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Whose Tordenskjold? The Fluctuating Identities of an Eighteenth-Century Naval Hero in Nineteenth-Century Cultural Nationalisms

Abstract

The naval hero Peter Wessel Tordenskjold (1690–1720) was one of the most celebrated historical figures in both nineteenth-century Norway and Denmark. This double national cultivation gave cause for an ongoing feud between Danish and Norwegian historians concerning his true fatherland. At the same time, the uncertainty surrounding his exact nationality offered a wealth of material for narratives of Dano-Norwegian, and even pan-Scandinavian rapprochement. This article explores Tordenskjold's track record as a figure of national cultivation by treating him as a dynamic and transnational memory site (*lieu de mémoire*). It will be demonstrated that the contestation surrounding the ownership of his memory formed an important motivation for the rich artistic cultivation of this national hero, while the symbolic meaning attributed to him was subjected to the ideological needs of the individuals and groups appropriating him. As such, Tordenskjold came to be alternately ingrained in Danish, Norwegian, Dano-Norwegian, and Scandinavian frameworks according to the relevant political and social circumstances.

Keywords

Peter Wessel Tordenskjold, Cultural memory, Cultivation of culture, National heroes, *Lieu de mémoire*

Introduction

Peter Wessel Tordenskjold (1690–1720) belongs to the most beloved and most cultivated national heroes in nineteenth-century Denmark and Norway. The list of songs, poems, stories, plays, novels, and biographies featuring the vice admiral in the leading role is a particularly long one and includes works by such prominent authors as Adam Oehlenschläger, B. S. Ingemann, and Henrik Hertz. On top of these literary appropriations, statues of the historic figure were erected in Copenhagen (1876), Trondheim (1876), and Christiania (1901), while he was immortalized on canvas by the likes of Otto Bache and Christian Mølsted. Finally, streets, squares, and parks were named after him across the two countries, later followed by the naming of, among several others, schools, ships, pubs, restau-

rants, kindergartens, sporting clubs, and – notably – Denmark’s most popular brand of matches.¹

Tordenskjold’s rich nineteenth-century afterlife – his veneration, cultivation, and canonization – has never been studied in much detail. So far, discussion of the topic has been contained to short and largely descriptive sections in biographies and encyclopaedias of the kind ‘writer W wrote novel X, painter Y painted painting Z’. An exception is an MA thesis from 2016 written by Eirik Veivåg Tveit which, however, solely addresses the historiographical tradition on Tordenskjold.² Dan H. Andersen, in the short final chapter of the most recent Danish biography, likewise discusses Tordenskjold’s legacy mainly with reference to history writing and school books, although he also devotes half a page to the matchboxes and mentions some painters and poets in passing.³

In this article, I want to widen the scope to include the fictional and material genres, while emphatically applying a transnational perspective to show two specific dynamics at work in cultural memory in general and the commemoration of Tordenskjold in particular. First, the creative and ideological engagement with the past that we call historicism operates according to its own inner temperature: warming up when the political or social circumstances compel different groups to appropriate Tordenskjold to meet their ideological or artistic needs, and cooling down in times of low topicality to a state of inertia or, adopting Michael Billig’s term, to ‘banal nationalism’. ‘Banal’ refers to that type of nationalism that has retreated to the unremarkable background of everyday life – the street names, statues, schools, pubs, and matches – as the almost unnoticeable but unceasing presence of national-historical identity.⁴ Secondly, and closely related to this first point, the remembered Tordenskjold is highly flexible in his identity, with his perceived ‘nationality’ continuously oscillating between Danish, Norwegian, Dano-Norwegian, and even Scandinavian identity on the same rambling rhythm of political development that informed the motivations of his appropriators. Taking the cue from recent insights from the field of cultural memory studies, I intend to unravel these trends in the nineteenth-century afterlife of Tordenskjold by presenting the eighteenth-century hero as a dynamic and transnational memory site.

1 Moving into the next century, the dashing young hero also appeared in films (in 1910, 1942, and recently in 2016) and a musical (1993). Since 1998, the Danish city of Frederikshavn has organized an annual festival in his memory that over a period of a few days attracts thousands of visitors.

2 Eirik Veivåg Tveit, “*Heil Det gaaer glædelig!*” *Konstruksjonen av viseadmiral Peter Wessel Tordenskjold i dansk og norsk litteratur 1747–1925* (MA Thesis, Høyskolen i Bergen, 2016).

3 Dan H. Andersen, *Mandsmod og kongegenst. En biografi om Peter Wessel Tordenskiold* (Copenhagen: Aschehoug Dansk Forlag, 2004), 383–390.

4 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 6.

Tordenskjold as a Dynamic Site of Memory

In his influential introduction of the term, Pierre Nora saw memory sites, or *lieux de mémoire*, as relatively stable points of reference that help to anchor the nation's historical identity in the public space and the collective consciousness, thus affirming the nation's continued viability in the present.⁵ Memory sites as such not only refer to actual sites, to physical geographical locations, but also to buildings and monuments, works of art, memorial days, symbolic actions, and – being in focus here – historical persons. Key figures from the nation's past, in their capacity as sites of memory, are intentionally invested with symbolic meaning in the service of nation building. Generalizing Jón Karl Helgason's observation on national poets, it can be argued that historic figures through their canonization 'assume a special semiotic role within a society; he or she is idolized, institutionalized and even mobilized in shaping socio-political realities.'⁶ Importantly, then, 'Great Men' (and admittedly to a much lesser extent 'Great Women') were celebrated not only for the remarkable achievements that had generated their fame, but also because they were believed to be exemplary of the nation's character, making their celebration not necessarily one of the honorary person *per se*, but, also of the nation in general.⁷ Through their cultivation across the spectre of cultural production and propagation – ranging from the writing of their biographies and their appearance in historical fiction to the erection of their statues and the institution of memorial days in their honour – national heroes such as Peter Tordenskjold were creatively recruited for the raising of national consciousness.⁸

In recent years, the study of cultural memory has moved away from Nora's understanding of memory sites as stable entities towards a focus on the cultural dynamics in which they function.⁹ Cultural remembrance has now come to be understood as an ongoing mnemonic process in which memory sites are constantly being invested with new meaning. To quote Ann Rigney, this also implies that memory sites, 'while they come into being as points where many acts of

5 Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, [1984–1992] 1997).

6 Jón Karl Helgason, 'The Role of Cultural Saints in European Nation States', in *Culture Contacts and the Making of Cultures. Papers in Homage to Itamar Even-Zohar*, ed. Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Gideon Toury (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Unit of Culture Research, 2011), 245.

7 Jo Tollebeek and Tom Verschaffel, 'Group Portraits with National Heroes: The Pantheon as an Historical Genre in Nineteenth-Century Belgium', *National Identities* 6, no. 2 (2004): 91.

8 Joep Leerssen, 'Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture', *Nations and Nationalism* 12 (2004): 559–578.

9 Ann Rigney, 'Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory', *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 11–28; Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, 'Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics', in *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 1–11.

remembrance converge, only stay alive as long as people consider it worthwhile to argue about their meaning'.¹⁰ As this article will show, these dynamics were clearly at play in Tordenskjold's case: his continuous remediation throughout the nineteenth century, and the many fluctuations in the identities and meanings ascribed to him in the process, were to a large degree the result of the long drawn-out quarrels on who exactly 'owned' his memory.

Nora's conceptualization of memory sites has additionally been criticized for its methodological nationalism.¹¹ The shift from static site to dynamic process has consequently been accompanied by a shift towards the application of a more transnational framework that does justice to the capacity of memory sites to travel across existing cultural borders.¹² Approaching the afterlife of Tordenskjold from a transnational perspective makes all the more sense, as the hero, from the beginning, was not to be pinned down to a single national framework. So much could already be evinced from the fact that we find Tordenskjold streets today in both Denmark and Norway. Tordenskjold belongs to a specific category of the Danish and Norwegian secular pantheons: that of overlapping names from the relatively long period of political union between Denmark and Norway (1380–1814). The large majority in this category concerns men who were born in Norway but had pursued their political, artistic, scientific, or military career in Denmark. Consequently, in the nineteenth century they came to be part of the memory cultures of both countries, rendering the 'ownership' of their legacy a matter of dispute. The case of the poet and playwright Ludvig Holberg is well known.¹³ Other notable figures in this category include the poets Edvard Storm, Christian Tullin, and Johan Herman Wessel, as well as the naval heroes Kjeld Lauridsen Stub, Cort Adeler, and Iver Huitfeldt. Tordenskjold stands out from this crowd by the scale of his cultivation alone. Although all these men have been commemorated through monuments, street names, and biographies, Tordenskjold, to a much larger degree than the others, also entered the world of fiction.¹⁴ It can be argued that it is exactly because of his fictionalized character that the name of Tordenskjold exerted such great mnemonic power, as his memory could be

10 Ann Rigney, 'The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing', in: eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 346.

