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Bastian Dahl: Academic Networking Outside Academia

Since the foundation of Norway's first university in 1811, classics has been an important part of Norwegian academia. The history of Norwegian classical scholarship, however, has received relatively little attention from researchers, and minimal literature exists on Norway's first classical scholars. One such scholar was Bastian Anastasius Dahl (1851–1895), a gifted Latinist who was expelled from academia on apparently dubious grounds and died at the age of just 43. Dahl produced several highly regarded works and, as recent archival research has revealed, created a vast international network of classical scholars, in stark contrast to his Norwegian contemporaries. In this article, I use my archival findings to shed light on this overlooked, yet illustrative chapter of Norwegian academic history, employing Dahl as a case study from a less canonical area of classical scholarship.

Keywords: history of classical scholarship; 19th-century philology; Norwegian classical scholarship; transnationality; archival research

In modern academia, scholars are constantly reminded of the importance of developing international networks and reaching out to international audiences. While this phenomenon might seem particular to the modern context, this article explores the academic life of a 19th-century scholar whose career was characterised by his active use of networking¹ and in-

¹ In this article, I adhere to the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of 'networking' as 'the action or process of making use of a network of people for the exchange of information, etc., or for professional or other advantage.' OED (2023).

ternational outreach. This scholar was Bastian Dahl, a relatively young classicist on the periphery of late-19th-century academia who nevertheless created a network of well-established classicists from across Europe and the United States and whose academic works received international attention and acclaim.

I wish to use Dahl as a case study to examine not only the history of Norwegian classical scholarship but also the relationship that could exist between a scholar from a small university and international, established academia in the late 19th century. To do so, I focus here on three elements of Dahl's international career: his correspondence with foreign academics, his distribution of his academic publications to foreign scholars and the reception these publications received abroad. The material presented is the result of ongoing archival research and has not been previously published. Before presenting and analysing this archival material, however, I will first seek to provide some key historical context regarding both Norwegian history, in general, and Dahl's life, in particular.

In the latter half of the 19th century, Norway had only one university, *Det Kongelige Frederiks Universitet* (now the University of Oslo), established in 1811. The second Norwegian university, the University of Bergen, would not be founded until 1946. This rather sparse academic landscape must be placed against the backdrop of Norway's political situation at this point. Having been, since 1537, in a real union with Denmark, during which time Copenhagen had been the seat of power, Norway was forced in 1814 into a personal union with Sweden as a result of the Napoleonic Wars. This union would last until 1905. Consequently, Norway's political, economic, cultural, and academic standing was far lower than those of its Scandinavian neighbours during Dahl's lifetime. Humanist fields not directly related to Norwegian culture, including classics, in particular, were increasingly regarded as being of lower importance, and classical philology had no more than two profes-

sors and a handful of students at any point in the century. The university's classical scholars, moreover, wrote almost exclusively in Norwegian or Latin (if they published at all) and rarely travelled abroad – at least before Dahl entered the picture.

Bastian Anastasius Dahl was born in 1851 in Molde, a small town in the northwest of Norway. He studied classical philology at *Det Kongelige Frederiks Universitet* from 1868 to 1874, during which time he also attended lectures at the University of Copenhagen from 1870 to 1871. In 1875, he became a teacher at *Aars og Voss' latin- og realskole*, one of Christiania's most highly regarded secondary schools. While teaching, he received travel scholarships from the university to attend lectures at several European universities: first in Leipzig, Bonn, Rome, and Naples in 1877–78; then in Berlin, at the Sorbonne and *Collège de France* and in Leiden in 1881–82. While Norwegian students in general were encouraged to study abroad in this period, Norwegian classicists had, up until this point, largely remained at home.

In the same period, Dahl wrote a 300-page thesis in German titled *Die lateinische Partikel VT* ['The Latin Particle *ut*'], which was awarded His Royal Highness the Crown Prince's gold medal for an excellent academic thesis in 1880. The exact context of this work is rather nebulous, as Dahl was not working at the university at the time, nor was it a doctoral thesis. In 1885, Dahl published another academic work, *Zur Handschriftenkunde und Kritik des ciceronischen Cato major* ['On Manuscript Studies and Critique of the Ciceronian Cato the Elder'], based on his studies and archival research in Paris and Leiden.

In the same year, Dahl was appointed to a research fellowship at *Det Kongelige Frederiks Universitet*, a position intended to develop promising young scholars and prepare them for careers as academics. After only one year, however, in 1886, he left this position, without having written a PhD thesis or achieved a doctorate by other means. For the remaining

nine years of his life, he worked as an archivist and private tutor of classical languages.

