



The Classical World in a Norwegian Workers' Encyclopedia: *Arbeidernes Leksikon* (1931–1936)

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AN ENCYCLOPEDIA FOR THE WORKING CLASS

In 1927 the first issue of the weekly illustrated *Arbeider-magasinet* was launched. Published, edited, and written by people sympathetic to the Communist Party of Norway (NKP), the magazine was editorially independent and aimed at the education and entertainment of the working class.¹ *Arbeider-magasinet* became an instant commercial success. The magazine statutes required that parts of the profits should be set aside for cultural purposes, and it was decided that some of the proceeds would be used for the long-desired publication of an encyclopedia for the working class.² The project was assigned to the experienced historian, journalist, and socialist activist Jakob Friis (1883–1956), who was soon joined by historian Trond Hegna (1898–1992). The resulting *Arbeidernes leksikon* – “Workers’ Encyclopedia” – appeared in six volumes and with c. 10,000 keywords in 1931–1936.³

Few encyclopedias are written from scratch. Most projects borrow and copy material from earlier works, with or without permission or due credit.⁴ *Arbeidernes leksikon* was explicitly inspired by “The Great Soviet Encyclopedia” (*Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, first

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1 Berggrav, *Magasinet*, 33–40; Pedersen, *Det var der vi ble til*, 9–18.

2 Berggrav, *Magasinet*, 43–46; Paulsen, “Arbeidernes Leksikon.”

3 Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*.

4 Prodöhl, *Politik Des Wissens*, 55–63.

edition in 65 volumes, 1926–1947) and “The Small Soviet Encyclopedia” (*Malaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, ten volumes, 1928–1931).⁵ The preserved editorial correspondence reveals that traditional bourgeois Norwegian, Swedish, and German encyclopedias were, in fact, also extensively used.⁶ Nevertheless, it soon became clear that the project was overwhelming. All articles had to be edited, and many of them had to be written anew to reflect Norwegian conditions. Editorial efforts to recruit qualified contributors from the labor movement were complicated by the opposition from the Labor Party (DNA), which at that time still identified as Marxist, but which propagated a line of democratic reformism, opposed to the revolutionary line of the encyclopedia editors and NKP.⁷ The leading DNA newspaper, *Arbeiderbladet*, called for all party members to withhold support for the project,⁸ which resulted in the editorial ignorance of the publication of the work and critical review in the party press. The solution found by the editors was to draw on Hegna’s network within the independent but communist-leaning and revolutionary Marxist organization and journal *Mot Dag* (“Towards dawn”), run by students and young academics, mostly affiliated with the University of Oslo.⁹ In 1933 the project was formally subcontracted to the organization, Friis remaining editor only by name.¹⁰ Most articles are unsigned, but the major entries on ancient Greece and the Roman empire were authored by the historian and classical philologist Jørgen Fredrik Ording (1902–1987). He was a part of the inner circle of *Mot Dag*, and was also responsible for many other articles on classical history as author or editor. The question of authorship, however, is not essential in this case, as the encyclopedia was conceived as a collective endeavor.

In the end, all six volumes were successfully published only one year after the original schedule, and the planned print run of 10,000 copies was sold out. The encyclopedia was generally well received in the communist and independent labor press but reviewed briefly

5 Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol 1., preface.

6 Correspondence to [Ole Christian] Gundersen, March 3, 1933, ARK1719 *Mot Dag*, box D-0002, folder “diverse,” Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek, Oslo; Report from meeting on how to speed up the publication process of *Arbeidernes leksikon*, January 7, 1933, ARK1536 Trond Hegna, box D-L0024, folder “diverse korrespondanse, *Arbeidernes leksikon*,” Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek, Oslo.

7 Bull, *Mot Dag og Erling Falk*, 219.

8 *Arbeiderbladet*, “Et arbeidernes leksikon.”

