A Story of the Kingdom built on Honour.

The literary and sociocultural structures of insults and feuding in Óláfs Saga Helga.

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Summary

This thesis deals with the descriptions of insults and feud in Óláfs Saga Helga. It's a multidisciplinary study that examines the source through the disciplines of history, anthropology and philology. The approach is descriptive and source centred. It shows a connection between the literary and sociocultural structures within the source and expands that towards theoretical models.
Foreword

This thesis project started out as a rather undefined and theory centred project. Because of the multidisciplinary nature of our study program I tried to adopt methods, theory and practices from multiple fields of scholarship (not all of which I'm fully trained for). As the research advanced and evolved what started out as an idea to "field test" philosophical theory on saga source, using scholarly methods of philosophy and history changed it's focus and grew because of new information and ideas acquired from the source materials and the research work. And eventually ended up with a curious mixture of source centred and defined research focus, seen and explained through an amalgam of theories and methods from scholarly disciplines of history, (Norse) philology, philosophy, cultural anthropology and historical cultural anthropology. The original philosophical model to be field tested did find it's place, as the definition of the central key term in the study – the insult!

For all those friends, relatives, teachers and colleagues who have supported me, one way or another, on my never-ending journey to learning. You know who you are. Glad to have you all in my feud party.

To The Road and it's Master!

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Introduction and aim

Feuds and honour have been one of the major areas of interest in the Nordic Medieval Studies of the modern Historical Anthropology. The field has been fairly researched throughout by such researchers as William Ian Miller and Jesse L. Byock in their works.1 Also many philologists have done research on the area from their point of view.2 However they mainly focus on the family and contemporary sagas as their source material and only make offhand references to King Sagas. There is to be a noticeable lack of studies done on the king sagas on the subject of feuding.

My intention for my Master thesis was going to be to continue and deepen from my earlier side subject Bachelor's dissertation3 and focus on a specific part of the feud and honour discourse – the insults. Not only the verbal voiced out ones or níðs, but all insulting actions that are described in the source. As I dwelled deeper into the subject of insults I realised it cannot be discussed without it's main context the feud itself. So this thesis work is dealing both with insult and the feud as it's frame work. As my primary source I'm using the fore mentioned King Sagas – more specifically Óláfs Saga Helga from The Heimskringla.4

The reason of this study is to give a surveying picture of what kind of mental image of insulting the author(s) and possibly the contemporary audience of Heimskringla had. This picture can tell us about the value set of the 13th century Norse social elite and literate circles. And maybe also help us to identify who or what kind

1 Miller 1996, passim; Byock 1982, passim.
2 Amory 1991, passim.
3 Harri Hihnala, “Kunnioitus tai kuolema - Kunnianloukkaus sanoin ja teoin Heimskringlassa”. University of Oulu, nonpublished side major bachelors dissertation 2007. (trans.) ”Respect or death – Insult by speech and actions in Heimskringla”.
4 OSH, passim.
of people the text was meant for. It also reveals some insights into the source material and it's nature itself.

In this work the aim is to search out what kind of descriptions of insult actions and feuding can be found from Heimskringla. What the actions are and what are their consequences. Then ask the data the following questions: What do these descriptions tell us about the saga itself and it's structures? What kind of image do the insult descriptions give about insulting as a phenomenon in Óláfs Saga Helga? What do they tell us about the mental images the author and the intended audience of the Heimskringla had of insulting and honour?

I'm basing my study on the definition of "insult" and theoretical basis defined by Jerome Neu in his book about philosophy of insults, "Sticks and Stones: The Philosophy of Insults". Which to my knowledge is the first general theory of insult. In a way I'm doing a case study where I implement Neu's philosophical theory as a tool on the source material provided by Óláfs Saga Helga in order to see if such a method can give us new knowledge and also if the philosophical base is still valid when using historical data. The reason why I choose to use Neu's theoretical base is that it's a new and wider theory of insult and insulting than there has been before and as such it could provide a fresh point of view that could help to raise new, meaningful questions and answers and lead to discovery of new knowledge or confirmation or disconfirmation of the old one.
Introduction and aim

- Sources

My main source is the mid part of a collection of sagas about Norwegian kings generally known as Heimskringla. It tells in the narrative style typical to sagas about Norwegian kings. The first part of it describes the mythical ancient times and transfers then to the first Norwegian kings. Second part is The Óláfs saga Helga which tells the story of St.Óláfr. Third and last part deals with the kings after St.Óláfr until the end of 12th century. All and all Heimskringla contains 16 separately named sagas. Of these I'm focusing on the Óláfs Saga Helga. The limitation of the material is needed for working purposes as sadly there is limited time and resources in my disposal for this thesis. I've chosen Óláfs Saga Helga as it's the longest of the individual sagas in Heimskringla and the easiest to separate and the one that functions best as an individual entity.

Heimskringla has been generally assumed to be written around 1230AD and attributed to the Icelandic author and chieftain Snorri Sturlasson (*1179–†1241AD). He was one of the influential political characters of his age. Snorri was an influential chieftain and politician and closely connected to both Icelandic and Norwegian nobility. He can thus be assumed to represent the the Icelandic and Norwegian social elite of his times. It's assumed that he wrote the Heimskringla in between his visits to Norway. In addition to Heimskringla Snorri has been tributed as the author of Younger Edda, Saga of Saint Óláfr and possibly Egil's saga. The fact of exactly when or by whom the sagas were written doesn't matter that much for my work as I seek to build a picture of the mental image of insulting in the sagas. However in order to attribute that image to someone and to connect it with wider context I am working

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6 Heimskringla, passim; Whaley 1993, pp.276.

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from the assumption that the saga were written around the time of the late 12\textsuperscript{th} to early 13\textsuperscript{th} century (probably around 1230AD) and by and to member(s) of the Icelandic and/or Norwegian social elite. This is commonly accepted to be accurate by the historians and philologists of this field.

The earliest known manuscript containing Heimskringla is known as 'Kringla', but sadly it does not survive to our days as it was destroyed in the Great Fire of Copenhagen in 1728 except for one leaf, the first one, which was brought to Stockholm for some reason.\textsuperscript{8} The original Kringla -manuscript has been dated to be from around 1260AD.\textsuperscript{9} Making it probably a second generation copy of the actual first manuscript of Heimskringla and contemporary to it. Luckily however several 17\textsuperscript{th} century scholarly transcripts of it survive and they can be considered accurate enough reductions of the original manuscript for the purposes of historical and anthropological research.\textsuperscript{10} So these transcripts can be used to study 13\textsuperscript{th} century contents of the manuscript with enough reliability. I'm using Bjarni Athalbjarnarson's, Finnur Jónsson's and Kjartan Ottosson's (Menota -project's digital version) modern scholarly editions of those 17\textsuperscript{th} century transcripts, as well as Lee M. Hollander's English translation of fore mentioned edition as reading and translation aid.\textsuperscript{11} Any conclusions from or about the text have been made from scholarly editions.\textsuperscript{12} Any direct quotes in Old Norse are from Ottosson's edition (because of it's convenient electronic form) and direct quotes in modern English are from Hollander's translation or my own translations (all referred accordingly in the foot notes).

\textsuperscript{8} Jørgensen 2007, pp.313–314.
\textsuperscript{9} Op cit, pp.313.
\textsuperscript{10} Op cit, pp.314–320.
\textsuperscript{11} OSH, passim.
\textsuperscript{12} All the three Athalbjarnarson's edition, Ottasson's edition and Hollanders translation have the same chapter and saga division. I will be referring to them in the common saga reference style with saga name (OSH,) and chapter number and not by edition page numbers.
- Historical background

For the purposes of a lay person or non mediaevalist scholar to understand the background and circumstances surrounding the things discussed in this work it is necessary to go through the historical background of Norway, from the times the text of the Óláfs Saga Helga claims to tell about, until the time around which it was written. The background of the author of Heimskringla, Snorri Sturluson, and the source itself are dealt more in detail in the chapter titled Source. To a medievalist historian, especially one specialised in Scandinavia this section is probably unnecessary.

Norway was habited by Northern Germanic people forming tribal like entities at least through the Roman period. In the Early Middle Ages this continued to be the case until around 900AD when Norway is traditionally considered to be first united under one king, during the rule of Haraldr Hárfagri (c.890/900-945), who conquered most of the country. The decisive battle of this conquest was in Hafrsfjord, near modern day city of Stavanger in Norway.13 This view is now contested and it is unclear how big of a portions of the Norwegian are he actually hold under his rule.14 After his death various pretenders sought to take over his position, but none of them succeeded in the undertaking completely. The country remained divided into several lordships, areas and petty kingdoms, though fever and larger than before Haraldr's rule. There were frequently internal struggles in which the Swedish and Danish kings took part. Especially the Danish king was was mixed in these and he even hold parts of the Norway directly under his rule for periods of time.15

The external and internal struggles of this time we intimately connected with the period of Viking expeditions as most of the pretenders participating had enriched themselves in this way or by having served under foreign kings. One of these warlords was king Óláfr Haraldsson (1015-1030AD) who's later known as St.Olafr and is the main and name charter of the Óláfs Saga Helga this thesis is dealing with. During his reign he managed to unite the country again into one Kingdom of Norway and he also made Christianity the official religion and hastened the conversion to it. He was defeated and killed in the battle of Stiklestad in 1030AD by Danish King Knut the Great together with Óláfr's internal enemies and he became a Catholic martyr later on. His reign was a turning point: After it Norway remained as a united monarchy and maintained it's independence from the neighbouring kingdoms and Christianity became firmly established and the centralisation of the state began. This is the period dealt with in the actual saga text of Óláfs Saga Helga.16

After this there was a period of civil war during 1130-1240 that was ended by the king Sverrir Sigrðsson's (1177-1202) victory over the other parties. This established his lineage to the throne and a period called the Norwegian Age of Greatness (1240-1319) began. This around the time Heimskringla and as it's part Óláfs Saga Helga was written in.17

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16 Bagge 1991, pp.8-9
- Historiography

The usage of sagas as source material has evolved and divided opinions ever since modern history writing began in Scandinavia. First in the national romantic era they were treated as first hand factual sources about medieval and Viking age past. Then they were criticised to the point where they were even seen as completely unusable as sources for history and only usable for literature and language studies by factual source critical historians and book prose theorists. After that followed a decades long discussion about the origins of sagas – debate whether they they were continuation of orally transmitted knowledge and stories or purely literal inventions.  

The new era, which we are now slowly moving beyond started when several researchers started applying the theories of historical anthropology to the saga texts in 1970s. The anthropological study of feuds had already started with other materials since Max Gluckman published his influential essay "The Peace in Feud" in 1955. It made it's way to saga studies along with the other ethnographical and anthropological approaches during the 1970's and early 1980's. By the late 1980's and early 1990's this ethnographic or historical anthropological school of saga studies was well established. From that time we have many influential scholars one of whom is Jesse L. Byock who's study on feuds "Feud in the Icelandic Saga" was published in 1982. In it he also goes into subjects closely related to my study – the feud and it's backgrounds, reasons, practices and conclusions. It was followed by publications and articles from several authors. The next larger study of the feuds in sagas "Bloodtaking and Peacemaking" was published in 1990 by William Ian Miller.

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18 Meulengracht Sørensen 1993b, 153-154; Pálsson 1992, pp.19; Meulengracht Sørensen 1992, pp.27.
22 Byock 1982, passim.
23 Miller 1990, passim.

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1993 Preben Meulengracht Sørensen published his studies of the sagas and honour "Saga and society" and "Fortælling og ære" in which he goes deep into the Icelandic saga society and it's perception of honour.  

In the field of studies on King Sagas the modern era was opened by Sverre Bagge who mainly focused on political history and history of political thought. He's main work on the subject is the "Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla" which was published 1991. And that seems to have been the focus on the studies done on kings' sagas since. There has been loads of new and innovative studies and articles done on King Sagas since 1990's. For example "Ideology and propaganda in Sverris saga" by Sverre Bagge, "Visions of Sovereignty in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla" by Richard Gaskins, "The King of Iceland" Theodore M. Anderson. In 2005 Patricia Boulhosa wrote a comprehensive study of the relations between the Icelanders and the kings of Norway named directly "Icelanders and Kings of Norway", but decided to exclude Heimskringla completely from her sources. They mainly concentrate on the ideals of kingship, Christianization processes, political structures and relations in between the Icelanders and the Norwegian monarchy. When they wander into the realm of historical anthropology or history of mental images they usually try to form the image of kingship, sovereignty, nationalism or such things closely connected to the fore mentioned topics.

There is a noticeable lack of studies of cultural and social history done on the King Sagas. This might mainly be because they tell about distant times of which they cannot be considered as reliable sources because of their time distance from them.

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24 Meulengracht Sørensen 1993a, passim.
26 Bagge 1993, passim.
28 Andersson 1999, passim.
29 Boulhosa 2005, passim.
However, it's often stated in the works that they could still be used as sources of their 13th century authors image of their past and also of their 13th mentalities. Virtually no-one seems to have gone into that trail of study from the cultural and social history's direction – only from political and religious history. There are some exceptions though for example Sirpa Aalto's "Främlingsbilden i Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla"\textsuperscript{30} in which she studies how "otherness" is defined in Heimskringla and what groups are defined as the other. Still it mainly seems that the study of sociocultural images and conceptions has been over looked on the King Sagas. Maybe because it's automatically assumed that they represent the same image as the other sagas that have been exhaustively dealt with by the ethnographic research or maybe because they are traditionally considered belonging to the the sources of political and religious history.

- Definition of the terms

\textit{Insult} (from Latin '\textit{insultare}'= leap upon; 'attack'):

Defining the term insult is one of the key factors for my work. I'm using a broad and flexible definition rather than a strict one in order to allow my self to include all instances of interest. I'm fully aware of how large and myriad a group of actions fall under this definition and it's one of my main intentions in this research to study and discuss those instances and their characteristics and features and in fact the whole definition.

The 13th century Norse society (at least in Iceland) is built on the framework of feuding.\textsuperscript{31} Which is triggered and evolved by the act of insult. In this honour centred

\textsuperscript{30} Aalto 2005, passim.
\textsuperscript{31} Byock 1982, passim.
society insult is as much wider concept than just the symbolic acts that are modernly considered 'insult' and people are much more eager to interpret actions as insults. Following the long and detailed definition that Neu gives in his book "Sticks and Stones" I have for purposes of this work defined insult as speech or behaviour that wounds or challenges the targets honour, self-respect or social standing or that asserts or assumes superiority or dominance over him.

In this definition of insult it doesn't necessarily need to be intentional, nor does it need to be detected by the target of it or the audience witnessing it. However, one of these elements is necessary to be present in the description if we want to be sure that such action was considered as insult in the mindset of the contemporaries of the Heimskringla and not just by us modern readers. Thus in this study insult is considered insult as long as one of the following elements is present: insulter intends to insult, target sees the action as insult or audience view the action as insult or the author tells us the action is to be considered insulting. Also, it's note worthy, that in the Norse context any action starting a feud process should be considered as an insult.

