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Landscape versus Museum: J. C. Dahl and the Preservation of Norwegian Burial Mounds

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Future Anterior, Volume 6, Number 1, Summer 2009, pp. xi-17 (Article)

Published by University of Minnesota Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/fta.0.0029>

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MONUMENT À STIKLESTAD

*œuvre de l'illustre voyageur qui fit lui par ses vœux dans une Patrie
qu'il tenait chèrement. L'œuvre de l'illustre*

Ensemble de l'œuvre de l'illustre voyageur

1. Monument à Stiklestad. In the 1790s, the Danish painter C. A. Lorentzen performed a *voyage pittoresque*, documenting for the Danish king Norwegian landscapes, natural resources, and ancient monuments. Among his prospects was the Stiklestad menhir of 1030. Lorentzen was J. C. Dahl's professor at the Royal Academy in Copenhagen from 1811. Engraving from Lorentzen's painting by J. J. G. Haas circa 1792–94. Courtesy of the National Library of Norway.

Landscape versus Museum

J. C. Dahl and the Preservation of Norwegian Burial Mounds

“Museums are praiseworthy institutions so long as one does not forget that they exist for the sake of the monuments, and not the monuments for the sake of the museums,” the illustrious Norwegian landscape painter Johan Christian Dahl (1788–1857) proclaimed in an open letter published in the Christiania (Oslo) newspaper *Den Constitutionelle* in 1843.¹ Nature preserves while museums destroy, he warned the public, advising against the excavation of the Norwegian burial mounds and promoting the natural landscape as the preferable preservation site for the medieval mounds and their contents. His short, passionate, and highly aggravated epistle on museums was composed in Dresden, where he had resided since the early 1820s. He held a professorship at the Dresden Art Academy until his death in 1857 and belonged to a circle of European painters among whom was his friend and neighbor Caspar David Friedrich.

Describing himself as “a friend of History,” “an examiner of Antiquity,” as well as an “*Antiquitetsliebhaber*,” J. C. Dahl was debating a phenomenon described as a “*Liebhaberie*” currently spiraling out of control. The so-called *Kjæmpehøier* contained equipment of various sorts that, in accordance with Norse paganism, were to accompany the privileged deceased on their journey to the next world. The mounds were monuments erected to commemorate great men and women, and were already described as such in the sagas of the Icelandic mythographer Snorre Sturlason at the turn of the thirteenth century. Installed in fertile parts of the Norwegian territory, continuously inhabited since the Middle Ages, the burial mounds were often haphazardly discovered and damaged by plowing farmers. While both mounds and contents were randomly registered in the topographical literature of the latter part of the eighteenth century, they were approached as *curiosa* and explained in accordance with biblical, mythological, or even Greek and Roman texts.² Their transition from a static and exemplary status to a temporalized, historical framework coincides with the establishment of the modern, public museum. Scholars and collectors of antiquities enthusiastically sponsored the excavations and the transference of the objects to the newly founded Department of Antiquities (Oldsaksamlingen) at the Royal Frederik’s University in Christiania, while the burial mounds themselves were most likely obliterated.³

2. J. C. Dahl, *The Ruined Church at Avaldsnes on Karmøy*, 1820(?). Dahl made his earliest sketches of the Avaldsnes church ruin and the burial mound in 1811, from which he later performed various drawings and paintings. From Marie Lødrup Bang, *Johan Christian Dahl, 1788–1857: The Life and Works*, 3 vols. (Oslo: Norwegian University Press / New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

“The burial mounds are themselves the natural and veritable museums of their own contents,” Dahl declared. The objections to historicize the artifacts, whether in the form of scientific scrutiny or deliberative aesthetization, brings to light two conflicting approaches to preservation at stake in the early nineteenth century pertaining to nature and culture—the landscape and the museum—respectively. In this sense, Dahl’s rabid defense of the burial mounds represents a significant contribution to early modern preservation theory. Crucial to the establishment of a Norwegian preservation body—*Foreningen til Norske Fortidsmindemærkers Bevaring* of 1844—Dahl represented an early preservationist sensibility in a Norwegian context. His *Denkmale einer sehr ausgebildeten Holzbaukunst aus den frühesten Jahrhunderten in der innern Landschaften Norwegens* (Dresden 1837), a collection of Norwegian stave churches measured and delineated by the German architect F. W. Schiertz on Dahl’s initiative, was the first systematic documentation of the still-exciting medieval structures threatened by deterioration and ignorance. “Professor Dahl in Dresden is univocally voted as member of honor, due to his interest in Norwegian antiquities as demonstrated by his work on the Norwegian wooden churches,” the board of the association decided at their first annual meeting in December 1845.⁴

