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Exonyms**

**Decline in the number of Danish exonyms in use for
European cities**

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** Prepared by Johnny Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

The Danish language holds numerous specifically Danish variants of names on places outside Denmark. The list of Danish exonyms includes names on countries, regions, mountain ranges, rivers, seas, islands and cities all over the world. The number of Danish exonyms does not necessarily correlate to the related places' proximity to Denmark. The Danish names for our neighbouring Scandinavian countries, with whom Danish contacts are immense, is, for instance, *Norge* and *Sverige*, which are also the endonyms used by Norway and Sweden themselves. On the other hand, we have a Danish exonym for the sea between the easternmost Sibiria and Alaska, *Beringstrædet* (Bering Strait), a maritime place otherwise extremely remote from Denmark both geographically and mentally. Admittedly, in this particular case, the truly exonym part of the name only consists of the generic element *-strædet* ('the strait'), and it furthermore happens to include the fact that the water is actually named after a Danish-born explorer Vitus Bering. But, then, also the Siberian landside of the strait has a specific Danish exonym, *Tjuktjerhalvøen* (Chukchi Peninsula; Rus. Чукóтский полуóстров (tr. Chukotskiy poluostróv)), a name variant that we only seem to share with Swedish – even if hardly many Danes or Swedes have ever been to this peninsula or even know about its existence. Likewise, it is not as if the Danish language can always be expected to use endonyms for nearby locations in familiar, neighbouring languages. An example of this is the north-German cities of Lübeck and Hamburg, which historically have been named *Lybæk* and *Hamborg* in Danish, even if the German endonyms are well-known by Danes and hold little difficulties in a Danish-language context. *Lybæk* and *Lübeck* are, in fact, pronounced completely alike, and even if the endonym form *Hamburg* has recently tended to replace the Danish exonym form in writing, Danes will still pronounce it in the exonym form ['hambø:r] rather than in the German form ['hambø:ʁk]. Thus, the observed usage of exonyms (and endonyms) in Danish for foreign places is not always straightforward.

Another observation that leaps to the eye about Danish exonyms is that while most them are, in fact, quite well-established and consistent in their usage in Danish language for quite some time, one particular class of exonyms seem to be in decline: names on foreign cities. To illustrate and try to explain this change, the present paper will present a case study on Danish exonyms and their development within the latest 150 years.

Danish place-name orthography in Denmark and abroad

In Denmark, *Stednavneudvalget* ('The Place-Name Committee') was formed in 1910 by the parliament with the task of standardizing official orthography for names on all major geographical locations (towns, villages, manors, forests, lakes, etc.) and administrative units (municipalities, parishes, etc.) in Denmark. This was to be implemented in correspondence to contemporary efforts to standardize Danish orthography in general. The task was by no means easy, as the diversity of place-name spelling until then had been extensive, and the final register of officially authorized place-names for all of Denmark was not fully completed until 1969. This does not mean that the work of the committee is finished, as it continues to advise on new names submitted for authorization or wishes for changes of existing names. The committee is nowadays appointed by the Ministry of Culture, who is also the nominal authoritative organ for Danish orthography in general.

This procedure, however, only accounts for names on locations within Denmark. While the Danish Place-Name Committee has occasionally been asked to advise on how to write names on foreign locations in a Danish context, the committee has generally abstained from publishing any authoritative lists or even recommendations on the matter. When *Dansk Sprognævn* ('Danish Language Council') was formed in 1955 as a new legal body for Danish orthography in general, also under the Ministry of Culture, the issue of foreign place names was gradually placed under the council, until this became explicit with a departmental order in 1981: "§ 2. Of the council's tasks are the following stressed: [...] 2. To answer linguistic questions from the authorities and the public, including giving guidance in the spelling and pronunciation of foreign names." In the following spelling dictionary to be published by

the Danish Language Council in 1986, a limited number of geographical names on foreign locations were for the first time included in a Danish dictionary. In later editions, basically all country names and some region names are included in the dictionary, which are hereby given an authoritative validity – be it in exonym or endonym forms. In 1994, the Danish National Council along with its equivalent sister institutions in the other Scandinavian countries published a joint list of names on countries and terms of nationalities in the five Scandinavian languages (Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish), *Statsnavne og nationalitetsord* (‘state names and words of nationality’), which was partly meant to help a standardized national naming of all the new nations to emerge in the post-cold-war era of the 1990s, and partly an attempt to align country naming within the Scandinavian languages – this latter aim probably being slightly too optimistic. In recent years, an electronic list of country names, nationality terms and names on capitals is published online by the council: [Lande og nationaliteter](#). Unlike the spelling dictionaries, these latter lists are more to be seen as helpful recommendations. As for the specific topic of this paper, i.e. city names, only those that designate capitals are included in the online list, and only very few names on other cities are found in the dictionaries. For most foreign non-capital cities, the only semi-authoritative record of how to spell their names correctly in a Danish-language context is found in atlases and encyclopaedias, for which linguistic and onomastic expertise has usually been consulted.

