Tourism, Im/mobility and the University Collections in Norway, 1870–1914

Ulrike Spring

Abstract: This article explores the cultural collections at Det Kongelige Frederiks Universitet in Christiania (now Oslo) from the perspective of German-language tourists between the 1870s and 1914. It takes for its starting point the early history of tourism and museum collections as a story of the entanglement of the mobile and the immobile, of movement and stoppage. It argues that examining this entanglement provides insight into the complex processes of nation-building, which are formed in an interplay between tourist ascriptions and national self-images. Moreover, the museum objects’ spatial relations – the location and context in which they were exhibited – had a decisive impact on their perception and interpretation. Using guidebooks and travelogues as primary sources, the article discusses four of the most popular collections: the Viking ships, stave church portals, Sámi artefacts and objects brought back from the Gjøa expedition, in particular artefacts made by the Netsilingmiut/Nattilik.

Keywords: Museum collections, tourism, mobility, immobility, Norway, Viking ships, stave churches, Sámi culture, Netsilingmiut/Nattilik culture, German-language regions.

In 1881, the German judge and travel writer Ludwig Passarge wrote in the first edition of his popular travelogue Drei Sommer in Norwegen: “The tourist does not visit Norway for the sake of its collections” (1881:42). In his 34-page chapter on cultural and natural sights in and around Christiania (now Oslo), he dedicated less than a page to the cultural collections at Det Kongelige Frederiks Universitet, Norway’s only university at the time and keeper of extensive cultural and natural history collections. Likewise, the prestigious guidebook Baedeker stated in its first German edition on Sweden and Norway, published in 1879, that the main attractions in Sweden were the cities and in Norway its nature (Baedeker 1879:xvii). Visiting museums was not the top priority for tourists, and even though the cities
of Christiania, Bergen and Trondheim boasted a growing number of rich museum collections, they could not compete with the spectacular beauty of Norway’s nature. At the same time, as a look at late nineteenth-century guidebooks and travelogues reveals, this perspective needs to be nuanced, as tourists flocked to see Viking and Sámi artefacts, and in general displayed much interest in Norwegian culture. This tied in with the active Norwegian nation-building processes at the time and the significant role cultural heritage played in this. If one seeks insights into the formation of national culture in transnational as well as international encounters and into the role museum collections played in this process, the concise notes and short descriptions of museums and collections mentioned in guidebooks and travelogues are an outstanding source. While there is some research on nineteenth-century tourism to Norway from the German-speaking regions (e.g. Fojuth 2018, Spring 2017, Spode 2010) and on the role Norwegian museums played in nation-building processes (e.g. Eriksen 2009), in this article I wish to combine these two approaches. My argument is that an examination of their interconnections allows for a deeper understanding of how and why specific images of Norway developed.

Travel texts provide insight into another typical feature of the nineteenth century, that of increased mobility. From a European perspective, this was a century of rapid changes in transport and communication technologies. Improved infrastructure such as upgraded roads and new hotels, steamships and railways, as well as advanced printing technologies, helped a burgeoning tourism industry to open up Norway to a growing number of visitors. The new leisure industry benefitted from global mobility driven by Western imperialistic ventures as well as the rise of the nation as a principal concept of societal organisation.

In this article, I am particularly interested in physical movement across space: tourists moved from place to place during their journey; artefacts had been moved from their original place to the museum. However, as mobility research has emphasised in recent years, the mobile always entails the immobile (for a useful overview, see Lambert and Merriman 2020): in the decades before and after 1900, the nomadic Sámi encountered difficulties when crossing the state borders in Northern Fennoscandia; the mobile tourists stopped at various places on their tour, looking for the special or unique; museum artefacts, which had been gathered from places outside Christiania, were assigned a place in the museum storage, with their now previous mobility being reduced to a memory expressed in labels or guides. Movement always goes hand in hand with constraints, breaks and stoppages.

In line with Lambert and Merriman (2020:10), I wish to “overcome binaries of mobility/immobility”, and will work on the presumption that the early history of tourism and public museums is a story of the entanglement of the mobile and the immobile. I argue that by examining this entanglement, one gains insight into the complex processes of nation making, which take place on the border between tourist ascriptions and national self-images. The nineteenth century is particularly productive as a starting point, as nation- and museum-building as well as tourism as a mass phenomenon were in the early stages of development. In order to make my project feasible, I will concentrate on tourism to Norway by German-language tourists and examine in what ways it contributed to the creation of the vision of Norway’s cultural heritage. How did travel writers perceive the prestigious cultural
university collections in Christiania from the 1870s until 1914? I will employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches: I have looked through numerous guidebooks and travelogues with the aim of discovering the most popular cultural artefacts in the university collections between the 1870s and 1914, and I examine these collections of objects from the vantage point of the mobile and the immobile. They are “in transit” (Jallo 2023) and intersect with other objects and collections, with the geographical and cultural spaces of their origin and their onward journey, with storage place and exhibition design. In doing so, I draw on a long tradition of studies on the museum object as a node in a network and as having its own biography (e.g. Treimo et al. 2023; Mordhorst 2009).

