

SIGURÐUR PÉTURSSON

## TO TELL THE TRUTH

– *But not the Whole Truth*

### Preface

ON THE 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1627 Guðbrandur Þorláksson (1542–1627), the Bishop of Hólar diocese in North Iceland, died after 56 years in office. There can be little doubt that many of his fellow-countrymen regarded his death as marking the end of an epoch. Not only had he been the spiritual leader of a diocese which covered approximately one third of Iceland for more than half a century, but he had also played a dominant role in the affairs of the whole country through his incessant work for the promotion of the Lutheran church and humanism, leaving, for example, a significant impression on education and book-printing. As one of the two bishops of Iceland, he ranked among the most powerful political figures in the country, one whose general influence was not to be underestimated in the discussions and resolutions of the Alþing, the ancient legislative and judicial body of the Icelanders. Finally, more than half of the population of Iceland had no recollection of any other man holding the staff of the Bishop of Hólar, so his passing must have left perhaps not a sensation of real grief but an awareness of taking solemn leave of the past among many people. As might be expected in such a situation, the desire to honour the deceased more elaborately than custom demanded seems to have arisen shortly after the bishop's death, although it was not fulfilled until a few years later, when the eulogy *Athanasia*, written in Latin, was published in Hamburg in 1630.<sup>1</sup>

1 The full title of the work is *ATHANASIA Sive Nominis ac fame IMMORTALITAS-REVERENDI AC INCOMPArabilis Viri DN. GUDBRANDI THORLACII, Superintendentis Borealis Islandiæ digniss(imi) vigilantiss(imi) Oratione Parentali, de ejusdem, VITA, VITÆQUE clausula, per ARNGRIMUM JONAM Islandum asserta. In memoria æterna erit Justus. HAMBURGI, Ex scriptis Litteris per Johannem Mosen. Anno M.DC. XXX. An exact re-print of the text is found in Arngrímur Jónsson, *Arngrími Jonæ Opera Latine Conscripta*, edited by Jakob Benediktsson. Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana, 11 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1952), III, 131–166.*

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*Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson's tombstone in Hólar Cathedral.  
 Photographer: Guðmundur Ingólfsson.*

The reason that the composition and publication of the eulogy took such a long time is explained to a certain degree in its introduction. The author, Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648), the most illustrious Icelandic humanist of his time and a long-time protégé and collaborator of Bishop Guðbrandur, says that he found himself inadequate for this honourable task; and he certainly showed reluctance to perform it, although the reason may have been more complex than pure modesty. The bishop's successor was his grandson, Þorlákur Skúlason (1597–1656). He had been brought up and educated by his grandfather, whence, as Arngrímur Jónsson rightly points out, it might have been considered most natural if he had been the one to compose a commemorative work in honour of Guðbrandur. Nevertheless, Þorlákur Skúlason did not do so but evidently preferred to persuade Arngrímur Jónsson to undertake the task – possibly as a gesture of respect, but most probably also because Arngrímur Jónsson had the best knowledge of the late bishop's life in all its variety, a fact which undoubtedly demanded some serious thinking and discretion on the part of the author. A comparison between the content of *Athanasia* and certain facts of the bishop's life, well documented elsewhere, will show how Arngrímur Jónsson found a way to distract the reader's attention from those events which did not conform to the image of Guðbrandur Þorláksson that the author wanted to hand down to posterity.

### The content of *Athanasia*

To help the reader to gain an overview of the composition of *Athanasia*, the following outline gives the main chapters and paragraphs of the work, which will be described presently in more detail. Numbers in parentheses refer to page numbers.

- A. *Introduction* (3–7)
- B. The biography of GÞ (Guðbrandur Þorláksson) (7–46)
  - I. The ancestors and relatives of GÞ (7–9)
  - II. The birth of GÞ (9–10)
  - III. GÞ's education (10)
  - IV. The Bishopric of Hólar (10–18)
    - 1. GÞ compared five times to Moses (12–14)

2. GP compared three times to Samuel (14–17)
- V. GP's endowments of mind and body (18–19)
- VI. Marriage, ties of affinity (19–21)
- VII. GP's munificence (21–30)
  1. The printing office (22)
  2. The edition of the Bible (22–25)
  3. Generosity towards the poor (25)
  4. Generosity towards his own family and guests (26)
  5. Generosity towards the church (26)
  6. Hospitality and affability (26–27)
  7. GP's generosity due to his virtuous character, which may be seen for example in his relationship with important foreigners (28–30)
- VIII. The last part of GP's life and his death (30–46)
  1. GP's long illness and his daughter Halldóra's piety (30–34)
  2. GP's death and funeral (34–38)
  3. Portents and catastrophes (38–40)
  4. Exhortation to the leaders of the church and consolation (40–46)

As may be seen from this outline, the work is divided into two main parts, the introduction and the biography. The latter consists of eight chapters, three of which are divided into smaller units. Thus the plan of *Athanasia* is quite clear – but what was it that Arngrímur Jónsson wanted to impart to his readers about his old patron, the Most Reverend Guðbrandur Þorláksson?

### A. *The Introduction of Athanasia*

From the very beginning of the introduction the reader is made to understand that the work that will follow is that of a learned humanist, proudly demonstrating in polished and fluent Latin his profound knowledge of both the classical world and the holy scriptures. Thus the first part of the introduction is strongly reminiscent of Cicero's *Pro Roscio Amerino*, not only in composition and thought but even in rhetorical phrasing.<sup>2</sup>

2 Cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cicero: Pro Roscio Amerino*, ed. by Andrew R. Dyck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1, 3.

Nonetheless the author is convinced that many readers will wonder why he, of all people, is undertaking this task. Certainly, he says, there are those who would be more capable of writing this piece of work, above all the late bishop's grandson and successor Þorlákur Skúlason, who is understandably reluctant to undertake it because of his manifest and honourable *modestia* "modesty." Having paid this tribute to the new bishop, the author dwells for a while upon the question why he was gradually persuaded to write the eulogy. An important reason for Arngrímur's acceptance of this task is that it would be unjust if, having commemorated other men and tried to glorify his own *patriam* "fatherland" in his writings, he should allow *ipsum patriæ patrem* "the father of the fatherland himself," i.e. Guðbrandur Þorláksson, to go unmentioned by refusing to contribute a just eulogy of his name. Having resolved to commemorate his old patron, Arngrímur promises in a threatening, almost invective, tone not to let the *supercilium* "arrogance" and *invidentia* "envy" of Guðbrandur's very few but very wicked enemies prevent him from asserting the immortality of his renown. By this remark the author admits that the old bishop was not universally beloved, although he does not elaborate either here or later in the work, except in vague hints.

