

Negotiating Pasts in the Nordic Countries

Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Memory

Edited by

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Using a Past – *Magistra vitae* Approaches to History

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History is indeed a witness of times gone by, a light of truth, a life of memory, a teacher of life and a herald of antiquity.

Cicero, *De oratore* II, 9, 36¹

Thus, the writing of history was considered for about two thousand years or so to be a place of learning where one could become wiser without coming to any harm.

Koselleck, *Historia magistra vitae*²

As this book explores the ways in which people have negotiated pasts that are considered to be interesting and worthwhile, it should include a study of the *magistra vitae* approach to history. Not only has this been one of the most influential approaches among European historians, adherents of this tradition have also reflected on the relationship between present-day concerns and available pasts – that is, on the very idea of a usable past. However, it no longer plays an overt role in the world of academic history. It is therefore relevant to start by raising the question: what happened to this tradition of history-writing?

Explaining the demise of a tradition

The standard accounts of what happened to the *magistra vitae* approach were published in the 1960s. The first was written by George H. Nadel, an associate of the Warburg Institute in London and an editor of the newly founded journal *History and Theory*. Entitled 'Phi-

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losophy of History before Historicism', it appeared in *The Critical Approach to Science and Philosophy* (1964), a *Festschrift* published in honour of the Austrian-British philosopher Karl R. Popper. The second was written by Reinhart Koselleck, a German specialist in the history of historical thinking. Entitled 'Historia magistra vitæ. Über die Auflösung des Topos in Horizont neuzeitlich bewegter Geschichte' (Historia magistra vitæ. On the disintegration of the topos within the framework of modernised history), it appeared in *Natur und Geschichte: Karl Löwith zum 70. Geburtstag* (1967) (Nature and history: In honour of Karl Löwith's 70th birthday).³

Koselleck was not aware of the fact that a few years earlier Nadel had treated the same tradition of history-writing. Nevertheless, they reached similar conclusions on many points. The *magistra vitæ* approach was seen as having its roots in Greco-Roman Antiquity. It had not been the only, but certainly the most influential approach until the end of the eighteenth century, when its use began to decline. The main point on which Nadel and Koselleck differed concerned the explanation of the decline of this approach to the writing of history.

Nadel noted that a *magistra vitæ* approach had been employed as long as historians were writing history with a lay audience in mind, and as long as they had been concerned with the study of 'individuals and individual behaviour'. To this he added:

After about 1800, exemplar history was largely confined to school-books ... since it was only for the education of children that the justification of the study of history in terms of its moral utility could now be plausible.⁵

Thus, Nadel saw the decline of the *magistra vitæ* approach as being due to the fact that historical scholarship had become an increasingly professionalised enterprise as of the late eighteenth century, where the idea of studying history for its own sake was favoured by academic historians. As far as Nadel was concerned, a long-standing struggle between opposing approaches to history was being brought to an end through the professionalisation of historical scholarship:

The perennial struggle between the antiquarian and the philosophical historian, the pedantic scholar and educated gentleman, fought in antiquity and again since the Renaissance, was coming to an end. The *erudite* was triumphing over the *philosophe*.⁶

To demonstrate that an antiquarian approach had won the struggle, thus defining academic history as 'the lowly pursuit of past facts', Nadel went on to quote the well-known passage from the preface to Leopold Ranke's *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker* (1824) (Histories of the Latin and German peoples):

The writing of history has been given the task of judging the past, of teaching people what is of use to them in future times; the present attempt does not aspire to such lofty undertakings: it merely wants to show how it actually happened.⁷

Koselleck explained the decline of the *magistra vitæ* approach in a somewhat different way. He saw it more as being an unintended consequence of the emergence of a new way of understanding historical processes; one in which history was now understood as what was termed 'a collective singular' (*Kollektivsingular*). Within this new framework of thinking it made sense to use such phrases as 'history in itself' – a notion that would have appeared meaningless as long as a *magistra vitæ* approach prevailed.

The authority of the ancient mode of history-writing became undermined, not least by those Enlightenment thinkers who had happily used its teachings. It took place in the course of an ongoing change whereby the past and the future became related to each other in a new way. At the end of the day it was 'history itself' that began to open up for a new mode of experience. The new kind of history achieved its own unique temporal quality and its different and changing modes of time and experience undermined the evidence that had favoured the idea of an exemplary past.⁸

Koselleck noted that a *magistra vitæ* approach did not disappear all of a sudden; its decline had taken place over many years. He quoted the same passage from Ranke's preface to *Geschichten der romanischen*

und germanischen Völker (1824) to which Nadel had referred, but added the point that Ranke actually employed the topos when, in the early 1830s, he had set out to read 'the book of history' and spell out its lessons to the readers of his new *Historisch-Politische Zeitschrift* (Journal of history and politics). Koselleck's comment on Ranke's project should therefore also be noted:

However, his obvious failure [with this journal] made it clear that it was no longer possible to re-use the ancient topos. ... There had occurred a relativisation of all [historical] events, and it had the effect of distorting [the whole idea of] history as a *magistra vitae* – moreover, it was also an experience shared by those who were opposed to the proponents of progress.⁹

All in all, Nadel and Koselleck agreed that a *magistra vitae* approach no longer played a significant role within academic history as of the mid nineteenth century, although they explained its demise somewhat differently. Nadel did so in terms of a professionalisation of the study of history, Koselleck in terms of the emergence of a new conception of history. Koselleck, however, also noted that academic history during the same period had become defined as a science of the past (*Vergangenheitswissenschaft*).¹⁰

An alternative view

In 1981, a group of West-German historians with a special interest in historical didactics published a book entitled *Der Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte* (The present-day relevance of history). They gave two reasons for doing so. The teaching of history, they asserted, would only appear worthwhile to students to the extent that it became connected to their present-day living. Moreover, the attempt made by academic historians to pursue the study of the past for its own sake had had the effect of estranging academic historians more and more from the wider society.

The first study in this book was entitled 'Historia magistra vitae. Zur Rehabilitation eines überwundenen Topos' (History as a *magistra vitae*. An attempt to restore a discarded topos). It was written by

Eckhard Kessler, whose field of study was humanist approaches to history, and included an outline of how the classical topos had been interpreted and used from antiquity to the present-day. However, at a certain point Kessler changed the way in which he argued his case. Whereas his treatment of classical, medieval and early modern interpretations had been based upon analyses of the works of specific authors, he proceeded differently in the last part entitled '*Lernen aus der Geschichte im Zeitalter moderner Geschichtswissenschaft*' (Learning from history after it had become a modern science). This section had the character of a theoretical analysis – that is, an attempt to outline how history as such can be understood. Why did he change his way of arguing his case?

Kessler wanted to refute the thesis put forward by Koselleck to the effect that the *magistra vitae* approach had been undermined by the emergence of a new way of understanding historical processes. The classical topos, Koselleck had pointed out, was incompatible with the notion that history should be understood as being a specific and unified whole (*ein singuläres und einheitliches Ganzes*).¹¹ Koselleck had argued his case in part by reviewing the arguments put forward by philosophers of history and historians in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, views that he appeared to find theoretically compelling. Thus, Kessler was confronted with the task of having to refute Koselleck's thesis if he wanted to uphold a *magistra vitae* approach.

