

# Between Scenography and Science

## Early Folk Museums and their Pioneers

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The historical museums are creations of 19th century Europe and closely related to the nation states, then under establishment. However, such museums do not constitute a constant entity; they are changing throughout the century. In the first half of the century, their focus was on prehistory and the Middle Ages in order to document the deep national roots. Interest in the Renaissance and the succeeding periods belongs to the second half of the century, which is also characterized by the founding of new kinds of museums. These newcomers are all connected to another important feature of this period: the great exhibitions. This is obvious with regard to the museums of applied art, but also to the so-called folk museums that from their Swedish conception spread to other countries in Northern and Central Europe.

The article tries to analyze the early folk museums and their objectives, partly by looking at four very different pioneers in this field: the Swede Artur Hazelius – the real inventor of the institution, the Dane Bernhard Olsen and the Germans Rudolf Virchow and Ulrich Jahn. They are all experimenting with new forms of communicating, drawing upon inspiration from the great exhibitions and the new wax museums, with the aim to evoke a national consciousness among common people. However, at the same time, they are aware that they are laying the foundation for a new ethnographical study of European peasantries.

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### Shrines of the Nation

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century a new kind of monumental buildings are erected in Europe: the museums. They shoot up all around the major European cities concurrently with the establishment and organization of the nation states. The museums are shrines for the nation's treasures of historic relics and objects of art. The new buildings are fashioned in such a way that the visitors are encouraged to feel solemnity and awe. They are lead through pompous portals and up imposing staircases made of precious stones. In the halls of the museum, the objects are placed on pedestals or in glass cases. They are to be contemplated, but not to be touched by profane fingers.

The visitors to the museum are expected to show the appropriate respect; conversation must be held in a low voice and unnecessary noise is to be avoided. There is a striking resemblance between the churches and these new places of worship.

Where the older cabinets of curiosities were exclusively for the privileged few, the new museums are open to the educated public, whose enlightenment and culture they are meant to promote. It is a development that begins in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the same time that the all-embracing museums increasingly have to give way to specialized collections, especially in the field of natural science. By the end of the century the first historical/culture-

historical special collections appear, only to become arguably the most important type of museum after the turn of the century.

That this had to be is evident if you look at the museums of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in a wider perspective, because that century must be characterized as the quintessentially historical century. In the self-consciousness and cosmology of that century, the historical perspective plays a role that has never been greater. This is the case in research, where a phenomenon was explained by throwing light on its history; in architecture and design, where a deliberate use of stylistic traits from other periods increasingly becomes the standard; and last but not least in the nation-building that was the agenda behind a great deal of the art and science of the time. History is one of the most important means of welding the different elements of a nation together, and it is here the new museums have their most important purpose.

However, the historic museum was not a constant entity; it changes throughout the century. The *national museums* or *Sammlungen vaterländischer Altertümer*, which were created during the national romantic enthusiasm at the beginning of the century, were almost entirely concentrated upon prehistory and the Middle Ages. It was with artefacts from these early ages that the deep national roots of a people could be documented. It was not until around 1860 that the interest in collecting was expanded to encompass the Renaissance, and by the end of the century it was this period that formed the centre of attention in cultural history. To a large degree, however, this expansion of the field of interest to later periods was put into effect by the foundation of some new kinds of museums.

## Descendants of the Great Exhibitions

Many different factors form the basis for the new museums that appear in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But their emergence and dissemination must predominantly be seen in relation to another important cultural phenomenon of that period: the great exhibitions. Like many of the other cultural innovations of the century, we find the first tiny steps towards this new institution in revolutionary France. But the

great leap forward happens with “The Great Exhibition” in London in 1851, which became the first of a series of world exhibitions that were to leave their mark on the second half of the century. The English took their turn again in 1862, but it was the French who became the main organizers of world exhibitions. Paris was the host of world exhibitions in 1855, 1867, 1878, 1889 and, finally, in 1900. In between the French, there were an Austrian “Weltausstellung” in Vienna and two American: one in Philadelphia in 1876 to celebrate the centenary of the Declaration of Independence, and one in Chicago in 1893, to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of America.

However, the world exhibitions were not the only ones. The idea caught on all over the western world, and the global exhibitions were accompanied by an ample supply of regional and national exhibitions. When the exhibition fever culminated around 1900, hardly a year went by without one or more great exhibitions taking place. And the amount of visitors was growing steadily. In the case of the world exhibitions, it began with 6 million in London in 1851 and ended with 50 million in Paris in 1900. At the same time, the exhibition programme in itself was altered or expanded along the way. What started as a purely economical concern, a competition between the nations of who had the most outstanding production of commodities was gradually turned into something that to a large degree has to do with culture and ideas.

The great exhibitions were to leave their mark on the world of museums in several ways. Firstly, they turned the museums into something more than just a collection. The exhibitions can be seen as the first media for “visual communication”, and the technique, the “exhibition language”, that was developed by their organizers was at least partly adopted by the museums. Of course, this is especially true of the museums that more or less arose as a direct result of the exhibitions. Time and time again, we find that when a considerable amount of objects had been procured for one of these temporary arrangements, there arose a will to preserve them and make them accessible to a future public. You could say that there was a desire to make the exhibition permanent. There is hardly a country

where you cannot find examples of museums that were established in that way. In some cases, the exhibitions have also been used to pave the way for a desired or planned museum. As a rule, this was the case with regional, temporary or topical fields of interest that were found to be covered insufficiently or not at all by the existing collections, and which therefore should lead to the establishment of a new museum.

