

This publication is a result of the European Union-funded Horizon 2020 research project: CoHERE (Critical Heritages: performing and representing identities in Europe). CoHERE received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 693289.

Chapter 2

Classical Antiquity in the Danish Classroom: “Oldtidskundskab” as Heritage

The educational system is the essential communicator of cultural heritage. Inevitably, therefore, it is a battlefield of political, social and ideological discourses on the role and content of education for society (Jensen 2008, 45). The point of departure in this chapter is the invention in 1903 of a new mandatory subject in Danish upper secondary school (*gymnasium*), Classical Studies (in Danish, *Oldtidskundskab*).

Seen in a European perspective, Classical Studies was a new approach in general education and has become a Danish speciality. Discussions about how much Greek and Latin should be taught compared to other subjects took place in most European countries as natural sciences and modern languages came to be seen as more and more relevant for society at large. In Classical Studies, students were to learn about Greek culture not by learning the language, but by reading texts in translation and by studying classical art and architecture. Rather than a study of language, therefore, Classical Studies became primarily a study of literature. The most recent study plan for Classical Studies defines the subject as dealing with the knowledge and culture of classical antiquity as the basis of European and global culture:

Classical Studies is a subject that deals with knowledge, information and culture from classical antiquity as the foundation of the art and imagination of later periods in Europe as well as globally. The subject is central in the general education of the students because it deals with ancient texts and monuments expressing values, concepts and idioms that became normative in later periods' art, literature, thinking and values (Stx læreplaner 2017).

This definition is the product of negotiations concerning the role and legitimacy of Classical Studies in Denmark that have been in progress for more than a hundred years. In spite of its name, the subject was originally focused exclusively on Greek culture, because it was a substitute for learning ancient Greek. Since its inception, the chronological and cultural framework of Classical Studies has broadened. Likewise, the number of students being taught Classical Studies has increased enormously in this period as the general level of education has risen. In 1906 462 students finished the three-year *gymnasium* (403 male and 59 female), in 1975 12,564 (for the first time there were more women than male students) and in 2017 26,910 with the mandatory subject Classical Studies (Fig. 2.1). In 2017 the number was equivalent to 37 percent of the year group, more than one-third of all young Danes (Fakta 2015, 3).¹ Thus a much larger cohort of Danish society today has knowledge of Greek culture than when the subject was invented in 1903 when the percentage was about one. In this respect the introduction of the subject paved the way for classical antiquity to become transformed with the spread of mass education in the twentieth century from being elitist knowledge restricted to the few to becoming appropriated, first by the growing bourgeoisie, and eventually by the general public. But for Classical Studies, knowledge of Greek and Roman culture in Danish society would have been a highly specialised niche – as it is for Egyptology and Assyriology, for instance.

This chapter will explore the negotiations and their consequences for the conceptualisation of Classical Studies. The social and political discussions are analysed in order to define the role of the classical past in the Danish educational system, but also to explore how classical antiquity has been conceptualised and performed in the classroom. Which classical past was deemed relevant in a Danish context, and why? In order to answer these questions, what could be called an excavation of the historical arguments and counterargument will be carried out. First, the preconditions for and invention of the subject will be discussed, looking at how the connection with Europe was constructed in an imagined geography, and at which heritages are at play in the linkage drawn between Denmark and classical antiquity during the nineteenth century. Since its invention, the

¹ The numbers derive from Statistics Denmark, published annual reports 1910-2004 and their digital database from 2004: <https://www.dst.dk/en> (accessed 24.06.2018)

legitimacy of the subject in the Danish school system has been challenged several times. The question of legitimacy is defined here as a challenge, and when a system is challenged it generates anxiety, insecurity and the need to argue for preservation of the status quo. At this point, arguments become noticeably more clearly expressed. Thus secondly, these “challenges” will be explored, with the aim of defining the tropes that have been developed and established in the discourse on the legitimation of the subject.

Greek and Latin

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the progression to university studies went through the so-called learned schools (*lærde skoler*) that replaced the Latin schools during the reform process of 1805–1809, as teaching became transformed by the neohumanism that spread especially from Germany. Latin was still the main subject, followed by Greek, which was now emphasised as the second classical language, but the language of examination was changed from Latin to Danish (Skovgaard-Petersen 1976, 88; Haue 2003, 90; Lynning 2007, 2; Olesen 2012, 8–9). With the first school law in 1814, primary schools were established and run by local communities all over the country, but these were not connected to the learned schools (Larsen, Nørr and Sonne 2013, 185–188). As a growing political group in Denmark, farmers and landowners were eager to democratise access to further education and argued in favour of local responsibility including for the learned schools. In this power struggle over the right to define and administer schools, a key issue was the purpose of education in general in society. Here the emergence of the concept of *Bildung* was a turning point. *Bildung* was introduced by the philosopher and literary critic Johann Gottfried Herder in 1774 in his ground-breaking work *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (Haue 2003, 17). It was further developed by Immanuel Kant and implemented in the German educational system by Alexander von Humboldt and Friedrich August Wolf with the foundation of the Humboldt University in Berlin in 1810 (Held 2000; Olesen 2012).

One of the important changes this promoted in the study of classical philology was a general move from pure language studies to the study of culture, including history, geography, philosophy, mythology, and art and archaeology, in what in German scholarship was defined as *Alttertumswissenschaft* or the scientific study of antiquity. The concept was developed as a disciplinary concept by the philologist Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824), who is generally

recognised as reforming the study of ancient languages into philology, implementing the critical reading of ancient texts as historical documents. Wolf's work is often illustrated by the anecdote of his insistence on being inscribed at the university as a student of philology, not theology, even if this study did not exist (Bolter 1980, 88; Harloe 2013, 193–202). Wolf studied in Göttingen, and was professor at the University of Halle 1783–1806; when the university closed after the Prussian defeat by Napoleon, he moved to Berlin. Encouraged by Goethe, he conceptualised his many years of teaching philology in his 1807 essay "Darstellung der Alterthumswissenschaft", which can be read as a disciplinary manifesto (Bolter 1980, 84–87). In Wolf's definition of philology, three main elements distinguish the subject from previous classical scholarship. Firstly, philology is conceptualised as a professional activity reserved to an exclusive elite of researchers. Wolf opposed the popularising of research because he considered it led to superficiality. Secondly, rigorous philology, like the natural sciences, leads to the attainment of truth. Wolf was clearly influenced by developments in the natural sciences, and he reacted to a growing awareness of these. As he states in his preface, those studying nature must recognise man as part of nature. Studies of history, language, and the art of man are therefore to be considered knowledge of the same order as knowledge of nature (Wolf 1818, xxiv). Lastly, the goal of study was knowledge of ancient man himself. In this view Wolf was very inspired by Humboldt and his concepts of *Bildung* and knowledge.

