts, *Króksfjarðarbók* dated to the middle of the fourteenth century and *Reykjarfjarðarbók* dated to the end of the fourteenth century. Both manuscripts are defective, *Reykjarfjarðarbók* consisting of remnants only. *Þórðar saga kakala* has not survived independently of the *Sturlunga* compilation. The *Sturlunga* compilation is believed to have been put together ca. 1300. *Þórðar saga kakala* covers events in Iceland from 1242-1250 and therefore its date of composition postdates 1250. Þórðr died in Norway in 1256, and it is likely that the saga was written between 1256 and 1300. In the paper manuscripts descended from *Reykjarfjarðarbók* there is an account of Þórðr's death which contains two references to a saga about him. The first reference is made after it is recorded that King Hákon gave Þórðr a district to administer, and the second immediately after the description of

his death (Carron, 1988, 649-50). These could refer to either oral or written accounts. The first possibly refers to accounts of Þórðr's years in Norway. The second has been considered to have been a later addition to the text (Pétur Sigurðsson, 1933-5, 127). There is some internal evidence for dating. Reference is made to Brandr Jónsson who became Bishop of Hólar in 1263 (*Sr* II, 1946, 69), and to Vermundr Halldórsson who was Abbot of Þingeyrar from 1254-1279 (*Sr* II, 1946, 74). The possibility that these were later interpolations by the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* cannot be excluded, but otherwise this internal evidence would suggest a composition date between 1263-1300.

Þórðar saga kakala's account of events in Iceland in the years 1242-1250 both complements and supplements the record for the same period in *Íslendinga saga*, and is one of the factors which would have influenced its inclusion in the compilation. Among the other reasons which indicate why this chronicle of Þórðr kakali's years in Iceland was included in *Sturlunga saga* are the close family links between Þórðr kakali's family, the Sturlungar, and their supporters the Skarðverjar. The Skarðverjar were based at Skarð in Skarðsströnd, a district in Dalasýsla. It is generally believed that the lawman Þórðr Narfason of Skarð (d.1308) or one of his brothers, Þorlákr Narfason of Kolbeinsstaðir (d.1303) or Snorri Narfason (d.1332) was responsible for the *Sturlunga* compilation. One reason for this attribution is because descendants of Þórðr Narfason's grandfather, Skarð-Snorri Narfason (d.1260), have been entered in the *Ættartölur* (*Sr* I, 1946, 51-6) which follows *Þorgils saga og Hafliða* in the compilation. Another reason is that members of the Sturlunga family and their supporters were related through marriage or kinship to the Skarðverjar. *Þórðar saga kakala* illustrates this point. Links can be drawn between some of the figures in the narrative and the Skarðverjar. For example, Sturla Þórðarson, author of *Íslendinga saga*, was related to the Skarðverjar through his marriage to Helga, daughter of Skarð-Snorri's brother Þórðr Narfason. Vigfúss Gunnsteinsson, a supporter of Þórðr kakali, was the son of Yngvildr Narfadóttir, daughter of Narfi prestur of Skarð and Guðrún Þórðardóttir. Helga Nikulássdóttir, who was the daughter of Þórðr's supporter Nikulás Oddsson, was married to Þorlákr Narfason. Narfi prestur Snorrason (d.1284) was married to Valgeör, daughter of Ketill Þorláksson, who was a friend of the Sturlungar. Ketill is also named in the *Ættartölur*.

The tradition of history writing in Iceland stretches back to the twelfth century to Ári Þorgilsson's (1068-1148) *Íslendingabók*, which is considered to be the earliest preserved example of Icelandic history writing (ca. 1122 and 1133). *Landnámabók* is also believed to have originated from the twelfth century (Whaley, 2000, 172-3), and so does *Hryggjarstykki*, the lost work of Eiríkr Oddsson, dating from ca. 1150, thought to be the first saga (Bjarni Guðnason, 1978). These were followed by the biographies of the Norwegian kings written by Icelanders - for example an account of the early years of King Sverrir of Norway's life was written by Karl Jónsson in the 1180's - and regional histories such as *Orkneyinga saga*. Biographies of the Norwegian kings survive in the thirteenth-century manuscripts *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna*, followed ca. 1230 by Snorri Sturluson's work *Heimskringla*. Thirteenth-century history writing culminates in the work of Snorri's nephew Sturla Þórðarson who wrote *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (ca. 1264-1265) and *Íslendinga saga* (ca. 1271-1284). *Þórðar saga*

kakala shares points in common with these works. Its use of sources and method of dating events is comparable, as will be shown in the following discussion.