## Permanent Exhibitions: Museums of Applied Art

The earliest and most direct example of this relation between exhibition and museum is the type that has been named *museum of applied art*. Already during the preparations for the Great Exhibition in London 1851, the organizers were preoccupied with the question of how to ensure the quality of the products under the new means of production. The prime mover of the exhibition, Prince Albert, thus stated that it was necessary to get “fine arts and beauty applied to mechanical production”.

When they were taking stock of the results after the exhibition, the English had to admit that although England was superior to the rest of the world on a technological level, the English production of furniture and articles for everyday use failed, especially when compared to the French luxury production, which was influenced by genuine craftsmanship. This confirmed the feeling of a stylistic decline, but it also strengthened the will to do something about it. What had previously been secured by the apprentice system in the guilds now had to be carried on by the aid of special craft schools. Another means was to make the exhibition permanent by creating a collection of high-quality examples, where the craftsmen and manufacturers could find inspiration.

Such a collection was not only meant to include choice examples of modern applied art, but also of historical objects representing the styles of the different historical periods. The reason this was seen as an important aspect of such a collection has to do with the fact that we are in the age of historicism, where it was deemed not only legitimate, but also commend-

able to use styles and decorative elements from the arts and crafts of former times. A third important element of such a pedagogical collection was to include a section that displayed the different materials and techniques that had been or might be used.

The next year, these considerations resulted in the foundation of the great *South Kensington Museum*, which was later renamed the *Victoria and Albert Museum*. And the idea also found favour on the continent. With inspiration from South Kensington, a large number of museums were established in Central and Northern Europe. Their content and limitations could vary a great deal, but it was the same idea everywhere. Art or technical schools were affiliated to many of them, but all were meant to serve the educational purpose: to bring about good quality craftsmanship and good taste (Mundt 1974).

It is interesting to observe how the interplay between exhibition and museum several times repeats the story of the Great Exhibition and South Kensington. It is often the impression of one's own country's inadequacy at one of the great exhibitions that becomes the driving force or at least the argument for the foundation of a national museum of applied art. After all, the idea behind such a museum was that it was to remedy the misery, and strengthen the country in question in the international competition (Stoklund 2003, chapter 8).

## Folk Museums

The museums of applied art were supported by a strong international movement, and therefore they became institutions with certain common traits. It is more difficult to find the common ground of the museums, which we here have chosen to refer to as folk museums. Some of their premises are the same as the museums of applied art. They are also indebted to the great exhibitions in both content and form. And, to a great degree, they are projects for the education of the people, but here the aim is not as much to develop good taste, but rather to create a popular national revival. As the name denotes, they display traditional folk or peasant culture, but not exclusively. Some of them have expanded

their subject matter to become general museums of early modern history that also throw light on the culture of other classes. Finally, it must be noted that folk museums and museums of applied art sometimes overlap. The latter frequently contained collections of folk culture, whole farm house rooms for instance, while several of the folk museums, on the other hand, saw it as their object to stimulate a revival of woodcarving, weaving or other forms of rural crafts.

What ties these museums together is – as the name indicates – the so-called *folk culture*, a concept that was created by the national Romantic Movement in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and ascribed with the significance of being the true and uncorrupted culture of the nation, which deserved to be revived and nurtured. In the beginning, however, it was predominantly the oral traditions of the rural population that was the object of interest and collection. It was not until the second half of the century that the material manifestations of folk culture really came into focus, and the interest among other things resulted in the new museums.

The time lags in the interest in the two sides of folk culture are evident in the following manifesto from the opening of the German folk museum in Berlin 1889, which deserves to be quoted in the original language:

“Wie unser Volk denkt und glaubt und fühlt und spricht und singt und tanzt, das wissen wir. Aber wie die Gegenstände ausschauen, welche es geschaffen hat, wie es seine Häuser fügt und aufbaut, wie es seine Höfe und Dörfer, Gärten und Fluren angelegt hat, wie es die Stube, Küche und Keller wirtschaftet und wie der Hausrat beschaffen ist, wie es sich kleidet, in welcher Weise es Viehsucht, Ackerbau, Jagd und Fischfang betreibt, wie die kunstvolle Hand- und Hausarbeit des Bauern, der Bäuerin gefertigt wird, welcher Fahrzeuge es sich in Handel und Verkehr bedient, welche Dinge uraltem Herkommen noch bei Geburt, Hochzeit, Tod und Begräbnis, bei Aussaat und Ernte, bei den verschiedenen Jahresfesten, im Gemeindeleben und in der Volksmedizin üblich sind, – das ist wahrscheinlich zum weitaus grössten Teile noch verborgen” (Jahn 1889: 335).

In this beautiful list, a museum programme is outlined, which would be able to paint a comprehensive picture of the life and culture of the peasant class. However, it was probably few of the early folk museums that were able to follow such a programme. At any rate, it was often folk costumes and other picturesque cultural aspects that came to forefront.

Even though these museums are largely established as a result of the same conditions and the same objectives, they all have their own profile, which to a large degree must be linked to the personalities that laid the foundation of the collections. It is true in all museum history that you cannot ignore the individuality of these collectors and pioneers, but it is a situation that is especially pronounced with regard to the folk museums. In order to understand these strange institutions and the cultural environment in which they were conceived, it is worthwhile to focus on their creators. We have chosen to have a closer look at four of these museum pioneers: the Swede *Artur Hazelius*, the Dane *Bernhard Olsen* and the two Germans *Rudolf Virchow* and *Ulrich Jahn*.