Danish exonyms for European cities

For the purpose of the present paper, I have gone through twelve Danish encyclopaedias and school atlases published since 1872 and up until today, more or less evenly distributed within the period. Based on this, it can be concluded that most European cities are, in fact, named in Danish with their endonym forms, such as *Stockholm*, *Oslo*, *London*, *Paris*, *Amsterdam* and *Madrid*. Also, it can be noted that this has indeed been practised since 1872. In the case of Oslo, the name *Christiania* (or *Kristiania*) was used in Danish until 1925, but this policy only followed the official change of endonym usage in the Norwegian language, thus, neither name qualifies as a Danish exonym. In total, I have identified 45 names on European cities that can be termed as Danish exonyms, in the sense that they differ – currently or historically – from the local endonym forms. Of these, ten are still in use as the predominantly used name in Danish, while another ten are occasionally used or recorded as an alternative name; twenty-five of the listed Danish exonyms since 1872 are no longer used.

The Danish exonyms on European cities are far from evenly distributed geographically. There are twelve in Poland, six in Italy, four in Russia, three in Scandinavia, three in Belgium, three in Estonia, three in the Czech Republic, three in East Central Europe, two in Germany, two in Greece and Turkey, two in Balkan, one in France, and one in the Iberian Peninsula; no Danish exonyms have been recorded for the British Isles.

The highest number of Danish city exonyms for any European country is found for Poland: *Bjelostok* (Białystok), *Breslau* (Wrocław), *Bromberg* (Bydgoszcz), *Danzig* (Gdańsk), *Elbing* (Elbląg), *Kattowitz* (Katowice), *Kolberg* (Kołobrzeg), *Krakov* (Kraków), *Posen* (Poznań), *Stettin* (Szczecin), *Stolp(e)* (Słupsk), and *Warschau/Varschava* (Warszawa). The significant Polish predominance among Danish city exonyms probably finds its explanation on several accounts. First of all, Poland is the immediate southern neighbour to Denmark, which naturally means that a certain degree of internal contacts between the two countries and their cities is to be expected. While the same can be said for e.g. Germany and Sweden, the Polish language and its derived onomastic orthography is quite different from Danish, which means that numerous Polish endonyms are highly difficult for most Danes to spell or pronounce, e.g. *Szczecin* (versus the Danish exonym *Stettin*). A third and no less important issue to consider is that basically all the Danish exonyms for Polish cities have been imported more or less directly from German, and until 1945 German was in fact the official administrative language for large parts of Poland (then Prussia), which means that to some extent it becomes debatable whether to label these German

names as exonyms or endonyms. Still, since Polish continuously was the native language of the region, I have recorded them as exonyms. Virtually all the exonyms for Polish cities were abandoned in Danish usage after 1945, when they were replaced in Danish by their Polish endonyms – or at least almost. The special Polish accented letters *ą*, *ł* and *ń* are not included in the Danish alphabet, which partly means that they bring a technical challenge in written Danish, where non-accented forms like *Elblag*, *Gdansk* and *Wroclaw* have often been preferred to the actual endonyms *Elbląg*, *Gdańsk* and *Wrocław*. And even if digital technology has eased the access to foreign lettering, only the fewest Danes would know how to pronounce such accented letters correctly. The same problem of pronunciation can be stated for many Polish place names without special lettering, which means that for instance the port city of *Szczecin*, which has been named this way in Danish since 1949, for most Danes is still best known as *Stettin*.

A similar phenomenon can be found for other city names in Central and Eastern Europe, where originally used German forms have been replaced in Danish by the national endonyms after 1945: *Belgrad* (Beograd), *Brünn* (Brno), *Dorpat* (Tartu), *Königsberg* (Kaliningrad), *Pernau/Pernov* (Pärnu), *Pilsen* (Plzeň), and *Reval* (Tallinn). In some cases, however, the accustomed Danish usage of the old German forms has been so deeply rooted that even though endonym forms were officially introduced in Danish after 1945 for cities like *București*, *Praha*, and *Sofija*, the corresponding Danish/German exonyms *Bukarest*, *Prag* and *Sofia* have prevailed in popular usage to an extent, where they have even been officially reintroduced as Danish exonyms since the 1980s. And even if endonym (or semi-endomized) forms like *Kijev* and *Plzeň* still hold the nominal status as official Danish-used names, Danish travel agents and football media continuously prefer *Kiev* and *Pilsen*. The Danish exonym for the Russian capital of *Moskva* has been in unchallenged use throughout the observed period.

