

Gillian Fellows-Jensen (ed.)

*Denmark and Scotland: the Cultural and Environmental Resources of Small Nations* (joint symposium of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters held in Copenhagen 15th-18th September 1999)

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In giving an opinion on a publication, the qualities of a volume can not be considered in isolation. This is so in a double sense, for no reviewer can claim immaculate objectivity. So, in fairness to my readers and to the authors, I must let the readers calibrate my biases, in considering what alternative approaches to the subject are on offer.

Firstly, I am prejudiced against those 'bandwagon books' which are currently seeking to exploit the interface between cultural and environmental studies, via publishers' promotions soliciting listing as 'set reading' for students. Some are shallow or downright unreliable works by 'science journalists' with no first-hand research experience. Other authors can claim academic recognition in part of the field, but are 'busking' otherwise: e.g. a '1999' book embodies 1950s misinformation... Secondly, I

definitely favour cases where a person with a distinguished record both as a hands-on researcher and as a thoughtful theoretician produces a major single-author work. Thus I value Professor Ian Simmons' *An Environmental History of Great Britain: From 10,000 Years Ago to the Present* (Edinburgh University Press, 2001). An author of Simmons' calibre can give a book unity and coherence often lacking in multi-author compendia. Indeed, conference proceedings are unpopular with publishers, because potential purchasers are reluctant to buy a hefty tome compiled from contributions each so specialised that few are of personal interest to them. Too often, a conference is viewed by participants essentially as a platform for exhibiting their particular expertise, to further narrowly-based career ambitions. They seldom pay more than lip service to co-operating in holistic exploration of nominal conference themes.

How, then, should we perceive the Danish/Scottish publication? Let us firstly consider the content in relation to who took part, and how the calibre of the speakers is reflected in the quality of the information. Then we can look at the degree of fidelity to the declared theme, before finally assessing to whom these proceedings may prove useful.

In spatial terms, the conference focused on Denmark and Scotland, and their relationships with neighbouring lands around the North Sea. Edinburgh has been dubbed 'The Athens of the North', and paradoxically the inspiration for the conference arose when Professor Malcolm Jeeves of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and Professor Henning Sørensen of the Royal Danish Academy met in Greece, at the 1996 NATO Advanced Research Workshop in

Athens. In the words of the latter, 'We found that we are neighbours, separated only by the water of the North Sea, an area for work and play for both Scotland and Denmark, and that Scotland and Denmark have much in common.' (p. 7) The specific theme for the symposium was developed by Dr Gillian Fellows-Jensen. On its acceptance by the RSE and RDA, she was invited to undertake the main responsibility for the conference, both in academic and in practical terms. Only those of us who have been involved in co-ordinating major international conferences can really appreciate her achievement in her response to such an onerous challenge.

Whilst in spatial terms the participants were 'neighbours', the multi-disciplinary membership of both institutions resulted in an extremely wide programme of papers in terms of time-span. This runs from the geological development of the North Sea basin many millions of years ago (with the human implications of that very ancient legacy) up to the opening of the Øresund bridge to link Copenhagen and Malmö in the year 2000. This, however, has resulted in neither 'journalism' nor 'busking'. Fellowship of the RDA and RSE is not lightly awarded, and the other speakers have equivalent reputations for soundness in their own fields. The quality of the information in the papers is thus assured.

Happily for the reader, however, this does not imply a uniform 'party line'. There was scope for 'genteel disputation' regarding interpretation: what we Scots call 'flyting'. This is a traditional pastime, common to Danes and Scots, like our common taste for straight-faced ironic humour ('pawkie' in the vernacular of 'The Athens of the North'; 'Laconic' to Hellenes). Thus on page 158 we find a Dane,

Lektor Michael Chesnutt, gleefully 'flyting': after a meticulously five page survey, he states bluntly: 'In my opinion all these studies approach the problem from the wrong historical perspective.' Full stop... And on page 91 Bjarne Stoklund takes a characteristically ironic dig at us: '*Vernacular architecture* is a concept used by the classically educated British for what we in Denmark designate with a more "home-spun" national term: *folkelig byggeskik*.' ... Aye!