There is a type of insults specific to Old Norse culture. They are called níð. A symbolic verbal or ritual insult that is directed against the manliness of the recipient. Usually accusing him of feminine tasks, (sexual)positions or just cowardliness or meekness. These obviously fall under the aforementioned definition of insult.
**Feud** (from Proto-Germanic 'faihitha' adj.'faiho-' = see explanation below):

I'm using directly the long and rather vague 9-point definition of the characteristics of feud that Miller outlines in his book "Bloodtaking and Peacemaking":

1. Feud is a relationship (hostile) between two groups.
2. Unlike ad hoc revenge killing that can be an individual matter, feuding involves groups that can be recruited by any number of principles, among which kinship, vicinage, household, or clientage are most usual.
3. Unlike war, feud does not involve relatively large mobilisations, but only occasional mustering for limited purposes. Violence is controlled; casualties rarely reach double digits in any single encounter.
4. Feud involves collective liability. The target need not be the actual wrongdoer, nor, for that matter, need the vengeance-taker be the person most wronged.
5. A notion of exchange governs the process, a kind of my-turn/your-turn rhythm, with offensive and defensive positions alternating after each confrontation.
6. As a corollary to the preceding item, people keep score.
7. People who feud tend to believe that honour and affronts to it are the prime motivators of hostilities. Crossculturally, there appears to be a correlation between the existence of feud and a culture of honour.
8. Feud is governed by norms that limit the class of possible expiators and the appropriatenesses of responses. For instance, most feuding cultures recognize a rough rule of equivalence in riposte, the lex talionis being but one example.
9. There are culturally acceptable means for making temporary or permanent settlements of hostility".  

I find this the most appropriate definition and I agree with Miller in his reluctance to define the term too closely. I see the feud as more of a living process of human conduct than a strict set of actions that can be defined universally.

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Introduction and aim

Honour (from Latin 'honorem'(later 'honor')= moral value, office, reputation):

Following Meulengracht Sørrensen's vague definition a person's honour is created by the opinion of the society around him. It's the value of a man according to the norms of society. The honour is a norm that tells how a man should be. According to Meulengracht Sørrensen, it was clear in the minds of the contemporaries what an honourable action was, consequently it is not necessary to define it too strictly.37

Þáttr (plur. Þættir) (from Old Norse 'Þátr' = single strand of rope):

Þáttr in modern use refers to short narratives in Old Norse-Icelandic. It derives from Germanic word for loop, strand or rope. More broadly Þáttr means simply “part of the whole a meaning attested in laws and through centuries of skaldic poetry and often used in literary context, meaning part of the text. Gradually extended to meaning more or less independent parts of larger compilations. Although meaning “part, chapter” still remains, as a literary term Þáttr now has the special technical sense of short independent narrative. 38 Byock sees Þáttr as a structural element in the saga narrative. A short story of feud that is interwoven into the bigger narrative of the sage. To him Þáttr are the primary building blocks of Icelandic saga story.39 For my purposes Þáttr are short semi-independent stories that form the body of the sage story around it's main storyline.

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37 Sørrensen 1993a, pp.211. Note: Nedkvitne 2000. argues the usage of these vague definitions as over simplifying, but doesn't offer an alternative definition.
38 Lindow 1993, pp.661-662.
- Theory and method

Being foremost a cultural history scholar by my training I'm going to base my study mainly on the theories and methods used by the discipline of cultural history and secondly to those of the anthropology. First and foremost of which is the source critical approach. The external source criticism for this work is already handled in the chapter about the source. Using authoritative expertise of previous researchers I can conclude certainly enough that the source I'm using presents views from approximately the 13th century AD. For internal source criticism there is no given set of universal methods except the common hermeneutical approach. Principles that I'm going to be using to form interpretive analysis involve but are not limited to: 1) understanding the subject according to its sociocultural and historical context, 2) assessing my own cultural and historical relation and bias to the subject, 3) being sensitive to potential contradictions between theoretical approach I'm using and the actual findings from the source material, 4) being aware of possibility of multiple interpretations among the actors of insulting descriptions, and 5) taking note any motives or customs of the author or the tradition he belongs to that might affect the descriptions. Using these and other means deemed necessary to form a hermeneutical approach during the actual research work I'll try to use the hermeneutical circle of interpretation to from a valid interpretation of the data from the source materials.

The anthropological methods I'll be applying when extracting and analysing the data from the sources include content analysis: looking for figures of speech, representative expressions and shared topics. Also quantifying the data – how much of different kinds of insult descriptions are there? Can they be classified into classes and analysed by the volume of them? In doing this I'll also try to see if there are

41 Eskola – Suoranta 2000, pp.120.
themes that occur in the insult descriptions. Like "unintentionality" or "immediate violent reaction" etc. 43 But in the end one has to remember that there is no mechanical mould for extracting data from the sources in the anthropological or historical sense – the researcher just has to try to find and interpret differences, similarities and peculiarities.44

Study of mental images is a broader field than study of opinions. Mass opinions are not available to historians except for recent times so one must go into the wider concept of mental images. Also mental image is by far a wider and more useful concept than an opinion. Where as opinion tells us what is thought about things at certain point of time, mental images are the cultural coding – the cultural heritage handed down and modified from one generation to another. This heritage contains within it various latent images which remain basically the same regardless of how many new features we may add to them in the course of time and what exact instances we apply them for. A mental image is longer-lasting and more durable than an opinion or attitude and these images are simplifications of the reality which they describe. An image is the map or ground work through which we perceive reality. It is the cultural codes of behaviour that are usually hidden from our everyday thought, but direct our actions and opinions – mental categories of reality. If we understand culture in an anthropological sense as the shared, learned and accumulated experiences and the shared coding of accepted thought and behaviour based on those experiences then mental images are the basic building blocks of culture. 45 The most central matter to understand when doing historical study of mental images is:

"The specific object of study in image research is the creator or possessor of the image, the person who has a certain image of a phenomenon or thing in his mind. The reason for this is very simply that the source material is concerned with the process of creation of the image and not with its object. Historical image research

draws attention to what an image is like, how we have formed a particular image of a certain thing, why we have this image, what purpose it serves, what changes have taken place in it, and what all this tells us of the creators of the image. It is of secondary importance whether the image is a “correct” or a “wrong” one, as one cannot even aspire to “correctness” in such a matter. On the other hand, we can easily come to terms with the creator through the medium of the image itself.”

As said before in the anthropological view culture is considered to consist of shared ideas and meanings and ways of behaviour. When considered in this light the sagas sources of medieval Norse society the very form of them as written medium makes them to be shared – thus they both build and belong to the culture. This alone makes them usable as sources for historical study of mental images.

However, we have to remember that they do not necessarily represent the “mass society”. Their nature as a literary medium in an only partially literate society and also their production and transmission value limit their authors and audience to the social elite of their times. Thus the cultural group whose image they present is more likely to be the elite – as with most historical sources.

The basis of my research is set on the historical cultural anthropology's and historical ethnography's view of the sagas as sources. It implies that even though saga texts are not contemporary sources about the events described in the actual narrative of them, they are still usable as historical sources about the time when they were written. About the mental images, attitudes and knowledge of the writer and of his audience and the society of their time. It's based on the idea that every written source is developed by the mind of it's writer and meant to be understood by it's audience, so it

always carries information about the sociocultural contexts of its time. Even though sagas are doubtful sources about the Norwegian kings they tell stories about, they are still usable as sources of 13th century Iceland's and maybe Norway's culture: world view and mental images. The traditions, acts and mentalities described in them are either echoes of the writers own time or at least about how they perceived their history.\textsuperscript{49} So my study aims to shed light on the mental images and culture of 13th century Norse society – not the Viking Age society claimed to be described in the Heimskringla.

This theoretical groundwork of mental images and culture also explains why insults as actions can tell us about the culture. If we are to understand honour as the value of a man according to the norms of society,\textsuperscript{50} These norms are the accepted ways of behaviour in the culture – the cultural codes.\textsuperscript{51} In this light an insult and retaliation - the feud, and is the accepted 'norm' way of defining and dealing this value of a man in his society. Thus by defining how this process was perceived to work (at least in theory – in written ideal) we can also shed light on what the existing norms are – what is the cultural coding - the mental image.

Starting from this theoretical foundation and using the forementioned methods by studying the descriptions of insulting in the Heimskringla I should be able to extract the mental image that the 13th century Icelandic-Norwegian social elite had on insulting.

I've chosen for my work a structure that's a mixture of philological, historical and anthropological research presentation styles since those are the scholarly disciplines I'm using in this study. Each portion or idea is first introduced. Then I'll

\textsuperscript{50} Sørensen 1993a, pp.211.
\textsuperscript{51} Keesing – Strathern 1998, pp.15-18, 288.
present the theoretical and methodological considerations behind the study and how I did the research on it. Followed by descriptions of the qualitative and quantitative source finds and a presentable case study derived from Óláfs Saga Helga and conclusions from them. Then I'll sum the portion up in conclusion and possibly present how it will connect with other parts of this research.

- Note on names

I'm referring to the title person and main character of Óláfs Saga Helga - King Óláfr Haraldsonar of Norway – mainly as St.Óláfr. This is not the way he's been referred to in most of the actual saga, but a later version of his name given after his death and sainthood. It is however quite commonly used in historical research, as a way to address him. I'm using this way because it makes it instantly clear who's being talked about and separates him for example from the Swedish King Óláfr. Also it's a constant and short way to address him which is important as his name is very frequently used in the text.

On other names of persons I'm using the standardised Old Norse versions with long vowels marked out and specialised letters 'Ƿ' and 'ᛇ' used. I'm treating these names however according to the English grammar; so for example genitive is marked with “-’s” and plural with “-s”. In place, object and such names I will use the version most relevant for the circumstances of the context they are mentioned in so there's mix of modern and old names in the text, but I'm trying to make sure to be consistent so the reader will not have to guess the connections between them.

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1. LITERARY STRUCTURES

It's been common to look at the Heimskringla as "more Norwegian" saga product since it deals with Norwegian kings and Norway more than with Iceland and the Icelandic society like for example the Family Sagas or Icelandic Sagas do. It's also been said that it lacks the feud centred structure of the Icelandic Sagas and Family Sagas which is seen as more Icelandic. When I started to dwell into the insults and feud in the central part of this saga compilation – Óláfs Saga Helga, I soon realised this is not necessarily the case though. In this first chapter “Literary Structures” the aim is to explain the story structures found in Óláfs Saga Helga. First I'll explain what kind of story lines are found from Óláfs Saga Helga and how these individual stories are structured and how they share structural similarities with the Icelandic and Family Sagas. Then I'll go through the method of finding and recognizing these individual story lines and finally I'll explain how these form the structure of the saga itself and what they tell about feuds.

1.1. The structures of the Pættir

When we look at Óláfs Saga Helga we see that the life of St.Óláfr is told through series of short stories. His rise to power is explained through the conflicts with earls and mighty men that hold Norway under their rule as vassals of Knut the Great, the Danish King. Other stories that build up St.Óláfr as a king are his interactions with the Swedish King Óláfr, the rebellious Uppland Kings and with the Earls of Orkney. Then when his downfall begins, it is his falloff with the mighty man Erlingr and his

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52 This argument is presented and opposed in. Bagge 1991, pp.75. Bagge argues that Heimskringla's conflicts are feud centred, and the main theme is not monarchy versus aristocracy.

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relatives and associates that finally tips the balance so, that when they join the King Knut's side, St.Óláfr finally has too many enemies internally and externally and his downfall comes fast. These kind of small interwoven stories that form the bigger whole are typical for sagas written in Iceland and the individual stories are called þáttir (plur. þættir). This þættir- constructed story form is exactly what Jesse L. Byock describes as 'saga form' and has outlined in his article “Choices of Honor: Telling Saga Feud, Tháttr, and the Fundamental Oral Progression”. To illustrate this I will follow Byock's method and explanation with a case study of my own from Óláfs Saga Helga step by step. In his article Byock uses diagrams to explain his case study so I will borrow the same diagrams and explain them as I go. The picture below gives the key to the symbols Byock uses in his diagrams. As the characters in my case study are somewhat different social standing I will explain when I replace some meanings of the symbols in my own case study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYMBOLS:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chieftains</td>
<td>Two types of freemen, godar and bændr, are portrayed in the following diagrams. In this episode the bændr are thingmen of those godar whom they seek as advocates. The circle represents the issue of dispute, here a woodland, although the disputed matter could be an issue of honor. The woodland is disputed when Thórðr's rights to usage are challenged by Thormóðr. Several types of past and present action are depicted: claim; transfer of claim; conflict; seeking an advocate; and advocacy alliance. The curved arrow represents movement into and out of the arena of conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers of differing wealth and status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer who has lost his or her property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue of dispute: property, insult, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claim</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transfer of Claim</td>
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<td>Conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeking an Advocate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocacy alliance</td>
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OSH, passim.

See: Introduction, Definition of terms, Þáttir, pp.9. This work.

Byock 1995, passim.

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Byock in his article uses as an example a Þáttr from “Vápnfirðinga saga”: ”Two farmers, each a thingman of a different local chieftain, quarrel over grazing and tree-cutting rights in a woodland they own in common. Up to this point the two bændr Up to the starting point of the story the two bændr (farmers) have shared the use of the property, but now one of them, Thórðr, is threatened by his more aggressive and wealthier neighbour Thormóðr.”

In my case study I will use the Þáttr that tells about the dispute of the Earls of Orkney over the possession of the Orkney Isles that forms a part of the Óláfs Saga Helga spanning from Chapter 97. to Chapter 103. While the story in it, is somewhat more complicated and connected with other narratives, than the one Byock uses in his example, it is also similar enough that the abstract applicability of Byock's theoretical model should not be lost in the differences of story details. Both deal with a feud over land (and power) possession and in both there's players from different levels of society and power, but a rather limited number of players are involved. And as can be seen later on in the case study they also share other similar elements in common.

![Diagram 1 and Diagram 2. Byock 1995, pp.173.](image)

“The first diagram portrays the initial phase of the dispute between Thórðr and Thormóðr. At this stage, the conflict is limited to the farmers, with chieftains having no reason to intervene. There is, however, movement within the system. As a result of Thórðr and Thormóðr's quarrel, the land has lost its place as a securely owned possession; it has moved into the liminal area of contest. ...the confrontation could have been settled between the two farmers. If a settlement had been arranged, the property would not have remained in play. Thormóðr, however, is unreasonable, and Thórðr is forced to seek the aid of an advocate (diagram 2). As a result, the property moves within the reach of a chieftain. “\(^{57}\)

In the Þáttr story about the Earls of Orkney there's four brothers - sons of the Earl of Orkney Sigurth. 3 of the brothers Sumarlithi, Brúsi and Einar are from earlier marriage and older where as the fourth Thorfinn is from Sigurth's later marriage with the daughter of of the King of Scotland Malcolm and very young when his father dies. After the death of Earl Sigurth in the Battle of Clontarf the older three sons inherit his title and the Orkneys which they divide amongst them three. Thorfinn who's juts a young boy ends up being fostered and brought up by his grandfather, King of Scotland. Who also bestows upon him the title of earl and gives him possessions in Scotland.\(^{58}\) So we start with roughly the same position as in Byock's example. There are four men that are are about the same ranking, background and power. The feud starts when Sumarlithi dies without direct inheritor. His one portion of the Orkneys is thus left for the grabs for the remaining 3 sons of late Earl. Now Brúsi claims no part of the heritage but both Einar and Thorfinn claim it whole. Einar dismisses Thorfinn's claim and takes hold of the contested portion of the isles and gains thus much power and men. Thorfinn however can count on support from his maternal side from King of Scotland.\(^{59}\) And so we end up in similar situation as Thórðr and Thormóðr in Byock's example. Two men quarrelling over possession of the land and one being stronger and the other being forced to seeks support from above.

