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Benedictines, Augustinians, and Dominicans: A Crisis of Icelandic Monasticism, c. 1296–1358[1]

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This study draws connections between events which impacted Icelandic monasteries from around the end of the thirteenth to the middle of the fourteenth century. It proposes that these events were largely fueled by the growth of episcopal power in Iceland after the nominal resolution of the *staðamál* conflict, but that they also drew upon and exacerbated existing tensions between the Augustinian and Benedictine orders on the island. While some of these tensions played out along regional divisions between the northern diocese of Hólar and the southern diocese of Skálholt, the role of Dominicans based in Norwegian houses was also significant. The crisis climaxed when the Augustinian house of Viðey switched over to the Benedictine rule for over a decade, and only returned to its original rule when an Augustinian bishop took over the diocese. On the basis of Icelandic and Norwegian sources, including annals, diplomas, and sagas, it is argued that the change of rule at Viðey was fundamentally tied to clashes between monasteries, bishops, and other parties going back to the end of the thirteenth century, specifically the decision of Bishop Jörundr to bring a southern Icelandic model of monasticism north to Hólar.

Introduction

Situated far out in the North Atlantic, on the periphery of the Latin Christian world, it should come as no surprise that Iceland was at some remove from the developments of monastic culture in the high and late Middle Ages – though it was far from completely isolated.[2] The only two orders to establish houses and a long-term

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[2] Numerous factors have led many twentieth-century scholars to frame Icelandic monasteries primarily in terms of small size, minimal impact on society, and mostly native culture: see Magnús Jónsson 1914, 283-84; Byock 1990, 151-52; Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 133. However,

presence on the island were the Benedictines and the Augustinian canons, both in the twelfth century. However, friars and members of other religious orders influenced the island in various ways; among these, the impact of the Dominicans was the most significant, and has inspired a wave of recent scholarship.[3] The tensions, disputes, and competitions which must inevitably have arisen between these three orders in Iceland are difficult to perceive through the extant sources. However, there is some evidence for a crisis in Icelandic monasticism persisting through the first half of the fourteenth century. A fourteenth-century monastic crisis was proposed by Gunnar Finnbogason in an article from 1951.[4] While there are many problems with Gunnar's approach and framing, there is nonetheless significant evidence that a real crisis took place during this period, and that several key events from the late thirteenth through the mid-fourteenth century are more connected with each other, and with Icelandic monastic life and culture, than has hitherto been appreciated by scholars.

This crisis was driven by numerous factors, and arguably the most important was the push by several key bishops to establish greater control over their dioceses. However, the evidence suggests that there was also a tension between the Benedictines who dominated Hólar diocese, in northern Iceland, and the Augustinians, who dominated in Skálholt, the older diocese which covered all of southern, western, and eastern Iceland.[5] In the twelfth century this was a relatively minor tension, conditioned in large part simply by the regional division between the orders, but it

this scholarly discourse has not been without nuance, and has expanded significantly in recent decades, and the neglect of the monastic history of Iceland has sometimes been exaggerated, as in Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir 2023, 15-30. For a recent discussion of how distinctive Icelandic monasteries may have been in their medieval northern European context, see Clark 2023.

[3] Most notably the 2021 collection *Dominican Resonances in Medieval Iceland: The Legacy of Bishop Jón Halldórsson of Skálholt*. See also Battista 2021, van Deusen 2014, and Hughes 2015.

[4] Gunnar Finnbogason 1951, 84-85. The majority of Gunnar's ideas were critiqued or rejected two years later by Guðbrandur Jónsson, including the idea of the monastic crisis (Guðbrandur Jónsson 1953, 398-99). While I agree that Gunnar's characterization of the crisis as a problem of laxity and lack of discipline among the monks is far too simplistic, Guðbrandur's critique is overly dismissive and has many problems of its own.

[5] The Augustinian canons arose over the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, as part of a larger movement of regular canons: communities of clerics organized, like monks, under a rule, and conceptualized and idealized as living a life imitating the apostles (Meville 2016, 125-35). The Benedictine order goes back to the fifth century and was the most widespread monastic order across medieval Europe. In the early twelfth century, when Icelandic Benedictine houses were founded, the Benedictine order was at a peak of growth, power, influence, and corporate identity following the impact of Cluniac reforms, even as their supremacy began to be challenged by the growth of new orders (Clark 2011, 50-59).

grew in the fourteenth century after the southern model of monasticism had been brought north, and eventually culminated in the temporary switch of rules at one prominent southern monastery. The occasional involvement of Norwegian Dominicans in Icelandic ecclesiastical life, despite the lack of a Dominican house on the island, influenced both episcopal and monastic politics in Iceland. Broadly, the Dominicans seem to have allied themselves with the bishops and the southern Augustinians, and become unfavorably viewed by at least some northern Benedictines. However, the situation was clearly complex and affected by individual personalities and interests. While the scope of this article is limited and several relevant areas of research will have to await future work, this is a key period of monastic history in Iceland, and more comprehensive study is called for to try to understand the monastic involvement in and experience of the turbulent transitions which reshaped Iceland in the century after the beginning of Norwegian rule.

Scholars have suggested that from their origins in the twelfth century, the two monastic orders of Iceland may have been not only regionally divided, but that they also had distinct ideological attitudes. It has been argued that the southern Augustinians represented ecclesiastical reform from the time of their arrival in Iceland, while the northern Benedictines had somewhat more conservative, and perhaps local, values. This relationship was further complicated by the interests of chieftains who patronized these monasteries, and secular attitudes towards reform.[6] With the beginning of Norwegian royal rule over Iceland in 1262/64, the creation of a new secular government was accompanied by a reorganization of the Icelandic Church; most important was the new vernacular *kristinréttr* (Church law) written by Bishop Árni Þorlákssson of Skálholt, as well as the long process of expanding episcopal control over many traditionally proprietary churches, know conventionally as the *staðamál* (the matter of the major church estates), which nominally ended with the treaty of Ögvaldsnes in 1297.[7] The echoes of this conflict and the process of implementing the new Church law continued well into the fourteenth century and even later, very likely with more difficulty in Hólar than in Skálholt.[8] The monastic crisis which began to emerge from the end of the thirteenth century must be therefore viewed as part of

[6] Johansson 2018, Helgi Þorláksson 2006, Gottskálk Jensson 2016.

[7] The key scholarship on the *staðamál* remains Magnús Stefánsson 1978 and Magnús Stefánsson 2000.

[8] See overview of the consolidation of the *staðamál* up to 1358 in Magnús Stefánsson 1978, 248-52, as well as Pedersen 2012. The full implementation of the new church law in Hólar diocese is conventionally dated to 1354, with a letter of King Magnús insisting that the Christian law accepted in the south must also be accepted in the north (DI III, 98-99).

the adaptations of the Icelandic Church to this new situation, especially as a reaction to the continuing growth of episcopal power after 1297.

While a few earlier events are significant, the first key events occurred in 1296, when Jörundr Þorsteinsson, bishop of Hólar 1267-1313 – a key driver of the *staðamál* in the north, but educated in southern Iceland by Augustinian canons – made a major change in the monastic landscape of Iceland, founding two new houses in his diocese: a priory of Augustinian canons at Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur, and a convent of Benedictine nuns at Reynistaður. Both of these were kinds of institutions which had existed in Skálholt diocese for over a century, but neither in Hólar. Benedictine monks were first established in northern Iceland in 1133, when the first Icelandic Benedictine house was founded at Þingeyrar in Hunaþing, in the northwest of the island.[9] It is possible, even likely, that there had been Benedictine monks present in Iceland before this point, but the evidence for earlier houses has been called into question.[10] Benedictine foundations first appeared in Norway a few decades before Þingeyrar, and it seems likely the Iceland development was riding on the momentum of the Norwegian one – there is a distinct possibility that the first monks of Þingeyrar were recruited through the Benedictine house of Nidarholm, on an island near the archepiscopal seat at Nidaros, and both communities seem to have had an especially close

[9] On the complex evidence for the foundation of Þingeyrar, see Cormack 2016, 65-69. Plans for the monastery may have gone back as far as 1112, and the priest Þorkell *trandill* donated the farm on which the monastery was built. The extant narratives focus on St. Jón Ögmundarson, the first bishop of Hólar, as the person who created the monastery, but it was actually formally consecrated by his successor, Ketill Þorsteinsson.

[10] One version of *Landnámabók* describes three monks living at the farm of Bær in Borgarfjörður western Iceland in the mid-eleventh century, and notes that they were left there by the missionary bishop Hróðólfr after he left Iceland (*Íslendingabók/Landnámabók*, 65). Hróðólfr is named in both the other early texts which mention missionary bishops, *Íslendingabók* and *Hungrvaka*, though neither of these mention the three monks with him (*Íslendingabók/Landnámabók*, 18; *Biskupa sögur*, 11-12). The scholarly consensus is generally that there was some sort of monastic community at Bær in Borgarfjöður, with Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir and Björn Þorsteinsson especially arguing for its significance in Icelandic history, especially through education (Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir 2017: 67-78; Björn Þorsteinsson 1978: 74-75, 125-26). However, the archaeological data for the church at Bær does not directly support the presence of monks, and the written evidence is limited to the passage in *Landnámabók*; Margaret Cormack therefore considers these monks to be entirely a hagiographic invention (personal communication).

connection by the fourteenth century.[11] In any case, the success at Þingeyrar was replicated further east in the diocese, at Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður, in 1155.

Skálholt diocese lacked Benedictine monks, but saw both Augustinian canons and Benedictine nuns established in the twelfth century. St. Þorlákr Þórhallsson, before becoming bishop of Skálholt in 1178, was educated in Paris early in his career. As he founded an Augustinian monastery in Þykkvabær in 1168, soon after returning to Iceland, we can be fairly confident that at least some of his time in Paris was spent at St. Victor, and he brought Victorine culture with him home to Iceland. In addition to several short-lived and entirely failed attempts,[12] major Augustinian houses were established in western Iceland: at Flatey in 1172, which moved to Helgafell in 1184, and then at Viðey 1226.[13] Kirkjubær, the first convent of Benedictine nuns in Iceland, was founded in 1186. Eventually, an Augustinian monastery was established in eastern Iceland at Skriða in 1494.