Among the oldest extant European preservation associations, the Association for the Preservation of Norwegian Ancient Monuments and Antiquities was founded by artists and scholars with the purpose to, as article 1 in the statutes (dated December 16, 1844) reads, “track down, investigate,

3. J. C. Dahl, *The Ruined Church at Avaldsnes on Karmøy*, 1820. Oil on canvas. After returning to the church ruin at Avaldsnes in the late 1830s, Dahl lamented the loss of historical significance through the excavation of the burial mound. Courtesy of the National Museum of Art, Architecture, and Design.

and maintain relics of Norwegian antiquity, particularly those that shed light upon the nation's artistic skill and artistic sense in antiquity, and likewise to make these objects known to the public through illustrations and descriptions.”⁵

Notwithstanding his involvement in the conservation of various medieval structures and ruins, it is as a painter of sublime and picturesque landscapes that the cosmopolitan Dahl has come to occupy such a prominent place in art history. His vast oeuvre is handed down as emblematic of national romanticism, and despite the fact that he spent almost his whole life outside Norway, also depicting Alpine scenery and the volcanic dramas of the Naples Gulf, he is considered a major “inventor” of the Norwegian landscape.⁶ I will argue that his artistic achievements and his operations within the field of preservation can be seen as interrelated enterprises: two parallel media striving to depict, secure, and ultimately to produce a national heritage. The dissolution of Denmark-Norway and the establishment of a new constitution guaranteeing political autonomy to Norway took place in 1814. In its wake, the early nineteenth century was preoccupied with questions of national identity, attempting to bridge and substantiate an unbroken Norwegian tradition predating four hundred years of Danish rule. These political circumstances have defined the horizon of nineteenth-century Norwegian historiography and certainly marked the interpretation of the aesthetic achievements of the period.⁷

Dahl's approach to the burial mounds must be understood in the context of his practice as a landscape painter.

From his residence in Dresden, he imagined and painted the Norwegian national landscape, based on the numerous sketches he had made during his five Norwegian journeys in 1826, 1834, 1839, 1844, and 1850. However, the prism of national romanticism is both too narrow and too smooth to fully explain Dahl's ambivalence toward museums and his laments over what he experienced as an ignominious exploitation of the burial mounds, and thus the erasure of "certain places' sacredness and historical significance."⁸ While archaeology and the establishment of museums of art, ethnography, and natural history were touchstones in inventing a national tradition, Dahl's polite concession that the museum might be an instructive and enlightening venue was firmly bracketed in his discussion of the burial mounds. An inventory published every year by the Preservation Association listed the types of antiquities that the association most desired to locate and register, spanning from buildings, especially wood and stone churches, to old letters on parchment. Among these desired treasures we find "rare burial mounds," as well as "antiquities, found in burial mounds, such as burial urns, weapons, tools, jewelry and ornaments, idols, amulets, and similar objects."⁹ Dahl, however, situating himself as a "conservative" versus "the current *Liebhaber*ie currently plaguing Norway," compares the removal of the artifacts from the ground with a sacrifice. The displacement of the remains of the past "disturbs and confounds Antiquities on the purpose of founding museums," he claims.

Despite the ephemeral status of Dahl's 1843 text, it nevertheless poses some very real conundrums for the discourse on museums, landscape, and preservation. Situated firmly within a nineteenth-century picturesque tradition, Dahl elaborates on conflicting artistic, scientific, and historic interests surrounding the excavations of ancient objects. Seen from the perspective of the landscape painter, burial mounds possess distinct scenic qualities akin to monuments, antiquities, and ruins. His argument for their protection was not, therefore, out of consideration for archaeological accuracy but for the historicity of the landscape. Dahl vehemently attacked the ongoing musealization of the mounds' contents, but at the same time turned the landscape itself into a large-scale museum. This conflation of museum skepticism and the launching of the landscape as museum constitutes an interesting and overlooked contribution to a familiar debate, namely the century-old critique of the museum as an instrument of deadening decontextualization.