To add more weight to his decision to write about such a famous man, Arngrímur turns to the learned world and quotes first a passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews on how we should remember those leaders who have spoken the word of God to us and emulate their lives.<sup>3</sup> Secondly he refers to Seneca on how we should cultivate virtues not only when they are present but also when they have been removed from our sight.<sup>4</sup> From these general and plausible reasons for writing a commemorative work on Bishop Guðbrandur, the author proceeds to refute the criticism that too long a time had passed to perform such funeral obsequies, or *parentatio* as he calls them here. This is done with a direct reference to Antiquity by mentioning the *feriæ Novendiales* and the use of the expressions, *solemne*, *sollennia*, *parentalia* and *Dies parentales*, illustrated by two quotations from the second book of Ovid's *Fasti*.<sup>5</sup> Having proved with these exam-

3 Hebrews 13:7.

4 Seneca, *De beneficiis*. L. Annaeus Seneca. *Moral Essays*, vol. 3, ed. by John W. Basore (London and New York: Heinemann, 1935), IV. 30, 3.

5 *Feriæ Novendiales* is generally used to denote a nine days' festival. The adjective *novendialis* also refers to what takes place on the ninth day, e.g. the offerings and feasts for the dead



ples taken from wise and cultured Antiquity that *parentationes*, funeral obsequies, could be performed after a lapse of time, the author concludes the introduction by expounding his own view that such rites in honour of the bishop should be performed annually on a *stativis feriis* or “fixed holiday.” They would, of course, be different from the pagan rites that were performed in direct worship of the deceased, since those suggested by Arngrímur would be a thanksgiving to God for the great blessing bestowed on the Icelandic church through the appointment and 56 years in office of this instrument of religious piety and pious religiosity, *religiosa pietatis et pia religiositatis organum*.

### B. *The Biography of Guðbrandur Þorláksson*

I. The first part of Guðbrandur’s history deals with his ancestors and closest relatives. It emphasises his noble but poor and honest ancestry. His maternal grandfather, Jón Sigmundsson (before 1460–1520) had held the office of lawman, the highest administrative position an Icelander could normally attain, but was more or less ruined by a 20-year struggle with Gottskálk Nikulásson (–1520), the penultimate Catholic Bishop of Hólar. Guðbrandur’s father, Þorlákur Hallgrímsson (–after 1594) is described as a poor but most pious parson, who began his career as a Catholic priest in an insignificant parish before gradually being promoted to more attractive posts; he was eager to imbue his fellow-men with the rudiments of the Christian catechism recently translated into Icelandic in keeping with the Lutheran policy of reform. Guðbrandur’s brothers and a few other close relatives are mentioned, primarily to show the true Christian spirit of the family and their readiness to enter into the service of God. The author returns to Þorlákur Hallgrímsson to describe in more detail how the parson and his honourable wife Helga (c. 1511–c. 1600) rejoiced in giving alms to the poor from their limited means, thus setting an example not unlike that of Bishop Martin of Tours (c. 317–397/400). God rewarded Þorlákur’s piety by endowing his sons generously with property, while Þorlákur

which were celebrated on the ninth day after the funeral. According to Arngrímur, the latter is the origin of the festival. *Solemne, solennia*: solemn rite or rites; *parentalia*: a festival in honour of dead relatives; *Dies parentales*: the days of the festival in honour of dead relatives. Ovid. *Fasti with an English Translation*, ed. and trans. James George Frazer, revised by G.P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library 253 (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1989), II. 543–546; 547–548.

himself is described as contented with his lot, in a portrayal that evokes some of the great figures of Republican Rome, when the author quotes three unidentified elegiac couplets on the divergent characters of Scaurus and Fabricius.<sup>6</sup>

II. There then follows a short passage on Guðbrandur's birth and birthplace. He was born under a *felici sidere* "lucky star" in the year 1542 on the small parish farm of Staðarbakki in North Iceland, which had no renown of its own until it became illustrious as the birthplace and cradle of such a man. An event of this kind was not unprecedented. Holy men such as the prophets Jeremiah, Hosea, Nahum, Zephaniah and Joel were all destined to be born in insignificant places that later became famous as their birthplaces. Scripture tells us about their fatherland, and how God chose them from humble places to become his instruments and priests; he always cares for the low from his high position and by virtue of his paternal affection wants to lead us, his sons, away from the inflated arrogance of men and demons, desiring us to ennoble our fatherland just as we are ennobled by it.

III. This passage, which is also very brief, deals with Guðbrandur's education as an infant and young boy. We are told that he eagerly imbibed the rudiments of the true faith from his parents, although the papist darkness was at that time just beginning to be dispersed. Later, already imbued with moral sanctity, he was sent off at a rather late age to the Latin school of Hólar; there he was at first slow of memory but endowed with a most sagacious mind, as may be seen from the documents and events of later years. The author deliberately does not at this point continue his account of Guðbrandur's youth nor does he describe his travels, studies or mental and physical gifts, which will often recur in the narrative of the rest of his life. Concluding the passage, Arngrímur begs the reader's pardon for this kind of *hysteron proteron*.

IV. After these short passages comes a rather lengthy chapter on the Episcopate of Hólar, the importance of which may be judged from the

6 *Scaurus habet nummos, urbana palatia, villas, / Pinguique innumeris prædia bobus arat; / Huic tamen assidue major succrescit habendi / Nunquam divitiis exaturata fames. / Ditiore est igitur patrio contentus agello / Qui vivit nullo fenore Fabricius.* "Scaurus has money, palaces in Rome and villas. He cultivates fertile estates for his innumerable cattle. Nevertheless his hunger for having things will never be sated by riches and grows steadily stronger. Consequently Fabricius who lives on no gain is richer being content with the small piece of land inherited from his father."

elaborate treatment of the subject-matter. In a few introductory words it is asserted that Guðbrandur Þorláksson's appointment to the bishopric of Hólar in 1570 meant the beginning of a *seculum aureum* a "golden age" for the church and his fatherland. The author is anxious not to slight Guðbrandur's predecessor, the first Lutheran Bishop of Hólar, Ólafur Hjaltason (ca. 1500–1569), who under the auspices of the Most Christian King Christian III (1503–1559), *Christianissimi Christiani III*, of Denmark and Norway had certainly sown some seeds, but had left the crop immature at his death. More specifically, this meant that from the very moment when he assumed this important office, Guðbrandur was confronted with serious problems of different kinds regarding the church. The success and perfection of the Reformation brought about by Guðbrandur with his flourishing new printing press allows the author to refer to his episcopacy as the beginning of a golden age or even the golden age itself; here he emphasises the words *seculum aureum* by using them for the third time. As might be expected, Guðbrandur's episcopal duties would offer ample material for a wordy writer, and while Arngrímur seeks to avoid such a treatment, the weight of the subject-matter is nevertheless so great that it demands more than a bare narrative. He explains that if we recall how we are encouraged by the apostle not to forget what we hear but preserve it in our memory, how could he respond more rightly than by briefly comparing his leader, whom he calls *ἡγούμενος*, with the famous leaders of the church of Israel? Obviously feeling that his comparison might sound a little hyperbolic, Arngrímur supports his view by referring to the words of the great Roman poet Vergil, *Parva licet componere magnis* "if we may compare small things with great" and maintaining that, just as Mantua could be compared to Rome, so Iceland's small churches, *Ecclesiolae*, could be compared to the hierarchy of the Israelites.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, if we take certain particulars of Guðbrandur's *vita* "life," *vocatio* "vocation," and *labores* "labours," we will find parallels in the histories of Moses and Samuel. In defence of his choice of comparison he asserts that there is no reason for anybody who arrogantly despises the humble to accuse him of matching things which are at opposite poles, *pugnancia secum / frontibus adversis componere*, thereby

7 Vergil, *Eclagues. Georgics. Aeneid I–VI*, edited and translated by H. Rushton Fairclough, revised by G.P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, Mass. And London: Harvard University Press, 1999), IV, 176.



quoting another great Roman poet, Horace, in order to show that he is comparing like with like, namely humans with humans, and not animals with humans.<sup>8</sup> We admire Moses and Samuel for their divine gifts. Should it not then be permitted to admire Guðbrandur for the same or similar endowments from God? And when the author thinks that he has justified his choice of comparison well enough he proceeds in a highly systematic way to enumerate five parallels with the history of Moses.

