

PETER HALLBERG

THE CONCEPT OF GIPTA-GÅFA-HAMINGJA IN OLD NORSE LITERATURE

In the Revelations of St Birgitta of Sweden there is a passage on her visit to a farm in western Sweden about the year 1349. When dwelling in that place she hears a voice telling her that the people there "venerate brownies and do not go to church, except in order to be spared from being ashamed before other people, and they never listen to the Word of God. Therefore the Devil is reigning in this place". The voice indicates how to teach the misguided inhabitants of that farm; for instance: "Don't bring the brownies sacrifices of your cattle and swine, nor of bread or wine and other things. Don't say that fortune causes this or that, but that it happens because God allows it."

Birgitta's Revelations were regularly written down by clerics in Latin from her dictation in Swedish. The Latin text was printed in Lübeck 1492 under the title Revelationes Celestes, since then the standard edition. Long before that time there appeared a Swedish translation of the Latin manuscript. The word rendered in the quotation above by "brownies" is in the Latin text penates, and in the Old Swedish translation tompta gudhom, approximately "spirits of the grounds". And the word rendered here by "fortune" is in the Latin "original" fortuna, corresponding to the words "lykka älla skäpna" in the Old Swedish translation.¹

As far as I know, this passage has not been utilized before in the discussion of the Old Scandinavian concept of fate or fortune. To me it seems to be of great interest in that connection. When Birgitta, or the voice through her, condemns talking of fortuna - lykka or skäpna - she regards it as a heathen and native habit. That is quite clear, especially as she is referring at the same time to a practice such as sacrificing to tompta gudhom.

II

As is well known, some scholars have maintained that the Old Scandinavian concept of fate or fortune is in fact of Christian origin. It will be enough here to mention Walter Baetke and his treatise on Christliches Lehngut in der Sagareligion (Berlin 1951).² One of his reasons for supposing a comparatively late and Christian origin of that concept is the fact that the words expressing it are lacking or rare in the Eddic poetry, which on the whole is much older than the sagas. In the Scaldic poetry they are rare too; and when they appear there it is often, according to Baetke, "in ausgesprochen christlichem Gebrauch" (50)

For my part, I am not convinced by Baetke's examples and arguments. As for the Eddic poetry, it moves in a mythological and heroic sphere, where norms and ideals, and the words expressing them, might well be of another kind than in the realistic prose sagas. And if the concept of

fortune sometimes turns up in a Christian c o n t e x t , it is not necessarily an indication of its specifically Christian c o n n o t a t i o n s in that context - to say nothing of its Christian o r i g i n . To Baetke's comments on the Icelandic sagas, the main and almost exclusive source for the study of the Old Norse concept of fortune, I shall return later. But I am not going here to engage in any detailed polemics against Baetke and his followers. Instead I will give my own reasons for an opposite view.

As a point of departure the passage from Birgitta seems to carry considerable weight, as it directly opposes the concept of fortune to Christian faith and connects it with heathen customs. And her testimony is not inspired by reading or foreign influences, but closely related to contemporary Scandinavian life. Perhaps someone would suggest the possibility that the inhabitants of the farm in western Sweden had adopted the Latin concept of fortuna. But that seems to be an extremely unattractive hypothesis.³

III

The passage from Birgitta also provides us with an opportunity of comparing a translation with its original. (To be sure, the circumstances in this case are a little special, as in a way Latin is here the secondary language, Swedish the original.) I suspect that translations from

Latin into Old Norse-Icelandic have sometimes played a rather confusing part in the discussion of the ideas involved and their provenance. As a fictitious example, let us say that we have come across the oldest case of the word hamingja "good fortune, luck" in a translation from Latin, rendering there the word fortuna. Does that mean that also the concept of hamingja should be thought of as adapted from Latin literature? Strangely enough there seems to be an inclination to think so, quite irrationally. But of course we have simply to do here with a translator's normal situation. He has to find in his native language the nearest equivalents of the words in the original. If he meets the Latin word fortuna, perhaps a domestic hamingja immediately strikes him as the best approximation to it. That does not imply at all that the concepts denoted by fortuna and hamingja are identical, or that they have the same background. It may seem a truism to say this, but I am afraid it is not unnecessary to emphasize that truism.

A few other, authentic instances can make the point still clearer. In the older section, written in the first half of the thirteenth century, of the Bible compilation Stjórn⁴ the giant warrior Goliath, slain by young David, is repeatedly called víkingr (463, 464, 465). In the translation Barlaams saga ok Josaphats⁵ from the middle of the thirteenth century, the enemies of the Christians are also sometimes characterized as vikings. Thus prince

Josaphat, turned Christian, addresses his own pagan father as "hermaðr oc grimr vikingr" (116). More striking, perhaps, is the comment on Josaphat, when he has abandoned his crown to devote himself to the life of a hermit, and is attacked by the Devil: "En sa hinn vngi berserkr guðs gek fram med oskialvannda h'artta" (197). Of a certain Antonius and his fight with the devils we learn: "En Iesus Kristr glæymdi eigi holmgangu sins bersserks" (54).

Now, although we have to do in these translations with definitely foreign and Christian matters, I suppose few scholars are prepared to dispute the Scandinavian origin of the words and concepts berserkr, hólmanga and vikingr. To be sure, if one goes on talking of berserks of God or Jesus Christ, the word may by and by assume some new connotations from its new surroundings. But that has nothing to do with its origin. And we are discussing origin now.

As for the words for the concept of fortune, such as auðna, gipta, gæfa and hamingja (the four discussed by Baetke), they have not, as far as I know, been shown to have been invented in connection with translations, in order to render certain Latin words. But if they have not, if they have existed before they were used in translations - and no scholar, I think, has questioned that - what did they mean then, in pre-Christian times? If you suppose a Christian-Latin origin for the concept of fortune in Old Norse or Old Icelandic literature, you will have to answer that question.