Dahl was also decisive in the process of establishing the National Gallery in Oslo in the late 1830s and, as such, was anything but a museophobe. His harsh attack on the excava-

tion of the mounds took place within a very specific historical setting and was directed against a particular issue. The implication of his argument is nevertheless wide. His critique was formulated at a moment when medieval remains were about to become known, a process that led to the discovery several decades later of the Viking ships, among other things. From a scientific as well as a political perspective, the discovery of these holders of things forgotten was considered extremely promising. For historians and archaeologists the mounds represented unique sources for knowledge about material culture, artistic production, and cultural and religious practices of the medieval age. Dahl, however, anticipates that, once excavated, the artifact's significance would be obscured:

For at the same time as one aspires on the one hand to preserve, one often disturbs just as much on the other. The Norwegian burial mounds are rifled, their contents are stacked up among the thousands of things amassed in the museums, and the desecrated tombs are consigned to ruin and neglect.

Dahl's objections to the disintegration of the burial mounds thus indicate sensitivity toward an aspect of the museum that was only later fully articulated. As we know in hindsight, once relocated to the museum, art and artifacts are inevitably invested with new functions as well as new historical and aesthetic values. The physical removal marks not only a displacement of objects, but also their *re*-location from one discourse to another. Detached from their original purpose and site of origin, they become forever contaminated with the logics of the museum. Subjected to discussions of provenance, taxonomy, and classification, they are transplanted to the realm of collection and thereby invested with a new form of historicity, that of the collected and exhibited item. Fascinated by the burial mounds as an embodiment of a historical and cultural imagination, Dahl disputed the objects' potentially altered status, their fate within the changed perception of the museum. However, the crux of his argument is that this very operation of defying the museum implies a superimposing of an alternative definition of *museum* as a competing, natural, and all-encompassing museological order *in situ*.

The critique of decontextualization pivotal to Dahl's apologetic maneuver echoes perspectives that ran parallel to the founding of public museums at the turn of the nineteenth century. In hindsight, this text proves yet another testimony to the tenacious paradox that the critique of the museum is somewhat immanent to the institution itself. Simultaneously, the captivating intersection of museum critique and the

4. J. C. Dahl, *Coast with Grave Mounds and Menhirs*, 1837. Drawing from the West Coast of Norway. From Marie Lødrup Bang, *Johan Christian Dahl, 1788–1857: The Life and Works*, 3 vols. (Oslo: Norwegian University Press / New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

preservation of landscape formations by means of a museographical discourse touches on issues of collecting, preserving, curating, and exhibiting “the real thing,” and thereby anticipates current debates on display, spanning from full-scale architectural structures to landscapes.

Museum, *in situ*

When Quatremère de Quincy in the 1790s advocated for Rome as a universal museum, he put forth a generous definition of *museum*. Geographically as well as historically inclusive, the art, architecture, and monuments of the “grand muséum qui s’appelle Rome” was framed within a total environment of sky and earth, climate, landscape, vernacular buildings, games, mores, and costumes.¹⁰ Paradoxically, this total museum was elaborated with the purpose of preventing objects from the same environment to be detached, defined, and conceived as museum artifacts. In his *Lettres au Général Miranda* (1796), Quatremère was addressing the relocation of Roman art to the recently founded Museum Français (later the Musée du Louvre). His seminal discussion of the museum’s lethal decontextualization, his prolific, persuasive arsenal of metaphors supporting the idea that the museum kills art to make art history, as well as the claim that artworks can best, if not only, be fully understood within the context for which they were produced, has informed the ambivalence surrounding the museum institution ever since.

Nonetheless, this initial critique of the museum — its transference, renaming, and reordering of artworks — itself depends on a competing notion of the museum, a museum curated by history, so to speak. By defining art and architecture as museum artifacts belonging to their space of origin, two conflicting museum definitions were at work in Quatremère's critique. Only by anchoring the actual objects in a constructed primordial context and presenting this cultural habitat as a museum *in situ* could he defend them against the museum that by the turn of the nineteenth century was about to provide the institutional legitimation for art's autonomy. Presented out of context for a detached public, the artworks were captured in a museological web through a complex aesthetic and epistemological process. Thus, we can detect a museum-versus-museum constellation in the making, one being a rationalistic, scientific, imperialistic assembly of decontextualized art, the other a romantic, given, organic whole embraced within its own historicity.¹¹

Even though "Le pays" described through geographical and climatic features are essential for the singularity of "Le véritable Musée de Rome," it is neither the land nor the landscape per se that first and foremost interested Quatremère. His scope was artistic and institutional. Nonetheless, the natural surroundings did provide the works of art and architecture with a key to their intentions, purpose, form, intrinsic beauty, and significance, as well as the frame for grasping their interrelation. This was a precondition for his famous propagation of Rome as "une sorte de mappe-monde en relief," as a kind of palimpsest of antiquity and modernity.¹² Only in Rome, *in situ*, embedded in a living history, were the works comprehensible. Imprisoned in museums, they became incongruent and lifeless.