### Artur Hazelius (1833–1901)

It is only natural to begin with Artur Hazelius, who quite rightly has come to be seen as the real creator of the institution: folk museum. In 1873, in Stockholm, he founded the first museum of this kind, and, in 1891, this was followed by the renowned *Skansen*, which in several European countries came to be synonymous with the actual concept of the open-air museum.

Artur Hazelius was born in Stockholm and grew up in a respectable middle-class family. His father was an officer with strong patriotic interests who made sure that his son was familiar with life in the countryside by sending the boy away on a sort of boarding school with a vicar in Småland. He later widened his knowledge of the Swedish landscape by means of the romantic walking tours, which were fashionable at the time.

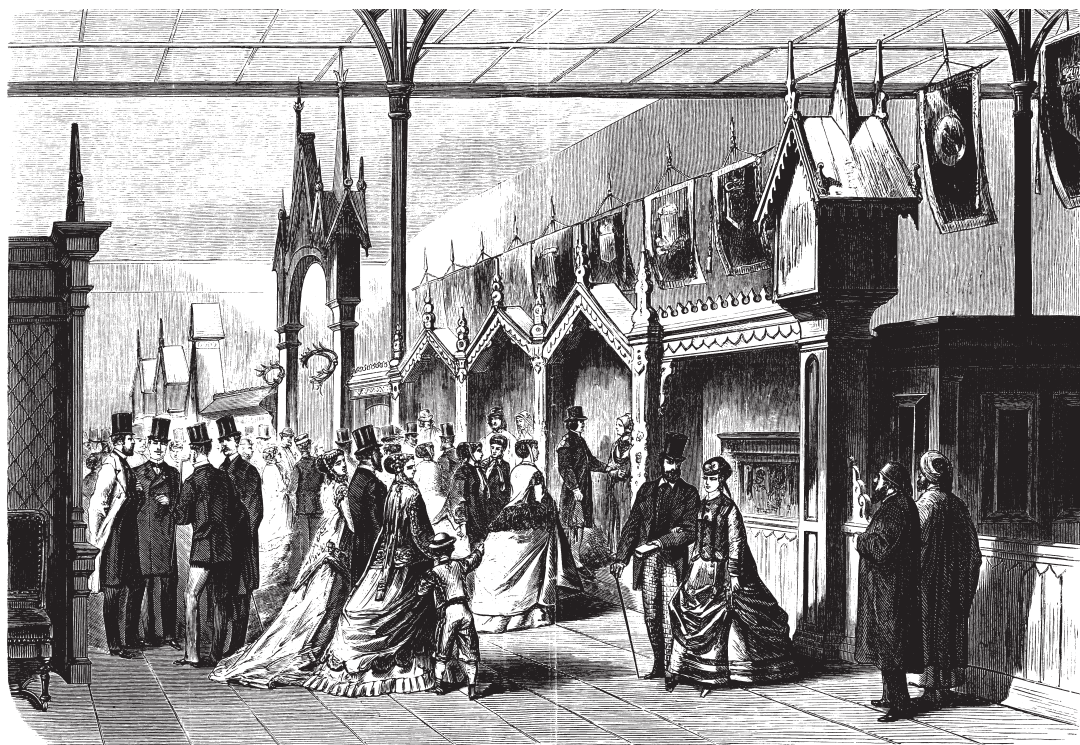
In the beginning, Artur Hazelius, who was trained as a philologist, exercised his strong desire to contribute to the national revival of the Swedish people by means of the language.

Hazelius got engaged in the work for a spelling reform, and he worked hard to supply the general public with good-quality popular writings. It is a bit unclear when his idea of communicating the national through a museum is conceived, but the idea of saving the peasant culture in a society undergoing a transformation and modernization has its breakthrough on a journey in 1872 in Dalarna, where he also acquires the first costumes for his collection. After that, however, things happened rapidly, and already the next year, he was ready to open his *Scandinavian-Ethnographic Collection* in Drottninggatan in Stockholm.

The innovation of this collection is partly that the peasant culture is brought into a museum for the first time, and partly that experiments are made with new forms of presentation, for instance the recreation of peasant rooms with wax dummies in traditional costumes. The story of Hazelius and his so-called *dioramas* has been told several times, but it is repeated here because it is important for under-

standing the form and content of the emerging folk museums.

The general public interest in the so-called folk or national costumes was aroused in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by popular series of costume pictures and genre paintings in the “Düsseldorf” style. There are some examples of wax dummies with folk costumes on display at the first world exhibitions, but it is not until Paris 1867 that this was systematized. That year, the exhibition committee requested that all the participants send wax dummies with “costumes populaires” to the planned exhibition. Surprisingly, these exhibition objects were placed in a newly created section that was meant to include “objects that could help to better the physical and moral condition of the population”. Here, the costumes were supposed to symbolize such national, popular values as were deemed important to uphold, but also to serve as an inspiration for handicraft and domestic industry, which this section was meant to stimulate and promote.



Folk museums in embryo? Visitors to the Paris World Exhibition 1867 admire the Swedish folk costumes, which are arranged in the decorative partition wall of the Swedish-Norwegian section. From *Illustreret Tidende* 1867.



Artur Hazelius' "Scandinavian-Ethnographic Collection" in Stockholm. From the very beginning, it contained the two elements that came to characterize the later development: Peasant life in dioramas (to the left) and single objects arranged aesthetically or typologically on the walls (to the right). The arrangement with emblems and banners is a feature borrowed from the great exhibition. Drawing by R. Haglund, reproduced from Bringéus 1974.

