

(RE)VISIONS OF ROYAL LUCK IN THE SAGAS OF ÓLÁFR TRYGGVASON

Chandar Lal

‘[G]ipt yður ok hamingja herra má oss
meira en menn nökkurir.’ (*ÓTM*, II, 96)

(Your luck and good fortune, lord, will be
more powerful for us than any men will.)

Óláfr Tryggvason, the late tenth-century missionary king of Norway, was immortalized in a sequence of medieval Scandinavian prose narratives. Written variously in Latin and in Old Norse, these included the early synoptic histories of Norway and a line of sagas which followed. The latter constitute by far the longer and more elaborate accounts of the king’s life and will form the main focus of the present study. The primary texts to be examined are Oddr Snorrason’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, Snorri Sturluson’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla*, and the anonymous *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*.¹ Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, citing Tim William Machan, conceives of these sagas as a ‘living textual tradition’ in which ‘writers freely created their own versions

¹ The editions used will be abbreviated respectively as *ÓTO*, *Hsk*, and *ÓTM*. Old Norse quotations will be in the normalized form used by *Hsk*. For a comprehensive account of the composition, manuscript context, transmission, and reception of the texts, see Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 2005, 15–120 and 225–67.

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Abstract: This article examines the depictions of royal luck in three sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason. In existing scholarship Old Norse concepts of luck defy clear definition, having been read variously as Christian and pagan; abstract and concrete; individual and societal; predetermined and serendipitous; innate and endowed from above. These apparent oppositions need not be mutually incompatible. Rather, the sagas discussed in this article approach these thematic concerns from multiple angles simultaneously. Since the texts are the products of an iterative tradition, notions of luck are shaped diachronically by layers of subjective ideology and idiosyncrasy, arising from multiple stages of authorial, editorial, and critical (re)interpretation.

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by selecting from, modifying and adding to earlier copies, translations and commentaries' (2005, 157). Yet, as Sverre Bagge remarks, a reader may find that traces of this creative freedom are startlingly difficult to discern:

From a practical point of view, the 'objective' style of the sagas creates considerable problems of interpretation. The author remains in the background, very rarely commenting explicitly on what he tells. [...] The idea that there are interpretations and subjective points of view behind the apparently objective façade of the sagas was [...] for a long time resisted by philologists and historians of literature. (1992, 61)

This article will propose that layers of subjectivity are indeed discernible in the present sagas, specifically via their subtly differing portraits of royal luck. This pervasive concept proves to be a site of thematic complexity, having been interpreted and reinterpreted iteratively over the course of the composition, transmission, and reception of these texts.

To varying degrees in each saga, a reader may be struck by the sheer power of Óláfr Tryggvason's good fortune: it is a central force in the narratives, repeatedly striking awe into the king's friends and foes alike. Indeed, Vilhelm Grönbech argued early in the twentieth century that luck is 'the strongest power, the vital principle indeed, of the [Old Norse] world', and 'Olaf Tryggvason is the perfect realisation of the ideal' (1931, 127 and 135). Not only does he possess formidable luck himself, but he also defines that of those around him: he projects his luck to some and makes oratorical pronouncements about the share enjoyed by others. The 'royal luck' of my title, then, does not solely refer to the good fortune which befalls the king directly; it also pertains to that which 'overflows and fills others with its abundance' (Grönbech 1931, 134). Particularly arresting is the manner in which the saga writers articulate this: each selects from a wide array of Old Norse words and terms which signify 'luck' or closely related concepts. These include *fylgja*, *gæfa*, *gipta*, and *hamingja*, as well as compounds and derivatives of each.² With this lexical plurality, I will argue, comes conceptual plurality. The sagas house mutable attitudes to luck, often demarcated through selective usage of words with distinct connotations. It falls to the modern reader to read between the lines of these lexical choices, along with the corresponding absences. What arises is a sense that there was no single, objective idea of 'luck' in these sagas, let alone in medieval Scandinavian societies at large. There is an article on the subject from 2006, entitled 'The Norse Concept

² Other Old Norse words in the semantic field of 'luck', which occur very infrequently (if at all) in the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason, include *auðna*, *happ*, *beill*, and *sæla* (Sommer 2006, 279). While *ÓTO* and *ÓTM* use multiple words for luck, *Hsk* uses no term other than *hamingja*.

of Luck': it will be contended here that no such conceptual unity is attainable.³ The sagas about Óláfr were compiled and recompiled in a textual tradition which spanned the centuries after the protagonist's death, and thus it is only to be expected that Icelandic writers would have voiced contemporary ecclesiastical, political, and social concerns.⁴ One must accordingly question the extent to which notions of luck constructed during the period in which Óláfr lived survived to the time in which the sagas about him were written. Seen cumulatively and diachronically, his luck comes to represent a network of shifting, subjective ideas, often markedly distinct from what the word 'luck' might mean to a modern reader.

The present article will be structured in two main parts, each appraising this complexity from a different angle. The first of these will consider the possibility that 'luck' can be read as a concrete noun of sorts. Royal luck can take shape outside a character's psyche; it assumes metaphorical dimensions, imagined as an animate, somatic entity with agency of its own. The effects of this will be examined through a series of close lexical analyses. The second part will consider the fact that depictions of luck are a product of social conditions as well as individual consciousnesses. Parallels will be drawn between the sagas' latent attitudes to luck and those perceptible in contemporary theological and socio-political sources.

As a means of approaching these plural, often incongruous, phenomena which constitute 'luck' in an Old Norse context, it is instructive to consider how the word equally houses an array of connotations in Modern English. In a philosophical monograph on luck, Nicholas Rescher asserts that 'whatever good luck provides us with is a free gift [...] it requires no investment of talent or effort, and no merit is at issue. And whatever bad luck deprives us of also leaves our merits untouched' (1995, 37). For Rescher, then, luck is a capricious, perhaps even random, force which must sit at odds with human agency. This modern conception evokes the fortuitous, the unpredictable, the disinterested. The same sense is conspicuous in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, whose defini-

³ Sommer 2006. It must be noted that Sommer's article concludes by making no case for a single concept of luck; indeed, it does the opposite, and reveals the illusory nature of its own title.

⁴ For example, a reading of the early sagas can be informed by Margaret Cormack's view that the cult of St Óláfr Haraldsson 'may well have offended Icelandic sensibilities; the Icelanders dated their own conversion to the reign to Olaf Tryggvason'. Oddr, concerned with local identity, may have sought to present the latter 'as the patron saint of Iceland', which would help to account for the potency of his protagonist's luck (1994, 10).

tion employs the very word ‘fortuitous’ no fewer than three times in quick succession.⁵ Yet, given the breadth of functions and cultural associations applied to this word ‘luck’, it comes to denote far more than pure chance. One may hear colloquial references to making one’s own luck, a phrase which goes so far as to invert the ostensible meaning of ‘luck’ entirely, transforming it into a phenomenon governed by anything but chance. In common idiom, one can be born lucky; one can have beginner’s luck or the luck of the devil or of the Irish: luck acquires conceptual relationships with specific settings, situations, and frames of reference. A number of distinct — indeed, contradictory — values are housed in what at first glance seems a single, coherent concept. Luck can simultaneously permit and preclude human autonomy and agency; it can be embedded within distinct temporalities, geographies, and social strata. It takes up a language and an iconography of its own; it is at once an experiential phenomenon and a cultural construct. As much as medieval Scandinavian concepts of luck may be seen to differ from modern ones, their innate complexity and multiplicity can be considered a common feature.

Sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason: Production, Revision, Reinterpretation

In evaluating how far the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason concur in their lexical approaches to luck, one must necessarily consider how these texts came into being. Given that each saga to be studied is the end product of a multifaceted process of composition, immediately striking is the plurality of creative mentalities at work. By virtue of passing through a ‘living textual tradition’, each saga is not only authored but may subsequently undergo stages of redaction, interpolation, deletion, and modification. While *ÓTO* predates *Hsk*, which in turn predates *ÓTM*,⁶ multiple influences were at play at each stage of composition, and it is not to be assumed that the development of these texts occurred in a linear and self-contained progression. Rather, a diffuse scribal enterprise could enable many voices to speak through each text. As Judy Quinn observes:

⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. *luck*, n. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/110864>> [accessed 10 April 2014].

⁶ It should be noted that the relationship between *Hsk* and *ÓTM* has been debated. Alan Berger (1999, 6) argues that Snorri’s saga is in fact an abbreviated version of *ÓTM*. Conversely, Sveinbjörn Rafnsson sees the two works as deriving from a common (now lost) source (2005, 242-63).

Scribes appear to have been working within an organic tradition [and] often seem to have quite deliberately altered the saga texts they were re-producing, consciously reworking them [...]. There seem to have been a wide variety of scribal practices, ranging from what we might term ‘duplicating’ a text to revising and rewriting it. (2010, 16)

Consideration must be given to this question of duplication versus creativity. Comparative literary analysis, such as attempted in this article, naturally requires that the objects of study are manifestly different works. Facile though this observation may seem, it rests on something of a value judgement. In comparing and contrasting *ÓTO*, *Hsk*, and *ÓTM*, one might assume that the works are separate entities, each the product of a distinct creative vision. Yet, in light of a heterogeneous manner of composition with apparently minimal regard for authors’ ‘proprietary control’ (Quinn 2010, 16), this is a difficult conclusion to reach. Ólafur Halldórsson, for instance, expresses reservations with regard to treating *ÓTM* as an independent literary creation in its own right. He takes particular care to avoid crediting the text with an ‘author’. Rather, finding that the saga contains ‘precious little which appears to have been original writing’, he deems the status of the work’s originator to be that of a ‘compiler’, who ‘gathered by far the greatest part of the text from written works’ (2001, v).

This scribal process seems a manifestation of that outlined by Quinn — but can the lack of ‘original writing’ be said to diminish the work’s individual creativity? Rowe suggests not, pointing out that such modes of composition are far from unique to *ÓTM*. Paraphrasing John Dagenais, she asserts that

most literary efforts in the Middle Ages were not expended on the creation of new works, but rather on the activities by which people transformed one manuscript into another, such as [...] reworking and copying. To ignore this is to ignore a significant aspect of the medieval production of meaning. (2005b, 31)

Taking this notion further still, Eleanor Heans-Glogowska expressly attributes *ÓTM* to an ‘author’ in her 2014 thesis, ‘Rewriting History’,⁷ asserting the saga to be the work of ‘a creative force rather than someone who just favoured the “cut and paste” approach’ (forthcoming, 15). *ÓTM*’s intertextual accretions (as detailed in Rowe 2005a, 157–58) may then offer an insight into the mentalities instigating them. As Siân Grønlie puts it, they ‘create a dialogue with the main narrative’, rendering *ÓTM* ‘multidimensional and multigeneric’ (2013, 32–33; also Phelpsstead 2007, 75). This process of textual construction and reconstruc-

⁷ I am indebted to Dr Heans-Glogowska for kindly providing me with a draft of this work.

tion, then, is self-reflexive, always aware of textual fluidities and their potential to reflect individuals' stylistic leanings and ideological motivations.

It is informative to consider at this point that *ÓTO* and *Hsk* are generally attributed to named 'authors', Oddr Snorrason and Snorri Sturluson respectively.⁸ The redactor of *ÓTM*, on the other hand, is anonymous. This may have implications for the way in which a reader perceives the creative consciousness(es) in each text. Rowe attributes *ÓTM* to an 'editor-scribe' (2005a, 157) in the singular, and indeed only one scribal hand appears in the portion of AM 61 fol. containing *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.⁹ Yet little can be known about this scribe, and one must turn principally to the text itself in order to discern acts or modes of consciousness. Conversely, Snorri's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* can be read in the light of a relatively advanced understanding of Snorri the man (about whom monograph-length studies have been written: see, for instance, Ciklamini 2008 and Wanner 2008). Purely by having an authorial name to attach to the text as a whole, a modern reader may naturally be inclined to afford Snorri a greater sense of creative autonomy, even if the subsequent transmission of his work was outside his control.¹⁰

This question of authorial control would be equally applicable in Oddr's case. Since Oddr wrote the first of the sagas about King Óláfr, it might be natural to expect that his work must feature a high degree of creative originality and that his personal voice might be easier to sense. But, as Lars Lönnroth notes, 'Oddr Snorrason [is a man] about whom we know next to nothing' (1975, 36); thus, as in *ÓTM*, one must rely on the primary text to apprehend any substantial sense of his mindsets and mentalities. This is no easy task, however, owing to the discontinuity of his work's manuscript witnesses. A complete saga may be attained only as a composite text formed from three manuscripts (Andersson 2003a, 1–3). Since these manuscripts contain different Old Norse translations of Oddr's Latin work, they may enable one to see the translators' differing sympathies and conceptions, but one can scarcely conceive of the composite text as a unified whole, even if it is ostensibly ascribed to a single author.

⁸ That said, as Finlay and Faulkes observe, 'the authorship of *Heimskringla* is not referred to within the text' (2011, vii). Snorri's authorship has been questioned: see Berger 1999; Boulhosa 2005; Cormack 2001; Jakob Benediktsson 1995; Jørgensen 1995; Louis-Jensen 1997.

⁹ 'AM 61 fol.', in *Handrit* (Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands, 2014) <<http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/da/AM02-061>> [accessed 11 August 2014]; see also *ÓTM*, III, cccxxxvi. For a palaeographical overview of the manuscript, see Ólafur Halldórsson 1982, 9–14.

¹⁰ See Whaley 1991, 41–47 for an account of textual variance in the manuscript history of *Hsk*.

As Alan Berger has it, Oddr's saga is instead to be taken as 'three translations, none of them entirely complete, none entirely agreeing with another' (1999, 6). Theodore M. Andersson goes so far as to describe the saga he edits as a 'bipolar composition with a split religious and political identity' (2003a, 25).¹¹

It can be inferred that the living textual tradition is not solely a medieval phenomenon; rather, it continues to the present day. Modern editorial activity adds complexity, another unique 'individual stamp' on the narrative, to borrow Peter Hallberg's phrase. *ÓTO*, *Hsk*, and *ÓTM* are all texts reconstructed from what seemed to their editors to be the 'best' manuscript source(s) available.¹² Thematic study must be foregrounded by recognition that these editions are, to varying degrees, synthetic representations of organic traditions. In Quinn's words, 'editorial practices have created out of complex manuscript witnesses [...] a body of deceptively neat narratives' (2010, 14). In seeing past this deception, as it were, one arrives at a further sense of the works' latent polyphony, with meaning created at a series of distinct experiential levels. The reader is led to doubt that he may engage dialogically with a governing 'I', an authorial voice who can be held answerable for every creative act performed in each text. Rather, the texts can accommodate an array of mentalities; each of these players, consciously or subconsciously, may bring with him a distinct ideology. This awareness will come to promote an understanding of how and why thematic variances occur in the sagas' depictions of luck.

Luck as a Concrete Noun?