Clashes over Möðruvellir, the Augustinian priory which Jörundr founded in 1296, began soon after his death, and continued for over a half century. A dispute with Þingeyrar over tithes began even earlier in Jörundr's tenure, and was not resolved until the 1320s. Around the same time evidence starts to appear for increased episcopal involvement in monastic life, through the forced replacement of abbots. The simultaneous arrival of two overbearing and seemingly reform-orientated bishops in 1343 – Ormr Aslákssson in Hólar and Jón Sigurðarson in Skálholt – is memorialized in the annals by the arrest and punishment of several canons, and even the execution of a nun. The next year brought a unique moment in Icelandic history: Viðey, an Augustinian monastery in the west of Iceland, switched over to the Benedictine Rule,

[11] The L-version of *Jóns saga helga* tells the story of the foundation of Nidarholm and attributes the initial idea to St. Jón (*Jóns saga Hólabyskups*: 70; *The Saga of St. Jón of Hólar*: 88-89). It is hard to take Jón's involvement as anything but hagiographic invention, especially in light of the saga inserting Jón into the story of Nidarholm's foundation told in Theodoricus Monachus's *Historia*. Nonetheless, it is significant that authors at Þingeyrar c. 1200 wanted to see them themselves as tied to Nidarholm through the shared holy inspiration of St. Jón; it is undoubtedly related that Nidarholm became involved in defending the privileges of Þingeyrar during one of the early fourteenth-century disputes which will be discussed below (DI II, 494-95). For a discussion of the foundation of Nidarholm as part of the first generation of Benedictine foundations in Norway c. 1100, see Nyberg 2018: 68-78. For the suggestion that the *Jóns saga* account is accurate and Nidarholm may have been a sort of mother house to Þingeyrar, see Gunnar F. Guðmundsson 2000: 215.

[12] There is some evidence for short-lived monasteries at Hítardalur in western Iceland, Keldur in the south, and Saurbær in the north. All of these were closed by the second quarter of the thirteenth century.

[13] On the foundation and rapid move of Helgafell, see Sverrir Jakobsson 2016: 84-89.

but switched back after less than a decade with the arrival of an Augustinian bishop, Gyrðir, to Skálholt diocese. None of the sources which detail these events give any sort of hint as to what caused them, and scholars have struggled to explain what was happening during this period of apparent crisis and what motivated the decision-making involved, especially the odd rule-switch at Viðey.[14]

As will be made clear, all these events, from the foundation of Möðruvellir to the return of the Augustinian Rule to Viðey, are connected. Previous scholars have noted the crisis of this period in terms of powerful, overbearing, and mostly Norwegian bishops, but have tended to overlook the perspective of the monasteries, and the potential impact of these events on the monastic culture of Iceland.[15] While disputes over episcopal power following the *staðamál* was the major factor in driving the monastic crisis of fourteenth-century Iceland, as increasingly powerful bishops tried to exert control over their dioceses, it is probable that Benedictine distaste for the meddling of Augustinians and Dominicans in their diocese, and interconnectedness of Icelandic and Norwegian monastic houses, created a greater antagonism between the orders within Iceland than had ever existed before. The change of rule at Viðey was not only determined by individual political disputes and episcopal power games, but by how the Benedictines and Augustinians had come to be viewed by this point

[14] Magnús Stefánsson (1978, 250) mentions the change of rule at Viðey, and places it among the general turbulence and harsh episcopal policy of the period; Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir (2017, 342) speculates it was a mistake tied to what she seems to view as the excessively reform-minded attitude of Bishop Jón Sigurðsson. Gunnar Finnbogason (1951, 85-86) contextualizes the change within a general period of monastic laxity and episcopal attempts to restore discipline. James Clark (2023) has suggested that the switch at Viðey happened at a time of a general decline of Benedictines in Norway, and thus that Bishop Jón Sigurðsson may have been trying to preserve some aspect of the traditional monastic culture of Iceland. In the most detailed discussion to date, Guðbrandur Jónsson (1953: 414-26) presents the change of rule at Viðey as an almost inevitable confluence of unfortunate events and circumstances. He argues that Viðey must have been so lacking in members that there were too few to elect a new abbot after the death of Abbot Helgi Sigurðarson in 1343, and that no Augustinians were available and willing to be moved from other houses, and so Benedictines from the north were temporary moved to Viðey to maintain the monastery, and, being unwilling to switch orders, these Benedictine monks thus essentially forced the rule to shift. While more research into the legal factors behind the rule change is necessary, there is no basis for supposing that there was any situation in which switching monastic orders was either the only solution nor even an ideologically neutral solution to whatever problems may have existed.

[15] While her focus is primarily on the tithe issue at Þingeyrar and the *Möðruvallamál*, and she does not discuss the rule change at Viðey, Susann Anett Pedersen has provided a very useful overview of monastic-episcopal conflict during this period, considering its relationship to secular power and emphasizing the bishops' goal of improving their control over their dioceses (Pedersen 2012: 62-79).

in history. While many questions remain unanswerable, and not all the pieces of the puzzle can be fit together, we must acknowledge the agency, ideology, and biases of monasteries within the political and ecclesiastical landscape of Iceland.

There are three main groups of sources for the history of the Church in Iceland during this period: the Icelandic annals, *Lárentíus saga* and *Árna saga*, and the diplomatic corpus of Iceland and Norway. *Lárentíus saga*, written in the second half of the fourteenth century, is the biography of Laurentius Kálfsson, who was bishop of Hólar from 1324-1331, and is the latest narrative source for Icelandic history apart from the annals. It provides most of the detail for the earlier disputes over Þingeyrar and Möðruvellir. The early fourteenth-century *Árna saga*, the biography of the reformer bishop Árni Þorláksson, bishop of Skálholt 1269-1298 and author of the new *kristinréttr*, is supplemental but provides an important additional perspective on Bishop Jörundr and the complex way he was viewed by his contemporaries. Annalistic writing provides the closest thing we have to a narrative framework for the rest of the Middle Ages in Iceland, after the 1330s. However, several important events and details appear in separate annals, and significantly more source criticism remains to be done to judge each annal's relative accuracy, so some caution must be used in relying on their accounts.[16] Finally, while the sagas and annals are more important for the present study, the largest and richest source material for late medieval Icelandic and Norwegian history is the diplomatic corpus, for the present purposes primarily the documents edited in the *Diplomatarium Islandicum* and *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* series.

Following convention and the extant source material, religious houses in Iceland will generally be referred here to as monasteries, whether Benedictine or Augustinian; when it is clear that the house is headed by a prior rather than an abbot – as at Möðruvellir – the term priory will be used. The term in Old Norse and modern Icelandic for these houses is *klaustr*, and is used without any distinction. Similarly, it is conventional to refer to Augustinian canons in medieval Iceland as monks, as they were distinguished from Benedictine monks in relatively few sources: members of both groups were almost always simply called *bróðir* (brother).[17] For the sake of clarity,

[16] The introduction to Gustav Storm's 1888 edition, *Islandske annaler indtil 1578* remains the most authoritative and comprehensive study of the Icelandic annals. However, Storm's work is currently being updated by Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, who provides a useful overview of the ten extant sets of annals and their datings in English in Rowe 2023, 309-10. See also Haug 1997.

[17] The term *kanokasetr* is occasionally used to refer to a house of canons, and primarily appears in the context of the foundation of new houses (*Biskupa sögur II*, 57-58; *Guðmundar sögur I*, 58). A vernacularized term for a canon, *kanóki*, also existed and appears occasionally in

I will refer to Augustinian canons here as canons, but this minimal distinction in the medieval Icelandic worldview is important and is in need of further research.[18]

Augustinians and Benedictines: Þingeyrar and Möðruvellir

As noted above, until Bishop Jörundr Þorsteinsson founded the Augustinian priory of Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur in 1296, there had been no Augustinian canons resident in Iceland's northern diocese, despite over a century of their presence in the south and west of the country. Exactly why Bishop Jörundr chose to find this priory is uncertain,[19] but the fact that he founded it in the same year as the Benedictine convent at Reynistaðr – there had also been no house for Benedictine nuns in the north until this point – suggests a full and deliberate importation of institutions of monasticism in Skálholt diocese into Hólar diocese. A couple of decades earlier, Jörundr had also deprived the Benedictines at Þingeyrar of what the monks claimed were their traditional rights to the bishop's portion of tithes from a number of farms near the monastery.[20] Þingeyrar claimed these rights were originally granted by the

some annals and sagas (*Islandske annaler*, 122, 128-29; *Biskupa sögur II*, 58). This terminology is indicative of the origins and identity of the Augustinian houses in Iceland, and there is no evidence that Augustinians in Iceland were friars, as is suggested in Sigurdson 2016.

[18] Preliminary research on the apparent lack of distinction between Augustinians and Benedictines in Icelandic sources has been done in Clark 2023. Clark suggests that more distinctions started to arise c. 1300, but the evidence presented is limited and this may simply be an accident of the changing nature of the sources. The level of distinction between the activities and social roles of medieval monks and canons generally has long been debated, see for example Brooke 1985.

[19] *Árna saga* states that care of the poor was part of Jörundr's purpose (*Biskupa sögur III*: 147); while care for the poor may have been an important factor, we should be cautious about such language of praise in a literary context. Sverrir Jakobsson (2024: 128) has suggested that Bishop Jörundr's foundation of monasteries at Reynistaðr and Möðruvellir were both motivated by the Church's view of its new property acquisitions – the farm at Möðruvellir being recently acquired during the *staðamál* – as incentive to push for new growth. Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir (Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir 2017: 390) has suggested that Möðruvellir was founded with the intention of functioning primarily as a school, but there is no evidence for this assertion. Because of a reference in one annal to Jörundr getting permission in 1267 to establish cathedral canons, *kórsbræðr*, at Hólar (*Islandske annaler*: 331), it has also been hypothesized that Jörundr's monastic foundations were tied to a plan to create cathedral canons, and that Þykkvabær had been founded with similar intentions, see Haug 2014: 120, Magnús Stefánsson 1978: 119. However, I am inclined to side with Magnús Már Lárusson 1958: 199, who reads *kórsbræðr* as an error, and this theory is in need of more serious re-evaluation than is possible here.