As Maurstad and Hauan (2012:18) note, museums have the power to produce as well as to change realities – and, one may add, university museums even more so because of the authority given to expertise. Their collections are intricately connected with European colonial and imperial undertakings as well as nation-building processes. The artefacts became ‘tools of nation building’, to adapt Daniel R. Headrick’s useful concept of “tools of empire” (1981). As the following analysis shows, the various objects interacted with a variety of spaces such as the local space of Christiania, the national space of Norway, the traveller’s place of origin, and the transnational tourist space created by the tourism industry, including guidebooks and travelogues.

**Norway as tourist destination**

From the 1840s onwards, the number of travellers from the German-speaking countries to Norway steadily increased. In the 1860s and particularly the 1870s, organised tours were introduced, and from 1889 the German emperor Wilhelm II went on regular tours to Norway, with much attention in the German-speaking regions (Gammerlien 2010:76f). This rising interest in the North was reflected in the publication of the first editions of the popular guidebooks by Yngvar Nielsen (1874)3 and Baedeker (1879), in hundreds of travel reports in German-language newspapers and magazines, and in many travelogues in book form.

For my analysis, guidebooks have proven to be a particularly valuable source, as they aim to provide a comprehensive overview of destination cultures while making conscious choices about what sights to recommend. They offer information regarding opening hours and entrance fees and must be regularly updated to remain useful, making it possible to identify changes and continuities over time. Whilst the genres of guidebook and travelogue sometimes overlap, guidebooks are forward-looking, guiding the prospective visitor on what to see while assuming an objective and impartial stance. In contrast, travelogues are oriented toward the past: they recount individual experiences; and although they encourage visits to specific places, they do not claim objectivity and often hint at the author’s political, social and cultural beliefs. For the purposes of this article, however, the author’s voice is less relevant; rather, I am interested in the texts as historical tourist products, and in the extent to which and why they reflect variations in sightseeing over a period of 50 years. Interestingly, travelogues hardly mentioned the collections, with the exception of the Viking ships, although one can assume that travel writers went to see other collections as well. In contrast, guidebook reports on the collections became longer and more detailed throughout the period I am looking at – a change that ran
parallel to the expansion of the collections and the growth of tourism. Finally, it is important to remember that the collections German travel book writers deemed worthy of a visit tell us not only about contemporary notions of Norwegian culture, but also of German-language culture.

For many nineteenth-century tourists, Christiania was off the beaten track, and for most travellers the town’s beautiful location in the fjord and its environs were its main attractions. Many tourists to the North preferred the tour along Norway’s West coast or a visit to another Scandinavian capital. Cook’s guidebook on Norway, first published in German in 1898, dedicated one page to Christiania, in contrast to more than seven pages to Bergen (Cook’s Welt-Reisebureau 1898). In the same year, a sightseeing tour on a steamer to the Northern capitals included a stay of more than three days in both Stockholm and Copenhagen, with only 35 hours in Christiania (“Separat-Dampferfahrt” 1898:4). For many of the wealthy middle- and upper-class tourists who could afford a tour to the North at the time, knowledge of Nordic culture was part of their Bildung and their cultural capital. Suggested two-day itineraries for time-pressed travellers in Christiania usually included museum collections (e.g. Baedeker 1888:150), and there is a clear correlation between the growth of tourism, expanding European imperialism, intensified
Norwegian nation- and museum-building and heightened interest in the collections.

The university’s cultural collections consisted of three separate institutions: oldsaksamling (Nordic/Norwegian archaeological objects), opened to the public in 1829; the coin cabinet, opened in 1835; and the ethnographic museum, opened in 1857. The ethnographic collection contained artefacts collected abroad, Norwegian folk culture (in 1906 together with post-reformation artefacts from the oldsaksamling transferred to the newly opened open-air museum Norsk Folkemuseum) and Sámi culture (in the 1950s relocated to Norsk Folkemuseum). During the period I am looking at, the collections were exhibited in small rooms in the university buildings, before being moved in 1904 to the new imposing Historisk Museum (Fig. 1 & 2). Viking ships were placed in a shed outside the physical buildings, and rune stones were positioned in the garden; all of which rendered a different kind of experience from walking through small and stuffy exhibition rooms before the opening of the new museum with its halls and electric lighting.