Unmonumental Monuments

Quatremère's fundamental critique of the displacement of art surely — consciously or not — colored Dahl's defense for not removing the medieval artifacts from their indigenous space. Hence one might argue that the integral relationship between landscape and museum is radicalized in Dahl's reflection on the fate of the burial mounds in the 1840s. For Quatremère the land and landscape served as a frame, a local coloring crucial for the understanding of art within an organic totality. By reframing the burial mounds as miniature museums — the "véritables musées de leur propre contenu" — Dahl introduced an audacious twist to this scenario. Here, he inverted the logic of the museum as a space of collection by projecting it back into a musealized landscape as an all-encompassing emblem of national characteristics. "Locating the museum is

admittedly an elusive task, given the range of activities and settings defined by the term,” Paula Findlen observes in her extensive study on collecting and possessing nature.¹³ The very idea of the unexcavated burial mounds as museums of their own hidden content challenged the premises for almost every definition of a museum. However different in scale, scope, and intention, a museum makes its collections accessible, either on a small scale, for a private collector, or on a broad scale, for the public. Availability and display is quintessential for a wide range of institutions that in different historical disguises have promoted themselves as museums. Likewise, ordering (e.g., reordering) is a conventional *sine qua non* for the museum artifact. A museum is by definition a space where objects are brought together within culturally and historically determined frameworks. Both these premises, that of display as well as that of reordering, are undermined in Dahl’s proposal to regard the burial mound as a preservative repository of its own unknown, untouched, and literally unseen content. This envisioned virtual museum does not even provide visual availability to its “collection” of medieval artifacts. The invisible order of the mound’s content is thereby that of an original state of storage from when the graves were once enclosed in accordance to local burial rituals.

On the other hand, to promote a landscape ubiquitously embedded with unexcavated burial mounds like blind museum vitrines is to transform nature as such into a museum with no physical boundaries. One could say that Dahl by this text draws a sketch of an imaginary museum, conceivable only through an appropriation of the picturesque, infusing nature with the imaginary power of the ruin. Strictly speaking, a burial mound, being a soft, modest, often virtually indistinguishable hillock in the landscape does not classify as a ruin. Piles of sand, stone, shingle and dirt, and covered by vegetation, they were organically woven into their natural environment. Their very materiality resists the deteriorating forces attacking architectural structures. Embedded in the landscape, these shelters and their concealed contents oscillated on the border between form and formlessness. By the time Dahl was warning against the endangering effects of musealization, these unspectacular, unmonumental monuments had become natural formations that appeared as old as nature itself. Protected and not deteriorated by nature, the burial mound was in a sense the exact opposite of a ruin, becoming a ruin only when it was touched. In the case of the burial mounds, excavation would be synonymous with ruination, with “vandalism” performed “under the pretext of working in the interest of science and art,” according to Dahl. Nevertheless, an aesthetic of ruins permitted Dahl to first zoom in and frame the burial

5. J. C. Dahl, *Mountain Farm in Tes-sungdal*, 1841. Oil on canvas. From Marie Lødrup Bang, *Johan Christian Dahl, 1788–1857: The Life and Works*, 3 vols. (Oslo: Norwegian University Press / New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

mounds as museums, to install them as virtual showcases within a natural museum. He could only do this, however, by insisting on them as autonomous objects. It is paradoxically only as untouched and whole that they can both be conceived as museums and be designated as privileged sites of historical contemplation.

The poetics of ruins are of course enhanced by the mounds' dedication as tombs—a favored typology within the cult of ruins and privileged emblems of romanticism. “The deserted tomb, the column corroded by vegetation, the remains of a temple dedicated to the gods imprint in us the image of an age that will never return; such objects induce the same confusion and commotion as the thought of the infinite age of nature,” architectural historian Renzo Dubbini observes.¹⁴ The mute materiality of the burial mound invokes a power of place and placement even more effectively than a conventional architectural ruin, balancing even more precariously on the border between nature and culture. At first glance it seems that Dahl's defense of the undisturbed burial mound dichotomizes two principally different museum spaces, that of nature and that of the modern museum institution—one romantic-organic and the other scientific-historical. In Dahl's vision of the mound as a museum, however, a twofold museum is projected onto nature. The singular mound is envisaged as a sealed museum exhibiting sacred objects, only secretly

alluding to its own interiority. The landscape is invoked as a museum without walls in which the mounds figure as *objets trouvés* to be admired and contemplated in their original state.