[20] *Lárentíus saga* states that Jörundr took away the tithes during the tenure of Abbot Vermundr (*Biskupa sögur III*, 370), so it must have happened between Jörundr taking office in 1267 and Vermundr's death in 1279.

first bishop of Hólar, St. Jón Ögmundarson, and there is documentary evidence that even the Benedictines in Norway were indignant at Jörundr's actions.[21] In essence, then, all the key factors that would characterize the rest of the monastic crisis were already in play at the end of the thirteenth century: a push for greater episcopal control and power, involving a manipulation of monastic life in a way that would undoubtedly encourage antagonism between the Benedictines and Augustinians of Iceland; as will be discussed in the final section, there was even some involvement from Dominicans, though exactly how much is debatable. While the crisis as a whole was quite complicated, and new factors and developments would affect later events, I would suggest that Jörundr's foundation of Möðruvellir, as well as his antagonistic actions towards the Benedictine monks of his diocese, had very real and lasting influence on both Benedictine-Augustinian and monastic-episcopal relations for the next half century or more.[22]

Jörundr's decision to found Möðruvellir was almost certainly based, at least in some part, on his own roots and education: he, like his contemporary reformer bishop, Árni Þorláksson, had been a student of Brandr Jónsson, the abbot of the Augustinian monastery of Þykkvabær on the south coast of Iceland. *Árna saga* presents Jörundr as one of the foremost of Abbot Brandr Jónsson's students: Jörundr is said to have the best memory of all the students, and Runólfr – the future abbot of Þykkvabær and close ally of both Jörundr and Árni – had the finest mind for learning and was the most diligent student.[23] From Brandr's school came the key Church reformers of the late thirteenth century, and both Jörundr and Árni drove the progress of the *staðamál*. The two reformers were not in full agreement about their methods, however, and Jörundr's policy of simply buying important church-farms from laymen was criticized by his contemporaries, including his purchase of Möðruvellir itself a few years before he founded the monastery there. In discussing Jörundr's purchase of Möðruvellir, *Árna saga* describes Jörundr as a wary fox, with Árni being a brave bear: they both pursued the interests of the Church, but using different methods. Jörundr was more political and underhanded, and a closer friend to the laity than to the clergy.[24] *Lárentíus saga* comes to a similar conclusion but from a different perspective: Jörundr sends his follower Laurentius to lay claim to a church-farm in the direct style of Bishop Árni, by threatening the local farmer with excommunication,

[21] DI II, 494-95. See note 37.

[22] Gunnar Finnbogason (1951: 84), in contrast, framed the beginning of his monastic crisis with the burning of Möðruvellir in 1317.

[23] *Biskupa sögur III*, 7.

[24] *Biskupa sögur III*: 146-47.

but when the farmer comes to Jörundr with his complaint, Jörundr betrays Laurentius. Jörundr blames the young priest for the overbearing use of excommunication, claiming that he had given no such instructions, and thereby ingratiates himself with the owner of Möðruvellir, who then accepts Jörundr's offer to purchase the farm.[25]

Jörundr was thus a very complicated figure already in the eyes of his contemporaries, and we should expect his creation of an Augustinian presence in a traditionally Benedictine territory to have equally complicated motivations, driven perhaps mostly by practical concerns but still influenced by ideological ones. He had grown up and been educated by Augustinians, and he must have had personal relationships with many of them, who would have assisted with the foundation. Abbot Runólfr, his fellow student, worked closely with Bishop Árni and other Augustinians in the *staðamál* project of setting proprietary churches under episcopal control.[26] It would thus be very reasonable for Jörundr to have seen the Augustinians as useful and familiar allies in growing his episcopal power in the north. Jörundr also seems to have maintained close episcopal control over the Möðruvellir canons, if the arguments made by Bishop Laurentius Kálfsson in *Lárentíus saga* are any indication, as will be discussed below. Likewise, if Jörundr had problematically close relations with the laity in the eyes of the author of *Árna saga*, that may well have influenced the problematically close relations Möðruvellir itself had with the laity, in the eyes of the author of *Lárentíus saga*.

Jörundr's political machinations were also related to his relationship to ecclesiastical, secular, and monastic powers and interests in Norway. The years before the foundation of Möðruvellir was a time of was a time of growing involvement of Norwegians in Icelandic Church affairs, and this must have included influence from both Benedictine and Augustinian houses in Norway. *Árna saga* hints at the early Augustinian involvement in Iceland-Norway relations: in 1262, Archbishop Einarr is said to invite Abbot Brandr Jónsson of Þykkvabær – along with his young fellow canon, the future Bishop Árni – and seeing his excellent qualities, the archbishop has Brandr elected bishop of Hólar in 1263.[27] The first Norwegian bishop of Hólar, Bótólfr, who was bishop from 1238 to 1247, had been a canon at the Augustinian house of Helgisetr, in Nidaros. The monastic situation was different in Skálholt diocese, where the first Norwegian bishop, Sigvarðr Þéttmarsson (1238-1268) had been an abbot of the Benedictine monas-

[25] *Biskupa sögur III*: 232-34.

[26] *Biskupa sögur III*: 19, 26, 68.

[27] *Biskupa sögur III*: 7-8.

tery of Selja, and the short-lived Grímr Skútuson, abbot of the Benedictines at Nidarholm, was appointed as bishop in 1321 but died the same year.[28]

The archbishops of Nidaros thus may have seen Augustinians as useful to his efforts in Iceland in the northern Benedictine stronghold of Hólar diocese, while Benedictines obtaining appointments in Skálholt may also have been seen as useful. The relationships between monastic orders in both Norway and Iceland had a definite impact on Icelandic episcopal politics, though the details are difficult to speculate about and require more research.[29] Thus, it is impossible to say exactly what the relationship between the foundation of Möðruvellir and the Augustinians in Norway might have been, but there is room to speculate. As already noted, there is evidence for connections between Icelandic and Norwegian Benedictine houses.[30] Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir has also suggested that Möðruvellir could have been a daughter house of Helgisetr, based on the fact that, during the crisis at Möðruvellir which will be discussed shortly, a certain Brother Ingimundr left to become a brother at Helgisetr.[31] However, there were other Augustinian houses in Norway which may have had an impact: Jonskloster in Bergen will also be relevant later in this study.[32] Seeing that Möðruvellir was founded by a bishop educated in Þykkvabær, if it had anything like a mother house, it was probably Þykkvabær, rather than any of the Norwegian houses. Indeed, it was under a Norwegian bishop, a former canon of Nidaros, that the real crisis at Möðruvellir began.

Jörundr's successor, Auðun *rauði* (the Red) Þorbergsson, a former cathedral canon of Nidaros and royal treasurer, was bishop of Hólar 1313 to 1322 and continued his predecessor's policies towards the Benedictines, while overseeing the beginning of decades of crisis at Möðruvellir. *Lárentíus saga* describes Bishop Auðun's immediate clashes with the clergy at Hólar after his arrival in Iceland in 1315, which the saga

[28] On Norwegian bishops in Iceland and their monastic connections, see Imsen 2021, 69-70, and Sigurdson 2016: 89-91.

[29] The only comprehensive study on Norwegian monasticism remains Lange 1856. For a general survey of scholarship on Norwegian monasteries up to the early 2000s, see Haug 2008, 64-69. See also Hommedal 2019: 52-53.

[30] See note 10 on Þingeyrar's relationship to Nidarholm. Gottskálk Jensson has speculated that the highlighting of Selja in Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* – written at Þingeyrar around the end of the twelfth century – could indicate "a possible institutional bonding between these two Benedictine Abbeys in times when Augustinian influence was increasingly felt in the archdiocese" (Gottskálk Jensson 2021).

[31] *Biskupa sögur III*: 367, note 1.

[32] For a general survey of the monasteries of Bergen, including Jonskloster, see Hommedal 2011 and Hommedal 2014.

author characterizes at least in part as caused by his not knowing local custom, but the saga is also rather critical of some of Bishop Auðun's opponents.[33] Auðun doubtlessly suffered from some culture shock, but it is also clear that his goal of expanding episcopal power was not wholly different from Bishop Jörundr's. Perhaps there was some escalation, but the conflicts he had in his diocese seem to have as much or more to do with his lack of Jörundr's fox-like skill as a politician and negotiator. Auðun's concerns with episcopal power and prestige had multiple dimensions, and *Lárentíus saga* praises him for making major renovations to Hólar cathedral, and for promoting the cults of both saintly bishops of Hólar, Guðmundr Arason and Jón Ögmundarson.[34] Auðun also continued Bishop Jörundr's tithe policy at Þingeyrar, and exacerbated relations further by siding against the monastery in a dispute between Þingeyrar and the estate at Breiðabólstaður over a large donation; this caused Auðun to receive a cold, even antagonistic welcome at Þingeyrar during his next visitation.[35] Auðun also removed Abbot Þórir of Munkaþverá from his office around 1316. This removal may have been tied to the dispute with Þingeyrar and its Abbot Guðmundr, and some annals simply state that there was conflict between Bishop Auðun and the abbots of the north, and that the next year both Þórir and Abbot Guðmundr of Þingeyrar left Iceland, presumably to petition for support in Norway.[36]

On May 20th, 1320, Abbot Grímr of Nidarholm and Abbot Þórir of Munkaþverá – the latter still in Norway, seemingly exiled and trying to find support to regain his position – signed a general deposition, not explicitly addressed to any particular authority, proclaiming the crime that had been done to Þingeyrar by taking the bishops' tithes from it, and naming two authorities who agreed with them.[37] The document represents the sense of unified Benedictine identity and solidarity which tied together these three monasteries in Iceland and Norway, confronting the threat of a series of powerful and antagonistic bishops. It therefore cannot be a coincidence that this letter was written in 1320 and signed by Abbot Grímr of Nidarholm, and that same abbot was elected as bishop of Skálholt the very next year, just before a monk of Þingeyrar itself, Laurentius Kálfsson, became bishop of Hólar in 1322. The

[33] Auðun's time in Iceland up through his death at Nidaros cathedral is dealt with in chapters twenty-nine through thirty-four of the saga (*Biskupa sögur III*: 321-47).