On this point, Kessler decided to re-employ the analysis of time presented in Book X of Augustine's *Confessiones* (397–401) (*Confessions*). Augustine had sought to demonstrate that the past can only exist in the present insofar as it is a part of people's memories and that the future can only exist in the present in the form of people's expectations. As far as Kessler was concerned, Augustine's analysis of time-consciousness represented a constitutive feature of human life, and on this basis he defined history as an inherent dimension of human life. Thus, Kessler was able to conclude his analysis of the history of the *magistra vitae* approach by presenting the following thesis:

The terms in which I understand my past will necessarily be those in which I understand my future, and vice versa. ... It is not possible to have a history that is not instructive about the present and the future.¹²

Kessler, as a matter of fact, did not challenge Koselleck's assertion that a specific way of interpreting the *magistra vitae* idea had lost its credibility in the course of the first half of the nineteenth century. But he pointed out that only a specific interpretation had been dismissed, not the whole idea per se.

What is missing?

At present, there are two answers to the question: what happened to the *magistra vitae* tradition? Nadel and Koselleck argue that it is a tradition that belongs to a bygone past, whereas Kessler claims that it is still in use. Yet, all three analyses are flawed by a similar shortcoming. When it comes to the period after the middle of nineteenth century, they each assume rather than demonstrate what happened to the *magistra vitae* approach.

Nadel assumed that the norms of academic history had remained more or less the same since the year 1800. Koselleck assumed that an understanding of history as a unified process had become a notion shared by European historians from the middle of the nineteenth century. Kessler accepted that the specific interpretation of the topos had lost its credibility in the course of the nineteenth century, but asserted that it had been substituted by a new interpretation. But he failed to offer any examples that could demonstrate that this was the case.

Thus, what is lacking at the present time is an empirical survey that will also cover the period after the mid-nineteenth century. I have therefore decided to survey how historians working within the boundaries of the composite Danish state have been handling the *magistra vitae* idea in the course of the last three centuries.

A *magistra vitae* historian

Two ways of approaching the past competed with each other in sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, one favoured by antiquarians, the other by philosophical historians.¹³

One of the main issues upon which they disagreed concerned the purpose of studying and writing history. Antiquarians rejected the idea of using history for present-day purposes, they wanted to approach the study of history more in the manner of a gentleman's sport – i.e. as a value in itself. Philosophical historians, by contrast, thought that using time to study history only could be considered a worthwhile enterprise to the extent that it served a useful purpose, and they therefore used their history-writing in attempts to intervene in contemporary affairs.

Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754) was the most prominent of Danish and Norwegian historians from the first half of the eighteenth century, and in Nordic studies of the history of historical scholarship he is ranked as one of the foremost philosophical historians in Europe at that time. He was appointed professor of history at Copenhagen University in 1730, but long before that he had made a name for himself as a historian who had set out to enlighten his fellow citizens.

His greatest success in terms of sales was a book entitled *Introduction til Natur- og Folke-Rettens Kundskab* (1716) (An introduction to the knowledge of natural law and the laws of nations), which appeared in four further editions during his life-time. Holberg began this work by outlining the fields of learning he considered to be worthwhile, and four such fields were listed: (i) moral philosophy, (ii) medicine, (iii) mathematics and (iv) history. He argued for the utility of the latter in the following way:

There are those who would not include histories among the beneficial sciences since they consider such stories to be only a way of entertaining people. But they are seriously mistaken in this because one not only learns geography and languages from the sound study of histories, but one also learns about public law and politics. Moreover, one should not forget the many wonderful examples to be found in such stories, which people can use to edify themselves.

Thus, the study of history is both useful and pleasing when it is handled in the proper way. However, it is deplorable that so many teachers instruct youth about the old kind of far-fetched history ... and let them learn parts of it of by heart rather than teach them what is useful and important.¹⁴

Holberg had employed a *magistra vitae* approach in his first book, which was entitled *Introduction til de fornemste europæiske Rigers Historier indtil disse Tider* (1711) (An introduction to the histories of the most distinguished European states up to the present time). It was his attempt to follow the example set by Samuel Pufendorf in his *Einleitung zu der Historie der vornehmsten Reiche und Staaten. Ein Unterrichtsbuch für junge Staatsmänner* (1682–86) (An introduction to the stories of the most distinguished European states. A text-book for young statesmen).

Holberg also employed such an approach in his three-volume study of *Danemarks Riges Historie* (1732–35) (History of the Danish empire) as well as in his *Almindelige Kirkehistorie* (1738) (A general church history) and *Jødisk Historie* (1742) (A Jewish history). Moreover, he included in his *Moralske Fabler* (1751) (Moral tales), the last work published during his life-time, a story about 'Histiens Skiebne' (The fate of history), in which he informed the public about the difficult working-conditions of historians at that time.

At various points in his work, Holberg attacked those scholars who favoured an antiquarian approach. The latter approach was rejected not only because it failed to provide young people with relevant and valuable knowledge, but also because it tended to waste their time by demanding of them that they should learn by heart what he described as being 'the old kind of far-fetched history' (*den gamle fabelagtige Historie*). Holberg frequently referred to or quoted Cicero, but at no stage did he actually employ the classical topos from *De oratore*. However, he openly acknowledged that he wanted to abide by the standards set by the classical European heritage. When he published his *Heltes sammenlignede Historier* (1739) (Comparative histories of heroes) and *Helinders sammenlignede Historier* (1745) (Comparative histories of heroines), he added to both the subtitle (*after Plutarchi Maade* (In the way done by Plutarch)). In the preface to the latter work, he explained why:

To return to this book I am now publishing, it is – as is my history of heroes – an attempt to imitate Plutarch's comparative history of famous men. This manner of engaging in moral reflections may be considered the most edifying as well as the least insulting. It is the most edifying insofar as it is based upon stories that function as a mirror of indisputable virtues and vices. It is the least insulting because no one takes offence from seeing their own failures depicted through the life of deceased persons.¹⁵

Holberg had employed the same approach in *Introduction til Natur- og Folke-Rettens Kundskab* (1716), in which history had been placed on a par with such beneficial fields of study as moral philosophy, medicine and mathematics. Yet, in later years, he went even further and pointed out that apart from studying the words of God, studying history was the most relevant and valuable field of endeavour. What could people learn by studying history? In one of his *Epistler* (Epistles), published in 1748, this question was answered in the following way:

I consider the science of history – after the word of God – to be the most useful and important of all fields of study when it is read with the right kind of eyes. It gives me knowledge about countries. I learn about people. I come to know myself. Yes, I even learn to predict. From the study of bygone events, one can assess what will happen, and for that reason any sober historian can also be taken to be a prophet. Moral reflections are of great use, but history has even greater consequence when it is read with discrimination and when it is presented in the proper written form.¹⁶

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was considered a commonplace to argue that the study of history was of crucial importance in the education of princes. This was the line of thought that underlay the idea of a *Fürstenspiegel*, Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (1513) (The Prince) being a well-known example of this genre. Holberg sought to develop this idea further. He not only saw the study of history as a way of educating princes and other statesmen, he wanted to place such studies at the very centre of the education of all citizens. He saw this project as a means of furthering their moral and civic enlightenment.

What, more precisely, did Holberg mean when he used the term 'history' (*historie*) in his writings? And how would history be able to fulfil the educational task he envisaged? Shortly after he had become professor of history at Copenhagen University, he published a short manual for the students attending his history courses. It was entitled *Synopsis historiae universalis* (1733) (A digest of universal history), and it gave the students a set of straight answers to a number of key questions. The first question and answer were the following:

What is history? History is to tell a story of bygone events in order to keep alive the memory of such events from which we may learn to live in a good and happy way.¹⁷

Holberg used a set of interrelated terms when he wrote about history. He employed the terms 'history' (*historie*), 'histories' (*historier*) and 'the history' (*historien*), an important point in the present context being that none of these terms was used as a synonym for the past. History, in Holberg's vocabulary, referred to a present-day activity. It referred to the telling, writing or reading of worthwhile stories about past times and to an academic discipline. As he saw it, the main task of the historian was to tell worthwhile stories about past times. When referring to history as an academic discipline, Holberg used the term 'the history' (*historien*) or the plural form 'histories' (*historier*). The latter was the case, for instance, in the preface to the third volume of his *Dannemarks Riges Historie* (1735), entitled *Betænkning om Historier* (An exposé of histories).

