

# Schleswig Holstein

– contested region(s) through history



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and  
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# Introduction

*Michael Bregnsbo & Kurt Villads Jensen*

Schleswig and Holstein have been contested regions for more than thousand years, but contested between different peoples and groups, and for very different reasons. In modern times, they have been closely connected to the building up of national identity and the formation of the modern nation state, and the number of publications on Schleswig and Holstein is overwhelming and has reached both a scholarly and a more general public far outside the boundaries of the two regions. Since the division of Schleswig into a northern, Danish part called Sønderjylland (Southern Jutland) in Danish and a southern, German part in 1920, called Schleswig, even if it geographically comprises only Southern Schleswig, this region has also been an interesting example for international studies on whether it is gradually possible to maintain regional cultural and economic cooperation across a modern state border, and on the rights and duties of linguistic minorities.

*Schleswig Holstein – contested region(s) through history* builds upon the strong tradition in historical studies of these regions. These historical studies, however, have often, but not always, been nationally biased, having had the implicit agenda of proving that either Denmark or Germany was in the right in the ongoing Dano-German national antagonism. As a result the two territories have been viewed from either a Danish or a German nation-state perspective, not as regions in their own right. Although reports of the death of the nation-state in politics, society and historiography may be exaggerated, in recent decades historiography has seen a growing focus on entities above or below the nation-state as worthwhile subjects of study in themselves, just as there has been increasing criticism of the tendency in much history writing to view the nation-state as the end result of history's (supposed) evolutionary process and consequently describe the preceding development teleologically in relation to it. Thus, *Schleswig Holstein – contested region(s) through history* aims to view the areas in their own right, not as appendages to current and later Danish and German nation-building

and nation states. This does not, of course, imply that they are seen as isolated entities, still less that the regions around them and many strong and varied influences from outside are ignored. Neither does it mean to deny that throughout history Schleswig and Holstein have indeed been contested regions, situated where different interests and forces have collided. Dano-German national antagonisms have certainly taken place here and have had a great impact on both Danish and German nation states and national history, but these national antagonisms are only some of the many reasons that Schleswig and Holstein have been contested places through history: indeed, national antagonisms are a phenomenon of relatively recent date in a region with a history of more than a thousand years.

The volume does not purport to be a comprehensive study of the history of Schleswig and Holstein in general, but aims to be a collection of articles that extend across an extended chronological period and which will together stimulate a discussion about the different reasons why Schleswig and Holstein have been contested. It is a volume that combines two research areas, both of which reflect the new historiographical tendency not to “overfocus” on nation states but to widen the perspective both inwardly and outwardly and avoid the danger of a teleological approach, work in which the two editors have been involved for many years. One concerns *spatiality*,<sup>1</sup> the other *regions* in a comparative European perspective. The latter was the topic of the EuroCORECODE project *Cuius Regio*, financed by the European Science Foundation 2010–2013, in which Michael Bregnsbo and Kurt Villads Jensen were the Danish participants.<sup>2</sup>

Space is always contested. This is one of the important implications of recent conceptualizing of spatiality and materiality. To earlier generations of historians and geographers, space could be understood solely in physical and geographical terms, and each single space would be definable within relatively precise borders and would be unique – different from all other spaces.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, space became increasingly considered a social construct – or, from another perspective, the idea of space

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1 Which is one of the profile areas of the Institute for History, University of Southern Denmark; see Magnussen (2013).

2 See <http://www.cuius-regio.eu/> (accessed 2 September 2014).



as a world that should be lived and perceived by the senses had been distorted by being measured and defined.<sup>3</sup> Instead, there was a growing interest in how human individuals ascribe meaning to space and change the material elements within it in order to change the symbolic value and the significance of it. Space is turned into place, as Yi-Fu Tuan famously put it in 1977.<sup>4</sup> People living in a landscape, or striving to gain control over it, have fought with diverse means, from legislation to architecture to art, to give it a specific imprint, to make it Christian instead of pagan, royal instead of ducal, Danish instead of German, etc. The invocation of a historical past legitimizing the present has been an integrated element in securing power over a space, be it through the erection of monuments, through ritualized behaviour referring back in time, or by other similar means.<sup>5</sup>