[34] *Biskupa sögur III*: 321-27.

[35] *Biskupa sögur III*: 331-32, 335.

[36] *Islandske annaler*: 151, 204, 266, 393; *Biskupa sögur III*: 331.

[37] DI II: 494-95; *The Saga of St. Jón of Hólar*: 101. For a discussion of the significance of this document, including the argument that it was intended to make up for the lack of documentary evidence for Þingeyrar's claims, see Gottskálk Jensson 2023.

Benedictines of Nidarholm clearly had a vested interest in Iceland at this time, and enough leverage with the archbishop to get their representative into office. If Grímr had survived for a few years, even though his position was in the south, he may well have been able to resolve the situation at Þingeyrar before Laurentius arrived on the scene, or at the very least would have helped in the process.

Arguably, the situation was worse for the northern Augustinians at Möðruvellir under Bishop Auðun. According to *Lárentíus saga*, Auðun called a synod of the elite priests of the diocese on March 12th, 1315, and he made several charges against the priest overseeing the diocese between bishops, Koðrán Hranason, and among them that Koðrán had allowed the canons of Möðruvellir to have authority in temporal matters; the canons had thereupon frittered away valuable resources, which Auðun wanted paid back to the cathedral estate.[38] Thus the *Möðruvallamál*, the dispute over monastic independence and resource management between Möðruvellir and Hólar, began, and it would linger through the rest of Auðun's tenure and that of Bishop Laurentius Kálfsson after him. The saga argues here and later that Jörundr had set up the priory at Möðruvellir with the understanding that the bishops of Hólar would be in charge of it, specifically of its finances; *Lárentíus saga* is clearly hostile towards Möðruvellir, and there is no documentation of the terms of Möðruvellir's foundation, so we cannot necessarily trust this argument. Nonetheless, such an arrangement would absolutely fit with what we know of Jörundr's character and attitudes towards episcopal power. The next year, in 1316, Möðruvellir burned down.[39] According to the account in *Lárentíus saga*, the canons were returning from the port of Gáseyri drunk, and started the fire through carelessness. The monastery was closed, the canons were housed elsewhere in the diocese – except for the Brother Ingimundr, who went to Helgisetr – and their plight was ignored by Bishop Auðun. The account of these events, interestingly, is made much later in the saga when the archbishop accuses Laurentius, during his visit to Nidaros in 1324, of neglecting his episcopal duty, and it is unclear whether Bishop Auðun confronted and ignored such pressure, or whether his prominent position in the archdiocese allowed him to escape it.[40]

According to his saga, Laurentius took many actions after becoming bishop-elect of Hólar in 1322, before going to Norway for his formal consecration, and the priority to support the Benedictines is immediately apparent. The saga notes that Þórir is still absent from Munkaþverá, and no abbot has apparently been elected since then, at

[38] *Biskupa sögur III*: 329.

[39] In the *Lögmannsannáll*, the date is 1317 (*Islandske annaler*: 266, 393); see also *Biskupa sögur III*: 330-31.

[40] *Biskupa sögur III*: 367-68.

least a five-year gap. Laurentius puts his former student Bergr Sokkason in his position, who is said to restore a proper monastic life – clearly there is an implication that discipline declined with the long absence of any abbot.[41] When Laurentius visits Möðruvellir during the same trip, the saga recounts how it is being run as a normal church, and two surviving brothers were living elsewhere as normal priests, and that all its incomes and moveable property had been transferred over to Hólar cathedral during Auðun's tenure; the only thing Laurentius mourns, however, is that regular canons should be leaving as secular clergy, and even that he decides to wait to address until meeting with the archbishop.[42] While the saga also has him waiting to resolve the bishop's tithes issue with Þingeyrar, which clearly causes some tension, he does at least agree to an arbitration which ends up providing some appeasement to the monks, by returning to them a property which had first been granted to them by Jörundr, and then been taken by Auðun.[43]

During his consecration visit in 1324, as noted earlier, Laurentius is pressured by the archbishop to reestablish Möðruvellir, but he maintains the control of Hólar cathedral over the monastery; it is during this very visit that the archbishop also pressures Laurentius to restore the bishop's tithes to Þingeyrar. Even in his own saga, Laurentius is like his predecessors in prioritizing episcopal power over all else, and his son Árni – a monk at Þingeyrar like his father – argues for Laurentius to return the tithes.[44] While he does not actually return the bishop's tithes to Þingeyrar when he returns to Iceland, the saga has him give a speech sympathizing with the monks' struggle against overbearing bishops, and grant them different properties as compensation which, Laurentius claims, are of comparable value and will not cause future disputes.[45] In contrast, Laurentius' attempts to maintain control over Möðruvellir go on for years with no indications of the Benedictine bishop sympathizing with the canons.

The *Möðruvallamál* is essentially the final conflict of *Lárentíus saga*, and while primarily a dispute between bishop and Augustinians, it very likely contributed to an escalation of tension between Benedictines and Augustinians in northern Iceland, as well as tension between north and south. In 1326, the Dominican Bishop Jón Halldórsson – who will be discussed in more detail in the final section of this study – and the abbot of the Augustinians at Þykkvabær, Þorlákr Loftsson, were chosen by

[41] *Biskupa sögur III*: 382.

[42] *Biskupa sögur III*: 355-56.

[43] *Biskupa sögur III*: 359-60.

[44] *Biskupa sögur III*: 367-70.

[45] *Biskupa sögur III*: 383-84.

the archbishop as judges to oversee the first settlement between Hólar and Möðruvellir. In making his case, Laurentius proposes that Hólar pay for the rebuilding and restoration of Möðruvellir, but that it should be headed by a prior, with a *ráðsmaðr* [steward] appointed by the bishop, and Bishop Laurentius would function as its abbot; he claims that this is exactly how Jörundr had arranged things. The brothers accept this arrangement, and Möðruvellir is quickly restored, but immediately the brothers complain to Bishop Jón that Laurentius was not upholding the bargain. Bishop Jón agrees to ride north, and the conflict resumes.[46]

During the rest of the dispute, several key issues relevant to the present discussion arise. When Laurentius is forced to give in to Bishop Jón and Abbot Þorlákr in the second round of legal proceedings in 1327, and return full control of Möðruvellir to the canons, the saga notes that rumors spread around the diocese shaming Laurentius for allowing himself to be governed by southerners.[47] At the same time as the Augustinian abbot of Þykkvabær is overreaching his authority in meddling in northern matters, the canons at Möðruvellir are characterized as drunk and worldly, hosting parties for local farms, and wasting their limited resources by living far beyond their means.[48] Bishop Laurentius on the other hand is praised repeatedly as a careful and successful estate manager, who brings wealth to his diocese and successfully founds important institutions, including a hospital for poor, impaired, and elderly clerics at Kvíabekkur in Ólafsfjörður.[49] Laurentius' identity as a bishop is also presented in the saga as fundamentally tied to his background as a Benedictine monk: the saga states explicitly that he continued to dress as a monk, and expected other bishops who came from the Benedictines to do the same.[50] I would thus argue that *Lárentíus saga* deliberately implies that the Augustinian order was more lax and worldly than the Benedictines, and that this laxness fueled Laurentius' problems with Möðruvellir.

This apparent disdain for the Augustinians is arguably so great that even his own saga implies that Bishop Laurentius had a questionable legal case, and that in defending episcopal interests he did not behave entirely correctly. Laurentius' final case is

[46] *Biskupa sögur III*: 391-97.

[47] *Lárentíus saga* has Laurentius being criticized for allowing matters to be dictated by southerners when the case over Möðruvellir is won by Bishop Jón and Abbot Þorlákr (*Biskupa sögur III*: 408).

[48] *Biskupa sögur III*: 414-15.

[49] *Biskupa sögur III*: 387-88.

[50] *Biskupa sögur III*: 381. This passage may is ambiguous, and may be stating that Laurentius was decreeing the policy of holding to a monastic *habitus*, or simply that he was communicating that this was the way things were generally done (i.e. outside of Iceland).

brought before the archbishop, argued for by Laurentius' student and eventual successor Egill Eyjólfsson, and finally Laurentius wins the case in 1328. His case is based entirely on precedent: primarily the precedent of how Jörundr initially ran Möðruvellir, but also the precedent of the first settlement between Möðruvellir and Hólar in 1326. Yet there is an authorial intrusion after Laurentius' victory, where the author quite explicitly states that the law and the Augustinian rule were on the side of Bishop Jón Halldórsson and Möðruvellir, while Laurentius only had precedent on his side.[51] Laurentius' position seems especially insecure when we consider that precedent was the argument made by proprietary church-owners during the *staðamál*, an argument that the reformers fought against. This authorial anxiety seems explicit when, immediately after comparing the two bishops' positions in the *Möðruvallamál*, the saga reminds the reader that Laurentius always desired to follow canon law, and proceeds to offer an exemplum demonstrating that.[52] So, even his own biography suggests that Laurentius Kálfsson – for the most part a champion of ecclesiastical reform and strict adherence to canon law – effectively rejects the Augustinian rule as irrelevant or insufficient legal defense.

Considering the three bishops of Hólar discussed above, we see Jörundr's southern model of monasticism clashing with the northern Benedictines, and then Auðun very clearly clashing with all three male monastic houses of his diocese; Laurentius, in turn, managed to repair relations with his own Benedictine order – while still pushing for episcopal power – but developed a completely antagonistic relationship with the Augustinians at Möðruvellir. The three bishops together show a consistent concern during the early fourteenth century for expanding episcopal control over monasteries, but Jörundr and Laurentius also suggest how much that control could be conditioned and colored by individual ideologies and allegiances: their respective Augustinian and Benedictine backgrounds, certainly, but also likely their individual personalities and political techniques. Laurentius, according to his saga, was a far worse politician and negotiator than Jörundr. We lack sources regarding Möðruvellir during the tenure of Laurentius' student and successor Egill Eyjólfsson, bishop of Hólar 1333 to 1341, so the safest assumption would seem to be that the monastery had some time to recover, but under the tight episcopal control which Laurentius established. There are almost no details about Egill's involvement with and relationship to the Benedictines, only that he appointed Abbot Björn to Þingeyrar

[51] *Biskupa sögur III*: 424-26. Further research is needed to explore the legal background to this dispute.