Sources available to the medieval chronicler were his own eye witness account, if he had witnessed or participated in the events he was describing, or eye witness accounts of other men who had been present. If he were writing some time after the event he was chronicling then he might use accounts which had been orally transmitted to other men, and/or other written accounts or even documents. For example the chronicler of the *Annals of Ghent*, which he began to write down in 1308, stated in the prologue to his work that he had decided to record battles, expeditions, attacks in Flanders etc. in chronological order, which he had witnessed in person or had obtained from the accounts of those present (*Annals of Ghent*, 1951, 1). Eye witness accounts were also integral to the chronicle or life of the Black Prince, which was composed in verse form ca. 1376-1387 by the Chandos Herald (Chandos Herald, 1979). The herald had accompanied his master Sir John Chandos on the Black Prince's Spanish campaign of 1367. In the case of *Þórðar saga kakala* it is likely that some of the men who were involved in the events which took place in 1242-1250 were still alive when the saga was written, or that eye-witness accounts had been handed down orally. In his work the author of *Þórðar saga kakala* acknowledges two types of source material, namely the poetry of two poets and one document, a letter.

One of the events described in detail in *Þórðar saga kakala*, which took place in 1242, is the account of Þórðr kakali's ride from Þingvellir to Helgafell to escape pursuit by his enemies (*St II*, 1946, 18-24). From the author's comments on this event it is clear that the length of the ride and the time it took was considered to be of great significance by people at the time. The detailed description suggests that the narrative was based on eye witness accounts. A close examination of this account suggests the identity of possible source men who may have been responsible for the details.

The outline of the events making up this episode is as follows. The author describes how Þórðr's enemy Kolbeinn ungi and his followers rode from the north of Iceland to Borgarfjörðr in the west in adverse weather conditions in an attempt to intercept Þórðr kakali. At England in Reykjardalur Þórðr was warned that his enemies were at Reykjaholt. Kolbeinn ungi's force outnumbered him, so a decision was taken to ride west through that region and to avoid contact with his enemies. The journey is described in some detail. At one point the saga author states that the ice was not thick enough for the horses to cross the river at Vellir. Then Þórðr was said to have ridden across some ice which covered stagnant water, the ice cracked beneath him and his mount, both were soaked, and he had to turn back to Þingnes to get some dry clothes. He then continued his journey. At Svignaskarð and at Eskiholt he left men behind him to keep watch for his enemies. Among the men left behind at Svignaskarð were three of the sons of Dufgus Þorleifsson: Svarthöfði, Björn kægill, and probably Kolbeinn grön. Þórðr Bjarnarson was left at Eskiholt. Þórðr's spies saw Kolbeinn's force arrive at Stafaholt, and rode off to warn Þórðr. The author notes that the horses Þórðr Bjarnarson and Björn kægill Dufgusson were riding collapsed beneath them, and that these two men were then forced alternatively to run or ride two on a horse behind Svarthöfði Dufgusson and Bárðr Þorkelsson (Sanda-Bárðr). Svarthöfði and Þórðr Bjarnarson then parted company with the others and concealed themselves under some loose snow because their enemies were close behind them. In the mean time the other

look-out men caught up with Þórðr kakali and warned him that Kolbeinn was in pursuit. The account then returns to Þórðr kakali and his men. He and his men halted at Álfartunga where some of his men sought safety in the church there. Þórðr and the rest rode on and crossed the bridge at Álftá. Kolbeinn and his men then reached Álftá but were unable to cross there because Þórðr had had the bridge pulled down behind him. This delayed Kolbeinn and Þórðr was thus able to escape capture and reach Helgafell.

The account then picks up where it left off when Svarthöfði and Þórðr Bjarnarson had hidden in the snow. It describes their escape in detail. They got mounts from nearby homesteads, rode to Stafaholt and then to Skógar where they planned to stay over night. They were awakened when some of Kolbeinn's men arrived there, and hid their mail and helmets in an oven and parted. Svarthöfði took his horse and rode away pursued by their enemies, and was cornered on top of a crag. To escape he pushed his horse off the crag and jumped after it, escaping injury because of the loose snow which had collected at the foot of the crag. His enemies chose not to risk following him, and he was able to escape and then returned later to the homestead for his weapons. He eventually rejoined Þórðr kakali at Fagrey.

