



## National museums in Denmark

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### Summary

From royal and private collections at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the monarchy established what would become the two main national museums in the country – one for art *Statens Museum for Kunst* (The State Art Museum) and one for archaeology, ethnology, ethnography and history *Nationalmuseet* (The National Museum). No doubt the archaeology museum was, from the very beginning, significant in creating a historically founded Danish nationalism that can be detected in the composition and priorities of the national museums. A young democratic Denmark continued on the same path and established a series of regional satellites. Then, in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, we see two private initiatives which both aimed to reach the people with feelings of Danish nationalism. One, by establishing a national picture gallery, may be seen as coming from the right *Det Nationalhistoriske Museum på Frederiksborg Slot* (The National Historical Museum at Frederiksborg Castle) and one, by establishing a folk museum including an open air museum after Swedish inspiration, may be seen as coming from the left - *Dansk Folkemuseum* (The Danish Popular History Museum). A few decades into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the later of these initiatives was incorporated into *Nationalmuseet* (The National Museum).

Besides the establishing of several aspect or disciplinary museums during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, museum history in Denmark seems to have been relatively calm with only a few disturbances created by the establishing of independent national or semi-national museums among the former colonies in the North Atlantic. That development also seems to have gone from a case with Iceland that was not altogether easy to a more harmonious case with the Faroe Islands. Finally it went on to the successful role model case with the establishing of a national museum in Greenland. However one way to interpret the isolated hot-tempered debate regarding the transfer of early medieval Icelandic manuscripts in the 1960s from Copenhagen to Reykjavik is the traditional popular mythological relation of the stories told in the manuscripts to the special role of archaeology and especially Viking age archaeology in Denmark since the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Taking away the manuscripts from Danish soil was, for nationalistic forces, like amputating the roots of Danish national identity.

Government control of the national museums in Denmark seems to have made museum development relatively harmonious whilst discussions about collections or special artefacts like the Icelandic early medieval manuscripts and the Danish victory lion in Isted have been placed outside the professional museum world since the private right wing and left wing national museum initiatives in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

## Summary table, Denmark

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
National Museum <i>Nationalmuseet</i> (NM)	1819, 1892, 1929-36 1989-92 (major changes)	1807	King, Aristocracy and Civil Society	State	Archaeology, Cultural History, Ethnography	Territorial, ethno-national and universal	Stone Age to contemporary society	Baroque palace in central Copenhagen.
The National Gallery of Denmark <i>Statens Museum for Kunst</i> (SMK)	1827, 1896 1969- 70 1992-96 (extensions)	1754	King, Aristocracy, civil society	State	Danish and Western European classical art	Primarily territorial	1500-1900	Neo-classical building, in central Copenhagen.
The Museum of National History <i>Det nationalhistoriske museum</i> (NHM)	1882	1878	Private initiative by capitalist and industrial elite, endorsed by parliament.	Private foundation	Art (portraits merited citizens moments history)	Territorial	1500 to contemporary society	Re-built renaissance castle, North of Copenhagen.
The Danish Folk Museum <i>The Open Air Museum, Dansk Folkemusuem, Frilandsmuseet</i> (DF)	1886 1920	1879 1901	Private initiative by academic and radical elite in Copenhagen, support from capitalist establishment, endorsed by parliament.	Private under state control, later state owned	Cultural history (popular history in 17 <sup>th</sup> to 19 <sup>th</sup> c.). Agricultural Denmark with houses from lost territories.	Territorial	1700-1900	Rural houses originally in central Copenhagen. Moved north of the capital (1901).

## **Introduction: The roots**

The primary roots of national museums in Denmark – meaning creating collections intended to reflect national history for the public and by that creating a sense of national collective memory – is found in *Det kongelige kunstkammer* (The Royal Chamber of Art, hereafter DKK) established during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. This royal collection of both natural, cultural and art objects was a result of both collecting on behalf of, and donations to, the king and even absorbing different private collections from noble men and academics. Even noble collections from defeated princes were merged into DKK as was the case in 1751 when the vast collections from Gottorp Castle in Slesvig was made a part of the Danish royal collections.

During the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, parts of DKK were removed to form their own collections. That was the case for the collection of coins, the collection of natural history and even most of the art collection. The latter seems to have primarily consisted of portraits at that time. None of these collections were museums in the modern sense as they were primarily intended for scientific use and as memorabilia by royal decision. The collections had no popular educative purpose before the end of the Napoleonic wars. The collections were considered private and were status symbols for the princes who had created them or conquered them.

With the loss of Norway in 1814, the need to shape ‘Danishness’ grew and this tendency became even stronger after the loss of the German speaking provinces of Sleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg in 1864. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a system was established with four museums in Denmark who could all claim to be national museums as their collections reflected national history and they had a public educative purpose. They all claimed to exhibit the history of Denmark and/or the Danish people. Their more or less official task would be to contribute to national pride and to foster nationalism in citizens (Feldbæk 1991-1992).