11 Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 22–27.

12 Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney, *Transnational memory: circulation, articulation, scales* (New York and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014).

13 The debate on Holberg's nationality came to a head in the early twentieth century, ignited by the writings of Viljam Olsvig, who emphasized the man's Norwegian descent, and the reaction by the Norwegian historian Francis Bull and the Danish historian Theodor Alfred Müller.

14 This, of course, comes with the modification that the staging of plays on Tordenskjold were outnumbered – by some margin – by the staging of plays written by Holberg, which held a permanent place in the repertoires of Danish and Norwegian theatres throughout the century.

moulded in a more engaging and aesthetically pleasing form that appealed to potentially larger audiences.¹⁵

But, before exploring the memorial tradition centring on Tordenskjold, let me first turn to Tordenskjold's life for the necessary historical background. Who exactly are we talking about?

The Life and Afterlife of Peter Wessel Tordenskjold until 1814

Tordenskjold was born as Peter Jansen Wessel on 7 November 1690 in Trondheim as the tenth son of a wealthy merchant and alderman. After having joined the Royal Dano-Norwegian Navy at the age of eighteen, he distinguished himself with his audacity and excellent seamanship on numerous occasions. He rapidly climbed the ranks as a result and in 1716 he was ennobled by King Frederik IV, receiving the name Tordenskjold (Thunder Shield) in the process. His most notable triumph followed in July of that year, when he managed to capture a large portion of the Swedish transport fleet in the harbour of Dynekilen, close to the Norwegian border. The loss of supply thus inflicted forced Swedish King Carl XII to abandon his invasion of Norway. The event later earned Tordenskjold the title 'saviour of Norway', which would become a common trope in nineteenth-century Norwegian nationalism.¹⁶

The young commander was unsuccessful with a surprise attack on Gothenburg in the spring of 1717 and subsequently lost the battle of Strömstad two months later. As a consequence of these setbacks he was stripped of the command over the Kattegat fleet and was court-martialled on the charge of criminal recklessness. Tordenskjold was ultimately acquitted and two years later he avenged himself with the capture of Carlsten fortress in Marstrand, after which he was promoted to the rank of vice admiral. After the signing of the peace treaty between Denmark and Sweden in 1720, Tordenskjold embarked on a Grand Tour to Germany, where he died, aged 30, in a duel with a former officer of the Swedish army.¹⁷

Already during his lifetime Tordenskjold had become the stuff of legends. One popular myth recounts a miraculous escape from a Swedish encirclement. Tordenskjold, all alone, managed to break free from the impeding soldiers with one dashing gash of his sword, exclaiming 'Not this time!' He thereupon jumped into the sea and started swimming back to his frigate, sword between teeth.

15 Rigney, 'The Dynamics of Remembrance', 347–348.

16 Tveit, "Hei! Det gaaer glædelig!", 65–69.

17 This short biography is based on Andersen, *Mansmod og kongegunst*.

The two – arguably most well-known – myths are both set during the siege of Marstrand. According to the first, Tordenskjold had personally spied on the Swedish troops by going around town dressed as a fisherman. The second one serves as an illustration of the hero's cleverness and inventiveness: he allegedly tricked the Swedish command into believing that his forces were far more numerous than they actually were by letting his modest group of soldiers march criss-cross through the streets of Marstrand.¹⁸ None of these anecdotes had any footing in historical fact, but were nonetheless presented as such. Olav Bergersen has suggested that this myth-making was plausibly reinforced by government propaganda. The long and expensive war had brought Denmark a small acquisition of territory in Schleswig, but not a lot more, and the glorification of Tordenskjold, who was popular among the citizens of Copenhagen, could very well have been used as a way to soothe the general disappointment over this meagre result. On 1 January 1720, for example, the government circulated a New Year's greeting in which Tordenskjold was praised as having been sent by God. Many more such leaflets were to follow over the course of that year.¹⁹

After Tordenskjold's death, the myths surrounding his character were re-mediated through popular culture and history writing. The popular song *Jeg vil sjunge om en helt* [I want to sing about a hero], written shortly after 1720, for example features the 'Not this time!' and disguised-as-a-fisherman episodes. The historian Casper Peter Rothe uncritically included the many popular tales that were told of Tordenskjold in his three-volume biography published between 1747 and 1750. Rothe's biography was in turn an important source for Ove Malling in writing his 1777 *Store og gode Handlinger af Danske, Norske og Holstenere* [Great and Good Deeds of Danes, Norwegians and Holsteinians], a school textbook commissioned by the royal court to legitimize the absolutist regime and foster the patriotic love for the king's realm among the population of the conglomerate state.²⁰ Thematically structured around virtues that were deemed typical of the Danish-Norwegian-Holsteinian character such as bravery, generosity, diligence, and that very same love of the fatherland, the book illustrated every virtue with a series of historical anecdotes. Of the many 'Danes, Norwegians and Holsteinians' Malling introduces across the pages none is mentioned more often than Tordenskjold. *Store og gode Handlinger* itself became a widespread book that went through several reprints over the

18 The phrase 'Tordenskjolds soldater' is still used in Danish and Norwegian today, usually referring to people who hold several positions within the same organisation, thereby giving the impression that the organisation in question is larger or more important than it factually is.

19 Olav Bergersen, 'Peter Wessel Tordenskjold', in *Norsk Biografisk Leksikon, bind XVI: Sørensen – Torp, Alf* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1969), 472.

20 Ole Feldbæk, 'Kærlighed til fædrelandet. 1700-tallets nationale selvforståelse', *Fortid og Nutid* 71 (1984): 270–288.

course of the subsequent century. Crucially, the book came to serve as the foundation for many smaller textbooks that were used for history teaching in public schools throughout the state.²¹ Besides exerting great influence on history education in both Denmark and Norway, Malling's book furthermore provided a rich source of inspiration for poets and playwrights. To name the most notable example, Johannes Ewald, the great poet of the time, based his 1778 *Singspiel Fiskerne* [The fishermen] on Malling's accounts. The play featured the song *Kong Christian stod ved højen mast* [King Christian stood by the lofty mast] which recounts the naval heroes Christian IV, Niels Juel and, of course, Peter Wessel Tordenskjold.



Tordenskjold havde faaet Befaling at gaar i Land i i Naane, han opdages og omringes af Svenske Dragoner. En af dem forlanger hans Kaarst, Tordenskjold svarer dem med en Vildt, hugges han over Hoveden og kommer med sin Kaarst i Niidren, tilbage til sin Fregat. — (de Svulfske Liv og gode Handlinger, af L. N. og H. pag. 182.)

Fig. 1: Unknown Artist, Wood engraving based on Malling's *Store og gode Handlinger* depicting Tordenskjold's miraculous escape from Swedish captivity.

