

## Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, Pilgrim and Martyr

Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson was a wealthy *goði* or chieftain in Vestfirðir in the far north-west of Iceland. Besides being a chieftain, he was a renowned physician and a widely-travelled pilgrim. His saga describes the feud between the protagonist Hrafn and his adversary Þorvaldr, which ended in Hrafn's execution in 1213. The saga was probably written about two decades after Hrafn's death.

*Hrafns saga* is a contemporary saga of thirteenth-century feuds which was incorporated in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation from around the year 1300. Besides the *Sturlunga saga* version, there is an independent version of the saga. The independent saga exists in two versions, one fuller and one abridged.

Several scholars have compared the different *Hrafns saga* versions and come to similar conclusions.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, the *Sturlunga saga* text is shorter; it is only about two-thirds of the length of the separate or independent saga. Occasionally the *Sturlunga saga* version has a fuller text; this occurs generally when the compiler needs to adapt his material to the *Sturlunga saga* context.

The separate saga can be seen as a mixture of hagiography and a conventional thirteenth-century Icelandic feud narrative. The *Sturlunga saga* compiler omits or shortens hagiographic, religious or supernatural material. The compiler's interests are not in the pious life of Hrafn, but in the feud between Hrafn and Þorvaldr.<sup>2</sup> In the prologue of the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, *Hrafns saga* is accordingly called the saga of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson and Þorvaldr Snorrason.

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<sup>1</sup> Úlfar Bragason 1988, 267–292; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1993, 55–80; Tranter 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Úlfar Bragason 1988, 287.

The longer version of the independent saga is the subject of my paper.<sup>3</sup> This saga is Hrafn's biography. In the prologue the author states that many events tend to be forgotten, stories of them do not relate what actually happened, and, therefore, people believe lies and disbelieve the truth. But, he continues in a proverbial way, "the lie retreats when it meets the truth".<sup>4</sup>

In most historical writing of the Middle Ages, hagiographic or secular, we find that the truth of the narrative is emphasised. Lying is considered sinful. Besides, what is told of God and the saints is essentially good and therefore considered true.<sup>5</sup> The author of *Hrafns saga* intends to correct misconceptions, to provide an illustration of God's suffering and patience, and to show that man has a free will which he can use for good or evil purposes.<sup>6</sup>

The saga text itself has an introduction in the style of the Icelandic Sagas of Icelanders with Hrafn's genealogy and description of the family's settlement. Since the days of Hrafn's great-grandfather there had been healers in the family. Their power of healing was originally acquired from St Óláfr of Norway. Hrafn's great-grandfather fought alongside King Magnús of Norway, son of St Óláfr, against the Wends.<sup>7</sup> The saint appeared to his son and told him to choose twelve men of the best families to take care of the wounded. As a reward, they and their families would be granted the power of healing from God through St Óláfr's intercession.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This version has been critically edited by Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, 1987. All my quotations from *Hrafns saga* are from this edition. Keneva Kunz translated those quotations into English.

<sup>4</sup> *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Sverrir Tómasson 1988, 255–256.

<sup>6</sup> Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, xxii.

<sup>7</sup> The Wends (*Vindur*) were Slavonic tribes that lived on the south Baltic coastlands.

<sup>8</sup> The battle against the Wends was fought in 1043. The *Heimskringla* account of this battle, which, interestingly, does not include the dream appearance of St Óláfr, says that King Magnús examined the hands of the men in his company after the battle and chose the twelve with the softest touch. They were chosen to tend the wounded, all of them for the first time, and became great physicians. *Heimskringla* III 1951, 45; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, xci.