IV

Generally speaking it seems to be a rather strange idea that the concept of fate and/or fortune should be so unusual that it would be necessary for Old Icelandic to import it from Latin and Christian literature. In various forms it is widespread all over the world. In Scandinavian countries it would be more natural to think of it as a common Indo-European heritage, than as a late literary loan from the South.

However that may be, it may perhaps be worth while to examine the facts once again, and ascertain the frequency and distribution of the "fortune words" (as I will call them for the sake of convenience) over a considerable span of texts and time. In such matters one cannot begin with picking out isolated cases, early or late, without seeing them against a wide horizon. One will have to work on a broad basis, excerpting a lot of texts from various saga genres, in order not to miss important general characteristics revealing chronological changes or typical differences between one kind of saga and another. In a set of tables, appearing at the end of this paper, I have shown in numbers some results of such an investigation. But before making any comments on those numbers, I would like to call attention to a striking quality of the Northern "fortune words": they are very productive in word formation, and show a rich variety of compounds. In Fritzner's dictionary one will find besides the simple gæfa the noun compounds gæfufundr,

gæfuleysi, gæfumaðr, gæfumunr, gæfuraun, gæfuskípti, gæfu-skortr, as well as the adjectives and adverbs gæfudrjúgr, gæfufár, gæfufullr, gæfulauss, gæfuliga, gæfumannligr, gæfumikill, gæfusamliga, gæfuvanr "lacking gæfa". One could add a few compounds with gæfa as the latter part, such as fargæfa "good luck with a journey" or konungsgæfa. Then we have the negative ógæfa and its compounds. And gipta and hamingja show a similar picture. It seems at least very probable, that a word group with such a remarkable growing power should have old and deep roots in the native ground.

V

And now to the figures of the tables. I have confined myself to the four words mentioned above: auðna, gipta, gæfa, hamingja, and their various compounds, all of them denoting either good or bad luck. On the other hand I have left aside words such as forlög, sköp and örlög, denoting fate in a more neutral sense, so to say. The late and very rare loan-word lukka "luck", a synonym of gipta and gæfa, has also been dropped. The excerpts are gathered from a series of saga genres, more or less distinct: Kings' Sagas; Icelanders' Sagas; Sturlunga Saga; Bishops' Sagas; translations of pseudo-historical works; "Riddarasögur", all of them also translations.

For a special reason I have recorded separately the share of "fortune words" represented in direct speech as

compared to the author's own relation. One will find, as a rather conspicuous and consistent feature, that those words are strongly "over-represented" in direct speech. If we take for instance Heimskringla, the third text among my Kings' Sagas, it has a total of 17% direct speech; but 26 out of 45 "fortune words", or 58 % , appear in direct speech - that is to say more than thrice as many as would be expected from an even distribution over the whole text. Most other Kings' Sagas show similar proportions. For this genre as a whole the average figures come very close to those of Heimskringla: 59% of the "fortune words" in direct speech as compared to a total of 19% direct speech.

The Icelanders' Sagas are on the same line. On an average they have much more direct speech than the Kings Sagas, 30 % , but also a considerably higher percentage of "fortune words" in direct speech, 79 % . If one has a look at the five biggest sagas, one will see that they all conform to the general tendency: Egils saga has 22 % direct speech against 93 % "fortune words" in direct speech; the corresponding figures for Eyrbyggja saga are 17 % against 100 % , for Grettis saga 24 % against 79 % , for Laxdæla saga 31 % against 86 % , and for Njáls saga 41 % against 95 % .

Of the other genres Sturlunga saga and the translations of pseudo-historical works show a definite "over-representation" of "fortune words" in direct speech, while

the distribution in Bishops' Sagas and "Riddarasögur" is quite even. In most of my material, then, the tendency is unmistakable. And Kings' Sagas and Icelanders' Sagas certainly should weigh most in this connection, as the two central saga genres and those showing the highest average frequency of "fortune words": 1.9 and 2.2 per 10,000 words respectively.

It might be added that there are a lot of "fortune words" in oblique narration too. If those cases had been included (which would have been possible, or even more correct), my figures for the dialogue as compared to the author's own relation would have become considerably higher.

The distribution demonstrated here can hardly be mere chance; its manifestations are too evident and consistent for that. But how to account for it? Has direct speech in contrast to the author's relation some general and intrinsic quality that would make it a hotbed for such a group of words as auðna, gipta, gæfa, hamingja? As far as I know, there is no evidence for that. So I have only one explanation to suggest: that to the authors themselves the "fortune words" did not seem as familiar as they supposed them to have been to the people from earlier centuries whom they are telling us about. In other words, the authors had a feeling that this vocabulary mainly belonged to an old native tradition, somewhat weakened and perhaps even a little old-fashioned in the authors' own days.

Some other figures in my tables possibly point in the same direction. Thus Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar by Sturla Þórðarson (1214-1284), dealing with a later period than the other Kings' Sagas, has the lowest frequency of them all: 0.7/10,000. One also notices the low number (0.8) in Sturlunga saga as compared with the Icelanders' Sagas (2.2). In both cases we have to do with tales of Icelanders, but in the former case from the nearest past or the author's own time, in the latter case from the remote past, some two or three centuries back.

On the whole, the fact that the Icelanders' Sagas, the central and most genuinely Icelandic saga genre, show the highest frequency of "fortune words" confirms the impression that those words are firmly established in a native tradition.

VI

We will return later to the problem of origin. But next it seems appropriate to dwell for a while upon the distribution and use of the four words recorded in my tables.

By far the least frequent is auðna. The most common term is gæfa, with the exception of the Kings' Sagas, where hamingja dominates; but nearly half of those cases - 26 out of 57 - belong to Heimskringla.