Less happily for the reader, the symposium papers have been printed in the sequence in which they were presented during the conference (viz pp. 251-253). Some of the juxtapositions are felicitous, with contributions dovetailing neatly together. In those cases similarities and contrasts between our nations emerge (sometimes evidently surprising even the speakers, which highlights the value of holding such symposia). We 'neighbours' benefit by realising on both sides of the North Sea that our stereotypes of each other's cultures can be misleadingly simplistic. Helpful juxtapositions of this kind are notable in the final cluster of papers, which explores aspects of national identity. But the very success of that section underlines the benefits which would attend rationalisation of the order elsewhere. After the 1999 to 2001 period required for publication, even those who attended in person probably only had hazy recollections of the content of individual papers. Those of us who were unable to be there are even less well equipped to shuffle the reading order to optimise our uptake of information. For example, it is not until page 191 that we reach Thomas Kiørboe's paper on 'Food webs and fish production in the North Sea'. It

would have been helpful to have assimilated this *before* embarking on 'The environmental impact of changing uses on the North Sea littoral of Scotland' by William Ritchie, printed sixty pages earlier. Instead, Kjørboe's paper appears between Roger Mercer's on archaeological heritage management and Jan McDonald's on 'Strolling players: theatre as an agency of cultural exchange.' This is but one of the cases where sequence conflicts with ease of comprehension.

I read the papers once in their published order, then enhanced my understanding (and my pleasure in the ideas they fostered) by re-reading them in a comprehensively modified order, suggested to me by my reconnaissance. It is not unknown for reviewers to indulge in ego-trips, making pejorative comments, but not 'putting their money where their mouth is' by offering an alternative solution in detail. Instead of being merely negative and dismissive like that, it seems preferable to be positive, and offer fellow readers a revised order as an option. What follows is not intended to be 'definitive'. On the contrary, with this as a starting point, by actively exploring personal alternatives we can each add depth to our appreciation of what the authors have achieved. At the start, I suggested that a key objective of the present review is to assess whether participants had viewed the conference just as a platform for furthering narrowly-based career ambitions, paying scant attention to the nominal theme. Or had they actually espoused co-operative holistic analysis of the declared theme of comparing cultural/environmental interactions in our countries? It was from my attempt at re-ordering that I felt justified in concluding that, overall, the latter is definitely the case. This emerged

from the way the papers resist being categorised mechanically in terms of traditional academic disciplines. In the majority of the papers we find the specialist authors not only engaging in thoughtful appraisals of types of content within their own disciplines which may bear on interfaces between cultures and environments. They also consider what they might contribute personally to identifying and analysing links transcending the boundaries which customarily segregate disciplines. Thus, for example we find Donald Davidson meditating on '*Soils as cultural resources*' (my emphasis), and the onomasticians (well known to SSNS members) apply their place-name expertise with considerable initiative to give us insights which illuminate the conference themes from several different angles – and so on, in paper after paper, with few exceptions.

Here, then, as a starting point for readers' own exploration of the valuable material from this conference is an overview of the content, with my attempt to modify the sequence to ease assimilation: H. Sørensen: 'Prelude' (pp.7-8), G. Fitton & L. Melchior Larsen: 'The geological history of the North Atlantic Ocean' (pp. 9-27), O. Michelsen & J. Korstgård: 'The geological history of the North Sea Basin' (pp. 28-46), T. Kjørboe: 'Food webs and fish production in the North Sea' (pp. 191-210), W. Ritchie: 'The environmental impact of changing uses on the North Sea littoral of Scotland' (pp. 103-122), D. Davidson: '*Soils as cultural resources*' (pp. 171-180), R. Mercer: 'The development of recording and protection of antiquities both within and as part of the landscape in Scotland' (pp. 181-190), D. Waugh: '"Fae da nort tae da suddart" Norse settlement in Shetland with