Wolf lays out the defining geographical borders of the subject of *Altertumswissenschaft*:

We would like to join all these people in one science; however, there are many reasons for a necessary separation and this does not allow us to place Egyptians, Hebrews, Persians and other Oriental nations on the same level as the Greeks and Romans. One of the most important differences between them is that the first are only a few if any steps above the kind of self-realisation [*Bildung*] named bourgeois policing or civilisation, in opposition to a higher actual spiritual culture [*Geisteskultur*] (Wolf 1807, 15–16).

He continues by emphasising the Greeks as the first and most innovative people ever to have lived

on the face of the Earth, unlike the Romans, who he defines as a people of no original talents but for conquering and ruling and who built their civilisation process on that of their Greek neighbours (Wolf 1807, 22). These conceptions of Greek and Roman cultures and their interrelations owe a significant debt to the writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, and they underline Winckelmann's role as the "founding spirit" of *Altertumswissenschaft* and neohumanism, as these developed as a trope in German nineteenth-century narratives of the history of scholarship (Harloe 2013, 7, see also chapter three). Wolf's conceptions also recount ancient conceptualisations of the relationship between Rome and Athens, as established already in classical literature by, for instance, Virgil (Hanink 2017, 33–34). Here is an imagined geography of Greek culture as pre-eminent above all others, which, through its originality and its qualities as role model, is embedded in the civilisation processes of Rome and then later cultures.

Wolf's concept of *Altertumswissenschaft* became very influential in Denmark. His book was translated into Danish in 1818 by Peter Oluf Brøndsted (1780–1842), professor of philology at Copenhagen University. In his preface Brøndsted emphasises how Wolf's essay nourishes and stimulates students through its high scholarly quality (Wolf 1818, viii-xiv). Brøndsted is best known for his travels in Greece and his excavations on the islands of Aegina and Kea, but he was extremely important for the implementation of Hellenism in Denmark (Christiansen 2000, 18–34; Rasmussen *et al.* 2008). He was also of paramount importance in the introduction of classical archaeology in Denmark (see chapter four). Brøndsted became *professor extraordinarius* in philology at Copenhagen University in 1813, but continued to travel widely as he was particularly interested in the material remains of the past. In 1832 he was made *professor ordinarius* in philology and archaeology.

In 1829, Brøndsted was joined at the University of Copenhagen by a young professor in Latin, Johan Nicolai Madvig (1804-1886). Brøndsted had paved the way for a widespread interest among the Danish intelligentsia of the early nineteenth century in the art and objects of, especially, Greece. Madvig, however, became much more influential in the educational system (Larsen 2006). Perhaps because he never travelled, unlike Brøndsted who was constantly on the road, Madvig had a stronger position at the university. In 1848, after the passing of the constitution and the implementation of democracy in Denmark, Madvig became the first Inspector of Education at the

Ministry for Education. From 1849 to 1851 he was Minister for Church and Education and responsible for a new school law implemented in 1850 that increased the number of lectures in mathematics and introduced natural science into the learned schools, responding to increasing demands for skills and knowledge in these areas in society. Madvig was probably influenced by the strong voice of Hans Christian Ørsted (1777–1851), professor of physics, with whom he had implemented earlier reforms (Haue 2003, 149–152). Ørsted saw philology and the natural sciences as two very different fields and was instrumental in upgrading mathematics and natural science in the learned school (Haue 2003, 89).

Two opposing currents in nineteenth-century discussions of education and the role of the various subjects have been defined as the humanists and the realists. Conservative humanists defended the primacy of the classical languages as the most important subjects in educating pupils in universal values. Their neohumanistic theory was based on Plato's definition of the world as a materialisation of abstract ideas. Moderate humanists were more open to the expansion of *Bildung* with modern languages and natural science. The humanists were opposed by the realists, who, basing themselves on Aristotle, argued that substance existed as it appeared and should be understood through the senses. The most radical realists called for the complete removal of classical languages from the school curriculum, the moderate a reduction (Larsen 2006, 20–27; Haue 2003, 92–93).

Madvig represented a moderate wing of humanists who sought a balance between individual and general education but wished to enshrine humanity and the training of the human free spirit of the individual as the primary purpose of education (Haue 2003, 108–109). In his first year of employment, Madvig had argued in favour of the traditional neohumanist education, but in the years immediately following he began to question this, something that has been seen as a professional and a personal crisis (Larsen 2006, 18, 27–34). In his memoirs, Madvig describes as a deep frustration his feeling of a general lack of knowledge in his first years as lecturer in a course on the encyclopaedia of philology (Madvig 1887, 92–93). Coming from an ordinary background, Madvig lacked the social competences that derived from growing up in the academic milieu. He had received the general education and studied classical languages, yet he did not feel that he had succeeded in the self-realisation that was the goal of education in neohumanist ideology. Thus he questioned the unilateral formal value of language studies as promoted by Wolf, and he became

instrumental in the abolition of the use of Latin in the examinations preparing for university studies, and also in general in the university in classical philology (Haue 2003, 160). In the study of Greek and Latin, he introduced a methodology of study called *autopsia*, which remains influential to this day. This was based on the formal education of studying language in depth through the original texts. In this he followed and developed the tradition into a rigorous methodology. But he clearly differed from the conservative neohumanists, who saw the classical as the ideal as he defined Greek and Roman culture as other and primitive. The classical became a mirror in which it was possible to gain a better understanding of the present (Haue 2003, 109).

