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*Benjamin Allport, Rosalind Bonté and
Hans Jacob Orning (eds)*

*Networks in the Medieval North:
Studies in Honour of Jón Viðar Sigurðsson*

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NETWORKS in the Medieval North: Studies in Honour of Jón Viðar Sigurðsson celebrates Jón Viðar's wide-ranging contributions to untangling the complex bonds of friendship, loyalty, and feud that comprise the social networks of *Norgesveldet*, the Norwegian kingdom and its tributaries (the jarldom of Orkney, the kingdom of Man and the Isles, the Faroes, Iceland, and Greenland), from the late ninth century into the fourteenth century.

This book contains, as well as a lively scholarly biography of and bibliography of the works of Jón Viðar from 1982-2022, fifteen diverse contributions, which not only reflect the interdisciplinary interests of the honorand, but also attest to his ability to foster international academic networks between historians, manuscript scholars, conservationists, and beyond. The contributions are divided under three headings: Sociopolitical Networks, Legal and Material Networks, and Literary Networks. Such subdivisions in any edited collection are always slightly artificial, but the editors have taken great care to organise the contributions in a manner that best presents an overarching picture of networks in *Norgesveldet*. This is a difficult feat considering that by nature networks are difficult to categorise because they are context-specific, assuming the characteristics of the source(s) from which they are derived. Thus, this collection delightfully features different interpretations of what constitutes a *Norgesveldet* network, which range from social networks formed of interpersonal and institutional bonds, trade networks underpinned by taxation in the late Viking Age, to conceptual networks emerging from the circulation of manuscripts, ideas and beliefs between people and places.

Jón Viðar is perhaps best known for his studies of relationships among Icelandic and Norwegian elites in which he has argued that actors leverage

their friendships to maintain or further their personal interests ('The Changing Role of Friendship in Iceland, ca. 900–1300', *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*). Therefore, it is appropriate that the first five papers investigate the sociopolitical networks of *Norgesveldet* and its geographical neighbours. In the opening contribution, Kim Esmark and Lars Hermanson explore whether 'Sigurðssonian' models can also be used to describe power games in eleventh- and twelfth-century Denmark. They compare the "alternative political sociology" of *Knýtlinga saga*, a vernacular history of Denmark, with depictions of power dynamics in corresponding Latin sources (pp. 33-38) to demonstrate that, although Old Norse and Latin narratives differ in style and purpose, 'Sigurðssonian' mechanisms of power "remain identifiable" in both (pp. 44-45).

Ben Allport's piece applies Social Network Analysis (SNA) to *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, the key narrative source for the life and reign of King Hákon Hákonarson (1204-1263) of Norway (pp. 49-74). Through social network visualisations and quantitative assessments, Allport not only describes, but shows how the society of the saga (individuals and their relationships) is structured, which in turn reveals new insights into how power consolidated in the hands of a small number of Scandinavian ruling dynasties and noble families (pp. 68, 70). This is a useful essay for individuals interested in applying SNA to Old Norse texts because Allport acknowledges the constraints and possibilities of using an interdisciplinary approach.

In their contribution, Fiona Edmonds and Sarah E Thomas explore a document that granted the Savigniac abbey of Furness in Cumbria the unusual right to elect bishops to the bishopric of Sodor (kingdom of Man and the Isles), which was a suffragan of the archbishopric of Niðaróss (pp. 75-96). Their detailed analysis sheds light on power dynamics in ecclesiastical networks, where ecclesiastical bodies like Furness Abbey used their patronage to negotiate with competing interests in efforts to gain or maintain their institutional power (p. 86).

The final two essays in the section explore the agency of women in *Norgesveldet* society. Auður Magnúsdóttir's chapter revisits the absence of female friendships (both with men and with other women) in Old Norse sources. She argues that, to find more examples of female friendship, the search must extend beyond the indigenous sources to include Old Norse translations of chivalric literature (pp. 109-112). In her contribution, Randi B Wærdahl analyses a variety of documentary sources from ca.1250 to ca.1319 to reevaluate the agency of noblewomen in high medieval Norway and discusses their ability to influence political decision-makers directly and/or indirectly (pp. 117-134).