*Hrafn saga* differs in many ways from other Icelandic contemporary sagas. We have descriptions of various physical and mental illnesses in miracles, but nowhere else do we have such accurate descriptions of a living physician at work as we have in *Hrafn saga*. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir has thoroughly studied the medical knowledge of *Hrafn saga*. She points out that all sorts of learning, including medical, came to Iceland in the early Middle Ages, and that Hrafn could have become acquainted with medical skills and medical literature on his travels.<sup>9</sup>

*Hrafn saga* also cites more poetry than any other contemporary saga.<sup>10</sup> It has twenty-six stanzas attributed to nine named poets, four anonymous stanzas and four dream-verses. The poetry is mainly presented in three ways, firstly as “part-of-story verses”, belonging to the discourse of the narrative, secondly, to add a contemporary comment to events described in the saga, and thirdly, as evidence confirming the words of the saga-writer.<sup>11</sup> One of the verses describes the power of poetry:

Margr mundi sá sendir  
 sókngífrs numinn lífi,  
 linna vangs, fyr lǫngu,  
 lundr, er nú rekr undan,  
 ef brynhríðar beiði  
 biti týgilig skytja,  
 niðr drepr skáld und skildi  
 skeggi, mál sem eggjar.

Many a man who now gets away unharmed would long ago have been deprived of life, man, if men’s big talk bit him in the same way as blades do — the poet lets his beard drop behind his shield.<sup>12</sup>

Several verses seem to be composed and recited in order to endure and survive the perils of the sea.<sup>13</sup> Eleven verses belong to a *drápa*

<sup>9</sup> Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, xciii–cviii.

<sup>10</sup> Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, xxxvi.

<sup>11</sup> On the use of verse in saga-literature, see Bjarni Einarsson 1974, 118–125.

<sup>12</sup> Translation according to Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 101.

<sup>13</sup> See esp. *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 19–23.

which the otherwise unknown poet Guðmundr Svertingsson composed, presumably not long after Hrafn's death.<sup>14</sup>

As has already been previously mentioned, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson was a well-travelled man. *Hrafns saga* tells of three journeys abroad and visits to four important pilgrim sites: Canterbury, St Giles, Rome and Santiago de Compostela, shortly before 1200. Accounts of travels abroad are frequent in medieval Icelandic literature.<sup>15</sup> The young hero is tried and tested and receives rewards, valuable presents and praise, from kings or other men of high rank. The first account of Hrafn's travels reads like a typical travel story:

Hrafn fór ungr brott af landi ok fekk góða virðing í qðrum lqndum af hqfðingjum, sem vitni bar um þær gørsimar, er Bjarni biskup sendi honum, sonr Kolbeins hrúgu ór Orkneyjum, út hingat: þat fingrgull, er stóð eyri, ok var merktr á hrafn ok nafn hans, svá at innsigla má með. Annan hlut sendi biskup honum, sðdul góðan, ok inn þriðja hlut, steinklæði. Hrafn var útan einn vetr ok var á hendi tignum mqqnum ok þótti mikils verðr, hvar sem han kom, fyrir íþróttu sakir. [...] Annat sumar sigldi hann út hingat ok fór til bús með fqður sínum á Eyri.

(While still a young man, Hrafn travelled abroad and gained the respect of leaders in foreign countries, as is evidenced by the treasures which Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson of the Orkneys sent to him in Iceland. These included a signet ring of gold worth an ounce, with his name and the figure of a raven [Icel. *hrafni*], a fine saddle and dyed cloth. Hrafn dwelt abroad for one year, where he associated with noblemen and was everywhere he went held in high regard on account of his skills. [...] The next summer he sailed to Iceland and returned to his father's farm at Eyri.)<sup>16</sup>

But the main point of the travel stories in *Hrafns saga* is to show Hrafn as a pious man, a good Christian. He visits pilgrim shrines, receives God's grace and presents from bishops.<sup>17</sup> In this respect, *Hrafns saga* resembles the legend of the Icelandic bishop-confessor St

<sup>14</sup> Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, xxxvii.

<sup>15</sup> Harris 1972, 1–27 and 1976, 1–28; Lönnroth 1976, 71–6; Úlfar Bragason 1988, 274–275.

<sup>16</sup> *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 2–3. Translated by Keneva Kunz.

<sup>17</sup> Úlfar Bragason 1988, 275.

Þorlákr. Þorlákr goes abroad to study. When he returns, his hagiographer writes:

Hann var þá með sama lítillæti eðr meira, er hann kom aptr ór sinni brottferð, sem hann hafði áðr verit, en eigi hafði hann sótt skart eða þessa heims skraut sem margr sá annarr, er minni fremð ok gæfu sækir í sinni brottferð, en hann hafði sótt.