Curating Landscapes

A curatorial approach to landscape was indeed emerging in Dahl's museum vision. He admitted that excavation might sometimes be necessary and useful to achieve a "more certain historical knowledge than what is provided by legend and folklore." Should the findings "after a full excavation prove to be of such an importance that the objects ought to be transferred to a museum and exhibited," it was imperative that the landscape formations not be eradicated:

On the contrary, they should be sealed again meticulously after the attainment of the result, after depositing in the place of the find an inscription fired in porcelain and enclosed in a receptacle or protected in some other manner as testimony to later generations, in case the handwritten observations should be lost or there should be doubt of their correctness.

A reconstruction of the mound after a full excavation was completed represented a distinctly musealizing gesture. By redistributing the museum's taxonomic categories back into the landscape, the painter conceded to turn the former grave into an empty mock-up, classifying and displaying the inventories through a standardized design program of plaques, with reference to the twelfth-century Danish archbishop Absolon's grave in Sorø, Denmark. By adopting the practices of the museum, the visual power of his alternative museum attempted to preserve landscape as an imagined space of "collection." This curatorial management of objects in nature radicalized the museum-versus-museum constellation that had been unfolding in his musings. However, hidden within the museum-versus-museum constellation that endeavors to impede the relocation of medieval artifacts to the Department of Antiquities, another act of displacement is unfolding. The operation of turning land into landscape, place into picture, and nature into an all-encompassing museum ironically harbors yet another act of relocation. The particular form of aesthetization of nature at work in this maneuver relies on a competing transplantation of the burial mounds. They are being argumentatively moved from the realm of nature to the realm of the collected and curated object, enforced exactly by the devices of the modern museum.

Undoubtedly, aesthetic and emotive considerations of scenic qualities allowed the painter to envision the pristine

graves intrinsic to the land's naturalized topographic contours. By envisioning the landscape as a total museum, Dahl wants it to move rather than to mediate and to delight rather than to instruct. This is obviously an aesthetically motivated argument. Nevertheless, Dahl reinforces his argument with reference to the mound's historical significance. The plea for the undisturbed burial mound may seem to represent yet another configuration of the stubborn dichotomy of the artist versus the scientist, associated with different and partially competing spheres of interests, use, meaning, and knowledge. Were one to accept this dichotomy, Dahl's argument would fold seamlessly into the Enlightenment construct perfected and theorized in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), detaching the aesthetic experience from the sphere of the useful, including both scientific facts and historical knowledge. Within such a framework, the burial mounds could be conceptually transposed to the realm of disinterested delight and labeled as "art," withdrawn from the spaces and uses of everyday life, and perfectly, though paradoxically, fit into the virtual as well as factual museum that was declared privileged space for guaranteeing autonomy for the aesthetic sphere.

A relabeling of the burial mound as a piece of art, resembling a kind of early land art, was made available by the late eighteenth century's altered perception of art as well as nature. This epistemological and linguistic maneuver could have represented a possible strategy for Dahl in his attempt to preserve and protect the burial mounds. The discourse unfolding was, however, neither centered on art nor aimed to enchant archaeological and ethnological artifacts with the aura of artworks. Pointing toward the landscape in which the mounds belonged, the landscapist did not suggest art as our optics. He consciously advocated a projected museum as the appropriate conceptual framework as he strove to preserve the container rather than the contained. Thus, his specific critique tended to destabilize a dichotomy of romanticism versus the rationalization of knowledge curated by scholars and displayed in museums. The argument is historically based as well as aesthetically motivated. Invoked as a venue of historical experience, the burial mound embedded in landscape materialized as a source of historical knowledge, parallel to the practices of collecting scientifically in the museum. The mounds were also envisaged as containers of historical knowledge, without investing the relics with historical provenance. Dahl recalls his visit to the island Karmøy at the west coast of Norway in July 1811. The local priest had shown him the intact burial mounds at Avaldsnes Church—a motif he painted several times later after sketches done during this first visit.