\(^{57}\) Byock 1995, pp.173.
\(^{58}\) OSH, C.96.
\(^{59}\) OSH, C97.
Here we get more complicated though as in Byock's example. Now, Thorfinn's power and support from Scottish King is not enough against powerful Einar with 2/3 of Orkneys under his command, many men and strong experience in Viking voyages and raiding and warfare. The confrontation almost gets into warfare between the sides, but Brúsi intervenes and proposes a reconciliation by offering his portion of the lands for Einar to rule so he could give Thorfinn the contested portion – this calms the situation down, but does not resolve it as neither of feuders is really happy with it.\textsuperscript{60}

The Story of the feud between Thorfinn and Einar is also interrupted with another Báttr that tells of one mighty man - Thorkell the Fosterfather - under Einar's rule ends up in feud with him and his forced to flee to St.Óláfr the King of Norway.\textsuperscript{61} He introduces the problems at the Orkneys to the King and speaks in behalf of the Thorfinn and so King Óláfr invites Thorfinn to visit him. Thorfinn visits St.Óláfr and gets his support in his affair with Einar.\textsuperscript{62} Now we got to the stage in which one side of the feud asks help from more powerful player and by gaining it transfers the feud to the sphere of social level above the earls – the kings. Orkneys come to the reach of St.Óláfr.

\textsuperscript{60} OSH, C98.

\textsuperscript{61} OSH, C98-99.

\textsuperscript{62} OSH, C99.

In Byock's example: “Thórðr finds a powerful advocate... Brodd-Helgi demands the payment of Thóðr's property, including the farmer's clouded interest in the woodland. Caught between his threatening neighbour and his grasping goði, Thóðr has little choice. Negotiations are quickly completed. The farmer's claim to half-ownership of the land is transferred (diagram 3).”

In the story of the Earls of Orkney is OSH, we again run in more complicated situation again because of the fore mentioned smaller þáttr about Thorkell. Now, when Thorfinn gains St.Óláfr's support he return to Orkneys and is more permanently reconciled with Einar who can't afford to feud with Thorfinn who now has the support of both the Scottish King and Norwegian one. Thorkell also returns with his newly gained more powerful ally, Thorfinn and is also formally reconciled with Einar as part of the deal. Einar however does not consider this feud to have ended and plans on killing Thorkell who learns about the attempt and as a preventative measure kills Einar and again escapes to Norway. This ends also the feuding between Thorfinn and Einar obviously as the later is now dead. It does not however end the feud as that inherits onwards.

In the fore mentioned reconciliation Brúsi and Einar joined their dominions of 2/3 of Orkneys to be ruled by Einar and they should now both inherit to Brúsi, but Thorfinn now claims half of the Einar's portion (the Orkneys to be dived in two halves between him and Brúsi). Brúsi is not much a fighting-man however and also he holds far less power than Thorfinn who has the support of the Scottish King and the manpower and wealth from both his dominions in Scotland and his part of the Orkneys. In this situation the only higher level player Brúsi can hope to turn to is the same person who before supported Thorfinn – King Óláfr of Norway.

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63 Byock 1995, pp.175.
64 OSH, C99.
65 OSH, C100.

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Now when Brúsi flees from his dominion to Norway to ask for help he is faced with exactly the same situation as Thórðr in Byock's example. St.Óláfr has little to gain in the feud if he just switches alliances, but since the lower level players in this feud are now both in need of his support he can over play them. So he does exactly what Brodd-Helgi does with Thórðr. He demands Brúsi to recognise his dominion over the whole of the Orkneys and to become his vassal – thus effectively demanding Brúsi to transfer his paternal heritage to him and becoming his servant. The matter is shortly completed as Brúsi is in Norway at the mercy of the king and also has no other way to compete against Thorfinn. Exactly the same situation as with Thórðr.

“With Brodd-Helgi replacing Thórðr, the dispute advances from the private to the public realm. The stage is now set for a conflict between Thormóðr and the chieftain, Brodd-Helgi (diagram 4).” In the OSH,'s Þátr about the Earls of Orkney exactly the same happens as related above. Thorfinn's feud with Brúsi is now transferred to be between him and St.Óláfr. What follows next is again somewhat different in details though as the situation is more complicated as already seen.


OSH, C100.

Byock 1995, pp.174. See Diagram 4 from previous page!
“Thormóðr is unwilling to stand alone against Brodd-Helgi, he now also seeks the assistance of a powerful advocate. Thormóðr goes to his chieftain, Geitir, Brodd-Helgi’s rival (diagram 5).68 — “Geitir accepts the case from Thormóðr, his thingman. — In this instance, two professional advocates, Brodd-Helgi and Geitir, have exercised their options to intervene in a dispute originating between farmers. As a result, they enter into the arena of contest, risking the loss of everything from reputation to life (diagram 6).69

In the case of the Earls of Orkneys there is no-one else to turn to however at the level of St.Óláfr. Scottish king being weaker than him and all other kings being too far away or distanced otherwise to be interested in the feud. Also because his earlier association with Óláfr Thorfinn assumes wrongly of being in good standing with him and when he hears about Brúsi's trip to Norway he follows to argue his case thus delivering himself too at the mercy of the Norwegian King.70

Now Thorfinn is faced with the same options as Brúsi just before him, but with even less of a choice since Brúsi has already “transferred” the dominion over the Orkneys to St.Óláfr. Thorfinn can either do the same as Brúsi and give up his right to the isles and become vassal to King Óláfr or enter into feud with him while at his mercy in Norway and most likely loose his dominions if not even his life. So he does the rational choice and submits (at least for now). As a reward for Bringing the Orkneys directly to the Norwegian King's reach Brúsi gets 2/3 of them as a vassalage and Thorfinn being more powerful anyway (because his connection to Scotland) and more likely to betray his liege gets a 1/3.71

70 OSH, C101.  
71 OSH, C101-102.  

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Thus what started as a dispute over 1/3 of the islands between 3 brothers ends up getting one of them killed and the whole of the isles transferred under the rule of the Norwegian King. This in turn advances St.Óláfr's honour as he now holds under his rule all the areas formerly ruled by Norwegian kings. It also works as a kind of character reference for him— he's being greedy— which comes to play to explain later events in the bigger narrative of the saga. Much the same as the dispute in Byock's example ends up fuelling the main narrative of the feud between the two chieftains:

“Later in the saga the reason for including this seemingly unimportant incident becomes clear. The dispute over the woodland merges into an ongoing conflict between two chieftains, Brodd-Helgi and his rival Geitir Lýtingsson, who champions Thormóðr's position. The incident is a step in the escalation of the saga's major feud, a contest between two local "big men," each of whom illustrates different personal behavior and leadership style. As the purpose of including the episode of the two bændr is clearly to advance the main feud, neither Thórðr's personal tragedy nor his motivation is explored. In fact, the saga shows little interest in the character of Thórðr; instead, it focuses on the role this incident plays in a chain of events eventually leading to the death of the overly ambitious Brodd-Helgi.”

This case study proves, that while it might seem otherwise at first glance, the Þáttr in Óláfs Saga Helga follow similar patterns as the Icelandic sagas in general. The story and it's settings conditions are more complex than in the Byock's example, but we can still find the same abstract patterns in it and the same advance of the story line. We can also clearly notice that the whole story is build around a feud— not around the king, politics or such.

1.2. How to find the Ættir

In the Óláfs Saga Helga many of the chapters are started of with introduction of a person: his name, home place and relations as well as his status, wealth and social position are declared – most often in lowering or lifting manner.\footnote{OSH, passim.} As an example:

"There was a certain man called Thórarin Nefjólsson. He was an Icelander whose kin lived in the northern quarter of the land. He was not of high birth, but he had a keen mind and always was ready of speech. He was not afraid to speak frankly to men of princely birth."\footnote{OSH, Hollander 2005, C85.}

or

"Earl Thorfinn was precocious in his youth and matured early. He was tall and strong, of ugly visage; and as he grew up it became clear that he was reckless, hard, cruel, and very shrewd."\footnote{OSH, Hollander 2005, C96.}

These are usually seen just as introductions of new characters to the story and that's of course their main function, but these seem to usually also be beginnings of new Ættir. Except for few cases where a person doing some significant single action in the story is introduced. Which is the case for example in Chapter 113. where St.Óláfr is dealing with the conflict over the conversion of the people of Guthbrands Dale who are keen on worshipping their own statue of Thor instead of the Christian God that can't even be seen. The character making a difference, Kolbein the Strong, is being shortly introduced even though it doesn't really start a new Ættir narrative:

"Kolbein the Strong was the name of one of the followers of King Óláfr. His kinsmen lived in Fjord District. He always went about armed, with a sword at
his side and a big quarterstaff in his hand, of the kind called a club.”

Kolbein's introduction this way is however crucial to the ongoing Þáttr: It's not really him that comes to matter, but his weapon of choice that he uses on St.Óláfr's command to break the Guthbrands Dale people's idol of Thor. Similar introductions without the beginning of a new Þáttr can be found in few other occasions too either when the character does some story wise central action, is an Icelander, has composed the skaldic verses presented next in the saga or his involvement is mentioned in some other source or saga also. But even most of the skalds or people doing some single significant action are mentioned basically by name only, without further insights to their vicinage, relations or other background.

Every new story line that gets interwoven into the narrative starts with introduction of the main characters in it. There might be a chapter explaining the time and place first, but the actual story never begins before the players in are introduced. In the bigger story lines this introduction might take whole chapter or more like in the beginning of the whole saga when St.Óláfr is basically being introduced from Chapter 1. all the way to Chapter 29. as the chapters just tell about his background, and exploits in his youth and relations and so on. Also some of the other main storyline characters like Erlingr and Einar Thambarskelfir are introduced here. Another example is in the beginning of the fore mentioned storyline about the Earls of Orkney the main characters are being introduced for the whole first chapter and the start of the second one too. In the smaller Þáttr the introduction might be just some sentences:

“There was in the earl's company a certain man called Jokul. He was an Icelander and the son of Bárth Jokulsson of Vats Dale.”

OSH, C113.
See for example: OSH, C99
OSH, C1-19.
OSH, C21; C23.
OSH, C96-97.
OSH, Hollander 2005, C182.
Jokul's introduction is short, but so is his Þáttr too – he's introduced and gets killed in the same short chapter. Jokul gets introduced, he gives and insult to St.Óláfr by accepting command of St.Óláfr's captured warship Bison, gets caught later on by St.Óláfr in Gotland and gets beheaded, but dies as worthy man by keeping his cool and composing skaldic verses until he dies after his botched, but mortally wounding execution attempt. So there is clearly a feud pattern and also a story with beginning and an end so it is a Þáttr albeit a very short one.

There is some occasions where it could be seen that a Þáttr begins with out a full introduction of a character too. In these occasions the main characters of that particular Þáttr are already familiar to the reader of the saga from previous Þættir and in most it could be also acclaimed that the actual storyline has begun from there and only been interrupted – thus making the beginning without introduction only a return to the story and not a start of a completely new individual Þáttr. This is the case for example in the episodes with the Uppland Kings where in Chapter 81. it seems King Hrærek is not introduced at the beginning of his feuding with King Óláfr. This is not however the start of the Þáttr nor the feud between them. The Þáttr starts already in the Chapter 74. and 75. where Hrærek, is being introduced shortly:

“...he was considered the wisest of the kings then ruling there.”

, and

“Hrorek was an able but obstinate man, whose fidelity the king could not trust to if he made peace with him; therefore he ordered both his eyes to be punched out, and took him in that condition about with him.”

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83 OSH, C182.
84 OSH, C81.
85 OSH, Hollander 2005, C74.
86 OSH, Hollander 2005, C75.
Also he is known to the readers all the way from Chapter 36, where in meeting of the Uppland kings he speaks against supporting St.Óláfr. So he is in fact introduced at the beginning of the Þáttr about his feud with St.Óláfr – this is only clouded by the many divided nature of the particular storyline.

In conclusion it can be said that the individual Þættir in Óláfs Saga Helga can be recognised and found by looking for introductions of new characters with more than just a name. This, more often than not, marks a start of a new storyline and a new feud or a new episode in old feud- and thus a new Þáttr. It is not however fool proof method, nor is it as simple to implement as it would seem at first glance, as the stories are often interrupted and divided into many sections and as many of them are intimately interwoven so that they might seem as continuation of each other rather than individual Þættir. This way of introducing new character also has a socioculturally meaningful reasons, to which I will return in the next chapter of this thesis work.

OSH, C36.
1.3. Structure of the Óláfs Saga Helga

As noted before Óláfs Saga Helga is composed of multiple interwoven storylines. There's huge amount of individual small story lines in Óláfs Saga Helga – or Þættir as they are commonly called in saga tradition. These Þættir all tell their own story of a feud that is either part of the bigger one from the start or gets interwoven into bigger storyline as the feud evolves and advances to higher social levels. It seems in fact that in Óláfs Saga Helga the storylines are completely structured around feuds. There is no single story that wouldn't be feud related. In fact there's hardly any chapters that are not related to feuding. The only chapters that are not in one way or another directly connected to a stories of feuding, in the Þættir, are basically those that describe the lay of the land in Scandinavia to help to understand the story and those describing miracles associated with St.Óláfr. And even chapters about the lay of the lands are there, because they help to explain the vicinage that's essential for the feud stories and the miracle stories can also be - if somewhat far-fetchedly – connected with the feuding, as they add to the honour value of St.Óláfr. All the rest of the chapters tell contain parts of the feud stories.

St.Óláfr's miracles can be seen as his ultimate feud victory even after his death. The miracle stories are used as a narrative element to explain and rise St.Óláfr in honour and power even after his defeat and exile have robbed him from most of the worldly honour. They start after his exile in Chapter 155 and continue through out the rest of the saga and intensify tremendously after his death in Stiklarstathir in Chapter 228. After that there's lot more miracles, his sanctity is being revealed even to his enemies and his miracles are being sung to public. This all rises him from a failed

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88 Byock 1995, pp.166; Lindow 1993, pp.661-662.
89 OSH, passim.
90 OSH, C155; C189 etc.
91 OSH, C230; C236; C240; C241; C244; C245 etc.

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king and a man to a saint of miraculous powers and thus renews his honour and gives him the final victory in his feuding with Knut the Great, who albeit his factions temporary victory over St.Óláfr's faction, is still a man while St.Óláfr has become saint in his death.

The rise of St.Óláfr to his power and his downfall are both told through interwoven storylines that are in fact feud chains. The story is structured so that the life of St.Óláfr is told through several shorter and lower level stories. His rise to power is explained through the feuding with earls and mighty men that hold Norway in their rule as vassals of Knut the Great the Danish King and this leads the start of the feud with Knut the Great. Other stories that build up St.Óláfr as king are his feuds with Swedish King Óláfr, Uppland Kings and with the Earls of Orkney. All through these feuds he rises in power and position and honour, but also keeps collecting enemies who mostly, one by one, go to or turn to Knut the Great to seek aid in their feuding with St.Óláfr or to escape from under his power. Then when his downfall begins, it is his feud with Erlingr and his relations and associates that finally tips the balance so that when they join the Knut's feud party, St.Óláfr finally has too many enemies internally and externally and his downfall comes fast. This is very similar structure to what we can find from the Icelandic Sagas and Family Sagas.