At the conclusion of this episode the saga author comments that people thought that the fact that men had ridden the same horses in a single ride from Þingvellir to Helgafell in difficult conditions was something to be wondered at and almost unparalleled. He interprets this as meaning that Þórðr's life had been spared so that he could perform great deeds. This was something which would remain in people's memory. The author does not incorporate any verse to back his description of these events, which he does in the accounts of the two battles, the sea battle of Flói and the land battle of Haugsnes. He does however note that the poet Ingjaldr Geirmundarson, a source for the descriptions of the two battles, was with Þórðr and his men, and it is possible that Ingjaldr was a source for this account since he rode with Þórðr kakali and was numbered among his supporters. Another likely source-man might be one of the Dufgussynir. The description of Þórðr's escape is interrupted by the account of the actions of Þórðr's look-outs, who included three of Dufgus Þorleifsson's sons. Only Svarthöfði and Björn kægill are named in the text. The third was almost certainly Kolbeinn grön. A fourth brother, Björn drumbr, appears not to have actively supported Þórðr kakali. Their father Dufgus was a son of Hvamm-Sturla's illegitimate daughter Þurðr and they were therefore related to Þórðr kakali. Of the Dufgussynir Svarthöfði is considered to be the likeliest source-man for some of the accounts in *Þórðar saga kakala*. Two of his brothers, Björn kægill (d.1244) and Kolbeinn grön (d.1254), predeceased Þórðr kakali (d.1256). His other brother Björn drumbr was still alive in 1284, and according to *Árna saga biskups* is said to have held Hjarðarholt against Bishop Árni Þorláksson (*Árna saga biskups*, 1948, 466). Svarthöfði supported Þórðr for most of 1242-1250, although he was in Norway between 1245 and 1247. He is thought to have still been alive in 1277 (Ólsen, 1902, 466).

The main source acknowledged by the saga author is poetry. He incorporates strophes from the work of two Icelandic poets, Ingjaldr Geirmundarson and Hallr. The use of verse to give weight and verification to a prose account is common in the kings' sagas, and it is used similarly in *Þórðar saga kakala*. Elsewhere in Europe from the twelfth century onwards rhyming chronicles were popular. For example, the Chandos

Herald's *Vie du Prince Noir*, a life of the Black Prince, *L'histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, a biography of William the Marshall written between 1225 and 1226 in Anglo-Norman verse, and John Barbour's *The Bruce* (1376). In *Þórðar saga kakala* selective strophes are used to support the author's descriptions of two battles fought by Þórðr kakali: the battle of Flói and the battle of Haugsnes. In his description of the Battle of Flói six strophes from an 'attack poem' by Ingjaldr Geirmundarson are used to authenticate the author's account. The fact that Ingjaldr was present in the battle, and that he composed his poem not long afterwards, is stressed and gives authority to the description of the battle:

'... svá sem segir Ingjaldr Geirmundarson í Atlöguflokki, þeim er hann orti um bardagann á Flóa. Nú er þetta því merkiligt, at Ingjaldr var þar í bardaganum ok orti þetta kvæði þegar um vetrinn eftir.' (Sf II, 1946, 56)

The author goes on to state that none of Þórðr's men went forward as boldly in battle as Þórðr himself, and to back up this statement he uses three strophes from Ingjaldr's poem to illustrate Þórðr's bravery, e.g.:

Þórðr óð í styr stríðum,
strengs kom hagi á drengi,
endr rifu ímunvindar
Yggjar tjöld, fyr skjöldu.
Gunnmána vann grenna
galdr-Freyr Sigars tjalda,
omr rauðsk í val vörnum
vígs, skóð drífusk blóði. (Sf II, 1946, 56-7)

Descriptions of battles in the kings' sagas are similarly authenticated by verse, e.g. in *Fagrskinna*:

'Here it is mentioned that these events had only just happened when the poem was composed, and one who took part in the battle composed it himself, and in the same poem he says further ...' (*Fagrskinna* 2004, 141)

