

Weather Perceptions in the Medieval North *Abstract for the General Public*

Modern-day challenges linked to human-induced climate change causing floods, droughts, avalanches, and other disasters, continue to spark an increasing and necessary scientific interest in how human societies coped with analogous shocks in premodern centuries. The chronological point of departure for this project is the turn to the second millennium AD in the harsh margins of the North Atlantic. There, in the recently Christianised North, a Latin literary culture developed on basis of a well-established insular writing tradition, quickly prospering in its vernacular form. This emerging Old Norse text corpus provides until the present day excellent documentary sources which offer insights into human-environmental interactions in the medieval North, holding a twofold significance: First, it can contribute to a reconstruction of weather events of the past, and second, return a nuanced mirror image of the medieval minds of its authors. Eventually, apart from ideological and literary functions, the analysed textual evidence allows to draw conclusions regarding the societal consequences of extreme weather events resulting in famines, epidemics, as well as epizootic diseases.

From this innovative concept results the aim of the project to contribute to a reconstruction of the environmental history of Northern Europe in the context of high medieval climate changes (c. 1000–1300) which hitherto remain understudied within the field of historical climatology. The project questions how medieval women and men adapted to, instrumentalised, and visualised the witnessed weather phenomena and explores the interconnectedness between climatic changes, famines, and mobility movements. Moreover, it attempts to show how medieval Scandinavians remembered past environmental changes within their literary and material culture. The relevancy for our time is demonstrated by the gained results on how past Nordic societies developed resilience to weather extremes, which in turn might enable us to anticipate anthropogenic environmental stress in the immediate future and possibly avoid it to a great extent.

Contrary to the steadily increasing popularity and necessity of climate-related studies, the Scandinavian perspective played only a subordinate role in the last comprehensive overviews of historical disasters or remained entirely neglected. However, the significance of medieval Scandinavia as research area for environmental and ecocritical studies is clearly recognisable in an ever-growing number of works investigating the nexus between past climate challenges and societal impacts in the region.

This consequently justifies an unprecedented holistic analysis of weather-related sources from medieval Scandinavia building on and enhancing the results forwarded by recent scholarship conducted in the field. Primarily drawing upon the rich annalistic Icelandic text corpus, the material of investigation is complemented by the earliest chronical works of the North from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the prominent saga literature as well as skaldic and Eddic poetry. Legal texts offer further fresh insights into collective management and adaptation to extreme weather events, whereby it will be both fruitful and innovative to consider not only the Icelandic but also Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish law codes as well as Scandinavian law in Slavophone Rus'. A final methodological approach considers natural proxies for historical climate reconstruction by drawing upon pre-existing geographical, meteorological, and dendroclimatological research. That interdisciplinary perspective hence enriches the literary-based project by data obtained from the 'archives of nature', e.g., from tree rings, sediments, and ice layers.

Eventually, the proposed outcome of the postdoctoral project is a monograph aimed to broaden our knowledge of climate-society interactions in the medieval North, helping us to cope efficiently with contemporary and future climate challenges.