1. Fylgja and hamingja as Reified Abstractions

In Modern English, 'luck' is exclusively an abstract noun. In Old Norse, this is not necessarily the case. Rather, certain nouns for 'luck' may ambiguously con-

¹¹ Andersson attributes this partly to the notion that Oddr targeted his work at clerical and secular audiences simultaneously. Similar questions of intended audience have been asked about *Hsk* and *ÓTM*. Jónas Kristjánsson (1977, 471–72) asserts that the former was composed for Norwegians, whereas Magnús Fjalldal (2013, 468) sees it as intended for an Icelandic readership, with an 'ambivalent love/hate attitude toward the Norwegian crown'. *ÓTM* has recently been taken as targeted at an aristocratic Icelandic lay audience (Heans-Głogowska 2014, 202–05).

¹² Matthew Driscoll notes that a 'new philological' approach is taken in *Editiones Arnarnæanae*, the series of which *ÓTM* is part (2010, 96). Ólafur Halldórsson's edition of the main text is faithful to AM 61 fol.; the extensive footnotes record variant readings in the other manuscripts. *ÓTO* — also edited by Ólafur Halldórsson — similarly displays the three manuscript sources in parallel, enabling one to consider them independently.

note both the concrete and the abstract; this yields thematic complexity. *ÓTO* refers extensively to King Óláfr's *fylgja* and *hamingja*. Both of these words have been taken to be translatable as 'luck', by E. O. G. Turville-Petre amongst others (1964, 230; see also Sommer 2006, 279). Such scholars have suggested, however, that both terms are more nuanced, so that neither signifies 'luck' in the purely intangible, interior sense which the Modern English word might. To begin with *fylgja*, Hilda Roderick Ellis Davidson and Turville-Petre propose that this word connotes some animal entity or guardian spirit; the word refers to a metaphorical bringer of luck as much as to luck itself (Davidson 1943, 130–33; Turville-Petre 1964, 227–30). Else Mundal distinguishes between two kinds of concrete *fylgjur*, with 'little in common but the name'. One, visualized as an animal, 'reflects a person's character'; the other, 'in the shape of a woman, [...] guarantees luck' (1993, 624–25). The latter is imagined vividly in *ÓTM*: shortly before being baptized by Þangbrandr, Hallr witnesses 'ix. konur, allar í ljósum klæðum ok á hvítum hestum' (II, 148) (nine women, all in light-coloured clothes and on white horses). It is asserted that 'þetta hafi engar konur verit aðrar en fylgjur' (II, 149) (these have been no women other than *fylgjur*). The reader here encounters a clear physical reification of *fylgjur*, with the narrator conspicuously setting out precisely how they are to be imagined. Evidence from *ÓTO*, however, reveals that Mundal's two conceptions are not always so easily distinguishable. In this earlier saga, *fylgja* appears as a noun on three occasions (131, 150, and 188). Each time, it is used in a relatively imprecise manner; descriptors are used sparingly and the only adjectives, *bjartari* (brighter) and *fegri* (fairer) (150), could pertain to an animal just as easily as to a human being. Oddr's work, then, depicts *fylgja* in a much less distinct fashion, as a concept which can be visualized in little more detail than merely as some form of animate being.

Hamingja too, according to Peter Hallberg, 'can have a touch of personification, [as] a supernatural force or being external to the man, accompanying him as a kind of *fylgja*' (1973, 153). There are etymological grounds for this view: a connection between *hamingja* and *hamr* (shape, skin, form) (cf. Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1874, 236, s.v. *hamr* II) was highlighted by Turville-Petre (1964, 230).¹³ *Hamingja* and *fylgja* appear as points on a notional continuum between concrete and abstract, then, with *fylgja* a shade more concrete

¹³ A sense of concreteness may also be implied by *fylgja*'s etymology. While connected with the verb *fylgja* (to follow), in the opinion of Turville-Petre it may also 'be related to Icelandic *fulga* (thin covering of hay) and Norwegian dialect *folga* (skin, covering)' (1964, 228).

than *hamingja*. Similar views have been expressed by Hedeager, Sommer and others.¹⁴ Yet the issue is complicated by the likelihood that semantic change occurred over time, giving rise to what has been read as the increasingly abstract nature of *hamingja*. For instance, Carol Clover, echoing Lars Lönnroth, argues that ‘the complex of terms and notions referring to “luck”, [...] whatever its prehistory, [...] was by the thirteenth century fully harmonized with Latin concepts of “grace”’ (1985, 266). Presently I shall question how far this view is applicable to the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason. ‘Grace’, at any rate, denotes something altogether more abstract than animate *hamingjur* or *fylgjur*; it follows from Clover’s premise that the conceptual ‘concreteness’ of *hamingja* and *fylgja* would have diminished by the time the sagas of Óláfr were composed. Where animal *hamingjur* do appear, it may be that they are the deliberately stylized products of cultural memory, a curious re-enactment on the part of Christian saga writers of an objective correlative ‘deep rooted in a heathen past’ (Hallberg 1973, 162).

Hallberg cites a handful of cases in which *hamingja* is given such concrete, sensory dimensions through its presentation as a material body. Perhaps the most overt is in *Víga-Glúms saga*, which has been dated to ‘just a decade or two after the first Olaf sagas’ (Andersson 2006, 66).¹⁵ Here, *hamingja* is figured somatically, embodied in the most literal of senses. It takes ‘the shape of a gigantic woman’ (Hallberg 1973, 153), as Glúmr remarks that ‘mundi kona sjá hans hamingja vera er fjöllum hærra gekk’ (that woman who went taller than mountains would be his *hamingja*) (Jónas Kristjánsson 1956, 30). The compiler of the saga leaves the reader in little doubt that he conceived of this luck as a being rather than a mere abstraction. Yet Sommer argues that despite the ‘physical Gestalt’ seen here, the word *hamingja* remains ‘to an overwhelming extent used in the abstract sense’ (2006, 281), quite unlike the consistently concrete *fylgja*. The example from *Víga-Glúms saga* would then be anomalous, but the very presence of anomalies indicates that meaning is constructed subjectively, in a variable relationship between signifier and signified. Indeed, it is not always discernible from context whether *hamingja* is intended to represent something concrete rather than abstract, as will be demonstrated shortly. Even

¹⁴ See Sommer 2006, 279; Hedeager 2011, 83; Mundal 1993, 625; Turville-Petre 1964, 230.

¹⁵ Víga-Glúmr himself is named in *Hsk* and *ÓTM*, perhaps indicating cultural or intertextual connection: see *Hsk*, 283; *ÓTM*, II, 1–10.

when the materiality of the noun is not stated explicitly, a sense of its physical nature may nonetheless be perceptible.

This is very much the case in the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason: one encounters ambiguities whereby abstract and concrete manifestations of luck seem to co-exist. As such ambiguities abound, the decisive role of the modern reader becomes increasingly marked. In Andersson's translation of *ÓTO*, one finds a clear sense of differentiation between distinct lexical manifestations of luck: Andersson systematically renders *hamingja* as 'luck' and *fylgja* as 'fetch'. Having encountered the overtly tangible nature of *hamingja* in the example from *Viga-Glúms saga*, one might now enquire why Andersson translates the word in such a purely abstract manner. The complexity of the word becomes clear as one compares the different manuscripts. In Chapter 5 of the S-text — which Andersson does not translate, opting to follow the A-text — there is a point at which *hamingja* can only denote something concrete. Here, Valdamarr's mother predicts the birth of King Óláfr, a 'konungsson með björtum fylgjum ok hamingjum' (*ÓTO*, 144) (prince with bright *fylgjur* and *hamingjur*). The yet unborn Óláfr's importance to the people is expressed through the potency of his luck. *Fylgja* and *hamingja* are collocated: both share in the quality of brightness, a sensory aspect which suggests that they are to be understood metaphorically. Intuitively, something which is bright must in the first place be visible. That *hamingjum* is a plural is telling: one can intuit that *hamingja* here appears as concrete, since it is being reckoned in discrete units rather than as a single, continuous idea. It would scarcely suffice to translate the quotation as 'prince with bright fetches and lucks'. If one accordingly decides that this *hamingja* signifies a physical entity, then how exactly is it to be visualized? The dual usage of the words *fylgjur* and *hamingjur* may suggest that the two words are not entirely synonymous: why should the prophetess refer separately to Óláfr's *hamingjur* and *fylgjur*, one might ask, if they are not intended as two distinct types of being? Alternatively, it might be held that the phrase 'fylgjum ok hamingjum' functions merely as an emphatic tautology, so that one is not to distinguish between the meanings of the two words but instead to observe the sheer extent of luck suggested by their cumulative effect. In either case, one can sense that the redactor was not only keenly aware of the importance of luck but also made a conscious effort to render it tangible. Obliquely, then, a reader can discern a stylistic or conceptual inclination specific to Oddr, or perhaps to the scribe producing this version of Oddr's text.