History was thus defined as a present-day activity that people pursue to become wiser about how to live their lives. Holberg also made the point that a first-rate historian would be able to make predictions about what was likely to happen in the future. Consequently, doing history in the proper manner required that one should clarify and negotiate the issue of what would appear to function as a usable past in a contemporary setting. Holberg therefore found it important to use the metaphor of a mirror when outlining the educational function of history. History was seen as a way in which people could contemplate and deliberate about what they should do about contemporary issues in the light of what had happened

in earlier times. Thus, studying history was a way of intervening in contemporary affairs.

When examining Holberg's use and understanding of various terms in some detail, it becomes evident that he used the term 'history' (*historie*) both descriptively and normatively. The term was used descriptively when it referred to any form of telling stories about past times. It was used normatively when it referred to those stories about the past which would help people to live a good and happy life. He made this clear in the opening paragraph of the aforementioned *Betænkning om Historier* (1735):

Nothing is easier, nor is anything more difficult than to write a history. Because of the first fact, everyone attempts to do it, and because of the latter fact, so few dare to do it. As soon as someone wishes to become an author, he will start to write a story as if it was the easiest task in the world. What can be easier than to tell about bygone things ... I confess that if history were nothing more than giving a simple account of bygone events, then it would be a task suitable for everyone. However, to define it in such a way is quite inadequate. Since the smallest history presents a challenge to an all-round and faultless person, discriminating and reasonable people will not dare to embark on such a task without trembling. It is actually a task that only few people have been mature enough to perform. Even though experience shows that in no profession does one work more intensively than within the historical profession, there is no other science in which masterpieces appear more rarely than in history. For every ten writers in others fields one is not likely to find a good history writer.¹⁸

A historian would have to be very full of self-confidence to use such a statement as the opening paragraph of a history-book. Yet, this is exactly the way Holberg introduced himself to his readers of the third volume of his *Dannemarks Riges Historie* (1735). Thus, to do history in the way favoured by Holberg, a historian should be able to combine at least three kinds of talent. First, the historian should be 'able to read history with the right kind of eyes'. This calls for a detailed and penetrating knowledge of the subject matter being dealt with. Next, the historian should be able to write history in a

way that people find engaging and enjoyable, since this constitutes a pre-condition of the reader's desire to spend time on reading stories about bygone days. Finally, the historian must also clarify the ways in which the subject matter at hand can be considered as constituting a usable past. This implies that the historian should indicate how the knowledge obtained about past times can be used when handling present-day issues and challenges. In sum, the good historian does not only have to be a knowledgeable and enlightened scholar, he or she must also be a talented writer and a citizen who wants to make a difference with regard to shaping the future course of history.

The transformation of an idea

In 1836, one of the Danish educational societies offered a prize to the person who succeeded in writing a new history of Denmark with broad popular appeal. Although C.F. Allen (1811–71) was studying theology at that time, he decided to take up the challenge and submitted a manuscript in 1839. After being assessed by a committee of prominent Danish academics, Allen was not only awarded the prize, the book was also published in 1840 under the title *Haandbog i Fædrelandets Historie med stadigt Henblik paa Folkets og Statens indre Udvikling* (Handbook of the history of the fatherland focusing on the internal development of the people and the state). Six further editions were published in Allen's life-time, and this work was used as a standard textbook for students of history at Copenhagen University until 1917.

In his introduction, Allen pointed out that Holberg's history of Denmark had succeeded in reaching a wide audience because it had employed a literary style of writing. He returned again to Holberg's achievement in his treatment of eighteenth-century Danish history:

Due to his comedies and ... historical writings, Holberg became the father-figure of the new Danish literature and ... he won a place in the heart of the people from which he shall never be displaced as long as the Danish people remain faithful to themselves.¹⁹

However, it was not only in the use of a literary style of writing that Allen set out to follow the example of Holberg, he also wanted, like Holberg, to exert an influence upon his fellow citizens by using the writing of history as a way of intervening in contemporary politics. He did so by encouraging his readers to mirror their own lives in his colourful and engaging narrative of Danish history, the culmination of that history being a somewhat controversial analysis of the political situation in Denmark in the 1830s.

Yet, it should also be noted that the whole framework of Allen's thinking was very different from that of Holberg. Whereas Holberg had entitled his analysis *Danmarks Riges Historie* (1732–35), since it was a history of the realm ruled by the Danish king, Allen had entitled his work *Haandbog i Fædrelandets Historie med stadigt Henblik paa Folkets og Statens indre Udvikling*. This title was not only somewhat ambiguous, it was also highly controversial. It was ambiguous because the three key words – 'fatherland' (*fædreland*), 'people' (*folk*) and 'state' (*stat*) – were not accepted as synonymous terms in the 1840s – insofar as the realm of Danish king at that time was a multi-ethnic and composite state. It was highly controversial because it raised the question of which groups within the Danish state belonged to the Danish people.

When an un-authorised German translation was published in 1841, it appeared under the title *Geschichte des Königreiches Dänemark* (History of the kingdom of Denmark). The translation was undertaken by a professor at Kiel University, Kiel being the other university city within the Danish state. He used the term 'kingdom' (*Königreich*) to make the point that Allen's history only treated the kingdom of Denmark and not the two duchies of Slesvig and Holstein. In the preface to the second Danish edition published in 1842, Allen strongly objected to his title having been translated in such a way. He pointed out that he had used the term 'people' (*folk*) to make it clear that ethnic Danes living in the duchy of Slesvig were part of his history of the Danish fatherland.

In writing history with an educational aim in mind, Holberg had addressed his readers as individual persons. His work was conceived as that of one individual person addressing another about what was a usable past. The way in which readers were addressed in Allen's

history was accomplished in a very different manner. He opted to address his readers as members of an existing collective: the Danish people. Thus, *Haandbog i Fædrelandets Historie* was a text authored by a Danish historian who wrote about the history of the Danish people so that it would be read and used by the Danish people. Thus, in *Haandbog i Fædrelandets Historie*, Allen employed a mode of history-writing that made it possible for Danish readers to identify with the stories being told about the fortunes and misfortunes of the Danish people; and in this way, the work sought to establish an imagined community that not only reached far back into a distant past but also into a projected future.

In the opening chapter the readers were presented with Allen's description of 'the national character of the Danish people' (*Folkecharacteren*), an attempt to outline the primordial character of the Danes. The last chapter included an outline of 'the development of the spirit of the Danish people' (*Folkeandens Udvikling*), in which Allen described the ways in which the national character of the Danish people had been changing since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Here Allen sought to persuade his readers that they were living on the brink of a wholly new era in Danish history.

