



Master's Thesis Projects

## The Retrospective Methods Network

# RMN

### Newsletter

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### The Age of the Eddic Poems: *of/um*-Particle as Criterium for Dating

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Research project undertaken for completion of a master's degree in Norse Philology at the University of Bergen; the oral examination was held on 11 June 2019; the thesis is available at <http://bora.uib.no/handle/1956/19972>. Supervisors: Jens Eike Schnall (University of Bergen) and Helen Leslie-Jacobsen (University of Bergen).

“Alderen til eddakvada i *Codex Regius*. Spesielt om *of/um*-partikkelen som dateringskriterium” [‘The age of the Eddic poems in *Codex Regius*, with special focus on the *of/um*-particle as criterium for dating’] was the subject of my master thesis. My ambition was to find criteria for dating which can get general approval and solve the long-lasting problem of dating the eddic poems. I concentrated on the poems in the ‘*Codex Regius* of the Elder Edda’, ms. GKS 2365 4to, and left out other eddic poems, and studied the linguistic traits in the poems. I found that linguistic traits, the *of/um*-particle in particular, provide us with the most reliable criteria for dating. I also concluded that the *of/um*-particle was *not* an expletive particle, as most scholars have maintained, but had still retained some meaning even in Norse time. I mapped which meaning the particle provided to the following word, in each case where the *of/um*-particle was used in the *Codex Regius* (225 cases; Appendix 2 in the thesis).

In skaldic poems, the use of the *of/um*-particle was extensive in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, amongst the most frequent of all words, but decreased markedly from the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. From the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the frequency was about 1/10 (!) of the frequency in the 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The particle ceased to be used after the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The use of the *of/um*-particle

in prose from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries is fully in accordance with the use in skaldic poems from the same time. The amount of the *of/um*-particle should therefore be used as a criterium for dating even in the eddic poems, provided that the *number of verselines* studied are sufficient numerable. Based on the use in skaldic poems, I concluded that we need 300 (short-)verselines or more to use the *of/um*-particle as a somewhat insecure indicator for dating, more than 500 verselines to use it as a relatively reliable indicator, while with more than 3,000 verselines, the *of/um*-particle is a solid indicator for dating.

In total, there are nearly 10,000 unrepeatable verse-lines in *Codex Regius*. The average occurrence of the *of/um*-particle is on the same level as in skaldic poems from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. This indicates that the great majority of poems in *Codex Regius* are older than the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

The other linguistic features I studied, was *SOV-wording* in unbound sentences; the so-called *vinðandin forna* [‘antiquated wording’]; *hiatus* in words which received contracted forms in the 12<sup>th</sup> century; the prepositions *ept*, *fyr* and *und* (which later become *eptir*, *fyrir*, *undir*); enclitic use of *ek*, *es* and *vas*; use of *enclitic articles* and *alliterations v/vowel*. I found a high degree of accordance between ages indicated according to all linguistic features; the poems that seemed to be old according to one criterium also seemed to be

old according to most other criteria, and poems that seemed to be young according to one criterium also seemed to be young according to most other criteria. This is a strong indication that those linguistic features have something to do with the age of the poems.

The use of the *of/um*-particle is the only linguistic features that indicates an age for all eddic poems.

Based on all linguistic criteria, I divided the poems in the Codex Regius into three layers. The oldest layer I would say should be older than the 10<sup>th</sup> century and younger than the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the middle layer probably dates from the 10<sup>th</sup> century or early 11<sup>th</sup> century, while the youngest layer (the three Helgi-poems, *Gripisspá* and *Atlamál*) seems to be composed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century or not later than the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

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