From the beginning of the saga we get the introduction of the characters that play biggest roles in the main feud of the saga – the one between St.Óláfr and King Knut the Great. The first one introduced is of course St.Óláfr himself the other two are Erlingr Skalgrimson and Einar Thambarskelfir. These two are the main mighty men in Norway with power exceeding that of the earls under King Knut's vassalage and of

92 OSH, passim.
93 OSH, C130; passim.
94 OSH, passim.
95 Byock 1995, passim; Byock 2003, passim.
96 OSH, C21; C23.
these two Erlingr is the one playing the major role in the feud with King St.Óláfr. The storyline begins from here and continues all through the saga until it culminates in the battle of Stiklarstathir and St.Óláfr's death. Some of the other stories are connected with a bigger story line in the narrative from the start in – some only connect later on, but they all tell their own story of insult driven feud that eventually connects with St.Óláfr and his feud with Knut. Mostly by those disposed in feuds by St.Óláfr joining the King Knut's faction if they are not dead. This situation is even said out loud it the saga itself when it returns into the main feud between St.Óláfr and Knut at point where Knut send his first demand of Norway or submission to St.Óláfr in chapter 130. Where it is said that King Knut waited for claiming back Norway because at first St.Óláfr was well liked, but then many of the people coming to King Knut from Norway later on were complaining about St.Óláfr's tyranny and wishing to be under King Knut's rule to get back their liberties.97

The other big Þættir around the main storyline of Óláfr, Erlingr and Knut in Óláfs Saga Helga are in order of appearance: St.Óláfr's feud with the Swedish King Óláfr in which he wins a lot of honour my being humble and patient and reasonable and little by little turning all of the Swedish king's factions members to his side.98 Then there is his the feud with Upland Kings that continues as the feud with the subdued Hrærek.99 Next come the Orkney Earls, Demands to the Icelanders, struggle over the taxation of the Faroes.100 After that the saga returns to the situation with Erlingr by a side Þáttr about Ásbjorn and his exploits and death which works as fuel for the feud between St.Óláfr and Erlingr.101 Erlingr tries to the last to avoid conflict with St.Óláfr but the conditions and St.Óláfr's greed of power eventually drive these two deeper and deeper into conflict that at last leads to Erlingr's death and shortly after to the death of

97 OSH, C130.
98 OSH, C56-94. With C7, C54-55 offering related information and scenes.
99 OSH, C74-85.
100 OSH, C127.
101 OSH, C117-C176.
St.Óláfr too. After this the main feud with King Knut start for good with his demand of power over Norway. Then follows a struggle where St.Óláfr with his faction gained mostly in his feud with the Swedish King Óláfr and the incidents in Ásbjorn storyline gets more and more into conflict with with Erlingr and Knut and eventually he gets overwhelmed and has to flee the country to exile, from where he comes back for the final battle and martyrdom in Stiklarstathir. As Can be seen from this short summary of the sagas events there is no story line in the Óláfs Saga Helga that is not a Þættir leading back to the feuding position of St.Óláfr either by actually evolving and linking to his feud with Knut or by affecting his honour standing in one way or another.

In conclusion in this chapter it has been shown that the Þættir in Óláfs Saga Helga follow the common feud structures of the Icelandic sagas as outlined by Byock. In which the whole story is build around the feud. It’s been summarised that the individual Þáttr can be identified by looking for the introductions of new characters into the saga. All the separate Þáttr start with the introduction of the new main player(s) of it. And third, the whole of the story lines of Óláfs Saga Helga is composed of lower and higher level Þáttr stories that are either interlinking into the main story or are part of it to begin with. Thus the whole of Óláfs Saga Helga is a story about feud(s).

102 OSH, C31-C176.
103 OSH, C130-C251.
104 OSH, C228.
2. FEUD AND SOCIETY

As we see from the Chapter one of this thesis dissertation the stories, Þættir, of Óláfs Saga Helga are all build around feuds and as I've shown these feud stories all follow the basic patterns and structures that we find common to the Icelandic and Family Sagas that Byock has analysed and modelled in his article “Choices of Honor: Telling Saga Feud, Thátr, and the Fundamental Oral Progression”\(^\text{105}\). These same literary structures of the feuding can also be seen as a reflection of how the feuds might have worked in the actual social reality of the society that produced the saga and of which the people who's mentalité the saga is based on, were from.\(^\text{106}\) In this second Chapter of my thesis I dwell more deeply into the actual workings of the feud processes and the reasons behind it and how it might reflect the society it's from and it's processes and realities.

This chapter will first go through the processes through which the feud forms, escalates, evolves and finally ends. At the same time it will dwell more deeply into how the sides of the feud are formed and how they affect the feud and the feud affects them. After that I will examine the the process of feud as part of the structure of the society itself and the relationship between the game of politics and the feud. And finally it handles the effects of feud to the society it's from and the individuals that are involved in it.

\(^\text{105}\) Byock 1995, passim.

\(^\text{106}\) See Theory and method.
2. FEUD AND SOCIETY

2.1. Development and structure of a feud.

To understand feud as a generalizable process rather than as individual stories we need to analyse what kind of main elements it's formed from and what are their functions in it. We need to seek out the processes through which it starts, advances, stalls as well as the ones that will eventually end it. I will do this through case examples from Óláfs Saga Helga. The instances dealt with are ones I thought best show case the points, but as far as I've gathered during this research process these elements also apply to most, if not all, similar instances throughout the whole of the Óláfs Saga Helga.

The feud obviously starts with an insult. There needs to be change in the status quo, in the balance of honour and position, in order for there to be a conflict that starts the feud chain. These primary insults vary hugely in severity and nature from Ḟátttr to another, but the circumstances and the people connect to them always guarantee that no matter how menial or grave they are they start the feud. For example in we find a seemingly menial matter of trying to buy corn and malts that starts the feud between Ásbjorn and Thorer Sel. And in chapter we find the grave insult of St.Óláfr capturing and mutilating the rebellious Uppland Kings starting the feud between him and one of the mutilated kings – Horek. In the first instance it's the conditions and connections of the people involved that make the feud to start: St.Óláfr has ordered ban on selling corn out from the area because of the situation with the external threats; Ásbjorn is related to Erlingr who's one of St.Óláfr's enemies and in an ongoing feud with him; Erlingr sells the corn despite the orders; Thorer Sel is St.Óláfr's man and considers the sell as an insult from Erlingr to his lord St.Óláfr; Ásbjorn looses his face back home for not getting the corn and malts in and being thus unable to uphold his social duties. And then the things spiral out of control. Ásbjorn ends up killing Thorer

OSH, C117.
OSH, C75.
Sel in front of king Óláfr. Who then takes up his vassals cause automatically as his own, which in turn bulls Erlingr in the mix from Ásbjorn's side and then we get one of the most complicated, bloody and event rich stories of feud in the whole of the Óláfs Saga Helga.\textsuperscript{109} In the second instance what makes the feud to start is obviously the seriousness of the insult in capturing and mutilating King Horek – he can hardly be blamed for starting a feud against St.Óláfr when this has stripped him from his possessions, family, friends, title and eye sight.\textsuperscript{110} Similar feud starting insults of varying degrees can also be found for example in Chapter 98. where Thorkel Amundason challenges Earl Einar's power by repeatedly asking him to relieve the burden of levy on the bondes even after he's warned not to do so.\textsuperscript{111} And Chapter 97 in which the whole feud of the Earls of Orkney begins with Earl Einar insulting his brother Thorkell by claiming 2/3 of the isles and denying Thorkell's heritage.\textsuperscript{112} This same pattern repeats itself at the beginning of every feud in Óláfs Saga Helga so we can say that the feuds start with and insult action.

When we take a look at the development of the feud the first element – which is easy to spot - that develops the feud is the insults, most actual actions in the feud chains are insults of varying degree and nature. Like in Chapter 84. where King Horek tries to stab King Óláfr and after failing that (physical insult) he verbally accuses this of cowardice; for fleeing from a blind man (a verbal insult and also a níð).\textsuperscript{113} And when Swedish King Óláfr doesn't arrive at the arranged meeting with the St.Óláfr to conclude the marriage agreement between his daughter and St.Óláfr as was deemed in the terms of their feuds mediation earlier he perform an insult on St.Óláfr by ignoring his position. And by breaking the mediation agreement he challenges him back into the feud.\textsuperscript{114} Or when Erlingr comes to St.Óláfr with army of follower to mediate on

\textsuperscript{109} OSH, C117-118, and onwards until C176.
\textsuperscript{110} OSH, C73-75.
\textsuperscript{111} OSH, C98.
\textsuperscript{112} OSH, C97.
\textsuperscript{113} OSH, C84.
\textsuperscript{114} OSH, C87.

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Ásbjorn's behalf in the killing of Thorer Sel – which challenges St.Óláfr's power and position as a King and his actual power over his dominion as he's forced to basically submit to Erlingr's ruling on the matter – even if Erlingr plays it down by letting St.Óláfr in name have the ruling as long as it's not to kill Ásbjorn.\footnote{OSH, C120.} I'll deal more in depth with the insults in the next main Chapter of this thesis so I will not go too much into them here. For now it's enough to note that the main action in feuding is insulting the other party(-ies) involved in it. That's the driving force, but when we look more closely at the structure of feud we can also find another element crucial to the development of the feud and ultimately the one that decides the out come of the feud. This is the composition of the feud parties and especially the change of/in them and their power relations. So there is two types of events in feud chains: party changes and insults. They are often interconnected one causing the other or even one being the other directly.

Where as insult is the action of the feud the party changes can be considered the deciding force of the feud. This is particularly clearly exhibited in the first major feud story of the Óláfs Saga Helga – the feud between St.Óláfr and Swedish King Óláfr.\footnote{OSH, C56-94. With C7, C54-55 offering related information and scenes.} This feud is primed all the way from things happening in the beginning of Óláfs Saga Helga in St.Óláfr's youth when he harries Sweden and out smarts Swedish King Óláfr by escaping his trap on lake Maelaren. And then it picks up when St.Óláfr drives the Earls Svein and Einar off their dominions in Norway that they hold on fief from the Swedish king. It's actually told in Chapter 56. how the Swedish king gets angry after the Earls have escaped to him and declares feud against the St.Óláfr:

"The Swedish king was much put out with Olaf the stout for having occupied the country tributary to him and driving out Earl Svein. To repay him, the king promised of the strongest retribution as soon as he was able to. He said that Olaf would not dare to be so bold as to take possession of the dominion the earl had had."
And many of the Swedish King's men agreed with him.

This starts the feud, but as is immediately visible from the rhetoric the Swedish king lacks the force to directly take action right away – he will “repay him... retribution as soon as he was able to”. What happens is a long dragging feud that carries on until Chapter 94 and echoes of which can be seen until the very end of the saga. In this feud, in the biggest role, are not the many, varied natured, insults dealt between the feuding parties, but the actual changes in the composition of these parties. Who's on who's side and why are changing because of the insults dealt and eventually this feud party balance determines the outcome of the feud – not the actual actions of insults.

In this feud between the Óláfrs the starting sparkles come from the St.Óláfr harassing the Swedish king's dominions in his youth and humiliating out manoeuvring at Lake Maelaren. This is further strengthened by St.Óláfr's insult on Swedish King by over taking his tributary areas in Norway and disposing his vassal Earls. After that the Kings match and trade insults by sending tax collectors to each others sides of the border area and catching and killing them as well as killing merchants in each others service. In this exchange of insults St.Óláfr gains slight upper hand and it's also described that since Swedish King Óláfr is easily irritable/aggressive anyway, him and thus his side take the losses heavier. The Swedish King Óláfr forbids the St.Óláfr's name from being used in his presence and insists him being instead called “That fat man”. This whole tit-for-tat and constant threat of warfare between the kingdoms leads to the situation where many parties are influenced negatively by the feud. This instability leads to the first feud party change in the story. St.Óláfr enters in negotiation with Earl Ragnvald, a vassal of the Swedish king, and convinces him to

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117 OSH, I & II, C56: Old Norse original text says: “Þvi fulgoðu allir Svía-konungs menn, at svá myndi vera.” - thus meaning “And all of the Swedish King's men agreed with him”.
118 OSH, Hollander 2005, C56.
119 OSH, C7.
120 OSH, C35-56.
121 OSH, C59, C61, C63, C65, C66.
122 OSH, C67.
secretly join his side of the feuding. This is made possible by the heavy burden this conflict inflicts on Earl Ragnvald's dominions that border Norway in the Southern Sweden. And by his wife's, Ingebjorg's kin ties to St.Óláfr through the late king of Norway Óláfr Trygvason, who was her brother and in who's death the Swedish King played a pivotal role.\textsuperscript{123} Affinity through marriage was considered to be form of kinship in Norse culture.\textsuperscript{124} The connection is thus made on many levels: practical safety & economics, kinship and through insults in previous feud before this sagas time. This change in the feud parties tilts the advantage clearly into St.Óláfr's favour as he now has foothold inside the Swedish king's side – this allows him to start clever political and clandestine actions instead of raiding and taxing.

Through Ragnvald and with Ingebjorg's help St.Óláfr sends and Icelander Hjalte to pursue clandestine actions in Sweden as his emissary in order to convince the Swedish King to negotiate for peace with St.Óláfr. They can't approach the Swedish king directly with such matter as he's so unreasonable enraged with St.Óláfr that he would surely just kill Hjalte. So Ingebjorg and Hjalte come up with a scheme where Hjalte goes to the court just as a travelling Icelander and gains Swedish King Óláfr's favour by faking to insult St.Óláfr by bring arrival taxes of arriving from Iceland to Norway to the Swedish king instead of to St.Óláfr.\textsuperscript{125} Ingebjorg also introduces Hjalte to Swedish king's daughter Ingegerd and ask her to help Hjalte on his journey.\textsuperscript{126} Over the course of Hjalte's stay in the Swedish court it becomes clear that Swedish king cannot be convinced into peace, but at the same time Hjalte befriends Ingegerd and reveals his true purposes to her and gets her to join the St.Óláfr's side.\textsuperscript{127} And now St.Óláfr's feud party has through changes crept all the way into the very family of his enemy. After this Ragnvald convinces an influential layman leader Thorgny to join in support to the proposal of peace to the Swedish king by reminding him of how the

\textsuperscript{123} OSH, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Miller 1996, pp.67-71.
\textsuperscript{125} OSH, C68-72.
\textsuperscript{126} OSH, C70.
\textsuperscript{127} OSH, C72.
feud impacts negatively on the bondes and how Swedish king while being aggressive and despotic is insulting the bondes by denying their right for peace and a say in the ruling. Then at the Thing Swedish king is suddenly challenged to make peace with St.Óláfr first by Ragnvald and then suddenly supported both by Thorgny and his followers and then his own daughter Ingegerd. He has lost majority of his support in his own feud party through clever manoeuvring by St.Óláfr's side and through his own unconformity. And is forced into mediation of his feud with St.Óláfr. Here we can see how the actual insults even though multiple and grave don't really change the situation except by making it fertile for party changes. The party changes are what rob the Swedish King Óláfr of his power and position and thus provide to be the ultimate insult on him and force him to reconciliation.