All ranks and classes of society became more enlightened, and the citizen thought of himself no longer as a passive clog in a machine, but as an active member of a civil society. The spirit of the times and major events in world history, local as well as distant ones, were also contributing to the awaking of the spirit of the people and began focusing the attention of the citizen on his own way of relating to the state and public life.²⁰

Holberg had often made the point that the good historian would be able to make predictions about what was likely to occur. Allen, it can be seen, had taken upon himself the task of outlining to the Danish people what the future was likely to bring. Thus, the final part of his work can be interpreted as an attempt to outline a self-fulfilling prophecy. It can be seen as Allen's way of generating a new political vision and sense of enthusiasm among his fellow Danes – this being an important prerequisite of any major political change.

Allen treated the history of the Danish people as constituting

a specific and unified entity, and he wanted to detect its inherent patterns of development. He could therefore conclude his history of the Danish fatherland by announcing to the Danish people that they, in the 1840s, were actually living on the threshold of a new era. Moreover, Allen's forecast turned out to be true. Less than a decade after he had first published his *Haandbog i Fædrelandets Historie* the constitutional make-up of the Danish kingdom underwent a dramatic change – a change that marked both the end of an absolutist government and the beginning of a more democratic form of government. By engaging in negotiations with his fellow Danes about their past, present and future, Allen's history-writing can be seen as having contributed to making the year 1849 one of the significant turning points in Danish history.

Signs of an emerging professional ambivalence

A review of Allen's *Haandbog i Fædrelandets Historie* appeared in one of the provincial Danish journals in 1843. Reviewing the second edition of the book, it was written by Caspar Paludan-Müller (1805–82) who, as it later turned out, would become Allen's successor as professor of history at Copenhagen University.

Paludan-Müller could not endorse Allen's understanding of the history of the Danish people because it appeared to him to be too subjective and to present a highly critical picture of that history. Paludan-Müller could therefore not recommend that the new *Haandbog i Fædrelandets Historie* should be employed within the Danish educational system. Youth, he argued, should be given a history that furthers their love and esteem for their fatherland, not a critical account of its most recent history. Yet, it should also be noted that Paludan-Müller did not disagree with Allen on the point of conceiving the history of the Danish people as constituting a specific and unified entity. It was the way in which Allen had interpreted that history to which he objected. Moreover, one of the entries in his diary from 1856 makes evident that Paludan-Müller was at that time nourishing the ambition of writing a more apt and suitable account of Danish history. The idea behind his projected history was described in the following way:

Such an enterprise would simultaneously move everyone who had the capacity to understand it, it would teach the people how to understand their present situation as well as give them a premonition of their future, and it would shift the attention of historians away from secondary matters and towards a task worth investing one's life in doing. Such an enterprise could only be a history of the fatherland, and it should be written in such a way ... that it would be of great significance for the life of the people.²¹

Thus, Paludan-Müller did not at that point object to the idea that the writing of history could be used to exert influence upon the future development of Danish history. On the contrary, he seems to have conceived it as being the *raison d'être* of such an enterprise. After he became professor of history in 1871, however, his way of thinking began to change.

There are signs of an emergent ambivalence in the lectures that he began to give on how to study and write history. His lectures *Indledning til Historiens Studium* (An introduction to the study of history) were held in 1876, 1878 and 1880, and they make clear that Paludan-Müller was finding it difficult to make up his mind about whether or not a historian should attempt to influence the ongoing making of history through the writing of history. He had outlined at the start of these lectures what the term 'history' originally referred to in Greek and Latin, and he then proceeded to present his students with the following definition:

History is the science treating the development of humanity on the basis of the events of the past. ... History only treats the past, both the nearer and more distant past. It looks back at those stages that humanity has undergone, considers what has been achieved, and seeks to identify the signs of an underlying development in order to be able to grasp the movement of history. It is practical life that concerns itself with the present, not history – history has even less to do with the future.²²

In his introductory lectures, Paludan-Müller can be seen as treating the whole of history (*historien*) as 'a collective singular' in the sense that Koselleck understands that term – i.e. to understand history

as a specific and unified entity. However, when philosophers of history had earlier thought about 'history' in those terms, the term had been used to refer to a process in time that included not only the past, but also the present and the future. Now, Paludan-Müller was making it clear that he was of the opinion that the term 'history' should only be used to refer to the past or to bygone epochs in the life of mankind. He made this point adamantly clear in his lectures on 'Dansk Historiografi i det 18. Aarhundrede' (Danish history-writing in the eighteenth century) when he stated: 'The writing of history only treats that which has been completed, a history of the present, rightly considered, is a contradiction in terms'.²³ Thus, Paludan-Müller was the first Danish historian who made a point of defining history as a science exclusively concerned with the past (*Vergangenheitswissenschaft*).

Yet, it is also evident that he could not wholeheartedly bring himself to abandon the idea of *magistra vite*. He found it difficult, however, to make this idea compatible with his definition of history. Sometimes he would note that studying past events generated insights into human affairs. To this he added on one occasion: 'the study of history is therefore of great significant for any statesman'.²⁴ His phrasing of this idea indicates that he was referring back to the idea that history functions as a *Fürstenspiegel*. On other points, he would launch attacks on historians who took a *magistra vite* approach on the grounds that they drew lessons from the study of past events. He objected to their doing so, because, as he put it, 'it is not history [itself] that teaches us, but the authors [of the history books]'.²⁵ His way of phrasing this objection makes it evident that – contrary to the working assumption of Koselleck's analysis – thinking of history as 'a collective singular' (*Kollektivsingular*) did not necessarily entail a straightforward dismissal of the idea of *magistra vite*.

One cannot infer from the fact that Paludan-Müller was feeling somewhat ambivalent about the idea of a usable past that his fellow historians were in the process of abandoning the *magistra vite* way of thinking. This was far from being the case as evidenced by the new history of the Danish fatherland, which A.D. Jørgensen (1840–97) published in 1882 – the same year he was appointed head of the Royal Danish Archives. Moreover, it is also clear that

Jørgensen's approach to this task was deeply affected by what had happened within the Danish state since the publication of Allen's history.

Jørgensen was born and educated in the duchy of Slesvig. A civil war had taken place within the Danish state between 1848 and 1850, in which German-speaking and Danish-speaking citizens had fought against each other. One of the contested issues concerned the future regulation of the relationship between the kingdom of Denmark and the duchies of Slesvig and Holstein. The civil war had ended in 1850 without any resolution of this issue. Another war broke out in 1864 between the Danish state and an alliance of Prussia and Austria. At the peace negotiations it had been proposed to divide Slesvig so that the Danish-speaking part would be incorporated into the kingdom of Denmark while the German-speaking part – together with the duchy of Holstein – would become part of Prussia. The Danish government, however, had rejected this way of settling the conflict, and in the end Slesvig and Holstein were both incorporated into the Prussian state. Thus, while some ethnic Danes decided to leave Slesvig and move to Denmark, many others remained and started a new life under German rule.

People in Denmark were worried that the ethnic Danes remaining in Slesvig would find it difficult to hold on to their Danish identity in light of the assimilation-policies being implemented by the Prussian government. In an attempt to help them meet this challenge it was suggested that a new history of Denmark should be published. The task was given to A.D. Jørgensen and the work was published in 1882. The Danish brewer, J. C. Jacobsen (1811–87), founder of Carlsberg, bought 10,000 copies and distributed them free of charge to Danes living in Slesvig. It also went on sale in Denmark, where it became a very popular history-book.

Jørgensen entitled his new history *Fyrretyve Fortællinger af Fædrelandets Historie* (Forty stories about the history of the fatherland), thus making use of the very same terms, 'the history of the fatherland' (*Fædrelandets Historie*), Allen had employed four decades earlier. Moreover, in much the same way as Allen had done, Jørgensen treated the ethnic Danes living in Slesvig as an integral part of the history of the Danish people. Again, like Allen, Jørgensen presented his work

as a history of the Danish people written by a Danish historian for the purpose of being read and used by Danish people – especially, in this case, by those living south of the Danish-German border.