[52] *Biskupa sögur III*: 426-29.

after the death of Abbot Guðmundr, and so as a lifelong ally of Laurentius, we should probably assume his relationship with the order continued to be good.[53]

Further research is needed to work out some of the further complexities of this period, especially the role of lay authorities, both in Iceland and Norway. It is clear, for example, that Jörundr's foundation at Reynistaðr was quickly embraced not only by the local Benedictines, but also by the secular leaders of the region, who had good relations with both Þingeyrar and the bishops of Hólar.[54] *Lárentíus saga* suggests local lay support for Möðruvellir in its region, but that support was not enough to fend off an antagonistic bishop – perhaps in part because Möðruvellir lacked the support of nearby Benedictines, which Reynistaðr could rely on. It may also be significant that Reynistaðr's first abbess, while from a southern family, became connected to a powerful northern family, and herself may have been living as a sort of anchoress at Munkaþverá. Thus, even though Reynistaðr was, in a way, bringing a southern model of monasticism north, it was able to quickly consolidate its resources and allegiances in a way that Möðruvellir was not.

Augustinians and Benedictines: A Renewed Crisis in 1343

After the deaths of both Bishop Egill and Bishop Jón Eindríðason in 1341, crisis quickly resumed, when two powerful and controversial bishops arrived in Iceland in 1343. Gunnar Finnbogason proposed that the two-year gap with no bishops in Iceland contributed to the monastic crisis of the following years, as the already lax monastic discipline eroded even further in the absence of governing episcopal authority.[55] While the evidence shows that there were *officiales* in place at both Hólar and Skálholt in 1341, whose duty it would have been to govern the diocese in the bishops' absence,[56] it is not impossible that lack of any bishops in Iceland during these two years did have some impact on subsequent events, when clashes between bishops and both monastic orders continued in the north, while similar disputes arose and escalated in the south. The combination of the long crisis in the north and the escalation in the south, I would argue, led to more direct and intense confrontations and tensions among all parties involved, culminating in the switch from the Augustinian to the Benedictine rule at Viðey. Moving beyond the narrative period of *Lárentíus saga*, this

[53] Most details we have about Egill's tenure as bishop appear in the *Lögmannsannáll* (*Islandske annaler*: 271-73).

[54] See my upcoming article in the *Scandinavian Journal of History*, "Benedictines and Lay Society in Fourteenth-Century Iceland."

[55] Gunnar Finnbogason 1951: 84.

[56] Sigurdson 2016: 76-79, 187-89.

section must rely on scattered annal references and documentary sources, and so the evidence is more difficult to interpret. Nonetheless, even though it is not possible at present to explain every aspect of it, the monastic crisis of the 1340s and 1350s can be best understood as part of a crisis that had been going on since the late thirteenth century.

In 1343, the Norwegian Ormr Áslákssson, bishop of Hólar 1342 to 1356, newly arrived in Iceland, imprisoned some of the brothers at Möðruvellir. Considering what an unpopular and contentious bishop he would become, it should be no surprise that this is the first of his acts named in the *Lögmannsannáll*.[57] No explanation is given there or in any other annals: the *Lögmannsannáll* only states the Bishop Ormr was at odds with the brothers, and imprisoned some of them. Though we cannot know, it seems possible that the brothers saw an opportunity with the gap between bishops, and attempted to regain the independence they had lost to Bishop Laurentius. Whatever the direct cause, the dispute was not resolved with the imprisonment of canons in 1343: one fragmentary annal, which may have been written at Möðruvellir,[58] states that nearly a decade later, in 1352, Bishop Ormr set a poor priest in charge of the monastery at Möðruvellir – the annal does not give this priest a formal title – who would take care of five brothers, their servant, and two clerics. The annal passage states that a certain Þórðr Bergsþórsson was made prior in the same year, so the 'poor priest' was probably a *ráðsmaðr* [steward], and the verb *fæða* [feed/provide for] confirms that his responsibility was tied to the provisions, livestock, and stores at the monastery. This fits rather well with Laurentius' arrangement a few decades earlier, when Laurentius set himself up as abbot, with one of the brothers as prior beneath him, but a *ráðsmaðr* appointed as well – because Laurentius' concerns were tied to property management and responsible use of food and other resources, his *ráðsmaðr* probably had a similar function to Ormr's, and this fits with scholars' general perception of the office, though more research is needed.[59] This whole arrangement

[57] Ormr's overbearing and contentious tenure, and his major dispute with the secular leaders of his diocese, has been relatively well-explored by historians, see for example Jón Jóhannesson 1958: 122-36. Despite the antagonism of the sources, Magnús Stefánsson has emphasized that Ormr and other fourteenth-century bishops were clearly dedicated to the Church and worked towards its interests, see Magnús Stefánsson 1978: 248-53; Sigurdson 2016: 92-94.

[58] *Islandske annaler*: xx.

[59] Erika Sigurdson (2016: 79-81) has shown that the cathedral *ráðsmenn* should be identified with the office of vicar-general, and confirmed the conclusions of earlier scholars that their duties included estate management, lifestock and other property. However, more work remains to be done in dilineating how distinct the monastery *ráðsmenn* might have been.

is implied to be a way of keeping the brothers in line, because, the annal states, the brothers had refused to follow a written decree of Bishop Ormr that the monastery itself should be moved to Hólar.[60] We have no other evidence for this unprecedented attempt, and the document which Ormr supposedly wrote does not survive. Though the details are lost, on some level Ormr's attempted relocation must be seen as an escalation of the push for episcopal control over Möðruvellir that Laurentius pursued: after decades of attempting to negotiate and maintain direct episcopal control over Möðruvellir, Ormr finally decided a refoundation would solve the problem. It thus resulted from the tensions that had long simmered between Hólar and Möðruvellir, even as it must have exacerbated them further.

Ormr himself was not a Benedictine, and though his main dispute was with Möðruvellir, there is some evidence of tensions with the Benedictines and their allies. According to the *Skálholtsannáll*, Ormr replaced the abbot of Þingeyrar in 1345, removing Eiríkr *bolli* and replacing him with Stefán, who had been the abbot of Munkaþverá; Ormr then placed Bergr Sokkason into the position at Munkaþverá, and the annals states that in so doing Ormr restored his honor – it is not clear what this means, exactly, but it is probably related to the fact that Bergr had given up his position as abbot of Munkaþverá in 1334, for unknown reasons.[61] There were several movements of abbots and monks between Þingeyrar and Munkaþverá, even during the latter part of Bishop Egill's tenure, which may be a reflection of ongoing problems.[62] The allegiances involved here are clearly complex, and don't divide neatly into two camps: the *Lögmannsannáll*, written by Bishop Laurentius' student Einarr Hafliðason, criticizes Ormr after he takes office, noting how he quickly used up the wealth that had been gathered by Bishop Egill and Einarr himself there.[63] Similarly, the ambiguity of Ormr's relation to the Benedictines is exemplified in a 1346 document, in which he grants partial ownership of two pieces of property to Þingeyrar; he states the monastery was in great need, and presents himself as being a charitable and helpful bishop.[64] However, one of these properties was Hjaltabakki, a farm which *Lárentíus saga* reveals had been granted to the monastery first by

[60] *Islandske annaler*: 224. One document may also hint, very indirectly, at the continuing crisis around Möðruvellir during Ormr's tenure as bishop: in 1350, the record of Möðruvellir's coastal rights, its *reki*, was formally copied (DI II, 858). Such a copy would have been important if the bishop was claiming control over the monastery's properties.

[61] *Islandske annaler*: 211.

[62] For a summary see Janus Jónsson 1887: 190-91, 204-205.

[63] *Islandske annaler*: 274.

[64] DI II: 835-36.

Jörundr, then taken by Auðun, then returned to the monastery by Laurentius.[65] It is therefore quite likely that in 1346 Bishop Ormr was in fact returning to Þingeyrar the rights to Hjaltabakki that he had already deprived them of. Taken together, the evidence suggests that while Ormr probably did not have an especially antagonistic relationship with the northern Benedictines, he was no ally to them, and like Bishop Auðun and Bishop Jörundr, for him the monks were a tool in his efforts to secure episcopal power. Einarr Hafliðason, therefore, could criticize Ormr in the *Lögmannsannáll*, without associating the spendthrift bishop to southern or Augustinian interests.

Ormr's career in Norway must have impacted his relationships with and ideas about the monasteries in Iceland, though we must speculate about the details. Before coming to Iceland, Ormr had been a cathedral canon at Stavanger, a city that had long housed Benedictines at Olavskloster and Augustinian canons at Utstein.[66] Elbjørg Haug has suggested that across Norway the earliest Benedictine communities may have functioned like cathedral chapters, following an Anglo-Saxon model, and that Olavskloster fulfilled this function in Stavanger until finally being secularized and absorbed by the cathedral in the second half of the thirteenth century.[67] Such secularization could have been a precedent for Ormr attempting to move the Möðruvellir canons to Hólar in the 1350s.[68] But even more immediately significant is the fact that, over the course of the decade before Ormr's election to Hólar, the bishop of Stavanger had been in a serious dispute with the abbot of Utstein; the bishop had even excommunicated the abbot.[69] Even though we cannot assume from this event that Ormr was antagonistic towards all Augustinian canons, it certainly prepared him to pick a fight with them, and likely to view the reform of monastic practice as an episcopal duty. It may also be significant that Ormr did not come from Bergen or Nidaros, and did not convey the patronage and good relations from those cities which the Icelandic Augustinians seem to have traditionally enjoyed. As will be discussed below, in 1350 he appointed a highly controversial abbot to Þingeyrar, who may have been a southerner and an Augustinian canon. Thus, even though Ormr

[65] *Biskupa sögur III*: 359-360.

