

Study 1a: Brita Brenna (TIK / UiO)

### Tools, tours and vistas: aesthetic practices of nature-landscape in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century

This study will investigate the topographical descriptions of Norwegian nature in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Two forms of description dominate this material: the visual landscape depictions, such as prospects, prints and landscape paintings, and the topographical literature itself. Using these distinct forms of landscape/nature-descriptions as its vehicle, the study queries the meanings as well as the means of the descriptions: what counted as landscape and what counted as nature, for whom, where and how? And by what means were these landscapes described, represented, and transformed into works of literature and art? One main question to be explored is the relation between scientific practices and theories, and the production of Norwegian landscapes.<sup>1</sup>

'Landscape' and 'nature' were both coined with new meanings in this period in the Danish language. 'Landscape' as a territorial and political entity (as in the medieval landscape laws) had mainly gone out of use, and the term gradually came to denote the pictorial landscape.<sup>2</sup> 'Nature' with its wealth of meanings – most of which originally associated to ideas of essence, rule, and necessity – was only now starting to be used as a term for external, physical reality.<sup>3</sup> Given the fluid state of both these terms in this period, the study aims to investigate how this "external physical reality" was made into an object; a thing to write about and look at. What were the processes making 'Norwegian nature' or 'Norwegian landscape' into precisely that: nature and landscape? One central hypothesis is that the new use of 'nature' to denote physical, external reality is closely connected to the new use of 'landscape' as a pictorial term. It is the aim of the study to investigate the exact nature of this connection.

Two practices were instrumental in transforming the conceptions of nature and landscape in this period; the textual description of place in the topographical literature, and the depiction of place in paintings and prospects. Both were intimately linked to modes of travel.<sup>4</sup> All through the 18<sup>th</sup> century, visualizations of Norway were produced in connection with the King's tour through the country.<sup>5</sup> The royal tour was a glorification of the sovereign's reign, enacted through dramatic spectacles as a means to establish political power. Norwegian landscape-nature was made into a spectacle through the tour, mobilizing painters and the painters' techniques to make a suitable scene for the King's glorification. Most mid-18<sup>th</sup> century visualizations of Norwegian nature were thus directly connected to political power, and had the King as their intended recipient. They were also intimately linked to scientific activities, through the patronage and orders of scientific societies.<sup>6</sup> This tradition, however, was changing rapidly towards the end of the century, a change which interestingly enough corresponds to the emergence both of new visual techniques – most notably the aquatint – and of a new audience for the natural scenery. The "voyage picturesque" was introduced, making Norwegian nature the source of marketable sceneries for a national and international public who themselves were (potential) travelers.

A similar shift can be found within the topographical texts. Initially, the King was the intended recipient of the topographical descriptions, a genre which in Norway emerged with the 43 questions asked by the King to all diocesan governors in the country, leading to the frantic mobilization of state officials to procure information about natural, historical, political and cultural facts about their regions.<sup>7</sup> Some of the

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<sup>1</sup> The art historian I. Ydstie discusses such connections in the Romantic period. See for example I. Ydstie: "Ein Geflecht von Skizzenbüchern. Wissenschaftliche Vorstellung und bildliche Darstellung von norwegischer Natur in den 1820er Jahren" in *Expedition Kunst. Die Entdeckung der Natur von C.D. Friedrich bis Humboldt*. Hamburger Kunsthalle.

<sup>2</sup> K. Olwig: *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic*, op. cit., A. Lie Christensen: *Det norske landskapet*. Oslo: Pax 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The substantial book on this in Danish is T. Bredsdorff: *Digternes natur. En idées historie i 1700-tallets danske poesi*. København: Gyldendal 1975. See also L. Daston: "The Nature of Nature in Early Modern Europe", *Configurations* 6.2 (1998)

<sup>4</sup> N. Green: *The Spectacle of Nature. Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France*. Manchester: MUP 1992 is an important inspiration.

<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of the century, a Dutch landscape painter (J. Coning) was sent to Norway to depict places the King had visited fifteen years earlier, in 1685. The 1733 tour was visualized in magnificent plates by a French drawing master, fully reproduced only in the 1990s. The 1749 Tour was followed by a Norwegian officer and etcher (Poul Isac Grønvold), but only one Norwegian scene survives. In 1788, a Dane followed the King to save his views for posterity (Erik Paulsen). See L. Østby: *Med kunstnarauge. Norsk natur og folkeliv i biletkunsten*, Oslo 1969, C. W. Schnittler: *Norges kunstneriske opdagelse*. Kristiania 1920, O.A. Øverland: *Det gamle Norge i billeder og tekst*. Kristiania u.å., M. Hauge: *Norge på trykk*, Oslo: Andresen & Butenschøn 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Most notably the landscape-painter Blumenthal produced his Norwegian landscapes on commission of the Danish Society of the Sciences to parttake in a commemorative publication of the King's 1733 tour, and later for the use in E. Pontoppidan: *The First Natural History of Norway*. 1752-53.

<sup>7</sup> The neat distinction between culture, nature, politics and history is, of course, mine. The king's 43 questions partitioned nature and society in quite different realms, see K. Røgeberg: *Norge i 1743*, Oslo: Solum 2004. For the topographical literature, see A. Eriksen: *Topografenes verden*, Oslo: Pax 2007 and S.

most notable of the topographical works were travel descriptions, and the whole tradition was partly inspired by the advices for how to describe and explore foreign countries, which were produced in scientific environments.<sup>8</sup> While the main function of the topographical tradition was to display economic resources and historical continuity, the tradition was also instrumental in linking the character of the people with the character of the nature-landscape. Increasingly, the topographical works were written, not to the king, but to fellow citizens, patriots, and societies of improvement.

This study will concentrate on the concrete processes and the means by which the landscapes came into being. Looking at scientific instruments, as well as representational strategies such as camera obscura and literary techniques, I will investigate the ways in which the modern Norwegian landscape is conceived and constructed both as a scientific and a pictorial entity in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Theoretically the project will engage with the history of art and science field, bringing to this science-study's sensitivities of the importance of tools and apparatuses of production for both aesthetic and scientific representational practices.<sup>9</sup>

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Supphellen: "Den historisk-topografiske litteraturen i Noreg i siste halvparten av 1700-talet, regionalisme eller nasjonalisme", *Heimen* 1979, XVIII. For a general discussion of conceptions of Norwegian nature, see N. Witoszek, *Norske naturmytologier: fra Edda til økofilosofi*, Oslo: Pax 1998.

<sup>8</sup> R. Boyle: *General Heads for the Natural History of a Country, for Scandinavia*, J. Faggot: "Tankar om fäderneslandets kännning och beskrifwande" (1741).

<sup>9</sup> Classical in both traditions: C. Klonk: *Science and the Perception of Nature*. Yale UP, New Haven 1996, B. M. Stafford: *Voyage into substance. Art, science and the illustrated travel account, 1760-1840*. MIT Press, Cambr. Mass, 1984, B. Latour: *Science in Action*, Harvard UP 1987.