Yet, there were also some points of difference between the two histories of the Danish fatherland. Whereas Allen had attempted to write a comprehensive history, Jørgensen's more modest endeavour comprised an assortment of stories about the ways Danes had thought and the achievements they had accomplished in bygone centuries. The stories were selected in such a way that readers would not only become better acquainted with the history of the borderland between Denmark and Germany, they would also become familiar with distinctive features of the Danish people, as highlighted in these stories. Moreover, Jørgensen made it evident to his readers that he was using a *magistra vitae* approach to history.

Our history can be, in its unsettled course, an invaluable teacher of patience and consolation. ... We ought to approach it without prejudice, without over-estimating our own significance, but also without unjust condemnation of what belongs to the past.²⁶

As will become apparent, Jørgensen had taken upon himself the task of being the Danish historian who would interpret on behalf of the Danish people the lessons of their own history. At the same time, it should be noted that his central concern was directed towards the future lives of Danes, not their pasts. The writing of *Fyrretyve Fortællinger i Fædrelandets Historie* represents his attempt to intervene constructively in the Danish politics of his day.

Jørgensen wanted to ensure that all Danes living north and south of the Danish-German border would be able to agree upon a common policy, which he thought would make it possible at some future time for all Danes to live together within the borders of the same state. To achieve this, he argued, one had to re-interpret and re-negotiate the way in which the relationship between Danes and Germans had been understood. It was with this aim in mind that Jørgensen went about selecting the different stories that he would include in his version of the history of the Danish fatherland. He concluded his history by conveying the following thoughts to the Danish people:

The ways of God are inscrutable. The serious misfortune that he allowed the Danish people to suffer [in 1864], has been a source of strength and reawakening in many ways, furthering internalisation of love for the fatherland, strengthening soft and weak aspects of the people's spirit and developing their rich spiritual powers. Times change and the minds of people also undergo changes. We cannot abandon the hope that the unhappy fate of the Danish part of Slesvig will at some point in time reach a happier resolution, and that the decision, which did not succeed in being carried out in 1864, will yet be carried as a final conclusion to the unsettled history of this country. This pledges us to achieve a state of permanent peace and reciprocal understanding between the related people living north and south of the national border – a border that has been established in the course of centuries of change and which it is not our task to question.²⁷

Jørgensen wanted, by writing his new history, to outline an approach to the contested Danish-German border issue, which he hoped would function as a self-fulfilling prophecy. As it turned out, during the aftermath of the World War I, almost four decades later, the Danish government decided to implement just such an approach when handling the question of where the border between Denmark and Germany should be drawn. Thus, it decided in 1920 to abide by the result of a referendum, in which the people living in the northern part of Slesvig were asked to cast their votes about whether or not they wanted to become part of the kingdom of Denmark.

Establishing a split professional identity

Kristian Erslev (1852–1930), who at the age of 30 became professor of history at Copenhagen University, was a trend-setting historian at the beginning of the twentieth century. He knew full well that historians sought to influence contemporary life by means of their history-writing, and he made use, for instance, of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Geschichte für das Leben* (1874) (On the uses and disadvantages of history for life) in his book entitled *Historieskrivning. Grundlinier til nogle Kapitler af Historiens Teori* (1911) (The writing of history. An outline of certain aspects of the

theory of history). One of its chapters focused specifically on the question of the utility-value of history (in Danish *Historiens Nytte*).

We Danes do not need ... to go beyond our own borders in order to discover that the writing of history influences present-day life. ... One may disagree about whether the practical effects of history-writing have been beneficial or harmful in each case, but no one can deny that history-writing continues to have such effects, and there is certainly no reason to assume that this will be any different in the future.²⁸

Thus, Erslev did not expect that a *magistra vitae* approach would cease to function as a guiding norm when history was being written. Yet, he had to confront the fact that such an approach was incompatible with the definition of scientific history that he was seeking to promote at the time. Erslev followed in the footsteps of Paludan-Müller in *Historisk Teknik. Den historiske Undersøgelse fremstillet i sine Grundlinier* (1911) (The procedures of history. Presenting the key features of historical research) by defining history as a science of the past (*Vergangheitswissenschaft*).

It was a basic premise of *Historisk Teknik* that it is possible to distinguish between different kinds of human and social science. On the one hand, there are the sciences concerned with present-day life and, on the other hand, there is a science of the past. They all set out to study the living-conditions and ways of life of the human race but there is a principal difference in the way that they can gain access to their objects of study.

What is history for us, was a living presence for our ancestors, and what happens today, is history tomorrow. Seignobos made this point aptly by stating that no object becomes historical except 'by position', that is by being something past for those that are studying it.²⁹

What distinguishes history from other human and social sciences, Erslev was arguing, follows from the fact that historians can only gain access to their objects of study in an indirect way. Whereas the other human and social sciences can observe the phenomena they study, historians can only obtain access indirectly, either by making

inferences from available remnants of the past or by making use of eyewitnesses from the past. For this reason, Erslev concluded, historians must employ their own unique method of research.

In this way, Erslev succeeded in conferring upon history a distinct disciplinary identity vis-à-vis the other human and social sciences. Yet, he knew at the same time that his idea that historians only concerned themselves with the past in no way squared with the actual practice of historians. Thus, Erslev had to try to find a way out of this predicament and did so by introducing a clear-cut distinction between, on the one hand, the writing of history (in Danish *historieforskrivning*) and, on the other, the scientific study of the past. The latter he called scientific historical research (in Danish *historieforskning*) or the science of history (in Danish *historievidenskab*).

Thus, Erslev was attributing a bifurcated professional identity to the historical profession. When historians were engaged in writing history, they could continue to employ a *magistra vitae* approach in order to identify usable pasts. However, when they set out to study the past in a scientific manner, they only had to concern themselves with what actually had occurred and abstain from any attempt at clarifying the ways in which knowledge of past events could prove useful in a contemporary setting.

That Erslev had been promoting a split professional identity became apparent when an eight-volume study entitled *Danmarks Kultur ved Aar 1940* (The culture of Denmark in the year 1940) was published between 1941 and 1943. It included an account of Danish academic history written by Povl Engelstoft (1876–1961), one of Erslev's pupils. History was here described as a Janus-faced enterprise.