Moving into the nineteenth century, Malling-style state patriotism that demanded loyalty to the king and his realm was steadily overtaken by a cultural nationalism that perceived the ethnic nation itself as the primary focus of identification. This also implied a shift in the semiotic meaning allocated to national heroes such as Tordenskjold, who was no longer primarily a harbinger of civic virtue as had been the case in the previous century, but first and foremost a specimen of the archetypal Norwegian or Dane. In many ways, in fact, Peter Wessel held out the

21 Andersen, *Mansmod og kongegunst*, 384–385.

perfect example of the idealized national character, something which is reflected in the large cultural production dedicated to him across the century. His popularity among both cultural producers and consumers is not hard to understand. However brief his life may have been, the hero's legacy contained a rich collection of mostly fabricated or at best semi-fabricated stories that followed the attractive narrative of the bold underdog triumphing, against all odds, over an enemy deemed far superior. Because of his half-historical, half-mythical character, Tordenskjold formed an ideal canvas for different ideological currents on which to project their norms, values, and ideals, be they absolutist, Danish-nationalist, Norwegian-nationalist, or Scandinavianist. Additionally, he was, both during and after his life, presented as a 'man of the people', as the prominent philologist Rasmus Nyerup phrased it in his short introduction to *Jeg vil sjunge om en helt*, making him a hero almost everyone could relate to.²²

In the nation-building context, Tordenskjold was regularly held up as a moral example for the common Norwegian and Dane to aspire to. This aspect of the cultivation of Tordenskjold became all the more pronounced, when Denmark-Norway in 1807 entered into war with Sweden and Great Britain as part of the larger Napoleonic conflict that swept the continent. In those dire times, bellicose heroes from the glorious past were employed to 'strengthen the weak, encourage the cunning and inspire the noble.'²³ To be sure, the mythological and medievalist taste of the time foregrounded legendary saga kings and warriors such as Stærkodder, Hrolf Krake, and Ragnar Lódbrok, but Tordenskjold and other naval heroes from the early modern period also had their role to play. In fact, Tordenskjold was presented as a worthy descendant of these saga heroes, 'a Viking in a naval officer's dress', who proved that the present-day Danes and Norwegians were still of the same noble stock.²⁴

In addition to his instrumentalization in wartime poetry and plays, Tordenskjold also premediated heroes of the ongoing war. A case in point is the young lieutenant Peter Willemoes, who died in battle with the English in 1808. In the introduction to his obituary poem published in the journal *Ny dansk Tilskuer*, N. F. S. Grundtvig called him 'the second Tordenskjold'.²⁵ Knud Lyne Rahbek would proceed likewise in an introductory poem to his Singspiel *Tordenskjold i Marstrand*:

22 Rasmus Nyerup, *Udvalg af Danske Viser fra Midten af det 16de Aarhundrede til henimod Midten af det 18de, med Melodier; Første Del* (Copenhagen: D. Sal. Schultz, 1821), 85.

23 Rasmus Glenthøj, *Skilsmissen: dansk og norsk identitet før og efter 1814* (Odense: Syd-dansk Universitetsforlag, 2012), 258.

24 Tveit, "Hei! Det gaaer glædelig!", 47, 64.

25 *Ny dansk Tilskuer*, 26 May (1808).

Den Søn har tit paa danske Bølger vandret,
Skiøndt han fik Navn som Tiden har forandret,
Hedd' engang Tordenskiold, og siden Willemoes.

[That son who oft has roamed the Danish waves,
Though time did change his given name,
Was once called Tordenskjold; now Willemoes.]²⁶

Rahbek's play is deserving of a closer examination here. Premiering at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen on 4 April 1813 – in the middle of the war – the tendency of the play is clearly to inspire self-sacrifice in the service of the fatherland, with Tordenskjold as the very embodiment of good patriotic conduct. Rahbek did his best to get both Danes and Norwegians on board for the contemporary struggle, as both nations are repeatedly praised for their noble character and patriotic fervour. It is, thereby, not hidden that Tordenskjold was of Norwegian descent, which is praiseworthy because: 'Man veed hvordan de Norske er. ... At Konge, Norge, Fædreland hos dem gaaer over Alt' [You know how the Norwegians are. ... For them, king, Norway and Fatherland go above all].²⁷

By elevating loyalty to king and country, the piece is still strongly rooted in the state-patriotic tradition. The significance thus attributed to these particular virtues also manifests itself in the positive portrayal of the Swedish characters, who are likewise driven by noble, patriotic motives. This benevolent attitude towards Sweden, even at the height of the war, can be explained by Rahbek's close friendships with Swedish literati; he had, furthermore, in 1796, been involved in the establishment of the Scandinavian Literary Society, which aimed at stimulating cultural exchange between the two countries, and can be seen as an early expression of cultural Scandinavianism.²⁸ The importance of national loyalty in the play is, therefore, not engendered through the vilification of Sweden, but in a different way. The main antagonist in *Tordenskjold i Marstrand* is a major in the Swedish army called Stahl, who prides himself on the fact that he has no fatherland. The explicit message is that he, therefore, also has no sense of honour. When Stahl is tricked into believing that Tordenskjold commands a sizeable army in Marstrand, he offers the latter to betray his Swedish superiors in order to get the best out of the situation for himself. Tordenskjold, being a man of honour, of course declines.

26 Knud Lyne Rahbek, *Samlede skuespil af K. L. Rahbek. Professor og theaterdirecteur, Ridder af Dannebrogen. Tredie Bind* (Copenhagen: Joh. Fred. Schulz, 1813).

27 Rahbek, *Samlede skuespil. Tredie Bind*, 173. Note that Norway and Fatherland are not synonymous here.

28 Julius Clausen, *Skandinavismen historisk fremstillet* (Copenhagen: Det Nordiske Forlag, 1900), 11.

After 1814: Competing Danish and Norwegian Appropriations

The conclusion of the Napoleonic wars would have far-reaching consequences for the geopolitical relations between the Scandinavian states. Denmark had been on Napoleon's side and was, after the French defeat in Leipzig, coerced to cede Norway to the Swedish crown according to the conditions of the Kiel treaty signed in January 1814. The Norwegians rebelled against this decision and declared independence on 17 May with the signing of a constitution and the election of the Danish prince Christian Frederik as their new king. Sweden consequently felt compelled to invade Norway in order to enforce the Kiel treaty; after a short war the Norwegians had to surrender, and the personal union between the two countries was officially implemented on 4 November, when the Swedish king was accepted by the Norwegian parliament as head of state. The members of parliament had, however, managed to negotiate favourable conditions within the new political constellation: Norway was allowed to keep its liberal (for the standards of the time) constitution and accordingly still maintained a large degree of sovereignty.²⁹

The dramatic events of 1814 thus saw Denmark and Norway parting ways after a union that had existed for over four centuries. This now clearly demarcated period was to be remembered quite differently on opposite sides of the Skagerrak. The war years had left Denmark bankrupt, the larger part of its naval fleet had been either captured or destroyed, and the capital lay in ruins after the British bombardment of 1807. What is more, with the cession of Norway, the kingdom had lost 35 % of its former population and more than 80 % of its territory.³⁰ The country's geopolitical demise caused a severe crisis of identity among intellectuals and remembering the pre-1814 period in both fictional and non-fictional genres provided much-needed impulses for national recuperation. To this end, such moral uplifting was primarily sought in Norse mythology, a vaguely defined heroic 'Nordic Antiquity', and the Valdemar Period (1157–1241), as in the literary works of Adam Oehlenschläger, N. F. S. Grundtvig, and B. S. Ingemann. The perception of the post-medieval period was more ambiguous. Although King Frederik VI disallowed any discussion of the 'loss of Norway' it, nevertheless, became instrumental in creating a severe national trauma for the generation of

29 Roald Berg, 'Denmark, Norway and Sweden in 1814: a Geopolitical and Contemporary Perspective', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 39, no. 3 (2014): 265–286.

30 These numbers exclude the overseas dependencies Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands, as well as the Danish colonies in India, Africa, and the Caribbean. See Michael Bregnsbo and Kurt Villads Jensen, *Det danske imperium. Storhed og fald* (Copenhagen: Aschehoug, 2004), 173; Knut J. V. Jespersen and Ole Feldbæk, *Revanche og neutralitet 1648–1814. Vol. 2, Dansk udenrigspolitisk historie* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal leksikon, 2002), 513.

1814 that was simply not forgotten.³¹ In the dominant historiographical tradition, the period of Danish-Norwegian union was portrayed as an era of decay during which the erstwhile peasant freedom was steadily eroded under successive aristocratic regimes. The historian C. F. Allen, writing in 1840, denounced European, and in particular German, influences on Danish society as corrupting forces, pointing out the susceptibility of the nobility towards ‘Germanness’ and other harmful foreign ideas that intruded upon the true national character of the Danish people. In Allen’s perception, this downward trend had been steadily reversed under the aegis of absolutism towards the end of the eighteenth century.³²

Despite this uneasy mixture of denial and trauma pertaining to the memory of the union with Norway, a certain nostalgia for the Greater Denmark of yesteryear, when the realm could still claim to be a military power of note, persevered. Ingemann, for instance, in his 1816 ode to the Danish flag *Vift stolt paa Codans Bølge* [The proud waves of the Baltic] invoked the same naval heroes as Ewald had done some forty years before him, recruiting Niels Juel, Christian IV, and Tordenskjold to convey the message that the present-day Danes, though tainted by defeat, were still of the same bold character as these brave forefathers and could still wave their flag with pride.