Likewise in his description of the battle at Haugsnes the author of *Þórðar saga kakala* incorporates strophes from *Brandsdrápa* by the poet Hallr, and from another poem about Brandr Kolbeinsson by Þórðr's supporter Ingjaldr Geirmundarson, and acknowledges his sources:

'Þess getr Hallr ok, at Brandr var framarlíga í fylkingu öndverðan bardagann, ok gekk þá fram fyrir hann Jón Skíðason, er kallaðr var kórkjappi, mikill maðr ok sterkr.' (Sf II, 1946, 76)

'Svá segir Ingjaldr í flokki þeim, er hann orti um Brand, ok kvað á, hversu margt látizt hefir:

Hreggsulli tók halla,
- hné ferð í dyn sverða -,
sköglar fúrs á skýra
Skagfirðinga stríðum.
Hvíts hefr hundrað látizk
hjaldrlands í styr manna,
- trautt má tal, þats hittum -,
tírcett, - ór því fætta.' (Sf II, 1946, 79-80)

The only other source acknowledged by the author of *Þórðar saga kakala* is a letter which he states was written by Brandr Kolbeinsson to Gizurr Þorvaldsson. He refers to the letter and records the contents:

‘Snemma í föstunni sendi Brandr menn sína suðr til Gizurar, Gegni Illugason ok Hámund Þórðarson, með bréfi. Þat sagði svá ...’ (*St* II, 1946, 72-3)

The author uses the same method used in other Icelandic texts in order to date and place his descriptions of events in time. In the opening line of *Þórðar saga kakala* he immediately sets his account of Þórðr’s years in Iceland in its particular place in history by referring to the murder of Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241):

Einum vetri eptir lát Snorra Sturlusonar hófust þeir atburðir, er mörg tíðindi gerðust af síðan ...’ (*St* II, 1946, 1)

He places the Battle of Haugsnes in a historical context with other events (*St* II, 1946, 83), drawing a comparison with the fire at Hítardalr which he noted was then the second most notable event that had taken place in Iceland. In this fire Bishop Magnús and eighty-two men died (*Hungrvaka*, 1938, 104), compared to approximately one hundred and ten men who died at the Battle of Haugsnes (*St* II, 1946, 79). A short list is also included of who was pope, emperor or king at the time when Brandr Kolbeinsson was executed. A similar method of comparison and dating is used in *Íslendinga saga* after the account of the fire at Flugumýri (1253):

Þá er brenna var á Flugumýri, var liðit frá Önundarbrennu (1197) fjórum vetrum fát í sex tigu vetra, en frá Þorvaldsbrennu hálf þriðri tigr vetra.’ (*St* I, 1946, 493)

and can be found in earlier history writing, e.g. *Landnámabók*:

Á þeim tíma, er Ísland fannsk ok byggðisk af Nóregi, var Adríánus papa í Róma ok Jóhannes, sá er hinn fimmti var með því nafni í því sæti; en Hlödover Hlödversson keisari fyrir norðan fjall, en Léo ok Alexander son hans yfir Miklagarði; þá var Haraldr hinn hárfagri konungr yfir Nóregi, en Eiríkur Eymundarson yfir Svíaríki ok Björn son hans, en Gormr hinn gamli at Danmörk, Elfráðr hinn ríki í Englandi ok Játvarðr son hans, en Kjarvall at Dyflinni, Sigurðr hinn ríki jarl at Orkneyjum.’ (*ÍF* 1, 33)

and similarly *Íslendingabók* (*ÍF* I, 25-6), and *Hungrvaka* (1938, 105-6). Otherwise the saga author uses the customary method of dating events by the Church calendar, i.e. Saints’ feast days and/or week-days, e.g.:

þeir kómu í Trékyllisvík tveim nóttum fyrir Jóns messu baptista (*St* II, 1946, 51)

(compare *Annals of Ghent*, 1951, 14: ‘Circa finem Junii, in vigilia apostolorum Petri et Pauli’).