The strong support that the French initiative received demonstrates that the time was ripe for such a new exhibition element. France presented no less than 42 costume dummies themselves; Russia displayed 12, Austria-Hungary 11 and Spain 8 (Wörner 1999: 145f). However, the Swedish and Norwegian costumes attracted a very special attention. They were displayed behind glass in niches, in a decorative partition to the Swedish-Norwegian section (p. 25), and when they received such considerable popularity from the visitors it was due not only to the life-like qualities of the dummies, but also to the fact that they had been arranged in small narrative groups. The wax dummies had been created from life models by sculptor Carl August Söderman, and the displays were based on popular paintings with scenes from the country life. In fact, the costume groups themselves appeared as "three-dimensional genre paintings" in full scale (Jonas Berg 1980; Stoklund 1993, 2003, chapter 9).

The success of Söderman's costume dummies was repeated at the following world exhibitions in Vienna 1873 and Philadelphia 1876. But Hazelius also seized upon the idea, in which he

saw a communication potential, and used it in an expanded form for the new museum in Stockholm. Söderman's dummies and the "three-dimensional genre pictures" were maintained, but now the small narratives were acted out in recreated peasant rooms in the form of dioramas with an open wall facing the audience. The idea for this must have come from the so-called wax museums or panopticons, which were appearing all over Europe at that time.

The next step was taken at the world exhibition in Paris 1878, where Hazelius had the Söderman wax dummies return to the world exhibition in their expanded diorama form. Not only was it popular with the visitors, for instance the heart-rendering scene, "The Little Girl's Last Bed", but he also managed in that way to present his new museum concept to an international audience.

In the following years, Hazelius worked on realizing another idea: the creation of a museum with complete houses on display in the open air. He might have found the inspiration for this in King Oscar the 2<sup>nd</sup>'s collection of historical buildings, which was established on Bygdøy near Oslo in the 1880s (Hegard 1998). However, it

might be worthwhile to have another look at the Paris exhibition in 1867. This was the first time a park with national *pavilions* had been created alongside the great exhibition hall, an arrangement that would later become the common practice. To a large degree, these initial pavilions represented the vernacular architectural styles of the different countries. Sweden was represented by a copy of the famous Ornäsloft from Dalarna, which was well-known from the story of Gustav Vasa, and Norway by a recreated medieval loft-store from Telemarken (Stoklund 1993, 1999).

It is interesting that Hazelius' initial modest proposal for an open air museum only included three buildings: the historic Ornäs house, a Swedish loft-store and a Norwegian stave-church, all intended to be copies (Grandien 1991). However, already in 1885, Hazelius acquired the first original building, a house from Mora in Dalarna that was to become the first of many original houses in the open air museum, which opened at Skansen, outside Stockholm, in 1891.

Meanwhile the museum in Drottninggatan, which changed its name to the *Nordic Museum* in 1880, was growing. It had primarily started as a collection of folk costumes, but it soon achieved a far wider scope. Hazelius had planned a separate museum building opposite the open-air museum at Skansen, and in 1888 the work commenced. However, it would take almost 20 years before the building could finally be opened. Artur Hazelius died in 1901 and thus never came to see his dream of a gigantic museum palace realized. Even though the original plan was heavily curtailed, it is still the 19<sup>th</sup> century notion of the museum as place of patriotic worship, a grand shrine of the nation, that was realized here. The central hall of the museum has been kept, with "dimensions the size of the largest churches" and a gigantic sculpture of the country's founder, King Gustav Vasa. In an obituary in 1901 for Artur Hazelius, his visions for a museum was articulated in this way: "He saw this hall open and wide with an airy perspective, framed by the colourful rural images, by views from the most beautiful parts of the Nordic countries [the dioramas]. He heard the sound of songs in praise of the great memories

of the mother country, he saw an enthusiastic youth gathered in there, under the white banners surrounding the statue of King Gustav" (Medelius et al. 1998: 107, my translation).

Meanwhile, Hazelius had realized his ideas of gathering the Swedish people for patriotic celebrations in the open-air museum, Skansen. Here, he had not only created a collection of buildings, but a sort of general picture of Sweden that also tried to show the flora and fauna of the different areas of the extensive country. And, here, he wanted people of all kinds to come and have fun and be edified. At Skansen people gathered on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, the day of King Gustav Adolf's death, and the 6<sup>th</sup> of June was celebrated as the day of the Swedish flag for the first time. It was at Skansen that Hazelius really expressed his scenographic talent.

It was clearly the national revival that Hazelius saw as the museum's most important concern. But as it grew big, the museum got a staff of scientifically trained employees who had a view of the museum's objectives that was somewhat different from the old founder. These divergences became obvious after the death of Hazelius, when they were planning the installation in the new museum, which was opened in 1907. Some of the older employees wanted to maintain the visions of the founder, while the more scientifically oriented would prefer the exhibits arranged according to function, age or typology. The final result was that the popular presentation with the national overtones was continued at Skansen, while the Nordic Museum in the new building was "made scientific" (Medelius et al. 1998, Installationen).<sup>1</sup>

## Bernhard Olsen (1836–1922)

Like Hazelius, Bernhard Olsen was a city child, but he was born in Copenhagen to more humble circumstances. His father was a porter in one of the student hostels at the University of Copenhagen, and this was as close as he came to the academic world. His artistic talent led him to an education as an illustrator and xylographer, and for many years he was a frequent supplier of drawings for *Illustreret Tidende* (The Illustrated News); for instance he made drawings of scenes from the war with Prussia in 1864, in



