

The Spatial History of a Danish History Journal

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On the 22nd of February, 1839, the founders of the *Danish Historical Association* found themselves in a fierce debate about the scope of their to be created history journal.¹ Christian Molbech, the initiator of the meeting, found himself opposed by N. F. S. Grundtvig, the most prominent Danish thinker of the century, who thought the organisation was limiting itself by only focussing on Danish history. The argument was about which parts of the past in which parts of the world mattered. Grundtvig left the founding circle of *Historisk Tidsskrift* in great anger. He had told the other members that they should make the journal about more than Danish history. They should make the journal about the history of the world and of other nations if they wanted their historical association to “function by the live word instead of the dead pen”.² Despite convincing the other members of the founding council to remove one of the multiple mentions of “Danish” in the articles of association, resulting in the journal having a slightly less nationalistic focus, Grundtvig left and never again joined the association. With Grundtvig out of the picture, the remaining members of the historical association set forth to collect a group of individuals capable of furthering their shared nationalistic and patriotic vision for the journal.³

From the above description one might get the sense that Molbech and the members of the historical association did not care about space and representation as much as Grundtvig. Though that may be true when thinking of the nationalistic as compared to world history, it is clear that the members of the association had very defined notions of what places the historical journal should cover and who should read and participate in the construction of historical knowledge.

¹ Jørgensen, Ellen, Chr. Molbech den danske historiske Forenings Stifter, 1939. *Historisk Tidsskrift* Bind 10, række 5, 43.

² ibd.

³ Clemmensen, Niels, En forening bliver til, 1990. *Historisk Tidsskrift* Bind 15, Række 5, 1-22.

Their opposition to Grundtvig's world history shows their dedication to the nationalistic lens on history.

Molbech aimed to reach people throughout the Danish realm as opposed to solely around the capital. The Danish Historical Association was very concerned with this kind of geographical coverage. In their opening statement they made clear that they wanted members from all parts of the country and "in particular" the importance of gaining members from provinces.⁴ Though the founders were very verbal about getting members from every part of the country, only seven of the 77 men invited to establish the Danish Historical Association came from outside the capital, and out of those seven none came from Danish territories outside Jutland or Schleswig Holstein.⁵ When it came to acquiring members in Jutland "one would not know where to inquire for interest" Molbech admitted.⁶

Space, place, and geography were important to the founding historians of *Historisk Tidsskrift*. The fights and struggles they went through to ensure a certain scope and representation in the journal speaks to the curated nature of the journal. Molbech and his fellow founders wanted to stay close to home by making the journal about Danish history.⁷

The question, however, is, what and where home is. How did the ideological boundaries of what was considered Danish history run geographically? Also, given our knowledge of the

⁴ Molbech, Christian et al. Fortale, 1840. *Historisk Tidsskrift* Bind 1, række 5, 7.

⁵ Steenstrup, C.H.R. Johannes, *Historieskrivningen i Danmark i det 19 Aarhundrede*, Feb. 14, 1889.

⁶ Chr. Molbech in letter to Chr. Olsen, Mar. 28, 1839. Box of documents from 1839 - 1879 in archive of Danish Historical Association.

⁷ #primarysources - The first couple of paragraphs of this paper seeks to paint a picture of a situation which illustrates the values of different actors who played a role when *Historisk Tidsskrift* founded. I intentionally tried writing this in a language which will make people interested in the arguments to come. Several primary sources are used in order to achieve the balance of telling a story while ensuring that the narrative is supported by the available primary sources.

fights that lead to the initial scope of *Historisk Tidsskrift*, how did the geographical boundaries of what was seen as Danish history change in the years since the journal's creation? Looking at the construction of space in different editions of *Historisk Tidsskrift*, can help answer this question. *Historisk Tidsskrift*, being fully digitised and accessible, is a rich repository containing works by Danish historians since the middle of the 19th century.⁸ During this time, Denmark changed from being a multinational empire to a small European nation. However, has the places addressed as Danish history by Danish historians changed with it?

In this this paper a spatial history methodology is applied to show how the world has been viewed spatially by Danish historians through time and to find the spaces which were silenced as a result of the particular way it was constructed in *Historisk Tidsskrift*.⁹ Spatial history opens up a window to experience how historians saw the world of Danish history at different points in the past. The main inspirations for this history investigation is Cameron Blevins excellent work on the spatial history of newspapers in Houston as well as Henri Lefebvre's work which contributed greatly to the spatial turn in history. The following sections of the paper will seek to combine the spatial history approach with a thorough contextualisation of the journal throughout time using more traditional historical methodological tools.

