

## Editor's preface

The present work, *opus postumum* of an author who was certainly the best connaisseur of Ossetic among Western linguists, has kept me busy for one and a half years. Now the edition has been completed, and I should like to add some lines of my own to the late Prof. Fridrik Thordarson's "Ossetic Grammatical Studies".

It was a summer day in 1981, when a colleague from Oslo knocked at my door in Vienna University and said that he would like to get to know the young lady writing her PhD thesis on Ossetic. He was the first person outside the Soviet Union who really took interest in my research on Ossetic onomastics. We started a vital talk on our common subject, the Iranian language of the Caucasus. This first meeting with Fridrik Thordarson had quite an encouraging effect on me. Since then I felt less lonesome with my scientific subject. Not only for me, but also for some other young linguists from the Western hemisphere, Fridrik represented a mature friend who was always ready to give his help. Over twenty years we met regularly, mainly within the framework of the "Societas Caucasologica Europaea" which was officially founded in Oslo in 1986, during an unforgettable conference organised by Fridrik Thordarson himself, who spared no effort to develop the legal grounds of our international "Societas". During our many meetings I had the great opportunity to make friends with Fridrik, whom I highly appreciated for his trustworthiness and for his fine humour. The last time I met him was in summer 2000, on the occasion of the last conference of the "Societas" in Munich. He seemed to be unchangeably young and always bursting of creativity. The bad news of his disease and his death after a third stroke on the 2nd of October 2005 shocked us all tremendously, to say the least. For the small discipline of Ossetic studies, Fridrik Thordarson's death meant an unimaginable loss.

Among Fridrik Thordarson's colleagues nobody knew that he was preparing a great book. He happened to discuss some details here and there and showed restricted parts of his "Studies" to some colleagues, but nobody had ever seen it as a whole before. It was his wife, Dr. Kirsten Schack Abrahamsen, who to her great surprise discovered huge files in her late husband's computer, and then also found some printouts of chapters of a book *in statu nascendi*.

Originally the book comprised five different, extensive versions from different years plus the first pages of one more, obviously proofread version, dated the 16 July 2004. One part of them, representing but the first three chapters, was typewritten. It is the only version containing a short "Preface", obviously still in a provisory form, dated as early as April 1994. But it could be concluded from the whole conception that this date does not tell anything about the real origin of the work. Furthermore, there were also two variants of an unfinished bibliography, relating to the first three chapters only. All these versions were incomplete, but they complemented each other in many respects. Parts of them contained also handwritten corrections. The arrangement of the chapters did not represent the typical order of a conventional grammar, though. As there was no table of contents, it could not be stated with certainty whether this arrangement was planned as such for a later publication. Concerning their size and degree of completion, the respective chapters differ considerably from each other. There is no particular paragraph on the verbal system in Fridrik Thordarson's book. The fact that the author chose the designation "Grammatical Studies" instead of "Grammar" can be interpreted in a way that no special chapter on the verb was intended, but Fridrik Thordarson did not hesitate to give specific information on the verb in different parts of his Grammatical Studies, depending on the contexts. Thus, his treatise on the preverbs

and their functions as aktionsart and aspect markers reveals many hitherto unknown details.

Together with his many articles, the present book represents the fifth essence of Fridrik Thordarson's multifarious work on Ossetic and his life-long occupation dedicated to all kinds of linguistic categories of that language. The author's wide interest in and his active competence of the modern Ossetic language enabled him to deal with refined subjects such as idiomatics and syntactical problems with the greatest of ease. His work on Ossetic shows a well-balanced proportion of research into older stages of the language as well as its modern varieties.

Fridrik Thordarson's "Ossetic Grammatical Studies" can claim to be the first Ossetic grammar that systematically takes into account the results of modern Indo-Europeanists' and Caucasiologists' research. This was the main basis of his innovative theses and explanations on the history and dialectology of the Ossetic language and on the areal role the Ossetic language played in past and recent periods. It is evident that the present book will widely contribute to our knowledge on the relative chronology of some of the migrations of the Ossetes and their neighbouring peoples and tribes in the Caucasus. This side-effect is by no means unintentional, for Thordarson knew well that in the case of the Ossetes, who are a people without a written tradition, only serious linguistical research can enlighten the past centuries to a certain extent.