Such individuality becomes more sharply perceptible when this episode is compared with the corresponding passage in the A-text, which, as noted, Andersson favours. Here the word *hamingja* is handled rather differently. The

prophetess makes no explicit comment on King Óláfr's *hamingja*; instead, she tells Valdamarr that she does not see 'þat er skelfi þína hamingju' (*ÓTO*, 144) (that which might unsettle your *hamingja*). In this case, *hamingja* could refer to an abstract phenomenon just as easily as to a concrete one. The verb *skelfa* can mean 'to make to shake' or 'to make to tremble with fear';¹⁶ the latter necessitates an object which is to some degree animate. The reader can take this in either of two ways, then: either the prophetess does not see anything that might upset Valdamarr's luck or she does not see anything that might strike fear into the bringer of his luck. Implicitly, it seems that the compilers of the two texts voice subtly different attitudes to the narrative's treatment of luck. If the two redactors were, as Andersson suggests (2003a, 26), working from the same exemplar, their varying uses of *hamingja* can only be attributed to their disparate creative faculties. Each leaves behind him an impression, however subtle, of his distinct attitude to the theme of luck in the text.

This echoes M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij's view that saga narration is characterized by 'latent fiction' (1973, 13). Admittedly Steblin-Kamenskij has been regarded by some as 'extreme in his tendency to set "the saga mind" in as sharp a contrast as possible to our own' (Hallberg 1974, 110); he is certainly bold in his assertion that this 'saga mind' constitutes 'the consciousness of a person living in a remote age, a consciousness completely dissimilar to our own' (Steblin-Kamenskij 1973, 13). Nevertheless, he makes valuable observations on the acts of individual creativity latent in the discrepancies between iterations of the narrative:

Fiction in the sagas is, so to speak, 'latent' [...]. An idea of the attitude of saga writers to their narrative material [...] may be given by accounts of the same event presented in two different sagas [...]. Still more significant are parallel sagas about the same Norwegian king — different versions of what was regarded as 'the same saga'. [Each writer] invented dialogue, speeches, details of everyday life, the background of events, and psychological motivation, and introduced characters or literary motifs which seemed plausible to him. (1973, 13)

Turning to *ÓTM*, one sees this source-dependent 'latent fiction' at work. Rowe finds that the text's treatment of source material from *Laxdæla saga* reveals

¹⁶ Zoëga 1910, 371; cf. Cleasby and Vigfússon 1874, 543; Fritzner 1883–96, III, 303, s.v. *skelfa* 3; *ONP*, s.v. *skelfa*, <<http://dataonp.ad.sc.ku.dk/webart/s/sk/70106cvkalf.htm>> [accessed 12 May 2014]. The *ONP* citations show that the word frequently has a personal sense, for instance in the numerous examples from *Alexanders saga* (whose oldest manuscript, dated in *ONP* to c. 1280, is AM 519 a 4to).

much about the compiler's sympathies. Her analysis may be extended to demonstrate that concepts of luck are handled in a particularly variable manner. For instance, Kjartan Ólafsson and Bolli Þorleiksson discuss the possibility of attacking King Óláfr, in response to the prospect that Óláfr might seek to convert them. Bolli is less than optimistic, and remarks that 'eigi mun þetta framgengt verða at því er ek hygg, því at konungr mun vera giptu drjúgr ok hamingju mikill' (*ÓTM*, I, 363) (this will not come to pass, so I think, because the king will be ample in his luck and great in his fortune). This assertion, copied into *ÓTM* almost verbatim from *Laxdoela saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 119), leaves the reader in no doubt as to the perceived pervasiveness of luck. Just as was seen in the preceding example from *ÓTO*, one encounters an almost tautological reference to two different words for 'luck', *gipta* and *hamingja*. As before, this might serve either of two functions. One is that 'luck' is simply being reduplicated for sheer force of emphasis: given Bolli's concern with the difficulty of the situation, it stands to reason that he should stress the extent of Óláfr's powers.¹⁷ An alternative possibility, however, is that the utterance is not tautological at all, but instead that the author of *Laxdoela saga* (and, hence, also the writer of *ÓTM*) recognized that the two words have distinct connotations, both of which he made a point of verbalising through Bolli. More recently, scholars have indeed distinguished between the connotations of *gipta* and *hamingja*. Sommer, for instance, considers *gipta* 'a force internal to the man' (2006, 279), whereas *hamingja* can have the aforementioned sense of externality and materiality, a 'physical Gestalt'. Bolli, then, would seem to be acknowledging two forms of the king's luck, one fashioned from within himself and one enacted outside himself. He expresses some degree of belief not only in an abstract notion of the king's luck but also in a specifically physical realization of this *hamingja*.

Perceiving this duality, the reader must now enquire whether there is evidence to demonstrate that this distinction was also present in the editorial or scribal consciousness as *ÓTM* was composed. A reader-response critic might remark that I, a modern reader, encounter Sommer's work on *gipta* and *hamingja*; in applying it to Bolli's speech, I create an impression of the character's psychological motivations, which go unstated in the narrative itself. The text's apparent construction of luck, then, would be necessarily contingent on a

¹⁷ The idea that royal luck dictates the outcome of combat is a recurring one. Memorably, at King Óláfr's request, Hallfreðr *vandræðaskáld* gouges out the eye of the heathen Þorleifr spaki. The latter remarks 'eigi ertu nú einn at, því at konungs gæfan fylgir þér' (*ÓTM*, I, 398) (now you are not on your own, because the king's luck follows you).

modern reader's conception thereof. Yet one can perhaps also retrieve evidence of authorial motives. Rowe says of this chapter that 'in general, *Óláfs saga* is more expansive here than *Laxdæla saga*, but [...] the borrowed content is not greatly changed' (2005a, 162). This is true, but perhaps the writer is selective in deciding where to expand and where to retain *Laxdæla saga's* expression. On either side of the quotation given above, it is apparent that *ÓTM's* narrative differs substantially from that of *Laxdæla saga*, whereas the quotation itself is rendered much more accurately.¹⁸ One may be tempted to infer that the compiler shows a particular lexical interest in this expression of luck.