9 Bull, *Mot Dag og Erling Falk*, 219.

10 *Ibid.*; Friis, *Bevegelsen Og Målet*, 165–66.

and negatively in DNA-affiliated newspapers and in Christian, central and right-affiliated publications. Both chief editors and several key contributors joined or re-joined DNA when *Mot Dag* was reconciled with the party in 1936 and later became prominent members of the democratic labor movement in Norway, which abandoned its Marxist orientation after World War II. The Communist Party became gradually marginalized in the labor movement and lost popular support after 1948. Thus, there was little demand for new editions of the revolutionary encyclopedia. It was only in the connection with the publication of a new, although not explicitly political, encyclopedia published by the labor movement publishing house Tiden in 1975, that the project was rehabilitated, and its pioneering effort in advancing working-class identity was recognized.¹¹ The only reprint is a much-abridged version published by the (then) socialist publishing house Pax in 1978.

RESEARCH HISTORY, SOURCES, NARRATIVE THEORY

Some correspondence and other records from the project are preserved in the archives of Friis, Hegna, and *Mot Dag* in the Labor Movement Archives and Library (Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek) in Oslo.¹² The Norwegian National Library has digitized most of the newspapers from the period. These contain advertisements, opinion pieces, and reviews about the project. *Arbeidernes leksikon* is barely mentioned in the relevant volumes of the official history of the Norwegian labor movement¹³ and figures only in short passages in the memoirs and biographies of the key figures involved in the project.¹⁴ Only limited academic scholarship has been undertaken about it. Kjell-Olav Hovde's MA thesis on the representation of the history of literature in the work highlights the inbuilt tension of the encyclopedia between establishing a working-class counterculture while at the same time educating its readership in theoretical Marxism.¹⁵ As we shall see, this duality is also present in the representation of classical antiquity, although arguably to a lesser degree. In the illustrated volume accompanying a 2012 exhibition on the history of encyclopedias in the Norwegian National Library,

11 Gerhardsen, Højdahl and Sannes, *Tidens Leksikon*, vol. 1, preface.

12 ARK 1065, ARK 1140, ARK 1536, ARK 1719.

13 Pryser, *Klassen og nasjonen*; Maurseth, *Gjennom kriser til makt*.

14 Bull, *Mot Dag og Erling Falk*; Friis, *Bevegelsen Og Målet*.

15 Hovde, "Arbeidernes Leksikons litteraturhistorie for fremtiden."

Arbeidernes leksikon figures as a prominent example in the chapter devoted to “Knowledge and ideology.”¹⁶

This article will focus on the reception and representation of the classical past in the encyclopedia. In Norway, as elsewhere, classical education long remained the preserve of male members of the upper classes. Mandatory Latin was removed from the curriculum in Norway with the introduction of three-year gymnasia in 1869. Nevertheless, it remained popular, with ca. one-third of the students still majoring in the language in the period when *Arbeidernes leksikon* appeared.¹⁷ History, however, was an essential subject in primary and secondary schools, and despite the emphasis on Norwegian and Bible history, children with the working-class background would have had some exposure to classical history after graduating from the mandatory seven-year public school system. This was even more the case for academically successful students who progressed through the selective two-plus-three years of middle school and gymnasium education. The explicit aim of *Arbeidernes leksikon*, stated in the preface to the first volume, was to prepare the working class for their historical mission: to assume power.¹⁸ What need would future rulers have for ancient history? Quite a bit, as it turns out.

Since the so-called linguistic turn of the 1970s, historians have been increasingly conscious that their activity intrinsically entails the construction of narratives.¹⁹ On a general level, Philippe Carrard, in his study of the French *nouvelle histoire* movement of the twentieth century, demonstrated that this applies to all historical texts, even those that explicitly reject a narrative approach.²⁰ New History, with an emphasis on description and structure, emerged partly in reaction to Marxist historiography,²¹ which does have an explicit narrative of historical development at its core. Nevertheless, New History’s insistence on structure over narrative is an interesting parallel to encyclopedias, with their alphabetical organization and claim to comprehensiveness and factuality. For Carrard, the hidden narratives of historical texts may be investigated through what he calls “the poetics of history:” the

16 Berg et al., *All verdens kunnskap*.

17 Statistics Norway, Graduates of general secondary schools, upper stage, available online.

18 Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol. 1, preface.

19 See Veyne, *Comment on écrit l’histoire*; White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*; Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*.

