

IN MEMORIAM: DR. ARNE ODD JOHNSEN, NORWEGIAN HISTORIAN

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Arne Odd Johnsen was born at Agder, Norway, on 3 December 1909 as the son of Oscar Albert Johnsen. Oscar became a professor of Norwegian history at the University of Oslo and author of several books and many articles. His work that is best known abroad is *Norwegische Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Norwegian economic history, 1939), one of the series of books with surveys of the economic history of different countries, published by Gustav Fischer at Jena, Germany.

Arne was inspired by the historical studies, library and career of his father. He became an even more many-sided and productive historian than his father was. As the son of a maritime nation he was attracted by the maritime and economic history of Norway. He was very proud of his mother's grandfather, sea captain Even Tollefsen, who was the first captain to bring a ship with a bulk cargo of petroleum from the United States to Europe. Arne published an article on this pioneer.

He registered as a student in Oslo in 1928 and received his Master's degree in 1936 with a thesis on Tönsberg during the economic depression in the first half of the 19th century. He studied at the École des Chartes, Sorbonne, and the Collège de France, in Paris from 1937 to 1939. There he started his studies in his second field of historic interest: Norway during the Middle Ages.

In 1939 he became a student at the University of Oslo until 1951 with an interruption during the German occupation, 1943–1945. He obtained his Doctorate in 1945 with a thesis of 438 pages on an episode of the Medieval history of Norway. He replaced his former professor at Oslo, Jacob Worm-Müller, known for his maritime history of Norway, as a temporary lecturer in 1947–48 and 1952–53. He left the University in 1951 to accept the post of military historian in the State Department of Defence until 1958. In that year he was appointed State historian until his retirement.

From the start of his career he was active in two quite different fields of Norwegian history: economic history and the Middle Ages. As an economic historian he contributed particularly to town history and whaling. He wrote extensively on the towns of Tönsberg and Kristiansund in Nord-Møre. In 1939 the association of Norwegian whaling companies at Sandefjord commissioned him to research the origin and rise of modern whaling which originated in Norway. He tackled this task with great ardour and published detail studies in *Norsk Hvalfangst-Tidende* (Norwegian Whaling Gazette) and other journals. Through his studies of Tönsberg during the 19th century he became interested in the pioneer of modern whaling, Svend Foyn, a skipper who had lived at Tönsberg. Foyn is a very remarkable man, a Puritan capitalist and founder of new industries. Johnsen published his biography and interesting diary from his pioneer years.

In 1939–1959 Johnsen prepared his great standard work on the first period of modern whaling, 1864–1905, which began in Norway. In 1959 his book *Den moderne hvalfangsts historie*, volume one, 1864–1905, appeared. It is the most comprehensive and authoritative work on the prelude and origin of modern, industrial whaling, preceded by efforts in countries outside Norway. Johnsen continued the work in this field of Norwegian historians before him, namely Sigurd Risting, Bjarne Aagaard and Peter Bogen.

It is surprising that he did not continue the work started in his magnum opus and abandoned whaling history. There are two possible explanations. The first is that he had become tired of whaling and preferred Medieval history. The second explanation is that his commissioner, the association of Norwegian whaling companies, thought 20 years for the writing of the first volume too long and wished to entrust the completion of the great work to another historian who would complete the task more quickly. Dr. John N. Tønnessen at Oslo took over Johnsen's task. It is remarkable that he published volume 2 in 1967, volume 3 in 1969 and volume 4, the last part, in 1970. He too delivered excellent work. There was a need for an English translation of this standard work. A condensed edition, *The history of modern whaling*, brought up to date by the prolific Tønnessen, appeared in English in 1983.

Johnsen took 20 years for his book on modern whaling because he spent much time on the Medieval history of Norway. I mentioned above that in 1945 he completed his doctor's thesis. It was published and deals with the long visit of the Englishman, cardinal Nicolaus Breakspear, to Norway in 1152–53 to found an independent province of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1948 he published *Fra aetessamfunn til statssamfunn*, a description of the evolution in Medieval Norway from a society of clans to a centralized monarchy. In 1955 he completed a book on the origin of the archdiocese of Nidaros (Trondheim), the religious centre of Norway.

A kind of intermezzo was Johnsen's period as a military historian, 1951–58. Again he performed excellent work in this field which was new to him. He compiled a bibliography of Norwegian military history and wrote a book on the somewhat neglected war between Norway-Denmark and Sweden in 1657–58, which he published in 1966.

After his appointment as a State historian — since 1962 with the status (that means with the salary) of a professor — he concentrated more than before on the Medieval history of Norway. He visited archives and libraries abroad and lectured there, inter alia as visiting professor at the Scottish University of Saint Andrews (Dundee) in 1968. He published several books and articles and contributed to publications of documents as historical sources. One of his works was a history of Norwegian Cistercian monasteries 1146–1254 in 1977, followed by his contribution to *The Textbook of the Cistercian Order*, which appeared in 1979.

He emphasized the influence of economic factors in his works on towns and whaling and the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Medieval Norway in his Medieval studies. His strong emphasis on the influence of foreign countries, in the first place of Scotland, England and France, and of foreigners on Medieval Norway was opposed by other Norwegian historians, such as Jens Arup Seip: they pointed out the importance of autochthonous influences. Professor Knut Helle at Bergen, who wrote a commemorative speech on Johnsen, sides with his opponents but admits freely Johnsen's stimulating contribution to the historiography of the Middle Ages in Norway.

Johnsen was honoured with the membership of the Videnskapelige Akademie in 1949 and the Kongelige Videnskapelige Selskap in 1953. Fairly late in his life he married Birgitte Christine Paus in 1952. They had no children. In the 70's his health began to fail. He suffered severely from rheumatism and from 1978 he and his wife spent the months of October to May on Gran Canaria in a milder climate. He took his books and documents with him and he worked on Gran Canaria as hard as at home. Gradually his health and after 1983 his productivity declined. He died at Oslo on 9 July 1985.

He was a reserved character and had few intimate friends. I was privileged to experience his warm friendship during my first visit to him at Oslo in 1949 to discuss whaling history. He wrote few letters but was a friend for life.

He is generally appreciated as a many-sided historian with a remarkable grasp of subjects new to him and with a great capacity for work. His list of publications in quite different fields is a long and impressive one. I honour his memory and friendship.