6. J. C. Dahl, *Birch Tree at Slinde in Winter*, 1835. Oil on canvas. Dahl sketched and painted the holy birch tree on a burial mound at Slinde on several occasions. From Marie Lødrup Bang, *Johan Christian Dahl, 1788–1857: The Life and Works*, 3 vols. (Oslo: Norwegian University Press / New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

At that time everything was untouched, and we admired with awe King Hugvald's grave and several others. — In the year 1836 the sight of this mound had inspired other observations and interests. The treasure was unearthed — and offered for sale. Truly, the benefits won were abundant — so abundant that one might at least have had the decency to close the mound and even — to expose its historical significance — provide it with a commemorating plaque proving what the mound once contained, and what it signified.

At the very same time as Europe witnessed an unprecedented effort to administer and examine nature as collectable into the museum through a variety of display techniques, Dahl emphasizes the historicity of nature — as museum.¹⁵ The oblivion being addressed embraces the singular objects as well as the burial mounds as integral to landscape. The annihilation of the mound as a “classic Plot of Earth” implies, he insisted, a loss of a historical and thereby scientific perspective. Indeed, the mound's embodied historicity might possess an imaginary power of greater importance than the hidden artifacts. In the grand panoramic vision of nature that was available for the landscape painter in the early 1800s, the mound was evoked as a concrete site for the display of history, alternative to the museum's managing of the past. For the

7. J. C. Dahl, *Landscape from Voss with Grave Mound and Menhir*, 1840. Oil on canvas. Private collection. From Marie Lødrup Bang, *Johan Christian Dahl, 1788–1857: The Life and Works*, 3 vols. (Oslo: Norwegian University Press / New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

landscape painter, the picture grasps the pregnant totality to which the museum—with all its decontextualized bits and pieces—can only aspire. As Françoise Choay argues, the imaginary as well as representational power of romantic art represents a “suppletory” trait in the field of heritage. Discussing historical monuments, she notes that the “gaze of the Romantic artists inscribed the monuments in a synthetic scenography that endowed it with a supplemental pictorial value that was quite unrelated to its own intrinsic aesthetic quality.”¹⁶

Painting a ruin, or a burial mound, is also a way of arresting processes of ruination, at least from the standpoint of aesthetic contemplation. To the extent that Dahl aspires to pictorial preservation, it is due to his all-encompassing notion of the landscape museum. For Dahl, as painter, the untouched mound renders an aesthetic value to the landscape as a true beholder also of its own intrinsic *historical* quality. Dahl is “an examiner of Antiquity” as well as a painter. In his concern for the mounds he demonstrates the conflation of romanticism and realism that so much characterizes his oeuvre.

Memento Mori

What Dahl in the 1840s coined as an exaggerated *Liebhaberie* is only one of many material expressions of what Stephen Bann has named the “historical-mindedness” of the nineteenth

century, and for which the museum served as an emblem.¹⁷ Untouched, the burial mounds were distinguished by age, but more importantly, they appeared to be timeless in the same way as nature is timeless. Excavation, relocation, and classification provide the vestiges of the past with a history as well as contemporaneity—that is, with a dimension of timeliness. The dynamics of protecting objects by means of historiographical interest, genealogical investment, or museographical inscription was, for Dahl, barbarism disguised as connoisseurship. Indeed, he saw no reason to discriminate between scholarly excavations and treasure hunters. Their operations were equally destructive: “Even though excavation is most often performed to obtain historical results, however barbaric—it is also often the case that the motif is treasure hunting, appropriating the possessions of the defenseless dead which should be regarded with reverence.”

Despite the museum’s noble intentions, the consequence of institutional preservation could in fact easily be destruction, oblivion, taxonomic overkill, as well as ignorance, Dahl asserted. His uneasiness with the thought of the objects “stacked up among the thousands of things amassed in the museums” must obviously also be understood in the context of inexperienced Norwegian archeologists and an unsatisfying registration policy. The Preservational Association’s year-books of the coming decades certainly manifest the fumbings of a new science. Organically and immanently anchored in their indigenous space, the artifacts had been protected against the corrosive actions of time. In the museum, on the other hand, their authenticity would be severely compromised by being dispersed and exposed to the random, at least historically determined, taxonomies of modernity. A certain complexity is added, though, to the understanding of the burial mounds as historical objects and to their concrete materiality as a vehicle for historical experience.