In Norway, the memory of what was now termed the Danish period (*Dansketiden*) likewise alternated between appreciation and rejection, depending on the cultural-political views of the beholder. On the one hand, a strong cultural union between Norway and Denmark persisted for at least the remainder of the century. The shared written language had an important role in accommodating these prevailing cultural relations. As Norway at the start of the century still lacked the necessary institutional infrastructure, Copenhagen with its well-established cultural and academic institutions retained its appeal for Norwegian artists, students, and academics.³³ Moreover, many Norwegians were tied to Denmark through family bonds or had received their education at the university of Copenhagen. The so-called *Intelligens* party that was formed in the 1830s considered the cultural ties with Denmark essential for the progress of Norwegian society and the development of a Norwegian national culture. Prominent figures

31 Rasmus Glenthøj, ‘Historie og hukommelse. En epilog, et perspektiv og en anden fortælling om Norge og Danmark’, in *Mellem brødre. Dansk-norsk samliv i 600 år*, ed. Rasmus Glenthøj (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2016), 284.

32 Claus Møller Jørgensen, ‘The writing of history and national identity: The Danish case’, in *Narrating peoplehood amidst diversity: Historical and theoretical perspectives*, ed. Michael Böss (Aarhus: Aarhus UP, 2011), 232–233.

33 Jørgen Haugan, ‘Den dansk-norske litterære union. Da Danmark løftet Norge ut av 400-årsnatten’, in *Mellem brødre. Dansk-norsk samliv i 600 år*, ed. Rasmus Glenthøj (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2016), 110–113.

within the party, foremost among them the young poet Johan Sebastian Welhaven, consequently held a predominantly positive perception of the period under Danish rule which, in their eyes, had lifted Norway up to a higher level of cultivation.

Welhaven's foremost opponent was Henrik Wergeland, a young poet like himself, who instead propounded the emancipation of Norwegian folk culture and the establishment of an autonomous Norwegian written standard as the foundation of national identity. Wergeland argued that the Norwegian national character had been at its weakest during the Danish period, and he perceived the year 1814 as ushering in a promising new beginning now that national sovereignty had been reclaimed. Illustrative in this context is the metaphor for Norway's history which he coined in 1834. In Wergeland's vision, the national past consisted of two half-rings: the Middle Ages, during which Norway had been a proud, independent kingdom, and post-1814 Constitution Norway; these two glorious periods were separated by a 'poor piece of welding' – indeed, the four centuries of Danish rule – and this faulty junction needed to be removed in order to fully reinstate the country's former, medieval glory in the present.³⁴

Interestingly, the leading historian associated with the Intelligens party, P. A. Munch, largely adhered to Wergeland's reading of the national past. In his eyes, Denmark had robbed Norway of 400 years of its historical memories and this was, according to Munch, as 'evil as robbing a country of part of its territory.'³⁵ Partly because of this negative assessment of the early modern period, Norwegian historiography – certainly at the beginning of the nineteenth century – remained primarily concerned with the study of the medieval past, which served the purpose of legitimizing the young, modern state, showing that the Norwegian people had in fact old roots and a rich historical background.³⁶

As noted before, cultural life in Norway needed to be built up almost from scratch after 1814. The capital Christiania owned no such institutions as a professional theatre, an art academy, or a publishing company, while the Royal Fredrik's University had opened its doors only a year before, in 1813. One of the consequences was that history teaching in schools, thanks to the lack of Nor-

34 Øystein Rian, 'Henrik Wergeland som historiker', in: *Henrik Wergeland. Sâmannen*, ed. Anne Jorunn Kydland, Dagne Groven Myhren and Vigdis Ystad (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2008), 225–272.

35 P. A. Munch, 'Bemerkninger ved det i Danmark stiftede kongel. Nordiske Oldskriftselskabs Virksomhed', in P. A. Munch, *Samlede Afhandlinger bd. I: 1831–Marts 1849*, ed. Gustav Storm (Christiania: Cammermeyer, 1873), 123.

36 Narve Fulsås, 'Norway: the Strength of National History', in *Nordic Historiography in the 20th Century*, ed. Frank Meyer and Jan Eivind Myhre (Oslo: Department of History, University of Oslo, 2000), 241–242; Odd Arvid Storsveen, 'Gi meg mine fire hundre år tilbake! Danmark og Norge: Historien som aldri tar slutt', in *Mellem brødre. Dansk-norsk samliv i 600 år*, ed. Rasmus Glenthøj (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2016), 218–231.



Fig. 2: Axel Ender's Tordenskjold statue in Oslo, placed in 1901. Photo: Tim van Gerven.

wegian alternatives, continued to rely on Danish textbooks (many of them modelled after Malling) until the 1830s, thus disseminating a now out-dated, state-patriotic vision of history.³⁷ On a more fundamental level, national feeling in Norway at the start of the century consisted mainly – but not exclusively – of a civic nature and concentrated around such political symbols as flag, parliament, and constitution. Only from the late 1830s onwards did cultural nation-building become more pronounced, resulting in numerous academic publications on national history, language, folklore, and folk music, as well as text editions of medieval sagas and literary adaptations of historical and vernacular motifs.

³⁷ Glenthøj, *Skilsmissen*, 258–259.

This national-romanticist upsurge brought with it a growing critique of the Danish appropriation of parts of Norwegian history. The historian and archivist Bernt Moe was one of the first people to voice this irritation. In his genealogical research into Tordenskjold's family, published in his own *Tidsskrift for den norske personalhistorie* in 1843, he agitated against the 'irrepressible rapacity' of the Danes for 'Norway's famous men' like Tordenskjold, Huitfeldt, Holberg, and Wessel. He thereby referred to a recent article by the Danish historian Caspar Paludan-Müller in which the latter had bluntly called Tordenskjold 'a Danish man' without referring to his Norwegian descent. On a superficial reading, this 'Danification', if you will, of Tordenskjold indeed seems to have been a common trait among Danish historians at the time. C. F. Allen had used the etiquette 'Danish' for Tordenskjold, and also Christian Molbech, in his chronological overview over Nordic history, simply referred to him as Danish.³⁸ However, Moe's irritation with Danish history-writing might very well have arisen by a misinterpretation from his side of the word 'Danish', which in historiographical usage was not necessarily of an ethno-nationalistic nature, but instead commonly invoked the eighteenth-century state-patriotic understanding of citizenship. In other words, 'Danish' might, in all these instances, likely have referred to the Danish conglomerate state and thus included, rather than excluded, Norway. The fact remains that the vagueness of the label 'Danish' in this context opened up to the type of criticism Moe expressed.

The mist that in this way surrounded Tordenskjold's ascribed nationality was even thicker in fictional cultivations of his life story, of which there were many in Denmark in the early nineteenth century. The leading romantic poet, Adam Oehlenschläger, for instance had written a drama based on Tordenskjold's life in 1833 that would also be performed several times on Christiania's main stage. In the play's finale, the vice-admiral's exanimated body is literally draped in the Danish flag: 'Nei Dannebrog! din blodrøde Dug / Og dit sneehvide Kors skal dække helten' [No, Dannebrog! your blood-red cloth / And your snow-white cross shall cover the hero].³⁹

Because of this longstanding tradition of Danish cultivation of Norwegian-born men like Tordenskjold, Moe awaited the publication of a new Danish-Norwegian historical-biographical lexicon by the Danish History Society with utmost suspicion, anticipating that also this publication 'skal bæres Omsorg for Ihukommelse af Norges udmærkede Mænd, rimeligviis for at de alle – selv de ny Norges – kunne vorde iførte den Danskhed I Aand og Væsen' [will undoubtedly contribute

38 Christian Molbech, *Historiske Aarbøger til Oplysning og Veiledning i Nordens, særdeles Danmarks Historie. Tredie Bind*. (Copenhagen: Jens Hostrup Schultz, 1848), 185.