The collections grew steadily through the nineteenth century and were adapted to curatorial interests and new theories. The
The oldsaksamling boasted a fine collection of stave church portals, which were brought to Christiania from other parts of the country. They were uprooted in two ways: first, they were taken off the churches they belonged to, and then they were moved to the capital. Falkenburg suggests that the appeal of the portals was “significantly overshadowed” once the Viking ships were discovered (2019:61). Although the popularity of the Viking ships was unrivalled indeed, a look through the guidebooks demonstrates that the portals in the German-speaking regions generated constant interest throughout the decades. One reason for this is that many German tourists were well acquainted with them before arriving in Norway. In 1841, the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm IV had with the help of an artist and professor in Dresden, Johan Christian Dahl, purchased and transferred a stave church to East Prussia in today’s Poland (Solbakken 2024:19f), four years after Dahl had published a major work on stave churches that introduced the churches to a larger European public (Bjordal 2024:57). Whilst the churches in the first decades of the nineteenth century were discussed as a phenomenon situated within an international context, in the second half of the century the focus shifted to their Norwegian character (Bjordal 2024:69f). They became more Norwegian, so to speak, in parallel with increased nation-building and a burgeoning tourism industry on the outlook for the unique in cultural heritage.

In its first edition, Baedeker (1879:153) called the carvings “impressive”, and later guidebook editions singled the portals out by awarding them a star, a sign used to mark sights of particular interest (e.g. Nielsen 1903:178; Baedeker:220; Norwegen 1914:262). Following mid-nineteenth century saw a shift from a focus on the aesthetic qualities of objects to their historical value. The life of ordinary people became important, and ethnographic and folklore collections rose in popularity towards the end of the century (see Miller 2017:ch. 8; Eriksen 2009:69, 72f). Parallel to the development of tourism as an industry in the second part of the nineteenth century, collections changed from being mainly study objects to becoming tourist attractions (Bouquet 1996:105f). Bouquet (1996:94) suspects a link between the nationalist atmosphere around 1905, when Norway gained political independence, and the doubling of the ethnographic collections in the first decade of the twentieth century from approx. 10,000 to approx. 20,000 objects. This increase can also be attributed to the attention the collections attracted as a result of the opening of the stately museum building in 1904 (Nielsen 1907:116).

In my sources, Nordic or Norwegian archaeological artefacts, Sámi and Norwegian folk culture were frequently mentioned, whilst the international artefacts and the coin collection did not receive much attention. From a quantitative point of view, objects that were unique to the North were most often referred to: Viking ships, stave churches, the Netsilingmiut/Nattilik collection brought along by Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen, and Sámi artefacts. In the 1870s, three rune stones, which were on display in the university garden, attracted interest as well (Jonas 1876:66; Passarge 1881:42), but receded into the background soon afterwards. Guidebooks and travelogues mention other objects, in particular archaeological objects found in Norway and those belonging to Norwegian folk culture, but most of the time they do so only briefly without further explanation, and I have therefore not examined them further in this article.

**Stave church portals**

In my sources, Nordic or Norwegian archaeological artefacts, Sámi and Norwegian folk culture were frequently mentioned, whilst the international artefacts and the coin collection did not receive much attention. From a quantitative point of view, objects that were unique to the North were most often referred to: Viking ships, stave churches, the Netsilingmiut/Nattilik collection brought along by Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen, and Sámi artefacts. In the 1870s, three rune stones, which were on display in the university garden, attracted interest as well (Jonas 1876:66; Passarge 1881:42), but receded into the background soon afterwards. Guidebooks and travelogues mention other objects, in particular archaeological objects found in Norway and those belonging to Norwegian folk culture, but most of the time they do so only briefly without further explanation, and I have therefore not examined them further in this article.
his visit to Christiania in 1890, the German emperor Wilhelm II commissioned Norwegian architect Holm Hansen Munthe to build a stave church and a Viking-inspired hunting lodge in East Prussia, now Russia (Marschall 1991:90; Solbakken 2024:36); and in 1893, art historian Lorentz Dietrichson dedicated an extended version of his work on Norwegian wood architecture to the emperor. The book received much attention in Germany (Halén 2010:106). In the same year, Christiania tourist Moritz von Mayfeld (1894:50) noted the portals to be among the most interesting objects of the university collection.

The stave church portals were therefore situated in a spatial context that went beyond the museum gallery and even beyond Norwegian territory, by being physically transferred through Norwegian and German geographical space. In Norway itself, visits to stave churches were part of the itineraries of most inland travellers, and from 1885 onwards, Christiania tourists could visit Gol stave church in Oscarshall where the Swedish-Norwegian king Oscar II had collected a few old buildings (opened to the public in 1881). Baumgartner (1901), who rendered long descriptions of stave churches in his travelogue, only referred to Oscarshall and not to the university collections, showing that the whole or entire object was perceived as more attractive than its parts.