For the time being, I cannot verify the reason for Dahl's premature departure from the university. According to one article written 30 years after his death, he was let go because of 'a vice not unknown in antiquity',² most likely a euphemism for homosexuality. I have not, however, been able to locate any earlier sources, primary or secondary, to corroborate this claim. On the other hand, professor of economics and statistics Ebbe Hertzberg was forced to leave his position at the same university for this exact reason, also in 1886:³ it is not implausible that Dahl suffered the same fate.

Although Dahl had – whether of his own volition or not – left academia, he subsequently published several more works, including two books in Norwegian on the history of Latin literature: in 1889, *Latinsk litteraturhistorie for gymnasier og filologiske studerende. På grundlag av Onorato Occioni: Storia della letteratura latina* ['Latin literary history for secondary schools and students of philology. Based on Onorato Occioni: Storia della letteratura latina'], a 500-page outline directed at students; and in 1891, *Tabellarisk oversigt over den latinske litteraturs historie* ['Tabular overview of the history of Latin literature'], a shorter overview of the same topic. The writing of both of these in Norwegian, rather than German, is a strong indication that Dahl was no longer targeting an international audience, a decision which could be connected to his departure from the university. As will be seen below, however, this did not prevent his works from being read abroad. In 1895, Dahl died after suffering a stroke at his desk at the National Archives, aged 43.⁴

² SMITH (1925: 126).

³ SVENDSEN (2009).

⁴ Dahl's biography is treated more extensively (in Norwegian) in PARELIUS (1952) and THOMLE (1919: 69–74). For Dahl's full bibliography, including works not discussed in this article, see THOMLE (1919: 72–74).

Even without examining Dahl's publications and the relevant archival material in depth, we can begin to sketch out the image of a Latinist with interests ranging from literary history to linguistics. We can also see that, at least at the beginning of his career, he targeted an international audience by writing in an 'international' language – a choice possibly influenced by his studies abroad. To acquire a better understanding, however, of the three elements of interest named above, namely Dahl's correspondence with foreign academics, his distribution of his academic publications to foreign scholars and the reception these publications received abroad, it is necessary to investigate his archives.

All of the archival material treated in this article is held by the *Romsdalsmuseet* in Molde, Norway. This archive includes a total of 31 boxes of material from Dahl's life, ranging from his old schoolbooks, photo albums and diplomas to book manuscripts, letters, and newspaper clippings. A substantial part of this material consists of letters, which clearly show that Dahl communicated with peers in both Europe and the US and that not only was he a well-known and respected figure in academic circles, but his work was read and reviewed by numerous prominent philologists in the international research community. Furthermore, while I do not wish to speculate extensively regarding Dahl's thoughts and motivations, there are several aspects which indicate that he actively worked to maintain and expand this network.

The letters in Dahl's archive were written in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, English, German, French, Italian and Latin between 1875 and 1892, and they came from Norway, elsewhere in Europe and the US. Their linguistic range may offer another indication that Dahl sought to create a wide international network. The letters also span a broad range of tone and content, from the formal to the private. An important subcategory is that of correspondence between Dahl and his peers, several of whom were fellow students from his travels abroad in the 1870s. While

Whether Dahl consciously created this network in order to gain something from it – such as positive reviews in international journals – or whether it was simply a result of having spent time abroad and wishing to maintain contact with friends and colleagues is not a point on which I wish to speculate.⁵ There is, however, another subcategory of letters which more clearly indicates Dahl's active efforts to make connections with foreign colleagues and academic institutions, namely the many letters of thanks he received from scholars and institutions who had received copies of his publications. It is clear from the letters that these were copies which Dahl himself had distributed.

For example, after the publication of his thesis on *ut*, Dahl received letters from several classical scholars thanking him for sending them copies of the thesis. These included two of his former lecturers, Eugène Benoist, professor at the Sorbonne, and Hermann Usener, professor at the University of Bonn, both highly respected and influential philologists. Usener, in particular, is highly complimentary of Dahl's work, remarking that he has made great progress from his student days in Bonn.⁶

Dahl was, notably, rather tactical in his choice of which publications to send to which scholars. This becomes clear when comparing the recipients of his *ut* thesis and his *Latinsk litteraturhistorie*. The former work was sent to Norwegian and foreign academics, often those with tenured positions at prominent European universities. The latter,

⁵ It is also important to note that only one side of the correspondence, that received by Dahl, is stored in this archive. Therefore, at least some degree of speculation is necessary to piece together the various conversations reflected.