Support for this can be found insofar as the compiler himself appears to insert the word *hamingja* actively into his narrative on more than one other occasion. In a speech which, as Rowe suggests, seems unique to *ÓTM* (2005a, 165), the king presents Kjartan with a cloak after their swimming contest. Óláfr says 'eigi skaltu yfirhafnarlauss ganga til þinna féлага, svá sœmiligr maðr ok hamingjusamligr sem þú ert' (I, 361) (you must not go to your companions without a cloak over [yourself], such an honourable and lucky-looking man as you are). Having encountered an exemplar in which luck overtly shapes characters' motivations, the redactor of *ÓTM* assimilates this influence and himself constructs a narrative which emphasizes outward appearances of luck. Shortly after having this *hamingja* pointed out to him by the king, Kjartan declares, 'ek ætla þar við liggja öll vár malskipti ok hamingju at vér truim á þann guð sem hann boðar' (I, 370) (I think that all our affairs and luck rest on this, that we believe in the god as he commands). Again, this is a speech which does not occur in *Laxdæla saga* as we have it and thus may be a creation unique to *ÓTM*. Indeed, Kjartan does not mention luck at all in the extant *Laxdæla saga*: the redactor of *ÓTM* has perhaps observed Bolli's concern and suffused it into Kjartan's character. Whether this was a conscious artistic decision or not, the effect is that the concept of luck becomes an influential element in *ÓTM's* dialogue, which cannot be said of *Laxdæla saga* quite as easily. The compiler of *ÓTM*, it seems, has *hamingja* on his mind.¹⁹

¹⁸ See *ÓTM*, I, 363–64, and cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 119–20. As Rowe notes (2005a, 165), it is not impossible that the redactor of *ÓTM* had access to another version of *Laxdæla saga* which is now lost; if this was the case, then *ÓTM's* adherence to the source text might have been greater than extant evidence suggests.

¹⁹ Such references to *hamingja* occur ten times in total (proportionally, more frequently than in any prior saga of Óláfr Tryggvason), often in quick succession. See *ÓTM*, I, 311, 322, 363, 395, 396; II, 52, 53, 95, 96, 285.

Luck as a Concrete Noun?

2. The Visibility of Luck in 'Lucky-Looking' Characters

In the aforementioned phrase 'hamingju samligr', which appears twice as a compound elsewhere in *ÓTM* (I, 104 and 139), one may perceive a further level of conceptual ambiguity. Rowe translates it as 'lucky-looking', as do the dictionaries of Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1874, 236) and Zoëga (1910, 183).²⁰ If Óláfr finds Kjartan to be 'lucky-looking', the reader encounters another instance in which the seemingly abstract notion of luck is made visible and given a figurative sensory quality. As Grönbech would have it, 'luck sets its stamp upon a man outwardly', enabling one 'to appraise a man at a glance' (1931, 156). Interior phenomena are again externalized, but in this case the process occurs in a different manner from before. Elsewhere, *hamingja* was seen to represent a self-contained body separate from that of its owner — in Rudolf Simek's terms, a 'personification, [a] protective spirit' (2007, 129). Here, contrastingly, the implied metaphor is such that Kjartan's luck is visible in his own body; it is as if he wears his luck as a facial expression of sorts. His *hamingja* remains visible in that Óláfr senses it, but it is not external to the man in the same way as if it were a guardian being which followed him. It might then be remarked that *hamingja* verges on acquiring a third conceptual function, separate from those described earlier: it here denotes neither a mere abstraction of luck nor an animate being. Rather, it represents something in between. If translated as 'lucky-looking', the expression does not call to mind a full-fledged personification; yet for Óláfr to 'see' Kjartan's luck, it must be imbued with some exterior, observable quality. Hence, this conception of luck might be considered partially metaphorical, visible but not altogether reified. But the subjectivity of this interpretation must be stressed: it is contingent on the manner in which the phrase is translated and on the way in which this translation is received by an individual reader.

To illustrate this equivocality of meaning, one may consider an altogether different interpretation of the expression. The suffix *-samligr* can be understood as meaning 'having the quality',²¹ which strips it of the specifically sensory con-

²⁰ See Rowe 2005a, 165. In much the same vein, John Sephton translates it as 'having a look of good fortune' (1895, 228). Prior to *ÓTM*, the only recorded use of the compound in *ONP* occurs in the fragmentary encyclopaedic manuscript AM 732 b 4to, where it refers to the planetary hour of Jupiter. One can only speculate whether this informed the diction of *ÓTM*, directly or indirectly. See *ONP*, s.v. *hamingjusamligr*, <<http://dataonp.ad.sc.ku.dk/webart/ha/31109ckron.htm>> [accessed 12 August 2014].

²¹ '-samligr (adj.)', in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* <<https://www>.

notations conveyed by ‘-looking’. In this case, ‘*hamingju samligr*’ might be interpreted as ‘having the quality of *hamingja*’ or perhaps ‘having the quality of a *hamingja*’. The difference of a single word yields two distinct interpretations: the former implies an understanding of *hamingja* in the abstract sense, whereas the latter suggests the opposite. Thus, plural meanings can be generated through the very lack of an indefinite article in the Old Norse language. It falls to the modern translator to decide whether to supply one, in the process arriving at a necessarily subjective reading of *ÓTM*’s depiction of *hamingja*.

Seen in the context of the living textual tradition, it is noteworthy that the phrase ‘*hamingju samligr*’ does not occur in any version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* predating *ÓTM*. This turn of phrase thus seems a late variation on a pre-existing theme, of which an earlier manifestation was *giptusamligr*. This compound appears in the A-text of *ÓTO*, but in no subsequent version of the saga. Óláfr offers his service to Ótta, who accepts it, remarking that ‘*mér lízk giptusamliga á þik*’ (172) (you have a lucky look about you).²² As before, the suffix *-samligr* poses problems. Andersson imbues it with a sense of visibility,²³ whereas Zoëga defines *giptusamligr* much more abstractly, as ‘lucky’ or ‘auspicious’ (Zoëga 1910, 165).²⁴ Andersson’s interpretation calls to mind another verbal construction which occurs slightly earlier in *ÓTO*. It is again *gipta* rather than *hamingja* which is visible upon one’s person, as the young Óláfr says to King Valdamarr, ‘*þá lízk mér þú jafnan með ógiptubragði er þú ert þar*’ (153) (you always appear to me with an unlucky countenance when you are there), referring to the pagan temple which Óláfr himself avoids. The noun suffix *-bragð* is less semantically ambiguous than the adjectival suffix *-samligr*. The former denotes a ‘countenance, look, expression’ (Zoëga 1910, 165); it is always visible. Accordingly, Andersson translates *ógiptubragð* as ‘an ill-favoured look’ (2003a, 49); in Zoëga’s dictionary, it is an ‘ill-boding countenance’ (1910, 456; cf. Fritzner 1883–96, III, 754, s.v. *úgiptubragð*). Such overt exteriority is difficult to reconcile with Sommer’s argument that *gipta* ‘invariably refer[s] to a force internal to the man and [is] never used to express an external manifestation’ (2006, 279). This occurrence of *ógiptubragð* is unique in *ONP*:²⁵ one

charttrials.abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?id=69994&if=default&table=lemma&val=&view=> [accessed 12 April 2014].

²² Translation is Andersson’s (2003a, 58).

²³ Cf. Fritzner 1883–96, I, 599, s.v. *giptusamligr*.

²⁴ See also Cleasby and Vigfússon 1874, 200.

²⁵ *ONP*, s.v. *ógiptubragð* <<http://dataonp.ad.sc.ku.dk/webart/o/og/59014477441ckronpnfr>.

might then perceive it as a creative coinage on the part of Oddr or, rather, the translator and/or scribe. Evidently the writer's creative act was not constrained by such a black-and-white rule as Sommer asserts: instead, he freely develops the *gipta* into a compound to express the polar opposite of what Sommer might expect. Even if the significance of this compound is largely to be generated via the comparative nature of a modern reading, it nonetheless reveals an individual's distinctive conceptualization of luck. In the mind of the creator of the A-text of *ÓTO*, the concept of *gipta* was clearly not solely a static, immovable constant. Rather, it was handled as a lexical building block, which could be developed and appended with conceptual nuances at an individual level.

