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Outside assessment of:

„Fast Goes the Fleeting Time: The Miscellaneous Concepts of
Time in Different Old Norse Genres and their Causes.“

Doctoral Dissertation at Charles University Prague,

by Mgr. Kristýna Králová.

2019.

The different genres mentioned in the title of this doctoral thesis refer to Eddic poetry, Fornaldarsögur, Family sagas, Kings' sagas, Bishops' sagas, Computistical material and also Diplomataria, thus covering a wide range of genres within Old Norse literature of the 12th to the 14th century.

The approach of the candidate both to the genres used and the access to types of time is highly methodological. Different types of time are mentioned (linear vs. cyclical, narrated time vs. narrative time, order, duration and frequency, etc.), and she employs the latter terminology (by G. Genette) with great profit. When it comes to dating methods, her fine distinction between intrinsic absolute, intrinsic relative, extrinsic absolute and extrinsic relative could, however, be somewhat simplified by simply stating that dating methods can either relate to Icelandic genealogies (including those of bishops), foreign rulers and their genealogies or astronomical methods. In any case, her observations are detailed, systematic and show consequence both in her terminology and in her methodology.

In general, I find the candidate's argumentation convincing, especially when she tries to distinguish between different types of time or applies these to the various genres. I also concur with her distinction between universal, regional, and local systems of dating (even if her terminology is somewhat different). At times, however, not only her methods of distinction may get to fine, but also the interpretation of these dating methods, as when she

interprets the dating in the Kings' sagas as a feudalistic method, while in fact (just as much as in the Icelandic family sagas or the Bishops' sagas) it simply orientates itself on the protagonists !

Occasionally, the candidate includes excursus which deal with narratological questions which are not directly relevant to the question of time, e.g. the observations offered on „characteristic beginnings“ in modern literature and in the Icelandic family sagas (pp. 94f). In this case, the observations are correct, even if the study of the beginnings of the Íslendinga sögur might have been more profitable (but undoubtedly more difficult) if compared with the beginnings of Fornaldarsögur. However, I find the candidate's comments very convincing.

Some criticism:

Genres are treated too much as having great similarities or even if written by the same authors – with the exception of the Konunga sögur, where the problem of great differences are mentioned within the genre, which is here quite rightly subdivided into biographical and synoptic works (cf. P. 146; the term synoptic has become usual to denote several collections of King's sagas that deal with longer periods of time parallelly, but in different styles). In other genres dealt with by the candidate, however, especially when dealing with the Íslendinga sögur and the Fornaldarsögur, one gets the impression that she sees these texts as a closely related corpus rather than as single texts originating over a long period of time.

One point of criticism regards dating of primary texts. While in some cases the candidate is very aware of different times of composition, in other cases she is sloppy in this respect, especially when assuming a high age for Eddic poetry, something which may have been acceptable 100 years ago, but nowadays cannot be assumed that easily, even when research positions do indeed tend to differ. But the new Edda commentary, now finally finished by the Frankfurt research team round the late Prof. Klaus von See, provides reliable and sound, if not always conclusive dating arguments for all the Eddic poems and cannot be ignored!

The candidate should also be warned of using secondary literature somewhat uncritically: she treats unscholarly publications by non-specialists such as Anthony Winterbourne and Paul C. Bauschatz (e.g. p. 19) as equal with serious publications, and even problematic books by specialists in other fields who offer somewhat unqualified statements on Old Norse literature, such as the Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup, p.31).

A more serious, but of course only formal criticism concerns the candidate's use of the names of Icelandic authors, both medieval and modern, which must correctly always be quoted with Christian Name plus Father's name, but never just by their fathers name ! Thus, Óláfía Einarsdóttir is throughout called Einarsdóttir (e.g. p. 18), and Iceland's most famous author is not found as Snorri Sturluson even in the bibliography, but under Sturluson, Snorri: these are beginners mistakes that are normally unacceptable.

To sum up:

Despite some, partly formal, shortcomings this is a typical PhD thesis with all the typical achievements and weaknesses, and should as such be accepted as the written part of the PhD process.

I suggest grading it with: pass!

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