Norse Greenland settlement: reflections on climate change, trade, and the contrasting fates of human settlements in the North Atlantic Islands

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Abstract

Changing economies and patterns of trade, rather than climatic deterioration, could have critically marginalized the Norse Greenland settlements and effectively sealed their fate. Counter-intuitively, the end of Norse Greenland might not be symptomatic of a failure to adapt to environmental change, but a consequence of successful wider economic developments of Norse communities across North Atlantic. Data from Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and medieval Iceland is used to explore the interplay of Norse society with climate, environment, settlement, and other circumstances. Long term increases in vulnerability caused by economic change and cumulative climate changes sparked a cascading collapse of integrated interdependent settlement systems, bringing the end of Norse Greenland.

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