The Nordic and the Classical

Madvig's school programme of 1850 was reformed in 1871 with the introduction of a two-part school system with both classical and mathematical programmes. The new system introduced an interesting novelty, the subject Old Norse (Hjorth 1972, 29–30; Haue 2003, 182–240). As described by a young contemporary theologian, the discussions about this reform were seen as widening the rift between "cis-latin" and "trans-latin": That is to say, they drew on the Latin distinction between Europe south and north of the Alps to point to a Denmark connected to Europe by the classical languages or uncoupled from it by a reduced classical content in education (Haue 2003, 196). The united liberal party had proposed a new structure with three programmes: a classical, a Nordic and a mathematical. In a speech in the upper house of parliament (*Landstinget*), Madvig argued strongly against a Nordic educational programme, seeing Danish culture as a culture developed on the borders of the civilised world and totally dependent on stimulation from Europe. If the Nordic component of education were to be strengthened, this should be done in dialogue with the European, not by focusing exclusively on the Nordic heritage (Madvig 1887, 252–253; Haue 2003, 197–198). The Nordic programme was dropped, but Old Norse was introduced as a mandatory subject for all students. The inclusion of this subject is to be understood in the context of a rising nationalism, and not least in the political changes that Denmark experienced in the 1860s (Rerup 1993). Denmark's catastrophic defeat by Prussian forces at Dybbøl Mølle in 1864 had compelled it to let go of Schleswig and the southern part of Jutland. The relationship with Germany had been problematic since the 1850s; now, anti-Germanism spread into the school system, where the aspiration to turn away from the German-inspired classical *Bildung* and the study of classical

languages to a Nordic past had already been nurtured in the context of the arts in the preceding decades.

The idea of Old Norse as a Nordic alternative to the classical tradition of *Bildung* was rooted in the ideas of Grundtvig. As discussed in chapter one, Grundtvig had a formative influence on the development of Danish cultural identity in the nineteenth century and was also one of the most influential voices in the school debate. He is often considered a fierce opponent of the classical tradition and is known as a very strong agitator for the abolition of what he called “the black school”, referring to the learned schools in which grammar was studied intensively for its own sake. However, Grundtvig himself had received a classical education, graduating in theology from the University of Copenhagen in 1803. What set him apart from earlier thinkers in Denmark was his focus on education for the people, together with an idea of the Enlightenment inspired by Herder’s thinking – that there are as many Enlightenments as people and individuals (Jonas 2014). In this respect Grundtvig opposed the privileged position of classical culture in traditional education. His clash with Madvig came when he proposed that the Academy of Sorø be reconstituted as a high school focused on “Danishness”, something that Madvig refused, arguing that both the learned schools and the university were teaching the spirit of Danishness (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1993, 262). Grundtvig, in reply, called Madvig the Latin minister, obliged like a rigid Latinist to consider all non-Greek and non-Roman civilisations as barbarian (Grundtvig 1848).

In 1889, the Ministry of Education published a proposal for a reform of the upper secondary school and asked the schools to comment. A key element was the abolition of two subjects, Old Norse and Ancient Greek, to make room for more lectures in Latin and mathematics. Most in fact agreed that Old Norse was not that important: the subject introduced a new and difficult grammar and there were not enough lectures for the students to really get to the content of Icelandic literature and the sagas. Those against the proposal argued that all young male students should get to know the literature and spirit of the Nordic past and that a knowledge of Old Norse was important for understanding the mother tongue (Kirke- og Undervisningsministeriet 1889, 16–17, 52). It was different with the suggested abolition of ancient Greek. The school principals in general agreed that knowledge of Greek culture was absolutely necessary and an essential part of the general education. A few argued that this knowledge should be obtained through reading the original

texts,² but there were several who supported the Ministry of Education's proposal that it should be acquired by reading Greek literature in translation. In these arguments, some of the tropes concerning the role of Greek culture that would be repeated in the years to come were formulated:

- Greek culture embodies a liberating force, as exemplified firstly through the case of Rome (which cultivated the culture of the conquered, then spread it through Latin literature and art and thereby established the common culture of Western Europe) and secondly through the Renaissance (when the rediscovery of classical texts was essential in breaking with medieval tradition and culture: Kirke- og Undervisningsministeriet 1889, 21).
- A civilised country has citizens who know ancient Greek. Not knowing Greek culture means a loss of civilisation (Kirke- og Undervisningsministeriet 1889, 63).
- Knowledge of the classical past, and especially of Greek culture, is essential to the understanding of modern European cultural life, of which Denmark is part (Kirke- og Undervisningsministeriet 1889, 63).

Ancient Greek was considered the most important discipline in general education and self-realisation. Old Norse was considered more of a skill, necessary for those studying the Danish language. It is astonishing that Old Norse was so easily dismissed, but this underlines the classical background of all teachers of the subject. The argument that established ancient Greek culture as the essential discipline for all students was that Greek culture was essential for the understanding of the values and structures not only of Danish but of European societies. It was the outlook and the connection with Europe that set the subject apart from Old Norse, which located Danish culture in a Nordic sphere. Thus, in the imagined geography of classicism, Greek culture was the link between Denmark and Europe.

The Invention of "Oldtidskundskab"

When the school reform was finally decided in 1903, it was a breakthrough in several respects. It

² This is strongly argued by the philologist Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1854–1928), see *Forhandlinger* 1889, 28–33, also published in Heiberg 1889.

merged the various different schools into one educational system in which primary school was followed by four years in the intermediate school and then three years in upper secondary school, now called the gymnasium (Skovgaard-Petersen 1976, 285-287; Haue 2003, 259-273; Gjerløf and Jacobsen 2014).³ The name gymnasium had been used since the 1620s by a few Danish schools offering a two-year preparation for university. The term derives from the ancient Greek word referring to the institution for training the minds and especially the bodies of young men. During the Renaissance, the term had been appropriated for higher education by the humanists, but it was only now introduced as defining upper secondary school in Denmark with the 1903 reform, clearly inspired by Germany, where the term had been institutionalised by Humboldt in 1812 as the unitarian name for schools providing access to university studies (Horster and Funder 2017, 18-19). The reform provided for girls to be admitted to upper secondary school. The school was divided into three programmes: modern languages, classical languages, and mathematics. Latin was still taught in all classes and students choosing the classical programme were to take ancient Greek, but Classical Studies as proposed in 1889 became mandatory for all students, prescribing one hour a week throughout all three years of the educational programme.