In the first place the author refers to Moses grazing his father-in-law's sheep on the high and steep Mount Horeb in the desert of Sinai. There God spoke to him for the first time and told him he had chosen him to be the leader of his people. In the same way Guðbrandur was elevated from the folds and pastures of the sheep on his father's farm to be educated at the school at Hólar as if on some kind of mountain or acropolis, which was the first step towards shouldering heavier burdens. Secondly, Moses took off his shoes because of the sacredness of the place, to symbolize that his mind was not inclined to any profane views but devoted to the one God. Similarly Guðbrandur took off the shoes of the papist religion which most people wore at that time and set foot on the sacred land like Moses, or to be more exact on the scriptural foundations of the reformed faith, where he imbibed the word of God brought to him by the teachers. Thirdly, the Lord had shown himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but not disclosed that his name was Jehovah, which was interpreted as meaning that the deeds of the fathers were not comparable to those of Moses. They founded a small church which in no way equalled the multitude that Moses led out of Egypt and governed in the desert. Thus the initial knowledge of God, introduced by Bishop Ólafur Hjaltason, seemed to represent the phase before Moses, but the perfection of Guðbrandur's subsequent work corresponded to the revelation of Jehovah's name through the ministry of Moses. In the fourth place Moses was a slow speaker, which may be compared with the sluggish memory from which Guðbrandur suffered during the first years of his school training.<sup>9</sup> In both cases, nevertheless, God in his mercy brought to pass what he had decided upon. Moses was obliged to use his brother as an interpreter, and an extraordinary gift of eloquence was

8 Horace, *Satires. Epistles. Art of Poetry*. Ed. and trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough. Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1929), I. I, 102–103.

9 *Exod.*, 4 and 6.

bestowed upon Guðbrandur, which he used both in writing and speaking for the benefit of the church. The fifth similarity is that neither enjoyed a smooth course through life, but thanks to their endowments and strength, both managed to emerge unscathed from their various struggles and difficulties. Moses fought for about forty years; and it would be tedious for the foreign reader to relate in detail the tribulation that Guðbrandur had to endure because of his printing-office, and how he finally struggled to escape from a bitter and contumacious secular strife which had lasted for more than 50 years. According to Arngrímur none of his fellow-countrymen was unaware of this; but he abstains from dwelling on the subject, to avoid reopening the wounds of the bishop's friends and excite afresh his adversaries' memory of a lost victory, so stirring up a hornet's nest. Therefore the author finds it advisable to refer us to his own work, *Crymogæa*, for further information and to describe instead the more peaceful work of the bishop for the benefit of the church, causing less upset or tedium to readers of good will.<sup>10</sup> But before doing so he seeks to conclude his comparison with the story of Samuel already touched upon.

As in the case of Moses, the comparison with Samuel is presented in a most systematic fashion. It is divided into three areas; first the interpretation of the name of Samuel, secondly a discussion of his vocation, and thirdly the contumacy shown to him by his fellow-countrymen. As regards the interpretation of the name, the author finds three ways to compare it to Guðbrandur. First of all it signifies that Samuel's mother had entreated God with sighs and tears to grant her a son – something which Guðbrandur's parents had undoubtedly done in their loathing of the papist religion and their desire that in response to their tears and imploring God should send them a herald of the pure faith. To enhance the importance of the comparison, the Icelandic church is even said to have ardently begged, like another Anna, for offspring to make the little, newly kindled torch of God's word shine more brightly. In its sterility the church had been granted Guðbrandur – by which statement the reader is led to the second etymological interpretation of Samuel, that God listened to the church in this great matter. For the third interpretation Arngrímur refers to his old friend David Chytraeus (1530–1600), who maintained that God was in

<sup>10</sup> The full title of Arngrímur's work is *Crymogæa sive rerum Islandicarum Libri III. Per Arngrimum Jonam Islandum* (Hamburg: Typis Philippi ab Ohr, 1609).

the name of Samuel. Hence it is very easy to compare with this name that of Guðbrandur, which is composed of the two elements, *Guð* “God” and *brandur* “sword.” Regarding Guðbrandur’s vocation, the author recalls four significant events in which he is comparable to Samuel. He reminds the reader that, according to Joseph, Samuel had four vocations from God during one night when he was twelve years of age. Guðbrandur also had four vocations, and while these were not in the same night or at the same age as Samuel, it is nevertheless the idea of darkness which becomes the basis of Arngrímur’s comparison. It was still night when God called Guðbrandur, then a young boy of twelve or fourteen, from his sheep like another David or Eli from his plough, to the Latin school of Hólar, where he was soon promoted to assistant teacher before going to the University of Copenhagen for further studies. It was like a second vocation when he was summoned to become headmaster of the Latin school of Skálholt in South Iceland, and by a third vocation he was ordained pastor of the church at Breiðabólstaður in the Northwest of the country. What may be regarded as the fourth vocation was his elevation to the Bishopric of Hólar. The third field of comparison deals with the disobedience and slander which Guðbrandur had to suffer among his own people, just like Moses and Samuel. The author does not want to return to this painful part of the narrative, which he had broken off a little before, but says that he has to mention one point before leaving the story of Samuel. Here the basis of the comparison between Samuel and Guðbrandur is taken from their repetitive involvement in secular affairs. The prophet, who was a judge for forty years, was severely resented by the Jewish people, when they chose a king against the will of God and thereby became a burden to Him. Something similar happened to Guðbrandur. As he had sworn an oath to the king at his episcopal ordination to consider the well-being of the people and support the common law and custom of the country, he inevitably became involved in secular affairs, thereby arousing wrath and enmity among state officials. This led to his being disgraced before the king’s representatives and even the king himself. But thanks to the goodness of his cause and his trust in God, he always withstood this hostility enjoying obvious royal favour to the very end of his life. After these remarks Arngrímur declares that he will now end his comparisons and continue the commemorative speech, *oratio parentalis*, which he has already begun.