If we wish to understand the ongoing attraction of the portals among travellers, I would like to suggest three possible explanations. First, the portals were truly impressive and beautifully carved, as the guidebooks pointed out over the years, and as any visitor to the museum today can confirm. Second, travel writers could refer to already well-established knowledge of stave churches among their German-reading audience. Third, travellers could easily move between the churches and the ornamented portals; the portals stood in metonymic juxtaposition with the churches, despite being only parts thereof. As the following discussion about the Viking ships indicates, access to complete or intact objects may have helped to evoke lasting interest in collections.

**Viking ships**

The popularity of the Viking ships among tourists was unrivalled from the 1880s onwards. In a telling observation, in 1910, tourist Arthur Müller wrote that when one had visited the Viking ships and – without specifying which one – one museum, one had seen all the sights Christiania had to offer (1910:15).

Already in 1867, the first ship, named Tune after its place of discovery, had been excavated, and was soon afterwards exhibited in a shed built in “old Norwegian style” in the backyard of the university (Undset 1878:90). Interestingly, in contrast to the Norwegian guidebook Tønsberg (1874:18), the German-language guidebooks of Jonas (1876) and Baedeker (1879) did not mention it, despite the fact that German-language newspapers had reported on its discovery and excavation in the late 1860s and the 1870s, sometimes even adding illustrations (e.g. W. 1868; “Ein historischer Fund” 1874).

The minimal interest the Tune ship generated in guidebooks and travelogues can likely be attributed to its being only partially preserved and the fact that it was found at a time when the aesthetics of museum objects and the scientific knowledge one could garner from them were still the dominant factors when evaluating them. However, with time and once more complete ships were discovered, it attracted more attention. This shows, I suggest, the relevance of the spatial context in which objects are displayed, how their meaning may alter
when juxtaposed with other artefacts, as well as the growing emphasis on the historical value of objects and on cultural heritage more generally.

In 1880, German-language newspapers covered the discovery of another Viking ship, calling it almost more spectacular than Heinrich Schliemann's findings (W. 1880:1). In contrast to the Tune ship, the Gokstad ship was well preserved and was almost immediately afterwards brought to Christiania and exhibited in a “primitive” wooden shed in the university’s backyard (Undset 1888:4). In 1881, Passarge (1881:42) referred to the two Viking ships as particularly interesting⁶, and in the late 1880s the two Viking ships were established as major tourist attractions in Christiania. Baedeker (1888:152) and Nielsen (1893:179) each bestowed a star upon them. The popularity of the two Viking ships may also have reflected the burgeoning cultural fascination with the concept of authentic human-made constructions as seen in the new genre of Open-Air Museums.

Yet the Tune ship could not compete in popularity with the Gokstad or later the Oseberg ship and was eventually only shown to the public by special request (e.g. Nielsen 1899:177). As Haakon Shetelig wrote in 1917, the Gokstad ship was more accessible to the public, the Oseberg ship was larger, and even scholars considered the Tune ship to have become somewhat dispensable after the discovery of the other two ships (1917:2).

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Fig. 3. The Tune ship at Frederiks gate 3 near the museum, in 1911, after having been moved from the university garden. Photo: Kulturhistorisk Museum, Fotoarkiv, Cj00374_C23838. CC BY-SA 4.0.
In the shed where the Gokstad ship was kept, tourists could purchase photographs and a booklet describing the vessel. In 1888, the booklet was published in German (Undset 1888), with a second edition in 1911 (Undset 1911). In the above-mentioned advertisement for a tour on a steamship to the Nordic capitals, the programme for the 35-hour stay in Christiania included a visit to “the museum with a beautiful collection of Viking weapons and a well-preserved ship from the Viking times” (Separat-Dampferfahrt 1898:4).

Unlike other parts of the cultural university collections, the Viking ships were often mentioned in travelogues, although there was a clear focus on the Gokstad ship, most likely due to the restricted accessibility of the Tune ship and because it only existed in fragments. Upon arrival in Christiania, von Mayfeld and his wife went straight to the university to see what he called the town’s most important sight, the Viking ship (1894:48); Paul Cohn, who came to Norway as member of a scientific club, visited the “unique” Viking ship and the Art Museum (1895:95); Therese Kracht, travelling with her husband, went to see the “museum, the Viking ship” during her two-day stay in Christiania (1898:172); and Alexander

Fig.4. Excavation of the Oseberg ship, 1904. Photo: Kulturhistorisk Museum, Fotoarkiv, CfO0181. CC BY-SA 4.0.
Baumgartner noted the Gokstad ship as “most interesting” and included a long description of the ship. To him, visiting the ship was a way of entering the past: “It is a special sensation when one finds oneself transported from the lecture halls of modern science to the ruins of the Viking Age” (1901:220).