(He was as humble as he had been before, possibly even more so. Although he had not sought any worldly goods and values as some men have done before, none of them brought home such good fortune and fame as he did.)<sup>18</sup>

Then the hagiographer proceeds to tell his audience that it was customary for men who went abroad to seek new clothes and weapons, where they found more choice in such things. What Þorlákr brought home was learning and Christian virtues. Þorlákr is depicted as a new model, one quite different from the heroes we meet in the sagas. The men he meets on his journey are not kings and earls, they are bishops and learned men.<sup>19</sup> Hrafn, the good Christian, is described according to the aforementioned preface of *Hrafns saga*. His choices indicate his values; he is peaceful, righteous, generous, shows mercy and rejects worldly wealth and glory. Þorvaldr and his family are depicted as the opposite, ambitious and avaricious.

Hrafn makes a solemn vow to St Thomas, which leads to his pilgrimage to Canterbury, and later to St Giles and Rome. When he visits the shrine of St Giles, he prays to God that he might never receive such wealth nor renown that they would prevent him from enjoying heavenly glory. In Rome, he dedicates his life to God, the apostles and other holy men. He gives offerings to the shrines he visits and buys relics. All his life he is a model of generosity, charity and hospitality, providing free meals for guests at his home in Iceland and a free ferry service over the fjord near his farm. The power of healing enjoyed by Hrafn and his family is divine power and a gift from St Óláfr.

<sup>18</sup> *Þorláks saga* 1978, 183 (normalised).

<sup>19</sup> Ásdís Egilsdóttir 1994, 11–18.

As Guðrún P. Helgadóttir has shown in her preface to her edition, and Margaret Cormack has demonstrated in a recent article, there are numerous hagiographic motives in *Hrafns saga*.<sup>20</sup> The hagiographic motives are, not surprisingly, mainly to be found in connection with Hrafn's death. Hrafn is attacked three times by Þorvaldr and his men. Before the first attack an initial portent appears. Hrafn is on a journey with two other men. They all see a great light, and, in addition, Hrafn sees himself in this light along with two other men. A similar scene occurs in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, written shortly before 1200 by the monk Oddr Snorrason.<sup>21</sup> Both scenes remind us of the Transfiguration as told in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.<sup>22</sup>

In fending off the first two attacks, Hrafn is helped by the arrival of reinforcements, causing Þorvaldr to seek a truce. After Þorvaldr has attacked him for the second time, a number of men encourage Hrafn to kill Þorvaldr. Hrafn refuses, because of his respect for St James. On this occasion they were expecting Þorvaldr's arrival the night before St James's Mass. The settlement, *i.e.* redress to Hrafn for Þorvaldr's previous attack, is arranged on the feast-day itself. Hrafn invites Þorvaldr and his men to join him in a meal and takes care of his men's feet by giving them new shoes. When they depart, Þorvaldr, the man who had once lived with Hrafn like a son or brother, embraces him. This could be a reminiscence of the Last Supper, the washing of the feet and the kiss of Judas, expressing betrayal under the guise of friendship.

The third attack, which takes place during Lent, is preceded by a sequence of saga-style omens, such as blood-rain and ghost-riders in the sky, and also by hagiographic prophecies. People see a mysterious light over the fortress near Hrafn's farm and on another occasion a pillar of light appears, reaching from heaven to the earth. St Þorlákr intervenes and frees the people whom Hrafn's enemies had bound, in

<sup>20</sup> Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, xxi–xxx, lxi–lxxx. See also Cormack 1989, 187–218.

<sup>21</sup> *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk* 1932, 152–153.