V-VI. Having returned to a more historical narrative of Guðbrandur's life the author becomes less speculative. We hear of the bishop's mental and physical endowments, of his accomplishments not only in theology but also in mathematics, astronomy, cartography, carpentry and the art of printing. Physically he was a very strong man and for a long time he was in good health, until he developed a slight tremor in his forty-third year. When he was thirty an event of the utmost importance occurred in his private life. He married the honourable virgin Halldóra Árnadóttir (1547–1585), whose father Árne Gíslason (–1587), the sheriff of Hlíðarendi in South Iceland, was one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Iceland at that time. Through this marriage Guðbrandur formed a relationship with a large family which for generations played a dominant role among the Icelandic aristocracy. The marriage was a happy one, and it was a severe blow to the bishop when his wife died in childbirth in 1585 leaving him four children. Only three lived to a mature age: a son Páll Guðbrandsson (1573–1621), later sheriff, and two daughters, Halldóra Guðbrandsdóttir (1574–1658), and Kristín Guðbrandsdóttir (1576–1652) who married the sheriff Ari Magnússon (1571–1652). Guðbrandur Þorláksson never married again, but enjoyed to the very end of his life the comforting presence and support of his unmarried daughter Halldóra, who, as we shall see later, became a most influential member of the household at Hólar.

VII. Although Guðbrandur Þorláksson was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he soon became a man of means and always kept a vigilant eye on his own interests. Nevertheless, he did not refrain from spending money when the purpose could be described as a good and Christian one, as when he supported people from his own means. His most remarkable act of munificence, according to the author, was when he acquired an old printing machine, the only one in Iceland, had it repaired, and began printing religious books in Icelandic. These were often translated by him or other qualified people, as the need of such books was sorely felt in the country. The bishop was deeply involved in this work at its various stages; and gradually this enterprise turned out to be one of the major achievements of the period, promoting the Lutheran religion in Iceland and at the same time preserving the Icelandic language. The climax of this flourishing activity was reached as early as 1584, when an Icelandic translation of the whole Bible emerged from the Hólar press, for which the bishop received

a large honorarium from King Fredrik II of Denmark.<sup>11</sup> Following this description there is a short excursus on older religious works in Icelandic, which in fact were not published in Iceland itself. Thus it becomes easier to place in relief the efforts of Guðbrandur Þorláksson, as unquestionably the man who raised the art of printing in Iceland to the heights of glory, adding to the honour of his fatherland. In spite of all his toils and exertions he could not, of course, escape accusations of ungrateful persons that he was doing all this out of *φιλοκερδία* or lust for gain. That this was not the case the bishop showed by bequeathing the press to the Church of Hólar, a bequest which was confirmed by royal diploma in 1628. Arngrímur observes that some might have had an office like this sold, telling the heirs to be content with the profit. Our man was different. Not unlike men of old who, after many victories in war, placed their weapons in the temple of the war god Mars as splendid trophies, Guðbrandur, in full conformity with the significance of his name, God's sword, consecrated his typographical weapons, which he had employed with success for more than fifty years in his fight against Satan, to the holy church for future use to the benefit of almighty God. And by God's will it was his grandson Þorlákur Skúlason who, as Bishop of Hólar, took over this torch to illuminate the church's way forward.

Another obvious testimony to the bishop's munificence, which also benefited the church, was his generosity towards the poorest clergymen, destitute farmers and beggars, whom he maintained in countless numbers, or as the author puts it: "Should I essay to include them all, as well essay to tell the tale of the Icarian waters," quoting the Roman poet Ovid.<sup>12</sup> More words could be devoted to our bishop's kindness towards his relatives, guests, pupils and those who went abroad to study, although Arngrímur prefers only to touch superficially on the subject without mentioning any of them specifically. The next example of Bishop Guðbrandur's generosity is the money he spent on the buildings at Hólar, in particular a new residence built in 1588. After some technical details of the building, we move on to the life led in the house, characterized among other things by sobri-

11 Arngrímur says that the year of publication was 1579, but the correct year is 1584.

12 Ovid, *Ovid with an English Translation. Tristia. Ex Ponto*. Edited and translated by Arthur Leslie Wheeler. Loeb Classical Library 151 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939), V 2, 27–28: *quae si comprehendere coner, / Icariae numerum dicere coner aquae*.

ety, joyfulness, humanity and affability – qualities which made guests leave the bishop’s table with even more reluctance than that shown by Diogenes when he was listening to Antisthenes and refused to be driven away even when threatened with a staff. Thus the bishop’s hospitality and his generosity to all men would have allowed him to say, with the blessed Job: “If I have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; if I have withheld the poor from their desire, and have caused the eyes of the widow to fail ....”, which of course he would not have done.<sup>13</sup>

To support his view of Guðbrandur and his lack of avarice, the author cites still more characters from the classical world, culminating in a direct quotation from Horace on the miser Uvidius, whose meanness proved of no use to him as he was eventually killed by a freedwoman.<sup>14</sup> No, Guðbrandur was not like that: he had riches, as Arngrímur acknowledges, but they did not have him, *Divitias, inquam, habuit Gudbrandus; non Gudbrandum divitiæ*. After a few more references to Job, the author concludes this section and links it to a new aspect of Guðbrandur’s life by defending himself against possible allegations that his purpose in this encomium was to attract the attention of the late bishop’s friends or heirs.<sup>15</sup> If, Arngrímur continues, anyone is listening unwillingly and suspects him of partiality, he may find abundant evidence of the esteem and favour in which Guðbrandur was held by the foremost men abroad. Besides King Fredrik II of Denmark (1534–1588), other important figures include the most Reverend Povl Madsen (1527–1590) and the theologian Niels Hemmingsen (1513–1600), at whose table Guðbrandur imbibed wisdom as a young but already mature man. In Germany too there were people who admired and loved Guðbrandur’s fame even though they had never seen him, for example Philippus Nicolai (1556–1608), who dedicated a work to him.<sup>16</sup>

Concluding the long and varied chapter VII, Arngrímur emphasises that Guðbrandur’s general conduct was a reflection of his virtuous charac-

13 The words seem to refer to *Job*. 31, 17, 16, 18 but the quotation is inaccurate.

14 Horace, *Satires. Epistles. Art of Poetry*. Ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough. Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1929), I, 1, 95–100. *Ummidius* is now the accepted reading in place of *Uvidius*.

15 The references are probably to *Job*. 31: 24–25.

16 The work referred to is *Synopsis articuli controversi de omniprasente Christo* (Hamburg, 1607).



ter. With this elevated judgement on the essence of the man, we are now prepared to hear about the sad final part of his life.