## **The very different periods of foundations: 1819-1827 and 1878-1885**

### **Nationalmuseet**

First out was what would become *Nationalmuseet* (The National Museum, hereafter NM). In 1807, the Danish king created a special commission – *Den kongelige Kommission til Oldsagers Opbevaring* (The Royal Commission for Ancient Collections Preservation) – to provide an overview of the collections and the cultural environment in the kingdom which reflected its ancient past. The Commission and its enthusiastic and effective secretary Christian Jürgensen Thomsen took the initiative to create and open *Oldnordisk Museum* (The Nordic Ancient Museum, hereafter OM) in 1819 in the Trinitatis Church in Copenhagen. The museum was open to the public and Mr Thomsen created a system in the archaeological collections with focus on material that actually became a governing principle in Nordic archaeology for generations and his systematic approach to archaeology even made its mark internationally. It would probably be accurate to say that the success of Christian Jürgensen Thomsen’s invention of the archaeological three period system, based on the material of the findings, provided an important background on the sustainability of the archaeological field as the basis for a narrative on the roots of the Danes. Thereby it became the ammunition for Danish nationalism. To a large extend we owe to Mr Thomsen for

archaeology becoming the primary tool from the past during the first waves of Danish nationalism.

It is significant that the establishing of a museum for ancient history was carried out at the same time as different commissions from 1821 onwards were working on proposals on what to do with the rest of the collections in DKK. In 1832, the collections of the OM were transferred to better premises at Christiansborg Castle in Copenhagen and Mr Thomsen even got responsibility for what was then remaining of the collections in DKK. The collections from personal belongings of the kings of Denmark were gathered at the small Rosenborg Castle in Copenhagen and the large natural collections were made into a natural museum. The paintings were made into a museum of their own – see below.

By the Danish constitution of 1849, a distinction was made between the private royal and the publicly owned collections and it was decided that the publicly owned collections should be given permanent residence in *Prindsens palais* (The Palais of the Prince) which is located near the Christiansborg Castle and is still the main premises of the museum. In 1892, the museum got its present name *Nationalmuseet* (NM) as it absorbed other smaller collections such as ethnographic as well as coin and medal collections (Mordhorst 2003 & Rasmussen 1979).

NM has, since the beginning, been situated in the Prindsens palais in the middle of Copenhagen. The building was built for the royal family between 1743-1744 as home for the crown prince – later Frederik the Fifth. In 1849, it was transferred to the new Danish State after the abolition of absolutism the year before. It had also been used for many different things, over the next decades, among them some museum exhibitions, before it finally became home to the new NM in 1892. Twice there have been major reconstructions. The first time was in 1929-1936 where several complementary buildings were created when the original garden of the royal home was included in the building and the second time in 1989-1992 where the area for exhibitions was made much larger. The roots in the old royal town house are however, visible in several areas of the NM.

### **Statens Museum for Kunst**

The collections of paintings in RCA from 1827 formed the new museum called *Det Kongelige Billedgalleri* (The Royal Picture Gallery, hereafter DKB) that was open to the public as was the case with OM a few years before. Unlike other parts of the old royal Chamber, the picture gallery had, from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, established a major collection of paintings from other parts of Europe. Paintings on order from the king were bought in Europe from Italian, Dutch and German schools. The acquisition of the collections from Gottorp Castle in Slesvig even brought in a major, mainly German collection of paintings.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century saw the development of high quality art in Denmark. The result of the establishment of artist education professionalization in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in Copenhagen by *Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi* (The Royal Danish Art Academy); this development was recognized by the DKB why the collections of Danish contemporary art was a major task during the whole 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

The museum was, from the beginning, housed in Christiansborg Castle and the collections were rescued from the great fire of that castle in 1884. A new building of impressive monumental

style stood ready in 1896 and the museum was reopened under its modern name *Statens Museum for Kunst* (The State Art Museum, hereafter SMK) (Rasmussen 1979).

The museum building was constructed between 1889-1896 on what was then part of the new area in Copenhagen. It was, at the time, the first building in Denmark created and built for museum use without being a reconstruction of an earlier building. Italian renaissance inspired the architect.

Already in the 1920s there were several plans for an extension of the building but it was in 1969-1970 that the government finally reconstructed the interior of the building to make room for larger exhibitions and the fast growing collections. Between 1992-1998, a new modernist building was erected and connected to the original renaissance building in order to create more room, especially for sculptures.

### **Det Nationalhistoriske Museum på Frederiksborg Slot**

By accident, the royal renaissance castle Frederiksborg burned down in 1859. Only the castle church and a reception house were rescued. Many saw this catastrophe as a tragedy and a national collect of contributions was successful in helping to rebuild the castle.

With private donations as well as contributions from the government and the king, it was possible to rebuild the castle and already in 1865 – just one year after the Danish defeat in The Second Slesvig War and the reduction of the kingdom to a minor marginalized European state – the Frederiksborg castle was rebuilt and considered ready for interior design. The plan from the beginning of the national collection process had been to re-establish the castle for royal use but since then the old king had died, the new king was not as popular and the country was in a severe economic situation after the war. The government would not invest in a new royal home.