[66] On Ormr's position as cathedral canon at Stavanger, see *DN IV*: 123, 136, 144-45, 184-85. On the history of Utstein and other monasteries around Stavanger, see Haug 2008.

[67] Haug 2008: 80-82.

[68] Such a plan could even have been following Jörundr's initial intentions, see footnote 19. However, this possibility requires significant further research.

[69] Haug 2008: 84-85.

was no close friend to the Benedictines in his diocese, his actions clearly must have encouraged tensions between monastic orders.

Jón Sigurðarson, bishop of Skálholt 1342 to 1348, also arrived in Iceland in 1343. Little is known about his background; because several annals record that a Brother Jón Sigurðarson left Iceland two years before his consecration as bishop, scholars have tended to assume he was Icelandic.[70] He is frequently given the title *bróðir* across different sources, so he must have been a member of a monastic order. In light of his actions, it is most likely that he was an Icelandic Benedictine brother, and that will be the hypothesis here; however, it is not impossible that he was an Augustinian canon, and that the pressure for the Benedictine switch came more directly from Archbishop Páll Bárðarson.[71] What is clear, however, is that Jón Sigurðarson had very strong ideas of monastic discipline and reform: immediately upon taking up his office, he ordered the execution of a Benedictine sister at Kirkjubær for blasphemy against the pope, and the punishment of two Augustinian canons at Þykkvabær – Arngrímr and Eysteinn – for striking their abbot, the same Abbot Þorlákr who had helped defend the canons of Möðruvellir during the *Möðruvallamál*.[72] The *Skálholtsannáll* gives some additional details in a passage written in Latin that after *dissentio* had arisen between abbot and brothers at Þykkvabær, Þorlákr had fled to the Augustinians at Viðey *quasi profugus* (like a fugitive), on the advice of Sigmundr, the *officialis* of

[70] *Islandske annaler*: 352, 401; Guðbrandur Jónsson 1953, 414. Bishop Jón being Icelandic during this time of Norwegian dominance over Skálholt would suggest that he must have had an especially close personal connection with the archbishopric, comparable to what Laurentius Kálfsson and Egill Eyjólfsson had cultivated.

[71] It is reasonable to assume that the clergy of Skálholt diocese would have more readily accepted an Augustinian bishop than a Benedictine. Jón Sigurðarson has the same patronym as Helgi Sigurðarson, the abbot of Viðey who died in 1343, and it is not impossible that they were brothers, and thus that Jón has strong Augustinian familial connections. The *officialis* of Skálholt who took up the position as the new Benedictine prior of Viðey, Sigmundr Einarsson, is implied in at least one annal to not have been ordained a monk until he took up the position (*Islandske annaler*: 210, 352) – which could support the idea that Bishop Jón did not have Benedictine friends or allies to take up the position, and had to depend on his allies within the cathedral community. However, either argument depends on Archbishop Páll have some positive view of the Benedictines: either in electing a northern Benedictine to a position in the south, or in himself pushing for the rule change at Viðey as, presumably, a means of reform at the monastery. The later idea, I would argue, is far more speculative, as Archbishop Páll was not himself a Benedictine, and it is hard to believe that he would push for such a specific and unusual policy entirely of his own accord. In any case, more research is needing into archepiscopal policy at ideology at this time than is possible here.

[72] *Islandske annaler*: 273-74. On the idea that the description of this as physical assault of the abbot may be exaggerated, see Gunnar Harðarson 2021: 268.

Skálholt.[73] The annal actually states that Abbot Þorlákr had initially intended to go abroad, perhaps to shelter among Norwegian Augustinians.

So, Bishop Jón Sigurðarson was obtaining justice for an Augustinian abbot by disciplining the two canons. Yet the events of the following year reveal the involvement of the Benedictines in this dispute: in 1344, the monastery of Viðey is reported to have switched to the Benedictine Rule. The Sigmundr who helped Abbot Þorákr flee to Viðey , who was also *officialis* at Skálholt, became a monk and the prior of the newly Benedictine house at Viðey.[74] Such a move must have been made with the approval of Bishop Jón, and probably at his instigation, or perhaps even that of the archbishop. The fact that the new Viðey was given a prior, rather than an abbot, may suggest that Bishop Jón intended to himself function as a sort of abbot, just as Laurentius had done at Möðruvellir. Jón can hardly have had the support of the Augustinians of his diocese, and the removal of Abbot Þorkell from the Augustinian monastery of Helgafell in the same year was probably related to the event in Viðey.[75] The northern Icelandic Benedictines, however, probably would have supported spreading their order south into Skálholt diocese, especially if Bishop Jón came from their ranks; Jón's seeming to be on friendly terms with the prominent northern priest Einarr Hafliðason,[76] as well as his attempt to mediate in the dispute between Bishop Ormr and the northern farmers, supports the idea that he had a connection to Þingeyrar or Munkaþverá that is missing from our sources.

We also have hints that the previous bishop of Skálholt, Jón Eindriðason, who was definitely a Benedictine brother, was in dispute with the Viðey canons, which adds further evidence to the idea that the change of rule of Viðey was related to rising tensions between the two orders. A letter written to Bishop Jón Eindriðason from

[73] *Islandske annaler*: 209.

[74] The *Skálholtsannáll* states that in 1344 the *munkaregla* – the rule of monks, i.e. the Benedictine rule – was established at Viðey on the feast of the Translation of St Benedict, but doesn't state who instigated the change (*Islandske annaler*: 210). The post-medieval *Gottskálksannáll* specifies more clearly that it is the Benedictine rule, and that six brothers were placed under it, and that Brother Sigmundr Einarsson is made prior (*Islandske annaler*: 352).

[75] *Islandske annaler*: 352. This change of abbots at Helgafell is only recorded in the post-medieval *Gottskálksannáll*.

[76] The *Lögmannsannáll* notes that when Einarr left Iceland in 1345, he did so *á kosti* [at the cost of] Bishop Jón. This happens immediately after Einarr moves from Hólar to his benefice at Breiðabólsstaðr. While there are of course multiple ways to interpret this passage: the issue may simply have been that Bishop Ormr had spent all the funds of Hólar cathedral, as the *Lögmannsannáll* accuses him of, and so had limited resources to send Einarr abroad. But it seems more likely that Einarr was at this point not getting along with Bishop Ormr, but that he knew Bishop Jón and got along well with him, and so persuaded him to pay for the trip.

Hákon Erlingsson, Bishop of Bergen, in the summer of 1340, describes a canon from Viðey who had been sent by Bishop Jón to stay with Bishop Hákon; in the letter, Hákon asks if the canon has permission to return home to Iceland.[77] We have no evidence that Bishop Hákon Erlingsson was a monk, friar, or Augustinian canon, but he does appear to have been a close friend with the Dominican Bishop Jón Halldórsson, who defended and patronized the canons of Möðruvellir in their dispute with Laurentius; there is also some evidence that there was a close relationship between the cathedral canons in Bergen and the Augustinian canons at Jonskloster at this time.[78] So in any disputes between Benedictines and Augustinians in Iceland, it would make sense for Bishop Hákon to favor the Augustinian side.

While this letter cannot prove that Bishop Jón Eindriðason was clashing with the canons at Viðey, nor that Bishop Jón Sigurðarson was a Benedictine continuing the same dispute, it does support speculation in this direction. The careers of these two bishops developed during decades of crisis and tension between monastic orders in northern Iceland, and they must have had allies in northern Iceland, among the social and intellectual circles that had supported the election of the Benedictine Bishop Laurentius, and his Benedictine-educated student Bishop Egill. I would argue that, even if we cannot know the full details of the event with our limited sources, the event of Viðey becoming Benedictine at the instigation of a bishop – in essence importing northern Icelandic monasticism to the south – would not have happened if Jörundr had not first brought the southern model north in 1296. Nonetheless, monastic allegiances and ideologies was still only one factor in this crisis, and the pursuit of episcopal power and dominance doubtlessly remained a more important factor. Both Bishop Ormr and Bishop Jón Sigurðarson made unprecedented power plays regarding Augustinian canons during their tenures – Ormr attempting to forcibly move the brothers of Möðruvellir, and Jón changing the rule at Viðey – and while both of them certainly had strong opinions about the two monastic orders, like Laurentius Kálfsson, certainly the most Benedictine bishop in Iceland, their commitment to their office as bishops was more significant.

Yet monastic allegiances once again became a major factor upon the arrival of Bishop Gyrðir around 1350, when the traditionally good relationship between the Icelandic Augustinians and Skálholt cathedral seems to have been restored.[79] Gyrðir had

[77] DI II: 730-731. I am following the editor Jón Þorkelsson's argument about who this letter is addressed to; however, because the year is missing from the document, it is not impossible that it was addressed to the previous bishop of Skálholt, Jón Halldórsson.

[78] Etheridge 2021: 22-23, 25-26; Hommedal 2014: 624.

[79] The *Skálholtsannáll* gives 1350, the *Flateyjarannáll* gives 1351, and the *Lögmannsannáll* gives 1352 for the arrival of Bishop Gyrðir in Iceland (*Islandske annaler*: 214, 276, 405).

spent some time as an Augustinian canon at Helgeseter in Nidaros, and became abbot of the Augustinian house of Jonskloster in Bergen in 1339.[80] The year after his arrival, under Gyrðir's oversight, Viðey returned to the Augustinian rule.[81] It is almost certain that Gyrðir's arrival represented the Norwegian Augustinians, and perhaps the Bergen Augustinians in particular, taking a direct hand in monastic developments in Iceland.