VIII. This chapter is divided more or less distinctly into sections on his long illness, his death and the grief which it occasioned. It includes a description of his funeral, portents of his death, and the catastrophes that followed it. The main part of the first section, which formally deals with the long illness that preceded Guðbrandur's death, is in fact devoted to his daughter Halldóra and the great piety she showed towards her father in a most difficult situation. The rhetorical description of her complete devotion to him and all her efforts to find a cure or at least some comfort for him in his illness, following the stroke at the age of 82, which left him paralysed and bereft of speech for the last three years of his life, may be characterized as a kind of homage to this remarkable lady. But in spite of all the care received by the old bishop the inevitable moment had to come. On 20th July 1627 Guðbrandur Þorláksson's life came to an end. His constitutional weakness had been aggravated by an epidemic disease. This event was followed by such grief, felt most intensely by Halldóra and the bishop's grandson, the future Bishop Þorlákur, that the author can hardly find the proper words to describe it except through classical imagery and in hyperbolic terms. The funeral itself, which took place on 25th July in Hólar Cathedral, is mentioned only briefly, whereas there is much speculation on the tombstone and a part of its Latin inscription, *Gudbrandus Thorlachius peccator Jesu Christi*, which Guðbrandur himself composed several years before his death.<sup>17</sup> These meditative remarks culminate in Arngrímur's conclusion that Guðbrandur's serious thoughts about death during his long life proved that he was *sapiens* "a wise man." We are informed that Þorlákur Skúlason wrote an epitaph, *carmen epitaphium*, in honour of his grandfather. Arngrímur hoped that it would be printed with the eulogy although this does not seem to have been done. However, the section on the funeral ends with an elegiac Latin poem, consisting of twenty verses written by Arngrímur himself in commemoration of his old patron.

17 Arngrímur quotes only a part of the inscription and that obviously from memory. The full and exact inscription on the tombstone is: *Expecto resurrectionem carnis et vitam eternam Gudbrandus Thorlacius Iesu Christi peccator Anno Christi 1627 20 Iulii*. "I await the resurrection of the flesh and the life eternal Guðbrandur Þorláksson sinner of Jesus Christ in the year 1627 20th July."

Ever since antiquity people had believed that the death of an important person was preceded by portents and even accompanied by catastrophes of various kinds; and as Bishop Guðbrandur was undoubtedly a great figure in the history of his country, his death was no exception in this regard. Thus Arngrímur mentions portents such as the appearance of a comet in 1617 and a volcanic eruption in south Iceland in 1625 which spread a dark mist over the country, resembling the episodes from church history when St. Paul was carried away from Asia, Augustine from Africa, Ambrosius from Italy and Athanasios from Greece. Not wishing to tax the patience of his readers, the author adds only the ominous sudden collapse of the church at Hólar, which followed the decline of the bishop's health and somehow foreshadowed his death. More calamities accompanied or followed Guðbrandur's death. Plagues such as harvest failure and famine went on for years; but the most serious disaster which struck Iceland occurred in the very month when he died: Algerian pirates, commonly but incorrectly called Turks, attacked several communities in Iceland with arms and fire, killing people and transporting more than three hundred as slaves to North Africa. No wonder that this event, which was to haunt Icelanders for generations, was interpreted by Arngrímur as a divine sign that Iceland, ungrateful towards God in spite of the blessings it had enjoyed through the works of Guðbrandur and others, would perform due obsequies on its father's departure from life.

After this harsh interpretation of the incursion of the Algerian pirates, the author moves on to exhort the remaining leaders of the Icelandic church to show courage and fight on its behalf. They are encouraged to wake the somnolent from their deep sleep, so they may unite and take their stand with God, the wrathful Lord, to mend the manifest schism, displaying due devotion and following the example of the dearly missed Guðbrandur. This thought leads to the main theme of this section, which may be characterized as a consolation, a common feature of writings of this kind. Though Arngrímur refers to several authorities, both biblical and classical, the most dominant reference is to the story of Job and his acceptance of misfortunes.<sup>18</sup> Arngrímur's submissive conclusion was that God's will had to be borne with equanimity, an attitude endorsed by the eulogy. This medicine against grief is further strengthened by the certainty

<sup>18</sup> *Job*. I: 21.

of the resurrection of the flesh and the reunion of dear souls. The dead and those of us who are still alive will soon be gathered together by our Redeemer. Thus we should not grieve immoderately. This ambrosia of God's word combined with the sovereign remedy of Job are sacred oracles; Guðbrandur himself always kept them in mind, not theoretically but practically, following the recent example set by the two martyrs, Johann Huss and Hieronymus of Prague, who no doubt also shook off their fear of death with this soothing medicine. The departure of Father Guðbrandur, *non amissus sed præmissus* "not lost but sent ahead," is thus both sacred and salutary; readers may look forward to seeing and embracing him and enjoying his daily company if they will freely and humbly commit to God the finality of Fate. In the same God-fearing spirit readers should be grateful to God for the new bishop, Þorlákur Skúlason, and place their utmost hope in him, acknowledging that by his succession God has compensated us for half the loss we suffered through Guðbrandur's death. This thought prompts the author to ask his readers to pray in the words of Jeremiah: *Agnosce Domine quia peccavimus, veniam petimus quam non meremur; manum tuam porrige lapsis* "We acknowledge, O Lord, that we have sinned, we ask forgiveness which we do not deserve; offer your hand to those who have fallen," thus recalling Guðbrandur's own words on his tombstone and at the same time giving hope to the Icelanders in their distress.<sup>19</sup>

At this point the author sees fit to round off his work. He modestly excuses himself for having said less than he ought about the life and death of Guðbrandur; to sum up, of all the things contributing to the *immortalitas* "immortality" of Guðbrandur's name and fame, those which bear the palm are his printing press and his inestimable work on the Bible in promoting God's word. Thanks to this work he could justifiably have congratulated himself in the famous words of Horace, *Exegi monumentum ære perennius* "I have raised a monument which will last longer than bronze" although Guðbrandur would have been the last to claim the honour of a laurel wreath, as Horace does in the final verses of the ode.<sup>20</sup> No, in Guðbrandur's case the celestial judge, *Βραβουτής* [sic!], has decreed a differ-

19 The author refers to *Jerem.* 14: 20 but only the first part of the quotation agrees with the words of that verse.

20 Horace, *Odes*, ed. by Niall Rudd. Loeb Classical Library 33 (Cambridge Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2012), III. 30, 1–8. Arngrímur quotes the whole ode.

ent honour, expressed in the words of the Apocalypse: *Dabo tibi coronam vitae* “I will give thee a crown of life.”<sup>21</sup> Returning to a more pragmatic and personal level, Arngrímur Jónsson then concludes his eulogy by quoting the verse *Nulla ferent talem secla futura virum* “No future centuries will produce such a man,” which he recommends should be repeated over and over again.<sup>22</sup>

### Historical facts not mentioned in *Athanasia*

A modern reader with an accurate knowledge of the history of Iceland in the seventeenth century would notice that some facts concerning the lives of Bishop Guðbrandur and his successor Þorlákur Skúlason are either only hinted at in *Athanasia* or omitted entirely. Since these circumstances would certainly have been even better known to a contemporary reader in Iceland, the question arises why Arngrímur Jónsson took the risk of trying to conceal common knowledge. Although these circumstances and events are to a certain degree linked, they will be treated here separately to throw light on the sentiments and motives which prompted Arngrímur to compose the eulogy as he did. First we shall look at Þorlákur Skúlason’s succession to the bishopric, second at his ancestry, and third at some disputes and a series of legal actions in which Guðbrandur Þorláksson was involved.