From Dahl’s perspective, the landscape as a whole was the topographical horizon within which the burial mounds may be understood. The ethnographic or artistic benefits of excavating, collecting, and displaying the remains of a medieval past were considered subordinate to the significance of the imagined totality of the mounds in the landscape. Dahl was distressed by the idea that the specific objects would be lost in institutional translation and become incongruent by the transposition to the museum, but he was even more worried about their sites being subjected to neutralization. Affiliating himself with the antiquarian, he evoked the perspective of the historian when he claimed that one

Uddrag af et Brev fra Prof. J. C. Dahl i Dresden.

De kjender mig som en Ven af Historien og en Branslet af Oldtiden, især med Hensyn paa mit Fædreland, og jeg maa i et til disse Gjenstande henhørende Anliggende udbede mig efterfølgende Ehmier optagne i den Constitutionelle.

Jeg er ifølge min nysnævnte Interesse for den fædrelandske Oldtid altsaa ogsaa Antiquitetstiebhaver, men dog paa en anden, og saa at sige mere conservativ Maade, end dette Tiebhaberis nu synes at forfølges i Norge, hvor det forekommer mig, at man forstyrres og confunderer Oldtidsminderne for at flabe Musæer. Musæer ere priidværdige Indretninger, naar man kun ikke glemmer, at de ere til for Oldtidsmindernes Skjold, ikke Oldtidsminderne for Musæernes. Medens man dandier Bergens Commandant Eske Bilde, og med Dette kalder ham en Barbar, fordi han lod nedrive Christtirken i Bergen og forstyrre Kongernes Begravelse, saa at der ei blev Spor af dem tilbage (hvortil han dog havde sine politiske Grunde) — betænker man ikke, at man nu til Dags, selv idet man troer at arbejde i Videnskabens og Kunstens Interesse, begaaer en Vandallisme, der ikke er stort ringere. Thi paa samme Tid, som man paa den ene Side bestræber sig for at bevare, forstyrres man ofte paa den anden Side ligesaa meget. Man gennemroder de noeste Kjæm-

8. Fragment from J.C. Dahl's letter published in the newspaper *Den Constitutionelle*, December 28, 1843.

should "take note of the precise historical connection between these funerary objects and the ground upon which they are found. This classic plot of earth, which one after a short time will seek in vain, can often be of just as great weight for the chronologist as the object excavated." This insight is crucial to Dahl's reflection on landscape as museum and as a locus of preservation. The launching of nature as a kind of open-air museum in which the burial mounds serve as miniature museums is a strategy to counter the fragmentation induced by institutional musealization.

Within his famous exposition of figures connecting museums with death, Quatremère de Quincy presented a remarkable metaphor. He compared the museum's fragmentation of totalities and the relocation of monuments to mausoleums robbed of their graves, as twofold empty cenotaphs, spectacularly summed up as "tombs that are no longer animated by death."¹⁸ The idea that museums kill culture "forms a universal doxa of modern philosophy," Didier Maleuvre observes in his comprehensive discussion on this particular doxa's many guises through the history of the modern museum.¹⁹ The extensive tradition of associating museums with death, and the recurrent bemoaning on how the museum's artificial and

neutralizing space kills art and artifacts by detaching them from a supposedly original context evokes, however, exactly a *metaphorical* landscape of graveyards, tombs, sepulchers, and so on.

The fertile metaphorical depot of life and death still haunting the discourse on museums was clearly at work in Dahl's 1843 reflection. The figurative aspects of this seductive rhetoric were intensified by the fact that the museological process in dispute could in fact also be regarded as grave robbery. Alluding to the desecrating appropriation of "the possessions of the defenseless dead," which should, according to Dahl, "be regarded with reverence," he announced a dramatic *memento mori*. "Death is stalking them in return," he warned those who showed "contempt for the dead and for the memory of departed times and persons." More notable than this slightly eccentric cursing of archaeologists as well as treasure hunters is the reverberation of Quatremère's double emptied grave veiled in his pondering. For "so greedy are men that they even stalk their dead while these are still living," Dahl claims, echoing the notion of the intact grave as organically anchored in a living history, and which could not be dismantled without detriment to its aesthetic and historical significance. Thus, Dahl brings the museum closer to the grave than a metaphorical conflation of these two spaces can achieve. In a striking inversion, he turned the image of the museum into a graveyard by designating the concrete grave as a museum of its hidden vestiges of the past, in a literal sense—as a means of preservation.