<sup>22</sup> Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, 81 (general notes).

order to prevent them from informing Hrafn of their whereabouts. A lost *Andreas drápa*, a poem on St Andrew, is recited to Hrafn on the sleepless night before his death, and it is said that he meditated on his *passio* after every verse. A priest and a close friend of Hrafn's dreams about the apostle's martyrdom the whole night. The reason why this poem is given this importance is that Hrafn is about to die a martyr's death and, by so doing, to follow in the apostle's footsteps.<sup>23</sup>

Hrafn is well-prepared to meet his death. When Þorvaldr declares that Hrafn shall be executed, Hrafn prays, receives holy communion and sheds tears of repentance. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir has drawn attention to similarities between *Hrafns saga*, *Magnúss saga* and *Thómas saga*. The death of Hrafn seems to be modelled on that of the archbishop of Canterbury; the latter meets his death on his knees, Hrafn on his knees and elbows. Both are in a position of devotion and both bodies lie as if in prayer.<sup>24</sup> The rough and barren field where Hrafn is slain becomes green and fertile the following summer. The place where St Magnús of Orkney was executed was stony and mossy, but after the martyr's death it became green, fair and smooth.<sup>25</sup>

The cult of St Magnús was very popular in Iceland, especially in the north and west of the country. St Thomas of Canterbury was also among the most popular saints in medieval Iceland and versions of his legend were influential texts. The author of *Hrafns saga* seems to have drawn upon the early translation of a life of St Thomas by Robert of Cricklade. The translator is believed to have been the priest

<sup>23</sup> The apostle's exhortation from his cross in the manuscript AM 645 has implications relevant to the saga-writer's presentation of Hrafn: "You must not turn the meekness of the Lord into devilish violence, for the Lord showed us perfect patience when he was crucified ... Prepare yourselves to be able to overcome the terrors and torments of wicked men with patience and an untrembling heart ... Be also then prepared ... to bear temporal torments that you may be able to come to eternal joys." Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, lxxxi.

<sup>24</sup> The death of St Magnús of Orkney is described in two versions of *Magnúss saga* and in *Orkneyinga saga*. The three texts agree when describing his death and the transforming of the ground where he was executed. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, lxiv. See also Cormack 1989, 191, and Antonsson 2004.

<sup>25</sup> *Orkneyinga saga* 1965, 106–111, 319–322, 364–369.

Bergr Gunnsteinsson, who was one of the Icelanders who sailed to Norway with Hrafn and bishop-elect Guðmundr Arason in 1202.<sup>26</sup>

Are the hagiographic motives in *Hrafns saga* only literary borrowings or do they have a meaning? Do they indicate merely his innocence and salvation, or was Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson perhaps even a potential saint? Numerous examples from the sagas show that people could be regarded as saints although never officially recognised as such by the church.<sup>27</sup> The fourteenth century writer, Arngrímur Brandsson, is in no doubt when he is describing Hrafn's execution in his legend of the saintly bishop Guðmundr. In his opinion and interpretation, the pious and innocent Hrafn died a martyr's death.<sup>28</sup> The *Hrafns saga* author seems to interpret Hrafn's death in the same way. The verb he uses to describe Hrafn's execution is *sæfa* which means "kill as sacrifice", and has strong associations with ritual slaughter and the blood of the Lamb.<sup>29</sup>

If Hrafn was looked upon as a potential saint, what kind of saint would he have become? What was the image that the saga-writer was creating?

The saga gives the impression that Hrafn, contrary to other chieftains, supported the Church's independence from secular authorities and in that way he is identified with St Thomas.<sup>30</sup>

Hrafn's healing power would have easily made him a potential saint. It is obvious that people would have appealed to him in sickness and injury. The saga has an account of some of his cures, which he performs as a living physician, but the saga-writer reminds his audience that "all true healing comes from God", and he quotes St Paul: "Alii gratia sanitarum in eodem spiritu."<sup>31</sup> Miracle-stories frequently tell us that people tried to get help from local healers and home reme-

<sup>26</sup> Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, lxxvii–lxxiv.

<sup>27</sup> Cormack 1989, 196–205.

<sup>28</sup> *Guðmundar saga* 1878, 55–56.

<sup>29</sup> Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, xxi.

<sup>30</sup> Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, lxxv–lxxiv; Úlfar Bragason 1988, 278, 284.