1) Besides being a relative of Guðbrandur Þorláksson, Arngrímur Jónsson was one of his protegés, as has already been mentioned.<sup>23</sup> This close relationship may be seen, for example, from the fact that having been principal of the Latin school at Hólar from 1589 to 1595, Arngrímur was in 1596 formally appointed assistant to the bishop by the Danish king. This was in addition to his being a parson and dean from 1597. When Guðbrandur Þorláksson suffered a stroke in 1624 that prevented him from carrying out his duties, Arngrímur was appointed officialis, i.e. official administrator of all the ecclesiastical duties of the bishop and also of the

21 *Apoc.* 2: 10.

22 A verse also used to commemorate the Lutheran Theologian, Philip Melanchthon. Vibeke Roggen, “Biology and Theology in Franzius’s *historia animalium sacra*,” *Early Modern Zoology: The Construction of Animals in Science, Literature and the Visual Arts*, edited by Karl A.E. Ehenkel and Paul J. Smith (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 138–139.

23 Arngrímur’s paternal grandmother, Guðrún Jónsdóttir, was a sister of Guðbrandur’s mother, Helga Jónsdóttir.

business of Hólar Diocese, functions which he performed until the arrival of the new bishop in 1628. At Guðbrandur's instigation and with his support, Arngrímur commenced the remarkable literary career which was to establish him as the greatest Icelandic humanist writer. With respect to the bishop's private affairs, Arngrímur seems to have been his confidant and at times also actively involved in his plans; it was in this connection that he made the long journey to Copenhagen in 1592 and again in 1602. Thus when Bishop Guðbrandur died, Arngrímur was undeniably the most eligible candidate for the bishopric. By virtue of his education, experience and literary works he was highly respected both in his home country and abroad, as his correspondence shows. As widely expected, Arngrímur was elected bishop at a meeting of the clergy of Hólar Diocese in the summer of 1627, but strangely enough he declined the office. Arngrímur has always been considered an ambitious man, which has made it difficult to fully explain why he refused an appointment that would have been the apex of his career. He may, of course, have been tired and depressed in this period, especially as he had lost his wife of almost thirty years just a few weeks before, but he does not seem to have felt any serious signs of failing health in general.<sup>24</sup> Possibly he wanted more leisure to devote himself to study and writing than the burdensome duties of a bishop would have left him. Thus his refusal may have been sincere, although some believed that he wanted the clergy to ask him more insistently. Another explanation could be that Guðbrandur Þorláksson's family, in particular his unmarried daughter Halldóra, wanted Þorlákur to succeed his grandfather. Halldóra was known to be an intelligent and most influential lady, and undoubtedly wished the very best for her nephew, whom she had in fact brought up. In all likelihood she not only desired this but was also active behind the scenes in order to see her wishes realized. We shall probably never know in detail how the matter developed, but the fact is that in the second round of voting Þorlákur Skúlason was elected bishop. His election was later confirmed by the highest authorities both in Iceland and Copenhagen, where it caused some surprise that it was he, not Arngrímur, who was to assume the office. Nothing is known about Arngrímur's feelings. Possibly his behaviour was

24 Arngrímur seems to have enjoyed good health to the very end of his life. In 1628 he married Sigríður Bjarnadóttir, who was 27 at that time, and had at least seven children by her, the youngest being born some four years before his own death.

motivated by more than one of the factors described above, but nothing can be deduced with certainty from his silence on his own election and from his eulogy of the new bishop. The only fact which could be interpreted as a reaction to the situation is Arngrímur's application to the Chancellor, immediately after the election, for a grant to support his studies. This application resulted in a royal order, issued in 1628, that Arngrímur should enjoy the revenue from seven of the cathedral's estates to the end of his life, which as it turned out was considerably less than he had hoped for. Arngrímur and Halldóra seem to have been on good terms in general; but if Arngrímur really came under pressure from Guðbrandur's family in this situation, it is easy to imagine that he must have been disappointed and to a certain degree estranged from them. This hypothetical reason could explain some of Arngrímur's reluctance when asked to write a eulogy of Guðbrandur Þorláksson; and if it was not because of this, he had at least two other weighty reasons for being reluctant, as we shall see next.

2) In *Athanasia* Arngrímur mentions the ancestry of Þorlákur Skúlason at least six times. On page 3 Þorlákur is said to be the son of Mr. Guðbrandur's daughter, *Dn. Gudbrandi ex filia nepos*, on page 25 he is congratulated on having received the torch from his excellent and famous grandfather, *lampada .... ab optimo et celeberrimo avo tuo traditam*, on page 33 he is called a *consanguineus* "relative" of Halldóra, on page 34 he is described as the hope and solace of his mother's sister Halldóra, *Matertera spes et solamen*, and on page 35 and 36 he is simply spoken of as Guðbrandur's *nepos* "grandson." A reader interested in genealogy might want to know more about the exact descent from Guðbrandur and would naturally turn to the chapter on the old bishop's family. There (pp. 20–21) we read that Halldóra, Guðbrandur's wife, left him four children when she died in 1585: a little daughter who died shortly after her mother; a son, Páll, who married and had at least six children; and two daughters who survived their father, namely Kristín, who married Ari Magnússon, with whom she had five children, and the often-mentioned Halldóra, who never married. Knowing that Þorlákur Skúlason was a son of Guðbrandur's daughter and a nephew of Halldóra, the reader would draw the logical conclusion that Þorlákur was the son of Kristín and Ari Magnússon, which he was not. An Icelandic reader would at once have realized that the name Þorlákur Skúlason did not conform to the Icelandic custom of patronymics, but a



foreigner might well have been misled by the author's deliberate blurring of facts. But if Þorlákur was not a son of Kristín and Ari, whose son was he?

To answer this question we must go back to the year 1570. In the summer the King chose Guðbrandur Þorláksson to become Bishop of the Hólar Diocese and summoned him to Copenhagen, where the bishop elect spent the winter before he was ordained on 8th April 1571. At the end of May he returned to Iceland to take over the administration of Hólar, but that was probably not the only business awaiting him. Private historical annals inform us that in 1571 a daughter, Steinunn Guðbrandsdóttir (1571–1649) was born to Guðbrandur Þorláksson. In view of a stringent law on adultery enacted only seven years before, this illegitimate child might have been expected to create serious problems in his career.<sup>25</sup> This does not seem to have happened. It is not known why Guðbrandur did not marry the mother, the daughter of a clergyman; but as already mentioned, a year later, in 1572, he married Halldóra Árnadóttir, who by bringing him both property and connections proved herself in every respect worthy of her new dignity.<sup>26</sup> Guðbrandur does not seem to have turned his back on his illegitimate daughter; there are even indications that she was brought up at Hólar, and it was there in 1590 that she married a well-to-do farmer, Skúli Einarsson (–1612), with whom she had at least eleven children.<sup>27</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason was one of these. When he was eight years old, he was sent to Hólar to be brought up by his grandfather and aunt, both of whom lavished on him all the care and expense needed to make him a gentleman. This was certainly not done in any secrecy; that would have been quite impossible in a community like Iceland, especially as many of Þorlákur's brothers and sisters became respected members of the upper strata of Icelandic society. Therefore, it may cause some surprise to see the efforts Arngrímur made in *Athanasia* to conceal well-known facts. More than one explanation may be offered. When Steinunn was born, the general attitude

25 *Annálar, 1400–1800*, 5 vols. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1922–1961), 2.77; 3.255.

