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



Münchener Nordistische Studien

herausgegeben von
Wilhelm Heizmann und Joachim Schiedermaier

Band 39

Titelbild: Drawing from the work of Olaus Magnus „Historia de Gentibus
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Foreword

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Prague, February 2020

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Introduction

Although several works about Old Norse people's time understanding have already been written, the topic is still far from being fully investigated. The research scope of the majority of these works is often too narrow, because their authors try to reconstruct Old Norse time perception based on the study of a single genre or even a single work of Old Norse literature. The results obtained through an analysis of such a limited choice of primary sources are arguable. However, there are also certain studies that exceed the border of one literary genre and examine the issue of Old Norse time perception from a broader perspective. I introduce these studies in more detail in the first chapter where I describe the current state of research and where I also explain in what matters this work differs from them. Generally speaking, I do not always fully agree with their authors' methodological approach to the research of Old Norse time perception as well as some of their conclusions that might seem too straightforward.

In my work, I based the investigation of time perception in Old Norse society on the thorough study of a broad scale of genres. Contrary to my original intentions, I decided not to reduce the scope of the primary sources to saga literature, but I have examined other genres as well, including works of such diverse character as is for example the *Poetic Edda*, a collection of mythological poems, or *Íslendingabók*, a historiographical text that describes the settlement and early history of Iceland. A detailed description of the primary sources can be found in the second chapter of the book.

I believe that only such a broader scope of the primary sources can reveal the surprising variety of time reckoning and perception present in different Old Norse works or genres. While some genres seem to be firmly grounded in original domestic time understanding, others are strongly influenced by foreign time reckoning and

perception that spread to Scandinavia together with Christianity and various learned treatises, especially historiographical and computational literature from continental Europe. Concerning this fact, I try to answer the following questions in the book: What were the characteristic features of Old Norse time reckoning and perception? How different was original domestic (heathen) time understanding from the continental European (Christian) practice? How is the arrival of new time reckoning reflected in Old Norse literature? What aspects of the local and foreign images and concepts of time do Icelandic authors blend in their works?

Unfortunately, Old Norse people never described their ideas about time directly, but answers to the aforementioned questions can be found through the analysis of the temporal structure of Old Norse literary works. The analysis of the dating systems and time indications used in these works can give us an idea of how Old Norse people reckoned time, while the analysis of narrative time can help us to reconstruct their time perception. However, one cannot focus solely on the narrative analysis of Old Norse works when studying local time understanding. It is also necessary to pay attention to the social background of these works, especially to the political and religious changes happening in medieval Scandinavia, due to their great impact on domestic time reckoning and perception. I took this fact into consideration when working out the methodology of my research, a more thorough description of which is included in the third chapter.

The primary aim of this work is to contribute to the research of Old Norse people's time understanding. Furthermore, it makes a more general effort to broaden the knowledge of time perception in the Middle Ages. As a work that examines the topic of time understanding in a certain medieval society it represents a piece of the puzzle that can be placed into a complex and heterogeneous picture depicting medieval images of time. I believe that similar studies of time understanding in ancient or medieval civilisations contain deep meaning for contemporary people, because they show us alternative ways of time reckoning and understanding. Studying time in Old

Norse society is especially interesting because it offers a possibility to observe how local time perception, preserved in certain works, has been blended with foreign concepts of time.

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