The echoes of the crisis continued for at least a few years, as is seen in how the complex career of Arngrímr Brandsson was tangled up with Ormr's continuing disputes and the links between Icelandic and Norwegian monasticism. In large part because of his possible authorship of several important texts, few figures from mid-fourteenth-century Iceland have been as well studied as Arngrímr Brandsson. The most recent account of Arngrímr's life and career is Gunnar Harðarson's, who argues that a variety of seeming contradictory sources can be interpreted as recording the activities of a single Arngrímr who moved between dioceses and three different religious orders.[82] This is in stark contrast to Guðbrandur Jónsson's arguments that there must have been at least two men named Arngrímr being described in these sources.[83] The single-Arngrímr theory has gained ground, so this study will treat all the evidence for Arngrímr as related to a single man, but there remains no strong consensus.[84]

Arngrímr Brandsson came from the south, from the aristocratic Oddaverjar family, and worked for Bishop Jón Halldórsson in opposition to Bishop Laurentius. He became an Augustinian canon in 1341, and was one of the canons imprisoned by Bishop Jón Sigurðarson in 1343. Arngrímr then went north and ingratiated himself into the service of Bishop Ormr, working with him in 1345 to promote the cult of Guðmundr Arason, and travelling with him to Norway in 1346. The next year, when Ormr left Iceland again, Arngrímr had presumably already become *officialis* of Hólar, and then in 1351, upon Ormr's return, the key moment occurred: Arngrímr was made abbot of Þingeyrar. It is difficult to imagine the monks were happy with this choice, if this Arngrímr was in fact the same southern Augustinian who worked for the

[80] *DN IV*: 206.

[81] *Islandske annaler*: 214, 405.

[82] Gunnar Harðarson 2021: 263–274.

[83] Guðbrandur Jónsson 1953.

[84] The view of two Arngrímr's has arguably been the consensus for a long time, see for example Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2012. However, for the current popularity of the single-Arngrímr theory, see for example Gottskálk Jensson 2022: 143-44, note 33 and Gunnvör Karlsdóttir 2017: 28-33.

Dominican Bishop Jón Halldórsson. Such discontent may explain why, in 1357, around the time when news of Bishop Ormr's death in Norway would have reached his diocese, Arngrímr was accused of unknown crimes and left his positions as abbot and *officialis*. The annals disagree here, and some imply than Arngrímr willingly left his position, and there were clearly different views among the authors about what exactly happened.[85] However, even if Arngrímr did 'voluntarily' leave Þingeyrar, it was most likely under pressure.[86]

The annals report that, the very next year, two archiepiscopal legates came to Iceland and, among several other important acts, reestablished Arngrímr as abbot of Þingeyrar. One of these was Brother Eysteinn, presumably the same Eysteinn of Þykkvabær who had been imprisoned alongside Arngrímr, and this seems best interpreted not only as an alliance between the two men, but also as a continuing interference of Augustinians in northern Benedictine affairs, and thus something that could continue tensions between the orders. Two annals also add that Arngrímr had made a vow to live under the Rule of the *predikarar*, i.e. the Dominicans. The *Lögmannsannáll* simply notes that he had sworn an oath to join the *predikaraklaustr* in Bergen, but the *Flateyjarannáll* adds that the legates who returned him to his position as abbot were ignoring his vow (*heiti*), suggesting disapproval at his return to his position.[87] As the next section will discuss, Arngrímr here probably contributed to several decades of increasing tension between Dominicans and Benedictines.

If this reconstruction of Arngrímr's career is correct, he represents on the one hand a surprisingly level of flexibility between the three religious orders being discussed in this study, as well as the high level of movement and potential opportunity available to the elite clergy between Skálholt, Hólar, Bergen, and Nidaros. At the same time, however, his movements highlight the tensions this flexibility could entail. It is very likely that he was not popular in the diocese of Hólar, and the Benedictines of Þingeyrar very likely disapproved of his appointment – certainly, by 1357, they

[85] The *Lögmannsannáll* and *Flateyjarannáll* are clearly antagonistic towards Arngrímr, and describe the priests of the diocese refusing to obey Arngrímr because of some unnamed crimes; the fragmentary annal from Skálholt, however, simply states that Arngrímr left his position as *officialis* (*Islandske annaler*: 225, 276-77, 405).

[86] Gunnar Harðarson leaves the question of why Arngrímr left the position of abbot open, while Guðbrandur Jónsson favors the language of the *Lögmannsannáll* over *Flateyjarannáll* and argues that Arngrímr willingly left the position, though in the context of being persecuted by his political enemies; both of them suggest the possibility that it would have been expected for Arngrímr to leave his position after the death of Ormr (Gunnar Harðarson 2021: 273; Guðbrandur Jónsson 1953: 430-35).

[87] *Islandske annaler*: 277, 405-406.

seem happy to have seen him go. His exact motivation for joining the Dominicans remains uncertain, as well as whether there is a possibility he was forced or coerced to join them.[88]

The Dominican Factor

Arngrímr was not the only Icelander of his generation to switch from being an Icelandic Benedictine to a Norwegian Dominican, and yet there seems to have been tension between these two orders in Iceland during the period being discussed here. From a northern Icelandic perspective, it can be argued that the Dominicans represented southern and Norwegian interference, a force allied to the Augustinians. In the south, the situation was more ambiguous, and while there seems to have usually been amicable relationships between the Dominicans, Skálholt cathedral, and the Augustinians at Þykkvabær, this was not necessarily the case with the other Augustinian houses.

It was Bishop Laurentius' own son, Árni, who first made the switch from Benedictine to Dominican, several years before Arngrímr. An undated letter from the Dominicans of Nidaros to Archbishop Peter Phillipus of Uppsala – himself a Dominican – probably written around 1337, describes Árni as a member of the order. Árni had been sent with a novice to go preaching in Jamtaland. The letter itself is a plea to the archbishop to support the Nidaros Dominicans, as their own archbishop had neglected them in favor of the local Cistercians. Further research needs to be done to unpack the full significance of this letter, but for the present purposes, what matters is its relationship to the narrative of *Lárentíus saga*, since the letter provides important reasoning for why the northern Icelandic Benedictines may have disliked the Dominican order.

Lárentíus saga suggests a predominantly negative view of Dominicans, a view that we can presume was not uncommon, though certainly not universal, among the students of Laurentius Kálfsson and their peers in mid-to-late fourteenth-century northern Iceland. During his time acting as a formal legate for the archbishop in Iceland, conducting a visitation across the island in 1307, Laurentius is betrayed by the Dominican Brother Björn, who is portrayed as lax in his duties and allied to Laurentius' enemies in both Iceland and Norway. In the saga, before his journey back

[88] There is no room to address the topic fully here, but Guðbrandur Jónsson also argues that Arngrímr was caught up in a dispute between two parties over the election of the next bishop of Hólar, and that it was because of this dispute that Arngrímr lost his positions (Guðbrandur Jónsson 1953: 430-33). I do not disagree that this was a factor, but such a dispute does not preclude that his identity as a southerner, a former Augustinian, and an ally of Bishop Ormr were also important elements.

to Iceland, Laurentius tells the archbishop that he has no skill in preaching, and requests to bring Brother Björn with him – which suggests that the Order of Preachers, the Dominicans, had a reputation that lived up to their name. However, Archbishop Jörundr replies with a warning that Dominicans are generally untrustworthy, and especially in legal matters.[89] If there is any truth to this characterization of the archbishop, it may suggest an ongoing tension between the Dominicans of Nidaros and the cathedral that continued through the 1330s and up to the time of the c. 1337 letter about Árni.[90]

The characterization of the Dominican Brother Björn in the saga is also significant to conceptualizing the interplay between episcopal power and the perspectives of different monastic orders. Björn should be a representative of central archepiscopal authority, but is presented in the saga as unreliable, and eventually abandoning his mission unfinished. The saga also has Björn quickly ally himself with Bishop Jörundr, who, as discussed earlier, instigated the beginning of the monastic crisis of fourteenth-century Iceland. In a way, Björn thus represents the allegiance between the Augustinians, the Dominicans, and Skálholt, at least from the perspective of the author and audience of *Lárentíus saga*. At the same time, the tensions and conflicts between monastic orders in Iceland cannot be understood in terms of simple dichotomies or core ideological positions inherent to each monastic order. Rather, disputes happen in the context of positions and goals that were constantly being renegotiated on political and personal grounds.

Lárentíus saga's characterization of its other main Dominican character – Jón Halldórsson, Bishop of Skálholt 1322-1339 – is complicated, but can summarized as respectful, while still somewhat negative. Importantly, the negativity that is present revolves around distaste for an outsider meddling in Hólar affairs. As noted earlier, the saga praises Jón Halldórsson for his Latin learning and largely sides with his interpretation of canon law over Laurentius' in the resolution of the *Möðruvallamál*.[91] Yet at the same time, the saga characterizes Jón as somewhat elitist and out-of-touch, a man who oversteps the authority of his position to help the Augustinian canons of Laurentius' diocese – and does so, as discussed earlier, with the abbot of Þykkvabær at his side. In the saga, the Dominicans and Augustinians of Skálholt and Norway are linked in their exteriority to the Benedictine-dominated Hólar diocese, and Bishop Jón exemplifies the tying of that exteriority to a troublesome overreach of episcopal

[89] *Biskupa sögur III*: 265-66.

[90] There is very little evidence that survives about the Dominican house in Nidaros, see Jakobsen 2003: 213.

[91] *Biskupa sögur III*: 383, 425-426.

authority: he sends Laurentius a letter of summons to Laurentius after the initial settlement of the *Möðruvallamál*, which Laurentius refuses to hear, because, as Laurentius argues, Bishop Jón is continuing to act with archepiscopal authority after that authority had expired with the first settlement in the case.[92] Laurentius himself is not guiltless – his own involvement with the canons of Möðruvellir is to an extent characterized as episcopal overreach – but his saga implies that this is not a problem of the same kind: he is a local, a northerner, a Benedictine.

Outside the context of *Lárentíus saga*, the annals show that Bishop Jón Halldórsson engaged in some of the same episcopal interference of monasteries within his diocese that characterizes wider episcopal efforts during this period: in 1324 he removed Abbot Þórðr of Helgafell from his position, and the next year Abbot Andrés from Viðey.[93] It is probably significant that he did this so shortly after his arrival in Iceland, like the actions later taken by Bishop Jón Sigurðarson; this was an important priority in his leadership strategy over the diocese. It may likewise also be significant that he did not replace the abbot at Þykkvabær, whom he subsequently worked with in the *Möðruvallamál*: the oldest Augustinian house of Iceland, founded by a saintly bishop of Skálholt, may have maintained a stronger relationship with the cathedral than the other monasteries in the diocese.