26 The name of Steinunn's mother is given as Guðrún Gísladóttir or Valgerður. *Annálar*, 3.255; *Biskupa sögur*, edited by Jón Sigurðsson, Þorvaldur Björnsson and Eiríkur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1878), 2.703.

27 Steinunn seems to have been at Hólar when Halldóra, Guðbrandur's wife, died in 1585. *Biskupa sögur*, 2.691. The eleven children of Steinunn and her husband all married and left an unusually large number of descendants.

towards illegitimate children was probably still rather medieval, and more liberal than the orthodox Lutheran church of the seventeenth century was ready to accept. The church's attitude could explain Arngrímur's personal view, if he had one, although he must have known that in the eyes of an ordinary Icelander such an attempt at concealment might seem absurd and ridiculous. A more plausible explanation is that *Athanasia* was primarily written for learned circles in other countries, where attitudes may have been more strict than in Iceland, and the last thing Arngrímur wanted was to slight the memory of Guðbrandur or Þorlákur's dignity. As *Athanasia* was written in Latin, he knew that few Icelanders would read it; and those who did so would most probably understand why he expressed himself as he did. It must have demanded some careful thought to find a way to treat this delicate matter. Arngrímur succeeded in this, although at the risk of his own reputation as an accurate and reliable author.

3) Three times hints are made about enemies who made life difficult for Guðbrandur. On page 5 Arngrímur speaks of the arrogance and envy of Guðbrandur Þorláksson's enemies, few in number but very wicked, *supercilium et invidentia æmulorum Gudbrandi Thorlacii (quos nisi extremè malos nullos habuit)*, on page 14 he passes over bygone evils, referring instead to the chapter on King Frederik II of Denmark in the third book of his own work *Crymogæa*; and on pages 16–17 he speaks about the downright disobedience and slander mixed with curses which Guðbrandur had to endure, *Strennuam contumaciam et diris mixtas calumnias expertus est*, without going into further details but asserting that the bishop's actions were in accordance with the oath he had sworn to the king at his ordination. Through these hints the reader easily gets the impression that the envy and enmities to which Guðbrandur was subjected were the result of his episcopal duties. Most probably this was Arngrímur's intention, but it is only part of the truth. Certainly Guðbrandur became involved in heated disputes of an official nature; but since these were at times intertwined with his personal interests it is very difficult to distinguish completely between his official and private actions. To gain a reasonably good overview of these complicated circumstances, we must once more go far back in time.

As Arngrímur had already mentioned in *Athanasia*, Guðbrandur's maternal grandfather was the lawman Jón Sigmundsson, who was for decades a powerful and dominant figure in Icelandic society. He became involved

in disputes of various kinds, such as questions about inheritance, accusations of not having paid full tithes to the Catholic Church and allegations that he had entered into an illicit marriage, as he and his second wife Björg were third cousins. Some of these cases brought him into fierce strife with the unyielding Bishop of Hólar, Gottskálf Nikulásson, which went on for almost the first twenty years of the sixteenth century. In this contest the bishop proved victorious and the lawman, having been a wealthy man, lost most of his property to the Church; he died in reduced circumstances in the autumn of 1520, only a few months before his adversary. Almost half a century later Guðbrandur took up his grandfather's case, and even went to Copenhagen in 1568 in an attempt to have the property of Jón Sigmundsson restored to his heirs, asserting that his grandfather had been illegally deprived of it. Guðbrandur was successful and some of the property still in the possession of the Church was actually restored to Jón Sigmundsson's heirs. But it was not only in his private affairs that Guðbrandur was active. As soon as he had taken over control of the Hólar Diocese he proved himself a most energetic and insistent defender of the interests of the Church in a variety of ways. He reclaimed ecclesiastical properties which certain of his predecessors had lost, took measures to improve the economic conditions of the clergy, asserted the rights of the Church in certain cases of immunity from the secular jurisdiction and soon became a highly successful promoter of God's word, as we have already seen. To get his way the young bishop often turned directly to the King of Denmark or his important connections in Copenhagen, thereby creating animosity and even hostility against himself among the local authorities in Iceland. Even the King's representative was offended, as he had expected the bishop to proceed in the more traditional way through the *Alþing*, the Icelandic legislative and judicial body. The enmities increased considerably in the 1580s, when the bishop instigated further claims to properties which had originally belonged to Jón Sigmundsson but had passed from the Church to other owners, including members of an exceptionally powerful family in Iceland. Himself a descendant of Jón Sigmundsson, Arngrímur Jónsson became involved in this series of events primarily or perhaps solely as Bishop Guðbrandur's agent. In 1590 Arngrímur made claim to three estates but was met with a strong defence and an unexpected manoeuvre on the part of the owners, who maintained that they were in possession

of letters showing that Jón Sigmundsson had given these estates to the Catholic Bishop Gottskálk to atone for serious offences. Panicstricken at first, Guðbrandur and Arngrímur backed down and lost the case. Later, when they obtained permission by royal warrant to examine these letters, they discovered that they were forgeries. An enraged Guðbrandur renewed his attacks, his anger appearing most clearly in three pamphlets written and published in 1592, 1595 and 1608. The bishop succeeded in having the letters officially recognized as forgeries, but the estates were not made over to the descendants of Jón Sigmundsson as the case was thought too complicated to allow their restoration. Although the bishop in his fury had transgressed the limits of decent behaviour so badly that in 1605 he was reprimanded by King Christian IV (1577–1648), he continued his fight to have the case reopened. This finally irritated the king so much that in 1620 Guðbrandur almost lost his bishopric, and was probably spared only because of his age. Nevertheless, he was sentenced to pay a heavy fine ratified by the king on 11th May 1622, which amounted to two-thirds of the property restored to him as a result of his lawsuits. In spite of his advanced age the bishop's bellicose nature remained untamed and in the following year, 1623, Guðbrandur tried once again to find a reason for a new lawsuit, asking Arngrímur to join him. This time Arngrímur politely but firmly refused.

If we compare the historical facts of Guðbrandur's long-lasting feud with the vague information found in *Athanasia*, it is evident that Arngrímur succeeded very well in concealing the late bishop's most embarrassing actions. The hints dropped by Arngrímur, as described above, give the correct impression that Guðbrandur had to fight for the rights of the Church and the fairly precise reference to the chapter on Fredrik II in *Crymogæa* is merely further proof. On the other hand, Arngrímur does not refer to the following chapter in *Crymogæa* on Christian IV, which mentions Guðbrandur's lawsuits to recover the property of his maternal grandfather. It is hard to believe that this was due to forgetfulness on Arngrímur's part rather than being deliberate. However, the most striking proof of his intention to cover up this affair is his reference to a book, *Crymogæa*, which was published in 1609, several years before the bishop's humiliating defeat. Thus even the most inquisitive of foreign readers would have found it extremely difficult to gather any accurate

written information on this matter, although it must still have been common knowledge among most older Icelanders and even in limited circles in Copenhagen at the time *Athanasia* was composed.