It remains to enquire why the terms *giptusamligr* and *ógíptubragð* do not occur in the later sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason. In the first case, it may be that their 'disappearance' was in fact a logical inevitability. The two words appear only in the A-text of *ÓTO*, which is dated by Stefán Karlsson to approximately the third quarter of the thirteenth century (*ÓTO*, cxlvii). After Oddr's work, the next extant saga of Óláfr Tryggvason is *Hsk*, whose earliest manuscript is dated to *c.* 1270 (Finlay and Faulkes 2011, xiii). It is thus possible that Snorri had compiled his *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* before Oddr's saga had even been translated into the form now called the A-text: in this case, it would naturally be impossible that Snorri could have reproduced the diction of the latter. It is certainly plausible that Snorri encountered Oddr's work in a version other than the A-text: indeed, Finlay and Faulkes take the view that 'Snorri clearly knew and used Oddr's life, in a version somewhat different from those that survive' (2011, xiii). Just how different was this version? Snorri's saga is not merely lacking the words *giptusamligr* and *ógíptubragð*; rather, it lacks any material corresponding to the entire episodes in which the A-text of *ÓTO* uses these words. Did Snorri consciously expunge them, or did he simply not have access to them, as might be the case if they were created by the translator of the A-text? This problem cannot be resolved, since the parts of *ÓTO* in question are preserved in no manuscript other than that of the A-text. One can only speculate as to their nature in the version of Oddr's saga available to Snorri. If Snorri did remove these concepts of luck deliberately, it might be in keeping with what Berger calls his 'bare-bones, anti-legendary style' (1999, 12). A highly metaphorical depiction of luck might have been awkward or undesirable in the eyes of Snorri and later writers, whether for stylistic reasons or ideological ones or both. If Snorri held the view that *gipta* denotes 'a part of [one's] character' (Hallberg

1973, 153) in an abstract sense, it stands to reason that he might not have permitted the word such distinct reification as is found in *ÓTO*. Another factor to consider is that conceptions of *gipta*, along with luck more generally, may be coloured further by specific social and theological functions.

Luck in its Social Contexts: 1. Gipta and gæfa as Gifts of Grace

William Ian Miller notes that *gipta* and *gæfa* are reflexes of *gefa*, ‘to give’ (2008, 71). If *gipta* and *gæfa* are by definition ‘given’, then by whom? It was suggested above that saga authors might have perceived a conceptual relationship between luck and grace. In scholarly discourse, this notion began with Walter Baetke, who argued in 1952 that *gipta* and *gæfa* represented Christian concepts from their very inception. His etymological argument, summarized by Lönnroth, is that *gipta* and *gæfa* are cognate with the Gothic *gibu* and Old English *giefu*, both of which were used systematically to translate the Latin *gratia*, connoting divine grace (Lönnroth 1976, 126). Baetke’s work cites Óláfr Tryggvason specifically as epitomizing the idea that ‘mit dem “Glück”, [...] kann nur das christliche Charisma gemeint sein’ (1952, 51) (with the [word] ‘luck’ [...] only Christian grace can be meant). One thus encounters a further conception of luck as a force external to the individual. Luck, if equated with grace, would be a phenomenon not inborn but given, not so much a part of one’s personality as a product of benevolent divine influence.

It must be noted, however, that Baetke’s view typifies one side of a scholarly debate. A notable proponent of the other side was Peter Hallberg, who considered it a ‘strange idea that the concept of [...] fortune should be so unusual that it would be necessary for Old Icelandic to import it from Latin and Christian literature’ (1973, 148). More recent scholarship, whilst often ambivalent as to the origins of Old Norse ideas of luck, places emphasis on semantic change. As cited earlier, Clover argues that concepts of luck were harmonized with God’s grace by the time the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason were composed. Such a view is inherently generalizing: in proposing that luck and grace were ‘fully’ (1985, 266) reconciled, Clover verges on implying that luck was perceived in a consistent and uniform manner across Icelandic literature after the turn of the twelfth century, whereas it is the thesis of the present article that individual subjectivities pervade. Each saga of Óláfr Tryggvason does make clear the fact that it was composed in a Christian society for a Christian audience,²⁶ but despite this common background the texts differ subtly in the way they connect luck and theology.

²⁶ See, for example, *ÓTO*, 125; *Hsk*, 328; *ÓTM*, 152–54.

In *ÓTO* one finds an instance of direct correspondence between *gipta* and grace. The narrator not only extols Óláfr's luck but also attributes it unreservedly to God: 'var hans gipt langt um fram aðra menn [...] dýrkaði Guð Ólaf konung með mörpum kröptum' (267) (his luck was far ahead of other men [...] God glorified King Óláfr with many powers). Andersson has perceived in Oddr's work 'the influence of [...] hagiographic literature' (2003a, 26), and this influence is apparent in the glorification of Óláfr. Yet matters are more ambiguous earlier in the same saga: while *gipta* appears as a gift from God, the theological orientation of *fylgja* is less clearly defined. Ostensibly, Óláfr's *fylgjur* too appear to be of a specifically Christian nature, confusing and alien to the pagan soothsayer who foresees them. The latter says to Óláfr: 'eigi fara litlar fylgjur fyrir þér [...] en þeira samvistu má ek eigi bera, því at ek hef annarskonar natúru' (188) (no small *fylgjur* go before you [...] and I cannot bear their presence, because I have a different sort of nature). Particularly when seen in the context of a missionary expedition, it is conspicuous that differing sorts of *fylgjur* correspond with marked differences in religious identity. If the idea of a *fylgja* was 'deep rooted in a heathen past' (Hallberg 1973, 162), then one might infer that the saga author here adapts it to carry Christian symbolism, integrating a native folk motif into a Christian world-view. Yet if this process of cultural adaptation is at work, it is not set out explicitly: 'annarskonar natúru' is tellingly indefinite, and understandably so, since the soothsayer is witnessing a form of luck which is in his eyes inscrutable. Thus, while this vision of luck may seem to be coloured by religious identity, its symbolism can only be implicit. It seems, then, that the narrative is not entirely consistent in how strongly it establishes the connection between luck and grace. This gives rise to subjective interpretation on the part of the reader, and indeed Hallberg plays down the importance of Christian symbolism altogether:

The two Óláfrs [...] were looked upon by the saga authors as ideal heroes, having good fortune in spite of their final death in battle. The [luck] connected with them concerns their careers as rulers, their overcoming of enemies and such matters. There is nothing especially Christian about these concepts. (1973, 161)²⁷

Meanwhile, Lönnroth expresses the opposite view, holding that 'Oddr makes it clear that King Olaf's luck was *ultimately* dependent on God's grace and his divine calling [...] God thus rules the fates who rule the fortune of Olaf'

²⁷ Further contributors to this debate include Ström 1968, Ejerfeldt 1969–70, Hermann Pálsson 1974a and 1975, and Lönnroth 1976.

(1976, 128). This interpretation is supported by *ÓTO*'s prologue, found only in the S-text. Here, the narrator reveals his most profound concern to be with Óláfr's divinely ordained powers, and urges the reader that 'ekki skulum vér forvitnask Guðs leynda hluti' (126) (we must not enquire about God's secret matters). Óláfr's luck, perhaps, is to be recognized as one such matter, its strings pulled by the inscrutable workings of 'almáttigr Guð' (299) (almighty God), as is suggested towards the saga's conclusion. Such a theologically-orientated reading would certainly be consistent with the fact that Valdamarr's aforementioned *ógíptubragð* is so closely tied to his religious practice. The narrative of *ÓTO* deprives Valdamarr of *gípta* only at the precise moment when he makes a sacrifice, and his fall from grace is realized. Elsewhere, he is treated rather more favourably. Earlier on, for instance, Óláfr says to Valdamarr, 'vil ek þar til njóta yðarrar giptu ok sjálfs þíns hamingju' (152) (there I wish to have the benefit of your *gípta* and your own *hamingja*). That is, when Valdamarr acts in a manner which does not oppose Christian doctrine, the narrative implicitly permits him to be endowed with *gípta*. A Christian ethic thus pervades: the heathen king's luck is contingent on how close his conduct is to the true faith as perceived by author and audience.

