

The Academy and International Research in the Humanities

It is obvious that a national academy will, to a large extent, be concerned with matters of national interest. Studies of Denmark's past and present, of the Danish language, art and culture have therefore always figured prominently in the Academy's activities. However, only by force can science and scholarship be compelled to deal exclusively with national and practical problems, and it is chiefly the results of basic research, carried out in fields outside the range of Nordic subjects, to which Danish research in the humanities owes its worldwide reputation. The majority of the scholars who have made such contributions have been connected with the Academy, and in a great many cases highly important treatises dealing with the humanities have been published by the Academy.

Two areas in which the subjects were primarily of national interest, but the results of which attracted attention far beyond the Danish frontiers, are those concerned with SAXO and the prehistory of Denmark. Saxo's historical work *Gesta Danorum* is one of the more extensive writings of the European Middle Ages, and it is an unusually consistent and daring attempt to employ ancient Latin literary prose with Germanic basic material.

Any progress in research on Saxo has therefore been assured attention everywhere among classical philologists, Germanists and medievalists, and since the founding of the Academy in 1742 Saxo has often been the subject of communications in its publications. In more recent times not only Saxo, but also the study of medieval Latin in general have been so assiduously cultivated by Danish philologists, in particular M. CL. GERTZ (1844–1929), HANS RÆDER (1869–1959) and FRANZ BLATT (1904–79) that it was quite natural to entrust the editorial supervision of the new international lexicon of this language, *Novum Glossarium Mediae Latinitatis*, to Danes. A commission under the Academy, headed by Franz Blatt as chairman and editor-in-chief was, until his death, in charge of this publication.

In the very first volume of the Academy's Memoirs, which also became known outside the Danish realm through a Latin translation, ERIK PONTOPPIDAN (1698–1764), dealt with a find from Denmark's prehistory. From this find he deduced that, prior to a period which practised cremation and buried bronze grave goods, there had been a period in which uncremated bodies and flint objects were entombed. It was such observations as this, combined with the ideas of a gradual technological development maintained by ancient Roman authors, that led, half a century later, in the Museum of Danish Antiquity, to the practical representation of the so-called three-period system (the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages). Nevertheless, it was J. J. A. WORSAAE (1821–1885), the founder of the strictly scientific study of prehistory, and

SOPHUS MÜLLER (1846–1934), the great systematist and acute scholar, who long ensured Denmark a leading position in prehistoric archaeology through their European-oriented works. In our own times JOHANNES BRØNDSTED (1890–1965) achieved wide recognition as one of the most knowledgeable scholars of Viking culture; but the research carried out by GUDMUND HATT (1884–1960) on prehistoric houses and fields in Denmark was of greater significance.

However, as earlier indicated, the Academy and its members have gained a particularly enviable reputation for original contributions in other fields of research. Contributions of especial distinction have been made in classical philology proper, Oriental studies, linguistics, and classical and Near Eastern archaeology, subjects which have been eagerly cultivated from the outset, but art history, ethnology, and musicology have also gradually entered the picture. It is hardly remarkable that classical and Oriental subjects were the first to attract attention when we consider that European culture is the product of a centuries-long process built on an ancient foundation, that the sacred texts of the prevailing religion were written in Greek and Hebrew, and for more than a millenium European scholarly literature was chiefly written in Latin.

The names of some of the Danish scholars of classical philology still stand out today, and of them J. N. MADVIG (1804–1886) and J. L. HEIBERG (1854–1928) are the most outstanding. Madvig participated in the establishment of the modern source-critical and text-interpretive



*J. N. MADVIG, president of the Academy 1867-1886
and first chairman of the board of the Carlsberg Foundation.
Painting by CARL BLOCH.*

method; his writings on the theory of languages, as well as his Latin grammar and Greek syntax, were pioneering achievements. Heiberg is particularly

renowned for publishing the works of the Greek mathematicians, natural scientists and physicians. On Heiberg's initiative, shortly after 1900 and in collaboration with the Berlin Academy, the Academy started an edition of the Greek medical texts, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*, and later the Academy took over the publication of the works of the Greek lexicographers, *Corpus Lexicographorum Graecorum*, with A. B. DRACHMANN (1860–1935) as editor.