39 Adam Oehlenschläger, 'Tordenskiold. Tragisk Drama 1833', in *Oehlenschlägers Tragødiæ*. 6 (Copenhagen: A. Oehlenschläger, 1833), 179.

to the appropriation of Norway's great men, supposedly to such an extent that all of them – even those born and raised in post-1814 Norway – will be entirely draped in Danishness].⁴⁰

Moe expressed his displeasure at a time during which a new movement started to take shape and make waves in the Scandinavian press. This movement was Scandinavianism – a first mention of that neologism would appear in a Danish newspaper in September 1843.⁴¹ The immediate cause for the excitement was a festive meeting between Danish and Swedish students arranged in Uppsala in June 1843.⁴² In notorious speeches held by the Danes Carl Ploug and H. F. Poulsen, the time-honoured idea of Scandinavian cultural unity found fresh political relevance in calls for the political unification of the three countries, which was presented as a necessary defence measure against the insurgent power blocks Germany and Russia. As Scandinavianism also supported claims for liberal-constitutional reform, the movement met with disfavour from the Danish and Swedish authorities; the newspaper issue in which Ploug's speech had been printed, was confiscated, while the establishment of a Scandinavian Society based in Copenhagen was prohibited by the court. The political headwind it received did, however, not stop Scandinavianism from quickly growing into an ideological force of note, and the events in Uppsala, for example, were discussed in 'even the smallest local newspaper in Norway'.⁴³

When the prominent Danish Scandinvist Frederik Barfod reacted against Moe's accusations in a letter published in *Den Constitutionelle* on 8 April 1844, his response must be seen in the light of the Scandinavianist enthusiasm of the day. Barfod – writing under the abbreviation O.e.a. – started his letter by objecting to Moe's implication that every single Dane would be complicit in this falsification of history; in fact, he assured that only 'et Par enlige Marodører' [a few marauders] would deny Norway its historical heroes, and he himself would certainly never dare to commit such a robbery. He attributed the agitation with which men like Moe protected Norway's national individuality partly to the idea of Scandinavian unity that just recently had been put high on the agenda. Himself a dedicated Scandinavianist, he assured that 'norsk Selvstendighed ... indeholder den bedste Forsettelse for os om Nordens tilkommende Enhed' [Norwegian

40 Bernt Moe, *Tidsskrift for den norske personalhistorie, første Række 1–9de Hefte* (Christiania: Chr. Schibsted, 1840–1846), 242–243.

41 Ruth Hemstad, "'Skandinavismens' tilkomst som samtidig og omstridt begrep', in *Skandinavismen. Vision og virkning* ed. Ruth Hemstad, Jes Fabricius Møller and Dag Thorkildsen (Odense: Syddansk universitetsforlag, 2018), 33.

42 The Norwegian students had also intended to travel to Sweden, but were unable to gather the financial means necessary to cover the expenses of such a trip. They, furthermore, met with authorities that were unwilling to assist them in the matter.

43 Kari Haarder Ekman, *Mitt hems gränser vidgades – En studie i den kulturelle skandinavismen under 1800-talet*. (Gothenburg and Stockholm: Makadam förlag, 2010), 65.

independence ... is the best precondition for the future unification of the North], adding that

kun Nordmanden som er sig selv, som hverken er svensk eller dansk, men i Evighed intet andet end norsk, kan med fuldkommen Selvstændighed, med fuldkommen fri og bevidst Selvbeslutning, afslutte et folkeligt Forbund, om hvis Varighed der er grundet Forhaabning.

[only the Norwegian, who is completely himself, and neither Swedish nor Danish, but in all eternity nothing but Norwegian, is able to enter into a Scandinavian union the permanence of which is reasoned.]

Still, for him, the intimate and historically rooted connectedness between the Scandinavian nations also implied that Norway's history had always been part of the larger Scandinavian narrative, making Tordenskjold not only Norwegian but also Scandinavian, such as he expressed in an insightful footnote:

... saa lidt som jeg skulde søge at fravende Norge ders Adeler, Hvitfeldt og Tordenskjold, saa lidt skulde det falde mig ind at fravriste det Holberg, Wessel og Storm. ... Jeg vilde ønske, at Danmark havde født disse Mænd, naar ... de dog ikke lige fuldt vare Søønner af vor fælles Moder, Norden.

[... I would no more intend to rob Norway of its Adeler, Huitfeldt, and Tordenskjold than I would deny it its Holberg, Wessel, and Storm ... I would have liked these great men to have been born in Denmark ... had they not already been sons of our common mother: Scandinavia.]⁴⁴

Barfod did not acknowledge the discrepancy he had provoked, in which Scandinavianism – or rather, the Scandinavianist outlook on history – led Adeler, Huitfeldt, and Tordenskjold back to Denmark through the back door. This was exactly the point that the historian P. A. Munch made in his many critiques of Scandinavianism. Munch perceived the ideology to be yet another ploy by Danish nationalists to use 'den nordiske og fornømmelig den norske Historie til Danskhedens Forherligelse' [Nordic and, in particular Norwegian history for the glorification of Danishness]. In fact, he argued, 'det er bekjendt, hvorledes man ... søgte, ved at anvende den svævende Benævnelse "nordisk", at stille Sagen i Halvmørke, idet man fremdeles ømmede sig ved at erkjende det for norsk, som alene var norsk' [it is well-known how ... the vague term 'Nordic' has been employed to keep things in the dark, in order not to recognize as Norwegian what truly is Norwegian and Norwegian only].⁴⁵

Munch feared that Scandinavianism would ultimately lead to the disappearance of Norway from history altogether. Acknowledging that national identity is not only determined by self-confirmation but also, fundamentally, by

44 *Den Constitutionelle*, 8 April (1844).

45 P. A. Munch, *Om Skandinavismen* (Christiania: Johan Dahl, 1849), 50.

external recognition, Munch worked throughout his life to affirm Norway's position in European history and culture, defending it arduously against competing representations. Even in a very short, seven-page biography of Tordenskjold, he sought to claim back historical territory, stating that it was not necessary to give an extensive account of Tordenskjold's life 'da der neppe gives nogen historisk Personlighed, hvis Livsomstændigheder i det Hele taget ere mere bekjendte, og hvis Navn lever saaledes paa enhver Nordmands Læber' [as there is hardly a historical character whose deeds are better known and whose name is on every Norwegian's lips]; he will, therefore, instead only address the unavoidable highlights and in addition 'antype de Familieforhold og øvrige Omstændigheder, der kunne vindicere ham for Norge som en af dets egteste Sønner, at han ej alene af Æt, men og i sin hele Fremtræden var og blev Nordman til Liv og Sjæl' [point out the family relations and other circumstances that will vindicate him for Norway as one of its truest sons, thus reminding us that he not only by birth but also in conduct was and remained Norwegian in heart and soul].⁴⁶

It appears that the Norwegian sensitivities were taken seriously by the Danish Scandinavianists. On the occasion of the second, large-scale student manifestation in 1845, the banquet hall in Copenhagen's Christiansborg Castle was decorated with a series of shields bearing the names of great Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes. The names on the shields explicitly reserved for renowned Norwegians included Holberg and Tordenskjold.⁴⁷

Two Theatrical Tordenskjolds and the Influence of Scandinavianism

In the middle of the historiographical debate on the nationality of Tordenskjold and others – to be exact, on 23 May 1844 – a play titled *Tordenskjold i Dynekilen* premiered at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. Also, this example of Danish cultivation neatly illustrated the point made by Munch and Moe, as Tordenskjold is here once again very much framed in a Danish-patriotic narrative. No mention is made of his Norwegian descent, and he is presented as the stalwart captain fighting for Denmark's valour. Somewhat uncharacteristic, and even more so against the background of the Scandinavianist agitation suffusing the capital at the time, is the roughly sketched contrast between smart and cunning Danes and dim-witted, foolish Swedes. This crude portrayal of the Swedish characters can also be perceived as uncharacteristic of the author, Henrik Hertz, who the fol-

46 P. A. Munch, 'Peder Wessel Tordenskjold', in *Anna Colbjørnsdatters, Cort Adellers, Peter Tordenskjolds Biographier*, ed. Michael Birkeland (Christiania: Chr. Tønsbergs Forlag, 1854), 48.

47 *Det nordiska studentmötet i Köpenhamn år 1845* (Gothenburg: C. M. Ekbohrns Officin, 1845), 31.

lowing year would contribute to the Scandinavianist student meeting in Copenhagen with a poem that celebrated Scandinavian brotherhood in general, and the city of Uppsala in particular.⁴⁸ Especially the final scene is jubilantly patriotic in tone, when Tordenskjold and his men, after the successful battle of Dynekilen, row away from the Swedish harbour. The play's ultimate song is performed to the well-known tune of 'Kong Christian stod ved højen mast' (the eldest of Denmark's two national anthems) and rubs the Swedish their defeat in their faces:

Sæt ud fra Land med raske Tag!
 Ombord! ombord!
 Med Jubel efter vundet Slag,
 Med Seiersraab fra Kampens Dag,
 Sæt ud fra Land med raske Tag!
 Ombord! ombord!
 O Dynekilen! Danmarks navn
 Skal længe lyde fra din Havn!
 Ja, tale skal om Danmarks Navn
 Din dybe Havn!