<sup>31</sup> "Some people have received the gift of healing from the mercy of the Holy Spirit." *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 6.



dies before they invoked a saint and there was also a very fine line between folk-remedies and ecclesiastically approved methods.<sup>32</sup> Miracle-collections emphasise divine healing, but it is clear that in practice most sick and injured people called on both the power of saints and on physicians or wise people. *Medicus* was a word used also for God and saints, and saints appear frequently in dreams as physicians.<sup>33</sup>

But the ultimate power over life and death was in God's hands. *Porláks saga helga* says that physicians are ordained by God so that "at his will they may sometimes succeed in preventing long-lived ailing by short-lived anguish".<sup>34</sup> The description of Hrafn's cures are not very different from the miraculous cures related in the Icelandic saints' lives. The need for divine sanction and support is obvious when Hrafn has to perform a risky operation. Hrafn seeks the opinion of priests and wise men in his household; they say that the patient will die unless he is operated on. On their verdict and with God's help Hrafn decides to operate, and before doing so he asks everyone present to chant five *paternosters*.<sup>35</sup>

Hrafn did not accept any payment for his work. In this respect he resembles the martyrs Cosmas and Damian. The kernel of their legend is that they were twin brothers who practised medicine without charging fees. They came to be called "the holy moneyless ones" and were invoked as patron saints of physicians.

It is also worth noting that when Hrafn visits the shrine of St Giles, patron saint of cripples and the indigent, he remembers an old saying: that God grants everyone a prayer in that holy place, and he prays that neither possessions nor renown should prevent him from attaining celestial joys. In the spirit of St Giles he sheltered and fed sick and poor people.<sup>36</sup>

Hrafn had the ability to cure people but the saga-writer also seems to believe that he had power over the sea. As a real saint he could therefore have become a protector of seafarers and pilgrims, following

<sup>32</sup> Finucane 1995, 62–63.

<sup>33</sup> Finucane 1995, 67–68.

<sup>34</sup> *Porláks saga* 1978, 217.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, xciv.

<sup>36</sup> *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987, 5.

in the footsteps of St James, whose shrine he visited in Santiago de Compostela.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Icelanders undertook numerous pilgrimages and we have accounts of a few earlier ones. Icelandic descriptions of pilgrim routes are found in the twelfth-century *Veraldar saga* and in Abbot Nikulás's itinerary for pilgrims (*Leiðarvísir*) from c. 1150. Thirty nine names of Icelandic pilgrims have been found in a guest-book from the monastery of Reichenau in Bodensee.<sup>37</sup> The first known Icelanders to go on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela was Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson who went there shortly before 1200.

Many of the miracles attributed to St James took place when people were on their way to his shrine. In one of them, ferocious Saracens attacked pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. St James appeared and came to their rescue. The Saracens became afraid and one of them asked the apostle: "Are you a sea-god?" The apostle answered: "I am no sea-god, I am the servant of the God that has power over the sea".

A bishop from Jerusalem was on his way to St James's shrine, sitting on the deck and reading psalms, when a powerful wave swept the ship and the bishop and his fellow-travellers fell overboard. St James saved them and the bishop's psalter did not even get wet.<sup>38</sup>

One of *Hrafns saga's* most important sources is the aforementioned *drápa* of Guðmundr Svertingsson. The *drápa* is an encomium of Hrafn's saintly life and character. It tells of Hrafn's second journey abroad, his pilgrimages to holy shrines, his gift of healing, his third journey abroad with bishop elect Guðmundr Arason on his way to Norway to be consecrated, and, finally, Þorvaldr's last attack and Hrafn's death.

The following is a short resumé of the poem:<sup>39</sup>

1. The first stanza describes how the wise and generous Hrafn conquers the sea with his ship, and the happy landing of his men.

<sup>37</sup> Einar Arnórsson, 1954–1958, 21; Foote 1959, 48–49.

<sup>38</sup> *Sögur úr Skarðsbók* 1967, 127–128.

<sup>39</sup> See Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, xxxvii–xxxviii.

## HELGISÖGUR

This stanza is a part of the narrative that explains why Hrafn went to Canterbury. He and his men attempt to catch a whale but are unable to pull it towards the shore. Hrafn then invokes St Thomas and promises to give him the whale's teeth if he assists them.