The three most frequent words are often used in very much the same sense, combined and paralleled like a group of

complete synonyms. So it would be a rather desperate undertaking to try to trace definite differences in their meaning and function. Between gipta and gæfa, at least, it seems impossible to find any such difference whatsoever. But hamingja sometimes reveals a profile of its own. If gipta and gæfa denote fortune - or, as ógipta and ógæfa, misfortune - clinging to a man as part of his character and individuality, hamingja, in accordance with its etymology (from OI hamr m. "outer clothing; guardian spirit"), can have a touch of personification, a supernatural force or being external to the man, accompanying him as a kind of fylgja. Thus, in Víga-Glúms saga a man's hamingja appears in a dream to his nephew in the shape of a gigantic woman (30-31). Still today one can say in modern Icelandic "Hamingjan hjálpi mér" or "Það má hamingjan vita", where it would be impossible to exchange hamingja for gipta, gæfa, or auðna. In Rómverja saga,⁷ a translation from about 1200 of works by Sallust and Lucan, fortuna typically enough seems to be rendered throughout by hamingja, while other Latin words, such as cursus or fata, are translated by gæfa.

As can be seen in the tables, Alexanders saga,⁸ a translation from about 1250 to 1260, makes more frequent use of hamingja than any other text in my material. That is due to the original Latin poem, where fortuna is very common, often in a clear personification, a being sometimes speaking of itself as one among goddesses, gyðjur (24-25).

A later original Icelandic "riddarasaga", Sigurðar saga böгла⁹, makes a more frequent use of hamingja than any other comparable text I know of. We have certainly to do here with direct influence from Alexanders saga, especially obvious as there are several references to Alexander, and also the personification of the concept is imitated. Two men, for instance, call themselves messengers of the hamingja, and one of them is talking of their adversary's "veika og vesala hamingja, er þér mun hér til fylgt hafa, og er því svo lausleg, að nú ætlar hún við þig að skiljast, enda hafið þið lengi illa saman búið" (111). Where we meet such a use of hamingja - strongly reminiscent of the fickle goddess Fortuna - in a work of Icelandic origin, it is no doubt influenced by the Latin concept, either directly or, as probably in our present case, indirectly, through the translated Alexanders saga.

At the same time we meet in Sigurðar saga böгла some cases of óhamingja (118, 119, 239, 248), with no touch of personification. In fact, when men began to use that negative, it is probably an indication that they no longer had any distinct feeling of a personified hamingja; the concept had more or less merged with gipta and gæfa. This process seems to have taken place rather early. Thus, in Veraldar saga¹⁰, a translation supposed to be as old as from about 1190, the only instance of a "fortune word" is óhamingja. It is said of King Salomon that in his old age

he was stricken by great óhamingja (33), as he fell in love with heathen women. In Snorri's Heimskringla¹¹, óhamingja appears several times (I, 299; II, 38, 246, 247).

VII

We usually talk of gipta and gæfa as denoting a kind of inherent and more or less constant quality of a man, affecting the course of his life. But sometimes these words assume another meaning, less mystic and general, more banal and conventional, so to say. This latter meaning, presumably secondary to the other one, may be illustrated by two late "post-classical" sagas, both from the first part of the fourteenth century. In Víglundar saga¹² a man says to his brother: "ok mundi okkr þat til ógæfu verða, ef þú dræpir bónda hennar saklausan" (108). The intended murder would give rise to misfortune for the brothers: til ógæfu verða. In this case, then, the ógæfa is seen as a possible result of a certain action - not as a cause of it. Similarly we hear in Finnboga saga ramma¹³ of an old married couple having "in mesta sæmd ok gæfa" (263), very much honour and luck, from their bringing up young Finnbogi. The gæfa lies in the reward they have from this, especially a generous payment.

The meaning now illustrated, although probably secondary, seems to have been introduced early, and to include hamingja as well as gipta and gæfa. Thus the case just

cited from Veraldar saga, the óhamingja which is said to henda "happen to" King Salomon, most likely has to be interpreted in that way. His misfortune seems either to be identified with his love for the heathen women, or to be the consequence of that love. But the passage does certainly not imply that King Salomon is to be regarded as a man of óhamingja in general.

The double meaning of the "fortune words" might be illustrated from Snorri's Óláfs saga helga, one of the Kings' Sagas richest in those words. When Óláfr gets to know that his court poet Sigvatr in Óláfr's absence has had the king's new-born son baptized and given him the name Magnús, he is at first very angry. But after Sigvatr has explained his reasons, the king says to him: "You are a real man of fortune (gæfumaðr), Sigvatr. It is not to be wondered at if fortune (gæfa) accompanies wisdom (vizka). On the other hand it is strange, which sometimes happens, that fortune (gæfa) accompanies unwise men, that imprudent doings turn into fortune (hamingja)" (210-11). In this passage, gæfa and gæfumaðr obviously refer to an inherent and permanent quality; gæfa is paralleled with and opposed to another such quality, vizka. But as hamingja is used in this connection, it clearly implies the more or less momentary result of an action. A corresponding meaning we find in óhamingja, when a man blames another man for having rushed "into such a big misfortune (óhamingja) and brought down

upon himself the king's anger, unnecessarily" (246).

More ambiguous, perhaps, is the only case of óhamingja in Ynglinga saga, the mythical introduction to Heimskringla. We are told there of Óðinn that he possesses the craft of sorcery, and that he is therefore capable of knowing beforehand the fates of men, and of giving them "death or misfortune (óhamingja) or sickness, and also of taking from them their sense or strength and giving it to others" (19). It is true, the óhamingja is described here as a r e s u l t of Óðinn's manipulations, but as Óðinn is a god, it is possible that the óhamingja which he imposes upon a man is meant to be not just momentary bad luck, an óhapp, but a more permanent burden, a kind of curse.

