

Foreigners and Outside Influences in Medieval Norway

edited by

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Introduction

Stian Suppersberger Hamre

With the transition to the Middle Ages came significant changes to the organisation of Norwegian society. Urbanisation gathered speed at this time and facilitated even greater contact with the surrounding world, contact which would also have been part of the reason for the emergence of urban centres. In the 10th century in Scandinavia and surrounding areas, the merging of larger entities into kingdoms or principalities ran parallel to urbanisation and a religious shift towards Christianity. This development can be seen as a major transformation of the region, one bringing it in line with the larger part of Europe. Territorial borders have been altered many times since then but the idea of the region as being composed of sovereign territories has been sustained until the present. Therefore, it can be argued that the sovereign territories that were emerging in the medieval period formed the basis of the perception of modern states and fuelled the narrative of national identity. Thus, this also marks the time when one can start talking about migration in a similar sense to the way we discuss migration today. Migration can be defined as the relocation of residence across recognised borders to an area defined as an entity different from one's former place of residence. Travel, on the other hand, is relocation for a limited period of time with the intention of returning to one's place of origin. One does not, of course, exclude the other, as a traveller might decide to stay and an intended migrant may decide to return to their place of origin. Outside influences can be defined as societal changes resulting from external stimuli. Both migration and brief contact, through travel and trade, can bring about cultural and other changes to a society through the exchange

of ideas and customs. This exchange takes place in various directions and different societies are mutually influenced by one another.

In an historical perspective, hardly anybody denies that migration has been an ever ongoing process. However, migration can be, and has often been, interpreted within the frameworks of two models. The first portrays migration as waves of dislocation and new settlement of larger groups, with periods of little or no mobility between periods of major migration events. The second model views migration as a continuing process where the societies are changing their cultural fabric accordingly. This, however, does not exclude that, at different points in history, there have been major resettlements of large populations. The first model views immigration as threatening and disruptive to the existing society, something which will abruptly replace and transform society into a new cultural entity. On the other hand, the second model interprets migration as part of the ever ongoing development of society, as a normal condition for maintaining society as its inhabitants identify it. The different interpretations are highly relevant to the present-day interpretation of migration and have an impact on policy making as well as the level of xenophobia.

No matter what theory one thinks has been most influential, there is absolutely no denying the fact that the movements of people, goods, and ideas have played a significant part in the development of societies past and present. It is just not possible to argue for a scenario where different cultures and national or ethnic groups have developed in separate vacuums. This is not to diminish the differences between groups of people, but rather to accentuate the fact that every culture is the result of continuous influences from a variety of different groups. Groups are always willing to incorporate new things that are deemed acceptable or favourable, which is why one will find a great amount of similarities between groups of people, regardless of whether the groups are defined on the basis of culture, ethnicity, or nationality, but also many differences which set groups apart. Thus, one can decide to focus on the differences, which have been, and continue to be, the favoured way of depicting societies different from one's own; a method which is meant to strengthen the feeling of belonging, but also portray a picture of the world where whatever group you belong to is infinitely better than the others. This nurtures conflict and is often used to justify derogatory

behaviour towards foreigners and foreign cultures. This use of history with an inaccurate view of the world is harmful as it promotes hatred. Thus, it is not very productive to continue to accentuate differences. A much more sensible approach is to try and elucidate the influences which historically have acted on different societies. This will create a better understanding of how different societies have developed into their current forms, but more importantly it will bring forward an understanding of societies as ever changing entities. An understanding of how societies develop through migration and contact with others, that society is the result of a continuous exchange of ideas, customs, and goods, will make contemporary changes less frightening and possibly diminish the level of xenophobia in society, as well promoting a more realistic view of history.

There are numerous approaches to studying immigration, mobility, and outside influences on a society. Just about any relics of past societies can provide useful information, but the common denominator for all such research must be a comparison between the geographical area of interest and the surrounding areas along with regions further afield. To do so, the archaeological record can be divided into three main categories which will provide different information: the people themselves, evidence of long term influences, and evidence of contact. The most direct approach to studying past migration and mobility is through analysing the skeletal remains of the actual people who lived at the time and place you are interested in studying. The isotope composition in dental enamel holds information about where a person spent the time during the period the tooth crown developed (e.g. oxygen, strontium, lead, sulphur). The enamel on the first molar develops during the first couple of years of life and thus holds information about where the person was during this early part of life. The third molar, on the other hand, is the last tooth to develop and holds information about a person's whereabouts during late childhood or their early teens. Information is always available about where the individual was buried (excavated), so it is known where the person's life ended and where they probably spent the last part of life. Bone could provide a fourth reference point in life history as bone is constantly remodelling and the isotopic value would represent a point in the last part of life. There are, however, issues with diagenesis when using bone samples and several elements are best avoided or used with

caution until these problems have been solved or better understood. Thus, depending on the methodology, it is possible to determine where people in the past came from and potentially moved during life. Genetic analyses of skeletal remains provide a different kind of information about individuals. Contrary to the direct individual information provided by isotope studies, ancient DNA provides information about the long ancestral lines of an individual and can show the long term genetic influences on a population.

Moving on from the people themselves, it is important to see how these people influenced society and here you turn to other aspects of the archaeological record. Evidence of long term influences on society can be found in the parts of the archaeological record which can show lasting cultural influences, rather than indications of brief points of contact between people of different cultural backgrounds. The kind of 'permanent' features useful for this type of study would include architecture, building techniques, organisation and structure of churches and other religious institutions, religious practices like burial customs, the structure and organisation of towns, and, last but not least, food culture, which can be approached through a combination of archaeological and historical sources. Historical sources can, when available, be informative and lend important supplementary information about many aspects of society. The articles in this book touch upon many different approaches, but are by no means comprehensive, and a lot more research and different methodologies need to be applied in the future to develop a satisfactory understanding of the history of immigration, mobility, and outside influences on Norwegian, and any other, society of the past.

About this book

This book is the result of a conference held in Bergen, Norway, in March 2016, entitled 'Multidisciplinary approaches to improving our understanding of immigration and mobility in pre-modern Scandinavia (1000-1900)'. As the title suggests, this was a multidisciplinary conference with papers and posters from a wide range of academic disciplines: history, archaeology, biological anthropology, zooarchaeology, isotope studies, and genetics. Only some of the participants at the conference have made contributions to this book, but the multidisciplinary approach has been maintained.

Multidisciplinary publishing presents some issues with regard to format and referencing, and cross-disciplinary understanding of one another's articles. The most important aspect of different disciplines working together is being able to understand one another and an attempt has been made in this book to make the articles as accessible as possible. Very specialised terminology has been kept to a minimum. Another issue is the use of footnotes which is an integral part of writing as an historian, but rarely used by most other disciplines, especially the sciences. The sensible decision seems to be to allow for the limited use of footnotes and this has been applied in this book. The referencing, however, has been merged into a common system regardless of the different disciplines normal preferences.

Despite the challenges with truly multidisciplinary publications, there is no doubt that this is the recommended approach for the future. No single discipline can shed sufficient light on societies of the past and only through real cooperative efforts, including many academic disciplines and other sources of knowledge, will it be possible to improve our knowledge of the past. This book is an attempt at bringing different disciplines together around a common topic. It is not as academically diverse as it perhaps could have been, but it is a good start which, I hope and believe, will be improved upon in the very near future.

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