⁸ #historyrepos - The full corpus of *Historisk Tidsskrift* carries immense potential. It has been a sink for historical works for longer than any other currently running history journal on the planet. I used 4503 articles for my analysis, a number way to large to comprehend by reading through the articles themselves. The spatial history analysis only works because of the great quality of the articles it is based on. To my knowledge I am the first person to use macroscopical digital humanities tools with this repo. I find it meaningful to inspire others to use repos like this one with these tools.

⁹ #historicalarguments - My argument is twofold; on the one hand I want to show why history journals should be interrogated as primary sources with their particular biases, on the other hand I want to make this about *Historisk Tidsskrift* and show how much a spatial analysis can further us in our attempts to understand the past.

What is required to write a spatial history of a history journal? First, in order to use the approach of spatial history, space and place must be defined not in terms of objective geometrical or geographical measures, but as a kind of consciousness that is malleable and historically contingent. Lefebvre, being the father of this interpretation of space, introduced the idea that space is socially constructed.¹⁰ Space here goes beyond the mere physical and seeks to describe demographic, social, and economic spaces which are often closely related to the physical. This paper uses this methodology by looking at how geographical space gets entangled with others aspects of reality by contrasting the lack of coverage of certain parts of the Danish realm by articles published in *Historisk Tidsskrift* with the very extensive coverage of areas close to the capital. The capital, as a seat of power, trade, and association-members, has been at the core of the construction of a skewed spatial consciousness in which the capital region seems larger and more important than the regions in the periphery.

The unique spatial experience created by *Historisk Tidsskrift* will in this paper be called an imagined geography. Imagined geographies were first mentioned by Lefebvre who used the term to describe the constructed spatial consciousness facing someone engaging with a media conveying information about space. In this paper, the term will mean the constructed spatial relationships or consciousness that emerges when the articles from a period or edition of *Historisk Tidsskrift* is analysed as a cohesive whole. Blevins introduced this particular definition of the term during his research on the imagined geographies of newspapers in Houston as a way to describe the unique views the newspapers presented through their daily publications.¹¹ If you

¹⁰ Lefebvre, Henri, and Donald Nicholson-Smith. *The Production Of Space*. (Malden, Mass. Blackwell, 1991).

¹¹ Blevins, C, Space, Nation, And The Triumph Of Region: A View Of The World From Houston, 2014. *Journal Of American History* 101 (1): 122-147.

imagine a person reading *Historisk Tidsskrift* with no other geographical knowledge, the spatial consciousness acquire from reading the journal would be a distorted version of the real geographical map. Areas that are mentioned a lot would stand out as more expansive to this person than areas which are rarely mentioned or left out. The ideas and understanding of space people acquire from reading *Historisk Tidsskrift* would be very different from people learning relationships between place and space through reading another journal or learning about geography strictly through “objective maps”.¹²

The first figure, presented below, can be seen as an approximation of the imagined geography of the articles published in *Historisk Tidsskrift* in the period between 1860-1870. This visualisation suggests that the journal managed to cover history relating to the main islands, most parts of Jutland, and the areas of Schleswig Holstein.