Academic historians, on the one hand, were being obliged to pledge themselves to the pursuit of truth and nothing but the truth. They should base their research upon critical analysis of available source material, and Engelstoft stressed that a historian should only abide by 'one master, and that is cognition'.³⁰ Academic historians, on the other hand, knew full well that – as Engelstoft put it – 'no other science besides history has been used as much in the service of the life lived by people'.³¹ And Engelstoft went on to outline the two-faced nature of Danish academic history:

The results of the slow prodding work achieved by scientific history have been transformed into party political programmes, they have been written on banners and carried along by the marching masses, they have shown the way to a people like bolts of lightning and cast them into an abyss of darkness. In the times of the greatest happiness and sadness, the hand of history has been stretched out to the nation to celebrate, to do battle and to console. For this reason, the scientific study of history [in Danish *historieforskning*] and the writing of history [in Danish *historieforskrivning*] are great, trusted and dangerous tasks. Therefore, the person who sets out to study how they have developed during a particular period of time must continuously focus both upon the work being done in order to achieve true knowledge and upon the fruits of that work as presented to a particular people.³²

Safeguarding a *magistra vitae* approach

The split professional identity that Erslev conferred upon academic history not only generated inner tensions in many a Danish historian. It also tended to split the profession itself into two different groups, one mainly concerned with the scientific study of the past, the other with the writing of history in a narrative mode that would appeal to a general reading public. The split became apparent when the Danish publishing-house Politiken in the late 1950s formed a team of historians to write a new history of Denmark. No professors of history at either of the two Danish universities – Copenhagen and Aarhus – were asked to participate in this project. The most straightforward explanation is that the publishers had recognised that their commitment to scientific history (in Danish *historieforskning*) would prevent them from successfully authoring a new popular history of Denmark.³³

The task of editing the new history was given instead to Hal Koch (1904–63) and John Danstrup (1919–92), the former a professor of church history at Copenhagen University and the latter an academic historian who had moved into journalism and broadcasting. Their qualifications to undertake the task included, among other things, a keen interest in how history is used in everyday life. In

1952, for instance, Koch had published an article entitled '*Hvad skal vi med historien?*' (What is the use of history?) in the popular magazine *Vor Viden* (Our knowledge), and answered this question in the following way:

The purpose of [writing history] is ... to help people to understand themselves and their conditions of life. It has its origins in the age-old question: what is a human being? If one wants to find an answer to that question, there is only one way to go: to consult available experience, to follow the life of man throughout history. Human experience is unfolded in history. ... History gives us a broader horizon, experience and understanding, and it thereby gives us a better chance of dealing with the vicissitudes of our own lives, both political and personal.³⁴

As can be seen, Koch's reflections on the use of history appear to echo the way in which Holberg had answered the very same question two centuries earlier when, in one of his *Epistler* (1748), he wrote:

I consider the science of history – after the word of God – to be the most useful and important of all fields of study when it is read with the right kind of eyes. It gives me knowledge about countries. I learn about people. I come to know myself. Yes, I even learn about how to predict.³⁵

The launching of *Politikens Danmarks Historie* (The *Politiken* history of Denmark) was an enterprise that filled fourteen volumes, published between 1962 and 1966. It was a tremendous success, at least if success is measured in terms of sales. No other history of Denmark has ever sold as many copies as it did. The two editors, Koch and Danstrup, used their *Introduktion til Danmarks Historie* (1962) (An introduction to the history of Denmark) to inform their readers of their understanding of history:

History is everything that has shaped our human existence – as well as that which is irrevocably bygone. It is, at the same time, the narrative concerning these matters, the verified description of how they happened. But history can also be about the recounting

of some part of the past in such a vivid way that it, in a sense, becomes part of our own existence. The history hereby being launched is intended of course to be history in the first sense of this term, which we have mentioned, but it should hopefully also become a history in the latter sense of that term.³⁶

Koch and Danstrup not only made the point that the past continued to shape people's ongoing lives, they were also hoping that the new stories being recounted about their pasts would exert a formative influence on the present-day lives of the Danish people. In much the same way as Allen and Jørgensen had done earlier, Koch and Danstrup wanted to use their new history to intervene in contemporary Danish politics, thereby seeking to shape the future course of events. In fact, the new history of Denmark was being presented as a useful past – one that would enable the Danish people to tackle successfully one of the major political challenges of the 1960s. It concerned Denmark's future relationship with the European Communities, the precursor of the European Union. The editors addressed that challenge in their *Introduktion til Danmarks Historie* (1962) in the following way:

The task of recounting the history of the country, to confront the past, to try to understand it and to accept it as part of our own existence, is a task that has to be taken up anew by every generation. That is no less the case today. Everything indicates that we are on the brink of taking decisions with far-reaching consequences – we are of course thinking about the issue of joining the rest of Europe. In precisely this situation, it is important that we understand ourselves as a people, that we know something about what we have achieved and what it is we can bring with us into the larger community – but also what we lack and where our weaknesses lie. One can only reach an understanding of these matters by becoming well-informed about the past.³⁷

As it turned out, the Danish electorate decided on the basis of a general referendum to join the EC a decade later. However, only a narrow majority of the Danish voters opted to become part of a larger European community and set out to develop a new identity.

There was a significant minority who wanted to avoid joining the EC so they could hold onto a traditional national Danish identity. Ever since the early 1970s, that division has been setting the agenda of Danish politics.

Negotiating a usable past

I have reviewed the ways in which Danish historians have related to the *magistra vite* approach over three centuries because Nadel, Koselleck and Kessler did not provide an empirical study of what had happened to this approach after the middle of the nineteenth century. It is now time to return to their studies to assess their theses in the light of this review.

Nadel and Koselleck were right when they pointed out that academic historians began to distance themselves from the use of such an approach during the nineteenth century. But the survey also shows that not all historians did so. Thus, this also reveals that Kessler was right in pointing out that a *magistra vite* approach was still in use after the middle of the nineteenth century. However, he clearly overstated his case when asserting that historians had no other option but to employ such an approach. The review undertaken here demonstrates that some historians did distance themselves from the way in which history was being understood within a *magistra vite* tradition.

The survey of Danish academic history is also of relevance if one wishes to assess the relative merits of Nadel and Koselleck's different ways of explaining the decline and demise of a *magistra vite* approach to history. Nadel did so in terms of a professionalisation of the study of history – one that made an antiquarian approach to the prevalent norm of academic history. Koselleck did so by seeing it as an unintended consequence of an emerging new conception of history, one of history as a specific and unified whole (*Kollektivisierung*).

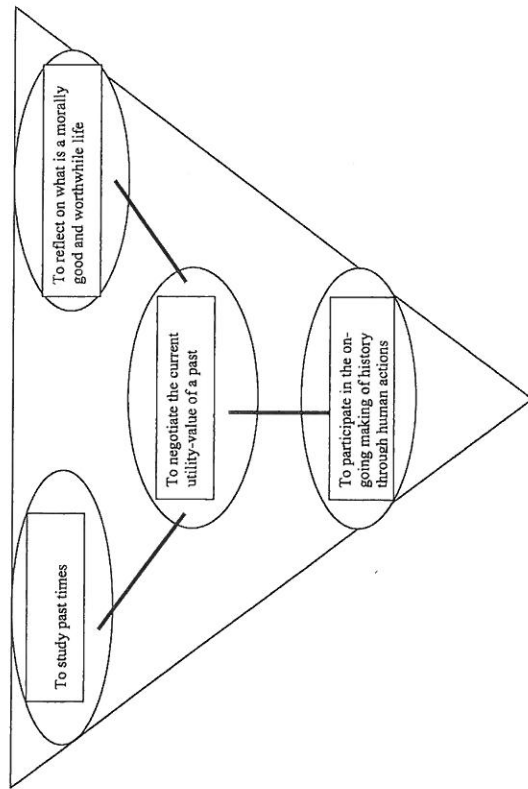
Both Paludan-Müller and Erslev employed history as a *Kollektivisierung*. However, on closer inspection it turns out that they did not employ the term 'history' (in Danish *historien*) in order to make the point that it should be conceived as a specific and unified whole. Rather, the whole thrust of their argument was towards

promoting a definition of history as being exclusively a study of the past (in Danish *fortiden*). In other words, they wanted to conceive of academic history as a science of the past (*Vergangenheitswissenschaft*). Thus, Paludan-Müller and Erslev did precisely what Nadel had claimed that they would be doing. They sought to make the antiquarian understanding of history the norm of academic history.