The same pattern continues in the story of the feud between the Óláfrs until the end. Swedish king breaks the reconciliation by not marrying his daughter Ingegerd to St.Óláfr's as promised and by threatening those people who supported St.Óláfr with retribution – especially Ragnvald. He instead marries his daughter to the King of Russia. At the same time Ragnvald tries to keep peace between the kingdoms by secretly marrying Swedish king's other daughter, Astrid to St.Óláfr. Ragnvald is then saved from the Swedish King by Ingegerd who takes him with her to Russia. Swedish King however ignores the bigger problem he is facing. By not conforming to the terms of the reconciliation for peace he has also insulted the bondes of his own kingdom who backed the treaty and we already thinking him as tyrannical and are now again under threat of Norwegian attack. They dispose of the Swedish King and elect his son Onund as their new king and reconcile him with St.Óláfr. After which the Swedish king Óláfr has finally lost all his power by alienating all his followers from

128 OSH, C79.
129 OSH, C80.
130 OSH, C87-91.
131 OSH, C91.
132 OSH, C93.
133 OSH, C94.

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his feud party either by actions of his own or of his enemy's. He is finally forced to make peace for real in order to keep any position is his kingdom and is allowed to puppet-rule by the bondes until he dies. In the end of the feud in Chapter 94 the situation has changed dramatically from the beginning of the feud:

“The King asked, “Who are the leaders in this attempt to wrest the country from me?” Freywiv made answer, “All the Swedes desire to have the old laws and their full rights. Consider, my lord, how many of your chieftains are present here to take counsel with you. I dare say there are six of us here whom you call your counsellors; but all others have ridden and departed into the countryside, there to meet in assembly with the people And to tell you the truth, the war-arrows have been cut and send about all the country, and criminal court has been summoned...”

So during this feud Swedish King Óláfs feud party has dropped from “And all the king's men agreed with him.” to “...there are six of us...”. From this we can clearly see that the element in this feud that solves it is the change in the structures and power relations of the feud parties involved. It doesn't matter so much who's tit-for-tat is more effective directly, but who manages to manoeuvre the right people and organisations to his aid in order to change the power balance of the situation to where the other party runs out of options. So in feuds the sides realign until one is decisively stronger and wins the feud. This same pattern ably to the other feuds in Óláfs Saga Helga too even if it's not always as clearly visible mostly because majority of the feuds don't really reach an end since they are transferred to a higher level of play until they mix up with the major feuds between the kings and get lost in the tumult.

So how does the feud then advance onward with these elements. As insults are dealt and feud party compositions change any party weakened in feud (or too weak to begin with) seeks help from any stronger party that is in feud with their feud enemy or feud enemy's support thus making feuds into interconnecting spirals of events. This is

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134 OSH, Ibid.
135 OSH, Hollander 2005, C94.
even said out loud in the Óláfs Saga Helga in the feud of the earls Of Orkney. When the feud inherits to be between Brúsi and Thorfinn after the death of Einar, Brúsi says:

“...; and although I am not powerful enough to maintain a feud against thee, my brother, I will seek some other way, rather than willingly renounce my property.”  

Byock calls this process “combining feud clusters into feud chains”. This is clearly exhibited in Ásbjorn's feud with Thorer Sel where both sides involve their superiors that are already in feud with each other – Erlingr and St.Óláfr. And the same process is at work also in Ragnvald's alignment with St.Óláfr against the Swedish King Óláfr – he has inherited Óláfr Trygason's feud with the Swedish king through his wife Ingebjorg, Trygason's sister. And to get help in that when the conditions allow he sees it beneficial to ally with Swedish King's enemy – St.Óláfr. The process is in function in all the feuds in Óláfs Saga Helga. According to Byock this process is also the same as in the literary structures of the stories, but stems from the traditional social terms of the development of the feud and is not just a literary artistic process. The feud is levelled up on social ladder until it reaches the very top thus linking the individual feud Þátr into one complete saga. So we can see here a connection between the literary structures and the inner sociocultural workings of a feud.

We have now gone through the two main process elements of the feud: The insult (which will be dealt separately in Chapter 3. as it's the focus of this thesis) and the feud party change and also how the feud advances through the social levels so we have left the question of how does a feud end. Traditionally it has been thought that feud can end either by the destruction of one of the sides or to a settlement. When we look at the Óláfs Saga Helga looking for these two options for feud resolution we

136 OSH, Hollander 2005, pp. 357; C100.  
138 OSH, C117-176.  
139 OSH, C67.  
140 Byock 1982, pp.115.  
141 Byock 1984, passim.
can easily find both types, but a more in detail inspection of them reveals an interesting feature: it seems peaceful or mediated reconciliation to feuds are not permanent. The feud is rekindled by slightest opportunity or insult.

For example in the feud of the Earls of Orkney the feud is settled multiple times peacefully either by negotiations or by threat of force, but each time it resurfaces. First the third brother Brúsi intervenes and proposes a reconciliation by offering his portion of the lands for Einar to rule so he could give Thorfinn the contested portion – this calms the situation down, but does not resolve it as neither of feuders is really happy with it. Then when Thorfinn gains St.Óláfr's support he return to Orkneys and is more permanently reconciled with Einar who can't afford to feud with Thorfinn who now has the support of both the Scottish King and Norwegian one. But again the feud resurfaces because Einar gets killed and Brúsi now inherits his half of the feud. Even in the after word of the feud this happens – after St.Óláfr takes over the feud and forces both sides to submit all rights to him effectively removing the feud it does not end. As soon as they are out of his reach they rekindle it and Earl Brúsi ends up giving up most of his dominion given to him my St.Óláfr to Earl Thorfinn because he has gained such a over whelming power position and it only ends completely when Brúsi dies soon after the martyrdom of St.Óláfr.

This same can be seen in the feud of the two Óláfr's: The reconciliation forced upon the Swedish King Óláfr does not end the feud, but it continues almost directly with him just taking the forced mediation as an insult. That feud only ends after the Swedish King Óláfr has lost all of his power and is about to loose his life to the rebellion and has to submit. But maybe most clearly it's presented in the feud

OSH, C98.
OSH, C99.
OSH, C101-102.
OSH, C103.
OSH, C56-94.

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between St.Óláfr and Erlingr. These two have at it all through the Óláfs Saga Helga and even though both of them seem to try their best in order not to escalate the situation more than absolutely necessary and they are settled peacefully multitude of times either my mediation or by self advocacy of the participants. Just the sheer mistrust and the situation where both claim and wield similar power in over lapping areas keeps pushing them back in to active feud and exchange of insults that eventually spiral out of control to the point where in a final scene of attempted peaceful settlement a remnant of old already reconciled feud between them – Aslak – surfaces to finally kill Erlingr and end the feud:  

"Then said the king, "Wilt thou enter into my service, Erlingr?"

"That I will,"said he; took the helmet off his head, laid down his sword and shield, and went forward to the forecastle deck. The king struck him in the chin with the sharp point of his battle-axe, and said, "I shall mark thee as a traitor to thy sovereign."

Then Aslak Fitiaskalle rose up, and struck Erlingr in the head with an axe, so that it stood fast in his brain, and was instantly his death-wound. Thus Erlingr lost his life.

The king said to Aslak, "May all ill luck attend thee for that stroke; for thou hast struck Norway out of my hands."  

In the process of analysing the feud stories in the Óláfs Saga Helga it was found that there seems to be no feud where peaceful or mediated resolution to a feud would have been permanent. So we can safely claim that in Óláfs Saga Helga only the destruction of one of the sides of the feud actually seems to end it, but that raises a question about why is that.

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147 See for example: C60, C116, C120.
148 OSH, C176; see C116.
149 OSH, Hollander 2005, pp.467; C176.

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One of the main reasons for the fact that mediated resolutions fail in the saga is that the mediated reconciliation are almost always seen as an insult from the mediators side and thus including them in to one of the feud parties. It's no in the act of reconciliation itself that the problem lies when the feud does not stop to it. What keeps the feud evolving even after reconciliation is arbitrated or forced upon it is the insult that's implied by reconciling rather than winning the feud. By forcing or negotiating the involved parties to accept terms instead of victory or by forcing someone's power over their affair the reconciliation challenges the position and power, and thus honour of one or both of the sides of the feud. Thus in inflamed honour environment of the feuding the reconciliation is always seen rather as an insult than as an end point. Reconciliation might also be a simultaneous feud party change in the form that it might add the mediator(s) or enforcer as a new player in the feud because of the insult they caused by involving themselves in the reconciliation action. They can either join one of the sides of the feud against the other who feels more challenged/wronged in the reconciliation process or get included as new feud party against both parties involved. Later especially if they were enforcing the reconciliation by their superior position (honour). Good example of the last is St.Óláfr against Earls of Orkney. This whole process might be because of how Miller says: "In honour based societies people are more likely to be extraordinarily sensitive to anything that might be deemed a harm or an insult...". So the willingness of the parties to be insulted makes them interpret mediation and advocacy – whether forced or negotiated - as an insult.

Some of the feuds in Óláfs Saga Helga remain open through out the saga and no closure is offered, but the ones that end seem to always do it the same way. Swedish King Óláfr looses his power and allies and only remains in his social position in name. Erlingr gets axed to the head by Aslak. All the Earls of Orkney except for Thorfinn eventually die – either by violence or by natural means. Thorer Sel gets cut down and Ásbjorn Selsbane pierced by a spear. And other minor feuds leave also a trail of people

Miller 1993, pp.57.

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who've lost their property, their position or their life. And finally even the main character St.Óláfr has his feuds to end by very final solution of being martyred in battle.¹⁵¹ So this leads to the conclusion that in Óláfs Saga Helga the only ending to a feud is total annihilation of the other party – either by death, party changes or total loss of power/position. (Loss of power mostly happens through the two first means).

In conclusion there's two types of event elements found in the feud stories presented in Óláfs Saga Helga. They are insults and feud party changes. They are often interconnected and can cause one another or be considered as both depending on the point of view. The first one, insults is what always start the feud and drive it forward and the second ones are the feud party changes that are either power or composition changes and more of structural and action in nature. The feud party changes are the force that eventually solves the feud chain by either forcing it upwards the social ladder or ends it by robbing the other party of options to participate further (in case where they can't pass their cause up because of having nothing to offer or the right connections, or there is no-one higher to pass it on). The seems to be no permanent peaceful settlements for the feud in Óláfs Saga Helga. Settlement mediated, negotiated, self advocated or forced upon is always temporary in nature and the feud remains dormant under it and can be rekindled very easily. The only way feuds actually end in Óláfs Saga Helga is through the complete annihilation of one or both of the feud parties. This can Happen either through insults (killing, murder, robbery/raid) or by feud party changes (total loss of support, natural death of party involved, total loss of position/standing).

¹⁵¹ OSH, passim.
2. FEUD AND SOCIETY

2.2. Feud party.

In order to understand the social realities behind the feud and the culture they stem from we need to take more closer look into the structure of the feud party itself. How and why these groupings are formed tells us a lot about the structures of the society that form them. There is several different ways a feud party can be formed up. Most common bond between the members in family ties or kinship. St.Óláfr has the support from his mother and fosterfather, Ragnvald's wife is sister of Óláfr Trygvason, Ásbjorn is related to Erlingr and so on. Kinship does not mean automatic alliance though – often quite the contrary. The Earls of Orkneys feuding a bloody feud against each other are brothers, Swedish King Óláfr's very own daughters defy him by both joining St.Óláfr's feud party. In order for the kinship to from a feud party bond the participants have to share also some other measures – like common interests or enemies.

Also friendship or camaraderie was often a contextual relationship stemming from the feuds – shared circumstances or antipathies led men to band and bond together. Example of this is Thorkell Fosterfather's and Thorfinn's connection during the feud of the Earls of Orkney or Bjorn the Marshall and Hjalte the Icelander during the feud of the Óláfrs. Friendship bond is formed because the men share conditions, side and enemies. This leads us to the fact that “Enemy of my enemy is my friend” is a common rule in feuding especially if one has any additional connections to that potential friend such as kinship, alliance, vassalage. The ally seeking for the feud party could also take the form of brokerage where one party enlists a broker to act on their behalf in the feud in attempt to acquire support to maintain or claim their rights

OSH, passim.
OSH, passim.
Shaw 2005, pp.10.
OSH, C96-C103; C68-80.
See also: Roche 2010, pp.123. Similar conclusion in medieval English honour society.

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by promising their profits from the action or similar favour to this broker. The clear examples of this are when the smaller feuds get passed on to the king – when one party is overwhelmed and loosing the feud it seeks the support and ruling from the king in order to strengthen it's positions. This happens with the Earls of Orkney both of whom turn to St.Óláfr for support, it's also the case with Ásbjorn and Erlingr and with all the Earls disposed from Norway in the beginning of the saga by St.Óláfr when they run to the Danish or Swedish king for safety and support.

Other feud party bonds found in the Óláfs Saga Helga include agenting, favour seeking or information passing. They are all basically different strengths and forms of the same process. The weaker connections – information passing is well known in the Icelandic sagas about feud. Some passer by or traveller is given information on the feud to deliver either to the opponent or the other participants of the same feud party. This can be compensated with payment or favour especially if the task of delivering the message is crucial or dangerous. While this does exists in the Óláfs Saga Helga too there's also two other forms of the same process of getting an outsider involved in the feud party present in the sage that are not that commonly exhibited in the Icelandic sagas (but not unheard of). The first one of them is agenting where instead of just asking a person to deliver message for compensation that person is actually asked to be the representative of the feud party in the matter. What separates this from brokerage is that the person is not of higher standing or more powerful – he is not asked to mediate or rule on the matter. Rather he's asked to work as an agent of the feud party by doing things like doing trade, raids, clandestine meetings/negotiations, spying, spreading false information, travelling somewhere to rule on the feud party's behalf etc. In return he's promised positions (in court or war party etc.), higher social standing, favours, property or wealth, brokerage on the feuds he's involved in and so on. Some kind of compensation.

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157 Byock 1982, pp.74-75.
158 Byock 1982, pp.92-93.
A good example of this kind of ordeal is the role of Hjalte the Icelander in the feud between the two Óláfrs. He is an outsider and being an Icelandic traveller very welcome in most places around the Nordic cultural circle – thus making him an ideal agent to enter the Swedish court to pursue St.Óláfr's feud party's agenda there. He also has no recognisable ties to St.Óláfr's side making him appear non partial in the feud and thus less suspicious than for example a Norwegian would be. He recruited by Bjorn the Marshall who belongs into St.Óláfr's feud party by vassalage, friendship and other ties and proves to be a regular Medieval “James Bond” over the course of the feud.\textsuperscript{159}

A more spontaneous form of this is also presented in Óláfs Saga Helga when persons take actions on behalf of the feud party on their own initiative on the expectation to be rewarded for it. This happen for example in Chapter 66. where Eyvind hears of Swedish King Óláfr's man Thorgaut's attack on St.Óláfr's merchant agent Gudleik and takes revenge on Thorgaut on his own initiative on behalf of St.Óláfr.\textsuperscript{160} This agenting is very common through out the saga and is most probably because of the social surroundings of the events in saga – the fact that these feuds revolve around a king and governing a kingdom. There's simply too many things to do and consider for the direct members of the feud party so they have to seek for outside help from the social level below in order to be able to take care of the running matters of the feud and of the kingdom. In a way it's a matter of government and politics, but since the feud and the government seem intimately interconnected these state agents and representatives are treated more as a part of the feud party than as officials.

So a feud party is formed by a myriad of means including family, kinship, friendship, clientage, shared enemies, shared allies, brokerage, agenting, favour seeking and information passing. Feud party is thus an ever changing and wide spread social construct which can eventually pierce all social levels after it seeks support from

\textsuperscript{159} OSH, C68-80.

\textsuperscript{160} OSH, C66.

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above and below it's starting level. It's members can come and go and be more or less involved, but the common rule is – once you're in you can't get out of the feud. This variety in the roles and connections of people involved means that the whole society is or can be involved in the feuds.