The old castle had a major private royal collection of paintings, among other things, but only some 300 paintings had been rescued so there were grounds for claiming that a major part of national heritage had been lost.

One of the more potent industrialists in Denmark during this pioneer period of Danish industrialization was brewer and founder of Carlsberg, I. C. Jacobsen. He was interested in history and saw the need to create a reference frame for popular understanding of the importance of the situations that were of major – and mainly political – importance in national history. The brewer managed to gather interest and moral support for his project from the capitalist and industrial elite in the country but it was important for him that the project, as such, got associated with his name as it suited his ambitions in regard to positioning in society. Mr Jacobsen was inspired by what he had seen at Versailles in France and he thus proposed to the government that a national history museum be established at Frederiksborg Castle. He also declared that he would donate the money necessary for the establishment of the museum. The proposal was approved and, in 1878, the museum was formally established and, in 1882, it was opened to the public under the name *Det Nationalhistoriske Museum på Frederiksborg Slot* (The National Historical Museum at Frederiksborg Castle, hereafter NHM). The museum was organized as a special branch of the Carlsberg Foundation and remains so to this day (Rasmussen 1979).

### **Dansk Folkemuseum**

When the former art director at Tivoli and present director of Panoptikon in Copenhagen Bernhard Olsen visited the World Exhibition in Paris in 1878, he experienced the three

dimensional way in which Arthur Hazelius, the founder of *Skandinavisk Etnografisk Museum* in Stockholm (later renamed *Nordiska Museet*) showed full scale vivid glimpses of Swedish popular history. Bernhard Olsen wanted to do something similar in Denmark and in the following year, 1879, he succeeded in creating something similar at an exhibition on traditional crafts hosted by the Danish Industrial Association and others in Copenhagen. The interest for this way of exhibiting cultural history was immense and in the next five years a committee with Bernhard Olsen as the driving force collected funds nationwide to create the basis for a new popular museum. In 1885, *Dansk Folkemuseum* (The Danish Popular History Museum, hereafter DF) opened in Copenhagen with several full-scale interior exhibitions of note especially that of rural popular cultural history from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century and that of craftsmen. Mr Olsen, in many ways, represented the new academic and bourgeois radical elite in Copenhagen that, shortly after the national tragedy of territorial loss to the Austrians and Prussians in 1864, saw Danish nationality closely connected to its agricultural past before modernisation began from 1869 onwards. In that respect, Mr Olsen's initiative was in practical opposition to the heritage brought about by Mr Thomsen, the founder of what became NM in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and who had put an emphasis on the archaeological past.

Already during the primary collecting and preparatory period before the opening, the committee had some financial support from the government. Just a year after the opening, a division of labour between DF and OM (later NM) was negotiated which, in reality, ordered that DM should concentrate on cultural history between 1660 -1849 – the epoch of Danish absolutism. According to the same agreement, the new museum would get governmental support via yearly grants. In reality, the museum was made public but strived to have its own leadership and governing structure while the private committee would continue as a board and Bernhard Olsen himself would be the director of the museum.

Following his role model in Stockholm, Bernhard Olsen also wanted to create not only full-scale interiors but also environments with full-scale houses and the documentation and collecting of such houses began immediately. In 1896, DF was able to show the first houses erected in a corner of Rosenborg Castle garden in central Copenhagen. There was, however, no political will to let the Open Air Museum grow at this location and in 1901 the collection of houses was placed in what was called *Frilandsmuseet* in Kgs. Lyngby just north of Copenhagen. Both indoor exhibitions still in Copenhagen at the former Panoptikan building and the Open Air Museum were loyal to the period which DF was supposed to exhibit and therefore, houses and interiors collected in long lost southern Sweden (under the Danish crown until 1658), Norway (under the Danish crown until 1814) and from Sleswig-Holstein (under the Danish crown until 1864), were shown.

In 1920, when Bernhard Olsen retired, DF, including the Open Air Museum, was incorporated into NM as a special department and the private committee ended its work (Christiansen 2000 & Rasmussen 1979).

The establishment of national museums in Denmark is characterized by initiatives early in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and a new museum surge in the later quarter of the same century. The first period is marked by an attempt to bring order to the chaos of the royal collections and at the same time make them publicly accessible. In this work especially, the establishment of OM with its connection to initiatives to preserve ancient traces in the landscape of Denmark made an impact

on the visualization of national characterization in Denmark. The intense period just before and after 1880 saw two very different private initiatives with the establishing of NHM and DF. Both initiatives were born from the loss in the war of 1864 and both had the ambition to stimulate national identity but used different methods and furthermore, got the arsenal for such an effort from different places. For NHM, the main method was to exhibit paintings that showed important moments in the narrative of national history. For DF, the method was to exhibit everyday life for common people who could be proud of their life and their efforts to survive and develop the country.

