

The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters

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History

The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters was founded on 13 November 1742. The initiative was taken by four men who were already cooperating closely in a commission for compiling a catalogue of all coins and medals in the possession of the King. They were collaborating smoothly and very efficiently. Among them Count Johan Ludvig Holstein was born into a well-known Mecklenburg family and later entered the service of the Danish Court where he made a spectacular career, and was respected as a loyal, conscientious, and hard-working civil servant of highest ranking. The young commoner, Henrich Henrichsen (later knighted as Count Hielmstjerne) had been privately educated by scholars like Hans Gram to whom he owed his intense interest in books. His collection of Danish literature from the 16th and 17th century later entered the Royal Library as one of its most valuable stock. The two academic members of the commission were both sons of Lutheran ministers, i.e. products of the ecclesiastical establishment. However, Hans Gram pursued a different academic career, and became a bachelor of arts in 1705 and a master in 1708 with classical philology as his principal subject. He cultivated his interest in history, and became a renowned historian in all Europe, and soon he was summoned to be the Royal Historiographer as well as a Professor of Greek at the University of Copenhagen. Erik Pontoppidan followed a more conventional academic ecclesiastical career, first as a minister, later as Royal Chaplain because of his pietistic views of the Lutheran faith. Pontoppidan was drawn into the Commission of Coins and Medals because of his interest in epigraphy. Thus the Commission was staffed by an eminent group of hard working personalities who all shared a genuine interest in learning, and they all worked well together. As their collaboration came close to an end, Count Holstein suggested to the King that this collaboration continued in another form or with another purpose. The King seemed to be in favour of this, and the commission planned to continue. On 13 November Hans Gram opened the meeting of the Commission with a detailed proposal to create a *Collegium Antiquitatum*, with the purpose to explore and publish the antiquities of Denmark and Norway. It was a proposal that took all aspects into account of the life and work of a learned society. The proposal was introduced with some amendments. It was established that this society should not be restricted only to one definite branch of learning, but should discuss all scientific and scholarly matters in general. Thus the society would be a vehicle not only for antiquarians. Without any limitation of disciplines there would also be room for natural sciences. This original debate has always been respected to such an extent that the present Academy considers itself as a truly national and multidisciplinary academy. In the beginning of its existence, the Academy conducted its business in a very informal way. There were no statutes until much later (1776) and there were no Royal Charter to confirm the privileges of the Academy until 1774. There was, however, a letter from the king, Christian IV that stated the royal acceptance of the foundation of this learned society and expressed the King's interest in the future of the Academy's activities, members and financing. The new Society was given the highest possible approbation when the King, Christian VI consented being its protector. To this day the Danish Monarch is still protector of the Academy. Of the royal protectors one has also been the President of the Academy, namely King Christian VIII who was elected President in 1838 when he was still a crown prince. He remained both protector and President until his death in 1848. The rather long period without statutes gave the Academy a possibility to find a viable course of action that eventually was confirmed in the unwritten rules in the future statutes.

In the very beginning the Society faced several challenges among which the acquisition of new members was given priority. It was finally agreed to elect 7 ordinary members of which 6 were historians or antiquarians and one was a mathematician, although not chosen as a representative of his discipline, but rather for his faculties in engraving. Over the years the Academy has transformed its ways due to the changes of the society in which it exists. The statutes have changed, the number and constitution of fellows have changed, and the impact of the activities of the Academy has also changed.

Geography and domicile

In 1876 J.C. Jacobsen, the founder of the Carlsberg Breweries, wrote to the President of the Academy that he had established a foundation, The Carlsberg Foundation, and he asked the Academy to take charge of it. This was no surprise since it was well known that The Brewer, as he was called, had many friends among the fellows of the Academy. He also had a great respect for the scientific work and realized how much the industry depended on this. When he established the Carlsberg Foundation on condition that the board of directors of the foundation should be chosen by and among the fellows of the Academy, he emphasised the importance of stable and insightful people being involved in the future of Danish industry and research.