20 See Carrard, *Poetics of the New History*.

21 Carrard, *Poetics*, 43.

rules and conventions that historians adhere to in their writing. What poetics of history may be found in a Marxist encyclopedia? Paul Veyne has operationalized the study of historical narratives by pointing out how they consist of events organized into a plot.²² There is clearly a plot of history in *Arbeidernes leksikon*, but how is it constituted? Jörn Rüsen throws out a more fine-meshed net by distinguishing four types of historical narratives: the traditional, the exemplary, the critical, and the genetical.²³ For Rüsen, these regulate our sense of time along three axes: memory, continuity, and identity. Below, these three approaches are rolled out on selected articles about classical history from *Arbeidernes leksikon*. This will demonstrate the ways different kinds of historical narratives defined by Rüsen are used by the authors and editors of that work to organize events in a series of historical plots according to Veyne. These are then combined into a coherent overarching metahistory as established by Carrard.

THE GLORY THAT WAS GREECE

Rüsen's "traditional narrative" constitutes historical memory by describing the "origins constituting present forms of life." It highlights continuity by arguing that these have permanence and establishes identity by "affirming pre-given patterns of self-understanding."²⁴ Such narratives, frequently idealizing, have been influential in classical studies and remain common, particularly within popular culture. Examples would include descriptions of ancient Greece as the starting point of traditions of philosophy, political thought, art, and literature that continue through history and still serve to identify some people and specific cultural traits as "Western" even today. As expected from an explicitly revolutionary work, the traditional narrative is not dominant in *Arbeidernes leksikon*. Nevertheless, examples may be found, for instance, in the sizable parts of the article on Greek history describing literature, language, art, and architecture²⁵ and in the many short, unsigned articles on ancient biography, mythology, monuments, and geography. These accounts are brief but generally positive, highlighting Greek culture's innovative, unique, and lasting qualities. That ancient Greek temples, sculptures, and works of literature are considered relevant and vital to a Norwegian working-

22 See Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*.

23 Rüsen, *History*, 11–19.

24 Rüsen, *History*, 12.

25 J.F. Ording, "Hellas," in Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol. 3, 835–841.

-class audience of the twentieth century shows that the editors of *Arbeidernes leksikon* considered knowledge, education, and culture valuable, independently of the revolutionary cause. The Marxist perspective is still visible, for instance, in emphasis on artisans and skill over artists and individual genius and Greek culture as a collective enterprise.²⁶ Thus the twentieth-century working class is included in the traditional narrative of ancient Greece; it also becomes part of *their* heritage and identity.

ELITE OPPORTUNISTS AND A PROLETARIAN HERO

More critical and generally less positive in their evaluation of the classical world are the many “exemplary narratives.” For Rösen, exemplary narrative gives cases that exemplify the application of general rules of conduct. They demonstrate the validity of such rules across time and serve the purpose of identity building by generalizing historical experience to such rules of conduct.²⁷ Such narratives are found in biographical articles on Greek and Roman rebel leaders and rulers. A point in the case is the articles on the Gracchi brothers,²⁸ who spearheaded attempts at agricultural and political reform in the Roman Republic of the second century BC. The grievances addressed by the two reformers are seen as caused by social injustice grounded in the relations of production. The focus is on the existence of a large group of propertyless and destitute citizens living in dependence on smaller aristocracy with large, slave-run landholdings. While the social problems were real, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus are not seen as true champions of the people in *Arbeidernes leksikon*, but as members of a new and ascending elite using the ordinary people to promote their individual and group interests. This contrasts with the gladiator Spartacus, who led an influential slave uprising in southern Italy from 73–71 BC. Spartacus is perceived as a true revolutionary whose project failed due to the lack of class consciousness among the rebelling slaves, who were more interested in looting or running away than in effecting revolutionary change.²⁹ Biographical articles on ancient rulers are brief but also exemplify Marxist historical theory. Caesar and Augustus

26 E.g., Ording, “Hellas,” 826.

27 Rösen, *History*, 12.

28 Ording, “Graccherne,” in Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol. 3, 513–515; Ording, “Romerriket,” *ibid.*, vol. 3, 123–124.

