There are no doubt many ways to classify the kings’ sagas, but this paper confines itself to just one classification. It proposes to distinguish between two groups of kings’ sagas, one group with a clear Icelandic orientation and a second group with, I believe, an equally clear Norwegian orientation. The Icelandic bent is peculiar to Morkinskinna and Heimskringla. A Norwegian alignment is most prominent in Sverris saga, Fagrskinna, and, as I will argue here, Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar. The contrast is most easily explained by the supposition that one group came into being as the result of strictly Icelandic initiatives while the other group was written under Norwegian auspices and with royal supervision. The latter group comprises biographies that we might refer to as ‘authorized biographies,’ biographies that have been given a royal imprimatur.\(^{1}\)

In a volume devoted to memorializing Sturla Þórðarson the question is how he fits into these two groupings. It appears that he is the only writer of the thirteenth century to compose two long sagas, one belonging to the first group and the other to the second.

Íslendinga saga is a purely Icelandic undertaking, whereas Hákonar saga was written at the explicit bidding of King Hákon’s son Magnús and Magnús’s advisers.\(^{2}\) Sturla therefore gives us the best opportunity to compare and differentiate between these two types of literature. As a point of departure for such a comparison we might refer to a statement in Finnur Jónsson’s great literary history to the effect that Hákonar saga and Íslendinga saga are written in the same style.\(^{3}\) The gist of what follows is that they are in fact crucially different. The concept

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1 Ólafía Einarsdóttir referred to Sverris saga as a ‘bestellingsværk’ in ‘Sverrir – præst og konge’: 68.
2 ‘[King Magnús]... skipaði honum [Sturla] þann væna at setja saman sögu Hákonar konungs fóður sins, eftir sjálfs hans råði ok inna vitrustu manna forsögn.’ (‘[King Magnús] assigned him [Sturla] the difficult task of composing the saga of his father King Hákon according to his own advice and the supervision of his wisest men’). See ‘Sturlu þáttur’ in Sturlunga saga, 2: 234.
3 Finnur Jónsson, Den oldnorske og oldislandske litterats historia 2: 727: ‘Alt, hvad vi i så henseende kan fremdragre, passer på ham [Sturla], som vi kender ham fra hans Hákonarsaga, stilen, nøjagtigheden, forfatterinterresser, alt er talende nok.’ More recently Hans Jacob Orning recognizes differences and accounts for them by assuming that Sturla adjusted half-consciously to the differing contexts in which he wrote. See Orning, Unpredictability and Presence: 255–56.
‘style’ can of course mean a number of things. It can refer to syntax or sentence formation, but it can also refer to much larger categories such as outlook or overall perspectives, attitudes, or thought patterns. It is with respect to these larger categories that the two texts differ, and to my mind they differ radically.

**Contrasting Styles**

*Íslendinga saga* gives the impression of being unsurveyable but is in fact all of a piece, at least down to 1242, a little after the Battle of Örlygsstaðir. Ever since the days of Björn Magnússon Ólsen it has been observed that *Íslendinga saga* can be considered a continuation of *Sturlu saga* since the two sagas fit together chronologically and tell the ongoing story of the same family.4 Each chapter is either pinpointed on, or leads up to, an important moment in the lives of the Sturlungar – Snorri Sturluson or Sighvatr Sturluson (less often Þórðr Sturluson) or Snorri's son Órækja or Sighvatr's son Sturla. It is truly a family saga, if that term had not been reserved for use elsewhere in the saga lexicon. Alternatively, the book could have been titled ‘Sturlunga saga’ if that title had not been preempted to describe the larger compilation.

Like *Sturlu saga* the continuation is cast as a series of lesser encounters leading up to major confrontations: the battle at Viðines, the battle at Helgastaðir, the battle at Hólar, the battle on Grímsey, the burning in of Þorvaldr Snorrason at Gillastaðir, the pillaging and burning at Sauðafell, the battle in Hundadalur, the battle at Bær, and the face-off at Skálholt.5 This part of the narrative can be viewed as a unified story leading up to the great culmination at the Battle of Örlygsstaðir, in which two of the chief Sturlungar succumb, Sighvatr and his son Sturla. The narrative, though more detailed, has the same shape as the classical sagas, in which a series of lesser encounters prefaces a catastrophic finale.6 In other words, the Icelandic author has chosen a native Icelandic structure to articulate his narrative.

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4 See Björn M. Ólsen, ‘Um Sturlungu’: 224, 391, 435; Pétur Sigurðsson, ‘Um Íslendinga sögu’: 3; Jón Jóhannesson, ‘Um Sturlunga sögu’ in *Sturlunga saga*, 2: xxxv.

5 On the segment from Bær to Örlygsstaðir see Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, ‘Historiefortælleren Sturla Póðarson’: 14–23.