In between the period of government initiatives for national museums from 1819-1827 and the private initiatives for national museums from 1878-1885, we can actually find an initiative that demonstrates how the whole idea of the national museum was being communicated to the population through the establishment of a large provincial museum in each of the Danish dioceses. These could be the regional storerooms and exhibitions for OM. The initiative seems to go hand in hand with the spirit of the first Danish constitution of 1849 and the ambition of getting the nation state visible in all parts of the country. The initiative came from the central administration and was passed through the young parliament. During a very short period of time, diocese museums were established in Ribe (1855), Odense and Århus (1860), Viborg (1861), Aalborg (1863), Randers (1872) and finally Maribo (1879). After this effort of spreading the sense of the national museum throughout almost all dioceses, this development stopped relatively abruptly. The reason for that can probably be found in the new centralistic policy from the national museum (Rasmussen, 1979). The issue of these provincial museums has however never really been researched.

Both NM and SMK, with beginnings in 1819 and 1827 respectively, grew out of OM during the absolute rule of a relatively large kingdom in Northern Europe. They formed in 1892 and 1896 respectively using their present day institutional names when, for little more than a generation, democratic rule of law had been the case in one of the smallest national states in Europe. This young democratic nation state tried, through provincial satellite museums, to engage the public nationwide. This was possibly realized as a top-bottom and academic initiative which therefore paved the way for private right and left initiatives such as NHM and DF. Also possible is that the final structuring of NM and SMK in the 1890s should be seen as a response to the private initiatives. The critical position at what became the NM, toward both provincial museums and DF, is well known. In the end, NM got control of the situation and took over DF in 1925.

### **The aspect or disciplinary national museums in Denmark**

During the 18-1900s, a number of specialized museums were established and the character of their collections or of their theme one of these has defined each museum. Even though the collections or themes intend to cover Denmark, the museums themselves are dominated by their specific collections or theme and have no formal intention of creating a sense of national belonging for the public.

The first such specialized national museums in Denmark were *Det Kongelige Naturhistoriske Museum* (The Royal Natural Museum) and *De Danske Kongers Kronologiske Samling* (The Danish

Kings Chronological Collections) both established in 1821 and *Den Historiske Våbensamling* (The Historical Collection of Amour) established in 1838.

The next expansion of specialized national museums came with *Danmarks Fiskerimuseum* (Fishery Museum of Denmark) founded in 1888 and *Dansk Landbrugsmuseum* (The Danish Agricultural Museum) founded in 1889. The last museum in the first wave of specialized national museums founded in Denmark was *Det Danske Kunstindustrimuseum* (The Danish Museum of Decorative Art) in 1890.

Where the first of these museums established in 1821-1838 all had their roots in DKK from the 16-1700s, the royal private collections as well as all the museums founded in 1888-1890 came into being on an initiative from national organizations of stakeholders. Each of these organisations could be found in the spheres covered by the museum's thematic collections. The private character of the museums did not exclude financial support from the government. This development is quite similar to the development seen above for the real national museums and even the timing is interesting since the private initiatives for national museums came in 1878-1885. Furthermore, the first wave of private initiatives for specialized aspect national museums came shortly afterwards in 1888-1890 and was branch-initiated; whereas the roots of the private initiatives for national museums can be characterized as bourgeois industrialist and bourgeois academic.

The founding of specialized aspect museums with ambitions of national coverage in their collections and narrative has continued. The following is a list of such foundations but it is probably not complete as there exists museums with very special collections amassing everything from clocks or radio receivers to aeroplanes and posters, all of which claim to be "The Danish Museum of .....", however, they are not officially registered.

- *Musikhistorisk Museum* (Music Historical Museum) - founded in 1898 by an association of individual enthusiasts.
- *Medicin-Historisk Museum* (Medical Historical Museum) - founded in 1907 by the Copenhagen University – in modern time re-named *Medicinsk Museum*.
- *Dansk Postmuseum* (Danish Post Museum) - founded in 1907 on the basis of a major private collection. The museum was established by the government agency for postal service that today also runs and governs the museum. In 1931, the museum changed its name to *Dansk Post og Telegrafmuseet* because of the governmental merging of two agencies. Furthermore, in connection with a modernisation of the museum in 2004 its name changed to *Post & Tele Museum*. The agency was formally privatized and changed into a registered company in modern times.
- *Den gamle By – Danmarks Købstadsmuseum* (The Old Town – The Urban Museum of Denmark) - founded in 1909 on a private initiative in connection with a national exhibition on urban life. The museum remains private but is recognized by the government.
- *Danmarks Tekniske Museum* (The Danish Technical Museum) - founded in 1911 by the Danish Association of Industrialists. The museum remains private but is recognized by the government.