2.3. The participants of a feud.

In Óláfs Saga Helga as in other saga literature the society and politics even the every day life for people is affected directly by the feuds and the social context and political units are defined by the changes in the feud parties. But why did these people choose to participate in such game of feuding – why choose any party or alliance. This is something we need to consider in order to learn about the past as Shaw says: "The main task of the historian is to understand how individual people in the past acted and why."¹⁶¹ We need to reach for the social and individual ideas that the people lived by their sociocultural context and thoughts in order to understand not only what they did but maybe why they did it.¹⁶²

A good place to start this search is the place where the individuals are clearly exhibited in the saga – the introductions that start the separate feud Pátrr as was explained in the Chapter 1.2 of this thesis. These are often seen as a simple introduction of characters and the relations declaring as away to tell the contemporaries who's being talked about. It can however been seen as a part of the "feud game". More than just to tell the readers who these people are it tells them their ranking in honour by relation, position, social ranking and wealth and also any honourful or dishonourfull things about them – all matters that define their level of

¹⁶¹ Shaw 2005, pp.3.
honour and thus their significance in the feud. Their relations and birth place also usually tell who's feud party they belong into and what feud they can be mixed with. Whom they can seeks support from or assume as their enemies in game of feuding. An especially clear example of this is at the start of maybe the most interesting feud storyline in the Óláfs Saga Helga in the Chapter 117 where both of the would be feuders Ásbjorn and Thorir Sel are introduced in this manner and in quite clear indication that their upcoming feud will set the embers of King Óláfr and Erlingr Skalgrimsons feud in to ablaze for sure.163

“There was a man named Sigurd Thoreson, a brother of Thorer Hund of Bjarkey Island. Sigurd was married to Sigrid Skjalg's daughter, a sister of Erling. Their son, called Asbjorn, became as he grew up a very able man. Sigurd dwelt at Omd in Thrandarnes, and was a very rich and respected man. He had not gone into the king's service; and Thorer in so far had attained higher dignity than his brother, that he was the king's lenderman. But at home, on his farm, Sigurd stood in no respect behind his brother splendour and magnificence. As long as heathenism prevailed, Sigurd usually had three sacrifices every year: one on winter-night's eve, one on mid-winter's eve, and the third in summer. Although he had adopted Christianity, he continued the same custom with his feasts: he had, namely, a great friendly entertainment at harvest time; a Yule feast inwinter, to which he invited many; the third feast he had about Easter, to which also he invited many guests. He continued this fashion as long as he lived. Sigurd died on a bed of sickness when Asbjorn was eighteen years old. He was the only heir of his father, and he followed his father's custom of holding three festivals every year.”

And,

“Up in the island Karmt there is a large farm, not far from the sea, and a large house upon it called Augvaldsnes, which was a king's house, with an excellent farm, which Thorer Sel, who was the king's bailiff, had under his management. Thorer was a man of low birth, but had swung himself up in the world as an active man; and he was polite in speech, showy in clothes, and fond of distinction, and not apt to give way

163 OSH, C117.
These introductions clearly exhibit their connections to the existing feud parties of St.Óláfr and Erlingr, but it also tells us why they would be keen to take action against each other in a feud of their own. Ásbjorn is using his inherited wealth and position to keep up social standing and to place his influence over his area. Where as Thorer is an active man of low birth who's carved his way up to be the king's bailiff – he needs to do his job well and has ambitions of gaining more social position for which he needs to act aggressively. They are both using the feud that's about to start as a tool to either keep up or gain social standing in their honour society. These are the two main reasons why anyone in the Óláfs Saga Helga gets involved in the feuding.

As for the original starters of a particular feud also for the people who get themselves connected to it it's mainly a matter of keeping or gaining social standing – honour. When the feud spoils to the pint where one of the sides is forced to seek help from the above it's usually the gains of wealth, followers, reputation and such that will draw these helpers from the higher social level into the feud. And for the ones that get involved against their will because of clientage, kinship etc. it's the need to keep up their standing. Since honour is gained in these dealings – it also needs to come from somewhere and that is the side loosing in the feud. So if you are unwillingly connected in a feud you can't just choose to ignore it and stay at status quo – the very act of ignorance will loose you honour and it will also make you loose followers, allies and possible help from above as these people deem you untrustworthy and come unsure if helping you is a good deal to them or if you are going to help them if they end up in the same situation as the feud party you're ignoring. In fact it seems you gain to loose more or all by ignoring a feud and only something by loosing it – unless of course it gets out of hand and you loose all.

OSH, Ibid.

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So if you participate in a feud you stand to keep or gain honour and standing in an honour society. This also applies to the other way: if you want to gain more honour and better standing you have to take part in feuds. So for the ambitious mighty men it's not just a deal of passively getting involved – it's the only way to climb up the social ladders. These men build their identities and standing on the fact that they feud. In his explanation of feuding in medieval England Saw describes his example story's two main feud participants Ferrour and Benet – two men of about equal standing, as follows:

"Ferrour and Benet..., part of the social identity of each man was constructed from his enmity towards the other." They used the law cases (insults in this form of feuding\textsuperscript{165}) to build up their social standing and social circles. In any dealing with them you had to choose which feud party you belonged to and thus become affiliated with even if you otherwise could have had no relationship to them.\textsuperscript{166}

Same applies to St.Óláfr and his enemies in Óláfs Saga Helga. If you deal with St.Óláfr you also have to take sides with his enemies and vice versa. Only very few in the saga manage to manoeuvre both sides and they are usually the most distanced ones from the societal connections – Icelandic skalds Like skald Sigvat who remains in good terms with both St.Olafr and Knut the Great despite dealing and befriending both sides. But he is protected by his position as “other” by being both Icelander and thus mostly outside the social structure and also by being a skald profession that was granted a special position as partially neutral. Other men that do not have these advantages can't remain in partial they have to take sides in the feuds if they are to deal at all with the kings, or the mighty men below the kings.

Also in order to become a great king with lots of influence and honour St.Óláfr needs to seek for feuds to partake in order to gain more honour. This is why he's keen on taking the feuds of the Earls of Orkneys to be his to mediate – it gives him a

\textsuperscript{165} My explanation.

\textsuperscript{166} Shaw 2005, pp.10.
possibility not only to gain some of the honour of the earls, but even to claim a right to their lands. Similarly as a king he's keen to rule over in the many lesser feud stories and to include one of the sides into his feud party. In medieval honour societies it's normal for Kings and earl to part take in the feud-game by disguising it as political action. He needs to not only solve matters of those under him in social standing, but also to seek to rob honour from those above or equal to him. This is clearly demonstrated in the fact that he disposes all the earls of the other kings from Norway – it's not only a matter of who's ruling, it's a matter of who has more honour. By exiling the earls and mutilating and capturing the Uppland kings St.Óláfr robs them of their honour and adds it or portions of it to his own. This is also why he starts actively feuding with the Swedish king and Knut the Great – if he'd just take the Swedish king's or Knut's initial proposals of vassalage he would keep his kingdom and wealth in about the same as it is – but what he would loose is honour and a chance to gain more of it. So as an ambitious man he has to take these challenges on which pays off very well for him in the first case with huge amounts of honour and stable allies gained in process of completely disposing the Swedish king and with out a direct military actions. So why all these feuds connect to St.Óláfr is that he in fact needs them in order to play his political game. What Saw says about Ferrour also applies to St.Óláfr:

"He was the man in everyone else's business and this both reflected and sustained his social self." and "such men converted their honour and trustworthiness into political power by acting as the useful intermediaries between lesser men."

This also applies to most of the other willing players in these feuds and of course the unwilling ones are there because of the circumstances to prevent themselves from loosing it all. In the absence of fixed power relations in such and honour society it was possible, normal or even mandatory to negotiate one's social and political position through feuding.

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167 Roche 2010, pp. 133.
168 Shaw 2005, pp.11.
169 Shaw 2005, pp.11.
170 Wickham 2001, pp.79.

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Even though the main reasons for getting involved in feuds are the keeping and gaining of social standing through honour gained and lost in the feud in society wholly immersed in the feuding there's of course other reason too. One of these is goading or social pressure of which the most common saga example is “malevolent women urging brave to feud”\textsuperscript{171} or more politely put the social pressure from those members of the feud party that cannot themselves directly partake in the actions of insulting.\textsuperscript{172} There's several examples of this also in Óláfs Saga Helga as can be expected. The clearest ones in the feud of Ásbjorn and Thorer. Where first Ásbjorn is mocked and goaded into avenging the insult he suffered from Thorer Sel by his uncle Thorer Hund and then after Ásbjorn's death Thorer Hund himself in goaded to avenge Ásbjorn by latter's mother.\textsuperscript{173} This can be seen as a circle of malign emotions one goading causes significant enough social pressure to force the next insult action in the feud chain which in return leads to the next goading. They need to do something to save their face – loosing ones face can be more damaging honour wise than risking the action of insult in an honour society.\textsuperscript{174} This social pressure can lead weaker willed participants or participants who'd otherwise have more to loose than to gain by participating to take actions in feud. They need to do something in order to safe their face in front of their own feud group.

Another reason to partake in feud can be the will to inherit the possessions and/or position of the someone by introducing oneself as someone's avenger in an honour society the avenger stand to inherit that person: his position, standing and especially his honour and on the flip side of the coin – his feud(s) and the enemies that come with them.\textsuperscript{175} This kind of situation is present in Óláfs Saga Helga for example in the feud of the earls of Orkney when Earl Brúsi declares his inheritance of his late brother Einar. With Einar's dominion and honour he also inherits Einar's feud with Thorfinn

\textsuperscript{171} Roche 2010, pp.125.
\textsuperscript{172} Roche 2010, pp.125; Byock 1982, pp. 94-97.
\textsuperscript{173} OSH, C117, C123.
\textsuperscript{174} Roche 2010, pp.124-125.
\textsuperscript{175} Roche 2010, pp. 128, pp.132.
and all it's consequences.176

So the people in the saga's society get involved in the feuds because they either want to gain or keep social standing and honour. Or they have to because they need to deal with someone actively involved in feud. They can also be goaded to partake by social pressures of the honour society or they want to, or have to, inherit someone related to them and the feud comes as part of the inheritance. It's also note worthy that participation in feuding is the only way to change social standing and gain power in an honour society so any politically active or otherwise ambitious persons need to actively seek to be involved in feuding not only with people below them, but also above in the social ladder.

2.4. Feud, politics and structures of society.

In Óláfs Saga Helga the feud driven honour society seems to involve everyone from humble farmers to mighty men, nobility, King Óláfr and even King Knut. These people obviously play on different levels of the honour society, but they are belong to the same structure as their feuds when evolving will go upwards in levels. This is also true with other feud societies – As Shaw puts it about the medieval England: "...Orderic understands his world as a vengeance (feud) society, where even God feuds."177 So if even the God can be seen feuding in medieval honour society it's no wonder king is immersed in the feud. He's not exempt from the game of honour, on the contrary he the hub around whom the feuds circle – he might be the most powerful individual player on the field still has to play. And when other kings get involved he's

176 OSH, C99.
177 Roche 2010, pp. 131.
affected in the same manner as the lower ranking people are. In a matter of fact it could be said the king is more immersed in the feuding than most of the high ranking people. Since he doesn't have the option not to participate when all feuds coming up the social ladder eventually end up under his feud party or against it just as all the people are under his rule or against it.

Even though he is the main character of the saga, it seem the one with most honour in Óláfs Saga Helga is surprisingly not St.Óláfr but king Knut of Denmark – he's the only one on the top level of feud pyramid and even if St.Óláfr does challenge Knut he's not playing at the same level but on the one below with earls and such mighty nobility. This level difference makes St.Óláfr's challenge of Knut even bigger insult. But their level difference also means Knut cannot really loose much honour by ignoring St.Óláfr – or at least he'll loose less than he would by confronting and loosing against him. So it gives Knut an advantage – he can play time and gather forces for the game. And that is exactly what we see him doing in the Óláfs Saga Helga – for the most part of the saga he is a shadowy after though – someone whom to go to after you loose all against St.Óláfr. He keeps collecting his supporters and vassals from the earls and other mighty men that escape the tumults of St.Óláfr's rise to power and his dealings with the Swedish king and internal enemies.¹⁷⁸

There is little or no separation in St.Óláfr saga between politics and feuding or warfare. From the first glance it might seem that lot of battles are not considered insults and are unconnected with feuds, but when you take a closer look to the nature of honour you soon realize that's not the case. Any attack or victory in battle is to be considered as an insult as they all increase or diminish the participating parties' honour. For example the mentions of St.Óláfr's battles in the start of the saga ¹⁷⁹ can easily be seen as non honour related explanation of St.Óláfr's youth, but when we count in the fact that this part is the introduction of the main player of the central story

¹⁷⁸ OSH, passim.
¹⁷⁹ OSH, C1-29.

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line or “feud þáettir” in the saga - the main story of St.Óláfr – we can easily see that these are told to tell why St.Óláfr has as much honour as he does. They are told because they increase his honour and thus in away they are insults – it's just that the party on who's expense the honour in them is gained does not matter for this particular story line, but as the honour inherits from feud to another the victories still matter. Also when King Óláfr outsmarts the Swedish King Óláfr by escaping his military entrapment, this advances St.Óláfr's honour relative to Swedish King Óláfr and is thus an insult against him and adds to the feud between the two Óláfs.¹⁸⁰ This same pattern is visible with all the battles mentioned in the saga. They all affect the honour of the participants and change their feud party affiliations, social standing and relative strengths in the on going feuds between the participating feud parties – thus they should all be considered as insults as to what comes to the story structure and to the sociocultural patterns of feuding.

In away the feud structured society can even be seen as a from of “feudalism”. In traditional feudalism need for specialised military service leads to the dependence system where the lower ones serve and submit to the higher up and in return receive favour and protection.¹⁸¹ In feud based honour society people entered relationships of dependence with their more powerful piers when the feud escalation leads to the point where it needs to be passed to the next social level in order not to loose it. So the brokerage process lead to a situation where in order to get help the lower levels of society need to submit at least partially to the higher ups and in return they receive help in the feud, favours and protection from their feud enemies. This makes me to agree with Reynolds in his argument that the medieval secular government depended as much on honour (as he calls it “respect”) than of legitimation or use of physical force.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ OSH, C7.
¹⁸¹ Halsall 1998, pp.4-6
¹⁸² Reynolds 2007, pp.22.
Feuding is often seen as destructive force attacking the social structures from outside and causing unbalance and disruption to otherwise peaceful living. This however is a modern view of the thing from the standpoint of a legislated society with stable social system and fixed power structures. In an honour society where such institutions are missing feud is not necessarily a destructive power and for sure it's not an outside power – it's an in build part of the social structures as we can see in Chapter 2.3. In honour society the process of feud can be seen as a form of a gift exchange. The participants of the feud trade with each other either insults that are gifts of negative value or participation that is a gift of positive value. As was explained in the theory section of this thesis the norms of culture are its accepted ways of behaviour. Conforming to these norms is considered "good" → acceptable → honourable. In an honour society the social standing of a person or group is defined by their honour. So honour constitutes the proper ordering of social relations. And the feud is the proper way of dealing with actual or perceived imbalance of this honour. The feud starts when there's imbalance of honour in the social structure or when the starting participants at least perceive that such an imbalance exists and seek to rectify it by making the starting insult. After that as we've seen the exchange continues in form of feud until balance is achieved and often spirals out of the control of the feud parties. The process of exchanging insults in feuding aims to keep the balance of honour. Goal of feud resolution is social stability rather than justice for victim(s) – the goal is attempted acceptable balance of honour. When this ideal balance of honour is never achieved, because of the nature of the sensitive honour culture or the fact that the imbalance never existed in first place, the actual process of trying to achieve the balance – feud – becomes the balance itself – the existing cultural norm in honour society. So rather than being an outside and destructive force towards the social structure the feud is the social structure of honour society. This is something an

183 Wickham 2001, pp.79.
184 Miller 1993, pp.16-18.
185 Shav 2005, pp.7.
187 Roche 2010, pp.123.
188 Byock 1984 passim.
individual living in such society have to take in consideration at all times. As Byock says:

"The heavy burden thus placed upon the individual was perhaps one reason for the intense interest displayed by sagamen in detailing resolutions both in and out of court. In saga literature precedents are called upon; methods of dealing with ójafnaðarmenn and other dangerous characters are offered; guidelines for the behaviour of successful middlemen abound; means of settlement are outlined; and ways of establishing and maintaining ties of reciprocity are described. ...not of fact but of form, which existed between the sagas and the society that produced them."  