[Away from the coast with rapid strokes!
 On board! on board!
 With joy that comes with victory
 With cries of victory on the day of battle
 Away from the coast with rapid strokes!
 On board! On board!
 O Dynekilen! Long shall Denmark's name
 Sound from your harbour!
 Yes, the sounding forth of Denmark's name
 Shall issue from your harbour deep!]⁴⁹

Interestingly, only one day before Hertz's play premiered in Copenhagen, a Singspiel with the apt title *Tordenskjold* went through its first rendition at the Christiania Theatre in the Norwegian capital. The differences between the Danish and the Norwegian play, written by Hans Ørn Blom, are interesting. What is particularly striking is that Blom's *Tordenskjold* is not necessarily presented as Norwegian. There are only three direct references to Norway in the entire play, and the national tone should instead be sought in the use of popular Norwegian tunes, such as 'For Norge, Kiæmpers Fødeland', as accompaniment for the many songs in the play. Aside from the music, the tenor of the play is remarkably

48 *Det nordiska studentmötet i Köpenhamn år 1845*, 34–35.

49 Henrik Hertz, *Samlede skrifter: Dramatiske værker. Sextende bind* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1867), 390–391.

Scandinavianist. This is all the more surprising, as Blom, contrary to Hertz, had previously expressed anti-Scandinavianist inclinations.⁵⁰

The comical plotline conjured up by Blom is completely fictitious and centres around a Swedish scheme to assassinate Tordenskjold. The Swedish officer Stenfeldt, using a false identity, has taken up quarters in a small inn along the Norwegian coast where Tordenskjold usually stops to gather supplies. To cut a long story short: the scheme fails, and Stenfeldt and his accomplices are taken captive, but all is ultimately settled in an orderly manner: Stenfeldt is pardoned by Tordenskjold and released and he even gets to marry the inn keeper's charming daughter. The play's final words of reconciliation are for Tordenskjold and stand in sharp contrast to the triumphalist tone of Hertz's closing scene:

Gevinst og Tab i denne Sag,
Hinanden fuldt opveier,
Men Magt og Held den spaaer den Dag
Da Nordens Folk, foreent i Slag
Gaaer frem til samme Seier

[Gain and loss in this story
have evened each other out
But one day the time will come
that the peoples of the North, united in battle
will progress towards shared victory.]⁵¹

Using a historical figure such as Tordenskjold – who after all had earned his fame in war with Sweden – in the context of Scandinavianism might seem counter-intuitive, yet this paradoxical activation of potentially divisive episodes from the past was common practice for Scandinavianists and was often applied in order to project a message of Scandinavian fraternization. The many wars between Denmark-Norway and Sweden between the end of the Middle Ages up to 1814 were in Scandinavianist historicism explained as unfortunate and improper feuds between brother nations that warranted the need for restoration of Nordic unity in the present. The premise that history was shared between the three Scandinavian countries implied in its ultimate consequence that also great achievements and famous figures from this 'age of discord' could be celebrated as shared pride.⁵² Frederik Barfod's previously cited claim that Tordenskjold was a 'son of our common mother: Scandinavia' reflect this widely held belief.

50 John Sanness, *Patrioter, intelligens og skandinaver: norske reaksjoner på skandinavismen før 1848* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1959), 488.

51 Hans Ørn Blom, *Digtninger af H.Ø. Blom* (Christiania: Steens Boktrykkeri, 1864), 79.

52 The term Age of Discord – *söndringens tid* – is derived from Esaias Tegnér's famous ode to Oehlenschläger from 1829 in which the Swedish poet-bishop saw the crowning of the Danish poet as 'the King of Nordic Poetry' as the symbolic moment that put the lid on the centuries of hate between the Scandinavian countries.

Henrik Ullstad illustrates how Scandinavianists appropriated age-of-discard heroes to proclaim their reconciliatory vision by taking Tordenskjold's contemporary Carl XII as an example. The Swedish king was a popular trope in Scandinavianist poetry during the first couple of student meetings. In order to make him fit into their narrative, the poets who used him as their subject, selectively delved into his biography and highlighted those parts that served their message, while they ignored, for example, the warmongering against Denmark, the repeated invasions of Norway, and the fact that he had died in that country during the siege of Fredrikshald in 1718. Instead, Carl XII was generally portrayed as the staunch defender of Scandinavia against the Russian threat and, as a result, as nothing less than a kind of proto-Scandinavianist and a symbol for the contemporary resistance against Russia.⁵³

Moulding Tordenskjold into the Scandinavianist narrative was less straightforward than in the case of Carl XII. Unlike his Swedish opponent, Tordenskjold had only engaged in war with the Scandinavian neighbour, and it might be for this reason that he scarcely features in Scandinavianist poetry and speeches. Yet, there are instances in which Peter Wessel too wore the jersey of the proto-Scandinavianist. We encountered this in Blom's *Singspiel*, and there are a few other examples. Particularly striking is a speech held by Mayor Ole Richter in 1876. The occasion was the unveiling of a Tordenskjold statue in his birthplace Trondheim. The statue was an exact copy of the one that would be erected later that year in Copenhagen, just outside the vice admiral's last resting place in Holmen's Church. Instead of seeing the statue in Trondheim as a reappropriation of Tordenskjold from Danish claims, the twin statues can, therefore, better be perceived as symbolizing the lasting historical bond between Norway and Denmark. In addition, Richter in his speech creatively put Tordenskjold's war effort in a positive Scandinavianist light, stating that 'han mægtigen bidrog til at hævde Ligevægtsprincippet og Jevnbyrdighedsideen i Forholdet mellom Nordens Riger og Folk, – at han afværgede en Magtstilling, hvorunder det ene af de trende Lande skulde havt et absolut Supremati' [he greatly contributed to asserting the principles of equilibrium and equality between the Nordic states and peoples – he rejected a constellation of power in which one of the three countries would hold supremacy].⁵⁴ Tordenskjold's famous victory in Dynekilen had in Richter's eyes not only saved Norway from occupation, but also secured the viability of the Scandinavianist project by forestalling Swedish expansion. It is, furthermore,

53 Henrik Ullstad, "Med mjöd och manligt glam på fädrenes sätt." Studentskandinavismen som ideologi och performativ praxis', in *Skandinavism: en rörelse och en idé under 1800-talet*, ed. Magdalena Hillström and Hanne Sanders (Gothenburg & Stockholm: Makadam Förlag, 2014), 87–88.

54 *Fædrelandsvennen*, 10 November (1876).

noteworthy that the unveiling did not arouse the Swedish authorities to protest, revealing that the memory of this bellicose hero had lost its divisive edge.

On Tordenskjold Street and Tordenskjold Square: Scandinavianism and Solidarity

Throughout the nineteenth century, Tordenskjold lent his name to many streets, roads and squares in both Denmark and Norway. In Norway, Trondheim in 1842 was the first major city dedicating a street to its famous son. Christiania followed suit in 1864 with both a street and a square in the centre of town.⁵⁵ As is the case with the Trondheim statue, these street names in the capital cannot simply be described as historical self-appropriations. On the contrary, the naming of a Tordenskjold street and square occurred in a politically sensitive time and needs to be seen against the background of the Second Schleswig War and the connected Scandinavianist agitation.

By 1863, no less than 82 streets required (re)naming in Christiania, owing to the rapid expansion of the city over the previous decades. A committee was formed under the direction of city conductor Christian Heinrich Grosch to draft a proposal containing new street names. What is striking in both the first (12 October 1864) and final proposal (14 December) is the relatively large portion of streets named after historical figures from the Danish period.⁵⁶ Next to Tordenskjold (who was the only one honoured with two streets) streets were named after fellow-naval heroes Iver Huitfeldt and Kjeld Lauridsen Stub, as well as the poets Tullin, Storm, Holberg and Wessel: the very same persons who had been the topic of the Moe-Barfod feud twenty years earlier. In addition, three streets were named after the three so-called *norske graner* [Norway spruce], who had served as officers in the Danish army during the First Schleswig War (1848–1851): Olav Rye, Hans Helgesen, and Frederik Adolph Schleppegrell. Both Rye and Schleppegrell had died on the battlefield.