29 Ording, “Romerriket,” 125–126; Friis and Hegna, “Spartacus,” *ibid.*, vol. 3, 478.

are, for instance, seen as driven by personal ambition but acting as the champions of a business- and slaveowner aristocracy locked in a power struggle with the traditional senatorial elite. The Roman people were diverted from their genuine class interest through entertainment, economic support, and access to slave labor.³⁰

The exemplary narrative in these articles is that class struggle is a constant in history. The ancient protagonists might be driven by personal ambition and patriarchal concern for the welfare of the people. However, the conflicts that bring them to the head of history for a brief time are brought about by structural tensions between new and old elites and between these elites, the free poor, and the large slave population. The constancy of class struggle throughout history demonstrated in these accounts confirms the validity of Marxist doctrine, and the failure of ancient revolts to turn into real revolutions due to a lack of class consciousness is a reminder of the importance of class solidarity to present-day workers.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE ACROPOLIS

Critical narratives, also called “anti-stories” by Rösen, challenge the origin stories and notions of continuity voiced in traditional narratives and create an identity through the rejection of tradition.³¹ These are common in *Arbeidernes leksikon*, as the premise of Marxist theory is that past (ancient and medieval) and current (capitalist) modes of production were based on exploitation. Following that view, a radical break from the past was imminent and inevitable. Again they may be exemplified through the extensive article on ancient Greece, which contains detailed discussions of Athens and Sparta.³² While the radical nature of Athenian democracy in the context of the ancient world is underlined, it also stresses how the system excluded women, discriminated against foreigners and descendants of mixed marriages, and rested on the exploitation of slave labor. This caused widespread unemployment among the free poor, who became dependent on state handouts, paid military service, and imperial expansionism. It is also emphasized how a small elite dominated the formally quite open system due to the wealth, education, and rhetorical training required to take an active part

30 Friis and Hegna, “Augustus,” *ibid.*, vol. 1, 428; “Cæsar,” vol 2, 122–123; Ording, “Romerriket,” 127–129.

31 Rösen, *History*, 12, 14.

32 Ording, “Hellas,” 818–828.

in democratic processes. Sparta is described as a “democracy for the ruling classes” with strong egalitarianism within the tiny elite of male citizens. At the same time, it rested on the exploitation of the helots, described as serfs and state slaves, and discrimination toward the Perioeci.

Readers familiar with classical history will recognize the various elements of these descriptions from any textbook and classical sources. They are presented in matter-of-fact language, and the narrative is driven by events and facts. Although laudable aspects of Greek culture are highlighted (see “traditional narrative” above), it is nevertheless clear to the reader that Greek freedom and democracy were not for all but rested on privilege, colonialism, and the exploitation of enslaved people.

UNDER THE YOKE OF ROME

The most crucial type of narrative of ancient history in *Arbeidernes leksikon* is, however, Rösen’s “genetical narrative,” which relates the memory of the “transformation of alien forms of life into proper ones.” The most explicit example of this is probably the article on the Roman empire, which fills no less than 21 columns or 11 pages.³³ As in traditional accounts, Rome is highlighted as a point of departure for later political, military, juridical, and religious development. But the plot of the article (in Veyne’s sense), which serves to organize the events and facts that are presented, is not the importance of Rome for later history but the rise and fall of the slave mode of production seen as characteristic of the ancient world in Marxist historiography. It explains how agricultural land and political rights were concentrated in aristocratic hands during the royal period and the early republic, leading to reliance on slave labor and the formation of a propertyless urban proletariat. The resulting tension was relieved by imperialism and government handouts. Imperialism led to the formation of new commercial elites, bringing about the end of the republic and the establishment of the principate. The concentration of capital in elite hands and the lack of new areas to colonize led to the civil wars of the third century. They were described as a revolutionary movement spearheaded by the soldiers, which failed to lead to social reform. They ended in a military and religious dictatorship, reinforcing economic stagnancy and decline, ultimately leading to the downfall of the Western empire.

33 Ordning, “Romerriket,” in Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol. 6, 115–136.

This narrative is established by casting critical events as the result of class struggle. The republican system was founded when the aristocracy successfully ousted the king but remained locked in a struggle between traditional and new elites who owed their wealth to slavery and used poor citizens as assets in their quest for power. The struggle of the orders, slave rebellions, social and civil wars, imperialism, *populares*, the collapse of republican institutions, and the establishment of hereditary rule all fit in. Important actors, whether the Gracchi, Catiline, Cicero, or Caesar, become figureheads of class interest, frequently motivated by personal ambition. On the one hand, the argument is circular; on the other, theory and history mutually reinforce the plot. In this manner, 1200 years of history and one of the largest empires of the premodern world become proof of concept for Marxist historical doctrine.