Though he is not yet named as a Dominican in *Lárentíus saga*, the episodes involving Árni Laurentiusson in the saga give context to the c. 1337 letter and show how Árni might have been seen as a traitor to the northern Benedictines. Shortly before Laurentius' death in 1332, he aggressively confronts his son. The details are unclear, but Árni is accused of neglecting his oaths as a Benedictine monk – even though his father was the one who brought him to live at Hólar cathedral, taking him away from Þingeyrar – and of drinking excessively; these are both tied to him planning to go to Norway. The saga states that Árni, weeping at his father's harsh recriminations, promises to mend his ways and return to Þingeyrar, but that after Laurentius' death Árni broke his vow, and his life ended badly, as his father warned it would.[94] Yet this is almost certainly the same Árni who we see preaching in Sweden just a few short years after this exchange. Even if Árni did end up dying young, even if he did drink to excess, what was his crime to deserve such strong condemnation in *Lárentíus saga*? I would argue that his switch from the Benedictine to the Dominican life – perhaps a plan that his father knew about – was a key unspoken part of the saga's characterization of his doomed future. And the saga's perspective on this switch, this

[92] *Biskupa sögur III*: 395-400.

[93] *Islandske annaler*: 152, 394-395.

[94] *Biskupa sögur III*: 433–434.

betrayal, would have been informed by the actions of Abbot Arngrímr – the abbot of the oldest monastic community in Iceland! – taking a vow to join the Dominicans only a couple of decades later.[95]

It is not overly speculative to suggest that the Dominicans and Augustinians sometimes functioned as an allied force within Iceland, especially from the perspective of the Hólar Benedictines. As Erika Sigurdson has pointed out, little is known about the backgrounds of the Norwegians who became bishops of Hólar, but they tended to be from cathedral communities, and from Nidaros in particular.[96] However, in Skálholt, there was a strong representation from Norwegians from the area around Bergen; of these, the Dominican Jón Halldórsson and the Augustinian Gyrðir Ívarsson spent a long time and appear to have had a lot of influence in Iceland, compared to the Benedictine bishops of Skálholt mentioned earlier. But equally important are the Icelanders who went to Bergen: Arngrímr, on clashing with the Benedictines and priests of Hólar diocese, took an oath to join the same community as Jón Halldórsson. As noted earlier, a letter survives from around 1340, sent from Bishop Hákon of Bergen to what the letter only describes as Bishop Jón of Skálholt – probably to the Benedictine Bishop Jón Eindriðason, but potentially to his predecessor, if the letter is slightly earlier – describing a canon of Viðey having been sent to stay in Bergen with Bishop Hákon.

I would suggest, then, that the Dominicans sometimes functioned as a kind of third player in the relationship between Augustinians and Benedictines in Iceland. Tension with them was a relatively minor factor compared to larger tension between major power players: between bishops and monastic orders, the archbishop and his diocesan bishops, and between secular and ecclesiastical authorities. Some disputes were exacerbated by tensions between Icelanders and Norwegians, undoubtedly a factor in the fact that Bishop Auðun and Bishop Ormr spent nearly their entire tenures at odds with powerful farmers and priests within their diocese. So there was perhaps an element of suspicion of the Dominicans as an order without any houses in Iceland. Yet the complexity of Icelandic-Norwegian relations at this time means that it is not enough to attribute the explicit suspicion of Dominicans we see in *Lárentíus saga* only to Icelanders' issues with Norwegians. The fact that Icelanders went to Norway and joined the Dominicans highlights how interconnected the monastic life within the archdiocese of Nidaros really was in the fourteenth century.

[95] The feud between the Dominicans and Cistercians in Nidaros described in the letter, wherein the archbishop was ostensibly favoring the Cistercian side, may have also been felt in Iceland, and could have impacted contemporary attitudes towards Benedictines, but the evidence is very limited and more research is required.

[96] Sigurdson 2016: 90-91.

Yet as much as this interconnectedness created bonds and opportunities for men like Árni Laurentiusson, it must have also increased tension and resentment among his peers, and certainly for his father.

Conclusion

To attempt to tie the many threads of this study together, I would propose that in a bid to expand his power, and perhaps his own ideas of ecclesiastical and monastic reform, Bishop Jörundr brought a southern model of monasticism into Hólar diocese in 1296, increasing the already existing tensions between himself and the Benedictines of his own diocese, and contributing to elevated tensions between the two monastic orders of Iceland for at least the next fifty years, if not longer. Some tension between the two orders of Iceland probably go back to the twelfth century and the Augustinian involvement in the *libertas ecclesiae* movement. A detailed discussion of this earlier era is beyond the scope of this study, but it is worth noting that the bishop of Hólar who most ferociously and controversially fought for *libertas ecclesiae*, Guðmundr Arason, who held the office from 1203 to 1237, also had some clashes with the Benedictines in his diocese. Further research could explore possible continuity and connections between Guðmundr's relationship with the Benedictines, and Þingeyrar in particular, and Bishop Jörundr's.

When Bishop Jörundr disrupted the monastic culture in his diocese at the same time as both Icelandic monastic orders were coming under increasing pressure from growing episcopal power, and perhaps by increased involvement of Dominicans in Iceland, it would make sense for tensions between the orders to have increased significantly. Bishop Auðun escalated matters by clashing with both Benedictines and Augustinians, while Bishop Laurentius – and to an arguably lesser extent Bishop Jón Halldórsson – contributed in a different way by choosing sides, at least to some degree. All of these bishops were primarily concerned with their own power and the power of their dioceses, but they did have other concerns and ideologies which affected their decisions. After all of this, it should come as no surprise that the two new bishops who arrived in Iceland in 1343 managed to drastically escalate matters, and what seems to be the temporary dominance of the Benedictines at this time may be in part attributed to the allegiances they had cultivated in Norway, especially with Nidarholm. This dominance was short-lived, however, and Bishop Gyrðir restored the previous order, as well as the favor of the Augustinians in Skálholt. The continued echoes of these events in the later fourteenth century await further study.[97]

[97] The issue of northerners complaining of southern meddling certainly never entirely went away, and Gottskálk Jensson has recently highlighted a sixteenth-century example: in 1522, all the highest clerics of Hólar diocese, including the abbots of both Þingeyrar and

There is some risk of circular reasoning in arguing for the cause and effect of monasteries on episcopal policies, and we cannot be certain that the change of rule at Viðey was caused by Bishop Jón Sigurðarson both having a northern Benedictine background and attempting to do to Skálholt something like what had been done to Hólar in 1296: import a monastic model in support of a new episcopal policy. Yet there is no inherent reason why Benedictines would have been more conducive to episcopal power or reform in mid-fourteenth-century Skálholt than Augustinians, unless Bishop Jón had an existing connection to them. In this context, then, there is no need to separate the personal political goals of individual bishops from the tension between monastic orders which I am proposing: that tension was carried and propagated by individuals and their ambitions. The fact that Bishop Jón was successful, at least for a short time, I would argue is good evidence that matters had escalated to a serious degree: Jörundr may have been able to found an Augustinian house on a farm he had himself bought during a tumultuous time, but even he could hardly have imagined trying to change the rule at either Þingeyrar or Munkaþverá.

It is thus reasonable to describe the period from around 1296 – arguably from a bit earlier, with Jörundr's first actions against Þingeyrar – until at least the return of Abbot Arngrímr to his position at Þingeyrar in 1358, as a period of monastic crisis. This was not simply a crisis caused by weak monastic culture and lack of discipline as Gunnar Finnbogason proposed in 1951 – though such factors may well have played a role. At the same time, it is too simplistic to view all these events strictly through the lens of increasing episcopal power and individual ambitions; monastic culture, ideology, and identity must have played a role. I am also not suggesting that there was a fundamental, institutional antagonism between Benedictines and Augustinians, but rather that a small, basic level of tension grew during this period, wrapped up in turbulent episcopal politics and regional antipathy. Many factors contributed to a tumultuous period, including the ongoing consolidation of the new ecclesiastical law, the involvement of Norwegians in Icelandic politics, and the growth of episcopal power in Iceland, which did not only impinge on the rights and interests of the secular elite – as historians have long discussed – but could also ruffle the feathers of monasteries and neighbouring bishops as well.

Sverrir Jakobsson has recently characterized the first half of the fourteenth century as a time when "ecclesiastical relations were volatile and raucous at times as the clerics cherished their newly won independence from secular interference and were loath to surrender control of their activities to overbearing bishops" at the same time as

Munkaþverá, protested the canons of Nidaros granting Bishop Ögmundr of Skálholt full authority over Hólar diocese (Gottskálk Jensson 2022: 136; DI IX: 119-21).

emphasizing that, thanks in part to the efforts of these bishops, "the Church in Iceland was more affluent, organized, and culturally dominant in the early fourteenth century than it had been at any time before that."[98] In this context, I would suggest that there is room for a deeper understanding of the effects this period had on the two Icelandic monastic orders, which had their own interests, ideologies, and biases. The Augustinians and Benedictines of Iceland were not entirely aligned with the clergy, the bishops, or the laity, and they could also have conflicting interests with each other. My focus here has been on the situation in Iceland, and some of its relations to Norway, but these matters should be explored more fully in the wider European discourses around Augustinian and Benedictine identity and norms, as well as episcopal relations to monasteries. Gunnar Harðarson has suggested that the first half of the fourteenth century, in the context of the Avignon papacy, was a time of greater episcopal involvement in abbotal elections.[99] Applying such general trends to help explain specific situations, especially in a peripheral and fairly isolated region like Iceland, is always risky, but it is also certain that there is room to better understand the motivations, ideologies, and cultural factors that shaped the changing landscape of Iceland in the fourteenth century.

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[98] Sverrir Jakobsson 2024: 135-136.

[99] Gunnar Harðarson 2021: 272-273.

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