Classical Studies was a new subject, with no tradition and no formal education of teachers. Martin Clarentius Gertz, a professor in philology, was appointed by the ministry to draw up the statutory instrument on the content of teaching, based on suggestions from a number of committees. His draft was followed in all its detail: “Among the Greek authors should be read parts of Homer, at least two dramas and examples of Plato and other prosaic authors. To this should be added – though less – examples of Latin key authors”.⁴ In the end, the reading of Latin authors was very seldom included, and in 1953 this requirement was removed from the guidelines (Andersen 2000, 66, 73).

³ Many of the schoolmasters proposed a postponement of the reform, and there was no political will to change the system before early in the twentieth century, when a change of government in 1901 eventually brought the liberal party *Venstre* to power (Haue 2003). The new minister of education, J. C. Christensen, and the head of education Martin Cl. Gertz succeeded in passing the law in 1903 and the new structure began to be implemented in autumn 1907 (Andersen 2000, 66).

⁴ Bekendtgørelse om Undervisning i gymnasiet 1906, 4.12.

Two elements introduced at the very beginning are still essential in the methodological and theoretical approach: the methodology of *autopsia* in learning, and the quality of the texts or monuments as normative for European culture. *Autopsia* (seeing with one's own eyes) derived from the philological methods introduced by Madvig. Originally, learning by seeing yourself had been based on reading the original texts. This was now transferred into a conceptualisation of the text as a whole as a monument, comparable to the sculptures, temples and vases studied by students. This was not detailed engagement with the grammar of words and sentences, but reading of the content of primary texts as opposed to secondary literature.⁵ This methodology is still characterised as a special method for the subject in Danish upper secondary schools, and it differentiates Classical Studies from similar studies such as history or history of religion. It is a rather positivistic approach, defined by one of the teachers as “through seeing yourself and on a documentary basis the students gain an authentic image of a culture” (Bender *et al.* 1981, 32; Krarup 1953, 11–12). The choice of methodology for the new subject followed from the teachers' training as philologists. They were thus applying the methods that they had learned and practised when reading the texts in Greek.

In 1953, the Greek and Latin teacher Per Krarup described the philologist teaching with translations as “gasping for air like a fish on dry land” – clearly not in his element, and almost embarrassed by having to talk about the texts without going back to the original Greek texts (Krarup 1953, 15). Nothing in philological university studies prepared these teachers for teaching in translation. Teachers of Greek and Latin in the upper secondary schools were still clearly the most qualified, but the need for more teachers consequently opened up the subject so that historians and teachers of literature, history, religion and Danish could teach Classical Studies. For a short period in the 1950s and 1960s, the University of Copenhagen offered a course in Greek culture (Krarup 1953, 16). However, a university degree was developed only in 1980 at Aarhus and Odense universities, encouraged by the Classical Association (Oldtidskundskab 1981).

One obstacle was the availability of translations. In the first place, only authors already translated

⁵ Bolt-Jørgensen 2003, 8–9. Whether this methodology is equivalent when studying translations was also discussed. Those arguing in favour of keeping the Greek language clearly rejected this, see Scharling 1903, 38–41.

could be taught, a consideration used as an argument against the subject in the first place. A society for the translation of historical sources had been established in 1875, and Gertz himself had founded a series called “Greek and Latin authors” in 1901, both initiatives that intensified the production of translations (Afzelius 1950, 137; Andersen 2000, 67). As late as 1947, the classical philologist Thure Hastrup was complaining about the lack of high-quality translations of essential texts (Hastrup 1947, 380). He emphasised the translations of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* excellently done by Christian Wilster in the 1830s (Krarup 1953, 12). These were reissued several times and used for teaching until new translations were published by Otto Steen Due in 2002 and 2004 respectively. But of Aristotle, for instance, very few translations existed, and only much later were many of the Aristotelian texts made available in Danish. It is informative to look at what was translated in the first years after the reform, and here the three tragedians are used as illustrative examples (Fig. 2.2).⁶ A number of translations of Aeschylus and Euripides had been made in the first half of the nineteenth century, although Hastrup considered only those by Niels Møller really qualified. He had translated three plays by Aeschylus, *The Agamemnon* in 1891 (reissued in 1966), *The Eumenides* in 1904 and *The Persians* in 1918.

There were very few plays by Sophocles in Danish, although *Antigone* had been translated by Thor Lange in 1893 and Niels Møller in 1894, with both these translations reissued several times until the 1960s, when the first new translations appeared (Andersen 2000). It is rather astonishing that the new subject did not provoke more new translations and many of the works translated in the early years of the century did not become key texts in teaching. The plays used again and again were Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* and *The Persians*, Sophocles’ *Antigone* and Euripides’ *Medea*, this last in spite of complaints about the quality of existing translations. As new translations appeared in the 1970s, Aeschylus seems to have been superseded by Euripides (Krarup 1953, 13; Andersen 2000, 83). Clearly, these plays are also those most favoured by more recent translators. Some translations were made for new performances, with especially *Antigone* and *Medea* being popular. It seems to have been difficult to widen the repertoire of the canonical texts once this was first established. A

⁶ The information derives from the online bibliography *Oldtidens og Middelalders litteratur – I skandinaviske oversættelser* by Johanna Akujärvi and Lars Boje Mortensen: <http://skandinaviske-oversaettelser.net/da/> (accessed 11 April 2018).

change came in the 1970s, when the Classical Association sponsored a series of translations including a large number of new translations that were made available for teachers and schools at reasonable prices (Andersen 2000).

