



Mythology and “Nation Building”: N.F.S. Grundtvig and His Contemporaries

Organised by
Paris-Sorbonne University and The Grundtvig Study Centre, Aarhus University

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Paris-Sorbonne Université, 1, rue Victor Cousin, 75005 Paris

The aim of the conference is to offer new perspectives on the role of pre-Christian mythologies in the formation of national communities in the 19th-Century. During this time, scholars, philosophers, politicians and artists played a crucial part in the formation of national identities, underpinning the emerging national communities. Pre-Christian mythologies, most notably Old Norse or Germanic mythology, were often seen as a cultural source in which to root the collective identity of the community.

Among such intellectuals was the Danish polymath N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872), who was a driving force in the formation of Danish national identity. In his ideas on the founding of the Danish nation, Old Norse mythology and the pagan past served as crucial cultural resources on which to build the future of the Danish community. Comparable ideas can be traced in the works of the Swedish philosopher and poet P.D.A. Atterbom (1790-1855), the British artist and activist William Morris (1834-1896) and the Icelandic poet and naturalist Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-1845), among many others.

The existing publications on the relation between myth and nation tend to primarily understand myth in the sense of a ‘national myth’ – a narrative of origin and belonging created in order to lend authenticity and legitimacy to a specific community, thereby bolstering a vision of its greatness in the present and/or future. While keeping this broad notion of myth in relation to the formation of national communities, we wish to focus on the role of pre-Christian mythologies in the cultivation of collective identities in this process.

Besides Old Norse or Germanic mythology, participants will explore the role of other pre-Christian mythologies including Greek and Roman corpora. By doing so, we wish to provide new perspectives on the cultural resources of nation building.

The conference, therefore has two foci: one section will focus on different theoretical perspectives on the over-arching theme. These topics will include theoretical concepts such as nation building and geographies of knowledge, although other well-established concepts and new approaches will also be explored. The second section will consist of a range of case studies, focusing on the role of pre-Christian mythology in the formation of specific national communities in Europe in the 19th Century, thereby providing an international comparative perspective to shed light on the similarities between, as well as the peculiarities of, the individual cases.

For more information contact the organisers at: mythandnationconference@cas.au.dk