Oriental studies were given their first real impetus with the material brought back to Denmark by the ambitious Danish expedition to the Orient of 1761–1767. Among other things, this material included copies of the inscriptions at Persepolis. Decisive steps towards the interpretation of these were made by FRIEDRICH MÜNTER (1761–1830), and his results were published in the Academy's Memoirs. Further breakthroughs in the same field were later achieved by RASMUS RASK (1787–1832) and, in particular, by N. L. WESTERGAARD (1815–78). These two scholars, who copied inscriptions and collected manuscripts during long journeys to the Orient, laid the foundations for modern Iranian and Indian philology, fields in which another two Danish scholars have gained themselves international renown: ARTHUR CHRISTENSEN (1875–1945), especially for his work on the Sassanians and his edition of Avesta, the sacred book of the ancient Persians and DINES ANDERSEN (1861–1940), first and foremost as editor of the Academy's publication *A Critical Pāli Dictionary*, the great lexicon of the Indian language in which so much Buddhist literature is written. In

spite of this trend, the old central field of interest in Oriental studies, that of Semitics, has not been neglected in Denmark, and here two scholars should be singled out: FRANTS BUHL (1850–1932) and JOHANNES PEDERSEN (1883–1977). Buhl achieved European recognition for his geography of Palestine, his work on the formation and transmission of the Old Testament and his enlarged, modern edition of the German Gesenius' great Hebrew-Aramaic dictionary – indispensable for any Semitist – and for his portrayal of the founder of the Islamic religion, Muhammad. Pedersen's monumental work on *Israel*, which had enormous influence among both Orientalists and historians of religions all over the world, shed an entirely new light on the original culture and religion of the Israelite people. This he achieved by a thorough analysis of the entire source material, not only the Old Testament, but also the writings of neighbouring peoples as well as archaeological finds. Furthermore, the philologist and historian of religions VILHELM GRØNBECH (1873–1948) wielded no small influence in parts of Europe. When still relatively young, he contributed much to the study of the Turkish language, and later he dealt with the pre-Christian Nordic culture on basic principles corresponding to those used by Pedersen in his studies of *Israel*.

As a Turcologist, Grønbech was a pupil of the linguist VILHELM THOMSEN (1842–1927), who, in being more than an Orientalist, continued the line from Rask. Rask's main efforts concerned the Old Icelandic language and its position in the Indo-European family of languages; but he also dealt

with languages derived from other roots, for example Finnish, and he is perhaps best remembered for establishing the law concerning the Germanic sound shift, whereby, for example, the Romance *p* at the beginning of a word corresponds to our *f*, in a word such as *father*. Thomsen led the way in exploring the Turkish language family by his epoch-making deciphering of the Old Turkish inscriptions at Orkhon in Mongolia. Moreover, he greatly furthered the study of the Finno-Ugri languages, of Lycian, one of the ancient languages of Asia Minor, as well as of Etruscan. The discovery of certain sound laws made by Thomsen and KARL VERNER (1846–96) revolutionized the concept of the original sound system of the Indo-European languages. HOLGER PEDERSEN (1857–1953) pioneered the study of the Celtic languages through his comparative Celtic grammar; he described Tocharian, the old Indo-European Central-Asiatic tongue, and defined a new class of Indo-European languages, the Anatolian. OTTO JESPERSEN (1860–1943) achieved world-wide fame by elucidating the development of the English language and by organizing a new discipline, phonetics. KRISTIAN SANDFELD (1873–1942) was the father of modern Balkan philology, and KURT WULFF (1881–1939) proved the relationship between the Chinese-Tibetan and the Malay-Polynesian languages. Rask and others of his time had already shown an interest in Eskimo languages, but it was WILLIAM THALBITZER (1873–1958) who brought Eskimology into line with the demands of present-day linguistics. KRISTOFFER NYROP (1858–1931) performed outstanding work in