⁶ 'Geehrter herr, heute ist mir Ihre grosse untersuchung über ut zugekommen, und ich greife unter dem eindruck, den mir die durchsicht einer anzahl theils allgemeinerer theils spezieller kapitel gegeben, unwillkürlich zur feder, um Ihnen glück zu wünschen, zu der lichtvollen klarheit, mit der Sie einen so massenhaften stoff zu beherrschen und einen verwickelten knäuel von fragen zu entwirren verstanden haben. (...) Das Sie, seit Sie von uns geschieden, nicht gefeiert haben sondern in angestrengter arbeit gewachsen und erstarkt sind, das lehrt freilich Ihr buch selbst.' (USENER 1881: 1f.).

a literary history written in Norwegian, as noted above, and intended for students, was mainly distributed to Scandinavian headteachers and schoolteachers.

Although the majority of the letters of thanks among Dahl's papers are fairly informal and personal, some are more formal. For example, the archive includes two letters from the *Regia Università di Roma*, dating from 1889 and 1891, both signed by the university's rector, Valentino Cerruti, who thanks Dahl for sending the university his *Latinsk litteraturhistorie* and *Tabellarisk oversikt*, respectively. What benefit an Italian institution would derive from two books in Norwegian is uncertain. As its subtitle shows, however, the *Latinsk litteraturhistorie* was 'based on' Onorato Occioni's *Storia della letteratura latina compendiata ad uso dei licei* (1883). In 1889, Occioni was a professor of Latin at the *Regia Università di Roma*, so in that sense, Dahl's own volume is perhaps not such a surprising gift, especially given that the two scholars had, by this time, corresponded with one another for several years, as noted above. Nevertheless, this point does not explain why Dahl also sent the second book, the *Tabellarisk oversikt*, beyond the possibility that it may have felt only natural, having already sent his previous book on the history of Latin literature.

In all of these cases, it is not unlikely that Dahl distributed the copies of his books of his own accord. In the case of the university in Rome, this could suggest that he retained a desire for an academic career even after leaving his position at the university in Oslo in 1886. There is, however, at least one instance where Dahl had another reason for sharing his work in this manner, namely an explicit request.

In 1885, a student of letters in Paris named Alix wrote to the Grøndahl publishing house to enquire about Dahl's *ut* thesis.⁷ The publisher presumably forwarded the letter to Dahl – as it can now be found in his

⁷ ALIX (1885b).

archive – and Dahl must subsequently have sent the student a signed copy of his book. This can be inferred from a second letter from Alix, sent to Dahl directly, in which he expresses his gratitude. This second letter is particularly significant in that it provides a unique insight into interest in Dahl's work abroad: Alix describes how Dahl's work is not only read but also praised by his lecturers.⁸ It is, of course, possible that some polite flattery is involved, but Alix's words must contain at least some truth; otherwise, he would hardly have sought to obtain a copy in the first place. Not only, then, was Dahl interested in promoting his work internationally, but his work was indeed read and valued abroad, even within academic institutions as reputable as the Sorbonne.

A more tangible representation of Dahl's international reception is the array of reviews he received in foreign journals. An industrious archivist, Dahl compiled several scrapbooks in which he kept a full record of all of the responses his publications received, both in journals and in private letters. The photograph in Figure 1 shows the table of contents in the scrapbook containing the reviews of his *ut* thesis. The sources listed consist of a mixture of Scandinavian newspapers and journals, in addition to German, Austrian, American, French, and Belgian journals. There are, in total, 15 reviews in six different languages, all of which praise Dahl's skill and diligence. *Zur Handschriftenkunde und Kritik des ciceronischen Cato major* similarly received attention in several foreign, mainly German, journals (Figure 2). As in the case of the *ut* thesis, these reviews were decidedly positive.

One might imagine that Dahl's other publications, which were all written in Norwegian, were not read outside of Scandinavia. From yet another scrapbook in his archive, however, it is clear that the *Latinsk*

⁸ 'J'avais souvent entendu nos professeurs citer avec de grands éloges ce remarquable travail et je l'avais le moi-même avec un véritable intérêt. Je désirais beaucoup l'avoir eu la possession, mais je n'aurais jamais osé espérer le tenir de votre main.' ALIX (1885a: 1f.).