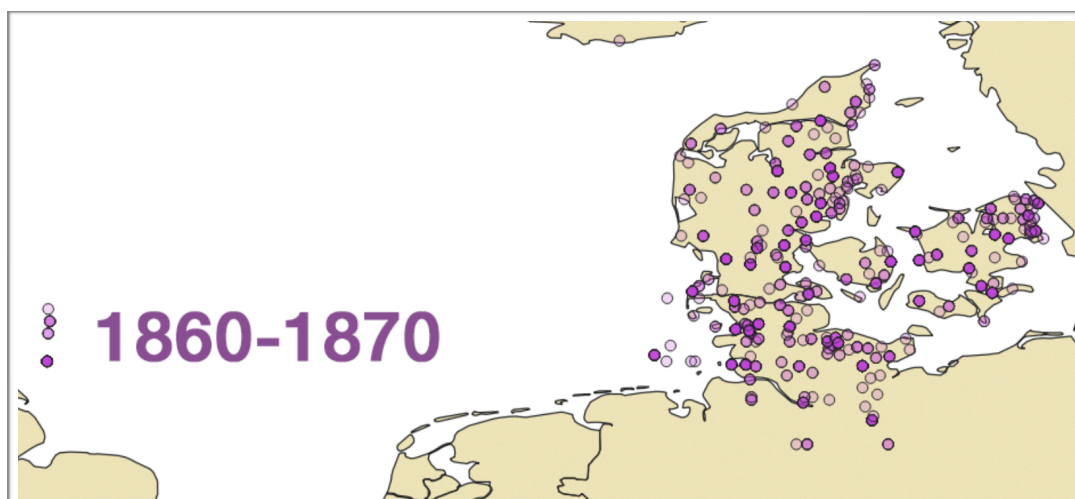


Figure 1. Produced by the author based on scraped data from *History Tidsskrift*.¹³

¹² #historylenses - The spatial history lens makes it easy for me to define my primary variables as ones that relate to space. It provides to me an angle from which other arguments will flow. Also it is a lens with which I can contribute with new knowledge to my field. It is a very different kind of history from what most Danish historians do.

¹³ To see an animated visualisation of the places mentioned in Denmark, Norway, and Schleswig Holstein in the articles of *Historisk Tidsskrift* from 1860 to 1930 visit [this page](#).

The visualisation exemplifies how a spatial analysis can allow for a deeper understanding of the vision the founders had for *Historisk Tidsskrift* as well as to question whether their vision became reality. It seems that the journal succeeded in covering the whole country in terms of its content and which places the founders might have referred to when wanting to include “the provinces”. The graph showing the names mentioned in all journal articles published from 1860 to 1870 indicates that the place names mentioned span much beyond the the capital. This suggests that the journal was able to cover historical content from across the Danish territories; succeeded in creating a journal whose relevance extended beyond the intellectual circles of Copenhagen. The other territories under Danish control, Greenland, and the colonies are not shown on the map because there are no mentions of places in these regions.

It seems that the colonies were not part of the geography which was seen as Danish. These regions being left out of this journal has resulted in a significant historical silence. Decades would pass before Greenland got its own journals such as *Tidsskriftet Grønland* which was established a hundred years later in 1953.¹⁴ Based on this insight one might argue that Danish history is based on a cultural or language-wise similarity. However, a region like Schleswig Holstein which hadn’t been part of Denmark for a while at this point and which contained a significant amount of individuals who didn’t relate to Danish identity at all, was extensively covered.

Historians can apply spatial history to investigate which geographical regions were mentioned most frequently by Danish historians as well as see which areas are left out. In his article, Cameron Blevins does this; he uses the mentions of places to find which areas are often

¹⁴ And the journal was established by Danish government officials, not Greenlandic people.

mentioned by the newspapers. However, by doing that he also locates the areas which were only rarely mentioned. So it seems that it is possible to find historical silences within *Historisk Tidsskrift* by applying the spatial history methodology. For example, in the plots from around 1900 till 1940 the north-western parts of Jutland are rarely mentioned. This application of the methodology suggests that digital humanities tools can serve as invaluable historiographical tools.