It is one of Fridrik Thordarson's main merits to have combined the methods of areal linguistics with purely historical-etymological research. In the present book he revealed more about the historical background of the various linguistic contacts of Ossetic and its neighbouring languages and the social interactions standing behind them than anybody else before.

Fridrik Thordarson spoke Ossetic fluently. His fine knowledge of the language did not only open the hearts of the local people for him, but also enabled him to undertake effective fieldwork. His studies in the fields of comparative phonology and toponomastics, which led him to conclude that the focus of innovative developments in Ossetic of any kind has always been the Dzæudžyqæu (Vladikavkaz) Plateau, must be called pioneer work. But even if we let the focus on areal linguistics aside, Fridrik Thordarson's research must be regarded as completely innovative, especially with respect to the Ossetic noun and the noun phrase, and so are his morphosyntactic studies. What we have here is the most extensive investigation that has ever been written on the Ossetic noun, considering both the inherited Indo-Iranian models and historical changes due to areal influence.

The Epilogue is an essay of its own. It reconsiders historical, ethnological and sociological reasons of migration and language shift. Except for wars and natural phenomena, such reasons could be specific marriage customs, traditional interethnic adoption institutions, or blood revenge.

To sum up, Thordarson's *opus magnum postumum* represents not only a new stage in the research of the Ossetic language. On the basis of exact linguistic methods, it also provides us with hitherto unknown aspects of cultural history and migratory movements in the far and more recent past of the Northern Caucasus area.

In 2006 I was offered the opportunity to edit Fridrik Thordarson's unfinished book, by his widow, Dr. Kirsten Schack Abrahamsen, who not only opened her late husband's library and her house to me but also helped me with bibliographical research, many kinds of organisational matters, and, most of all, encouraging words. I would like to express my deep gratitude to her.

For the financial realisation of the project I am greatly indebted to both Prof. Per Kvaerne (University of Oslo / Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture) and Prof. Bert Fragner (Institute of Iranian Studies of the Austrian Academy of

Sciences, Vienna), whose common initiative created the basis for a scientific joint venture resulting in the publication of the present book.

Furthermore I have to thank Prof. Winfried Boeder who allowed me to include a short unprinted article by Fridrik Thordarson which he had intended to edit himself (cf. the end of the present work).

My thanks also go to Dr. Agnes Korn (University of Frankfurt) who was always ready to help me with bibliographical research, mainly concerning Iranica. Furthermore, I am thankful to Prof. Manana Tandashvili and Lela Samushia, M.A. (University of Frankfurt), for their advise on lexical problems concerning the modern Kartvelian languages. I would also like to express my particular gratitude to Dr. Elguja Dadunashvili (Rustaveli Institute, Tbilisi, Georgia) who provided me with a photocopy of the 1946 edition of the Nartic Epos.

Last but not least, I am feeling particularly grateful towards my husband, Prof. Jost Gippert (University of Frankfurt), who not only formatted the author's original files but who also performed an acribic proofreading of all parts of the book as well as the technically complicated work of bringing all kinds of indexes into a digitally correct form. Without his encouraging attitude, readiness to discuss open questions, and digital skills, the present book would not have seen the light.

My own part in finishing this book is humble. I felt deeply moved when I was given the honour to do the final work on a great project that could not be undertaken any more by the author himself. My contribution consisted in aligning the different versions, verifying and completing the greater part of the bibliographical notes and sometimes also the lexical and formal entries, and in compiling the indexes. In a few cases, when necessary, I felt it useful to refer to more recent literature that could not be considered by Fridrik Thordarson himself any more. Additions of this kind are marked by [S.F.].

All in all, I have always tried not to change the author's wording, whenever possible. It goes without saying that all the wealth of ideas expressed in this book as well as the conclusions remain Fridrik Thordarson's property.

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S.F.