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has been stressed more and more often that mutually exclusive interpretations of the same space can exist contemporaneously and side by side, often for a long time without influencing each other. Space is now considered the frame around diverse and often conflicting interpretations. To different individuals, the same space can convey a totally different meaning. Or, to put it another way: no space has any single identity but each is defined by the sum of human activities, so space is a continuous process of creating and re-creating.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, in our present context, the main focus will not be on deciding whether Schleswig and Holstein have been mainly characterized by one or another identity, but to demonstrate how the region has always been contested and the subject of ardent discussion between different groups of individuals – but for different reasons throughout time. [And national antagonisms have, seen in the long perspective, been a point of contest of relatively recent date. While looking at our region from a long-term perspective, it will become clear that national antagonisms have been a point of contest only at a relatively recent date.

Schleswig-Holstein can be considered a region, or the combination of two or more regions, but the two landscapes can also be understood

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3 Donohoe (2014), pp. 2-3.

4 Space as concept, see Tuan (1974); Tuan (1977); Tuan (1995)

5 On creating remembrance of history through ritualized behaviour, see Connerton (1989); Schechner (2002).

6 Castells (1996), pp. 412-423; Magnussen (2013), p. 11-12, referring to Massey (2005).

as only a part of a larger region. As was the case with the concept of 'space', the definition of 'region' has also been discussed and changed over time. The etymology of the word stems from the Latin 'regere', to rule or to command. It may therefore originally have been understood as a unit which is subject to a ruler from outside, or at least one which is not independent, but it may also simply mean an area within certain boundaries, an area that can be defined. These two aspects of the word conflated in early modern and modern usage, so that region became simply an administrative unit.<sup>7</sup>

Within geography, it became common in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to talk about 'natural regions'. They could either be defined by natural borders such as water, mountains, dense forests or deserts, or they could be characterized by common ecology, common natural resources, or by being a centre of different lines of communication. This kind of definition has been taken over by many historians as a convenient and almost self-explanatory concept, on the assumption that an area with a common geography would also have a common history.

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'historical region' was coined as a concept to cover a meso-region, which over a long period of time is characterised by an individual cluster of social, economic, cultural and political structures and which is larger than a single state yet smaller than a continent, such as Scandinavia or the Balkans, to use the definition of Stefan Troebst.<sup>8</sup> In practice, however, many historians have designated much smaller entities historical regions when they have felt able to locate a common, deeply rooted identity among the inhabitants, a sense of a common history or old and well established common institutions. Such regions are not only a physically defined area, but space that is lived and experienced by individuals.<sup>9</sup> These historical regions have sometimes been divided by modern state borders, but not always.

'Functional regions' are defined by their shared functions in, for example, economic or political matters. They may be linked to physical space, but with technological development of communication and

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7 Reclus (1885-1887) may be one of the first to use 'region' as a geographical administrative term to designate the units of which a modern nation state is composed.

8 Troebst 2003, p. 173.

9 Exemplified in the concept introduced by Fremont (1976): *espaces vécus*, experienced space.

with globalization, they can become more and more virtual and transcend geographical and national boundaries.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of regions has become more changeable in recent years, as has the broader concept of space. There is a tension – which is not always made explicit – between scholars who try to define and fixate the characteristics of a region, and those who study the fluctuations over time in the elements they have chosen to define a given region. Raimo Väyrynen has expressed the problem in this way: “Our regional images are often based on unexamined and outdated metageographical conceptions of the world – a perspective dubbed the “jigsaw-puzzle view” that assumes that discrete, sharply bounded, static continental units fit together in an unambiguous way. Yet, the world is not structured in such a neat manner; on the contrary, regions disappear and reappear as they are transformed by various economic, political, and cultural factors.” Or, he continues, scholars simply leave the concept undefined: “Scholars in history and political science seem to think that they will know a region when they see one.”<sup>11</sup>

Concepts are contested, as are regions themselves. The present collection intends to contribute to a theoretical and conceptual development. Its main purpose, however, is to present some of the many arguments that over time have been produced in discussions about the status and identity of the regions of Schleswig and Holstein and thereby also to illustrate how multi-faceted the concept of region is in practice. Different themes are presented within a broad chronological frame to enable comparison across time and between more academic disciplines. The articles were first read and discussed at a conference at University of Southern Denmark in Odense, 5–6 November 2012, and later substantially revised.