Although *autopsia* rendered the use of readers or text books unnecessary, introductions to Greek literature to be used in teaching the subject appeared rather soon anyway. One of the first was published in 1912 by Valdemar Nielsen (Nielsen 1912). It is an interesting document, as it provides us with an insight into the contextualisation of the textual material. The book was reprinted several times, most recently in 1966. Nielsen provides a framework for understanding the texts in the context of an ancient society, focusing on the authors and their personalities. For instance, the Aeolians are described as the most energetic and bold people with an unrestrained passion demanding satisfaction, and he considers this as a “national dowry” which accounted for the emergence of poets such as Sappho and Alcaeus. The reader also provides us with the framework for the canon of text established in this period. It begins with Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, followed by Hesiod, who is credited not for writing interesting literature but only because he is the first named individual person in European literature (Nielsen 1912, 6). Then come the poets – Tyrtaeus, Solon, Alcaeus, Sappho, Anacreon, Simonides and Pindar – to be followed by the three great tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Aristophanes and, in brief, Menander are mentioned as authors of comedies. The presentation of the authors is framed by information about the oral and musical performances of lyric and the development and physical scenography of the dramas. The historians, Herodotus and Thucydides, are presented with an evaluation of their personality. Herodotus is presented as a naive and credulous man, more storyteller than historian, whereas Thucydides is the exact opposite, critical of superstition and shaped by the liberal environment of Athens of his time. Xenophon is described as dry and less spirited, and he is condemned for his preference for Sparta that prevents him giving the Athenians their due praise. Lastly, the philosophers are presented: first the pre-Socratics such as Thales of Miletus, then Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, and Democritus. The sophists are discussed at greater length and depth. The sections on Protagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle focus on their philosophical ideas, but Socrates in particular is also delineated through anecdotes like the one of his wife pouring a jug of water over his head when he tried to leave after being scolded, and how he then calmly noted that

after thunder comes rain (Nielsen 1912, 26).⁷ The choice to include an anecdote, that does not appear in the original texts and is only preserved in later commentaries, but at the same time one repeated again and again, could be a didactic choice, on the other hand goes into the more popularising genre, that we saw Wolf condemning 100 years earlier. The short chapter on rhetoric focuses on a detailed presentation of Demosthenes as the defender of Athenian greatness, and laments the widespread demoralisation and weakness in Athens (Nielsen 1912, 34). The book ends with a very short piece on later philosophy and the Roman period: “In the Roman period it is Greek *Bildung* that has given the Roman its character” (Nielsen 1912, 37).

Nielsen’s reader follows the teaching process itself. From 1903, students took the subject for three years. Eventually a hierarchy was established whereby in the first year they read Homer, in the second, the tragedies, and only in the third year were they mature enough to read philosophy (Krarup 1953, 12–14). The curriculum was defined as at least 3,000 lines of Homer, one drama, 150 pages of prose, and fifty pages from Latin authors. This turned out to be too much, and in 1922 it was reduced to 2,000 lines of Homer, two tragedies, and 125 pages of prose, half of which was to be Plato and the remainder drawn from the historians. Teachers could read twenty-five pages of Latin authors, but this was seldom done, and this option was removed in 1953 (Andersen 2000, 73). The peripheral role of Latin was counteracted by a new act in 1971 which added “Roman” in parentheses every time Greek was mentioned – a rather subtle attempt to include Latin and Roman literature (Bekendtgørelse 1971, §11). The parentheses were removed in a new act in 1987, under which the focus was defined as classical Athenian literature, with the option of including texts from earlier and later periods if they were deemed to contribute to learning (Undervisningsministeriet 1988, §23). In other respects, the content remained the same and was only changed in 2002 with the addition of the study of the later reception, as will be discussed further below. But first, it is necessary to look at the different challenges that produced the twentieth century’s legitimatising arguments or tropes, which led to this change of content.

⁷ There are different versions of the anecdote, and describing the jug as a water jug is a rather innocent version, as others mentions a chamber pot.

Challenging Classical Studies

The mandatory status of Classical Studies has been challenged several times since its inception. In the mid-1930s and again in the mid-1940s, it was suggested that it be substituted by a new subject, Contemporary Studies. In 1958 and again in the 1970s, it had been suggested that Classical Studies be made optional (Haue 2003, 339–41, 349, 368, 386–38). Even in the 1930s, students felt the subject to be of little value for their education (Haue 2003, 349). In the mid-1980s, a report on the teaching of humanistic subjects in secondary school suggested that Classical Studies be abolished and integrated partly in a new subject called religion–philosophy, partly in the subjects history and literature studies. Once again, however, Classical Studies survived, and even gained in strength when teaching was moved to the last of the three years of the upper secondary school programme and taught three hours per week (Haue 2003, 498; Undervisningsministeret 1988; Bolt-Jørgensen *et al.* 1985).⁸ At the turn of the millennium, in a context of major societal and technological changes, the educational system was scrutinised once again. This time, a new subject, Cultural Studies (*kulturfag*), was proposed. It was argued that Classical Studies in its present form had outlived its usefulness, because Latin had at this point been so reduced that students were lacking what they had achieved in Latin previously (Undervisningsministeret 1997; Bolt-Jørgensen *et al.* 2003; Zibrandtsen 2003). The idea was not implemented, among other reasons because the Danish People’s Party questioned this change (Frevert 2003). Instead, the content demands for Classical Studies were reformed by adding a new dimension, that of “perspective” or reception, with the mandatory inclusion of Latin authors. This change was fundamental. Classical Studies was now no longer studied with the main focus of reading classical literature as an essential part of a common heritage, but instead to understand the later use and meaning of this particular past. This was a new way of legitimising the relevance of the subject, moving the focus to the afterlife of the classical past and its role in European history and culture.

It is quite impressive how Classical Studies as a rather small subject in the curriculum has been able

⁸ Haue 2004, 214. Rapport om de humanistiske fag 1985. It is quite astonishing that there were no philologists in the group appointed by the ministry to write the report, and it is difficult not to see this as the reason for the ease with which the abolition of Classical Studies was suggested, even if all agreed that it incorporated all the essential elements of general education that were the key goal of the education, as argued by the group.

to survive the modernisation processes of the upper secondary school. The arguments carried forward during the various crises that have confronted Classical Studies are embedded in the tropes that have developed out of discussions since the nineteenth century. The question of the role of Classical Studies in the general education offered by Danish secondary schools provoked a number of publications, even *apologiae*, in 1981 (Bender 1981), 1985 (Bolt-Jørgensen *et al.* 1985), and two in 2003 (Bolt-Jørgensen *et al.* 2003; Andreassen 2003). All four volumes include comments and reflections not only from teachers and professors, but also from journalists, authors, actors, and other representatives of Danish society invited to demonstrate how learning Greek and Latin or Classical Studies has been essential to their personal and career development and for society as a whole. Three of these volumes were published by the Classical Association (*Klassikerforeningen*), founded around 1935, which has been a very strong advocate for Classical Studies and of paramount importance to its development and survival (Iuul 1985). One of the goals of the Classical Association was the exchange of information, and its membership magazine, founded in 1967 with a first issue of only one page, has developed into a lively forum for discussion, with articles spanning texts, teaching, art, politics, and all themes related to the Latin, Greek and Classical Studies in upper secondary school.⁹ The association has also been responsible for further education, study tours, and European cooperation. The following analysis of the tropes that have emerged in discussions of the subject is based on the four publications referred to above, although a lively discussion has also been taking place in the Classical Association's membership magazine and in public media.¹⁰