The same connection between royal luck and grace pervades in *ÓTM*. Referring to the *þettir* interpolated into the *Flateyjarbók* redaction, Rowe finds Óláfr to be 'a king whose "luck" cannot be anything other than synonymous with Christian grace' (2005b, 72). Such a view is apparently applicable to the AM 61 fol. text: here, Óláfr's *gefá* and *hamingja* are twice described as operating only 'með Guðs miskunn' (with God's grace).²⁸ Indeed, Óláfr himself is shown to be conscious of the agency of grace. The narrator occasionally uses free indirect discourse, impelling the reader to align himself with Óláfr's musings as expressed in the narrative. Among such instances are the young Óláfr's contemplation of his destiny: he is said to think 'at hann mátti eigi qðlask ríki í Noregi útan Guðs miskunn efdi hann' (I, 202) (that he could not obtain a kingdom in Norway unless God's grace strengthened him). What the narrator elsewhere attributes to luck, he attributes here to God's grace, suggesting a degree of figural interrelation between the two concepts.

²⁸ *ÓTM*, I, 322; II, 18. *ONP* equates this expression with the Latin 'dei gratia', whose relevance to thirteenth-century Norwegian kingship ideologies will be discussed presently. See *ONP*, s.v. *miskunn* I, 1 *með Guðs miskunn*, <<http://dataonp.ad.sc.ku.dk/webart/m/mi/54613art.htm#D=37292>> [accessed 12 May 2014].

ÓTO and *ÓTM*, then, yield comparable impressions of God-given luck. In Snorri's intermediary work, however, matters are strikingly different.²⁹ The words *gipta* and *gefa* are entirely absent from *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Hsk*: the only word used for luck is *hamingja*, and this too is used sparingly.³⁰ Why does Snorri's lexis of luck differ so markedly from those of his antecedent and his successor? If one pursues the view that terms for luck generally connoted a sense of divine agency, then their relative scarcity might reveal *Hsk*'s lesser inclination to dramatize Óláfr's state of grace. *ÓTM* has been read as 'a more overtly religious text in comparison to other accounts of the Icelandic conversion' (Heans-Głogowska 2014, 131) and *ÓTO*'s 'tragi-heroic' (2006, 117) aesthetic has been taken by scholars as indicating the work's indebtedness to hagiography (see, for instance, Andersson 2003a, 26). *Hsk* contrastingly reveals less of an ideology grounded in theology. Far from setting out to beatify Óláfr, Snorri constructs an economical, 'anti-legendary' (Berger 1999, 12) narrative as part of a compendium professing its principal motivation to be an antiquarian interest in historical sources. Consistent with Diana Whaley's description of the narrator's style as 'free from hagiographic zeal' (2011, 95), *Hsk* makes little attempt to express royal luck as laden with Christian symbolism. Snorri's work, then, seems to be built on a different ideology of kingship from the other sagas, manifest through its different attitudes to luck. Snorri's Óláfr does not have to be emphasized as king by divine providence, and therefore does not have to outshine all men in his grace; consistent with this in turn is the muted thematization of luck. Thus, authorial intent may be apprehended via the narrative's lexical gaps and absences. To substantiate this further, one can assess collateral evidence for the ideologies of kingship which underpin the works.

Luck in its Social Contexts, 2. Ideologies of Kingship

Grönbech argues that 'the peculiarity of luck constitutes the natural foundation of a Germanic king's authority and influence', but that the resulting 'concatenation of events was not dependent on God's keeping a strict balance' (1931, 159 and 155). He perceives a sharp distinction between the effects of luck and grace. The former, it would seem, is always fashioned from within, and the ability to fashion it is a distinguishing feature of kingship. Yet this distinc-

²⁹ This pattern informs Berger's view that Snorri's saga postdates *ÓTM*; he sees *Hsk* as the 'odd man out' where *ÓTO* and *ÓTM* have much in common (1999, 6).

³⁰ It is used on four occasions: see *Hsk* 266, 288, 298, and 299.

tion is perhaps drawn too readily, and not only for the reasons detailed above. Certain evidence, contemporary to the Óláfr-sagas, bears further witness to the close conceptual interrelation between royal luck — and, more generally, royal identity — and divine grace.

Magnús Erlingsson, who ruled Norway shortly before Oddr wrote his saga, was the first of the Norwegian kings to use *dei gratia* (by the grace of God) in his royal style (see Hoffmann 1990, 125 n. 2). Óláfr Tryggvason may have lived rather earlier than Magnús Erlingsson, but the sagas about the former could nevertheless have been tinged by ideological trends instigated around the latter. Emphases on royal grace might then be a reflection of the composers' times. In the first instance, this assertion rests on the premise that the Icelanders writing kings' sagas were acutely aware of contemporary socio-political climates in Norway. There is evidence to suggest that this was so: Ármann Jakobsson, as paraphrased by Rowe, points out that 'all the authors of the kings' sagas were from precisely that class of society that was most highly travelled and educated' (Rowe 1999, 96). Such geographic and cultural movement is particularly clear in the case of *Hsk*; Snorri's own ill-fated connections with the Norwegian court are well documented (see, for example, Bagge 1992, 12). Andersson observes that cultural transfer between Norway and Iceland may indeed be perceived through the early transmission of the sagas of Óláfr:

That the book business was binational in this era is illustrated by the fact that the Icelandic sagas of Olaf Tryggvason [...] are preserved chiefly in Norwegian manuscripts. Icelandic saga writers must therefore have been aware that they were writing for both audiences. (2006, 116)

Given this 'binational' aspect, one must consider Norwegian sources on kingship in order to arrive at a more holistic reading of the subjectivities of royal luck. One such source is *Konungs skuggsjá*. This didactic text was composed 'probably in the 1250s' (Holm-Olsen 1993, 366) — that is, later than *ÓTO* and shortly after Snorri's death. While this would preclude direct influence on *ÓTO* and *Hsk*, it may be that *Konungs skuggsjá* reveals ideologies which were current during much of the textual tradition concerning Óláfr Tryggvason. We have seen that *ÓTO* and *ÓTM* are comparable in their tendency to bridge the concepts of luck and grace: was this tendency a product of individual, subjective views, or did it arise through adherence to socially normative values? *Konungs skuggsjá* might appear to support the latter, since its distinctive ideology of kingly luck is largely consistent with that of *ÓTO* and *ÓTM*. Not only does *Konungs skuggsjá* state explicitly that royal authority is divinely

ordained,³¹ but it also suggests an association between this divine right and the prominence of luck. The work, targeted at princes and young kings, professes to be ‘gott ok auðnæmlegt hverjum er gipta fylgir’ (Holm-Olsen 1945, 3) (good and easy to learn for everyone whom luck follows). The audience, then, is defined by its *gipta*: the writer conceives of his princely reader as inherently lucky. In effect, *Konungs skuggsjá* stresses that luck accompanies kings and princes,³² and that people are instated as such only through divine providence: the connection between luck and grace is then undeniable. Comparisons can thus be drawn readily between the ideologies of *Konungs skuggsjá*, *ÓTO*, and *ÓTM* — but how informative is this, given the temporal distance between each text?