B. Anmædelser og Kritik af mine skrifter 1879-91 a-e.	
a Den latinske udtale 1879.	
1. J. Færevlandet 1879, af P. Aubert.	23
b. Zur Handschriftenkunde u. Kritik des ciceronischen Cato major I, 1885, II, 1886.	
1. J. Deutsche Literaturzeitung 1886, nr. 13, af H. Stangl. (I)	25
2. — — — 1887, nr. 11, — — — (II)	26
3. Berliner Philol. Wochenschrift 1887, nr. 10, af H. Deiters. (I)	27
4. Neue Philol. Rundschau 1887, nr. 5, af F. Zengeler. (I-II)	27
5. Raurians Jahresbericht af P. Schwanke. (I-II)	28
6. Wochenschr. f. klass. Philologie 1887, nr. 28, af W. Friedrich. (I-II)	29
7. Rivista di filologia IV (1887) 5-5. af F. Ramorino. (I-II)	30, a
8. Revue critique 1888, nr. 19, af L. Duval. (I-II)	30, b
9. — — — 1890, 7 (b. 125), af E. Thomas. (I-II)	30, c
10. Nordiskt Tidskrift f. Filologi. N. R. VII (1886-87), s. 255-56, af G. Jørgensen. (I)	
c. Udgave af Weisses Populære Forelesninger II, 1886.	
1. J. Dagbladet 1886, 446, af Jørgen Jørgensen.	31
2. Aftenposten 1886, 753, af Monstjerne.	32
3. Dagen 1886, 307, af Jørgen.	33
4. Tidning. Magasin 1886, 51, af E. Schjeth.	34
5. Hørmø. Tidende 1886, af K. Petersen.	34
6. Smøstenes Tidende 1886, 153, af Kroll.	35
7. Christ. Intelligens-tidende 1886, af n.	36
8. Stockholms Dagblad 1886, af n.	37
9. Bergens Aftenblad 1887, 2132, af Bauergaap.	37
10. Bergens Tidende 1887, af J. Schneider.	38

Figure 2. Table of contents in Bastian Dahl's scrapbook of responses to *Zur Handschriftenkunde und Kritik des ciceronischen Cato major* (i.a.) (DAHL 1894a: 2). Courtesy of Romsdalsmuseet; photograph by Victoria Mostue.

litteraturhistorie did indeed receive some attention in Finland, Germany, the UK, and France (Figure 3). Curiously, these reviews do not mention that the book is written in Norwegian. On the contrary, an anonymous writer in *The Classical Review* states that the *Latinsk litteraturhistorie* 'is worth the attention of English schoolmasters' – without mentioning the obvious language barrier.⁹ The same reviewer also suggests that Dahl is too modest when describing his book as based on Occioni's, pointing

⁹ CR (1889: 415).

Indhold.

A. Anmeldelser og kritik 1889- . a - c

a. Latinsk Litteraturhistorie. 1889: 1. Trykte i aviser og tidsskr.

1	"Hjst" 1889, (7/4) -	B. Morgenstjerne	3
2	"Dagbl." 1889, (2/5) -	A. Chr. Bang	5
3	"Intellig." 1889, (3/6) -	Gilboansen	6
4	"Kjøbenhavn" 1889, (7/4) -		
5	"Verd. Gang" 1889, (2/4) -	Ingens Hansen	7
6a	"Bergenspost" 1889, 16 (2/5) -		
6b	2 ^{de} gengivet i "Kongl. Bulet." 1889, 41 (25/5) -		
7	"Tijds. Hftenbl." 1889, (7/4) -	H. J. Richter	8
8a	"Politiken" 1889, (gæng. i "Hftenp." 1889, 604) -		9
8b	"Vor Dagblom" 1889, s. 172-78. -	H. L. Rommestrop	
9	"Litteratursk. tidskr." 18 . . . s. 371-74. -	H. J. Bentzen	10
10a	"Tidskr. tidskr." XXX (1890), 151-52 -	F. Gustafsson	"
10b	"Tidskr. utg. af Pöteborg, för i Söndag" 1891, 188, 34, 44 -	C. Spinnberg. (Gjengivet i "Hftenp." 1892, 27) -	11
11	"Wechschr. f. klass. Phil." 1890, nr. 13. -	H. B. Drachmann	11
12	"Deutsche Literaturzeitung" 1891, nr. 10 -	H. Bl. Gertz	12-13
13	"Neue philol. Rundschau" 1889, nr. 24. -	H. F. Schöder (Gj. Hftenp. 1891, 50) -	14
14a	"Centralorg. f. d. Inter. des Klassikernesens" XVIII (1890), 150-51. -	H. F. v. Lenz	15
14b	2 ^{de} gengivet i "Hftenp." 1890, 541, i "Dagbl." 1890,		"
14c	"Berliner Philologische Wochenschr." 1890, nr. 4, 1266-67. -	H. F.	
15	"Classical Review", III (1889), 9, 415.		16
16	"Italisch		"
17a	"Revue critique" 1889, nr. 32, s. 88-99. -		17
17b	2 ^{de} "gæng. i "Hftenp." 1889, (7/4) -	H. Berlin Child Wochenschr. 1889, nr. 39 (25/5) -	"
17c	"Revue de philologie" XIV, 1, s. 127-28 (18 . . .)		