From the exhibition of applied art in Copenhagen 1879: Room from a wealthy farm on the island of Bornholm, arranged with dummies in costume by Bernhard Olsen. From Nyrop 1879.

which he took part as an officer. These abilities, combined with a keen interest in the cultural history of clothing, lead him to a position at the Royal Theatre as a costumier. At the same time, in 1868, Bernhard Olsen was appointed artistic director of the Tivoli Gardens amusement park, a position he was to hold until 1885. In his long period as director, the inventive Olsen was to leave his mark on the time-honoured institution. New buildings were erected, the gardens were renovated, and he arranged a versatile programme of celebrations, festivals and exhibitions, where an educational element was often intertwined with the entertainment.

The position as artistic director meant that he was required to monitor the developments in the European entertainment industry, and one of the places where you would meet the latest innovations in this field was at the world exhibitions. Thus, it was at one of these exhibitions

at Paris, in 1878, that Bernhard Olsen first became acquainted with Hazelius and his new ideas for a museum. However, there was another attraction at the exhibition that in terms of communication held more appeal for him than Hazelius' dioramas, and that was the Dutch room from Hindeloopen. Here, the visitor did not have to remain outside looking into the rooms through the missing fourth wall, instead he could enter into the room itself through a door, and, once entered, in a way he became part of the past himself (de Jong & Skougaard 1993).

Olsen followed this principle when he got the opportunity to arrange a "section for the peasant class" at a large exhibition of arts and crafts in Copenhagen. This section was predominantly meant to exhibit folk costumes and handicraft, but Olsen had also succeeded in acquiring and recreating a series of complete interiors, fitted out with persons in regional costumes, but also



Bernhard Olsen at the entrance to his open air museum in Sorgenfri 1915. The two lions have nothing to do with the content of the museum but they make the entrance more visible and stately. They are, maybe, also striking a national tone by reference to the lions in the Danish coat of arms. Photo the National Museum, Copenhagen.



open to the public. These rooms were recreated in the new *Danish Folk Museum* that he opened in 1885, next to Tivoli.

In the same building, he had established the first wax museum or panopticon in Scandinavia, and here it was the diorama principle he used. He seems to have found some of the inspiration for this at the Brothers Castan's Panopticon in Berlin, which was founded in 1874 and was the first to gather the dummies in narrative groups. Bernhard Olsen used the same idea in his wax museum, which he himself characterized as "a plastic newspaper as a companion to the graphically illustrated news." Depictions of current events and famous personalities of the day were predominant, but Olsen also found room for more historic presentations, such as a scene depicting traditional peasant life on the island of Amager, featuring an image borrowed from a well-known genre painting. Another example of such a "three-dimensional genre painting" was the Norwegian painter Tidemand's "A Killing at a Feast", showing a scene from Western Norway. Here the room that framed the event was created with "beams from the almost 400-year old Nesheim farm" from Hardanger, as the catalogue

describes it (Rasmussen 1979: 84–85; Skougaard & Varnild 1994).

These examples show the close relations that existed between the museum and the entertainment industry of the time. But they also explain why Olsen's museum in some respects took another direction than Hazelius. The difference is the most pronounced if you compare how the two pioneers realized the idea of an open-air museum.

The museum that Bernhard Olsen opened north of Copenhagen in 1901 was initially called "The Museum of Buildings at Kongens Lyngby", and that was exactly what it was: a collection of buildings. Even though Bernhard Olsen, who had a keen interest in gardening, could not resist creating some gardens that had no direct relation to the buildings, there were none of the other elements that characterized Hazelius' Skansen. Rather, it is more likely that Olsen associated such elements with his former workplace, Tivoli, as it was here and not in the open-air museum that Bernhard Olsen excelled as a scenographer and organizer of festivals.

A peculiar aspect of the Danish open-air museum in its initial form was that it exclusively

consisted of buildings from the former Danish provinces east of Öresund and from Schleswig, which had been occupied by Prussia in 1864; and, added to this, a copy of a house from the Faroe Islands. There were two reasons for this rather one-sided choice of buildings. It was partly because Bernhard Olsen felt that the peasant houses in Denmark were too modern. He wanted to show the older stages in the historic development of the houses in his museum, and it was necessary to cross the nation's recent borders to find them. "But they are selected from the lost countries not only because the most primitive types were to be found there, but also because the youth of this country must be taught about all that used to belong to Denmark, to strengthen the memory of what has been lost and pave the way for the spiritual rallying of the scattered, which is the only form of reconquest that I can imagine" (letter from Bernhard Olsen, translated from Rasmussen 1979: 131–132).

Thus, in this programme, a robust national revival is combined with a perspective of a cultural historical evolution. Even though Bernhard Olsen's professional background is as an artist and a scenographer, he is from the beginning aware that his initiative also has a scientific purpose. Already in 1879, when he had organized the section of the exhibition of arts and crafts that eventually became the Danish Folk Museum, he wrote in a letter to Hazelius that he had "managed to include the historic-ethnographic science in the exhibition programme" (Rasmussen 1979: 14).