Broad parallels can be drawn between the treatment of history in the kings’ sagas and that by the author of *Þórðar saga kakala*. The collection of kings’ sagas preserved in the manuscript *Morkinskinna* (which covers the period 1030-1157) is considered to have been written in Iceland ca.1220. A comparison can be drawn between *Morkinskinna*’s account of a sea battle between King Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson of Norway and King Sveinn Úlfsson of Denmark (*Morkinskinna*, 2000, 227-9), and the account of the sea battle in *Þórðar saga kakala* between Þórðr kakali

and Kolbeinn ungi. Before they engage in battle with their enemies both Þórðr kakali and King Haraldr address their men:

‘Þórðr talaði þá langt erindi fyrir liðinu ok minnti menn á harma sína ok eggjaði í ákafa, at menn skyldi vera sem hraustastir, þó at í nökkura raun kæmi.’ (Sf II, 1946, 51)

Aspects of Þórðr’s speech are also reminiscent of King Hákon’s speech before battle with Duke Skúli in 1240 in which he referred to losses he and his men had suffered (*The Saga of Hacon*, 1894, 224–5). In the set speeches made by Þórðr there are many points of similarity with those in the Kings’ sagas (see Knirk, 1981). Both Þórðr and Haraldr harðráði were engaging in battle with a superior force. Haraldr noted that although his enemies outnumbered him, they had smaller ships and their troops were probably less reliable. Haraldr saw the odds as overwhelming because the opposing forces were twice the size of his (*Morkinskinna*, 2000, 227). At the battle of Flói Þórðr was similarly outnumbered. He was reported to have had ca. 190 men (Sf II, 1946, 52) compared to Kolbeinn ungi’s 470 men (Sf II, 1946, 53). To establish the difference in odds the author of *Þórðar saga kakala* quoted from the poet Ingjaldr:

‘Ok enn segir Ingjaldr frá liðsmun:

Íms hafði lið ljóma
leikherðandi verðar,
- ruðusk mál í styr stála
- stinn -, tveim hlutum minna.
Því frákr þundar skýja
þingeggjanda leggja
Gunnar seims frá glaumi
grœðis skið of síðir.’ (Sf II, 1946, 61)

And this point is underlined in the saga author’s report of the speech Þórðr made after the battle in which Þórðr drew attention to the overwhelming odds and said:

‘at varla munu á váru landi dæmi til finnast, at menn hafi við svá mikit ofrefli átt at skipta ok svá í móti gengit drengiliga, sem guð þakki yör.’ (Sf II, 1946, 63)

It is likely that the author of *Þórðar saga kakala* was influenced by the kings’ sagas and familiar with accounts of Haraldr harðráði’s sea battles. He makes a reference to Haraldr before his account of the battle of Flói when he states that Þórðr and the men with him took a vow to fast on water every Friday night for twelve months with requiems for the soul of King Haraldr Sigurðarson (Sf II, 1946, 54).

In general terms, other similarities can be found between *Þórðar saga kakala* and other medieval European history writing. For example, in medieval chronicles portents and auguries proliferate and are used to herald or foreshadow victories or disaster. For example, the author of *Þórðar saga kakala* records that a comet was often seen during the winter before the Battle of Haugsnes (1246) (Sf II, 1946, 71). Similarly in *Hákonar saga* the sighting of a comet is recorded in 1240 and forbodes the coming of war (*The Saga of Hacon*, 1894, 203). The same comet is also recorded in Matthew Paris’s account of the year 1240 in his *Chronica majora* (Paris, 1877, 4). In *Þórðar saga kakala* it is told how, when Kolbeinn ungi was preparing for battle and the Eyfirðingar were crossing from one boat to another, one man slipped, fell into the water and was never seen again. This was interpreted as a bad omen (Sf II, 1946, 52),

which was supported by later events when the battle of Flói resulted in a heavy loss of life on Kolbeinn ungi's side. In medieval writing dreams were also used as a portent of future events (Given-Wilson, 2004, 48-56). In *Þórðar saga kakala* the death of Brandr Kolbeinsson in 1246 is foreshadowed by a dream experienced by a priest named Björn Starrason before the battle of Haugsnes. Björn dreamed that a man, who he identified as Brandr Kolbeinsson, bowed down over him and spoke the words 'Domine Jesu Christe, accipe spiritum meum' (*St II*, 1946, 74). This is then underlined by a short account of how when the Skagfirðingar were at Viðimýrr a sickness overcame them and almost thirty men fell unconscious and were unfit. Unusual deeds are also interpreted as indications of the future. For example after Þórðr kakali escaped from Kolbeinn ungi and his men and reached Helgafell the saga author states that men marvelled at this and thought that this meant that Þórðr had lived to perform great deeds in the future (*St II*, 1946, 24). In the *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, compiled ca. 1416-17, swans were seen swimming among the king's fleet when he was sailing away from the coast of the Isle of Wight towards France and this was seen as a good omen (*Gesta Henrici Quinti*, 1975, 21).