VIII

There is another instance in Heimskringla, in Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar, indicating a vagueness or ambiguity about the concept of hamingja and óhamingja. When the heathen Earl Hákon Sigurðarson, Óláfr's principal opponent in Norway, has been killed by his own slave, we have a kind of epitaph by the author, summarizing the dead chieftain's character and life. He is said to have had many qualifications for being a leader: great ancestry, wisdom and prudence to manage the ruling power, and also "fearlessness in battle and by that the fortune (hamingja) of coming off victorious and killing his enemies". But after a stanza, quoted in order to

substantiate this judgment, we hear again: "Earl Hákon was a very generous man, but such a great chieftain as he was he had an extreme misfortune (óhamingja) in his death-day" (298-9). This passage, of course, refers to his being killed by a slave in a pigsty. And the reason for that pitiful end, we get to know in the next sentence, was that then the time had come when heathen sacrifices and their performers (blótskaprinn ok blótmennirnir) were to be condemned, and holy faith and true service to come instead. Earl Hákon, then, somewhat paradoxically was invested both with hamingja and óhamingja. To solve this seeming contradiction we have to understand those words here as referring not to one overall and general quality, but to different aspects of the earl's character and fate.

Snorri's Óláfs saga helga also provides us with a series of occurrences of hamingja in that deeper sense which we usually connect with the word. Thus Óláfr's hamingja is said to have turned out to be stronger than the sorcery of the Finns (11). One of the district kings in Norway has a feeling that Óláfr's auðna and hamingja will decide, if he is going to gain the power over the country or not (48). Before leaving on a mission for Óláfr Hjalti Skeggjason asks the king to lay his hamingja on this expedition. The king answers that Hjalti has often shown himself to be a man of hamingja, but is now eager to provide Hjalti and his companions with his own royal hamingja, "if it carries any

weight" (88). Precisely what it implies to "leggja á" or "leggja til" one's hamingja, is hard to say. But perhaps one has to imagine it as a kind of occasional transfer or extension of that somewhat elusive personal quality.

One of the petty kings just mentioned warns his colleagues not to "etja hamingju við Óláf Haraldsson" (102); that is to say, he does not trust their own hamingja to match Óláfr's. Comparing himself to Earl Hákon King Óláfr boasts that Hákon has been lacking hamingja in their earlier confrontations (327). On another occasion Óláfr hesitates to trust his hamingja so unconditionally as to meet his enemies with only a small force (339).

Naturally enough the viewpoints may differ as to what is to be regarded as a person's hamingja or óhamingja. Thus, when Óláfr happens to come across the young Earl Hákon Eiríksson at sea and has him taken prisoner, he makes the comment to him: "People have not been lying of you kinsmen that you are handsome men, but as for your fortune (hamingja), it is out now." But young Hákon himself is more confident: "It is not misfortune (óhamingja) that has happened to us." Victory changes from one time to another: "Perhaps we will have better luck another time" (38). In other words: an incidental mishap, an óhapp, need not necessarily brand a person as a man of misfortune; he may principally be a gæfumaðr despite that.

The double use of hamingja can be traced also in Egils saga, for instance. Five of the seven cases have the supposedly more genuine sense of a general quality. In one of the two remaining cases old Kveld-Úlfr reminds his son Þórólfr that he had once warned him that his visit to King Harald's court would bring no hamingja to the family (49). Later, when Þórólfr has been killed by the king, Kveld-Úlfr doubts whether he will himself be granted the hamingja of revenge (61). In these two examples we again have to do with hamingja denoting the result of an action rather than a force affecting the course of a man's life.

By the way, it is worth noticing that unlike the four other big Icelanders' Sagas - Laxdæla saga, Eyrbyggja saga, Njáls saga and Grettis saga - Egils saga reveals an unusually high frequency of hamingja, and at the same time - also unlike those four sagas - no single instance of gipta. The same is the case with Heimskringla among the Kings' Sagas - a little indication again of a certain affinity between Heimskringla and Egils saga.

There could, of course, be much more to say about the "fortune words" and their functioning on various levels. Sometimes they are used in the deeper sense of a kind of metaphysical or mystic power, affecting our whole life. Sometimes, perhaps in the same texts, they do not seem to mean much more than our talking of good or bad luck. And then we have all kinds of shades and blends of meaning

between these two extremes.

IX

Now, let us return again to the problem of origin. In his discussion of the "fortune words", and especially the fortune connected with the kings, Walter Baetke strongly emphasizes the circumstance that by far the most of these words apply to "the Christian kings Óláfr Haraldsson (the Saint) and Óláfr Tryggvason" (51). The fact itself is well established, at least as far as Óláfr Haraldsson is concerned, and can easily be read out of my tables. Typically enough, Óláfs saga hins helga (Legendary saga) has the highest frequency (4.1/10,000) of "fortune words" amongst the Kings' Sagas; and within Heimskringla one notices that Óláfs saga helga dominates completely.

But how to account for this? To me, Baetke's conclusion as to the Christian origin of the concept of fortune (51), seems somewhat rash. The two Óláfrs, the missionary kings, were looked upon by the saga authors as ideal heroes, having good fortune in spite of their final death in battle. The gipta, græfa and hamingja connected with them concern their careers as rulers, their overcoming of enemies and such matters. There is nothing especially Christian about those concepts. If they are native Scandinavian concepts, as I contend, and besides fairly neutral in relation to definite religious systems - they mean success in life, but can be

provided by Óðinn, by God, or by some other, more undefined power - if it is so, what would then be more natural than that popular Christian kings and heroes should be endowed with plenty of that fortune? The gipta, gæfa and hamingja - however deep rooted in a heathen past - could fit the Christian hero excellently.

Quite another matter is that by a long and frequent use of the "fortune words" in such a context, they could, perhaps, by and by assume a Christian shade of meaning. But even of this, I think, there is no clear evidence, if any, in our texts.

X

It is a striking fact that on the whole the "fortune words" are very infrequent in the specifically Christian texts, and when we meet them there they have nothing peculiarly Christian about them.

In 500 big pages of Heilagra manna sögur¹⁵ one finds only one case of gipta and two of hamingja; not one single gæfumaðr among all those holy men and women.