The Viking ships became even more popular once the Oseberg ship had been excavated in 1904; the latter was soon acknowledged to be one of the “greatest adornments” of the museum (“Tausendjahrfeier” 1911). In 1907, it was shown to the public in a shed near the museum for the first time, and in 1912, after having been briefly on display in connection with the university anniversary in 1911, the so-called Oseberg room with the findings from the ship was opened at the Historical Museum (Brøgger 1917:90, 119), attracting much attention in Central Europe (e.g. “Der Oseburgfund” 1912). By 1914, the Oseberg collection cemented its position as one of the central collections of the museum. Meyer’s guidebook described the Oseberg ship as “the most interesting archaeological find ever made in Norway” (Norwegen 1914:263).

What can these examples tell us about the entanglement of mobility and immobility and its relevance for the ships’ appeal? First of all, the transfer of the ships from their place of discovery to Christiania reflected the inherent characteristics of a ship: its mobility. As a ship it related directly to travel and discovery, not only to the tourists’ personal experiences – they had come to Norway by ship after all – but also to European imperialist expansion and exploration, which had accelerated since the 1870s.

Second, when visiting the museum, tourists had to walk to see the ships, which were exhibited outside the main buildings. Even though the ships were placed there for practical reasons, this also set them apart from the other collections in the museum galleries. The fact that one had to go to a special place to visit them, could buy memorabilia and information to take home, and that unlike many of the other university collections, one usually had to pay to see them, turned the ships into a special experience. While the ship’s original role was to make people mobile, mobility was now transferred to the tourists who walked around the ship, adding a different sensation from that of standing in a museum gallery and looking at artefacts. In his guide to the Gokstad ship, Undset detailed the tour the visitor was recommended to take: first to enter the long gallery in order to get a view of the whole ship, next to walk around the ship starting with the entrance door, and then to look at the objects exhibited along the walls of the shed (Undset 1888). Ironically, even the mobile tourist could become as immobile as the ship: von Mayfeld (1894:48) complained that around the Gokstad ship there was “actually no room anywhere for a comfortable viewing”.

Third, just like the stave churches, the popularity of the Viking ships transcended the geographical borders of Norway, as demonstrated by the many German-language newspaper reports. Moreover, on the occasion of its fifteenth anniversary in 1893, the Vienna Skating Society built a replica of the Viking ship (“Ein Wiener Eisfest” 1893). In the same year, Norway sent a copy of the Gokstad ship to the World Fair in Chicago, to international acclaim. Von Mayfeld referred to this in his travelogue when visiting the Gokstad ship in Christiania (1894:48). The ships were part of a commodification process that went hand in hand with a growing tourism and souvenir industry. They were a spectacle, and in the form of a souvenir they could be brought home as a physical manifestation of one’s trip. A miniature version of the Viking ship could also be purchased as a souvenir in Christiania (Nicolaysen 1886:cover; Weborg 1901:133).
Fourth, the Viking ships demonstrate the interplay between nation-building (and branding) and tourism in a time of an increasing focus on the past and its relevance for the present and future. In Norway, the Vikings and the early Middle Ages were a vital part of nation-building at the time (Ebert 2018:143–145), and while tourists perceived the Viking ships as Nordic and more specifically Norwegian heritage, they also considered them as part of European heritage due to Viking journeys. British travellers to Norway had been interested in Nordic mythology and the Viking Age since the first half of the nineteenth century (Spode 2010:20, 23), and for German tourists in the latter part of the century they offered access to a long-gone Nordic culture (“Der Oseburgfund” 1912), or were an opportunity to learn about a culture that had had an immense impact on much of Europe and still existed in traces among contemporary Scandinavians. According to Marschall (1991:193), the German public was mostly interested in the fabled “Germanic original homeland, the world of the Vikings” rather than contemporary Norway. It is telling that, in 1898, a statue of Wilhelm II standing on a Viking ship was built in Germany (see Halén 2010:109).

As I suggest in the following discussion, the connection between travel and discovery, nation-building and ongoing European colonial and imperialist expansion may also help to explain the popularity of two collections of Indigenous artefacts, those of the Sámi and the Netsilingmiut/Nattilik.

**The Sámi collection**

Whereas the collection of the Arctic Netsilingmiut/Nattilik came into the museum rather late in the period I am examining, the first collection I would like to discuss, that of the Sámi, laid the foundation for the ethnographic museum in the 1850s (Pareli 2019:252). Curators of the ethnographic museum Ludwig Kristensen Daa and after his death in 1877, Yngvar Nielsen, consistently added Sámi objects to the collection. At the end of Nielsen’s career, they amounted to 1260 objects (Pareli 2019:256). In 1874, a reconstructed Sámi farm was opened in the university garden, but had to be taken down in 1880 due to its decrepit state (Nielsen 1907:45f).

In particular the nomadic reindeer Sámi culture in the north of Norway was a key attraction for tourists, at the same time as it evoked racist comments especially in travelogues. In Norway, racist attitudes towards the Sámi prevailed, with Nielsen both reflecting and perpetuating them (Pedersen 2019). There is an uncanny tension between the vivid tourist and ethnographic interest in Sámi culture, and the open racism and denial of their political and cultural rights.