First trope: Greek antiquity is alive

One of the major criticisms of spending many teaching hours on ancient Greek and Latin has been the fact that the languages are no longer spoken. They are “dead languages” which have no practical use in present-day society, as students argued in 1933. Wolf had already been confronted with this argument in the eighteenth century as natural sciences and a general turn towards more

⁹ See <http://www.klassikerforeningen.dk> (accessed 11 April 2018). The history of the association has never been written. A short summary of the first fifty years was published in the journal by the chairman Christian Iuul in 1985, but there are no archives from the first thirty years of its existence.

¹⁰ On the occasion of the debates in the 1970s, the editor of the membership magazine published a list of media appearances [in 1977](#).

utilitarian subjects began to influence universities through the ideas of Rousseau (Bolter 1980, 88–89). The argument for maintaining Greek culture as essential in Danish education turns this around. The argument says, because the Greeks created a culture that shaped Western minds and civilisation, we are all Greeks, and we all speak Greek (Wivel 1985, 9; Gjørup 2003, 15; Mejer 2003, 81). This is the strongest legitimation, and has been carried forward through all discussions.

The argument is made on two levels in the Danish discourse. One is the overall societal level. Here it is argued that European language and civil society were shaped by the classical Greek period, so that it is essential to know this period in order to understand ourselves and the world around us. To quote Hans Hauge, former professor of Danish and English literature:

How many Greek and Latin words have I not already used after so few words? Philosophy thinks in Greek, as Derrida had said: there is thus no philosophy that is not “Greek”. Our literature is Greek. No one opens the mouth about that without speaking Greek (Hauge 2003, 284).

This argument is based on an approach to language as fundamental and essential for human social culture, organisation, and thinking. It is based on Herder’s theory of peoples as ethnic groups and exemplified in Shelley’s famous quote, “we are all Greeks” (Olesen 2010, 4). It also carries an embedded imperialism and elitism. As Simon Goldhill has remarked on Victorian Britain:

Part of the justification of the continuing study of classics was that it formed, as well as informed, the mind, and formed the mind not just for the gentleman, but for a figure of authority. A training in how to rule (Goldhill 2011, 2).

In fact, to “We are all Greeks” has often been added “except the Greeks”, thus implying the appropriation by the Western world of Greek culture (Pelt 2000, 31, 40).

The other level of argument in this trope focuses more directly on scholarship, stressing the necessity of knowing Greek and Latin in order to do research within a number of areas. Typically, this argument is used by scholars from other disciplines (Andersen 1985, 48–49; Bager 1985, 86;

Windfell 1985, 97). On the one hand, the entire conceptualisation of Western scholarship is based on ancient sources such as Plato and Aristotle (Pade 2003; Thomsen 2003; Tortzsen 2003; Wagner 2003; Zeeberg 2003). On the other, the actual use of Greek and Latin – especially Latin – by European elites in the arts and sciences until the eighteenth century, when national languages began to win ground in writing and teaching, makes research history impossible without knowledge of Latin. This argument is not applicable to Classical Studies, but is advanced to advocate the preservation of Greek and Latin as languages.

Second trope: Greek antiquity is civilisation

The belief that we are shaped by the Greek mind and the Greek spirit is related to the definition of the Greeks as the first civilisation. The key word here is roots (in Danish, *rødder*). Ancient Greek culture is defined as the *roots* of European culture:

Where are my roots? In Klim in Vester Hanherred [in northwestern Jutland], if this is where my great grandfather guarded his sheeps, of course yes, if you talk about genealogy, but if it is about linguistic awareness and common ideas about values, the answer is completely different. Here we find the roots in Athens, Jerusalem and Rome (Bolt-Jørgensen 2003, 7–8).

Here the imagined geography is very clearly defined as a mental and sociological community based on common ideas and values. Several authors locate the roots in Athens, Jerusalem and Rome, but Athens has a special place as the origin of these roots (Bolt-Jørgensen *et al.* 1981, 18; Karsted 1985, 45; Jansen 1985, 51; Tamm 2003). The theologian and philosopher Johannes Sløk (1916–2001) even defines Hellas and Athens as the authentic roots, whereas the other important roots – Jewish culture and Christianity – are latecomers (Sløk 1985, 16). The Greeks shaped a world of arts, literature, democracy and freedom, and without these elements, a society cannot be defined as a civilisation. This also means that marginalising the classical past would be catastrophic. With no knowledge of the Greek past, we will be rootless, and we will end up not being civilised (Wulff-Jørgensen 1985, 68; Høeg 2003, 16).

It is also frequently stated that the surviving texts of the Greek philosophers and writers cover a

range of themes that are still essential today in order to discuss a broad range of subjects in class, and that no other culture is capable of providing this material – and even if they were, it would then be necessary to go back to the Greek authors in order to understand them fully (Hansen 1985, 93; Johansen 1985, 28–29). This is a legacy of the philological traditions developed by Wolf in his *Darstellung der Alterthumswissenschaften*, where he argues that the Greeks cannot be compared to other ancient cultures because the Greeks simply had reached a higher intellectual level (Wolf 1818; Hanink 2017, 115–6).

Third trope: Greek antiquity is liberation

When the classical is defined as civilisation, this also implies a possibility of using the classical as a model, a possibility of returning to civilisation when development has been proceeding in a wrong direction. Whenever European culture has seen the need to renew itself, it has turned to the classical cultures. This was the case in the Renaissance in Italy, and in the Enlightenment (Høeg 2003). It is a key element in the concept of classicism, that depends on a circular temporality implementing a rebirth after death, as discussed earlier. With Hellenism, Greek classical culture in particular has come to exemplify a special concept of freedom and liberty that has been incorporated into the idea of a special Western culture. As one teacher of Classical Studies has expressed it: “Classical Studies has to show how the archaic human being broke from mythos to logos – to show how free thoughts created free people” (Galmar 1985, 88).