As mentioned above, *Konungs skuggsjá* postdates *ÓTO*, suggesting that the former could not have informed the latter directly. The similar attitudes to kingship seen in two works may hint at common social circumstances, but one must equally take into account other approaches to the motives behind *ÓTO*’s thematic makeup. Dietrich Hofmann, for instance, argues that Oddr and the associated Þingeyrar circle were motivated principally to depict Óláfr as a saint (Hofmann 1984, 143–46; Haki Antonsson 2012, 76). In this case, the latter’s luck might have been intended to symbolize a supernatural quality which transcends human society altogether. In other words, Óláfr’s luck could signify a unique state of grace, far greater than that which *Konungs skuggsjá* affords to all kings.³³

If *ÓTM* was, in turn, written approximately a century after *Konungs skuggsjá*, then this may call into question the latter’s utility as a source for the former’s contextual background. Ideological change could have occurred in the intervening years. However, Heans-Głogowska notes further evidence which points

³¹ See, for instance, Holm-Olsen 1945, 123–24: ‘nú er konungrinn skipaðr at gæta þess hins helga húss, er sett er í þat helga sæti, at gæta heilagra dóma Guðs’ (now the king is instated to protect the sacred house in which the holy seat is placed, in order to protect the holy judgments of God). Also Heans-Głogowska 2014, 35–43.

³² It is worth noting that contrasting attitudes occur in certain *Íslendingasögur* and narratives about Icelanders. In these texts, *gipta* was by no means reserved for royalty and other figures of high status. A striking counterexample is *Audunar þáttur vestfirzka*, ‘thought to have been composed in the 1220s’ (Miller 2008, 1). Its protagonist, ‘a man of no account’ (Miller 2008, 3), is endowed with remarkably potent *gipta* (Miller 2008, 71–78).

³³ It is unclear how far Óláfr Tryggvason was treated as a saint in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland. Haki Antonsson observes ‘that there was no cult of Óláfr Tryggvason in either Norway or Iceland’ (2012, 95), whereas Margaret Cormack considers it ‘possible that Olaf Tryggvason [...] was already being viewed as a saint’ even by the time *Íslendingabók* was written (1994, 143).

to the widespread adoption of similar kingship ideology during the period in which *ÓTM* was composed. The *Jónsbók* laws, espousing attitudes to kingship close to those of *Konungs skuggsjá*, were current in Iceland from 1281.³⁴ This informs Heans-Głogowska's conclusion that 'when *ÓSTm* was written sometime between 1325 and 1350, kingship can be said to have been established as an office [...] instituted by God' (2014, 36). Given that *ÓTM*'s vision of royal luck seems to follow so naturally from the kingship prescribed by the likes of *Jónsbók*, it can be regarded as a prism of wider social values; it presents collective ideology, albeit disseminated through individual voices.

ÓTO and *ÓTM* thus depict luck in a manner largely consistent with their respective contemporary sources on kingship. *Hsk*, on the other hand, might seem to be something of an elephant in the room.³⁵ Given the conclusions drawn earlier in this article, it appears that out of the extant sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason, *Hsk* is temporally closest to, yet ideologically furthest removed from, *Konungs skuggsjá*. Sverre Bagge comments as follows:

Snorri's picture of the king differs from this ideology [i.e., that the king's office is God-given]. Though Snorri most probably believed in supernatural qualities inherent in the king, especially the king's luck, his main emphasis is on charisma in the sense of ordinary, human qualities that make the king attractive to other men. (1992, 130)³⁶

Bagge, then, sees Snorri's interpretation of royal luck as anomalous within his typical kingship ideology. He argues that in *Hsk* a king is 'the best man in the country' (1992, 130), as defined by society rather than by the workings of grace, but that royal luck is nonetheless a transcendent distinguishing feature. One might respond, however, that Snorri's depiction of luck does in fact fit the scheme of his overall anti-supernatural attitude to kingship. It was noted above that Snorri seems to present luck in a muted way compared with *ÓTO* — If Snorri conceived of luck as something supernatural, a gift from above, then its absence from his narrative is perhaps telling. Given that he makes little attempt

³⁴ See, for instance, Sandvik and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2005, 227–28.

³⁵ Given that *Hsk* was a direct source for *ÓTM* (see Ólafur Halldórsson 2001, 21–154), the ideological differences between the two texts are particularly striking. For discussion of the way *ÓTM* draws and departs from *Hsk*'s attitudes to kingship, see Heans-Głogowska 2014, 35–44.

³⁶ This may be paralleled with Snorri's own social mobility within secular hierarchies: 'the majority of his conflicts are conflicts between individuals, in which the king is involved in a similar way as any other mighty man' (Bagge 1992, 75).

to connect the king with an apparently supernatural concept, one may infer that he did not see Óláfr as metaphysically distinct from other men.

One finds, then, that attitudes to luck are symptomatic of both individual and collective ideologies. Snorri's approach to kingship led his treatment of luck to diverge from that of *ÓTO*; subsequently, the compiler of *ÓTM* opted to shift the balance back towards a relatively normative view of kingship and kingly luck (that is to say, normative in the sense that his view corresponded with that expressed in contemporary law). Yet, as much as sources like *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Jónsbók* help to paint a picture of ideological norms in their respective milieux, they always have limitations from a literary-critical perspective, being to various extents temporally, spatially, or imaginatively removed from saga writers themselves. How far can a critic utilize such evidence to account for differences in literary technique? By tying contextual sources to the specific literary moments in which luck is articulated, one may attempt to grasp the way a writer interpreted concepts of luck as defined by society around him — yet this reconstructive act is ultimately an act of subjective interpretation on the part of the modern reader. Sources such as *Konungs skuggsjá* can only partially illuminate the way an individual writer might have conceived of luck on a given day.

Conclusions

Returning to the contrast between modern ideas of luck and those expressed in the sagas discussed above, one can draw an important distinction. In Modern English, as asserted in the introduction to this article, luck is defined almost exclusively as a statistical concept. As may be illustrated by a lottery, which picks out a winner completely at random, luck does not rest on personal qualities, qualifications, or any sense of justice. While individual skill and effort are important factors in accounting for success, they do not altogether negate the influence of pure chance. Conversely, as the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason seek to extol the virtues of their protagonist, they must ascribe Óláfr's successes to something which transcends chance entirely. By envisioning individuals' luck as an innate quality, the sagas implicitly account for why the likes of Óláfr Tryggvason succeed, while others do not.

Yet from multiple strands of analysis deployed in this article, it is evident that the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason handle the concept of royal luck in a highly mutable way. Pluralistic, indeed, apparently contradictory notions have been found to coexist: the sagas depict luck as both concrete and abstract, both visible and invisible, both given by God and earned by man. Over the course of a

tradition in which the texts were written and rewritten iteratively, interpreted, and subsequently reinterpreted, their polyphony thus becomes a defining feature. Indeed, *ÓTM*'s narrator makes a metafictional comment on the plurality of narratives which converge in his saga: his work functions 'svá sem rennandi vötn fljóta af ýmissum uppsprettum ok koma öll í einn stað niðr' (II, 31) (just as running waters flow from various springs and all come down into one place). With this abundance of narratives comes an abundance of sources, ideologies and voices: it is little surprise, then, that one finds multiple realizations of royal luck.

Particularly striking, ultimately, is that the extent of this variation exceeds that which has been suggested in previous scholarship. Previous analyses of medieval Scandinavian concepts of luck, as cited in this article, have sought to equate individual Old Norse nouns with particular manifestations of luck, identifying persistently binary relationships between signifiers and the signified. By exploring the conceptions of luck manifest within and between the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason, one finds instead that the semantic ranges of the words *gipta*, *gæfa*, *fylgja*, and *hamingja* are fluid and overlap. Ideas of luck are open to subjective authorial interpretation rather than prescribed consistently by a collective understanding.

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