Already in the 1870s there were discussions about the extent to which Norwegian and, more generally, European objects should be considered on a par with “exotic” cultures (Nielsen 1907:77; Kyllingstad & Rørvik 2011:384, 394); consequently, in 1906 Nielsen, who had collected both Norwegian and Sámi folk culture, transferred the Norwegian ethnographic objects to Norsk Folkemuseum. Sámi objects, according to Nielsen, did not belong to European civilisation, and they were only integrated in Norsk Folkemuseum in the 1950s (Kyllingstad & Rørvik 2011:405–407; Bergstøl, Perminow & Eek:66, 68). They were literally taken out of European cultural and geographical space and grouped together with the rest of the world. In her analysis of the museum’s ethnographic exhibitions, Ruud (2019) shows that the combination of labels and artefacts re-
inforced established perceptions regarding the exhibited culture’s degree of “civilisation.” The manner in which the Sámi collection was displayed then further affirmed visitors’ view of Sámi people as exotic and distinct, as distinct from Norwegians.

Before the discovery of the Gokstad ship, the Sámi artefacts generated much attention among guidebook writers. In 1876, Emil J. Jonas noted them to be “the most interesting” among the university collections, and “definitely deserves attention” (1876:67). From its first edition in 1879 to its thirteenth in 1914, Baedeker dedicated most space to the artefacts collected in Norway. The Sámi collection was mentioned throughout, albeit without much detail or alteration; for instance, Baedeker 1888 and 1894 reproduced the description from its 1879 edition (1888:152; 1894:151). However, with museum texts becoming more elaborate in guidebooks over the years, Baedeker also allocated more space to the artefacts. In 1911, it mentioned the “rich” Sámi collection and the special entrance fee to the room where it was exhibited (1911:220), whereas in 1914 it included an extended list of the objects on display, such as tents, household things, tools, weapons, boats, costumes (1914:222). Nielsen on the other hand mentioned the Sámi collection only briefly in the edition from 1893 (179), and not at all in the 1899 edition.

Travelogues hardly ever mentioned the Sámi collection in Christiania. Considering the keen interest tourists had in Sámi culture, this perfunctory attention to the collection is surprising. After all, Wallem (1914:63) declared in 1914 the Sámi room to contain the richest collection of its kind in Norway, and the travel writers, though silent on the collection in Christiania, dedicated much room to their encounters with Sámi in the north of Norway and to their visits to Tromsø Museum and its Sámi collection. Moreover, Sámi objects were in high demand among collectors and tourists, and in 1907 Nielsen lamented that they had become very expensive and difficult to get hold of (1907:122).

I suggest that the collection’s location in Christiania might be one reason for the comparatively little interest it elicited among tourists, as Sámi were foremost associated with the Nordic North. The majority of tourists to Norway embarked on journeys to the North Cape along the Norwegian coast, visiting Tromsø and its widely known Sámi camp in Tromsdalen. Here, they could meet Sámi in person, learn about them at Tromsø museum, and purchase Sámi objects either directly from the Sámi or at one of the shops in town selling souvenirs (see Spring 2016). In Christiania, the museum objects lacked this direct link to living Sámi culture. I would like to argue that the emphasis on “living” is crucial here: one could no longer meet Viking culture or only in traces, therefore moving ships and other items from their original resting place to Christiania made them accessible to the world. In the capital, they represented Norwegian cultural heritage. In contrast, Sámi artefacts in Christiania did not represent Sámi culture to the same extent, because they did not provide direct access to their culture. The relations between centre and periphery were turned upside down, making Tromsø and the North into a centre, and Christiania into a periphery. In addition, like all other collections at the museum, Sámi objects were overshadowed by the popularity of the Viking ships.

**The Gjøa collection**

In 1907, German-language newspapers published articles on the newly opened exhibition of Netsilingmiut/Nattilik culture at the
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Historical Museum in Christiania (e.g. “Die Netschilli-Eskimos” 1907). The objects had been given to the museum by Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen, who between 1903 and 1906 together with his crew had navigated through the Arctic Northwest Passage and had traded a large collection of approx. 1,200 objects with the Netsilingmiut/Nattilik on King William Island. Many of these objects together with other ones from the expedition were exhibited in a room called Gjøasalen, named after the expedition’s ship Gjøa. Today it is the largest collection of Netsilingmiut/Nattilik objects worldwide, holding 900 artefacts (Svensson 2015:324f).

In the 1911 edition of Baedeker, this collection, together with the Sámi one, was the only one at the ethnographic museum that was mentioned in detail: “Collection of Eskimo objects (…) brought back by the polar explorer Roald Amundsen from his expedition on the ship Gjøa to explore the Magnetic North Pole and the Northwest Passage (1903–7)” (Baedeker 1911:220, italic in original). Just as for the Oseberg collection, visitors had to pay an entrance fee to see the room (Baedeker 1911:215; Wallem 1914:11, 55), indicating its relevance.