EVENTS, PLOT, POETICS

Zooming out from the specific narratives in the articles discussed above, the genetic narrative of the Roman Empire also exemplifies the grander historical narrative of *Arbeidernes leksikon*, constituted by hundreds of short and a handful of longer articles relating various aspects of history. History becomes a stream of repression, exploitation, and imperialism, provoking rebellions and revolutions that are often either unsuccessful or otherwise co-opted by elite agents and interests. This allows us to read the alphabetically organized, factual, and mostly jargon-free encyclopedic accounts as parts of a larger plot.

While the articles on ancient Greece and the Roman empire contain historical narratives aligned with Marxist historical theory, the many shorter articles need to be read in context to grasp the overarching narrative. Carrard's concept of "poetics of history," the rules and conventions that historians adhere to in their texts, might help exemplify how this was done in *Arbeidernes leksikon*. On a basic level, this is visible in the (actually quite limited) use of Marxist terminology, such as proletariat, class, exploitation, revolution, or mode of production, and the conscious selection of topics and assignment of space. Thus Aristonicos, the leader of a rebellion mobilizing slaves and the poor against Roman rule in Pergamon 133–129 BC, gets a full page that includes bibliographic

references. In contrast, Aristides, the great Athenian statesman, gets a mere ten lines.³⁴

On a more sophisticated level, Carrard divides historical texts that have no overt narrative structure into the categories of “descriptions” and “metahistories.”³⁵ Descriptions are texts that ask not “what happened” but rather “what were things like.”³⁶ Thus, they lack the events that propel the plot in Veyne’s approach to narrative history. This seems to be an apt parallel for an encyclopedic approach to history, which, although it contains many events, fails to organize these into a plot explicitly. Carrard finds two narrative structures even in descriptive texts, the “tour” and “the map.”³⁷ Arguably *Arbeidernes leksikon* makes use of both. The map consists of many small descriptions of historical conditions and processes, all playing out according to the same set of rules (e.g., slave mode of production, class struggle), and thus all situated within the same historical landscape. The tours are constituted by cross-references between articles that connect short factual articles with each other and the longer narrative accounts of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. The article on Aristonicos, for instance, refers to the Gracchi. That article, in turn, references the article on the Roman empire. Carrard’s “metahistories” are texts that engage with prior works and discuss already existing information in light of these.³⁸ *Arbeidernes leksikon* contains only a few explicit references to other texts. However, given that the whole project depends on bringing history in line with Marxist historical thought, there is a specific metahistorical dimension. At times this becomes overt, for instance, in the article on ancient Greece, which enters the modernist-primitivist debate on the nature of the ancient economy on the modernist side.³⁹ The article on the Roman empire polemicizes against explanations for the decline of Rome that were popular at the time: racial degeneration and excessive luxury, and argues that declining economic productivity and the inability to reform caused the downfall of the Western empire.⁴⁰ The descriptions and the metahistorical aspects of *Arbeidernes leksikon* contribute to the more common and familiar narrative of historical stages.⁴¹ Here

34 Friis and Hegna, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, vol. 1, 366–368.

35 Carrard, *Poetics*, 37–47.

36 Carrard, *Poetics*, 38.

37 Carrard, *Poetics*, 38.

38 Carrard, *Poetics*, 41.

39 Ording, “Hellas.”

40 Ording, “Romerriket.”

41 Carrard, *Poetics*, 47–54.

classical antiquity is just the first main stage in a development that has led to the capitalist world of the twentieth century, to a communist revolution in the Soviet Union, and that will also necessarily lead to a revolution in Norway and other industrial countries shortly.

THE CLASSICAL WORLD IN ARBEIDERNES LEKSIKON

There is no doubt that history is vital in *Arbeidernes leksikon*. While the emphasis is on contemporary and recent history, as well as the history of the socialist movement, premodern history, including the classical world, received broad coverage. The encyclopedia was explicitly Marxist and revolutionary, and history constituted evidence that Marxist analysis was valid. On a general level, Carrard's and Veyne's approaches to historical narration shed light on how this story was told consistently within the restraint imposed by the encyclopedic genre's requirement of brevity, factuality, alphabetization, and the multitude of non-historical content. On a more specific level, however, Rösen's typology of historical narratives shows that this was not the only story told of the classical past.

