

## Editorial

### Memory and History – Three Dates, and Even More Topics

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Anniversary dates and centenary years carry a slight smack of atavism. Not even humanities scholars, situated as they are between faith in the Creator of time and, in the modern era especially, a heightened reverence for human calendarisation, are wholly free from the magic of historical commemorations; after all, these offer common ground for meeting the wider community where it feels at ease, namely to greet the regulated Return of the Same. From the viewpoint of popular science, then, as a vehicle for scholarly knowledge and understanding, anniversaries and centenaries have an educational value that should not be underestimated, as well as great potential for engaging society's interest.

#### Riga and Grimmelshausen

From this writer's viewpoint as a historian and cultural researcher, it is therefore important to mark three secular and, for the European North in the broad sense, momentous dates: 1621, 1721 and 1921 – historical landmarks which, it is hoped, will also be reflected in this year's articles for NORDEUROPAforum or the Nordeuropa-Blog. It is 400 years since the Swedish king Gustav II Adolf seized the renowned Hanseatic city of Riga from his cousin, the Polish king and Lithuanian grand duke Sigismund III Vasa, and received tribute from its citizens. For several decades thereafter, the metropolis of the eastern Baltic Sea region was to remain the empire's largest city in terms of population, financial power and trading significance. Gaining control of Riga heralded in Sweden's status as a great power for the next hundred years, during which time not only vast areas of the Baltic region but also many territories of the Holy Roman Empire and colonial possessions in North America and Africa were brought under Swedish dominion. And while we are on the subject of Gustav Adolf, Sweden and the Holy Roman Empire, let it also be noted that 1621 was the year of Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen's birth in the Hessian town of Gelnhausen; the first German writer whose exuberant tales introduced a wider German-speaking public to the Swedes and Finns who roamed German lands during the Thirty Years War. End of Sweden's great power period, beginning of the Russian empire in the North.

## Editorial 2021

A hundred years later, however, obdurate Swedish claims to great power were a thing of the past. In 1721 Sweden had to cede Riga and all of the Baltic provinces to the Grand Duchy of Moscow under the Treaty of Nystad. Only the year before, it had lost parts of Swedish Pomerania to the Electorate of Brandenburg, and back in 1715, the secularised prince-bishoprics of Bremen and Verden had been sold to the Electorate of Brunswick-Lüneburg (Hanover). Even longer had passed since its colonial successes. Only the town of Wismar and its environs and the Swedish County Palatine of Zweibrücken were left as pitiful remnants of Sweden's former palpable presence in central and northern Europe. However, the Peace of Nystad not only ended the Swedish claim to dominance but also marked the rise of Russia to become the all-dominating great power in the north-east of Europe, securing the Tsardom's place in the 18th century European pentarchy, and thus as a decisive factor in northern European foreign policy – with consequences up to the present day. Still in 1721, Moscow's ruler donned the imperial crown as Emperor of Russia, which was taken as a serious affront by its neighbours, adherents of the Western Church; after all, there was only one emperor in Christian Europe at that time and his seat was in Vienna, not St. Petersburg.

### Resolution of the Åland Question

The ascendancy of Russia also had a bearing on another event that occurred 200 years later: the unification of the Åland Islands with the nascent sovereign Republic of Finland in 1921. While the Åland Islands were inhabited almost exclusively by a Swedish-speaking population and were part of the Grand Duchy of Finland during that period, they had been under Russian military occupation since 1809 and thus posed a threat, mainly to the Swedish capital, Stockholm. In 1917 they declared their independence, demanded annexation to Sweden, and were then successively occupied by a White Guard protection corps, a Swedish expeditionary force and German intervention troops from the Baltic Sea Division – until the League of Nations decided that the Åland Islanders should belong to Finland. This resolution has been acknowledged ever since as a rare example of cultural difference, international integration and political concord being facilitated, successfully, by an international organisation. Nevertheless, the subsequent history of Finnish Åland was not without its tensions, and it would be worth investigating this 100-year experience of lived diversity more thoroughly than has been done to date.

### Scientific Research into the Northern Lights

Even beyond the bounds of the Swedish-Russian geography of power, developments took place which have retained their virulence to this day. After the extreme North had been brought under the sway of the Danish king, – Christian IV having undertaken an expedition to Finnmark and the Kola Peninsula in 1599, – interest in the territory took on a pan-European dimension. In this context, let it also be remembered that it was in 1621 that the Northern Lights, named the »aurora borealis« by the French mathematician and astronomer Pierre Gassendi, were first subjected to scientific study. From a scientific history taking that as a starting point, up to and including present-day Northern Lights tourism, this topic offers enough facets to be written about in several articles for *NORDEUROPAforum* and similar publications (see below).

