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PAMPHLET # 1

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The Dana Repository

Plotting the 1,138 ‘Danas’ located in the Danish Royal Library’s Digital Newspaper Archive 1800-1870

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ABSTRACT: This pamphlet presents a Dana repository drawn from the Danish Royal Library’s Digital Newspaper Archive ‘Mediestream’ (1800-1870). It outlines the semantic categorization and coding of this material that is the basis for distant readings of the demi-goddess Dana’s development in the course of the first three quarters of the nineteenth century. Appendix 1 outlines the semantic coding; Appendix 2 offers a list of 1,138 hard links with semantic indications for each occurrence.

KEYWORDS: Dana; Mythology; Reinchantment; Newspapers; the Danish Royal Library; Mediestream; Nineteenth Century; Distant Reading.

Introduction

The Romantic movement spurred on a general interest in pre-Christian mythologies in Europe. Deemed ‘culturally authentic’ – a decidedly positive label in the days of cultural nationbuilding – pre-Christian, Nordic mythological creatures, such as Balder, Thor or Freja, suddenly roamed nineteenth century public discourse in Denmark (cf. Bønding 2021). In this study we have, however, singled out a mythological creature of a slightly more blurred origin – one of no clear-cut cultural derivation – but one that, nevertheless, strenuously keeps popping up in nationalist-romanticist, semantic contexts in Danish nineteenth century newspaper material: ‘Dana’ the fantastic creature gradually claiming the position of allegorical personification of emergent modern nationstate Denmark in the course of the first three quarters of the century (1800-1870). There is no Dana in the pre-Christian, Nordic pantheon and it seems most likely that her rise is rooted in a simple (but attractive and strong) phonetic-associative structure: ‘Dana’ is phonetically close to the legendary king ‘Dan’ nested in ‘Danmark’.

That Dana does in fact claim the position of allegorical personification of Denmark is a conclusion we draw based on our survey of the Danish Royal Library's rich Digital Newspaper Archive. Further arguments, contextualizations and analyses are available in "Fictional Realities of Modernity: The Fantastic Life of the Demi-Goddess Dana in the Emerging Nation State of Denmark" (Baunvig 2021). What we present in this pamphlet is the data-set furnished with a description of the practical as well as the hermeneutic procedures that went into the construction of this material.

Material and Procedure

35,464,209 is the total number of newspaper and periodical pages scanned by the Danish Royal Library's digital archive initiative Mediestream covering the period 1666-2013. By way of OCR technology, the Danish Royal Library has made the material readable and searchable through an interface allowing for period definition. This enables a straightforward list generation conveying the total number of occurrences of 'Dana' in Danish newspapers within the period from 1 January 1800 through to 31 December 1869.¹

Admittedly, raw OCR-corpora tend to be somewhat dirty – especially when the original material was set in 'Fraktur' (or in other types of 'Gothic') blackletter type-settings as was the case in Danish newspapers until the late nineteenth century (cf. Pauli 1940). We compensated for this situation with hours of manual cleaning and annotation. By way of *close reading* controls, provided for by Mediestream's facsimile display, we rejected false positives. But more importantly, based on this display we have read and systematically coded each of the 'true' Dana incidents to gain overview of their genre and semantic context. The result of this coding is found in the Excel spreadsheet of Appendix 1; a total list of each of the hard links to the 1,138 coded Danas as they occur in Mediestream is found in Appendix 2.

This procedure does, however, have an inbuilt, self-evident blind spot: False positives are relatively easily detected. But there is no way telling how many Danas the OCR dirt made us miss. Here we must simply take comfort in the assurances that quantity can give – in the assumption that the size of the corpus secures an acceptable statistical significance.

Coding the Danas

In the Excel spreadsheet of Appendix 1 each of the rows represent a Dana occurrence. The columns are divided into decades by way of colour-coding: the 1800s: light blue; the 1810s: light red; 1820s: yellow; 1830s: grey; 1840s: green; 1850s: light orange; 1860's light yellow. The columns, furthermore, contains data on print dates (column A-C); information on the newspaper print page of the individual Dana occurrence (column D); information on the given district of the individual newspaper (column E); generic

¹ <http://www2.statsbiblioteket.dk/mediestream/avis> [accessed 2 March 2021].

information allowing us to categorize the individual Dana's nesting in either poetry (A), prose (B) or commercials (C); the semantic evaluation of the Dana occurrences is plotted in columns G-AA. For each Dana we have considered the representation of the following semantic and stylistic categories: G) Family; H) Name and title; I) Mythology; J) Mother of the land; K) Emotional categories; L) Fatherland; M) Death; N) Nature/Gardens; O) The sea; P) The king and members of the royal family; Q) Terms associated with 'God'; R) Sweden; S) Norway; T) The North; U) Germany; V) England; W) France; X) Italy; Y) War; Z) The Flag, Dannebrog; M) Commercial goods. These semantic-stylistic categories are the result of an iterative, evaluative process allowing us to calibrate an initial list.

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