The Gjøa room – the choice of name was a signal in itself – and its descriptions in the guidebooks pointed to the asymmetrical pow-
er relations in terms of mobility between the Netsilingmiut/Nattilik and the Norwegians, or rather, between Arctic Indigenous and Western people. In the exhibition from 1907, a huge Norwegian flag decorated the room, next to Amundsen’s stuffed dog, revealing that this room was as much about Norwegian achievements and travel to the inaccessible polar regions as about the Arctic region. The Gjøa room also contained objects from other Arctic populations, but the significance of the objects collected on the expedition was manifested in the exhibition structure: they were placed in the middle of the room, surrounded by objects from Greenland, Alaska and Canada (Wallem 1911:1). It is telling that the Netsilingmiut/Nattilik became part of the generic term “Eskimo” (used at that time for all Indigenous peoples living in the Arctic) in Baedeker, whereas Amundsen’s achievements were noted in detail.

I suggest that the reasons for this interest in the collection were at least twofold and closely connected to mobility, nation-building and imperialism: first, Amundsen’s expedition was part of what is often called the “heroic age” of Western polar exploration; it showcased the seemingly non-ending access to and control of mobility in Western cultures. Ventures into the ice sparked much fascination in Europe, also in the German-speaking regions where German and Austro-Hungarian polar expeditions in the 1860s and the 1870s had further increased interest. The 1880s and 1890s witnessed Norway solidify its position as a polar nation, blending national self-images with external ones. The crossing of Greenland and the Fram expedition under Fridtjof Nansen’s leadership in the 1880s and 1890s were met with much excitement all over Europe, as was Amundsen’s Gjøa expedition in the early 1900s. In Norway, the polar achievements played a vital role in nation-building, and they directly tied in with another part of Norwegian mobility history, that of the Vikings. Ekholt (2020:61, 63) shows in her Master’s thesis on Amundsen’s media reception in Norway that he was constantly compared with the Vikings and the ship Gjøa with Viking ships. In 1905 Norway had gained political independence from Sweden, the new museum had opened just before in 1904, and the Gjøa objects together with the newly erected museum showcased Norway as a force to be reckoned with in the cultural and scientific world – in the early twentieth century, scientific knowledge and technological progress were still a measure of a nation’s degree of civilisation. It is telling that in 1907, at the International Sports Exposition in Berlin, Norway contributed with images of the Norwegian coast and midnight sun as well as with objects from the Fram and Gjøa expeditions (“Die Internationale Sportausstellung” 1907). Whilst the Viking objects showcased Norwegian grandeur in the past, these held promises for a great future. By 1914, Norwegian as well as German guidebooks had extended the classification categories at the museum from three to five: oldsaksamling, ethnographic museum, coin collection, and the Gjøa and Oseberg exhibition (Wallem 1914:11; Norwegen 1914:259).

The second reason for the interest in the expedition collection was that it brought little known cultures from far away to a place within easy reach for European tourists. Unlike the Sámi, whom the tourists could easily visit, the artefacts on display at Christiania were the only means of access to Netsilingmiut/Nattilik culture and territory. Moreover, according to the newspapers, the objects provided insights into the distant past and into the early evolution of humans (“Die Netschilli-Eskimos” 1907). Amundsen himself called the Netsilingmiut/Nattilik “a people from the Stone Age”
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(Amundsen 1907:214). Just as we have seen with the Viking artefacts, the collection could help Europeans to study the past and get a glimpse of the future. In a time of imperialism and scientific racism, learning about Indigenous people was a means to distinguish between European and non-European cultures, ascribing them a kind of immobility compared to the progress of the European cultures. According to Ruud (2019), these approaches significantly influenced the ethnographic display and the descriptions of objects at the Historical Museum. Even though Norway may not have been directly involved in colonial imperialism, it was still part of the broader European context and its colonial ideologies.

Yet again, we need to search for explanations as to why, unlike the Viking ships, the Gjøa objects were hardly mentioned in travelogues: one reason could be that travel writers considered the Viking period a distinct Norwegian experience, in contrast to one that involved far-away Canada and a people with no direct connections to Norway or Scandinavia. Another possible explanation could be that they competed for attention with the many other so-called ethnographic objects at European museums. Lastly, the polar achievements were of a recent nature, maybe too recent to comment on as part of the tourist experience in travelogues.

**The im/mobility of museum objects**

Tourism is a spatial endeavour, and sights, including museum collections, are intertwined with geographic and temporal imaginaries. The Viking ships drew links not only with other Scandinavian countries but also with various locations across Europe where the Vikings had settled or where Viking artefacts had been discovered. The stave church portals connected with stave churches in Norway and with the (mobile) stave churches in Prussia, but also with a global space, through discussions about their relations with international design in the first half of the century. The portals moreover functioned as a synecdoche inducing curiosity; tourists could see the complete churches around Norway, on their way from or to Christianity, and at Oscarshall.