In the homilies of the Icelandic Hómilíubók¹⁶, written about the year 1200, and thus a comparatively old document, there is no instance of gæfa or hamingja, and only two of gipta. Elizabeth counts it a greater gipta (139) than she deserves, when the Holy Virgin, her kinswoman, comes to see her. But especially interesting for our purpose is the

other case. Men are blamed there for doing good deeds not so much for the sake of faith and love of God, but "more in the hope that God will give them worldly fortune (veralddliga giptu), both property and honor and health in this world" (95). Thus there is emphatic stress here on a wholly mundane meaning of the concept of fortune in gipta.

In the oldest part of the Bible compilation Stjórn, some 300 pages (349-654), supposed to originate from the first half of the thirteenth century, there are only six "fortune words", all of them hamingja. Thus King Jonathan says of his enemies, the Philistines: "For God our Lord has deprived them of fortune (hamingja) and given them under Israel" (452). That is to say, God can dispose of the hamingja, but in itself it is neutral, it may belong to heathens as well as to Israelites. "From where came to me the great fortune (hamingja) of finding so much pity in you?" (422), Ruth asks Boas - and that is hamingja applying entirely to Ruth's worldly welfare.

In the first 300 pages of Stjórn, the youngest part of the work, presumably from the first decades of the fourteenth century, we find a higher frequency of "fortune words" - this time no instance of hamingja, but one of auðna, twenty-two of gipta, and six of gefa. But still they lack specifically religious connotations. Jacob asks his brother Esau for his giptu ok miskunn (185). Laban addresses Jacob with the wish: "Before you I would like to be a man of

fortune (gæfumaðr)" (176). Joseph is sent by his father to find out how giptusamliga (193) his brothers and their cattle get on. The same word is used of Joseph himself: "God accompanied him, and all his undertakings were successful (tókusk honum giptusamliga)" (198). On the whole, Joseph is seen as a typical gæfumaðr, but as in the sentence just quoted, his gæfa, though provided by God, is of a completely worldly nature. "God was still with Joseph," we hear, "and showed mercy to him and gave him the fortune (gipta and gæfa)" (200) of getting on well with the warden of his prison, a contact leading up to Joseph's success and promotion with the Pharaoh of Egypt.

XI

At the end of his treatise Walter Baetke remarks that the phrase gipt hins helga anda is a common one (54) - a fact taken by him, of course, to support the view that the concept of fortune in Old Norse poetry and prose on the whole is strongly connected with, and originated in, Christian ideas. But such a conclusion is open to serious objections - decisive objections, as far as one can see.

Baetke does not seem to make any difference between the terms gipt and gipta, obviously regarding them just as variants of one and the same word. He has failed to notice that there is a definite differentiation in the use of them. From the point of view under discussion here, it is quite

impossible to treat them as if they were identical. The word gipt has preserved much of the basic meaning "gift", and - unlike gipta, as well as auðna, gæfa and hamingja - it has become a kind of terminus technicus precisely for Christian blessing or inspiration.

In the Icelandic Hómilíubók quoted above we have, as said, only two cases of gipta representing the "fortune words". On the other hand, we meet gipt twenty-five times, and then with specifically Christian and religious connotations, often in the qualifying phrase gipt hins helga anda.

Also in Stjórn it appears again and again. The inspired law-maker Moses is said to be "fullr af heilags anda gipt" (5). We hear of Baruch and Deborah that after a victory they offered God a song of praise, telling much of the future "af gipt heilags anda" (388). When David had been saved from his enemies by the Lord, "he went into the Lord's tent and recited before Him in all humbleness af gipt hins helga anda" (545) a psalm of praise.

In the three cases quoted here, the word gipt is then related to a distinctly religious inspiration - connotations that one will not find with the words gipta, gæfa and hamingja in the same texts. On the other hand, gipt is extremely rare in profane sagas. From Heimskringla and the five biggest Icelanders' Sagas I have one instance only, in Grettis saga¹⁷, where an old woman tells Grettir that

he is now deserted by "allri gipt ok gæfu" (247).

That we have got this clear differentiation and a specific word for the gift of heavenly blessing and religious inspiration, may well be regarded as an indication that there was a certain need for it, and that gipta, gæfa, hamingja could not do the same service - because they had in themselves if not an irretrievably heathen character, then a completely profane one.

XII

I would like to add here a few words on Vatnsdæla saga¹⁸. As the table shows, it has the highest frequency of "fortune words" among the Icelanders' Sagas: 9.3/10,000; thus it can lay claim to a special interest in the present connection.

The dating of Vatnsdæla saga is rather difficult. But it is usually held to have been written comparatively late, in the latter part of the thirteenth century. The author displays an obvious Christian orientation. His saga ends with the judgment on the chieftain Þorkell krafla, that he "was a believer and loved God and prepared himself for his death in a very Christian manner" (131). Combined with that fact the extremely frequent use of "fortune words", especially hamingja, may seem to support the hypothesis of a late, Christian origin of that concept.

However, the author of Vatnsdæla saga is not only a

Christian. He is also very interested in heathen customs and superstitions, sometimes of a rather odd kind. And in fact, all of his twenty-seven "fortune words" except the last one - the Christian Þorkell krafla is said to be a giptumaðr (131) - apply to the heathen forefathers, practically throughout in the sense of an inherent quality, belonging to a family as well as to its individual members. In one or two cases the hamingja seems to have a slight touch of personification. Thus, a father addresses his son with the words that the time has now come for him to try his strength and know "hvát hamingjan vill unna þér" ("what fortune is willing to allow you") (6).

In his edition of the saga in Íslensk fornrit VIII (1939), Einar Ól. Sveinsson talking of the concept of fortune makes the comment: "it would have been better, if the saga had not been nagging about it that much" (xxix). It is true, the author's exploitation of hamingja seems a little exaggerated. Here too one has the impression of a certain antiquarianism. Probably he saw the family hamingja as a concept typical of a remote past, and over-exposed it in his eagerness to revive those old days¹⁹. At the same time fortune was a suitable quality for people whom he obviously admires. Perhaps he regarded the men of hamingja as a kind of heathen equivalent of good Christians.