Author Biography

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Endnotes

¹ "Udrag af et Brev fra Prof. J. C. Dahl i Dresden," *Den Constitutionelle*, December 28, 1843. All further Dahl quotations will be from this document, translated by the author.

² The status of the Norwegian burial mounds within the topographical literature of the eighteenth century is described by Anne Eriksen in her recent study *Topografenes verden: Fornminner og fortidsforståelse* (Oslo, Norway: Pax forlag, 2007).

³ The finest historiographical contribution to the founding of nineteenth-century Norwegian museums of art and science, contextualized within a European horizon, is still the archaeologist Haakon Shetelig's *Norske museers historie* (Oslo, Norway: Cappelen forlag, 1944).

⁴ Signed R. Keyser, Frich, Nebelong, C. Holst, and Flintoe in Christiania, December 20, 1945. *Foreningen til Norske Fortidsmindemærkers Forening. Aarsberetning for 1845* (Christiania, Norway: Fabritius 1846).

⁵ "§1, Love for Foreningen til Norske Fortidsmindemærkers Bevaring" (Vedtagne i Generalforsamling den 16de December 1844.)

⁶ Dahl's contribution to the appropriation of the Norwegian mountains as aesthetic objects was exhibited as "Oppdagelsen av fjellet," at the Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design, in Oslo 2008, and is discussed in Nils Messel's catalog essay "Discovering the Mountains." Ingebjørg Ydstie's article "Dahls fornemmelse av terreng" (Kistefosmuseet, Norway: Labyrinth Press, 2000) sheds light on the geological implications of Dahl's oeuvre.

⁷ The reception of Dahl's production as exemplary of national romanticism was consolidated in the art historian Andres Aubert's two influential studies, *Professor Dahl: Et stykke av aarhundredets kunst—og kulturhistorie* (1893) and *Den nordiske naturfølelse og Professor Dahl: Hans kunst og dens stilling i aarhundredets utvikling* (1894). Current publications that argue for Dahl's art as constituting a specific Norwegian landscape include Øivind Storm-Bjerke's catalog "Farm and Waterways: Telemark Typologies" (Oslo, Norway: Kunstnernes Hus, 1998), Magne Malmanger's "På sporet av den norske natur," in *Johan Christian Dahl* (Kistefos-Museet: Labyrinth Press, 2000), and Rune Slagstad's "When the Mountains Were Formed," in *Oppdagelsen av fjellet*, ed. Nils Messel (Oslo, Norway: Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design, 2008).

⁸ This marks the horizon for one of the rare comments on Dahl's objections to the excavations, suggested by Hans-Emil Lidén in his monograph on the first chief civil servant for antiquities in Norway. See Lidén, *Nicolay Nicolaysen: Et blad av norsk kulturminneverns historie* (Oslo, Norway: Abstrakt forlag, 2005), 98.

⁹ *Foreningen til Norske Fortidsmindemærkers Forening: Aarsberetning for 1845*. (Christiania: Fabritius, 1846).

¹⁰ See especially "Troisième lettre" in Quatremère de Quincy, *Lettres au Général Miranda* (1796) in *Considérations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l'art* (1815; repr., Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1989), 207.

¹¹ This impossible dichotomy is acutely deconstructed in Didier Maleuvre's historical demonstration of how the romantic tradition of museum critique dating back to Quatremère de Quincy "instills the notion that the work of art inhabited its time and space immediately, like a tree in the forest." Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press 1999), 74.

¹² Quatremère de Quincy, *Lettres au Général Miranda*, 242.

¹³ Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1994), 16.

¹⁴ Dubbini, *Geography of the Gaze: Urban and Rural Vision in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2002), 84.

¹⁵ For a compelling study of museums of natural history, see Carla Yanni, *Nature's Museum: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, trans. Lauren M. O'Connell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 87.

¹⁷ The multifaceted material by which Bann interprets this historical-mindedness is given a most pregnant expression in his tropological reading of the Musée des Petits-Augustins and the Musée de Cluny in Paris. See "Poetics of the Museum: Lenoir and Du Sommerard," in *The Clothing of Clío: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹⁸ "Que me disent ces mausolees sans sépulture, ces cénotaphes doublement vides, ces tombeaux que la mort n'anime plus?" Quatremère de Quincy, *Considérations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l'art*, 48.

¹⁹ Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, 20.