special reference to Unst and Old Scatness' (pp. 47-57), C. Morris: 'Norse settlement in Shetland: the Shetland chapel-sites' (pp. 58-78), M. Chesnutt: 'Nordic-Celtic links in folk literature' (pp. 153-170), B. Stoklund: 'Vernacular architecture between environment and culture: the case of "stock-stove" houses in Shetland' (pp. 91-102), T. Smout: 'Thinking about the environmental history of Scotland and Denmark since 1600' (pp. 139-152), T. Jeff Maxwell: 'Land management and rural development' (pp. 79-90), G. Fellows-Jensen: 'Danish place-names in Scotland and Scottish personal names in Denmark: a survey of recent research' (pp. 123-138), J. McDonald: 'Strolling players: theatre as an agency of cultural exchange' (pp. 211-222), F. Lundgreen-Nielsen: 'National identity in Denmark' (pp. 223-233), D. Page: 'Scottish identity' (pp. 234-238), A. Forte: 'Scots Law and Scottish national identity' (pp. 239-250).

As hinted above, some of what emerged at the conference evidently surprised the speakers themselves. I myself first went to Denmark in 1963, as an undergraduate studying archaeology and geomorphology under Danish professors. Since then I have been back many times: working with Danish researchers, involved in archaeological experiments and filming for TV, even (with great temerity!) running study tours. So I reckoned that I was fairly well informed. But ... we started by noting the Greek genesis of the Conference – well, reading these papers demonstrated to this denizen of 'The Athens of the North' that he was subject to a delusion, and 'the Greeks had a word for it': *hubris*: 'insolent pride or presumption' ... Paper after paper offered me food for thought, and with this fresh nourishment to enliven my own

ideas, I shall certainly be re-reading the book. Its portability will facilitate this: some conference proceedings threaten hernias. This is a pocketable paperback, just 230x150mm, but the graphics are clear and the point-size of the text does not penalise ageing eyes.

The ultimate aim of this review is to assess to whom these proceedings may prove useful. We can indeed be confident of the calibre of the international contributors, and hence be assured of the quality of the information. The thought-provoking discussions do make this a rewarding read for those of us with long-established interests on both sides of the North Sea and across the other landscapes and seascapes on the horizons of the Scottish Society for Northern Studies. At the same time, the book offers an intriguing but sound threshold which can be recommended to those wishing to enter the world of northern studies, whether formally as students, or informally for pleasure. The section 'Bibliographies' reflect the very wide subject matter of the conference. If one wants to follow up a particular theme (whether plankton or cathedrals...), they signpost further reading effectively but selectively, so that one does not feel overwhelmed.

I suspect we should thank Gillian Fellows-Jensen for her editorial acumen in this, as well as for her major contribution to the success of the conference as a whole. Previous to this event, contacts between the RSE and RDA had been restricted to the exchange of publications, plus Danish participation in the 200th anniversary of the RSE, away back in 1983. It is good that in May 2000 a formal agreement was concluded on future closer cooperation. The success of the

1999 event augurs well for an on-going sequence of symposia.

Ian A. Morrison

Tom Schmidt

*Norske gårdsnavn på -by og -bø  
med personnavnforledd*

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This impressive work on Norwegian farm names in *-by* and *-bø* with personal name specifics is the doctoral thesis of Tom Schmidt, senior lecturer in the Department of Name Research at the University of Oslo. The writer states apologetically in his introduction that the gestation period has been lengthy but it could not have been otherwise. The study is so densely detailed that it clearly represents many years of research. It is an enormously valuable work of reference for all who are interested in the history of place-names in *-by* and *-bø* and it should appear in many university libraries and other academic bookshelves. The language of the two-volume study is Norwegian and, although it would certainly be enormously useful to have an English translation, the content of the Norwegian text repays the effort of translation. Volume I contains detailed commentary on the Norwegian *-by* and *-bø* names, whereas Volume II tabulates the occurrences of the names in Norway, with indications of the valuations of the settlements bearing the names, in an attempt to determine the period during which the names were coined.

It is impossible to do full justice