The book opens with an introduction by Steen Bo Frandsen that places the regions of Schleswig and Holstein in a historical context and gives an overview of some of the questions that have been contested over time.

The two following articles, by Inge Adriansen and Jelena Steigerwald, describe in more detail how history, historical monuments and historical heritage have been used in the 19th and 20th centuries in

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10 See Väyrynen (2003).

11 Väyrynen (2003), pp. 25–26.

Schleswig and the Danish–German borderland in the fight for identity and for ownership of the region.

The next two articles, by Oliver Auge and Mikkel Venborg Pedersen, present and discuss dynastic issues in the Middle Ages and in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively. They are followed by the article by Hans Schultz Hansen on economic and social interests and choice of identity in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

The following two articles, by Carsten Jahnke and Michael Bregnsbo, concern the question of national issues, national conflicts, and nationalism; the first in the Middle Ages, the second in 1848. The following article by Andres Minos Dobat concerns the impressive fortification of Dannevirke and mentions its enormous significance as a national symbol in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it primarily analyses the military importance of Dannevirke in the Viking Age and the Middle Ages.

Practical, administrative and religious aspects on a regional level are the focus of the next four articles. The first article, by Jesper L. Boldsen, Kaare Lund Rasmussen and Lilian Skytte, investigates the health and mobility of the inhabitants in Schleswig from chemical analyses of skeletons. Kirsi Salonen and Per Seesko write about the church administration in the Middle Ages and after the Reformation, and Martin Krieger presents the peculiar status of Heligoland in Early Modern times.

The book finishes with two articles about some further implications of the centuries-long contest for Schleswig–Holstein. Rasmus Glenthøj discusses the implication of the loss of the regions in 1864 for Danish history writing and self-understanding, and Jes Fabricius Møller its significance for the Danish monarchy as an institution.

Schleswig and Holstein have been contested regions for more than a thousand years, conceivably much longer. This has been so for different reasons, and the fight for controlling and defining the regions has been military, legal, ideological and economic. Since 1945 the Dano–German antagonisms in Schleswig–Holstein in particular and on the nation state level in general have seen a gradual *détente*. The declarations of Bonn and Copenhagen in 1955 have to a large extent solved the national minority problems on both sides of the Dano–German border and those arrangements are often depicted as an ideal model for the solution of national minority problems, one worthy of imitation by others. However, this development in Schleswig–Holstein should

be seen as the result of a long, troublesome and often bloody history, experiences that have had a long-term impact on both parties, not something which can be immediately transferred to other areas in the world currently troubled by national antagonisms. That said, it cannot be denied that former antagonisms have in many respects been overcome today. Thus, in 2011, the city of Flensburg, the largest city in Schleswig, has elected a mayor from the Danish minority party, and since 2012 the German *Land* of Schleswig-Holstein has had a centre-left regional coalition government in which the Danish minority party is having a couple of ministerial offices.

Furthermore, the party of the Danish minority in Schleswig and the corresponding party of the German minority in Denmark are both increasingly expounding themselves not as national minority parties but as regional Schleswigian parties preserving a distinct Schleswigian identity (including both Danish and German speakers) and cultural heritage. This certainly suggests national reconciliation but it has also to do with a new scene for Schleswig-Holstein and the Danish Sønderjylland being a contested place. Both are geographically situated in the periphery of Denmark and Germany respectively and feeling neglected and disregarded in many respects, e.g. regional economic development, political and administrative centralisation. The national political parties of Denmark and Germany respectively are seen by both the Danish-minded and the German-minded population of Sønderjylland and Schleswig-Holstein as acting primarily on a national agenda with too little attention to the special economic, social and cultural problems of their region. Thus, the outlines of a new apple of discord concerning Schleswig-Holstein can be seen, a centre-periphery one where centralisation is the problem and regionalisation is seen as the solution.<sup>12</sup>

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