- *Dansk Jernbanemuseum* (Danish Railway Museum) - founded in 1928 by the government agency for railroad service and is still governed by that agency which has been formally privatized and changed into a registered company in modern times.
- *Gilleleje Museum* - founded in 1929 as both a local museum and a national fishery museum because of vast collections in this area. The museum was founded by a local history association. That association still governs the museum and it is even recognized by the government.
- *Handels- og Søfartsmuseum* (The Maritime Museum) - founded in 1931. It was created by and is, even today, still largely run by the maritime branch but recognized by the government.
- *Jagt og Skovbrugsmuseet* (Hunting and Forest Museum) - founded in 1942 by the government and is still solely run by the government.
- *Dansk Pressemuseum og Arkiv* (Danish Media Museum and Archive) - founded in 1955 by an association primarily composed of the media sector. The museum changed its name to *Danmarks Mediemuseum* (Media Museum of Denmark) in 2003.
- *Orlogsmuseet* (The Navy Museum) - founded in 1957 by the navy. In 2004 it merged with *Tøjhusmuseet* formerly called *Den Kongelige Våbensamling* (The Royal Collection of Armour) and is still governed by the government.
- *Dansk Fiskeri- og Søfartsmuseum* (The Danish Fishery and Maritime Museum) - founded in 1962 on a private local initiative and is still governed locally but recognized by the government
- *Arbejdermuseet* (The Working Class Museum) - founded in 1983 by the Labour Unions. They still govern it but the government recognizes it. In 2004, the museum merged with *Arbejderbevægelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv* (The Labour Movements Library and Archive).
- *Kvindemuseet* (The Womens Museum) - founded in 1984 by an association of enthusiasts that still govern the museum but the government recognizes it.
- *Immigrantmuseet* - founded in 1995 as part of a locally-governed museum but it is recognized by the government

The list uncovers some characteristics. First of all, the driving force of establishing more museums with national coverage has not been so much by the government as it has by local or branch forces. Secondly, there has been some local competition where at least three localities have founded fishery or maritime museums with national or at least semi-national aspirations. That also reflects the development of some border conflicts between the parallel founding of many local museums and the national museums, especially that of the aspect national museums. From time to time a local museum has a self-imposed national responsibility for an aspect of history or a special type of object. In the list above, such developments and even some frictions are seen in the initiatives in Gilleleje with a fishery theme early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and in Farum at the end of that century with an immigration theme.

## **The separatist national museums within the Danish kingdom**

The three northern Atlantic territories of Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland have all developed semi-national or national museums as more or less integrated parts of the process by which they have created their own national identity that is clearly separated from Denmark and a Danish national identity. It is naturally very difficult to see the construction of separate national identities of the northern Atlantic territories separated from the construction and development of the Danish national identity. Furthermore, it may also be disputable whether or not development in this sphere for each of the territories has brought influence from one to another.

### **Iceland**

For Iceland, a parliament was established with an advisory role in 1845 and that may be perceived as a starting point for an Icelandic separatist movement. Almost one hundred years later, in 1944, separation from Denmark was completed. The formation of a national museum in Iceland was closely related to this development. In 1851, the Danish government allowed for a special assembly to be called in Iceland for discussions about the constitutional future of Iceland. The timing, from the point of view of the Danish government, could have been better as the First Slesvig War had just been brought to an end – a war which, at its core, was not only about independence for the mostly German speaking duchies under the Danish crown but was also about the spread of parliamentary democracy. As Icelandic representatives went too far - for Danish tastes - with their aspirations for independence, the government in Copenhagen sent the assembly home and the first real attempt to find common ground in the discussions ended.

One initiative coming from this early unfortunate and confrontational development was the founding of a national museum for Iceland in 1863 that took place on a private initiative from the painter Sigurður Guðmundsson. The name of the museum was *Þjóðminjasafn Íslands* that can best be translated as “The Memory Collections of Iceland”.

After full independence in 1944, the museum functioned like a national museum in all archaeological, cultural history and art history aspects. The hot-tempered discussions in the 1960s about the return of the early 13<sup>th</sup> Century Icelandic Saga manuscripts from Denmark were formally an archive or library dispute and did not involve the museum but were probably symbolic in relation to the heritage shared between the former colony and Denmark in the first decades after the separation. It is, however, important to also mention that the collaboration between the young national museum in Iceland and NM in Copenhagen has been very dynamic and open. Major parts of the Icelandic collections in Copenhagen are now deposited in the national museum in Reykjavik.

### **The Faroe Islands**

*Føroya Forngrípagoymsla* (The Faroe Historical Collections) - founded in 1898 and was the result of an initiative by writer and political nationalist Jóannes Patursson in 1890 with direct inspiration from an important meeting about the preservation of Faroe cultural heritage just before Christmas in 1888.

It was, from the beginning, a private museum depending on the volunteer work of a few people. In 1916, a historical society for Faroe history was founded and this association took some responsibility for the museum. It was, however, still difficult to get enough resources to carry out

the normal activities for this museum. In the 1940s, a bond between a Faroe historian with special interest in Viking history – Sverri Dahl – and the museum was established with a special focus on the Viking era that became equally important for the museum and the characteristics of Faroe collective cultural historical identity.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, the Faroe Islands were occupied by British troops while German forces occupied Denmark. After the war, it was clear to both the locals and the Danish Government that restoration of a county governing arrangement was not what the Faroe islanders really wanted. The proposal, with a solution from the Danish government, was not satisfying to the Faroe negotiators and in 1946, the local parliament held a referendum on the Faroe Islands accepting the Danish ‘offer’ or seeking independence. The referendum resulted in a majority voting for independence but the Danish government immediately abandoned the parliament. New negotiations led to legislation for the Faroe Islands with some degree of home rule beginning in 1948.