The saga feuds – even if not historical fast can be seen as a window into the forms of the society that produced them. So even if these feud parties never existed – they can be seen as models of what did. It also tells us that the saga is written by someone who understands both politics and social order to be honour centred and feud driven. Someone who lives in fully immersive honour culture.

In Óláfs Saga Helga the king is not only involved in the feuding, but the feud is the way through which he rules. He's also the final focus point for all feud chains. Surprisingly the highest player in the game of feud in Óláfs Saga Helga is not St. Óláfr but the Danish king Knut the Great. Even warfare is handled as an element of the honour exchange and feuding. And it can even be interpreted that the process through which the feud advances causes the society form linkage of dependence similar to the Central European medieval feudalism. In the society of Óláfs Saga Helga feud is not an exception to the norm or destructive force, but the actual structure of the social reality the force that form and hold the society together. So the saga is obviously written by someone who sees his social reality as a fully immersive honour culture.

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189 Byock 1984, pp.86.

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3. INSULTS

Last, but not least we get to the main focus point of this thesis research – the insult. After going through the literary structures of Óláfs Saga Helga and the structures and processes of feud and its sociocultural connections it's time to take a look at the one element in common in all of this – the driving force of the feud, the action driving the story structures forward and directly interacting with the social balance of honour. It should be quite clear by now with all the hints and mentions of insults throughout the previous two chapters that the insult is something very central both in the process of feud itself and in the literary structures of the saga based on it as well as in the nature of the honour society that produced these. This Chapter is build back and forth in comparison to the overall structure of this thesis and the previous two Chapters; I'm going to go from details to general.

In the first sub chapter I'm going to go through the different types of the insult found in Óláfs Saga Helga and explain them through examples from the source. There's some interesting finds through this and understanding the nature of the insults is necessary for understanding their roles in the feud, society and story. Second Chapter will deal with the theory of honour exchange and the role of the insults in the society and the third chapter will return to the insult as an element in the structure of a feud and through that as a literary tool.
3.1. Types of Insults

There's a huge multitude of individual insults in the Óláfs Saga Helga. The first hundred chapters of the saga alone have around 50 different insults of varying form and severity and the rest of the saga has by no means less of them – this means an average of an insult in every other chapter of the saga. From what looks like mundane child's mockery when St.Óláfr in his youth saddles a he goat instead of a horse for his fosterfather Sigurd Syr to murders of tax collectors and merchants in the feud between the St.Óláfr and the Swedish king Óláfr. There is verbal insults between St.Óláfr and Swedish King's emissary as well as so odd things as insult by marrying one's daughter to different man than promised as is the case when Swedish King Óláfr marries his daughter Ingegerd to the Russian king instead of St.Olafr as promised. There's insult by claiming heritage, by robbery, military action and by simply having enough power and standing to challenge someone. So how are this things to be classified and understood so that they can be analysed.

At first glance many of the insults in Óláfs Saga Helga seem random and non connected, but once you see the feud structure as a whole in the story it becomes clear that there is nothing random in them as far as the story is considered they either bring forth the feud chains in the story or are used to further the feud by including new people into the feuds. The first type of these are easy to define and find – it's what most people think when they hear about an insult. Something that mocks the other

OSH, passim.

I chose to deal in the quantifying measures with the first 100 Chapters of the saga as it seems to give a good presentation of the whole saga. Is easily understandable amount percentage wise and simply because all the individual insults in the saga's 251 Chapters are too burdensome and unnecessary for the purpose of this work to count accurately.

OSH, C2.
OSH, C59, C91.
OSH, C59-66.
OSH, C7, C30, C66, C97, C116 etc.
side, robs him of honour and tells him you are better. Something that demands a slap back unless you want to loose your face. They are also the most numerous in the Óláfs Saga Helga. From the 50 insults in the first 100 chapters around 40 are these kind of “traditional insults. These are the insults between different feud parties. Clear examples can be found for example in the start of the feud between the two Óláfrs where the kings trade these both verbally and by action. First St.Óláfr start by disposing Swedish King's earl from Norway. Soon the situation evolves into tit-for-tat exchange that starts with the Swedish king sending his tax collector into Norway and thus insulting St.Óláfr's position as a ruler over these lands, then we'll get a verbal insult when the tax collectors come to front the St.Olafr with their matter and he refuses their right to collect taxes:

“The same winter (A.D. 1016) came messengers from the Swedish king, Olaf the Swede, out of Svithjod: and their leaders were two brothers, Thorgaut Skarde and Asgaut the bailiff... ...Then says Asgaut. "It is not wonderful that thou art called Olaf the Thick, seeing thou answerest so haughtily to such a prince's message, and canst not see clearly how heavy the king's wrath will be for thee to support, as many have experienced who had greater strength than thou appearest to have. But if thou wishest to keep hold of thy kingdom, it will be best for thee to come to the king, and be his man; and we shall beg him to give thee this kingdom in fief under him."

All the signs of insult in this verbal one are clear to see: He insults St.Óláfr's intelligence, his ability to act and power and then he challenges his position by telling him he' would even need help and Swedish kings mercy to even submit to him. After this St.Olafr still answers peacefully and advices Asgaut to leave Norway in order to keep peace, but then the things escalate as Asgaut goes on in his business of tax collecting and thus insults St.Olafr again who retaliates with counter insult – he hangs Asgaut. After this follows a series of murders and robberies of representatives of both sides – very traditional insults. These insults also include the insult of mediation handled in Chapter 2.1. The act of forcing or negotiating the feud sides to reconcile

OSH, Hollander 2005, pp.291; C59.
OSH, C59-66.
acts as an insult towards the side who looses more in the process. Like in the matter of the bondes and Ragnvald forcing the Swedish king Óláfr to make peace with St.Óláfr. It's even said in the saga that this process makes Swedish King Óláfr angry at the mediators. And it's clear form the out come that after this for sure – if not before the bondes are to be considered to belong to the feud party of St.Óláfr in this feud as they mutiny against their own king. These kind of insults are very common through out the Óláfs Saga Helga and are always dealt between the feuding parties in question.

On first impression when going through Óláfs Saga Helga there is a lot of minor insults or threats of insults that were not considered that big of a deal by the characters receiving them, but after realisation that the characters these are dealt to – often by family members or friends of some kind – come parts of the feud parties after them or increased in role in the feud, these don't look like so pointless playful minor things or just random social interaction. They serve similar purpose as the more traditional and serious looking insults between feud parties – they are there to drive the feud onwards. They come in quite a variety of types not dissimilar to the previously explained insult type.

They are basically either there to establish standing within the feud group, question if person is going to participate in the feud or his loyalty, or to set him in position where he in order not to escalate the situation has to partake in the bigger feud, or to simply goad him into taking action in the feud. The childish insult of St.Olafr towards his fosterfather Sigurd Syr is an example of the first type of these. By asking St.Olafr to perform servant's tasks for him – saddling a horse - Sigurd Syr insults St.Óláfr's honour as an ambitious man of royal blood. And St.Óláfr reminds Sigurd Syr about their social standing order by saddling a he-goat instead. Which actually isn't as innocent insult as it seems to modern viewer in any case, as the action

OSH, C88.

OSH, C2.
is in fact a níð – insult on Sigurd Syr's manhood – goats are animals women take care of so riding a he-goat would make Sigurd Syr feminine. Other examples of these “minor” insults include the favour gaining by insulting the enemy of the feud party to want to be in good terms with which is exactly what Hjalte does with Swedish Kings Óláfr when he tell this he did not pay his arrival taxes to St.Óláfr, but instead brought them to the Swedish king thus insulting St.Óláfr – Swedish King's feud enemy (although there is no real insult as he's actually St.Óláfr's agent and only faking the insult in order to gain trust.)

One where an outsider is included into the feud group with insult is St.Óláfr's jesting with Thorarin:

“The king saw that Thorarin had stretched out one of his feet from under the bed-clothes, and he looked at the foot a while. In the meantime the others in the lodging awoke; and the king said to Thorarin, "I have been awake for a while, and have seen a sight which was worth seeing; and that is a man's foot so ugly that I do not think an uglier can be found in this merchant town." Thereupon he told the others to look at it, and see if it was not so; and all agreed with the king. When Thorarin observed what they were talking about, he said, "There are few things for which you cannot find a match, and that may be the case here." The king says, "I would rather say that such another ugly foot cannot be found in the town, and I would lay any wager upon it." Then said Thorarin, "I am willing to bet that I shall find an uglier foot still in the town." The king "Then he who wins shall have the right to get any demand from the other he chooses to make.""Be it so," said Thorarin. Thereupon he stretches out his other foot from under the bed-clothes, and it was in no way handsomer than the other, and moreover, wanted the little toe. "There," said Thorarin, "see now, king, my other foot, which is so much uglier; and, besides, has no little toe. Now I have won." The king replies, "That other foot was so much uglier than this one by having five ugly toes upon it, and this has only four; and now I have won the choice of asking something from thee.""The sovereign's decision must be right," says Thorarin; "but what does the king require of me?" "To take Hrorek," said the king, "to Greenland, and deliver him to Leif Eirikson."
This very humorous exchange could be just a playful mockery between friends, but the end of the conversation proves it to be much more. St.Óláfr insults Thorarin in order to get him in position where he has to give promise of service and partake in the feud between St.Óláfr and the Uppland King Hrorek.

Questioning the intentions of the member of feud party happens for example when Swedish King Óláfr's daughter Ingegerd flaunts verbally St.Óláfr's achievement with the Uppland kings on his fathers face to gain knowledge whether or not this is going to keep his end of the peace settlement and marry her to St.Óláfr.\(^{201}\) Or when Ásbjorn asks Erlingr if he's not a mighty freeman when he cannot sell him grain against St.Óláfr's orders.\(^{202}\) Great example of goading insult of very classical saga style can be found later on in the same feud when after Ásbjorn's dead his mother hives her brother, Ásbjorn's uncle, the spear that killed Ásbjorn:

“...before they parted she said, "It has so fallen out, Thorer, that my son has suffered by thy friendly counsel, but he did not retain life to reward thee for it; but although I have not his ability yet will I show my good will. Here is a gift I give thee, which I expect thou wilt use. Here is the spear which went through Asbjorn my son, and there is still blood upon it, to remind thee that it fits the wound thou hast seen on the corpse of thy brother's son Asbjorn. It would be a manly deed, if thou shouldst throw this spear from thy hand so that it stood in Olaf's breast; and this I can tell thee, that thou wilt be named coward in every man's mouth, if thou dost not avenge Asbjorn." Thereupon she turned about, and went her way. Thorer was so enraged at her words that he could not speak. He neither thought of casting the spear from him, nor took notice of the gangway...”\(^{203}\)

The insult is neither taken slightly nor does it lead anything, but what's intended Thorer takes action in the feud. What is note worthy in this case and separates it from the normal insults is that to avenge the insult Thorer does not take action against

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\(^{201}\) OSH, C89.

\(^{202}\) OSH, C117.

\(^{203}\) OSH, Hollander 2005, pp.393; C123.

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insulter herself, but instead the opposing feud group – so it's not a insult between two people in feud, but rather an intergroup reminder of actions expected from a member. As can be seen from these examples these insults are in no way minor or dismissed they are used as a way of communicating will of others over these characters – including them in the feud party and it's actions.

This leads to a conclusion that there is basically two types of insulting in Óláfs Saga Helga, they differ in their intent and target, but not in their basic nature as driving actions in the feud. The first group is aimed at the feud enemy intends to change the situation by robbing the other party from honour; the second group is aimed at members of own feud party or prospective members form outside and it intends to goad them into joining, check their loyalty or to act in the feud. I've classified these insult types as:

- **Exclusive insults:** They are the tit-for-tat insults that are commonly connected with the idea of feuding that drives the feud onward. They vary from verbal mockery to robbery, murder and war actions, but are often more severe than the insults in the second group. They are the backbone of the feuds. The method used to advance the feud chains and get either closer to victory of defeat. Their sole aim is to transfer honour from the recipient to the perpetrator.

- **Inclusive insults:** These are most often verbal insults or reminders of insults dealt by others. They are jests, actions and reminders that are used to include characters into the feud party. Reminding them that they have to take part or are in threat to be seriously insulted and ending up as enemies – loosing honour and status. They are used to include characters into feud groups, tell them they need to take more central/active role in the feud or as questions to help decide which side of the feud grouping is more beneficial to the party dealing the inclusive insult. They serve as a driving force in side the feud party in quite the same manner as the first group of insults works between the different feud parties.
So how does insult exactly trade honour - what is the process through which the honour exchange is processed. This can be easiest understood with help of anthropological gift theory: if we see insults as form of gifts given in the social interactions it's easy to see how trading them deals with the honour balance. As Miller puts it ’Insults and injuries were understood to be gifts, of negative moral value to be sure, but gifts none the less, and as such they demanded repayment.”204 (By giving a gift) you put the person to the trouble of having to make return. And most important, you reduced the other person's status relative to you. Thus gift so costly that it could never be adequately repaid had the capacity to shame the recipient in the same way that someone was shamed by an insult that he was unable to avenge properly. A gift not costly enough might harbour an insult as to the recipient's status or his capacity to repay.205

So when St.Olafr disposes the earls that have ruled Norway under the vassalage of the Swedish king he deal him a gift of negative value and at the same time he gains honour to him by being able to deal a “gift” so costly the Swedish king is unable to repay it immediately.206 When this is continued exchange after exchange in the same feud – St.Óláfr always retaliating with an insult more severe that he was dealt to - it's easy to understand why the honour balance tips so much into his favour that first outsider flock to his party, then people under the influence of the opposing party with any ties to him and finally even the Swedish bondes and lords who otherwise would be at the core of the opposing feud party.

204 Miller 1993, pp.16.
205 Miller 1993, pp.17-18.
206 OSH, C56-94.
This way of seeing the insult process explains why the insult drives the feud onwards and why the insults cause the feud party changes, the sifting balance of honour makes one of the sides more honourable and thus more likely to gain supporters as it can offer them higher honour status by association and more peaceful sociocultural situation as it has more stability and can offer more protection against other parties since it has more from which to from loose if needed.

Insults very often need to be conversed within the feud group and/or need public opinion of them in order to either at all become insults or to assess their seriousness. Public opinion – can also make them worse – fama – or word of mouth matters a lot in a society with limited communication possibilities. There is no objective offence, but rather process of the social assessment of particular acts. Some regarded as meaningless, others become rated as insults. Honour in order to exist needs public judgement.