In their records of battles chroniclers as a rule list the number of casualties and name prominent men who were killed on opposing sides. For example the *Annals of Ghent*, which chronicle the years 1297-1310, lists the names of prominent nobles who died in a battle in 1303, and the total number of those killed. Similarly the numbers of those killed or wounded on Kolbeinn ungi's side in the battle of Flói are recorded, and a list of the most notable men (*St II*, 1946, 64). Likewise with the account of the battle at Haugsnes the number of men killed on opposing sides is noted and the names of the prominent men killed (*St II*, 1946, 79). The Chandos Herald in his chronicle of the life of the Black Prince (Chandos Herald, 1979, 102) provides the total number of men slain in a battle, and lists a few prominent men of rank.

Attention is often drawn by the chronicler to a leader's noble or pious nature. For example in the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* (1975, 61) the pious conduct of Henry V is noted by the chronicler:

'Amongst other most pious and worthy ordinances, he commanded that, under pain of death, no man should burn and lay waste, or take anything save only food and what was necessary for the march ...'

In a similar vein the author of *Þórðar saga kakala* reports that there were two things that Þórðr had told his men to have the greatest care for: that they should spare women and churches (*St II*, 1946, 38).

The general tone of the author of *Þórðar saga kakala* is usually one of detachment and impartiality. He raises no criticism against Þórðr for the hurried execution of Brandr Kolbeinsson (*St II*, 1946, 79), nor against Kolbeinn ungi for the fact that he did not play a major role in the battle of Flói, but finds reasons to condone the latter (*St II*, 1946, 57). However the voice of the author commenting on the events he describes does make itself heard on occasion. In the first stage of the battle of Flói Þórðr's men force Kolbeinn's men to take cover because of the volume of stones and missiles they are throwing at them, and as a result the battle turns against Kolbeinn and his men (*St II*, 1946, 56). At this point in the text the saga author notes that two things were of significance and lists them. The first was that Kolbeinn's men had not equipped themselves with a good supply of stones, and had brought no more than a

small load on two boats, whereas Þórðr's men had loaded each boat with stones. The second was that very few men on Kolbeinn's boats had much knowledge about boats, whereas Þórðr's men were experts. He concludes:

‘Nú má þat skilja, at með þvílíkum atburðum má sigrið skipast með auðnu milli höfðingjanna. En eigi olli þat, at eigi hefði hvárir tveggja margt it bezta mannvál.’ (St II, 1946, 56)

When Kolbeinn ungi made preparations for battle the author describes how Kolbeinn's boats were completely covered with shields from the bows to the mast (St II, 1946, 53), and he then comments that no man in the land had ever seen such armament on boats. In 1244 when Þórðr kakali sent Ingjaldr Geirmundarson to Borgarfjörðr to get Þorleifr Þórðarson and Böðvarr Þórðarson's support, which they had previously promised him, they refused, and the author remarks dryly that it had happened to them as to many others that it was easier to promise to do something than to actually do it (IIP reading: *Fór þeim svá sem mörgum at minna þykkir fyrir at heita en at efna*). Likewise the voice of the Chandos Herald makes itself heard through his narrative after he records the death of Sir John Chandos at the bridge of Lussac:

‘But when things go wrong, one misfortune often follows another; it often happens in this way.’ (Chandos Herald, 1979, 136)

The points examined show that *Þórðar saga kakala* is based firmly in the tradition of medieval history writing both within Iceland and without. The saga author uses the same conventions for the recording of casualties in battle, the use of portents, auguries and dreams in his narrative. Some elements of the set speeches share similarities with those recorded in the kings' sagas. He uses the same type of sources as other medieval chroniclers, and like other Icelandic history writers incorporates verse into a prose description in order to authenticate events. Limits of space and time have restricted the extent of this examination, and the subject would benefit from further research with a wider selection of comparative material, and investigation of the vocabulary used.

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