For the journalist Peter Wivel, this position is exemplified by the East German author, Christa Wolf, who in her novel *Kassandra* “speaks Greek”, figuratively speaking, using the “language of the past” – the mythological arena of the war between Greeks and Trojans – as the only language available to her to maintain a connection with civilisation, separated as she is by the division of Europe (Wivel 1985, 9–10). Wolf’s novel was written before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, thus illustrating how ancient Greek texts were used as a liberating tool of expression.

Fourth trope: Roman antiquity is the first classicism

In Classical Studies, Greek culture was the primary subject. As the twentieth century progressed, however, Latin and Roman authors were included in the curriculum, first optionally, then from 2002 as a mandatory element. However, many of the discussions present Roman art as a reception of

Greek art (Gjørup 2003, 18–19; Thomsen 2005, 10; Høeg 2003, 15). The Augustan period is particularly emphasised as the most relevant, focusing on Virgil and a classicising artistic style. The same trope is also evident in many of the later textbooks produced in the course of the twentieth century (for instance, Fich *et al.* 1999, 288).

Scholars have identified a quite denigratory attitude towards Roman culture. This has been explained as a Danish anti-Romanism, developed in the late nineteenth century as part of Grundtvig's critique of the black or learned schools and the rise of Hellenism that was clearly much more marked in Denmark than in Sweden (Carlsen 2003, 29; Elkjær and Krarup 1947, 18; Lundgreen-Nielsen 1993). The Rome pictured by Danish poets and writers is peopled by distant, cold, weak, degenerate, heartless, brutal, slanderous, irreligious and perverted men seeking power – the most positive to be said is that they were also stout and disciplined pragmatics.

Fifth trope: Greek heritage is shared European heritage

An essential part of the legitimation of Classical Studies since its inception has been the connection to Europe, as we have seen above. This idea of Greek culture as European culture grew even stronger in the course of the twentieth century, as will be evident in the following section. The philologist Jørgen Mejer argued in 2003 that Greek, Latin and Classical Studies are a necessity for students in order to understand their own past, and “that these give Europe a community and a feeling of belonging that is important if the European Union is to develop into a superpower in a world of superpowers” (Mejer 2003, 83). Here again, the classical subjects are a key element in the Danish accession to the imagined community of Europe. Other discourses talk about “a common European background” (Bolt-Jørgensen *et al.* 1981, 26; Johansen 1985, 44), “how the European human was shaped” (Johansen 1985, 28), and ancient texts as “tangible cultural heritage that makes Denmark not only a province but also a part of Europe” (Petersen 1985, 75). In this sense the future of Europe is dependent on the survival of the ancient Greek and Latin languages and knowledge of Greek and Roman culture. It is only through this prism that Danes are able to recognise themselves as Europeans.

Classical Studies as European Heritage

The arguments embedded particularly in the last of the five tropes outlined above paved the way

for a change in the identity and content of Classical Studies in 2003. The concept of Europe had been increasingly used since the 1980s as an argument for the importance of the subject, having been an essential component in the discourse on the Nordic/Danish and the Greek/European. Since the 1980s, there has been a change in the discourse, with the focus changing from general education to an ideological legitimization of Classical Studies. It had to be relevant to contemporary life, and this was argued through the increasing importance of Europe in contemporary Denmark, as the concept of Europe has changed in train with the development of the EU.

The Danish/European connection during this period has not been straightforward. After Denmark joined the EU in 1972, participation was followed by scepticism about the role and influence of the EU. However, that Denmark was the only Nordic country to join the EU at this time underlines its special connection with Europe among the Nordic countries (Hansen 2002). Denmark defined this step as a bridging between the Nordic and the European, but it has since become a political balancing act between participation and hesitation, as expressed through a number of referendums whenever the EU moved towards closer integration, leading to the Danish amendments and the decision not to join the European Monetary Union in 2000.

In the consolidating act of 1987 on the subjects in the gymnasium, the European connection was for the first time specified as essential for the purpose of student learning: "that the students through the knowledge of Greek culture acquire common European conceptualisation and idioms in order to understand and be able to relate their own society" (Undervisningsministeriet 1988, 407). The expanded teaching guidelines specified how the knowledge of Greek culture is a tool with which to understand contemporary society and a shared European mentality. The word used is *code* – Greek culture is a code that you need to know to fully understand the underlying meaning of Danish and European culture (Undervisningsministeriet 1988, 408). The same word was used again by classical scholar Sten Ebbesen when he defended Greek as a university subject in 2015, when the University of Copenhagen considered to close it down (Ebbesen 2016). It is a word that underlines the normative character of the subject. The arguments in the *apologiae* discussed above talk about the "key to understanding our society" (Bolt-Jørgensen *et al.* 1981, 3; Bolt-Jørgensen *et al.* 2003, 10). The implication is that without this key or code, it is impossible to manoeuvre in present-day society.

The reform of 2002 had serious consequences for Classical Studies, because Latin was removed as a mandatory independent subject and integrated with a subject called general language understanding (*almen sprogforståelse*). This strengthened the need for Latin and Roman literature to be included in Classical Studies, and thus two major changes were made: the reading of at least one Latin author, and the inclusion of “perspective”, something that could be presented as the reception of antiquity, but as will be shown below, has a slightly different meaning. The relevance of the discipline was thus transformed into a methodological practice with which students had to analyse the use of ancient ideas, concepts and art forms in later European culture. The guideline introduced the headline “Identity” before “purpose”, and the change in focus is spelt out:

Oldtidskundskab is a cultural discipline about antiquity as the basis for European culture. The discipline concerns ancient texts and monuments in which values, concepts and forms that became norms in European culture, are expressed (STX- bekendtgørelsen 2004, bilag 45).

Since the change of 2003, it has been stated that this turn to the normative role of European culture through the study of “perspective” has secured the survival of Classical Studies as an independent subject. It has been argued that without its rich afterlife in European history, the classical cultures would probably occupy the same place in upper secondary school as Egyptology, Nordic mythology or the Renaissance – which is to say none (Jørgensen *et al.* 2014, 4). This is in clear opposition to the trope defining classical culture as civilisation and stating that no other culture had attained the level of the classical and thus of Western civilisation. This change therefore represents an attempt to rethink the premise and meaning of the subject of Classical Studies by including the idea of perspective and challenging the constructed privileged position of Greek culture. As discussed in chapter one, reception studies have boomed in recent decades, and a number of new and innovative studies have focused attention on the nineteenth century’s problematic conceptualisation of the classical past. Thus the reform of 2002 opened up the space for these elements to be introduced into teaching.