This is visible in Óláfs Saga Helga in many instances. After the Swedish King Óláfr doesn't show up to the meeting to conclude the marriage matter between his daughter and St.Olafr it's told in the saga that St.Óláfr counsels with his men to decide who exactly has insulted them in the matter – the Swedes as a kingdom/nationality since they mediated the deal, or just the king. It's the public opinions of his men that decides how his feud party will handle the matter – seek more support from the Swedish allies and bondes against the Swedish King or to attack Sweden collectively for counter insult – they come to the first opinion. Very similarly when Ásbjorn returns from his failed trip to the south being robbed of his cargo of grains and sail it's not so much the seriousness of the insult itself that makes him loose honour, but the fact that since without the grain he can't hold the feasts customary public talk about the

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207 Fama 2003, passim.
208 Roche 2010, pp. 128.
209 The anthropology of Violence pp.43.
210 OSH, C90.
incident escalates and the insult is defined as dire. And the final tipping point is his uncle Thorer Hund goading him with inclusive insult at his feast by calling him coward for not taking action in the matter.\textsuperscript{211} And in the same manner what makes Ásbjorn revenge the insult very rashly and unwise by killing Thorer Sel in front of the St.Óláfr at feast is the fact that, Thorer is reciting story about his insult publicly and getting approval from the crowd to the fact that Ásbjorn acted cowardly in the matter.\textsuperscript{212}

“It was getting late in the evening, and Asbjorn heard people ask Thorer what had taken place between him and Asbjorn; and Thorer had a long story about it, in which he evidently departed from the truth. Among other things he heard a man say, "How did Asbjorn behave when you discharged his vessel?" Thorer replied, "When we were taking out the cargo he bore it tolerably, but not well; and when we took the sail from him he wept." When Asbjorn heard this he suddenly drew his sword, rushed into the hall, and cut at Thorer. The stroke took him in the neck, so that the head fell upon the table before the king, and the body at his feet, and the table-cloth was soiled with blood from top to bottom. “\textsuperscript{213}

Insults only have meaning in social context – honour and status can only be gained or lost in public theatre you can only have honour if someone knows about it. Also the proper actions to follow after being insulted are very much dependant of the inter feud group conversations about the insult.

Insults can be seen as gifts of negative value. They cost the recipient honour and not being able to repay them in full causes them shame that will cost even more of it. The shift in the balance of honour between the feud parties causes the other one to gain strength, allies and favours where as the loss of honour will diminish the possibilities for the loosing side. Honour in order to exist needs public recognisances as it's not something physical that would be visible for new observers as such – it

\textsuperscript{211} OSH, C117.
\textsuperscript{212} OSH, C118.
\textsuperscript{213} OSH, Hollander 2005, pp.382; C118.

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needs to talked about and the information about it needs to be spread for it to affect the social reality of the society. For that reason also the insults that are trades of that invisible honour need to be witnesses, negotiated and judged in the public forums of the sociocultural interaction.

3.3. Insult and the story

Insults are always connected to feuds. They are the action in them. Dealing insults causes the feuds to advance and the feud parties to change and evolve the feuds onwards. This same applies from the social context of feud into the literary structures as has been shown before. If we take a broader look on the insults and the balance of honour affecting the storylines in this manner we can see a different view to the literary structures outlined in the Chapter 1.

Insults dealt in another feud can matter in another. Feud party's honour and status are something that will be gathered and lost in all feuds they are involved in – not just in the specific one the opponent is concerned in. So this trade of honour gifts is a continuous social process in the honour society – not just feud by feud exchange. This evident in the way St.Óláfr's win against Uppland Kings gives him honour that matters in his feud with Swedish Óláfr:

“One morning early the king rode out with his dogs and falcons, and his men around him. When they let slip the falcons the king's falcon killed two black-cocks in one flight, and three in another. The dogs ran and brought the birds when they had fallen to the ground. The king ran after them, took the game from them himself, was delighted with his sport, and said, "It will be long before the most of you have such success."...
"Do you know of any king," said he, "who made so great a capture in so short a time?"

"It is indeed," replied she, "a good morning's hunting, to have got five black-cocks; but it was a still better when, in one morning, the king of Norway, Olaf, took five kings, and subdued all their kingdoms."  

Based on this is evident that in that in the Óláfs Saga Helga the honour sum up of St.Óláfr's from the different feud stories should be seen as a combination. He keeps collecting and loosing honour with insults through out the whole saga – not just Þáttr by Þáttr bases. This is also evident by the fact that after he looses honour in dealings with Erlingr when he has to submit because Erlingr's bigger following and give up in his revenge to Ásbjorn for killing Thorer Sel, he keeps running into trouble with his own subjects when the heathen bondes challenge him for conversion attempt and then Einar Tambaskelfer decides to go meet with king Knut of Denmark. He has lost honour and that lowers his standing so that others dare to challenge his rule too.

If we see the whole saga in this light and as a collection of feuds of St.Óláfr like it's been defined earlier in this work we can see it as a counting of the honour status of St.Óláfr. First he gains honour with his background and exploits in youth and adds to that with his insult victories over the earls who are ruling the Norway and Uppland Kings, the he reaches a peak in his honour with his feud victory over the Swedish King Óláfr. After that he falls into to the folly of most Icelandic saga heroes, he gets greedy and unfair, he robs the Earls of Orkney of their paternal possessions and while he does still gain honour it's evident that he's getting greedy. After that he reaches for more honour by starting feuds with the Faroes and Iceland – in both of which he's eventually out played and gains nothing – and as gaining nothing means loosing in insult exchange of honour – this is the start of his downfall. Then he starts getting more and more challenged by the only remaining domestic opponent Erlingr and because his

214 OSH, Hollander 2005, pp.333; C89.
215 OSH, C120-122.
failure to realise the importance of the smaller feuds the situation escalates and he keeps loosing more and more honour through Erlingr's side's insults until he's so weakened that King Knut the Great sees his opportunity and sends his ultimatum after which St.Óláfr's honour collapses because of him being unable to keep building it with the gift exchange of insults in successful feuds – as there is no such feuds going on for him. And so his kingdom comes down and he's forced into exile. Seen like this we can say that Ólaf's Saga Helga is *a story of the kingdom built on honour*. 

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The aim of this master's thesis research is to explore the descriptions of feud and insult in the Óláfs Saga Helga and then to try to tell something about their sociocultural context and the mentalité of the people who produced it. In practice this has been done through first looking at the text as a literary composition and through case studies to define literary structures and patterns. Then comparing and connecting these structures and patterns to the sociocultural backgrounds of the authors' society and seeking out hints about the social realities behind the textual cover. Lastly the concept of insult has been theorised with the help of the presentations of it in the saga and then this theory has is connected to those sociocultural connections and patterns found earlier.

Chapter 1. deals with literary structures of the Óláfs Saga Helga. It's the philological part of this thesis even though there's also lot of methods and some comparison materials from historical anthropology in it.

In Chapter 1.1. the case study proves, that while it might seem otherwise at first glance, Óláfs Saga Helga has the same individual Þátr construction that is common to Icelandic saga literature even though it is a King Saga and commonly considered more Norwegian than Icelandic in nature. The story in the Þátr and its setting conditions are more complex than in the Byock's example of the model it's compared to, but the same abstract patterns of feud centred Þátr construction can still be found from it. The whole story is built around a feud – not around the king, politics or other topics.

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In Chapter 1.2, it's suggested that the individual Þættir in Óláfs Saga Helga can be recognised and found by looking for introductions of new characters. This, more often than not, marks a start of a new storyline and a new feud or a new episode in an old feud - and thus a new Þáttr. It is not, however, a fool proof method, nor is it as simple to implement as it would seem at first glance. The stories are often interrupted and divided into many sections and many of them are intimately interwoven so that they might seem like a continuation of each other rather than individual Þættir.

In Chapter 1.3, it is been shown that the Þættir in Óláfs Saga Helga follow the common feud structures of the Icelandic sagas as outlined by Byock as the whole saga is build around the feuds. The storylines of Óláfs Saga Helga are composed of lower and higher level Þáttr stories that are either interlinking into the main story or are part of it to begin with. Thus the whole of Óláfs Saga Helga is a story about feud(s).

So in Chapter 1, we learn that it can be said that Óláfs Saga Helga follows the Icelandic saga construction models from individual small stories throughout all composition of the saga. From this it can be concluded that Óláfs Saga Helga most likely is a product of the Icelandic saga literature and not in any major way more Norwegian product. It also comes clear that the whole of the saga is about feuds of the St.Óláfr. This is very relevant in retrospect to the following chapters.

In addition we get a useful tool for finding and separating the individual Þáttr from the text.
Chapter 2. of the thesis deals with the relationship between the feud and the society. In it the structures and processes of the feud itself are examined not as literary structures, but as sociocultural constructs. Based on the theory of historical anthropology that all text intended to be used by a society in any factual manner – like as their view of their own history in this case – has to be understandable to its author and audience and thus has to reflect at least some of their views of the prevailing social reality. So it can be assumed that the sociocultural constructs of feud in the text for at least some part reflect the mentalité of the 13th century Norse social elite on feud and insult.

In Chapter 2.1. it's analysed that there are two types of event elements found in the feud stories presented in Óláfs Saga Helga. They are insults and feud party changes which are often inter connected and can cause one another or be considered as both depending on the point of view. The first is insults which always start the feud and drive it forward and the second are the feud party changes. They are either power or composition changes of the feuding group and are more structural than active in nature. It's shown that the feud party changes are the force that eventually solves the feud chain by either forcing it up the social ladder or by ending it by robbing one of the participating parties out of options to participate further. It's also discovered that there seems to be no permanent “peaceful” settlements for the feud in Óláfs Saga Helga. Settlement mediated, negotiated, self advocated or forced upon is always temporary in nature and the feud remains dormant and can be rekindled very easily. The only way feuds actually end in Óláfs Saga Helga is through the complete annihilation of one or both of the feud parties. This can happen either through insults (killing, murder, robbery/raid) or by feud party changes (total loss of support, natural death of party involved, total loss of position/standing). Latter of which is the more common way.

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Chapter 2.2. deals with the social composition of the feud party itself. How it is formed and what kind of social relations cause the people to band together for purposes of feud. It becomes evident that the feud party is formed by a myriad of means of selection of social connections including family, kinship, friendship, clientage, shared enemies, shared allies, brokerage, agenting, favour seeking and information passing. Feud party is thus an ever changing and wide spread social construct which can eventually pierce all social levels after it seeks support from above and below it's starting level. It's members can come and go and be more or less involved. This variety in the roles and connections of people involved means that the whole society is or can be involved in the feuds.

Also it's pointed out that Óláfs Saga Helga has a form of connection called agenting that's at least not common in saga literature. In which a socially lower level person is recruited to actively present the higher level feuder not as a mediator but as feud agent mostly dealing with delivering insults and instigating feud party changes.

Chapter 2.3. deals with the reasons and motives for the people as individuals to participate in feuding. The main reason for the people in the saga's society to get involved in the feuds is because they either want to gain or keep social standing and honour. The secondary reason is that they might have to get involved with the feud in normal social interactions, because they need to deal with someone actively involved in a feud. Or they might be goaded to partake by social pressures of the honour society or the feud comes as a part of an inheritance. It's also note worthy that participation in feuding is the only way to change social standing and gain power in an honour society so any politically active or otherwise ambitious persons need to actively seek to be involved in feuding not only with people below them in social standing, but also above in the social ladder.

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Chapter 2.4. is about politics and feuding. In Óláfs Saga Helga the king is not only involved in the feuding, but the feud is the way through which he rules. He's also the final focus point for all feud chains. Even warfare is handled as an element of the honour exchange and feuding. Surprisingly the highest player in the game of feud in the Óláfs Saga Helga is not St.Óláfr but the Danish king Knut the Great. And it can even be interpreted that the process through which the feud advances causes the society form linkage of dependence similar to the Central European medieval feudalism.

As summary of Chapter 2. it becomes clear that in the society of Óláfs Saga Helga feud is not an exception to the norm or a destructive force, but the actual structure of the social reality that forms and holds the society together. Everyone in this society described in the saga is connected with the feuds and the group structure of their society is dependant on the feuds. So the saga is obviously written by someone who sees his social reality as a fully immersive, feud driven, honour culture.

Chapter 3. deals with the insults and honour themselves directly. First the insult descriptions are analysed and classified and then the concept of insult is linked to the ideals and functioning of the honour culture.

Chapter 3.1. is dedicated to the classification of the types of insults found in Óláfs Saga Helga. The result is that there are basically two types of insult in Óláfs Saga Helga:

- Exclusive insults: They are the tit-for-tat insults that are commonly connected with the idea of feuding that drives the feud onward. They vary from verbal mockery to robbery, murder and war actions, but are often more severe than the insults
of the second group. They are the backbone of the feuds. The method used to advance the feud chains and get either closer to victory or defeat. Their sole aim is to transfer honour from the recipient to the perpetrator.

Inclusive insults: These are most often verbal insults or reminders of insults dealt by others. They are jests, actions and reminders that are used to include characters into the feud party. Reminding them that they have to take part or are in threat to be seriously insulted and ending up as enemies – loosing honour and status. They are used to include characters into feud groups, to tell them they need to take more central/active role in the feud or as questions to help decide which side of the feud grouping is more beneficial to the party dealing the inclusive insult. They serve as a driving force in side the feud party in quite the same manner as how the first group of insults works between the different feud parties.

In Chapter 3.2. the insults are connected to the theoretical model of honour balance as a form of gift exchange. Insults can be seen as gifts of negative value. They cost the recipient honour and not being able to repay them in full causes them increasing amounts of shame. The shift in the balance of honour between the feud parties causes the other one to gain strength, allies and favours where as the loss of honour will diminish the possibilities for the loosing side. Honour in order to exist needs public recognition as it's not something physical that would be visible for new observers as such – it needs to talked about and the information about it needs to be spread for it to affect the social reality of the society. For that reason also the insults that are trades of that invisible honour need to have witnesses, and be negotiated and judged in the public forums of the sociocultural interaction.
Chapter 3.3. deals with the connection of insults to the story. Insults are always connected to feuds. They are the action in them. Dealing insults causes the feuds to advance and the feud parties to change and evolve the feuds onwards. It's also defined that insults and their balance of honour inherits with the feud party from a feud to another. And based on that the Óláfs Saga Helga can be seen as a continuous counting of the honour status of St.Óláfr as he builds his kingdom and looses it. Seen like this we can say that Óláfs Saga Helga is a story of the kingdom built on honour.

As a whole this study proved to be a very fruitful way of looking at the source. It revealed some things that were to be expected and confirmed results from similar studies on other sources, but it also produced new and interesting information and opened up some new questions:

_Do these same structures and patterns of both literary and sociocultural context also exist in other saga sources? Other King Sagas? Icelandic Sagas? Could they even be found in other medieval materials like for example the Livonian Chronicles or such?

_Is this same model of feud and insult present in other honour societies than the Norse one? And does it function similarly?

As a multidisciplinary enterprise the research shows that there's a line of connection from the literary structures to the sociocultural view of the source and to the theoretical approach. Thus interconnecting the three disciplines used – Philology, History and Anthropology.

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Bibliography

I Sources

OSH, All the editions listed below are referred to just as OSH, when talking about the source information. The exact references are used when text is quoted directly from one of the editions.


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Not all the resources listed in bibliography are referred to in the finished work, but they have been read for the research and are thus listed as they may have influenced the work either by ruling things out or by influencing the thinking processes. If any of the information is taken directly from these works without referring to them that's purely accidental and I apologise.

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