

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, and Thomas Småberg, eds, *Friendship and Social Networks in Scandinavia, c.1000-1800* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013). Print, 310 pp, 3 b/w ill., ISBN: 9782503542485.



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*Review*

As the title promises, *Friendship and Social Networks in Scandinavia, c.1000-1800* focuses on friendship and social networks in northern Europe. Given that much of the research on medieval friendship in northern Europe has not been translated into English, it is satisfying to have access to an entire collection of English-language research.

Of the twelve essays – excluding the editors’ introduction – there are a few that bear specific mention. Lars Hermanson, in ‘Holy Unbreakable Bonds: Oaths and Friendship in Nordic and Western European Societies, c.900-1200’, notes two main themes in current friendship research: friendship as a political function and friendship as defined by contemporary monastic thought. He successfully argues that ‘the application of the dichotomy of a political-pragmatic friendship versus a spiritual-emotional friendship runs the risk of conveying an incomplete and lopsided picture.’ (37) He uses the concept of an ‘oath-taking’ society – taken from Fredric Cheyette, who coined it as an alternative of the ‘feudal society’ – to re-evaluate Danish power structures by taking social networks, including friendship, into account. Mia Münster-Swendsen’s ‘Educating the Danes: Anglo-Danish connections in the formative period of the Danish church, c.1000-1150’ also bears individual mention. She shows how friendships were central to early medieval Danish intellectual society: the need for a master and students who could (and would) carry on his work, as well as the connections needed for information (manuscripts, ideas) to circulate.

Despite there being no mention of gender in the title, the essays all reflect a strong masculinity focus, albeit, for the most part, an implicit one. There are two

essays in this work that will be of interest to scholars of masculinity in the medieval period: Nanna Damsholt's 'Masculinities and Friendship' and Thomas Småberg's 'The Language of Masculine Friendship: Idealism and Political Realism in a Swedish Fourteenth-Century Rhyming Chronicle'. Damsholt looks at Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, and Abbot Vilhelm of Æbelholt's letters, finding a 'multiplicity of constructions of masculinity' (195) in Denmark around 1200. Her work is of particular interest as she does not separate friendship from gender, taking it as an explicit core aspect of friendship – including how the intellectual discourse on friendship was used to define women's boundaries within the social hierarchy. Småberg reiterates the underlying theme of the book overall: friendship was a masculine ideal, always drawing back to structures of power. In terms of both friendship and masculinity, his essay is interesting for his claim that chivalric ideals and norms were slow to come to Sweden. Småberg uses the early fourteenth century rhyming chronicle *Erikskrönikan* to show that the chivalric ideals and norms that were prevalent in the rest of Europe around this time were slowly coming to Sweden, and were not integrated flawlessly.

There are, however, two issues with the work overall. The first is a problem which plagues friendship research in general, namely that friendship is researched in texts where 'friendship' terms are used – e.g. *vän*, *amicitia* –resulting in any relationships that were not spoken of in these terms being invisible. In this instance, this results in the almost total absence of women in friendship. None of the essays focus on women's friendships: by engaging only with the dominant discourses of the time, the collected work of *Friendship and Social Networks in Scandinavia* appears to show that women had no equivalent to the masculine ideal that was friendship, nor any role worth mentioning in creating and maintaining social networks.

The first page of each chapter includes the author's contact email, as well their research interests, and concludes with neatly defined primary and secondary sources cited, making it easy to follow up sources for both scholars and students.

The Brepols cover is, not surprisingly, simple but striking, making it an aesthetically as well as intellectually pleasing book. Students and scholars of both friendship and masculinity will find this a welcome addition.

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