Figure 3. Table of contents in Bastian Dahl's scrapbook of responses to the Latinsk litteraturhistorie (i.a.) (DAHL 1884b: 1). Courtesy of Romsdalsmuseet; photograph by Victoria Mostue.

out, for example, that Dahl's version is 200 pages longer.¹⁰ One of the French reviewers asserts, more explicitly, that Dahl's book is 'infinitely superior' to its Italian precursor.¹¹

One aspect of these reviews also highlights Dahl's propensity for networking: while there are several examples of reviewers who knew

¹⁰ Dahl himself underlines his independence from Occioni in the book's introduction. DAHL (1889: XI f.).

¹¹ Dosson (1889: 99).

Dahl before reviewing his work, the archive also includes material from correspondence initiated by Dahl after having been reviewed. In 1883, for instance, Dr Johannes Segebade gave Dahl's *ut* thesis a positive review in the *Philologische Rundschau* (see Figure 1, No. XI). Later that same year, Dahl received a letter from Segebade, thanking him for getting in touch and for suggesting the possibility of a personal acquaintance.¹² This may offer another indication that Dahl was eager to forge new connections in foreign academic circles and that he used reviews of his work as a means of accomplishing that goal.

Among his international contemporaries, all of Dahl's academic publications received relatively wide and decidedly positive attention. It is also clear that some academics regarded them not only as commendable but as useful tools for students, even abroad. It is remarkable that a young academic from an almost equally young university, lacking any particular initial reputation, received so much attention outside of Norway – even when writing in Norwegian – especially given that he held neither a doctorate nor a university position. This profile becomes still more extraordinary when we compare Dahl to other classical philologists in Norway in this period, as he appears to have enjoyed a far more international academic life than his Norwegian peers in terms of studies, publications, reception, and network.

I stated above my intention to use Dahl as a case study to examine the relationship between a small university and international and established academia in the late 19th century. What this case study shows is that it was indeed possible for a classicist from a peripheral nation such as Norway to create a name for himself outside his native country. We may also infer that it was desirable for a philologist to have such an international reputation, as it was something which Dahl appears to

¹² 'Die Aussicht auf eine persönliche Bekanntschaft, die Sie mir eröffnen'. SEGEBADE (1883: 1).

have strived to achieve. As this archival research is ongoing, however, there remain some unanswered questions surrounding the interaction between Dahl and international academia.

For example, considering his wide reach in contemporary academia, did Dahl have a lasting academic influence, either in Norway or abroad? There are some potential indications to this effect, including statements from later scholars¹³ and non-Norwegian academic publications which cite Dahl's work, even as late as the 21st century.¹⁴ To take another perspective, it is also currently unclear whether (or how far) Dahl's research was influenced by his many foreign trips and connections and consequently deviated from contemporary Norwegian scholarship. As we have seen, he appears to have deviated from his Norwegian peers in terms of his international connections and reception, but it is not equally clear how his research methods and interests coincided with those of Norwegian classicists.

Despite these unanswered questions, it is evident that Bastian Dahl's life and work shed valuable light on the history of classical scholarship from a geographically peripheral and institutionally marginalised perspective. While it is important to emphasise that Dahl is not, in several ways, a typical representative of Norwegian classical philology, it is nevertheless inescapable that he and his archive offer unique insights into how a classicist from the academic outskirts worked in the late 19th century. His case forms, therefore, an important chapter in the history of both Norwegian and international classical philology.

¹³ E.g. PARELIUS (1952: 55).

¹⁴ E.g. KREBS (2023: 182); PINKSTER (2021: 299, n. 112); CABAÑEROS (2010: 514); FLECK (2008: 437); BODELOT (2003: 337; 340; 341 *inter alia*).

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