The Academy had difficulties in finding a permanent residence, and J.C. Jacobsen came to the rescue by offering a building that should house both the Carlsberg Foundation and the Academy. The mansion was to be built just opposite the New Carlsberg Glyptothek in the centre of Copenhagen. The architect involved was Vilhelm Petersen who completed the work in 1899. It was decided by J.C. Jacobsen that the Academy should enjoy free rent *in perpetuum*, free heating and electricity as well as general maintenance of the building. The building is still housing the Academy on these conditions. Only the building has undergone a series of changes during the years. In 1976 the Carlsberg Foundation celebrated its 100 years anniversary with a major rebuilding of the house which added a new meeting hall to the house on the third floor of the building in an area that had previously served as storage for the Academy publications.

The structure of the Academy

During its existence the Academy has had several statutes. During the last 30 years they have not changed much. The fellows of the Academy are divided into two groups, those with Danish citizenship and a group of foreign researchers. The Academy has a number of fellows elected according to a set of rather traditional rules. A person is only eligible when being suggested by a fellow of the Academy. Elections of new fellows take place every year, alternating between the humanities class and the natural sciences class. The number of fellows is in principle not limited. In the 1990'ies it was decided that every second year the humanities class elects 6 new national and foreign members, and for the natural sciences class the corresponding numbers are 9/9. In this way the average number of fellows will always fluctuate around 250 fellows. The division into classes demands a further explanation. The humanities class includes the humanities and the social sciences. The natural science class includes two divisions: the biological, and the mathematical physical division. The Academy is governed by a Board of directors consisting of 8 or 9 people: The President, the 2 Vice Presidents who are also chairmen of the two respective classes, the Secretary who is responsible for the secretariat and the economy, the Editor who is responsible for the Academy Publications, the Chairman of the Financial Committee with the accounting responsibility, two members from each class, chosen directly by their classes. Finally, the past President is a board member for two years. None of the members of the Board of Directors are fully employed. Daily work is carried out by a secretariat with a head of administration of academic background, and three full time employees. For additional tasks students are employed on an ad hoc basis.

In the 1970s it was decided to make radical alterations of the statutes. The number of new fellows elected increased in order to decrease the average age, and it was decided that fellows could only hold a post in the Academy for a limited amount of time and only till they reached the age of 70. It was decided that the Academy should have a secretariat with an administrative staff of several people so that the Board of Directors of the Academy could take care of their research and leave the daily Academy administration to the staff of the secretariat. Initiative was taken to arrange ten public lectures a year. It was also decided to become more visible by hosting scientific symposia and conferences. And finally in the beginning of the 1980s it was decided to create a series of scholarships of 5 years duration, called *The Niels Bohr Scholarships*. These scholarships turned out to be a success, but were never repeated.

Activities

According to the statutes the aim of the Academy is to “strengthen the conditions for research in Denmark, especially basic research, and to further interdisciplinary understanding”. This is accomplished through meetings, publishing scientific papers, participating in international research activities, and by counselling activities to the Ministry for Research, Science and Technology.

Meetings

The main activity of the Academy has always been the meetings for the fellows. To day there are 14 annual meetings, taking place every second Thursday from the end of September till beginning of December and from the end of January till May. At each meeting two lectures are given by one person from each class. Obituaries are also given at ordinary meetings. The Secretary of the Academy can choose to change the contents of a meeting if he finds it appropriate. The President can invite guests to the meetings that are not otherwise open to the public. After the two lectures, the business matters of the Academy are handled, sometimes as mere information and sometimes for plenary decision. The number of participants at the meetings varies with 60 as an average number. There are always a lot of people attending the meetings when the elections of new fellows are discussed. After meetings a light meal is served in the New Meeting Hall. And at approximately 11 pm the meeting is over. The Academy pays travel expenses for the fellows from other parts of Denmark in order to ensure a certain geographical diversity at the meetings.

The Academy arranges ten public lectures each year. These popular arrangements became possible after the New Meeting Hall was established in 1976. Their main purpose is to inform the public of the new developments in science and humanities. Lecturers (both members and non members) are invited to give a lecture by the Public Lectures Committee.

During the last 15 years the Academy premises have been used quite frequently for conferences of different sizes and topics. The Academy is situated in downtown Copenhagen and is close to both the Central Station and the Airport and therefore attractive as a meeting place. The fellows often have internal meetings as well as meetings with representatives from other Academies, the Ministry for Research, Science and Technology etc.

