

Feuding and Kingship in 13th-Century Iceland: A Case of Medieval State Formation *

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Outline

1. Introduction
2. Law under the king : dealing with killing and feuds
3. Feuds under the king's rule
4. Conflict solution under the king's rule
5. Conclusions

1. Introduction

- c.930-1262 : “The Icelandic Free State” -- Laws, assemblies ⇔ No kings, overlords
- 1262-64 : Submission to the king in Norway
- 1380 : Norwegian king → Danish king
- 1918 : Independence
- 1944 : Republic of Iceland

2. Law under the king : dealing with killing and feuds

3. Feuds under the king's rule

Table 1: The list of revenge cases 1264-1400

	year	event	source
1	1273	Guðlaugr Tannason attacked a man for the revenge of his father killed in 1252. Court trial, mediation and settlement	Ár ch.28
2	1296	"there was a killing-summer, and happened 9 'stökkvívíg (a chain of killings)' in Iceland"	annals
3	1309-10	Killing of Sir Kolbeinn Bjarnarson → Kolbein's son killed the killers	annals; Lá 27, 28
4	1342-43	Conflict over <i>sýsluvöld</i> : Jón Hallsson vs. Arnórr Þórðarson → Jón had Arnórr's hands and feet cut down, by the advice of Þorsteinn Gunhlytinn → Þorsteinn was killed in revenge for Arnórr	annals
5	1344	Killing of Páll Eyjólfsson → His sons took revenge and killed 2 men	annals
6	(1357)	(Not a feud) a killing with no revenge: Jón murti killed a man but "never went abroad and lived more than 30 years from that and died of illness"	annals

(After Helgi Þorláksson, *Konungsvald og hefnd*, 1997, pp.251–2, 254–5.
 Ár. = Árna saga biskups and Lá. = Lárentíus saga in ÍF XVII)

* This project is supported by Grant-in-Aid for JSPS Fellows. This paper based on parts of my MA thesis submitted to the University of Iceland in 2012: Sayaka Matsumoto, *No Longer a Feuding Society? Legal Practice and Kingship in Late 13th-Century Iceland*. [Published online]

4. Conflict solution under the king's rule

- **Text 1: Allegation of high treason**

Herra Ásgrímr took it badly, that Loptr valued another man no less than he, and thus he tried to bring a lawsuit against the both, and then the men came those who recited that they, Björn and Loptr, had spoken in a more disrespectful way about the kingship than was seemly.

(ok því leitaði hann þeim báðum sakir at fá, ...

þeir Björn ok Loptr hefði talat ósæmiligar til konungsdómsins en byrjaði.) [Emphasis mine]

(*Árna saga biskups*, in *Biskupa sögur* III (Íslenzk fornrit XVII), Reykjavík, 1998, ch.60, p.84.)

- **Text 2: the process of settlement**

They, Loptr and Björn, made an excuse, and in the event it turned out that there was no need to offer the pledge of innocence. Thus it was agreed that they would swear the oath of fidelity to King Magnús and King Eiríkr and Duke Hákon. For that they placed their hands on the book and then called God to witness that they were obliged to him to be faithful and loyal, both secretly and openly, and never to be against a king's agent when he spoke on law and rights. [Emphasis mine]

(Þeir Loptr ok Björn afsaka sik ok verðr eigi svá atburðrinn at nauðsyn stæði til undanfærslu. Því varð þat at sætt at þeir sóru trúnaðareidda herra Magnúsi konungi ok Eiríki konungi ok hertoganum Hákon. Þeir lögðu til þess hönd á bók ok því skutu þeir til Guðs at þeir skyldu honum hollir ok trúir leynilega ok opinberliga ok hvergi vera í móti konungs umboðsmanni þar sem hann talaði lög ok réttandi.)

(*Árna saga biskups*, ch.60, p.85.)

Figure 2: Royal Officials under the King's Rule