It was in the atmosphere of the aftermath of this development that the Faroe parliament, in 1952, decided that the *Føroya Forngrípagoymsla* (The Faroe Historical Collections) should officially be renamed *Føroya Fornminnisavn* (The Faroe Historical Museum). The status, in modern times, is undisputedly that of a semi-national museum for the Faroe Islands. The staff know it and the Faroe Islands local government and parliament know it and it is symbolic that, in recent times, the address of the museum homepage has become: [www.natmus.fo](http://www.natmus.fo).

## **Grønland**

In Greenland, it took longer than in the other northern Atlantic territories to gather enough interest and support for constructing a national identity and the need for a semi-national museum. A reason for that may be found in the composition of the inhabitants in Greenland. With a relatively large number of the inhabitants being first or second generation immigrants from Denmark, often these people held much higher regard for social and cultural capital. During most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it has not been in the interest of this group to challenge the question of national identity.

Greenland was officially a Danish colony up until 1953 when Greenland was transformed into a County. In 1979, this status was replaced by legislation much like the one for the Faroe Islands regarding home rule. Development in Greenland was in many ways considered at least 30-40 years behind. That also goes for engagement in the heritage and identity of the people in Greenland that may be seen as having been even further behind that of Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

In 1968, *Grønlands Landsmuseum* (Greenland County Museum) was founded on a joint initiative from locals and museum people as well as the Ministry of Culture in Denmark. After the introduction of home rule in 1979, the large Greenland collections in NM in Copenhagen were divided up and a major part was relocated to Greenland. In 1991, the Greenland government decided to give the museum a formal national status and to merge it with the provincial archive for Greenland that had been established in 1982. The new institution was, from 1991, renamed – in native Inuit language - *Nunatta Katersugaasivia Allagaateqarfialu* or in Danish *Grønlands Nationalmuseum og Arkiv* (Greenland National Museum and Archive). This organization exercises full traditional national museum – and archival – responsibilities and tasks. Also, for this museum

there has been a great deal of help from NM in Copenhagen much the same way as it had been for Iceland. Actually, the repatriation process for collections, combined with depositions of large collections from Denmark to Greenland, has been used as a role model in literature from UNESCO (Pentz 2004).

### **The study of relation between politics, professionalization and the museums**

The classic work on Danish museum history is still the 30 year old monograph “Dansk museumshistorie” by Holger Rasmussen. It is a solid and relatively detailed description of both the museums and the politics that formed them. Unfortunately, it only covers cultural history museums but art museums are left out.

The roots from the 17th and 18th centuries are thoroughly analysed recently by Camilla Mordhorst in “Genstandsfortællinger. Fra Museum Wormanium til de moderne museer” from 2009. Otherwise modern museum history and the historical development of art museums will be partially found in a number of articles and monographs about individual museums.

Works on national identity development however, compensates to some degree at least, for the political background and the cultural history context surrounding the founding and development of the national museums. The most central works are the anthology “Dansk identitetshistorie” edited by Ole Feldbæk 1991-1992 and the voluminous monograph “Nationale symboler i Det Danske Rige 1830-2000” by Inge Adriansen 2003. In the later part of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century, development in Denmark is characterized by a struggle between some academic historians and archaeologists who focused on political history as the ‘real’ or important history on the one side and on the other side, academic historians and archaeologists who saw the historical development of everyday life for ordinary people as the central issue which would preoccupy both research and museums. Palle Ove Christiansen wrote, in 2000, the monograph “Kulturhistorie som opposition. Træk af forskellige fagtraditioner”. The argumentation in this book, to a large degree, explains the founding of the non-governmental national museums in the 1870s and 1880s.

Recent developments in regard to restructuring of the Danish museum landscape in the 1970s using new museum legislation and again in the beginning of the 21st Century with the merging of many museums on local level as well as on national level are less studied by historians. The changes in the 1970s however, are well documented and even explained by Holger Rasmussen (see above) in his work from 1979. As well, the most recent political development on central level is documented in easily accessible documents from the Cultural Department.

Combined with some interviews of central researchers and public servants, it should be possible to get an impression of the national museum’s role and their relation to the ongoing constructing and reconstructing of the nation state.

In Peter Pentz’s article from 2004, “Utmut-Return: the return of more than 35000 cultural objects to Greenland” an in depth description and analysis of the repatriation process between Denmark and Greenland is found and is considered a good starting point for the study of the formation and development of the separatist national museums.

## Conclusions on harmony and disharmony in the museum evolution

The narrative of the development of the museums in Denmark may look very harmonious not least in comparison to that of other European countries.

From royal and private collections at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the absolute monarchy established what would become the two main national museums in the country – one for art, SMK and one for archaeology, ethnology, ethnography and history, NM. No doubt the archaeology museum was, from the very beginning, especially important in creating a historically founded Danish nationalism that can be detected in the composition and priorities of the national museums. Maybe the search for national roots in archaeological findings was a way of finding national roots despite the fact that the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century absolute Danish monarchy ruled over a conglomerate state with Danish, Norwegian and German languages and cultures (and even the special dialects and languages in their own right on the North Atlantic on the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland).