In the perspective adopted here, the high frequency of "fortune words" in such a story as Vatnsdæla saga rather

seems to corroborate the view that the saga concept of fortune is ancient and native.

XIII

Much is problematic and ambiguous about the concept of fortune in saga literature, and will probably remain so. But after all, one thing seems fairly clear: there is no basis for the hypothesis that this concept must be of foreign and Christian origin.

However, that hypothesis is not without its interest from another point of view, as symptomatic of a trend in recent years to try to find, even desperately, direct connections between saga writing and Christian medieval literature. Let us suppose that a scholar finds in an Icelanders' Saga a character full of pride but punished for his arrogance by the course of events. Aha, he thinks, and translates the pride of the saga into superbia, one of the seven mortal sins. And now we have to do with a Christian morality, a sort of theological treatise - although the saga author has managed to conceal his real purpose so ingeniously that nobody has been able to excavate it before our modern X-ray-eyed interpreter.

This is a bit of a caricature, of course. But I think we must admit that we sometimes do things not very far from this, and that makes one rather uncomfortable. To keep to my example, pride is a trait of character which has

certainly appeared and been noticed and commented upon by men in all times and all over the world. To establish on such points direct connections between saga literature and medieval Christendom, we will have to find exclusively or specifically Christian features in details or patterns. The fact that the saga authors were Christians, does not imply that they wrote as Christian moralists and propagandists, for the reader's edification. For instance, even the usual theme of conversion to Christendom in the Icelanders' Sagas often seems to be a sort of literary topos, a matter of a fairly objective report rather than of pious edification.

The same contention must be made in respect of all kinds of comparative studies in the saga field, when we are searching for models or loans. Archaic epic everywhere has many striking features in common. I think there are some books in the Old Testament far more similar to Icelanders' Sagas, both in subject-matter and style, than Tristrams saga ok Ísondar is for instance - a translation supposed by at least one scholar to have given rise to Icelandic saga writing²⁰. But most of us would probably hesitate to conclude that the Old Testament served as a model for the saga writers - although it could be proved that they knew that model. An old and wide-spread genre such as heroic epic is likely to reveal many quite similar traits independently, wherever it appears, in details as well as in patterns and narrative devices. The opposite would certainly be strange.

Needless to say, comparative studies, studies of relationship and origin, are a very respectable undertaking, in the field of saga research as elsewhere. A medievalist, however, has to face realistically the sad fact that his material and sources are so much scantier and more ambiguous than those of later times. And he must realize that this cannot be taken as an excuse for slackening the claims to scholarly standards of argument and evidence - even at the price of saying little or nothing on comparative matters.

In tackling the problems here touched upon a saga scholar could learn a lot from folklorists and anthropologists. We know, for example, that folktales move from country to country, from one part of the world to another. But to establish a relation of cause and effect between two stories, however alike, a careful folklorist would not find it enough to point to similar patterns in plot and character types. To draw such a conclusion, he would require that the tales had also some very peculiar details in common, which could not possibly be coincidental: a certain person has in both cases a wart on his nose, and the like. Anthropologists again and again find the same patterns in ideas and customs of primitive societies in various corners of the world, without rushing into conclusions as to origin and interrelations. They analyse those structures for their own sake, well knowing that even the most striking similarity between them is a quite normal fact, telling us nothing of dependence in one

direction or the other.

I think the Old Scandinavian concept of fortune is a topic to be discussed by scholars in that spirit and with that insight.

NOTES

1. The Old Swedish text of Birgitta's Revelations is edited by G.E. Klemming in Samlingar utgivna av Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet, 14 (1857-84). The passage quoted is to be found in vol. 3, pp. 197-8. For the same passage in Latin, see Revelationes S. Birgittae. E Codice Membs. Fol. 21. Bibl. Universitatis Lundensis ("Cod. Falkenberg") Suecice et Britannice Praefatus. Pars posterior. Edidit Elias Wessén (Einar Munksgaard, Hafniae 1956), p. 514. A passage very much reminiscent of the one just cited appears in the Old Swedish text, p. 196. A man is accused of false belief or superstition (vantro), because he believes that everything is ruled by skäpnom ok lykko; the same man uses magic and "certain devilish words" in order to catch plenty of fish.
2. Walter Baetke, Christliches Lehngut in der Sagareligion. Das Svoldr-Problem. Zwei Beiträge zur Sagakritik. (Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philologisch-historische Klasse. Band 98. Heft 6. Berlin 1951.)
3. An interesting parallel to the passages from Birgitta is to be found in the Old Norse translation, Barlaams ok Josaphats saga (ed. Christiania 1851 by R. Keyser and C.R. Unger), a religious story wide-spread in medieval Europe in Latin, French and other versions. After the Flood, we are told, men in the world grew worse. They "glæymdv sialfum guði. oc gerðu ser sialfer guði. Svmir truðu at aller lutir skylldu sialfkrave verða. oc skylldi allt skipazt með engarre forssio. ætlaðv engan guð vera þann er þeir atto vndir at luta. Einir trvðu

at hamingian myndi fagnað oc fremd veita oc at orllog oc auðna myndv allu raða" (pp. 24-25; my italics). The concepts of fortune and fate are thus, in this Christian context, definitely seen as opposed to real faith in God.

4. Stjórn. Gammelnorsk Bibelhistorie, edited by C.R. Unger (Christiania 1862)
5. Barlaams saga ok Josaphats, edited by R. Keyser and C. R. Unger (Christiania 1851).
6. Víga-Glúms saga, edited by Jónas Kristjánsson in Íslenzk fornrit IX (Reykjavík 1956).
7. Rómverja saga, edited by R. Meissner (Palaestra 88, Berlin 1910).
8. Alexanders saga, edited by Finnur Jónsson (København 1925).
9. Sigurðar saga böglá, edited by Bjarni Vilhjálmsen in Riddarasögur III (Reykjavík 1953).
10. Veraldar saga, edited by Jakob Benediktsson (Skrifter udg. af Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 61, København 1944).
11. Heimskringla, edited by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson in Íslenzk fornrit XXVI-XXVIII (Reykjavík 1941-51).
12. Víglundar saga, edited by Jóhannes Halldórsson in Íslenzk fornrit XIV (Reykjavík 1959).
13. Finnboga saga ramma, edited by Jóhannes Halldórsson in Íslenzk fornrit XIV (Reykjavík 1959).