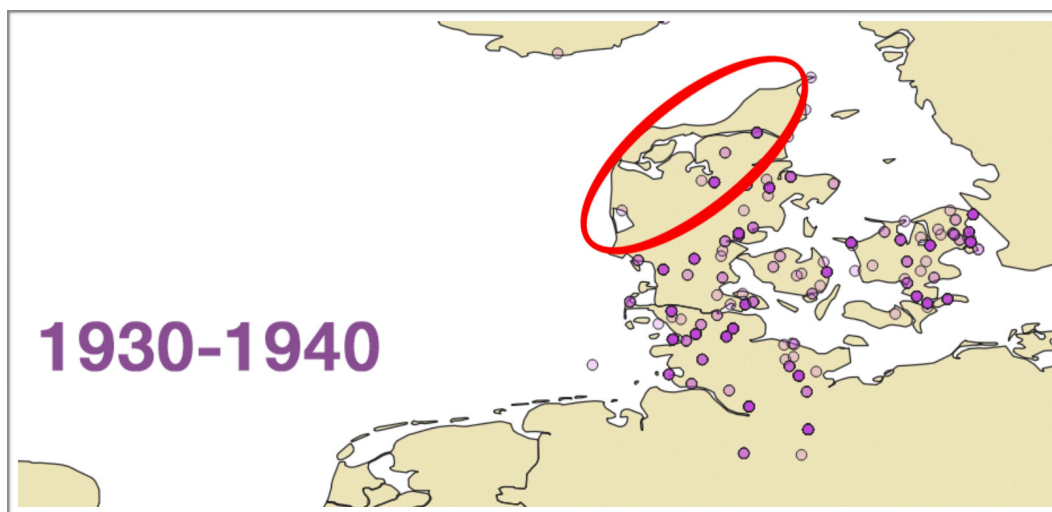


Figure 2. Produced by the author based on scraped data from History Tidsskrift

The map above beautifully calls into attention the discrepancy between the areas which are well-covered versus the areas which are not. Following Lefebvre's argument which asserts that space is something that humans produce over time, one can see a spatial manifestation of a silence by looking at the places that are not mentioned in the map. The findings of the spatial analysis show how silences can take on many forms. Whereas recent scholars have addressed the silences that relate to the Danish colonies, the silence close to home, in Northern-Jutland, has not been addressed in any literature I have encountered. Whereas treatment of Danish colonial

history by historians is, in some ways, inevitable as a product of our post-colonial era, some of the silences uncovered by the spatial analysis might not have been caught by the current waves of cultural and post-modern history.¹⁵

The maps shown above is a result of applying the kind of macroscopical tools which allows historians to grasp very large concepts, such as the spatial consciousness embedded in a journal containing thousands of articles. When used to investigate the work of historians, these tools allow for a novel insight into how historical knowledge was produced in the past.¹⁶

Whereas many historians such as Blevins have used spatial history to investigate historical phenomena, they have not necessarily sought to use the spatial history methodology as support for the historiographical critique in of itself.¹⁷ Historical silences often have spatial manifestations, therefore it should be possible to use spatial history tools to uncover these silences. Historians should explore how these tools might be used to support their claims.

Historisk Tidsskrift is a media through which it is possible to observe how historians perceived and conceived space through time. Spatial analysis is a toolbox for historiographical critique.¹⁸

Lincoln Mullen argues that spatial history can be used to understand the people who had a large

¹⁵ #historicalnarrative - One can think of a grand narrative brought by *Historisk Tidsskrift* as a whole. The colonies are not mentioned for decades of years, while several articles are dedicated to investigating the history of nobles or royalty in each issue. And this narrative is illustrated in the spatial analysis by what is mentioned and not mentioned throughout.

¹⁶ Graham, Shawn, Ian Milligan, and Scott Weingart. 2015. *Exploring Big Historical Data: The Historian's Macroscope*. Imperial College Press.

¹⁷ #historicalsilences - It seems clearer to me now that certain nationalistic narratives which resulted in the silencing of large geographical areas and significant groups in society were constructed by historians and other groups of people in power. In this paper I look at what was published in a history journal of the past. Here spatial history is a strong tool because it doesn't just show what is mentioned, but also allows us to see which areas aren't mentioned.

¹⁸ Which makes this research project as much of a methodological exploration as a spatial analysis of *Historisk Tidsskrift*. In this paper I want to question what kinds of historical arguments and knowledge can be generated with the usage of digital humanities tools.

influence on society. In understanding the kinds of spatial awareness, that were constructed by historians, who were essential to defining the concept of the Danish nation, one can see at a deeper level where the line runs of what, who, and where is Danish.¹⁹

The approach outlined above might be applied to *Historisk Tidsskrift* through an analysis of the language used in the journal. For example, the word ‘fædreland’, meaning fatherland, is used a lot throughout the journal in the early years. In the articles of association, it is mentioned that the history presented should be done with ‘nærmest hensyn til fædrelandet’, highest attention to the fatherland.²⁰ One can compare these invocations of the fatherland to the macroscopic findings provided by our spatial analysis. One can ask whether the north-western regions of Denmark were considered part of this fatherland if they were not covered in the journal. This region, which is considered part of the Danish heartland culturally and language-wise, was not mentioned in ten years worth of articles from the journal. If it was considered part, one can ask why such a marked silence exists in coverage of this region.

