*Die Grenzen des Netzwerks 1200–1600.* Kerstin Hitzbleck and Klara Hübner, eds.
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"The reason for this workshop and volume was a certain feeling of unease regarding the enormous success of the network paradigm . . . in mediaeval studies" (7): despite this rather skeptical beginning, *Die Grenzen des Netzwerks* is in no way a polemic against the

use of network analytical methods in historical research. In fact, it is a serious examination of the possibilities and limits of a methodological approach that has become increasingly popular during the last years. A downside of this success is obviously that many historians use the network vocabulary only in a metaphorical way. But even though we seriously try to collect and analyze historical data by means of network analytical methods, there are various problems and restrictions. Some of them are discussed in this volume.

One obvious objection is the availability of sources, which is a ubiquitous theme of all the articles: either we seem to have no sufficient data or the wrong data. Written records, for instance, can normally only document long-distance relationships. Consequently, they often draw an "inverted picture" of the medieval face-to-face society (31). In search of historical networks we construct "artefacts of research" (19) that can lead to false conclusions. Furthermore, it is very difficult to reproduce dynamics of networks — we often have only a "snapshot" or an addition of chronologically different network data (31, 52). Quite rightly, the editors express their "warning to use the network theory without reflection" and their "encouragement of the irreplaceable qualities of verification of sources and its methods" (12). Every collection and analysis of network data, which is historically blind, must doubtlessly fail.

Some of the articles give very impressive examples for that claim. Kristina Odenweller and Jessika Nowak contribute case studies on two humanistic texts. At first view, a reconstruction of the personal networks of the humanistic authors seems to be possible. But both texts — the well-known memory book of the Paduan jurist Giovan Francesco Capodilista and the letter book of Rolando Talenti, the secretary of Zanone di Castiglione, bishop of Bayeux — are by no means simple mirrors of the personal background of the protagonists. The letter book of Rolando Talenti, for example, can be interpreted as a sort of "application portfolio" (84) of the secretary who wanted to show his rhetorical skills and good contacts to important persons, while politically displeasing writings were probably eliminated.

Communication networks are also the issue of some other papers. The article of Bastian Walter-Bogedain, for instance, examines the correspondence of some merchants and town clerks from Switzerland and the Upper Rhine region during the Burgundian Wars in the 1470s. The establishment of information channels and the use of the influential potential of personal relationships were crucial for medieval politics, both on the smaller and larger scales. This idea is also the basis of the essay by Jörg Schwarz, who introduces the biography of Johannes Waldner. This famous social climber and chancellor of Emperor Frederic III committed suicide in 1502 when he lost his former influence at the court of Vienna. Schwarz's research demonstrates the chances but also the challenges of the reconstruction of "ego-networks": on the one hand, it is very fruitful for a better understanding of medieval politics and especially of the functionality of princely courts; but, on the other hand, the cost-benefit ratio remains problematic. Nevertheless, historical network research has great prospects, especially in the investigation of medieval courts, shown in the essays of Andreas Fischer (about the

Roman curia in the thirteenth century) and Andreas Bihrer (about the court of the bishops of Konstanz in the fourteenth century).

Two articles by Christoph Dartmann and Gerald Schwedler are dedicated to the phenomenon of "anti-networking," which is also visible in medieval sources. Dartmann investigates the political system of the medieval Italian urban communes, which were strongly influenced by various network structures. Political instruments, like certain elements of electoral procedures and the institution of the *podestà*, obviously served the purpose of limiting the influence of personal networks. Schwedler discusses monastic practices of "breaking the networks" between monks and the world. A brief summary (Christian Hesse) closes the volume.

*Die Grenzen des Netzwerks* is a book without mathematics and sociograms. But thanks to its interesting case studies and elaborate methodological considerations, it can be regarded as a remarkable contribution to recent historical network research and Renaissance studies.

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