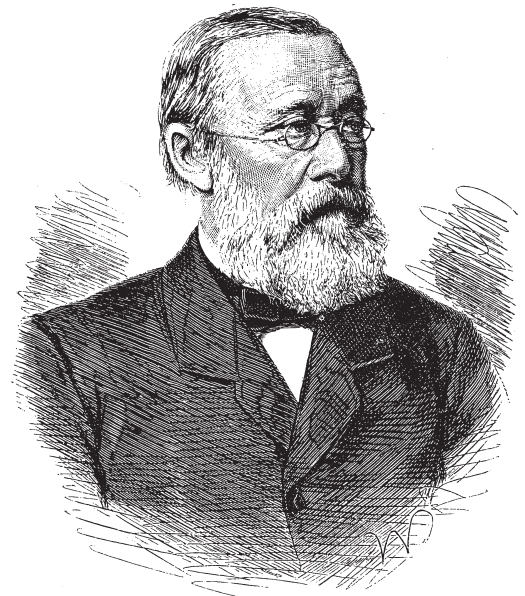
As a cultural historian he was self-taught, but his contemporaries praise him as a knowledgeable museologist, especially in the field of the history of clothing. As the managing director of two museums he did not have much time for a literary production, but nonetheless, he has left behind a considerable amount of articles about cultural history that bear witness to both a scientific versatility and an impressive knowledge of details.<sup>2</sup>

### Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902)

The third in the series of museum pioneers is a personality with a completely different back-

ground, but just like Bernhard Olsen it was also for him the meeting with Artur Hazelius and his museum that got him started. The year was 1874, and the occasion was a congress about archaeology and (physical) anthropology in Stockholm, in which Rudolf Virchow took part. The participants of the congress were invited to the opening of a new section of the one-year-old Scandinavian-Ethnographic Collection in Drottninggatan. Immediately, Virchow was captivated by the new form of museum that had been created here, and he dreamed up the idea of creating something similar in Berlin.

It was medicine that was Virchow's real field of knowledge, and he is seen as one of the key figures in the history of medicine. His main contribution was the development of the so-called cellular pathology as a substitute to the older humoral pathology, which is to say that he altered the explanation of the causes of a disease from disturbances in the body fluids to cellular changes. However, he covered several other fields, for instance social medicine, which became a popular topic in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The interest in the connection between diseases and society led him to politics, and he ended up in the Reichstag, where his liberal views made



Rudolf Virchow. Woodcut 1886. From Steinmann 1964.

him collide with Bismarck, who is even said to have challenged him to duel.

Rudolf Virchow's path to the field of cultural history went through medicine, or to be more precise through another of the specialities that were making great strides in the last part of the century: the physical anthropology. Virchow was preoccupied with the history of the evolution of man and the potential of archaeology to illuminate the question of race and its changes over the years. He personally participated in several archaeological investigations, amongst others the excavation of Troy, lead by the controversial Heinrich Schliemann, and it was due to his efforts that the rich finds of Schliemann were acquired for Germany.

At the time, the step from archaeology to ethnography was a small one, and Rudolf Virchow got actively engaged in the establishment of a *Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin (Völkerkunde=ethnography). The folk museum, which he found the inspiration for in Stockholm, he had initially imagined as a subdivision of the ethnographical museum. However, lack of space made this impossible, and instead, in 1889, an independent *Museum für deutsche Volkstrachten und Erzeugnisse des Hausgewerbes* was opened in temporary premises elsewhere. The name of the museum makes it clear that here – as in Stockholm and Copenhagen – it was the folk costumes that were the main components of the museum. However, the manifesto from the same year, from which we have already quoted the opening paragraph, calls for more comprehensive collections, which were to present a wide-ranging picture of the daily life in all parts of rural Germany, “in order to demonstrate their still existing popular characteristics in costumes, house design and products of domestic industry, where possible exhibited in complete room arrangements with plastic figures, in the way it has been done in the Hazelius museum in Stockholm” (Jahn 1889: 337, my translation). The reason why folk costumes gained such prominence is probably connected with the fact that they were symbols of the traditional peasant culture that were easy to understand, and, in addition, guaranteed crowd-pullers.

As a matter of fact, it was completely different sides of folk culture that was the main interest

of the founder. As a natural scientist with an interest in evolution, Virchow was primarily concerned with the manifestations of primitive culture, which pointed backwards towards a prehistorical connection. He found such manifestations in the articles for everyday use and especially in the buildings of the peasants, which received his particular attention. The interest in rural houses can be traced back to two aspects of his other activities: his studies in social medicine, which he carried out in Silesia in connection with a typhoid epidemic, where he thoroughly studied the housing conditions and habits of the rural population; and the archaeological studies of house-shaped urns, the forms of which he believed he could rediscover in the later peasant tradition. Virchow does not leave behind a large body of work in the field of ethnology, but nonetheless he did publish a few smaller treatises on forms of tools and types of houses.

Considering his interest in the prehistoric roots of the peasant culture, it is understandable that Virchow worked to create the foundation for a *Deutsches Nationalmuseum für Altertümer und Volkskunde*. However, the plan was never carried out and neither was the suggestion of turning the folk museum into an open-air museum in order to make room for the collections. Rudolf Virchow died in 1902, without having found a satisfactory solution to the practical problems of the museum.<sup>3</sup>

### Ulrich Jahn (1861–1900)

Artur Hazelius and Bernhard Olsen were both managing directors of the museums they had founded. Evidently, such a thing would not be possible for a man like Rudolf Virchow whose main efforts lay elsewhere. He would have to be content with being a prime mover, organizer and fund-raiser, and therefore his achievements as a museum pioneer would not have been possible without his younger co-founder, Ulrich Jahn.