### **Danish Colonisation of Greenland**

A century after Gasperi's discoveries, a different Danish expedition under the Norwegian pastor and missionary Hans Egede landed in Greenland, thereby asserting the crown's claim to a renewed foothold in an old Norwegian, and since 1536 also Danish, tribute territory following centuries of logistical inaccessibility (due most likely to the »Little Ice Age«). From the viewpoint of the Danish and Norwegian rulers, this was the beginning of Greenland's modern history. Those subjugated by them probably saw it rather as an assault on their millennia-old indigenous culture, combined with colonisation and oppression – which continues today – of the population that Egede had encountered as a hunter-gatherer society in 1721 and considered it necessary to »civilise«, »cultivate« and convert »to the true faith«. The postcolonial rifts between the Danish »motherland« and Greenlandic subjects of the kingdom still resonate today and are a topic of heated debate on the world's largest island; indeed, this might stimulate various ideas for authors of the present journal.

### **Still Current: The Schleswig Plebiscite**

A more recent topic of Danish and German history in an international context was taken up last year. The German-Danish Year of Friendship 2020 was proclaimed to commemorate the Schleswig referendum of 1920, and the published programme, cited in Joachim Grage's »Editorial« in *NORDEUROPA forum* 2020, sparked a lively debate. This year the continuing commemoration will be covered in the »Nordeuropa-Blog« and will no doubt prompt a range of comments – particularly as a series of »Year of Friendship« events had to be postponed or extended until 2021 due to the pandemic, and will therefore continue to provide talking points.

### **Special Focuses and Development of *NORDEUROPA forum* 2020–2021**

A surfeit of history does nobody any good, as Nietzsche concluded in his day. Not for that reason alone, it is worth pointing out that *NORDEUROPA forum* is a platform not just for Northern European memorial culture but for other topics, too, furthering the conversation about northern European politics, literatures and languages, for instance, and about cultural and societal developments in general.

In this regard the publishers and editorial team of *NORDEUROPA forum* are very grateful that the Humboldt-Universität-Gesellschaft supported one of last year's special focuses – »Bilder des Nordens in der Populärkultur« (»Images of the North in Popular Culture«) – by financing the necessary translations of numerous articles. Without this grant, some of these articles could surely not have been published. In the year 2021, then, *NORDEUROPA forum* will address two more special focuses, this time devoted to the relationship between nature, the environment and literature. On the one hand, we have six articles to look forward to on the theme of »Environmental Change in Nordic Fiction«, and on the other, five articles on »Changing Concepts of Nature and Literature«.

Organisationally, too, certain changes are afoot in 2021. The *NORDEUROPA forum* blog, previously hosted on the »Hypothesen« website, is moving to the Northern European portal »vifanord« (<https://portal.vifanord.de/blog/>). This will bring together the scholarly blog accompanying *NORDEUROPA forum*, the finds and reports of the FiD

## Editorial 2021

Nordeuropa and the articles of the NordicHistoryBlog in one place under the title »Nordeuropa-Blog« with a view to enhancing each blog's visibility and providing interested readers with a larger communication platform. The aforementioned German-Danish Year of Cultural Friendship, which elicited a substantial response on all three platforms in 2020, will find a new home on the »Nordeuropa-Blog« under the rubric »deutsch-dänisches Freundschaftsjahr« (»German-Danish Year of Friendship«). But the blog lends itself equally well to the discussion of other topics, so in 2021, various NORDEUROPA *forum* blog entries will be devoted to the »Digital Humanities«, a recent topic of animated debate in Northern European circles. And naturally, the editorial team and publishers invite readers to open new blog discussions again this year.

Meanwhile the editorial team of NORDEUROPA *forum* has grown to 37 members, comprising 11 publishers and 24 editors, a managing editor and an editor-in-chief. We have also enlarged the geographical catchment from which we recruit. Members of the editorial team no longer come from the narrow German-speaking region alone, but also from Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Latvia, Iceland, Greenland and the USA. This is to be welcomed, because it broadens our thematic horizons and increases our academic expertise. But it also entails logistical problems which, inspired by the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, can only be solved digitally for the time being. This year the usual annual meeting of editorial board members took place in a virtual setting. At least this compensated visually and intellectually for the lack of physical proximity. But of course we all hope to be able to meet again physically and in person, for that stimulates inspiration and academic reflection far better than screen-projected electronic impulses.

On that note, I wish our team and all our readers a scientifically fruitful and journalistically productive year 2021!

Berlin, May 2021



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