A young democratic Denmark continued on the same path and established a series of regional satellites. By the time of the democratic breakthrough in 1849 and even more after the loss of the German speaking duchies Slesvig and Holsten, there had grown a need for seeking a national identity in the rapidly changing and even disappearing rural society and to do this without replacing the older tradition of archaeological engagement.

In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century we see two private initiatives which both aimed to reach the people with the feelings of Danish nationalism. One with establishing a national picture gallery may be seen as coming from the right NHM and one with establishing a folk museum including an open air museum after Swedish inspiration may be seen as coming from the left - DF. A few decades into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century one of these initiatives – DF – was incorporated into NM. Especially the DF follows the path of seeking the roots of national identity in rural society where as the NM had continued the dedication to archaeology. By incorporating the DF in NM in the 1920ies archaeology and rural romance finally merged.

Besides the establishment of several aspect or disciplinary museums during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, museum history in Denmark seems to have been relatively calm with only a few disturbances created by the establishing of independent national or semi-national museums among the former colonies in the North Atlantic. That development also seems to have gone from a case with Iceland that was not altogether easy to a more harmonious case with the Faroe Islands. Finally, it went on to the successful role model case with the establishing of a national museum for Greenland. However one way to interpret the isolated hot-tempered debate on the transfer of early medieval Icelandic manuscripts in the 1960s from Copenhagen to Reykjavik is the traditional popular mythological relation of the stories told in the manuscripts to the special role of archaeology and especially Viking age archaeology in Denmark since the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Taking away the manuscripts from Danish soil was, for nationalistic forces, to amputate the roots of Danish national identity. There appears to have been no similar discussions or popular debate about other collections in relation to the establishing of national museums in the North Atlantic territories. The representation of lost territories in Danish museums and especially NM also has its special preconditions. Collections of North Atlantic and German origin are to be found in Danish national museums and major collections have been transferred out of what is now Denmark. That is even the case for smaller parts of collections with Norwegian roots whereas

collections with roots in landscapes which since 1658 are part of Sweden have seldom been discussed. That probably has to do with two different circumstances. First of all, even in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the formation of Danish national museums began, it was quite long ago – more than 150 years – since the eastern provinces became part of Sweden. The histories of the provinces were not really used by the Danish absolute monarchy or by the democratic state to construct Danish nationalism. It was quite a different matter with the North German provinces which were lost in 1864 – an intense period in the formation of Danish national identity. Secondly, we can actually find a few traces of how the histories of the Southern Swedish landscapes were used in Danish nationalism. At the DF, a few houses from Scania were collected to be placed at the Open Air Museum. This was when DF was still all-private and certainly a place for popular storytelling. DF used more labour to get houses and farms from the lost provinces in Northern Germany and that also required using more economic resources.

One may ask the critical question why development of museums in Denmark seemed to be relatively peaceful. We also remind ourselves about the situation in Denmark with a reduced kingdom after the loss of Norway in 1814 and later the loss of the duchies of Sleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg in 1864 and thereby becoming a member of the group of small European countries. Denmark has even had its hard experiences during both world wars when a large contingent young Danish-speaking people were forced to fight in World War I and Nazi occupation during World War II. The political outcome of that history has been a situation where Denmark was a close follower and ally to the United Kingdom until the 1940s and since then an even closer follower and ally to the United States of America. For many years, Danish nationalism was more or less defined as being not Germanic. In spite of relatively objective reasons for fostering a Danish nationalism, the national museums do not seem to have been used in an especially strong way in any defence of such nationalism when challenged. Maybe the explanation behind the relatively harmonious national museum history in Denmark can be found in the tendency to place nationalism as a political process outside the museums.

### **The Isted Lion and the unchallenging national museums**

The case of the Isted Lion may illustrate that point. In short, the history is about a monument with a lion that was created in 1859-1860 to commemorate fallen Danish soldiers during the 1<sup>st</sup> Sleswig War and specifically in the battle of Isted in 1850 – the last battle with a Danish victory. In 1862, the statue was placed in the old Flensburg churchyard where many of the fallen Danish soldiers had been buried. The statue and the gesture were the result of a major nationwide collection and was one of the many efforts in a young democratic Denmark after 1849 to foster national pride. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sleswig War in 1864, Flensburg was under Prussian rule and the statue was brought to Berlin where it was placed at the Military Academy in Berlin-Lichterfelde. The symbol of Danish victory was now a symbol of Prussian, and from 1871, German victory. Its popularity was not to be mistaken. Already in 1874, a German banker financed a copy to be placed southeast of Berlin in Heckeshorn by Grosser Wannsee. This lion was called “Der flensburger Lowe” (The Flensburg Lion). It was supposed to mark the final Prussian victory in 1864. In Denmark it was, in popular terminology, called The Falls Lion. The situation with the lions did nothing for Danish self-esteem.