From the visualisation above other questions arise. Why, for example, are there still so many mentions of Schleswig Holstein? In 1930, Schleswig-Holstein had been separated from Denmark for 66 years. Why might the region still be referred to so much? Looking closer at the articles in which Schleswig-Holstein is mentioned in the early nineteenth hundreds it is clear that the area was still treated as part of Denmark at this point in time. Engaging with history relating to this region was still at this point perceived as a Danish history. For example; the 1900 edition of *Historisk Tidsskrift* brought an article describing a Danish princess ruling part of Schleswig

¹⁹ Mullen, Lincoln, Introduction To Spatial History And Mapping: Doing Digital History, 2017. Presentation given at George Mason University.

²⁰ Molbech, Christian et al. Fortale, 1840. *Historisk Tidsskrift* Bind 1, række 5, page 6.

Holstein in the 11th century. It describes a period in which Danish families managed to gain influence further south than had formerly been the case.²¹ This article is one of several in which Danish identity is continually extended south of the border into Germany. The spatial analysis can serve as a compelling, if perhaps slightly self-evident, support of the conclusions made by Danish historians who have written extensively on the topic.²² Schleswig Holstein has for hundreds of years been considered a frontline in which different languages and cultures meet; The extensive coverage the region should be interpreted as part of a longer history of repeated attempts at historical revisionism by German and Danish historians.^{23 24}

One can extend this line of analysis and question to what extent nationalist sentiments might have driven historians to keep including regions such as Schleswig Holstein in the Danish narrative, as if they were still part of Denmark. The first section of the articles of association from 1840 states that it is meant to “awaken historical spirit and interest” in general and in particular relating to the Danish nation.²⁵ The scope of the journal is outlined to be that of furthering the historical scholarship about the Danish nation. The first decades of *Historisk Tidsskrift* should be contextualised by looking at the rise of nationalism in the Danish realm at

²¹ Olrik, Hans, En dansk fyrstinde i Nordtyskland i slutningen af det nte århundred, 1900. *Historisk Tidsskrift*, Bind 7. række, 3.

²² Østergård, Uffe, Danish National Identity, 2012. In *Gertsen M.C., Søderberg AM., Zølner M. (eds) Global Collaboration: Intercultural Experiences and Learning*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

²³ Palgrave, Macmillan, Schleswig and Holstein in Danish and German Historiography, 2011. *Disputed Territories and Shared Pasts: Overlapping National Histories in Modern Europe*, pages 200 - 223

²⁴ #historyschools - Here I am relating my findings to a decade or century long arc of work by Danish historians. Schleswig-Holstein is an area which historians have perceived to have high relevance throughout the existence of *Historisk Tidsskrift*, as society and culture has transformed immensely. I find it reassuring that I am able to contribute to this large body of work with my spatial analysis.

²⁵ Den danske historiske forenings vedtægter, 1840. *Historisk Tidsskrift* Bind 1, række 5. Accessed on Feb. 19, 2018, <https://tidsskrift.dk/historisktidsskrift/article/view/53928/72309> page 1

the time. It was a time in which the empire was under immense pressure. Having been on the losing side of the Napoleonic war, Norway had ceased to be Danish territory. In 1868, the empire would get further reduced as a result of losing the Schleswig-Holstein war to the Prussian Empire. These geopolitical changes, supported by thinkers such as Grundtvig, initiated significant cultural change throughout the Danish nation. The nation rather than the empire was increasingly seen as the unifying trait in a state which was rapidly losing its status of empire.²⁶ Might the empirical past have played a significant role in establishing the identity of the Danish nation?

The approach of this paper makes it possible for historians to ask new questions. The questions the spatial analysis allow historians to ask questions relating to *Historisk Tidsskrift* are of a different character from those which might arise from more traditional analysis' of the journal. The approach resulted in known silences such as the ones relating to the Danish colonies as well as novel ones such as the one in North-eastern Jutland in the 1930s. The approach also refuted in support for existing historical arguments about the historical state of Schleswig Holstein. Several examples of questions which break the silences of history.

Another conclusion reached in this paper is that spatial history combines well with a traditional history analysis. The interleaving of data-driven arguments with a qualitative critique based on a historiographical school.

²⁶ Fukuyama, Francis, National Building and State Building, 2015. *Building the Nation: N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish National Identity* ch. 1.

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