However, both Nadel and Koselleck overlooked the fact that a number of academic historians remained committed to the *magistra vite* approach long after the middle of the nineteenth century. The Danish historians who opted to do so were convinced that the writing of history would only be able to gain an impact beyond the academic world to the extent that it had and was seen to have a utility-value for ordinary people; that is to say, to the extent that history-writing could be seen as making a difference in their everyday lives.

At the core of the *magistra vite* approach is the notion of a usable past. When history is written in this way, it seeks to exert an influence upon the ongoing making of history as this takes place in the present-day world. As we have seen, this was done in two related ways. Firstly, the writing of history was conceived as contributing to the establishment, maintenance or re-definition of a specific imagined community. The community in question was referred to as 'the Danish people', and Danish history-writing sought to foster a sense of ethnic fellowship between Danes of the past, present and future generations.³⁸ Secondly, Danish history-writing was also employed in attempts to influence the future course of history, i.e. to shape the direction of the decision-making that constitutes an on-going making of history. That history was being written with the latter aim in mind is clear from the histories of Denmark published by such historians as C.F. Allen, A.D. Jørgensen, H. Koch and J. Danstrup.

The idea of a usable past entails that someone wants to use a past to do something specific in a present-day setting.³⁹ It therefore requires that people negotiate with themselves or others regarding the utility-value of a specific past – that is how a particular past can be used in the ongoing process of making history. Thus, such negotiations will take place within a triangle.



Notes

- 1 'Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitæ, nuntia vestustatis.' Cicero 1981, p. 308.
- 2 'So galt die Historie, für rund zwei Jahrtausende, als eine Schule, ohne Schaden klug zu werden.' Koselleck 1979, p. 39.
- 3 Nadel and Koselleck had a similar motive for drawing attention to the *magistra vitæ* approach. They were indicating that the two histories of the philosophy of history, published by Popper and Löwith in the course of the 1940's, had bypassed one of the most influential philosophies of history within the European setting.
- 4 Grafton 2007 concludes his new study of this tradition of history-writing with a chapter on the 'death of a genre'. Thus, he agrees with Nadel and Koselleck that this tradition disappeared by the end of the eighteenth century.
- 5 Nadel 1964, p. 469.
- 6 Nadel 1964, pp. 469–470.
- 7 'Man hat der Historie das Amt, die Vergangenheit zu richten, die Mitwelt zum Nutzen zukünftiger Jahre zu belehren, beigemessen: so hoher Ämter unterwindet sich gegenwärtiger Versuch nicht: er will bloss zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen.' Ranke 1883, p. vii.
- 8 'Wenn die alte Historie von ihren Lehrstuhl gestossen wurde, und zwar nicht zuletzt von den Aufklären, die sich so gern ihrer Lehren bedienten, so geschah das im Zuge einer Bewegung, die Vergangenheit und Zukunft neu aufeinander zuordnete. Es was schliesslich 'die Geschichte selbst', die einen neuen Erfahrungsraum zu öffnen begann. Die neue Geschichte gewann eine ihr

eigentümliche zeitliche Qualität, deren verschiedene Tempi und wechselnde Erfahrungsfristen einer exemplarischen Vergangenheit die Evidenz nahmen.' Koselleck 1979 p. 46.

- 9 'Doch sein sichtlicher Misserfolg [mit dieser Zeitschrift] schien den Rückgriff auf den alten Topos geschichtlich zu desavouieren ... hinter der Relativierung aller Ereignisse, die die *historia magistra vitæ* verzehrt hat, [verbarg sich] eine allgemeine Erfahrung, die auch der Gegenlager der Fortschrittler teilte.' Koselleck 1979 p. 55–56.
- 10 Koselleck 1979 p. 65.
- 11 Koselleck 1979 p. 58.
- 12 'So wie ich die Vergangenheit verstehe, verstehe ich notwendig auch meine Zukunft und umgekehrt. ... Es kann keine Geschichte geben, die nicht über Gegenwart und Zukunft belehrt.' Kessler 1981 p. 28.
- 13 These are the terms used, for instance in Phillips 2000.
- 14 'Historier, hvor vel een deel ikke vil regne dem blant de nyttige videnskaber holdende fore at de alleene tiene til at fornøje sindet; men de fare der udi groveligen vilde thi af Historiers sunde Læsning lærer man foruden *Geographie* og Sprog ogsaa *Jus publicum* og *politica*; icke at tale om de mange herlige exemplar, som findes der udi hvor ved et Menneske kan opbygges saa at derfore et Studium er ikke mindre nyttigt end behageligt besynderlig naar man gaar den rette vej; men det er at beklage at en stoor deel lærere i steden for det som er nyttigt og magt paaliggende øver ungdommen udi den gamle fabelagtige Historie og ... lade dem Lære visse stykker hid og did ...' Holberg 1913, p. 520.
- 15 'For at komme til dette Værk igien, som jeg nu bringer for Lyset, da er det, saavel som mine Helte-Historie, en *Imitatio af Plutarchi* sammenlignede berømmelige Mænd. Denne Maade at *moralisere* paa kan holdes for den meest opbyggelige og mindst anstødelige. Den er mest opbyggelig, eftersom den grunder sig paa Historier, som ere Dyders og Lasters ubedragelige Speyl. Den er mindst anstødelig, saasom ingen fortørnes ved at see sine Feyl afmaalede udi afdøde Personer.' Holberg 1934, p. 408.
- 16 'Jeg holder det Historiske Videnskab næst Guds Ord for den nyttigste og vigtigste af alle, naar det bliver læst med rette Øyen. Jeg lærer deraf at kiende Lande. Jeg lærer at kiende Mennesker. Jeg lærer at kiende mig selv. Ja, jeg lærer at spaa. Thi man kan af forbigangne Ting dømme om tilkommende, og derfor i visse Maader hver grundig *Historicum* for en Prophet. *Moraliske* Betænkninger ere vel af stor Nytt; men Historien haver kraftigere Virkning, naar den læses med Skønsomhed, og naar den er udi rette Skikkelse.' Holberg 1935, p. 639.
- 17 'Quid est Historia? Historia est rerum præteritarum narratio, eum in finem suscepta, ut earum conservetur, quibus ad bene beatæque vivendum instrumentum.' Holberg 1928, p. 13.
- 18 'Intet er lettere, intet er ogsaa vanskeligere end at skrive en Historie. Udi den første Henseende seer man, at alle bemænge sig dermed, og udi den sidste, at saa faa driste sig dertil. Snart haver en ikke faaet Lyst til at være *Author*, førend han gjør en Begyndelse med at skrive Historie, som det allerletteste Arbeide; thi

hvad kand være lettere end at fortælle forbigangne Ting Sandelig dersom Historie intet andet var end forbigangne Tings *simple* Beretning, bekiender jeg, at det er hver Mands Arbeide. Men, saasom saadan *Definition* er gandske utilstrækkelig, og den mindste Historie udfordrer et heelt og fuldkomment Menneske, saa begive skionsomme og fornufige Folk ikke uden skielvende til et Arbeide, som gandske faa ere befundne at have været voxne; thi Erfar-
 enhed viser, at, endskjønt ingen *Profession* arbeides meere og oftere end udi den Historiske, saa er dog fast intet Videnskab, hvorudi meer sielden komme Mesterstykker for Lyset, saasom mod 10 andre Skribentere skall neppe findes én god Historieskriver.' Holberg 1927, p. 3.

19 'Holberg blev ved sine Komedier og ... sine historiske Skrifter den nyere danske Litteraturs Fader, og ... han vandt ... en Plads i Folkets Hjærte, hvorfra han aldrig vil fortrænges, saalænge det danske Folk bliver sig selv ligt.' Allen 1842, p. 520.

