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Report of the President of the Society for the Advancement
of Scandinavian Study

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Scandinavian Studies, Volume 90, Number 1, Spring 2018, pp. 153-156 (Article)



Published by University of Illinois Press

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Over the past year, the Scandinavian countries have emerged as a touchstone in political debates, highlighting the fact that the need for education about the Nordic region has never been more important. Many of our members have been asked to comment on Scandinavian topics in the media, and they have acted as important sources of competent, informed analysis tempered by nuanced and sophisticated understanding of Nordic history, culture, and politics. Through this public work, our members have brought attention to our field and have underscored the importance of our organization both nationally and internationally.

Our visibility as a Society goes hand in hand with the importance of our research and teaching. The Society's journal, *Scandinavian Studies*, under the leadership of editor Susan Brantly, continues to be a highly visible forum for cutting-edge research on issues related to the study of Scandinavia and the Nordic region. There is no better indicator of this importance—and the relevance of our work—than the Society's annual meeting.

The 2017 meeting, held under the thematic banner of “Nordic Connections Old and New,” took place in Minneapolis, Minnesota, home to one of the nation's oldest programs in Scandinavian Studies at the University of Minnesota, and a city historically at the center of Scandinavian emigration. Close collaboration between St. Olaf College and the University of Minnesota, with financial support from Norden: The Nordic Council of Ministers and the American

Scandinavian Foundation, ensured the success of the conference. The planning committee, led by William Banks, included members from across the region, including Shelly Nordtorp-Madson, Dan Karvonen, Jim Parente, Frankie Shackelford, Ben Teitelbaum, Glenn Kranking, Jeremy DeAngelo, and outgoing Society president Margaret Hayford O'Leary, all of whom I would like to thank on behalf of the Society for their tireless work. Their efforts made the conference a memorable one.

The conference opened with an engaging keynote address by Anatoly Liberman (University of Minnesota) entitled "Some (In)Soluble Questions of Saga Origins." It was followed by 2 full days of talks and workshops spanning a wide range of topics. As has been the practice in past years, many of the talks were scheduled into streams and interlocking panels, filling ten concurrent panels over seven sessions. In all, the Society welcomed 201 presenters and an additional fifty-five participants representing eleven countries, including participants from all the Nordic countries, as well as the Russian Federation, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Of particular importance to the future of the field was the participation of sixty-one graduate students, whose contributions indicate a healthy interest in Scandinavian Studies across many disciplines.

Graduate students are an important and vibrant component of our membership, and each year we celebrate their accomplishments through awards and fellowships. The Aurora Borealis Prize for the best graduate student papers presented at the 2016 conference was awarded at the 2017 conference to Amber Rose (Language and Literature) for her paper, "The Rest of the Wolf: Masculinity and Magic in *Völsunga saga*," and to Samantha Ruth Brown (History and Social Sciences) for her paper, "The Danish Meatball War: Pork Politics as a Means to Exclude." The Einar and Eva Lund Haugen Memorial Scholarship was awarded to Charlotte A. Abney Salomon of Yale University, while the Birgit Baldwin Fellowship selection committee decided not to make an award for the current year. Unforeseen events led to delays in the deliberations of several of these committees, and fellowship and award winners were announced out of cycle. A clarification of executive council duties and award selection processes will ensure that all future awards will be made by February 15, allowing recipients ample time to schedule their attendance at the following conference, where the formal announcements will be made during the closing banquet, a past practice that will now be policy.

At the end of the annual meeting, the Society welcomed two new elected members to the Executive Council, Gantt Gurley (Literature), and Benjamin Teitelbaum (History and Social Sciences) to terms of 4 years. At the same time, we bid farewell to our two long-serving members Chip Oscarson (Literature) and Peter Leonard (History and Social Sciences), whose tenure on the council came to an end. On behalf of the society, I wish to thank them for their dedication to the Society and for their good humor and collegiality over these past years. Also, Margaret O'Leary handed the presidential gavel to me; while she no longer wields the mighty gavel, she continues to serve for another 2 years in her new role as past president. Finally, we are delighted to welcome Julie Allen to her newly elected post as vice president.

During the past 2 years, under the leadership of President O'Leary, the Society worked to solidify conference locations at early dates, allowing us to find the best prices and to give organizing committees ample lead time for the complex duties associated with conference planning. With assistance from Paul Steen of HelmsBriscoe, we have planned conferences through 2021, with cities already selected for 2018 (Los Angeles), 2019 (Madison), 2020 (Puerto Rico), and 2021 (Seattle). Executive committee discussions have highlighted ongoing concerns with conference site selection, including a consensus on working toward choosing locations that support hotel workers' ongoing struggles to guarantee safe and equitable work environments, as well as choosing locations that balance travel costs with conference center costs. The rise of the "gig economy" has led many conference attendees to seek alternative lodging. Unfortunately, this personal cost-minimization strategy undermines the Society's ability to negotiate hotel deals, and ultimately jeopardizes the fiscal well-being of the Society. The current conference organizers are experimenting with differential registration fees that are designed to discourage this behavior so that we can keep registration fees at their historical levels. The executive committee is continuing to discuss this pressing concern, as the cost of the annual conference will only increase in coming years; without a guaranteed hotel block, the costs will rise much faster, and much higher.

The Society has also been moving toward streamlining conference registration, paper proposal and review, and program generation. The challenges of developing an easy-to-use online system while integrating several different systems are significant, but will lead to efficiencies for conference organization in the long run. One of the affordances of these systems is the ability to schedule partial sessions related to grouped

panels, since breaking organized streams or panels into groups of four or five presentations is difficult, while stranding papers in sessions with one or two papers is counterproductive. Finally, the need for finding efficiencies in the conference planning process is particularly acute given that university support for conferences has been drastically curtailed in the past 3 years at many of our host universities.

Other ongoing work includes developing a clear call for proposals for the Society's logo and journal redesign; we intend to develop a solicitation package that aligns with best industry practices. Our website backend also needs ongoing support to remain secure and up-to-date. This important redesign offers us additional opportunities as we discuss the future of the Society's *News & Notes*, currently on hiatus, and the syllabus-sharing project. Fortunately, the work of the president and the executive council is made infinitely easier with the attentive diligence of our executive director, Clydette Wantland, whom I would like to thank on behalf of the Society.

Timothy R. Tangherlini
SASS President

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