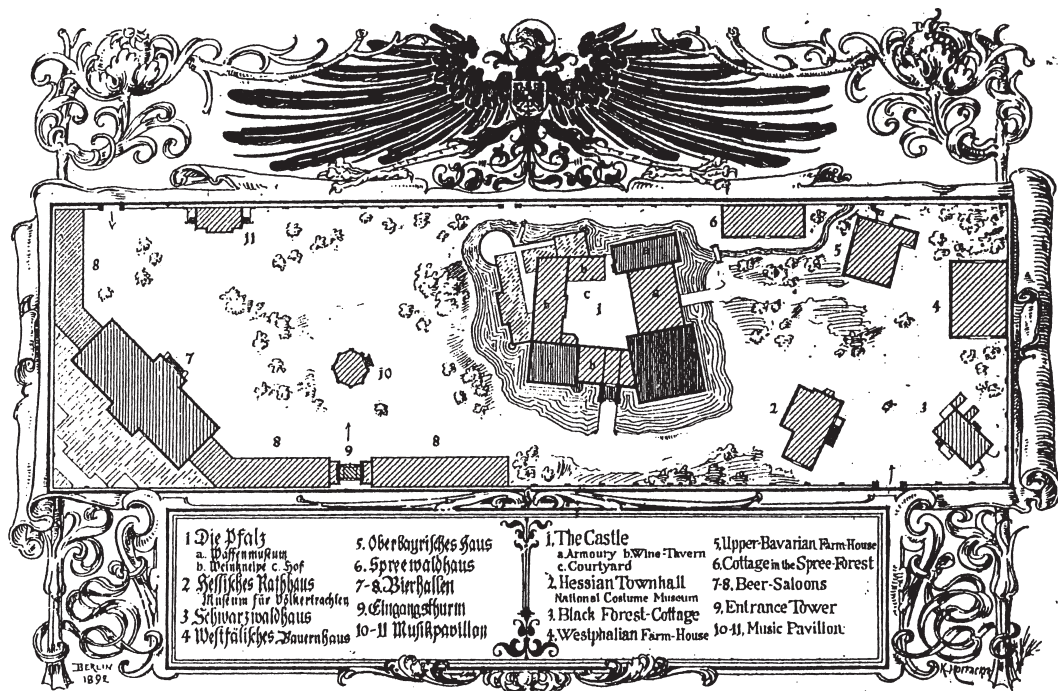
Ulrich Jahn's academic background was in the field of philology, just as it was for Hazelius, and just as it would be for a couple of generations of German ethnologists or *Volkskundler*. He took his doctorate with a thesis that was central to the *Volkskunde* of the time with its interest

in the history of religion: "Die deutschen Opfergebräuche bei Ackerbau und Viehzucht", and he collected a large body of traditional legends and fairy tales from his native Pomerania. He is said to have had a brilliant ability to get in touch with ordinary people, an ability that was to benefit him a great deal later on, when he was collecting material for the museum.

Ulrich Jahn met Rudolf Virchow at an anthropology congress in Stettin in 1886, and, at the instigation of Virchow, Jahn moved to Berlin, where he became one of the prime movers in planning the folk museum. In arrangement with Virchow, he acquired a "test collection" from Rügen, which was exhibited in the panopticon in Berlin, and which was highly instrumental in getting the ball rolling. It was also Ulrich Jahn who subsequently wrote the aforementioned programme (Jahn 1889), which was sent out in an expanded version as a questionnaire to local contacts. Meanwhile, Jahn continued collecting and arranging the displays

in the museum. Central to the first exhibition was a Sorbian peasant room from Spreewald, featuring wax dummies in folk costumes. The wax dummies had been supplied by the director of the panopticon, Louis Castan, who was a member of the board of the museum.

However, the small museum in Berlin with the incessant lack of space did not offer enough possibilities for the dynamic Ulrich Jahn. In 1891, he got engaged in a German Exhibition in London, to which he had recreated a "North Frisian" house with two living rooms that he beforehand had found panels and furniture for in the village of Ostenfeld in Schleswig. This whetted his appetite, and in the following years he conducted very comprehensive collections all over Germany with the intention of participating in the world exhibition in Chicago in 1893. The collections were funded by a committee that included several big financiers and had Rudolf Virchow as its chairman. These preparations resulted in one of the largest attractions of



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Plan von dem deutschen Dorfe. — Map of the German village.

Ulrich Jahn's German Village at the World Exhibition in Chicago 1893. It was a part of the so-called Midway Plaisance, and, besides a reconstructed castle, a town hall and some farmhouses, it included restaurants, beer saloons and music pavilions. From Wörner 1999.

its kind at the Chicago exhibition, the so-called *German Village*, consisting of no less than thirty-six buildings, including a reconstructed town hall, a romantic castle and typical farm houses from different parts of Germany.