However, in the ministry’s teaching guidelines, the engagement with perspective is consistently

defined as working with the traces from classical antiquity that can be seen, firstly, in the continuing influence on language, and secondly, in the – unique – “repeated return to the origin in classical antiquity in marked periods of liberation in Western civilisation – for instance in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment” (Undervisningsministeriet 2010, 3–4; Stx lærerplaner 2017, 3). This is a reversion to the arguments we encountered above, characterising Greek culture as still alive and as liberation. There is no attempt here to go deeper into the construction of these tropes, to develop this into more critical studies of reception. In fact, the definitions seem to point to consolidating the normative rather than questioning it. Later in the guidelines, the recovery of the traces is described as revealing “the key to the understanding of essential elements of European culture and knowledge about our own identity” (Undervisningsministeriet 2010, 4). Once again we meet the metaphor of paving the way for understanding.

The authors of a 2014 report on “perspective” in teaching suggest a new line of inquiry through a focus on the non-homogeneous in the ancient texts, looking at pairs of opposites such as friend/enemy, individual/community (Jørgensen *et al.* 2014, 13–14). Here, the critical perspectives are embedded in a questioning of who defines and authorises the discourse of the universal. In an anthology published in 2005 to act as inspiration for the teacher in navigating this new minefield, philologist Ole Thomsen presents perhaps the most critical text on classical heritage in this context, turning his attention to a number of the established discourses on how Greek culture was sustained through Roman reception so as to develop what has been defined as the Graeco-Roman unified culture. He challenges the traditional approach, that we study the classical because it has made us who we are – explaining it as naive or self-assertive – by applying a multicultural perspective, which questions how the Greeks were appropriated to make Western culture what it is, and what negative consequences this might have had (Thomsen 2005, 9–16). Critical thinking is at the core of the goal of teaching, and it has been argued many times that the Greek texts provide excellent material with which to learn critical reflection (Stx-lærerplaner 2017, 4–6). Still, this kind of critical investigation is nearly absent from the ministry’s teaching guidelines.

The discourses in Denmark concerning Classical Studies have until now reflected the general European appropriation of classical cultures as global heritage belonging to us all (Petersen 1985, 71). These discourses continue to pursue what has recently been defined, in a reinterpretation of

the history of classical reception, as the colonisation of the classical (Hanink 2017). Classical heritage has been conceptualised as a universal heritage, shared by all European nations. In the most recent reform of upper secondary school in 2017, the identity of Classical Studies has now acquired a global dimension: “Classical Studies is a knowledge, information and culture subject that addresses antiquity as the basis of art and imagination in later periods in Europe as well as globally”.¹¹

The subject of Classical Studies is now confronted by the new demand that the European dimension be extended to a global dimension. This development was not generated by a globalising approach to Classical Studies, but specified in the political agreement between the government and the parties supporting the reform with the objective of strengthening global competences and understanding through the use and understanding of languages in order to strengthen cultural understanding.¹² Hans Hauge prophesied a revival of the classical tradition already in 2003, when he entitled an article “Classical Studies is Globalisation” in one of the *apologiae*. He argued that the classical would return as the essential in general education, because nationalism was on its way out: that nationalism and the focus on national cultures were a parenthesis in the *longue durée* and that the classical tradition was returning, as it was this that had been the Danish connection to the world beyond our borders (Hauge 2003). Thus the imagined geography of classicism was reborn. The role of classicism on a global scale has, as mentioned in the introduction, recently been subjected to post-colonial critique, but this dimension is totally absent from the ministerial guidelines. Hauge’s prophesy did not come true, on the contrary the last years have witnessed a return of nationalism making a rethinking of the role of classicism even more necessary.

The Victory of Hellenism

The continued vitality of Classical Studies can be interpreted as the victory of Hellenism in Denmark.

¹¹ Læreplan for oldtidskundskab 2017: <https://uvm.dk/-/media/filer/uvm/gym-laereplaner-2017/stx/oldtidskundskab-c-stx-august-2017.pdf?la=da> (accessed 25 February 2018).

¹² Aftale mellem regeringen, Socialdemokraterne, Dansk Folkeparti, Liberal Alliance, Det Radikale Venstre, Socialistisk Folkeparti og Det Konservative Folkeparti om styrkede gymnasiale uddannelser, 16 June 2016: <https://www.uvm.dk/-/media/filer/uvm/udd/gym/pdf16/jun/160603-styrkede-gymnasiale-uddannelser.pdf> (accessed 25 February 2018), 21–22.

The subject has survived for more than a hundred years and a change in its rationale from general education and self-realisation to more and more weight being laid on utilitarian skills. In spite of this, Classical Studies has survived due to its slow transformation from being primarily a study of language to a literary subject, until today it has become a cultural study. This progression has sustained the role of classical culture as a link between a Nordic and a European sphere in a shifting political environment. The content of the subject continues to give priority to the Greek classical period, thus defining the role of the classical past in the spirit of Hellenism. The reason for the survival of Classical Studies as a secondary school subject in Denmark as compared to Norway and Sweden is surely this link between Denmark and Europe at the time of Danish participation in the EU – even if this last has met with scepticism and hesitation. Studying Greek and Roman culture rather than Greek and Roman languages has proved to be a way of keeping a bond with a historical past whose relevance on the border of Europe has been contested and challenged.

Whereas Classical Studies is still considered essential to a historical understanding of present society, Latin has suffered, and in fact has almost been abolished as mandatory. Latin was never studied as a cultural subject but was predominantly considered a language subject. The elimination of Latin from the Danish educational system is part of a general language crisis in Denmark, in which also many modern languages are now highly endangered both as subjects in upper secondary schools and as university subjects. Even if Danes in general master more than their native language (normally English) and understand other Nordic languages, there has been a steep decline in the number of students studying foreign languages in the *gymnasium* as well as in further education. The decline of Greek and Latin as languages is part of this development.