Publications and exchange agreements

From the very beginning of its existence the Academy published the so-called proceedings of the regular meetings. These presented the most recent research by and for the fellows, and gave them the opportunity to discuss the topics. When the proceedings were published they were often sent to learned Societies abroad with whom the Academy had cooperated. Eventually this changed into more regular exchange arrangements. The publication activity changed gradually. It was decided to divide the proceedings into two series, a mathematical-physical one and a philosophical, philological and historical one. To day the Academy publishes a mathematical-physical series, a biological series and two historical-philosophical series. Moreover a Yearbook of the Academy is published (Oversigt over Selskabets Virksomhed). This gives general information about fellows, meetings, publications, accounts, Academy foundations and other activities.

Formal exchange agreements with other learned societies began in 1779 with the connection with the Academy in St. Petersburg. Gradually during the 19 century the exchange rate grew. The Academy did not only have this kind of agreement with the fellow Academies; several Universities all over the world are now also part of this agreement. To day we have approximately 780 exchange agreements, a number that has decreased somewhat during the last 10 years due to the growth in electronic publishing. Still we publish our series, forward them to our exchange partners, receive publications from them in return, and as the Academy does not have room for the received publications on its premises, they are all registered and sent forward to

the research libraries in Denmark who thus acquire a number of journals and books at no cost. The approximate number is 2,500 per year.

International activities and cooperation

The Academy has always supported international cooperation between researchers. After the First World War it became a mutual goal for the academic world to restore the contact between the French and the German researchers. After the Second World War the western world was divided by the iron curtain, and therefore it became crucial for the researchers to create the best possible ways for contact between universities and learned societies with no regard to geography and for most Academies it was of the utmost importance that the learned societies had a possibility to further academic cooperation without any prejudice as to political views etc. The Academy has been active in this respect both as an individual body, but also in cooperation with other academies and other scientific bodies as for example ICSU (International Council for Science). We believe that the manifestations caused by a very active participation in the international work have had a certain impact especially because of the Academy's political independency. In recent years we have opened for the possibility to make official agreements with some fellow Academies to ensure a better mobility. There are now far better possibilities for researchers to work all over the world, due to a better infrastructure and also an open mindedness as to sojourns abroad for some time during an academic career.

The Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters does not play a very important economic part on the international academic scene, but through our memberships in international bodies we present our point of views, and we try to be represented when crucial topics concerning research are discussed either in Denmark or in different parts of the world. The Academy is a member of ICSU, as mentioned above, of UAI (Union Académique Internationale) and ESF, European Science Foundation. The Academy is also involved in the work of several Academy Associations.

The development of the research policy

The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters did play a significant part in Research in earlier times. It represented the academic world and the researchers from a point of view of excellence. After the creation of the national Research councils it no longer plays any significant official part in the Research policy of the country. Some of its members are members of the different Research Councils pointed out by the University or by the Minister of Science and Technology. The term *research policy* is of a more recent date, and of course the Academy does its utmost to be as influential as possible.

Research policy as such became part of the official political agenda in the 1960s, and the Danish Research Agency is placed in connection with the relevant ministry. The research policy as executed by the Ministry has now been active in approximately 30 to 40 years. The research policy institutions are undergoing a radical change for the time being, and therefore the Academy finds new possibilities to act as an independent body often in cooperation with the national research councils and the Danish Research Agency.

Foundations and awards

The Academy has several foundations. They are not very substantial, and therefore they do not play an essential role for the research of the country. But it must be emphasized that the Academy is closely connected to the most important private foundation of Denmark as to support of research, namely the Carlsberg Foundation. The founder of the Carlsberg Breweries, J.C. Jacobsen, left his entire fortune to the Carlsberg Foundation. As mentioned before he stipulated - in the statutes of the Carlsberg Foundation - that the board of directors should be chosen by and among the fellows of the Academy. This has proved to be a good way of securing his fortune as well as the future of the Carlsberg Breweries. And both the Academy and

the researchers in Denmark are most thankful to *the old brewer* for this act that has proven to give ample support to both natural sciences and humanities.