## Conclusion

A writer composing a eulogy is quite naturally encouraged by the genre itself to exaggerate the good qualities and deeds of the person being praised, and an objective treatment of the subject matter can hardly be expected. This certainly applies to Arngrímur Jónsson and his *Athanasia*. Nevertheless, in the case of Guðbrandur Þorláksson, whose life was characterized by many great achievements but also by highly controversial actions, it cannot have been easy for Arngrímur to find the golden mean in his choice of material. A wrong decision could easily have exposed him not only to criticism but also to ridicule. As far as can be seen, Arngrímur did not write anything that was not true, but naturally enough he made elaborate use of Guðbrandur Þorláksson's many talents and accomplishments in his composition, with frequent references to the Bible and classical antiquity to illustrate the divine profundity of the bishop's life. The emphasis is on describing Bishop Guðbrandur's prophetic vocation, *vocatio*, his true Christian qualities, such as *benignitas* "benignity," *munificentia* "munificence," and above all *pietas* "piety," which comprises all other virtues. He is a wise man, *sapiens*, and the sword, *gladius*, of God, as his name signifies, the king's sworn servant who founded the golden age, *seculum aureum*, of the Icelandic Church. Still, Guðbrandur is no saint and Arngrímur does not intend to represent him as such. He is a human being with all the accompanying faults, which Arngrímur knew better than most people, although he did not want to mention them. In my view Arngrímur manages to solve his dilemma in a most elegant fashion not only through his attempts to conceal facts but also by making an important issue of Guðbrandur's tombstone. He quotes a part of the inscription where Guðbrandur himself emphasises that he is a *peccator* "sinner," and although we do not know exactly what the bishop had in mind in using this word, *peccator* alludes to sins, *peccata*, in general, a description which would certainly fit some of his actions in the eyes of the Church. The inscription is echoed in the final chapter of *Athanasia* in the general Christian acknowledgement of our sins for which

we ask God's forgiveness. By confessing his sins Guðbrandur looked to God for forgiveness, thus rendering any human comments superfluous. Through this theological loophole Arngrímur justifies his reticence in discreetly eliminating anything which might have spoiled the idealised portrait of his old patron – the spiritual leader of Iceland and father of his country, *pater patriae*.

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## SUMMARY

**Keywords:** Guðbrandur Þorláksson, Arngrímur Jónsson, elegy

In the year 1627 Guðbrandur Þorláksson (1542–1627), Bishop of Hólar-diocese in northern Iceland, died at the age of 85 having held the bishop’s staff for 56 years. Throughout his unusually long period in office the bishop exercised an overwhelming influence in several fields of Icelandic society. He left clear marks not only on the administration of the church but also on the general spiritual life of Icelanders. To carry through his diverse projects he managed to gather many able collaborators who in their turn enjoyed the bishop’s support. One of the

best known of these was the learned humanist Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648), a relative of Guðbrandur Þorláksson, who had already become his protégé in his youth and remained an intimate and loyal participant in many of the bishop's dealings – both public and private – to the very end. After Guðbrandur Þorláksson's death Arngrímur Jónsson was asked to compose a eulogy to his old benefactor, a task few, if anyone, was more fit to perform. Arngrímur showed reluctance, probably more than could be ascribed to traditional modesty in situations like this, but finally he accepted and in 1630, the eulogy, *AΘΑΝΑΣΙΑ sive nominis ac fame immortalitas reverendi ac incomparabilis Viri Dn Gudbrandi Thorlacii* appeared in print in Hamburg. As Guðbrandur Þorláksson's life is well recorded in many different contemporary documents, we are furnished with material which enables us to compare the portrait of Guðbrandur Þorláksson drawn by Arngrímur Jónsson, to that which may be gathered from other sources. A comparison will show the problems Arngrímur had to face, if he was not to offend an international audience's sense of decency or damage the ideal image of the bishop. The eulogy itself demonstrates how the author solved these problems either by omitting unpleasant matters or by evading in a rather ingenious way delicate facts without violating too seriously his own trustworthiness in the eyes of the Icelanders who knew the whole life story of the bishop. Thus, while the *Ἀθανασία* of Arngrímur Jónsson does not add much to our knowledge of the historical Guðbrandur Þorláksson, a remarkable but not blameless character, it shows how its author wished to portray a great man of the ecclesiastical order to whom he doubtlessly desired to pay due respect for future generations.

### ÁGRIP

**Lykilorð:** Guðbrandur Þorláksson, Arngrímur Jónsson, lofræða

Árið 1627 lést Guðbrandur Þorláksson (1542–1627) biskup á Hólum 85 ára að aldri og hafði hann þá setið á biskupsstóli í 56 ár. Á langri embættistíð sinni var Guðbrandur mikill atkvæðamaður á mörgum sviðum íslensks þjóðlífs. Hann markaði djúp spor ekki aðeins í stjórn kirkjumála en einnig á almennt andlegt líf Íslendinga. Til að hrinda mörgum ætlunaverkum sínum í framkvæmd auðnaðist honum að eignast góða samverkamenn sem í stað þessa nutu stuðnings biskups. Einn kunnastur þeirra var hinn lærði húnasti Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648) frændi hans, sem hann hafði tekið undir verndarvæng sinn þegar á unga aldri. Reyndist Arngrímur trúr og traustur vinur Guðbrands allt til æviloka. Að biskupi látnum var Arngrímur því beðinn að semja lofræðu um hinn forna velgjörðarmann sinn og voru fáir taldir betur fallnir til þess verks en hann. Arngrímur færðist hins vegar undan meir en búast mátti við af því lítillæti sem mönnum var tamt að sýna við slík tækifæri. Loks féllst hann þó á að semja lofræðu og árið 1630 birtist á prenti í Hamborg *AΘΑΝΑΣΙΑ sive nominis ac fame immortalitas reverendi ac*

*incomparabilis Viri Dn Gudbrandi Thorlacii.* Lífssaga Guðbrands er vel kunn þar sem hún er skráð í mörgum samtímaheimildum. En einmitt þetta atriði gerir okkur kleift að bera saman þá mynd sem Arngrímur Jónsson dregur upp af honum við aðrar heimildir. Sá samanburður sýnir okkur glögglega þann vanda sem Arngrímur varð að takast á við ef hann vildi forðast að særa viðkvæmni alþjóða lesenda eða hlífa fyrirmyndar orðspori biskups. Í lofræðunni má sjá hvernig höfundur tókst að leysa þennan vanda með því að sneiða hjá óþægilegum staðreyndum eða láta ógetið um viðkvæm mál án þess að skaða um of eigið orðspor í augum Íslendinga sem þekktu alla lífssögu biskups. *Αθανασία* bætir ekki miklu við vitneskju okkar um hinn sögulega Guðbrand Þorláksson, sem var merkur maður en ekki flekklaus, en sýnir okkur greinilega hvers konar mynd höfundur ritsins vildi draga upp fyrir komandi kynslóðir af miklum kirkjuleiðtoga sem hann æskti að sýna tilheyrilega virðingu.

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