2. Hrafn sails towards the shrine of St Thomas and travels further south. Hrafn is steadfast, and prevents misfortune.
3. The third stanza tells how he accomplishes his journey to visit St James, including sailing through raging storms.
4. Sick and injured people come to see Hrafn; he heals them and they all go away cured and trouble-free.
5. Guðmundr Arason invites Hrafn to voyage with him and Hrafn appears to be the one of the voyagers best suited to give good guidance on the journey.
6. On the voyage they are hard-pressed and at one stage see nothing but breakers and skerries.
7. Hrafn undertakes the task of piloting on his ship and saves both ship and men.
8. Bishop Guðmundr has to make use of Hrafn's counsels before he can get consecration. May he ever be free of torment above the clouds.
9. Everyone goes rejoicing to meet Hrafn when he comes home.<sup>40</sup>
10. Hostility from Hrafn's adversaries is growing and Hrafn is attacked. Hrafn, the reconciler of men, is deceived.
11. The last stanza depicts Hrafn as a shining example among men. He offers to die alone for his company in order to buy peace.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The poet seems to be using here a well-known topos from legends of confessor bishops, showing how people receive them when they return from consecration journeys.

<sup>41</sup> The poet probably intends to recall the words of Caiphas in John 11:49: "it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation should not perish", echoed in a fourteenth-century recension of *Thómas saga erki-biskups*. Both the *drápa* and this version of *Thómas saga* use the same word, *fríðkaup*, dying in order to buy peace. See Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987, 113 (notes on the verse).

Skaldic poets admittedly enjoyed describing ships and sea-journeys. It is interesting to note, however, how many stanzas from this encomium on Hrafn tell of his journeys on sea and how he rescued his people from perils at sea. *Hrafns saga* also has a chapter devoted to his voyages and his skills as a navigator. When Hrafn accompanies bishop-elect Guðmundr on his journey to be consecrated, they are in great danger near the Hebrides. The bishop-elect asks him to pilot, but at first Hrafn humbly refuses. Guðmundr urges him to do so and Hrafn pilots with great skill and good fortune. This passage has been used in all versions of the sagas or legends of bishop Guðmundr. The narrative is shorter in the oldest version (A-version) but obviously based on the *Hrafns saga* text, although it has more emphasis on the bishop-elect, who later came to be regarded as a saint.

Hrafn and Guðmundr were friends all their lives. When they returned from Norway the bishop gave Hrafn valuable presents, a fine horse, a cloak and a so-called sun-stone, probably some sort of crystal. According to the legends of bishop Guðmundr and *Sturlunga saga* there was a great belief in the protective power of Guðmundr's clothes. Hrafn and Guðmundr also give each other cloaks. Gifts and gift-exchange are well-known themes in saga literature, where friendship and loyalty is often confirmed with a gift. It was believed that a gift conveyed part of the former owner's personality.<sup>42</sup> A gift from a king was therefore considered of great importance and the same must have applied to presents from a saintly bishop.

After Hrafn has been slain, Þorvaldr and his men plunder his farm but fail to recognise the value and nature of the cloak and sun-stone and throw them away. The sinful Þorvaldr was unworthy of having things given to Hrafn by bishop Guðmundr. Þorvaldr later went on a pilgrimage to Rome, however, to atone for his sins.

There were signs of sanctity during Hrafn's life and around his death. His contemporaries had reason to believe that the most important signs would eventually appear. A patron saint of sailors and fishermen would have been welcome, not least in the north-west of the

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<sup>42</sup> Gurevich 1968, 126–138.

country, the Western Fjords, where life depends on fishing, and sailing can be extremely dangerous.

All his life, Hrafn acted as the generous, kind and helpful man every pilgrim could appreciate, housing people and feeding them, providing them with a free ferry ride and taking care of the sick. Descriptions of his life and death suggest sanctity — only the final proof, a post-mortem miracle was needed, and his contemporaries knew that one had to be patient when waiting for such a miracle to happen: it could take years.<sup>43</sup> The saga-writer associates him with the saints whose image he wishes him to reflect: St Thomas, St Giles, St James and St Andrew.

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<sup>43</sup> Cormack 1989, 216.

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