14. Egils saga Skallagrímssonar, edited by Sigurður Nordal in Íslenzk fornrit II (Reykjavík 1933).
15. Heilagra manna sögur I, edited by C.R. Unger (Christiania 1877). I have examined the first 500 pages of this volume.
16. Hómilíubók, edited by Th. Wisén (Lund 1872).
17. Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, edited by Guðni Jónsson in Íslenzk fornrit VII (Reykjavík 1936).
18. Vatnsdæla saga, edited by Einar Ól. Sveinsson in Íslenzk fornrit VIII (Reykjavík 1939).
19. Cf. A.U. Bååths question in connection with Vatnsdæla saga in his thesis Studier öfver kompositionen i några isländska ättsagor (1886): "Does it not seem, then, as if the author wrote with the aim of demonstrating the old belief in fate?" (p. 29, footnote).
20. The scholar referred to is Paul V. Rubow, who presented his hypothesis in Smaa kritiske Breve (København 1936), p. 12

T A B L E S

Frequency of the words auðna (1), gipta (2), gæfa (3), hamingja (4), and their compounds, such as giptusamliga gæfuleysi, hamingjumikill.

Abbreviations: DS = direct speech
 FR = frequency per 10,000 words
 S = total size in words

In order to save space, editions have been indicated only by the years of publication. Fuller bibliographical information will easily be found for instance in: Hans Bekker-Nielsen and others, Norrøn fortællekunst, København 1965; or in: Kurt Schier, Sagaliteratur, Stuttgart 1970. - As for the Icelanders' Sagas, they have been excerpted here from the editions in the series Íslenzk fornrit. Exceptions from that are the two versions of Eiríks saga rauða, H(auksbók) and S(kálholtsbók), where I have used Sven B.F. Jansson's text in Sagorna om Vinland I, Stockholm 1945; and the younger version, Y, of Gísla saga, edited by Konráð Gíslason, København 1849.

KINGS' SAGAS	S	DS %	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Total	In DS %	FR
Fagrskinna (1902-03)	54000	11.5	-	-	1	8	9	3 33	1.7
Hákonar saga Hákonar- sonar (1887)	100000	11.5	-	6	-	1	7	2 29	0.7
Heimskringla (1941- 51), as a whole	228000	17.0	6	-	13	26	45	26 58	2.0
Ynglinga saga	10000	0.1	-	-	1	1	2	0 0	2.0
Hálfðanar saga svarta	2000	2.5	-	-	-	-	0	0 0	0.0
Haralds saga hárfagra	9700	7.4	1	-	-	-	1	1 100	1.0
Hákonar saga góða	7000	8.4	-	-	-	-	0	0 0	0.0
Haralds saga gráf- feldar	3700	7.2	-	-	-	-	0	0 0	0.0
Óláfs saga Trygg- vasonar	28000	11.0	-	-	-	4	4	1 25	1.4
Óláfs saga helga	91000	25.0	3	-	7	17	27	19 70	3.0
Magnúss saga góða	6800	18.0	-	-	-	-	0	0 0	0.0
Haralds saga harð- ráða	23000	16.0	1	-	1	1	3	2 67	1.3
Óláfs saga kyrra	1000	4.4	-	-	-	-	0	0 0	0.0

KINGS' SAGAS	S	DS %	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Total	In DS %	FR
Magnúss saga ber- totts	4700	8.0	-	-	-	-	0	0 0	0.0
Magnússona saga	7500	18.5	-	-	1	-	1	0 0	1.3
Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla	5900	12.5	-	-	-	-	0	0 0	0.0
Haraldssona saga	9600	8.0	-	-	1	1	2	0 0	2.1
Hákonar saga herði- breiðs	7000	26.0	1	-	1	-	2	2 100	2.9
Magnúss saga Erlingssonar	11000	15.5	-	-	1	2	3	1 33	2.7
Knyttlinga saga (1919- 25)	48000	23.0	1	1	4	5	11	9 82	2.3
Morkinskinna (1932)	90000	34.0	-	12	7	8	27	21 78	3.0
Óláfs saga hins helga (Legendary saga) (1922)	39000	22.0	-	1	10	5	16	7 44	4.1
Orkneyinga saga (1965)	61000	13.5	-	1	1	2	6	1 17	1.0
Sverris saga (1920)	80000	23.0	3	5	2	2	12	9 75	1.5
KINGS' SAGAS, TOTAL	700000	19.0	12	26	38	57	133	78 59	1.9

ICELANDERS' SAGAS	S	DS %	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Total	In	DS %	FR
Bandamanna saga (K)	9400	56.0	-	-	2	-	-	2	100	2.1
Bandamanna saga (M)	11000	54.0	1	1	1	-	3	0	0	2.7
Bjarnar saga Hítðela- kappa	19000	22.0	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0
Droplaugarsona saga	9400	19.5	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0
Egils saga	62000	22.0	-	-	8	7	15	14	93	2.4
Eiríks saga rauða (S)	7700	16.5	1	1	1	-	3	1	33	3.9
Eyrbyggja saga	38000	17.0	1	1	-	1	3	3	100	0.8
Finnboga saga ramma	23000	27.0	1	-	3	2	6	1	17	2.5
Fóstbræðra saga (H)	14000	31.0	-	-	2	1	3	2	67	2.1
Fóstbræðra saga (M)	18000	28.0	-	-	2	-	2	2	100	1.1
Gísla saga (E)	19000	27.0	1	-	2	-	3	1	33	1.6
Gísla saga (Y)	22000	29.0	-	1	-	-	1	1	100	0.4
Grettis saga	61000	24.0	-	1	12	1	14	11	79	2.3
Grænlandinga saga	6500	18.0	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0
Grænlandinga þáttr	4200	28.0	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0
Gunnlaugs saga	9400	31.0	-	1	-	-	1	1	100	1.1