The volume neatly transitions from discussing socio-political relationships connecting individuals and institutions to investigating the broader legal and mercantile networks binding the Norwegian realm to its subsidiaries and neighbours. These networks are also a theme in the honorand's work, notably in *Skandinavia i vikingtiden*, where he argued that, from ca.975 to ca.1050, Vikings controlled the North Sea trade network by levying tolls and customs at strategic points along the Rhine and Elbe estuaries (p. 154). Sveinn H Gullbekk's piece tests this 'Sigurðsson Hypothesis' by examining the numismatic evidence. His investigation into the composition of Viking Age silver coin hoards offers fresh insights into why German silver coins make up the largest proportion of coin finds in Scandinavia (pp. 139-141). Additionally, his comparison of how Scandinavians understood German and Anglo-Saxon monetary systems shed light on the fiscal adaptability of Viking traders, who, depending on the context of a negotiation, could engage in both financial systems (pp. 141-151).

Continuing the theme of taxation, Helgi Þorláksson's contribution explores the Norwegian subjugation of Iceland from an economic perspective. He effectively outlines the economic reasons that Norwegian kings were fiscally incentivised to control Icelandic trade and institute a royal tax, notably the demand for Icelandic *wadmal* (pp. 169-172, 177-181). This paper offers a refreshing interpretation of Iceland's subjugation, which is typically analysed using political or institutional - not economic - frameworks.

Turning attention to legal networks, Már Jónsson's article unearths the textural layers of *Járnsíða*, an Icelandic legal text, through a comparison with its Norwegian and Icelandic source material (pp. 194-205). In her contribution, Lena Rohrbach employs Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory to illustrate that manuscripts and the legal texts they contain were not just objects, but active participants in forming and shaping the geopolitical and social networks of *Norgesveldet*. From English and Burgundian/Netherlandish documentary sources, Nöelle L W Streeton paints a picture of the global trade in artists' materials for manuscript production. Through case studies of specific commodities like "grains for cloth" (pp. 230-236) and detailed examinations of potential logistical routes (pp. 236-223), she emphasises the interdependence between craftspeople and merchants in networks of exchange, observing that merchants would not bring these items to far away locations like Norway and Iceland unless there was demand for them (pp. 239-240).

The final section of the volume investigates how ideas, histories, and narratives were transmitted from, in, and to literary networks in *Norgesveldet*, and to that region in the period directly after the collapse of *Norgesveldet*.

Karl G Johansson's piece explores how the Latin motif of Charlemagne and his "cardinal sin" was appropriated and re-dressed as the tale of Snæfríðr's marriage to the Norwegian king Haraldr *hárfagri* to serve new functions in a vernacular context (pp. 247-266). Rosalind Bonté's chapter synthesises textual accounts of Iceland's conversion to Christianity from *Íslendingabók* to the end of the Icelandic Commonwealth in 1262/1264 to trace how the cultural memory of Christianisation changed over time (pp. 267-295). By highlighting these changes, she successfully demonstrates how conversion narratives served as vehicles for Icelanders to explore their evolving relationships with the kings of Norway and express their ideas on identity and autonomy. In his chapter, Alex Woolf compares genealogies in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* with *Laxdæla saga* to investigate the role of matrilineal descent in origin stories for the kingdom of Norway/Dales region of Iceland (pp. 297-308). Using the case study of *Gottskálksannáll*, a late sixteenth-century set of Icelandic annals, Elizabeth Ashman Rowe explores how tangible elements like land ownership and manuscripts combine with intangible phenomena like socio-political relationships and textual connections to form networks in Iceland (pp. 309-326).

In a fitting end to the volume, Anne Eriksen considers Norway's loss of power - a common theme in early modern Nordic historiography - through the lens of two seventeenth century compilatory works by Johannes Lilienskiöld (pp. 327-343). She argues that the lack of originality of Lilienskiöld's compilations is what makes them interesting because it shows that "his volumes offer a good representation of wider tradition, and are a good source of knowledge about the time in which they were produced", and particularly demonstrate how contemporary historiographers perceived and discussed tropes of "Nordic greatness" (pp. 328, 341).

Networks in the Medieval North is a handsomely bound and well-illustrated collection, with a few errors and inconsistencies that are not worth mentioning here. Overall, each contribution stands on its own merits, offering new perspectives to its respective field of Scandinavian Studies. Yet, specialists should venture beyond the article of most relevance to them to explore the book as a network in its own right, which brings together different approaches to study *Norgesveldet* via the shared influence of Jón Viðar Sigurðsson's scholarship.

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