For southern Europe, there is a strong Danish tradition for the use of the exonyms *Lissabon* (Lisboa), *Rom* (Roma) and *Athen* (Athína (Αθήνα)). All identical to the corresponding German exonyms, but nevertheless considered Danish names through and through. While *Athen* has never been challenged by other forms, *Lissabon* was in fact officially replaced with *Lisboa* in the period 1930-1994, but without ever gaining any popular support, which led to the reintroduction of the exonym (along with the endonym as an optional choice) since the mid-1990s. A special Danish exonym engagement is found in Italy: besides *Rom*, it includes *Florens* (Firenze), *Mailand* (Milano), *Neapel* (Napoli), *Turin* (Torino) and *Venedig* (Venezia). Also here, the Danish forms are (almost) identical to the German ones. The six Danish exonyms for Italy have shown highly different degrees of endurance. While endonyms took over for Firenze, Milano, Napoli and Torino by the end of the nineteenth century already, *Rom* and *Venedig* are still prevailing as supreme-reigning Danish exonyms. An early attempt to replace *Venedig* with *Venezia* was, in fact, made already in the early twentieth century, along with the other Italian city names, but for some reason this one did not succeed, and it has been abandoned since 2010.

Returning to Northern Europe via the Atlantic, a Danish-exonym stop can be made in Belgium, and particularly the cities of *Bruxelles* and *Brugge*. Here, the old Danish variant forms *Bryssel* and *Brygge*, based on the German exonyms *Brüssel* and *Brügge*, were practically archaic already by the 1870s. Indeed, it was no longer the Danish forms, but the German ones that were used in Danish records in 1872-1930 and 1872-1925 respectively, after which they were officially replaced by the Flemish and French endonyms. Whereas *Bruxelles* became commonly known in Danish after Denmark's entrance in the EU in 1972, the name *Brugge* has remained more difficult for the Danes to embrace, since the pronunciation of the Flemish *u* is less obvious in Danish eyes and ears than the German *ü* – because of which the German spelling is still widely used in Danish media.

Danish exonyms for German endonyms

As this quick tour around Europe in the search for Danish city exonyms would show, there is a close correlation between Danish and German exonyms. With that in mind, it is of little surprise that only few

Danish exonyms exist for German cities. Two of the historically known cases already mentioned, *Hamborg* and *Lybæk*, had even been officially replaced by the endonym forms Hamburg and Lübeck before the beginning of the studied period. The only two cases included in this survey is *Rendsborg* (Rendsburg) and *Cöln* (Köln); while the latter is more of a spelling variant than an actual exonym, the former designate a small town just south of the historical German-Danish border of significant importance to the region's history. Thus, Danish and German place-name variants at first glance could appear to be basically identical and existing in mutual peace. Nothing could, however, be further from the truth.

This is not the place to engage with the complicated borderland relations between Denmark and Germany in concern of the region of Schleswig-Holstein, but to sum it up briefly, the northern half of the present-day *bundesland* along with Danish region of Sønderjylland for long constituted the Duchy of Schleswig/Slesvig under Danish administration, and of mixed ethnicity, culture and language (German, Danish and Frisian). After the Second Schleswig War in 1864, the entire duchy came under German administration, but after a referendum in 1920, the northern half was returned to Denmark. Before 1864, the administrative language of the duchy was predominantly German, and in areas with specific Danish or Frisian linguistic influence, many place names had for practical reasons German parallel forms. However, as language differences in the duchy became a heated political issue in the 1830-40s, adding fuel to other issues leading to the First Schleswig War in 1848–1851, the choice of linguistic forms of place names also became a matter of warfare. After the Prussian victory in 1864, all Danish place names in predominantly the northern parts of the duchy were replaced by German names only – and new ones were invented in German, where such did not already exist. Likewise, when the northern territories were returned to Denmark in 1920, all place names were returned to their Danish forms only – and new Danish ones were invented, if such did not already exist.