The large collections that Ulrich Jahn obtained for the exhibition had in advance been reserved for the museum in Berlin. However, the transportation back to Germany dragged on, and Jahn himself never really returned to the museum. He had discovered much better prospects in other parts of the world, and he ended up settling in London as an antique dealer. There was a rupture between him and Virchow, and afterwards Jahn withdrew all the objects he had acquired for the London exhibition in 1891 from the museum, including the two livingrooms from Ostenfeld, because they legally belonged to him. He later sold these objects to Bernhard Olsen, and they are now an important element of the Ostenfeld farm at the Open Air Museum in Sorgenfri (Stoklund 1999).<sup>4</sup>

## Between Scenography and Science

Hopefully, this small sketch of four museum pioneers has given an impression of the motley world, in which the earliest folk museums were formed. Together, the four very different characters represent all the currents that merge in the folk museum phenomenon. Artur Hazelius is the great national revivalist, for whom the museum acts in the interest of a greater cause. However, he is also a fabulous collector who establishes the greatest and most vigorous of the folk museums. Bernhard Olsen is an artist and a professional scenographer who turns into a competent cultural historian. Rudolf Virchow is the scientist who predominantly sees the museum and its collections from a scientific perspective. His right-hand man, Ulrich Jahn, begins as a researcher in traditional *Volkskunde*, but ends up as an organizer of exhibitions and an antique dealer. They are all great patriots, and in the rhetoric that accompanies the new museums the national chords are vigorously played.

The examples demonstrate the close connection with the great exhibitions. Not only do the museums employ a form of visual commu-

nication that had been tested beforehand at the temporary exhibitions. But in the construction phase the pioneers also use the exhibitions as opportunities to introduce the new museums and their potential. However, the problem with this close interaction is that the museums are not only influenced in form, but also in content by the exhibitions. The early folk museums present the same idylized picture of the traditional peasant culture and a happy and carefree rural population that artists had created in the genre paintings, and reproduced in the exhibitions. And the fact that peasant rooms populated by dummies entered a great number of the museums around 1900 is ultimately a reflection of the bourgeois worship of home and family, which culminates in this very period (Stoklund 1999).

However, the four biographical sketches also demonstrate that from the very beginning there has been a duplicity in the objectives of the folk museums. The nationally inspired staging of traditional peasant life walks hand in hand with the awareness of laying the foundation for a scientific exploration of European peasantries. Besides the staged scenes from traditional peasant life, the museums also hold systematically classified collections, which is evident already in the woodcut of Hazelius' first museum (p. 26). The two very different ways of presenting exhibits do not always coexist peacefully, however, sometimes they are in a bitter fight about what the right objectives for a museum should be.

We have seen how the systematic, scientific school came out victorious when they moved into the Nordic Museum in Stockholm in 1907, whereas Hazelius' popular staging of life-like images of folk life was continued at Skansen. In Denmark, the question of the objectives for a museum had been raised ten years before by the director of the *National Museum*, Sophus Müller, who delivered a broadside against the new "interior, exterior, and park museums", as he calls them, phenomena that ought not to be counted among the museums. A real museum is a place where artefacts "are arranged and treated according to scientific principles" (Müller 1897). There is no doubt that scientific principles to Sophus Müller meant typological ordering and evolutionistic interpretation.

The Danish cultural historian, Troels-Lund, was one of the people who took the side of the new folk museums. He pointed out that the same kind of dualism could be found outside the museums in written cultural history. On one hand, there were the specialists who studied the origins and development of isolated phenomena, and, on the other, there were those who brought times past back to life with large-scale cultural pictures, as he had done in his own work “Daily Life in Scandinavia in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century” (Troels-Lund 1879–1901; cf. Stoklund 1989). In a letter to Georg Karlin in Lund, founder of another of the early folk museums in Sweden, Troels-Lund tries to encircle the essence of a new, alternative way of writing cultural history:

“If I should point out what annoys the other side and causes its dislike – be it in books or in museums – I would in one word call it *illusions*. The ability to agitate imagination, to evoke an illusion corresponding to a past reality, is as well the strength as the weak point of the new way. In this true and false – or at least uncertain – will meet in close unity. For it cannot be denied that in the linguistic picture and in the museum-made interior or exterior, there will – how well and truthful it might be made – be something extra beside the single elements from which the mosaic has been put together. This *extra* is the view of the producer and the corresponding illusion of the reader or spectator. In my opinion, this is the most noble and most ethereal oil of history, without which the whole is rather worthless. But, at the same time, it is the red rag which infuriates those of the opposite opinion. And rightly so, for to them historical research is only analysis, and what can and should be obtained are only critically determined details and single objects. To us, the objective is a synthesis, the picture as a product of its parts or at least assembling all parts into a whole” (translated from a letter quoted in Bringéus 1992: 64–65; cf. Christiansen 2000: 89).

In the 20th century, the museums undergo a professionalization that to a great degree prioritizes the systematic, scientific side of the work. In several generations of museum officials there

can be detected a puritanical attitude towards the communication aspect, and a recoiling from the staging of the past that the early folk museum pioneers practised as an important part of the museum work.

In the last few decades, however, we have seen a change in the attitude both among the museum officials and cultural historical writers. For many it is once again acceptable to use the imagination to make the past come alive, in order to create a more comprehensive picture and to maintain people’s attention. However, this also means that, today, a hundred years later, the balancing act between scenography and science that we have encountered among the early museum pioneers has gained a renewed interest.

*Translated by Søren Stoklund*

## Notes

- 1 There are two older biographies of Artur Hazelius: Böök 1923 and Berg 1933; this chapter is predominantly based on Bringéus 1974; Grandien 1991; Biörnstad 1991 and Medelius *et al.* 1998.
- 2 This biographical sketch is based on Rasmussen 1979.
- 3 The chapter on Rudolf Virchow is based on Ackerknecht 1957; Steinmann 1964, 1967 and Müller 1992. –The German Volkskunde Museum in Berlin was in 1999 reorganized under the name *Museum Europäischer Kulturen*.
- 4 The chapter on Ulrich Jahn is based on Weinhold 1900; Steinmann 1964, 1967 and Müller 1992.

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