The social geographer Professor Maoz Azaryahu has described how commemorative street names contribute to the cultural production of a shared past. They form an instrument with which to project a dominant vision of national history upon society. Through street names the past is literally connected to physical spaces in the present and as such made part of everyday life – indeed a

55 Tordenskjoldsplass was in 1932 built over and replaced by Oslo's characteristic city hall; Tordenskjoldsgate still exists and runs alongside that monumental building.

56 Minutes of these meetings were retrieved from the Oslo City Archive: Christiania bystyresaker, 12. Oktober 1864, Sag 3: 'Angaaende nye Gatenavn'; Christiania bystyresaker, 14. December 1864, Sag 4: 'Angaaende nye Gatenavn'.

very good example of banal nationalism.⁵⁷ It would, therefore, appear logical to place the naming round of 1864 within this frame of communicating a vision of the past that can stir up pride over these heroes and, in turn, over the nation at large. At the same time, the choice of exactly these figures could be perceived as claiming them back from Denmark – where there were also streets and public spaces bearing their names – by literally anchoring them in Norway through their inscription on the Christiania city map.

However, the timing of the whole operation complicates this seemingly straightforward analysis. The Grosch committee convened for the first time on 30 June 1864, not long after the Norwegian and Swedish governments had decided not to support Denmark in the war with Prussia and Austria. In his MA thesis on the history of street naming in Oslo – an otherwise understudied subject – Erlend Tidemann argues that at least the decision to name three prominent streets in the central Grünerløkka district after Rye, Helgesen, and Schleppegrell can be seen as a protest against the government. The deeds of the *norske graner* [Norway spruce] were well-known not only in Denmark, but also in Norwegian society. Particularly salient in this context was the fact that the triumvirate back in 1814 had refused to enrol in the Swedish army and had instead remained true to Denmark.⁵⁸ In the same vein, naming streets after men like Tordenskjold and Stub, who had earned their glory in war situations with Sweden might likewise be interpreted as a critique of the Swedish decision makers.

Unfortunately, there are no extant minutes of the committee meetings that might corroborate the political protest thesis, but there are additional arguments to be made in support of Tidemann's claim. For one thing, there are indications of Scandinavianist sympathies among the committee members, which would imply support for the military involvement of Norway and Sweden. Five out of six of them took part in the Scandinavian student meetings of 1851 and 1852 in Christiania. In addition to this, the magistrate and the mayor involved in the decision-making process had also been present at these occasions.⁵⁹ One committee member, head of Christiania police Carl Johan Michelet, had signed an appeal in *Morgenbladet* soliciting donations in support of Norwegian volunteers who wanted to travel to the Danish front.⁶⁰ His father, furthermore, was

57 Maoz Azaryahu, 'The Power of Commemorative Street Names', *Society and Space* 14 (1996): 311–330.

58 Erlend Tidemann, *Holdninger til gatenavn i Oslo* (MA Thesis, University of Oslo, 2011), 57–58.

59 The names of Nicolay Nicolaysen, Carl Johan Michelet, Christian Heinrich Grosch, Georg Andreas Bull, W. Jürgensen, A. Petersen, Carl Fougstad, and August Thomle all feature in the list over participants given in *Studentertog til Christiania 1851 fra Lund og Kjöbenhavn: Beretning fra et Udvalg af Deeltagerne* (Copenhagen: S. Trier, 1853). The only committee member that did not take part was law expert Frederik Peter Brandt.

60 *Morgenbladet*, 9 April (1864).



Fig. 3: The intersection of Huitfeldts Gate (named 1864) and Cort Adellers Gate (named 1870) in Oslo's Frogner district. Photo: Tim van Gerven

commander of the Norwegian troops encamped at Gardermoen and which had fruitlessly waited for their deployment. Major General Christian Fredrik Michelet was of the generation of Rye, Helgesen, and Schleppegrell, and it is more than possible that he had served together with them prior to 1814. Finally, it should be mentioned that several members of the committee entertained close ties with Denmark, either through family relations or study periods at the university of Copenhagen. Grosch had even been born in the Danish capital.

Dissatisfaction with the government's refusal to act upon the Scandinavianist rhetoric might thus have provided a motive for honouring men from the Dano-Norwegian period with street names. But a different motive is probably more

likely. The street names were arguably not primarily a message to the Norwegian and Swedish governments, but instead first and foremost an act of solidarity with Denmark. The names of Tordenskjold, Holberg, and the other great Dano-Norwegian men underlined the longstanding historical and cultural bond between Norway and Denmark. Activating the memory of Rye and Schleppegrell served as a reminder that Norwegians were willing to die for Denmark: they had done so in the recent past and were still prepared to do so in the present, as was proven, in 1864, by the 105 Norwegian volunteers fighting on the Danish side.⁶¹

Again, as would be the case 12 years later with the unveiling of his statue in Trondheim, the naming of Tordenskjold Street and Tordenskjold Square was neither an act of re-appropriation from Denmark, nor an expression of animosity against Sweden. On the contrary, the memory of Tordenskjold was in this instance employed, first of all to invoke solidarity with Denmark in its hour of need and, more indirectly, to project a message of Scandinavian brotherhood in a period during which the ideals of Scandinavianism were put to the test.

The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Swedish-Norwegian union on 4 November 1864 featured a similar instance of Tordenskjold being framed within a pan-Scandinavian narrative. During the official festivities held in Christiania, Major general Carl Björnstjerna – his hopes unshattered by Denmark's recent defeat – held a speech on the prospects of Scandinavian unification, reminding his audience of the centuries of bloody warfare between the two countries which, according to him, had also had positive consequences. The Norwegians and Swedes had earned each other's respect in battle, as he stated: 'ogsaa skattes Carl den XII's Bedrifter lige høit paa begge Sider af Fjeldet, ogsaa har Tordenskjold ingen varmere Beundrer end den svenske Sømand' [The deeds of Carl XII were valued highly on both sides of the mountains, while no one admired Tordenskjold as much as the average Swedish sailor].⁶² Here, once again the bellicose sides of Carl XII and Tordenskjold were neutralized, and the two soldiers were anachronistically remembered as instigators of Scandinavian rapprochement. In the nineteenth-century context, they united rather than divided.

61 H. A. Hanson, *For Nordens Frihed, Svenskerne, Nordmændene og Finneerne i vore sønderjydske Krige* (Copenhagen: Danmarks-Samfundet, 1919).

62 *Morgenbladet*, 12 November (1864).

Tordenskjold's Return to Norway

The period 1843–1845 – not coincidentally the years containing the first two Scandinavianist student meetings – marks the high point of the feud on the exact nationality of canonical Dano-Norwegian figures, which included Danish appropriations of Tordenskjold (Hertz, Paludan-Müller), polemic Norwegian responses to these appropriations (Moe, Munch), as well as alternative Scandinavianist adaptations (Blom, Barfod). These skirmishes, however, seem to have fizzled out rather quickly after 1845. This was to a large degree a consequence of the feud being soon overshadowed by another, and even fiercer, historiographical and philological debate between Danish and Norwegian academics concerning the ownership of the Old-Norse heritage.⁶³ Consequently, new Danish appropriations of the Trondheim native were met without any of the previous venom; two comedies on Tordenskjold (1862, 1872) by the popular author Carit Etlar as well as Holger Drachmann's long epic poem *Peder Tordenskjold* (1880) all received sympathetic reviews in the Norwegian press.