Even today, more than a century after the transfer of Nordschleswig/Sønderjylland, the question of place names in either German or Danish can still attract heated debate, especially on the Danish side. In Danish school atlases and encyclopaedias, Danish forms of the city names *Slesvig* and *Flensborg* have been used exclusively until the 1970s, after which the German endonyms *Schleswig* and *Flensburg* finally appear to have been acknowledged in Denmark as well. But the Danish forms are still recognized as fully legitimate alternatives – whereas the German forms *Hadersleben* and *Apenrade* for two cities on the northern side of the present border are considered a provocative thorn in the side for many Danes in the region.

Danish exonyms for Scandinavian endonyms

No similar grievances are observed in the studied period for the historically easternmost Danish provinces of Skåne, Blekinge and Halland, which were conquered by Sweden in the mid-seventeenth century. Here, the originally Danish settlement names were to a large extent changed into more Swedish-sounding pronunciations and spellings, e.g. from *Ormetofte* to *Örmatofte*, *Eskilstrup* to *Eskilstorp* and *Birkerød* to *Björkeröd*. However, this process had been implemented by the mid-eighteenth century already, and the original Danish name forms are nowadays mainly remembered by historians and nationalistic parties. For most of the major towns in the transferred region, Danish and Swedish names are in fact the same (e.g. Halmstad, Helsingborg, Lund, Trelleborg, Ystad and Kristianstad), and for the remainder, the differences are often extremely limited, e.g. *Malmø* vs. *Malmö*, *Landskrone* vs. *Landskrona*, and *Sølvesborg* vs. *Sölvesborg*. For all the included Danish atlases and encyclopaedias since 1872, these towns are recorded by their Swedish endonyms only. Still, when you today approach the bridge between Denmark and Sweden by train or car, the streets signs on the Danish side will tell you that *Malmø* (and not Malmö) is awaiting on the other side. Just as the Swedish signs in Malmö will direct you to *Köpenhamn* (not København).

Outside the historically Danish provinces in the southernmost part of the country, no Danish exonyms can be accounted for in Sweden. For Norway, the history is slightly different, as Danish was the administrative language in Norway from the end of the Middle Ages to 1814. Because of this, most Norwegian cities today still have names that took their present form within the Danish period, and therefore need no Danish exonyms. The main exception is *Trondhjem*, which in Norwegian has developed (or returned) to a more Norwegian-sounding endonym form *Trondheim*, while it remained to be called by its old name in official Danish contexts until 1930 – and by some of the elder generations of Danes the city is still known by this name.

The most sensitive case of Danish exonyms in present-day Scandinavia probably concerns Finland. Finland was a Swedish-governed province until 1809, which means that the bulk of settlements in Finland have names in both the Swedish administrative language and the Finnish native tongue; in southwestern Finland and the Åland islands Swedish is indeed still a native tongue equal to Finnish. In a Danish context, the towns of Finland have traditionally been known by their Swedish names, since these for a long time were the official forms and since the Swedish language is significantly closer to Danish than Finnish is. Thus, when major Finnish cities like Helsinki, Turku and Tampere are also still officially co-named within Finland by their minority-language Swedish forms *Helsingfors*, *Åbo* and *Tammerfors*, Danish atlases and encyclopaedias have had to choose between what were considered the actual Finnish endonyms and the Swedish forms – which for the latter both could be considered in a negative context as colonial exonyms and in a positive context as minority endonyms in recognition of the Swedish-speaking community. The Danish solution has mainly been to use the Swedish forms until 1930, and since then using the Finnish forms as the first choice with the Swedish form following in parenthesis. As a curious compromise solution, one Danish encyclopaedia from 1964-65 chose to use the Finnish form only for Helsinki and the Swedish form only for Åbo. The question of Finnish city names is still a somewhat sensitive issue for several Danes dealing with Finland – probably much more than it is for the Finns or the Swedish-Finns themselves.

A future for Danish exonyms for European cities?

As this paper has aimed to show, the number of Danish exonyms on cities in Europe has declined with more than half over a period of 150 years. Especially for the cities of Eastern and Central Europe, Danish exonyms imported or copied from German were abandoned after 1945 in favour of endonyms. However, several of the officially abandoned exonyms have been so deeply rooted in the popular usage, that they have been officially reintroduced within the last 20 years. While ten Danish city exonyms are used almost exclusively, another ten are still occasionally used as alternative forms. Some of these latter ten may divert either into oblivion or to retake the position as a predominant exonym, but on a whole I expect little changes to occur in the numbers in the years to come. I certainly see little chance for any of the 25 abandoned exonyms to be reintroduced by now, and even less chance for completely new Danish exonyms to be introduced for European cities in the future.