Romance studies, LOUIS HAMMERICH (1892–1975) in German studies and folklore; Hammerich also contributed to the exploration of the Eskimo languages. Together with the distinguished Slavist and leading expert on Russian literature, ADOLF STENDER-PETERSEN (1893–1963), he set about the publication, under the auspices of the Academy, of an Old Russian – Low German phrase-book for merchants dating from 1607 that is a goldmine from the point of view of philology and cultural history: *Tönnies Fenne's Low German Manual of Spoken Russian*. The greatest name in our circle of linguists in recent decades has, however, been that of LOUIS HJELMSLEV (1899–1965), son of the mathematician Johannes Hjelmslev, mentioned in the next chapter. In a revolutionary manner Hjelmslev gave a new orientation to the study of the structure of languages, and in the hitherto most consistent manner he formulated a theory of language. In his view, language was a prerequisite for thinking, and philology was thus the real basic science of the humanities. Although there have been several important philosophers among the members of our Academy, of whom HARALD HØFFDING (1843–1931) in particular won wide respect for his treatment of the history of more recent philosophy, Hjelmslev's theory of language has probably met with greater response abroad than any other philosophical work of a modern Danish humanist. The fact that language research has reached so high a level of development in Denmark, to some extent allowing comparison with the situation in physics where the solution of the problems confronting him led NIELS BOHR

(1885–1962) into philosophy, has often been ascribed to the circumstance that a small nation, more than a large one, has of necessity to learn the principal foreign languages. This explanation is probably not fully adequate: it has certainly also been of importance that the old Danish monarchy encompassed a large linguistic spectrum ranging from Greenlandic, Icelandic and Faeroese, via Norwegian and Danish, to Friesian and German. Moreover, at an early stage the old Danish scholars on their travels to the south and to the Orient fully understood the value of bringing all kinds of manuscripts back home with them.

Classical and Near Eastern archaeology developed side by side with classical philology and Oriental studies. The Academy made its name in archaeological circles outside Denmark through its publication in French in the 1750's of F. L. NORDEN's records of his journeys in Egypt and Nubia (mentioned above by A. Lomholt), but more particularly by numbering among its members such archaeological pioneers as GEORG ZOËGA (1755–1809), the great methodologist of Mediterranean archaeology, FRIEDRICH MÜNTER (1761–1830), one of the founders of Early Christian archaeology, and PETER OLUF BRØNDSTED (1780–1842), who is reckoned among the first field archaeologists in Greece. Three Danish excavations of the same magnitude as those undertaken by large nations – on Rhodes, carried out by K. F. KINCH (1853–1921) and CHRISTIAN BLINKENBERG (1863–1948), at Kalydon by FREDERIK POULSEN (1876–1950) and EJNAR DYGGVE (1887–1961), and at Hama – all became known initially through

the publications of the Academy. The same applies to a large number of the portrait studies of Frederik Poulsen, of Dyggve's writings on Early Christian archaeology, of KNUD FRIIS JOHANSEN'S (1887–1971) interpretations of Greek works of art, and to the well known volumes of JULIUS LANGE (1838–1896) on the representation of the human body in the figurative arts, in which he demonstrated that so-called frontality is a constant phenomenon in all primitive art. Since 1970 the Academy has also published the results of the Danish excavations in Phoenicia. Represented by Christian Blinkenberg, the Academy was, moreover, co-founder of the international publication dealing with ancient painted pottery, the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, to which Denmark has to date supplied eight volumes.

F. L. Norden had already made ethnological observations on his Nile journey, and when in the 1840's the Academy became involved in the organisation of the scientific circumnavigation of the globe by the corvette *Galathea* studies were also made of exotic peoples and their cultures. In more recent times KAJ BIRKET-SMITH (1893–1977) issued his studies of the cultures of the Pacific area in several of the Academy's publications; some of these studies resulted from Birket-Smith's own participation in a new *Galathea* expedition. In this context it should be mentioned that the Academy has now taken the initiative in publishing the Pre-Columbian antiquities that are kept in Denmark in the series *Corpus Antiquitatum Americanensium*. Many of these artifacts were brought to Denmark by the first *Galathea* expedition.

Among the internationally-orientated enterprises of the Academy, finally, is the publication of the music manuscripts of the Orthodox Christian Church in the impressive series *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae*; the musically-talented classical philologist CARSTEN HØEG (1896–1961) played a role in deciphering the Byzantine musical notation and initiated the whole of this work. Also, in more recent musicology, Academy members have achieved world-wide recognition, i.a. KNUD JEPPESEN (1892–1974) for studies in 16th century Italian music, in particular Palestrina.

P. J. RIIS