Tourism, as well as the nation, one may add, is constantly shaped and reshaped in a kind of liminal zone or hybrid border zone between the local, national and the international. Nansen's and Amundsen's expeditions had confirmed Norway's position both nationally as well as internationally as a leading force in polar exploration. Amundsen's Netsilingmiut/Nattilik collection was connected with Norwegian culture and territory, with European exploration activities and race theories, as well as with temporalities that produced racial and national hierarchies. Conversely, as the many descriptions in the travelogues show, Sámi culture was closely associated with the north of Norway; one may even infer that Sámi objects at Tromsø Museum were considered more “authentic” than those at the museum in Christiania. Tourism discourse differentiates not only between national and international space, but also along specific locations within national space. As the various examples examined in this article suggest, the location and the context in which the objects were exhibited had an impact on their interpretation.

Museum objects then are located at the intersection of the mobile and the immobile, both in terms of physical mobility and in their capacity to create links to other objects that may be spatially close or far away. Objects are relational, and so are the collections they belong to. This includes relations to objects I
have not mentioned in my discussion so far, such as those artefacts in the university collections that were not or rarely mentioned in guidebooks and travelogues. Travel writers showed little interest in the non-European ethnographic collection, with the notable exception of the Gjøa objects, despite it featuring numerous interesting objects, many of which were collected by Norwegian seamen and missionaries. Unlike in the metropoles of Europe, where these collections were a central part of the tourists’ visits, in Christiania objects associated with Norway were most popular. One possible explanation for this bias could be that contemporary Norway was not associated with imperialistic activities and that Christiania played a minor role as a European capital, which directed tourists’ expectations towards the specific national. On a more general level, this aligned with the broader shift towards the national that gained momentum in the latter half of the century: the artefacts discussed in this article were all ‘tools of nation-building’.

A last question that needs to be addressed is the extent to which the discussion above is uniquely tied to German-language tourism. Certainly, interest in Viking culture and stave churches could be directly linked to contemporary discussions in Germany about Germanic heritage. Yet, as Birgit Marschall (1991:100) rightly points out, Viking glorification, stave church architecture and in general Wilhelm II’s antiquarian enthusiasm for Nordic and Norwegian culture, were not representative and leave out critical contemporary cultural discourse in Germany. Travellers had numerous motives for their journey and their experiences were multifaceted. For many, the tour offered a welcome escape from their everyday lives and into a sublime nature experience or a mythical world (Spring 2020). Moreover, they could tap into a German media space that established connections between Germanic and Scandinavian narratives of the past (Marschall 1991:192).

Travel texts are as much about the destination culture as they are about the sender’s culture, though tourist mobility and the developing transnational tourism industry played a vital role in rendering standardised ideas about destination cultures. The emerging tourist destination Christiania and its museums and collections were part of complex negotiations between tourists’ expectations and biases, the tourism industry’s typecasting and sale strategies, and Norway’s self-presentation and identification. Moreover, the various collections gave rise to specific images of the nation, as a result of the complex entanglement of the mobile and the immobile, of physical movement and its obstruction.

Notes

1. All translations by the author. This article is a result of the research group Collecting Norden, funded by UiO:Nordics (University of Oslo, 2021–2023).

2. From 1877 onwards the spelling Kristiania gradually replaced that of Christiania in official contexts. For the sake of consistency, I will use Christiania throughout.

3 Historian and guidebook writer Yngvar Nielsen was responsible for the University’s ethnographic collections 1877–1916 and head of the Norwegian tourist organisation 1890–1908.

4. The more detailed the guidebooks became, the more information they provided on the museum collections, e.g. in 1914, the “Congo collection” was awarded a star, albeit without any further comment (Norwegen 1914:262).

5 Passarge wrote parts of the Norway section of Baedeker, however apparently not the section on Christiania (Baedeker 1879:V).
6 His description of the Viking ship is almost identical to that of Moritz von Mayfeld, a typical feature of travel texts at a time when intertextuality and plagiarism were quite common.

7 Whilst the Tune ship for much of the time could be visited for free by giving a tip to the caretaker, the admission rules varied for the other ships. In 1911, for instance, entrance to the Gokstad ship was free on Sundays and Fridays, whilst the Oseberg ship cost 25 øre (Baedeker 1911:216).

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Sønner A/S.


Ulrike Spring, Dr. phil., Professor of Modern European History
Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History, University of Oslo,
P. b. 1008 Blindern, 0315 Oslo, Norway
https://www.hf.uio.no/iakh/english/people/aca/history/tenured/ulrikesp/
ulrike.spring@iakh.uio.no