20 'Oplysningen spredte sig mægtigen i alle Stænder, og Borgeren lærte at betragte sig ikke som en villieløs Maskine, men som et selvbevidst og selvvirksomt Medlem af Statssamfundet. Tidens Aand og store Verdensbegivenheder, nære og fjærne, bidrogs ogsaa Deres til at udvikle den vaagnende Folkeaad og henvende Borgerens Opmærksomhed paa sit Forhold til Staten og det Offentlige.' Allen 1842, p. 616.

21 'Er saadant Værk maatte paa een Gang gribe Alle, der havde Evne til at opfatte det, lære Folket at forstaa sin Nutid og aen sin Fremtid, og føre Historikerne bort fra det Underordnede til hvad der virkelige var værd at sætte sit Liv ind paa. Det kan ikke være Andet end at Fædrelandets Historie, saaledes behandlet ... maatte blive af høi Betydning for Folkets Liv.' Paludan-Müller 1958, p. 52.

22 'Historie er Videnskaben om Menneskeslægrens Udvikling gennem Fortidens Begivenheder. ... Historien har kun Fortiden at behandle, den nærmere eller fjærne Fortid. Den skuer tilbage paa de tilbagelagte Stadier, betragter de vundne Resultater og opleder i dem Udviklingens Spor for at kunne følge dens Gang. Nutiden tilhører det praktiske Liv, ikke Historien; – endnu mindre har Historien med Fremtiden at gjøre.' Paludan-Müller 1991, pp. 36–37.

23 'Historieskrivning har kun det afsluttede til Gjenstand, en Nutidshistorie er, ret beset, en Selvmodsigelse'. Paludan-Müller 1883, p. 46.

24 'Derfor er Historiens Studium saa vigtig for Statsmanden.' Paludan-Müller 1991, p. 37.

25 'Det bliver da ikke Historien, der belærer, men Forfatterne.' Paludan-Müller 1991, p. 72.

26 'Vor Historie kan i sit omskiftelige Løb være os en uvurderlig Læremester i Taalmod og Forrøstning Vi bør gaa til den uden Fordomme, uden Overvurdering af vor egen Betydning, men ogsaa uden uretfærdig Fordømmelse af, hvad der tilhører Fortiden.' Jørgensen 1915, p. 532.

27 'Guds Veje er uransagelige. Den tunge Tilskikkelse, han sendte det danske Folk [i 1864], har til visse i mange Maader været til Styrkelse og Vækkelse, til Inderliggørelse i Kærlighed til Fædrelandet, til Styrkelse af Folkets bløde og svage Sind og til Udvikling af dets rige aandelige Evne. Tiderne skifter

og Menneskeres Sind forandres; vi kan ikke slippe det Haab, at det danske Sønderjyllands ulykkelige Skæbne en Gang vil formidles, at den Afgørelse, som mislykkedes 1864, endnu vil kunne opnaas som endelig Afslutning af dette Lands omskiftelige Historie. Den bør da kunne blive et Pant paa varig Fred og god Fortsaaelse mellem beslægtede Folk nord og syd for den nationale Grænse, der er sat af Aarhundreders Udvikling, og som det ikke er vor Sag at gaa i Rette med.' Jørgensen 1915, p. 533.

28 'Vi danske behøver ... ikke at gaa uden for vore egne Grænser for at erkende, hvorledes Historieskrivning paavirker Nutidslivet. ... Om Historieskrivningens praktiske Indvirkning i hvert enkelt Tilfælde har været til Gavn eller Skade, kan man tviste om, men at denne Virkning stadig findes, det kan ingen nægte, og der er sikkert ikke Grund til at tro, at det i Fremtiden vil stilles sig anderledes.' Erslev 1937, p. 253.

29 '[H]vad der er Historie for os, var levende Nutid for vore Fædre; og hvad der sker i Dag, er i Morgen Historie. Træffende har Seignobos udtrykt dette ved at sige, at ingen Genstand er historisk uden 'par position', nemlig ved at være Fortid for den, der studerer den.' Erslev 1926, p. 3.

30 'Han har [indadtill] kun een Herre, og det er Erkendelsen'. Engelseft 1943 p. 155.

31 'Men udadtill – ingen Videnskab er som Historien blevet taget i det levende Livs Tjeneste.' Engelseft 1943 p. 155.

32 'De Resultater, der blev Frugten af Videnskabens Cellearbejde, er blevet omformet til Partiprogrammer, er skrevet paa Faner, der vaje over marcherende Masser, har tændt flammende Lyn for et Folk og har sænket det ned i Mørke. I en Nations glædeste og sorteste Timer har Historien rakt den sin Haand, til Jubel, til Kamp, til Trøst. Derfor er Historieforskningen og Historieskrivningen en stor og betroet og farlig Gerning. Derfor maa den, der vil studere deres Udvikling i en bestemt Periode, altid have Blikket rettet baade ... mod Arbejdet for Sandhedens Erkendelse og mod Frugterne, der blev rakt Folket.' Engelseft 1943 p. 155.

33 An analysis of this and other histories of Denmark from the second half of the twentieth century can be found in Jensen 1997.

34 '[Historieskrivningens] formål er ... at hjælpe mennesker til at forstå sig selv og deres livskår. Den har sin oprindelse ud fra det gamle spørgsmål: hvad er et menneske? Vil man søge svar herpå, er der kun én vej at gå: at rådspørge erfaringen, at følge mennesker i det historiske forløb. I historien ligger den menneskelige erfaring foldet ud for vore blikke. ... Historien kan give os en større horisont, erfaring og forståelse og derigennem ogsaa bedre mulighed for at møde vort eget livs tilskikkelser, både politiske og menneskelige.' Koch 1952, p. 308.

35 'Jeg holder der Historiske Videnskab næst Guds Ord for den nyttigste og vigtigste af alle, naar det bliver læst med rette Øyen. Jeg lærer deraf at kiende Lande. Jeg lærer at kiende Mennesker. Jeg lærer at kiende mig selv. Ja, jeg lærer at spaa.' Holberg 1935, p. 639.

36 'Historie er alt det, der har skabt vores tilværelse – foruden det som uigenkaldeligt er forbi. Samtidig er det beretningen om disse ting, den dokumenterede

skildring af, hvorledes tingene skete. Men historie kan endelig blive et stykke af fortiden genfortalt så levende, at den også på den måde bliver et led af vor egen tilværelse. Det værk som hermed begyndes, er naturligvis historie i ordets første betydning, men det skulle også gerne blive det i den sidste.' Koch & Danstrup 1962 s. 5.

37 'Og det at fortælle landets historie, at mødes med fortiden, søge at forstå den, og acceptere den som led af vor egen tilværelse, er en opgave, som hvert slægted må søge at løse på ny. Det gælder ikke mindst i dag. Alt tyder på, at vi står over for afgørelser af den største rækkevidde – vi tænker naturligvis på en tilslutning til det øvrige Europa. Netop i denne situation er det betydningsfuldt, at vi forstår os selv som folk, ved noget om, hvad vi har skabt og hvad vi kan bringe med os ind i det store fællesskab – men også hvad vi mangler, og hvor vore svagheder ligger. Det lærer man nu engang kun at forstå ved at vide grundig besked om fortiden.' Koch & Danstrup 1962, p. 5.

38 I have explored this dimension of Danish history-writing in further detail in Jensen 2008.

39 I have further explored the idea of a usable past in Jensen 2009.

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