ICELANDERS' SAGAS	S	DS %	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Total	In DS%	FR
Hallfreðar saga	8800	34.0	-	6	1	-	7	4 57	8.0
Heiðarvíga saga	12000	38.0	-	-	-	-	0	0 0	0.0
Hrafnkels saga	9100	42.0	-	-	1	-	1	1 100	1.1
Hænsa-Póris saga	8700	41.0	-	-	1	-	1	1 100	1.1
Kjalnesinga saga	11000	30.0	-	-	1	-	1	1 100	0.9
Kormáks saga	10000	19.5	-	-	2	-	2	2 100	2.0
Króka-Refs saga	11000	36.0	-	1	2	-	3	3 100	2.7
Laxdæla saga	58000	31.0	-	5	1	1	7	6 86	1.2
Njáls saga	97000	41.0	2	8	12	-	22	21 95	2.3
Vápnfirðinga saga	9600	26.0	-	-	1	-	1	1 100	1.0
Vatnsdæla saga	29000	38.0	-	10	3	14	27	20 74	9.3
Víga-Glúms saga	19000	36.0	-	2	4	2	8	8 100	4.0
Víglundar saga	12000	23.0	-	-	1	-	1	1 100	0.8
Þórðar saga hreðu	16000	34.0	-	1	-	2	3	2 67	1.9
ICELANDERS' SAGAS TOTAL	645000	30.0	7	39	63	31	140	110 79	2.2

STURLUNGA SAGA (1946)	S	DS %	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Total	In	DS %	FR	180
Porgils saga ok Hafliða	13000	8.5	-	1	3	-	4	3	75	3.1	
Sturlu saga	18000	13.5	-	-	-	1	1	1	100	0.6	
Prestsaga Guðmundar góða	16000	17.5	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0	
Guðmundar saga dýra	19000	6.9	-	-	1	-	1	0	0	0.5	
Hrafns saga Svein- bjarnarsonar	5000	5.2	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0	
Íslendinga saga	101000	6.5	3	3	2	-	8	1	13	0.8	
Pórðar saga kakala	30000	6.6	1	2	-	2	5	2	40	1.7	
Svínfellinga saga	5600	12.0	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0	
Porgils saga skarða	45000	17.5	1	-	-	1	2	1	50	0.4	
Sturlu þáttur	3200	21.0	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0	
STURLUNGA SAGA, TOTAL	256000	11.0	5	6	6	4	21	8	38	0.8	

BISHOPS' SAGAS (I-III, 1948)	S	DS %	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Total	In	DS %	FR
Hungrvaka	7700	0.9	-	1	4	1	6	0	0	7.8
Þorláks saga byskups	14000	7.3	-	-	2	-	2	0	0	1.4
Páls saga byskups	7200	0.0	-	-	5	-	5	0	0	6.9
Árna saga byskups	44000	10.5	-	-	-	1	1	0	0	0.2
Jóns saga helga ("eldri")	17000	14.5	-	1	-	1	2	1	50	1.2
Jóns saga helga ("yngri")	18000	8.3	-	-	1	-	1	1	100	0.6
Guðmundar saga Arasonar	48000	10.0	-	-	1	-	1	0	0	0.2
Laurentius saga	35000	15.0	-	1	-	1	2	0	0	0.6
Guðmundar saga Arasonar (by Arngrímur Brandsson)	66000	16.0	-	9	-	5	14	2	14	2.1
BISHOPS' SAGAS TOTAL	257000	11.5	-	12	13	9	34	4	12	1.3

TRANSLATIONS	S	DS %	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Total	In	DS %	FR
Alexanders saga (1925)	48000	31.0	-	4	2	61	67	43	64	14.0
Gyðinga saga (1881)	27000	16.5	-	-	1	1	2	1	50	0.7
Karlamagnús saga (1860) as a whole	214000	40.0	-	9	24	6	39	33	85	1.8
Karlamagnus saga ok kappa hans	18000	20.0	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0
Af fru Olif ok Landres syni hennar	11000	43.0	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0
Af Oddgeiri danska	16000	51.0	-	1	2	-	3	3	100	1.9
Af Agulando konungi (B)	60000	40.0	-	7	7	4	18	12	67	3.0
Af Agulando konungi (A)	45000	40.0	-	-	10	1	11	8	73	2.4
Af Guitalin Saxa	21000	49.0	-	1	4	1	6	6	100	2.9
Af Otvel	12000	37.0	-	-	1	-	1	1	100	0.8
Af Jorsalaferð	5400	47.0	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0
Af Runzivals bardaga	16000	47.0	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0
Af Vilhjalmi korneis	3400	35.0	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0
Um kraptaverk ok jartegnir	5900	8.5	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0.0

"RIDDARASÖGUR"	S	DS %	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Total	In DS %	FR
Bervers saga (1884)	23000	30.0	-	-	-	-	0	0 0	0.0
Ivents saga (1872)	16000	48.0	-	1	-	-	1	1 100	0.6
Möttuls saga (1878)	6100	39.0	-	-	-	-	0	0 0	0.0
Partalopa saga (1877)	11000	32.0	1 ¹⁾	-	-	-	1	1 100	0.0
Strengleikar eða Ljóðabók (1850)	38000	24.0	-	-	7	1	8	2 25	2.1
Tristrams saga ok Ísondar (1878)	49000	33.0	-	-	7	2	9	2 22	1.8
"RIDDARASÖGUR", TOTAL	143000	32.0	1	1	14	3	19	6 32	1.3

1) This auðna is a verb: "Nú fari minn hagr sem auðnar" (89)