By the turn of the century, however, the old irritations came to the surface again. In 1901, the celebration of May 17th in Christiania was largely dedicated to Tordenskjold. According to an account of the events in *Nordisk Tidende*, 'the entire capital and numerous visitors' – including the Swedish crown prince – witnessed the unveiling of Axel Ender's statue of the naval hero on Tordenskjolds Plass. A speech was held by admiral Jacob Børresen (whose Tordenskjold biography appeared the same year) before the veil was lifted during a military salute of 13 canon shots roaring from Akershus Castle and several Navy vessels anchored in the fjord. The remarkably Norwegian-chauvinistic article in *Nordisk Tidende* – a Scandinavian-language newspaper serving the Scandinavian diaspora in the United States – did not fail to remark that the 'great naval hero had now finally been given back to his fatherland'. The reporter continued along the same lines:

For han *har* i disse tvende aar kun i historien tilhørt Norge medens hans stöv hviler i fremmed Jord. Det hviler i Danmark, men ikke med nordmændenes samtykke. Den norske helt slogs for Norges frelse paa hin tid, men han slogs for sit fædreland under

63 Once again, P. A. Munch was the central figure in this feud. Elaborating on the so-called 'migration theory' propounded by his close colleague Rudolf Keyser, he stated that the ancient forebears of the Norwegians had been the original inhabitants of Scandinavia as they had populated the region from the north, whereas the ancestors of the Swedes and Danes had entered from the south, and were thus of mixed Nordic-continental stock. For Munch, this implied that the Eddas and sagas were written in Old-Norwegian rather than in a common Nordic root-language. Anne-Lise Seip, 'Nasjonsbygger og kosmopolitt', in P.A. Munch: *Historiker og nasjonsbygger*, ed. Sverre Bagge, John Peter Collett and Audun Kjus (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 2012), 11–32.

dansk flag, og da hans bedrifter kronedes med held, og han paa samme tid frelste Danmark fra undergang, saa blev Norges løn fordi den havde fostret den tapre søn, den, at æren herfor ikke skulde tilhøre hans fædreland, men Danmark.

[He has in these two centuries only in our memory belonged to Norway, while his remains rested in foreign soil, in Denmark – without the consent of the Norwegian people. The Norwegian hero fought for Norway’s valour in his day, but he fought for his fatherland under the Danish flag, and when he celebrated his greatest victories, he also saved Denmark from ruination. In reward, Norway was denied the honour for having raised this brave son, which was instead bestowed upon Denmark.]⁶⁴

Those who after the exuberant ceremony still had not had enough of *Tordenskjold* and were lucky enough to own a ticket, could visit a spectacular staging of Jacob Breda Bull’s drama *Tordenskjold* at the National Theatre later that evening. The papers were primarily impressed by the abundant stage settings and the spectacular theatrical effects, significantly less so by the literary qualities of Bull’s adaptation of the vice admiral’s life which, according to *Aftenposten*, lacked psychological depth and real suspense. This was, however, of no consequence, according to the review, as the play lacked literary pretensions and instead aimed at something quite different:

Nu fik man liden eller ingen Tid til at tænke paa Stykkets Magerhed som kunst. Hjernerne hvilede i veltilfreds national Stemning, og med Sympathi fulgtes den kjække Søguts mange Bedrifter – under Kartovernes hule Drøn og Musketternes Dundren.

[The spectators had little or no time to ruminate over the play’s meagreness as a piece of art. Our minds reposed in a pleasant nationalistic mood, and it was with the greatest sympathy that we followed the stout sailor’s many trials and tribulations, while the canons rumbled, and the muskets thundered around our heads.]⁶⁵

Compared to Blom’s proto-Scandinavianist and Hertz’s all-Danish hero, Bull’s *Tordenskjold* is, with some distance, the most Norwegian *Tordenskjold* of the three, being portrayed as an undisturbed optimist who bravely defies Sweden’s military prowess and warmongering. Still, despite numerous expressions of patriotic fervour, the play’s tenor is not one-sidedly nationalistic, nor anti-Danish or anti-Swedish. Bull does, for example, not gloss over *Tordenskjold*’s loyalty to the Danish king and the Danish flag, and he also does not obscure the fact that the vice admiral after the war proposed the Swedish consul in Copenhagen to join arms against Russia.⁶⁶ Also the review in *Aftenposten* picked up on the restrained patriotism: ‘Forfatteren har havt de beste hensigter – han viser en sterk patriotisk Følelse, men holder Chauvinismen unda og lader ikke Følelsen udarte.

64 *Nordisk Tidende*, 30 May (1901).

65 *Aftenposten*, 27 March (1901).

66 Jacob Breda Bull, *Tordenskjold. Et folkeskuespil i tre afdelinger* (Christiania: Det norske aktieforlag, 1901), 244.

Danske som svenske kan ikke paa noget Punkt føle sig stødt' [The author has the best intentions – he gives expression to great patriotic feelings; yet, he keeps chauvinism at bay and does not let these sentiments spin out of control. Neither Danes nor Swedes can be offended by this piece in any way].⁶⁷



Fig. 4: This photo taken during the unveiling of the Tordenskjold statue in Christiania on 17 May 1901 demonstrates that the papers hardly overstated the attendance of the event. Photo: Anders Beer Wilse, DEXTRA Photo / Norsk Teknisk Museum

In the sources, I could find no clues as to why the year 1901 was picked to celebrate Tordenskjold. It was in no way an anniversary year related to his life. It is, therefore, hard to detach the revival of interest in Tordenskjold at this time from the growing crisis within the union with Sweden, despite the toned-down patriotism that characterized the celebrations. In this context of mounting tensions, cultural production was actively employed in Norwegian society to raise national consciousness. The Norwegian parliament had for example in 1899–1900 subsidized a cheap, but high-quality edition of the King's Sagas in both Norwegian language variants, in order to make what was deemed a national monument available to every citizen. Odd Einar Haugen argues that the impact of this popular publication should not be underestimated as it contributed greatly to the

⁶⁷ *Aftenposten*, 27 March (1901).

fostering of national feeling in the build-up to the dissolution of the union in the autumn of 1905.⁶⁸

Tordenskjold, of course, represented as a legendary ‘saviour of Norway’ and as a victor having defeated Swedish invaders, became the perfect focus for mounting pleas for full independence. In this light, it may not be surprising that precisely in 1905 Etlar’s play *Tordenskjold i Dynekilen* was revived in Norwegian theatres, 43 years after its first performance, while Bull published a novel based on his 1901 play that same year. It was especially the events at Dynekilen that came to symbolize Norwegian resistance against Swedish rule. The Scando-American newspaper *Nordisk Tidende* – which was also widely distributed in Scandinavia itself – again contributed a particularly polemic voice to the debates. On 20 April 1905 for example – a few days after the Norwegian government had rejected a final attempt from Swedish side to save the union – the paper printed a poem titled ‘The Day Tordenskjold saved Norway’. The author of the poem was none other than Jacob Breda Bull. This time, Bull had abandoned the restraint informing his theatre piece, and the implications of the poem are evident: just as Carl XII abandoned his plans to invade Norway in 1716, the present Swedish king should give in and grant Norway its political autonomy. Dramatizing the interception of the transport fleet at Dynekilen, one verse reads as follows:

Tolvte Karl paa flaaden bier;
Flaaden kommer aldri frem!
Sverigs stolte svaner tier;
Tordenskjold har talt med dem.
Wessels torden
Tvang fra Norden
Kongen hjem.

[King Carl awaits his fleet
But the fleet never comes!
Sweden’s proud swans are silent
Tordenskjold has talked to them
Wessel’s thunder
Forced from the North
The king back home.]⁶⁹

68 Odd Einar Haugen, ‘Editionen westnordischer Mittelaltertexte in Skandinavien – ein historischer Überblick’, in *Geschichte der Edition in Skandinavien*, ed. Paula Henrikson and Christian Janss (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 24–25.

69 *Nordisk Tidende*, 20 April (1905).

Conclusions

From this inventory of his memorial afterlife, the figure of Tordenskjold emerges as a discursive pawn recruited in the political commotions leading up to the dissolution of the union between Norway and Sweden on 7 June 1905. This final incarnation once again bears testimony to his remarkable symbolic flexibility. Travelling through the nineteenth century on the tidal wave of historical and political change, the ghost of Tordenskjold was present, one could say, at every landmark moment, taking on a different persona according to the ideological needs of the individuals and groups appropriating him for their cause: a modern saga hero inspiring courage in the devastated Copenhagen of 1813, a famous son of Mother Scandinavia in the 1840s, a spokesperson for solidarity with defeated Denmark in 1864, a figure of resistance against Swedish occupation in 1905. In the process, he was attributed different national identities: Danish, Norwegian, Dano-Norwegian, or Scandinavian, which either gave cause for strife between competing appropriations, or worked into reconciliatory and coalescing visions on Scandinavian identity.

The case of Tordenskjold and his role in nineteenth-century Scandinavian memory culture reveals the intimate entanglement between the various national movements in this part of Northern Europe. This entanglement was in part accommodated by the awareness of a larger, pan-national identity tying the three countries together. Sidestepping the dead end that is methodological nationalism, the study of memory sites such as Tordenskjold – ingrained as they are in a dynamic and transnational process of remembrance – goes a long way towards showing how national and regional identities take shape in continuous interaction with other competing and complementing identities.