In 1945, after World War II, a Danish journalist persuaded American troops to bring the original lion from Berlin to Copenhagen as a gift to Denmark and, in October of 1945, the Danish king and the government had to show themselves as grateful at a public venue in front of the press. The statue was placed just nearby the *Tøjhusmuseet* (The Royal Collection of Armour). The symbolic location of the lion at the gate of a museum that is supposed to illustrate Danish military history is interesting and was probably the natural choice in 1945. There seems to have been no direct involvement by the museum in choosing this place (Björn 1993 & Adriansen 2003).

Nationalist forces in Denmark could feel some sort of revenge. However the history does not end here. Since 1945, nationalist forces in Denmark and in the southern part of the former duchy of Sleswig have tried to push for a return of the statue to its original location in Flensburg in Germany. The ever-changing Danish governments have been arguing that such a question would only be a political matter if and when the city of Flensburg would ever contact the Danish government about such a request. Again and again, responsible journalists and the occasional politician, but no museum people, have said that a repatriation of the lion to Flensburg and Germany could be misunderstood as a Danish sign of animosity if not aggression. That was absolutely unneeded at a time when the relationship between the two countries should instead be a role model to follow by other parts of Europe.

Around 2000, Flensburger got competition from a group of citizens in Fredericia in southern Denmark not far from the present day border to Germany. The entrepreneurial group in Fredericia said that the second last battle ever to be won by Danish troops had actually taken place in Fredericia just a few weeks earlier than the battle at Isted. It would be good to bring the lion to a place of victory and Denmark could not wait forever for a hypothetical repatriating of the lion to Flensburg. The museums in Fredericia, even though they document and display the military impact on the history of the city, were never involved in this process.

Suddenly, in the summer of 2009, city council in Flensburg almost unanimously decided to ask the Danish government to return the lion. The government had no choice but to take the request seriously and preparation for the return is now in progress and the lion is expected to be in Flensburg sometime during 2011. Now the Danish government is claiming that the lion is coming home and will be a symbol that the time of conflict between Danish and German cultures is over. In the few weeks after the majority decision by city council in Flensburg, there were, of course, initiatives to protest and even a revival of the proposal of moving the lion to Fredericia. The Danish government rely on the populist Danish right wing party for their majority in parliament and actually had to promise that party, in public, to return the lion to Flensburg (Kristoffersen 2009)

The Danish museum world have not been involved publically what so ever in the discussions about the lion. Only comments on the restoration has been seen and then one comment by the director of *Tøjhusmuseet* (The Royal Collection of Armour) who said that he was a little sorry to say goodbye to the lion which for many years has had its place by his museum. That is all!

The case illustrates how national politics in many ways, and especially when it includes controversy, has been lifted out of the Danish museum world. The museums are supposed to conduct their relatively harmless work with collecting, preserving and displaying traces of the material and immaterial past – not much else. The legal basis for all museums in Denmark, being

particularly precise, points out that the task of the museums is to collect, preserve, register, mediate and research. In this way the government not only shows the direction of national museum work in the country but also says how precisely to conduct it. This reflects an approach to heritage thinking which has not taken any influence from academic development under a century. In the Danish context, we also find that it is not in the Department of Culture but in the Department of Education where the government develops the concept of a Danish national narrative in 2008 that is supposed to be a fundament of common knowledge for the citizens. This narrative includes both the first democratic constitution in 1849, the loss of the German speaking duchies in 1864 and their return, through decision in popular referendum by the northern part of Slesvig, in 1920. The museums are supposed to be a backbone for these narratives and there is no incentive to question that. (Nielsen 2008 and Grønder-Hansen 2008)

The case of the Isted lion does not seem to be stuff that may engage the majority of Danes today and even though some nationalist forces show great and passionate interest; the museums are passive. When a Minister of Education takes initiatives on national history narratives, museums are not included in the composition.

The relatively harmonious development of museums on a national level in Denmark may, in this light, be interpreted as the result of a process by which the museums have become rather harmless tools of the government. This is the result that, through the system of museum legislation, combines a very traditional perspective of what the museum is and the way which the museum gets its financing. With this in mind, it is even more interesting in regard to the role of private sponsorships in Danish national museums – both the four pioneering museums with roots in the 17-1800s and the specialised museums, primarily those of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. When NM, in the 1990s, had the primary building complex in Copenhagen repaired and restructured, sponsoring from a major private fund had made it possible. A whole new section of 21<sup>st</sup> Century buildings in *Den gamle By – Danmarks Købstadsmuseum* (The Old Town – The Urban Museum of Denmark) between 2008 and 2014 is privately financed as are the new buildings for a completely restructured *Handels- og Søfartsmuseum* (The Maritime Museum) which should be opened in 2014. On a smaller scale, private money, in the same way, is very important or even dominating throughout the Danish cultural scene when it comes to infrastructure and buildings which attract a major amount of visitors. That seems to be a characteristic that has developed in recent decades.

The private sponsors are often relatively conservative and patriotic. The attraction of these sponsors to the national museums goes hand in hand with the de-politicized museums. The museums themselves are perceived as everything but provocative.

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