On the one hand, ancient history and classical heritage are represented as subjects of independent, even eternal significance, as typical in traditional historical works and encyclopedias of the period. This may be ascribed to ambitions to educate the working-class audience that the encyclopedia was written for, as well as to create a work that was an alternative to mainstream encyclopedias in terms of comprehensiveness. On the other hand, social injustice, poverty, discrimination toward women and foreigners, imperialism, and reliance on slave labor are characteristic of the ancient world. In this, the encyclopedia foretells topics that, although well-attested and known, only entered mainstream Western historiography in earnest in the 1970s. A third program, even if less overt, may also be discerned: The emphasis on revolutionary leaders, popular rebellions, and the hard work, skill, and industriousness of ancient slaves, artisans, and workers not only serves to establish historical consciousness but also indirectly credits the working class with the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome, thus appropriating the traditionally bourgeois domain of classical history for the people.

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Fig 1: The six leather-bound volumes of *Arbeidernes leksikon* (1931-1936) instill the liberating value of education and knowledge. The illustration on the back of the volumes depicts a human climbing toward the sunlight on a staircase built by a set of *Arbeidernes leksikon*.

ARBEIDERNES LEKSIKON



og råstoff for den elektriske
industri (ved bygging av flyve-
brennpunktet i den impetive)
amerikanske aluminiumstrust
produksjonen i Norge og
60 prosent av verdensproduktet
beholdes av det europeiske
1926 med Tyskland, Frankrike,
og mellomlandet. Aluminiums-
le er avhengig av dette kartell.



FRIS
reklamer

s leksikon»
ved siden av Ossland; «Tag-
ingen aktiv deltager i arbeider-
på hotte mod tidens krav kan
ikke opslagsverk. Oppsett ikke an-
føres idag. Tegn dig som sub-
bestillingsmedlem på baksiden
magasinet's ekspedisjon
lage). Oslo eller lever den til
ditt sted eller arbeidsplaz.

svarer allerede i de første to heftene på foregående spørsmål. I de følgende heftene vil man finne svar på en lang, lang rekke av de spørsmål som vi alle daglig støter på i det politiske liv hjemme og i utlandet. Vi nevner i fleng: Dawes- og Youngplanene, femårsplanen i Russland, forholdene i Kina, India og Syd-Amerika, o. s. v. Til alle disse spørsmålene vil man i Arbeidernes leksikon finne et rikt kartmateriale, som ikke hefter sig ved detaljer, men illustrerer de økonomiske og materielle forholdene i vedkommende land og derfor blir til direkte støtte for studiet av de spørsmål som interesserer arbeiderklassen: Kampen om verdensmarkedene, om råstoffkildene, om sjø- og transportveiene etc. etc. ***** Kjensgjerningene om disse spørsmål er det som avgjør svaret på dagens diskusjonsemner: er det fare for en ny verdenskrig, vil femårsplanen bli gjennomført, vil det britiske verdensimperium oppløses, kommer Norge med i neste krig og på hvilken side o. s. v. o. s. v. Men selvfølgelig vil Arbeidernes leksikon først og fremst gi svar på spørsmålene om arbeiderbevegelsen her hjemme, om dens historie, om *Thranitterbevegelsen*, om de faglige og politiske organisasjoners historie og menn og om alle de begivenheter som alle arbeidere bør kjenne, og som det særlig er nødvendig for dem som deltar i arbeidernes organisasjoner å være inne i. *****

«Arbeidernes leksikon» utkommer i 94 hefter à 60 øre, med 2 hefter hver måned. For ca. 3 øre pr. dag blir du altså i stand til å erhverve dig dette fond av kunnskaper om alle de spørsmål du støter på og som interesserer arbeiderklassen i dens kamp

Fig 2: Advertisement printed in labor-movement newspapers in 1931 to attract subscribers to *Arbeidernes leksikon*. The total price of the leather-bound set, NOK 71.40, amounted to c. one week's wage for a skilled worker. National Library of Norway. CC-BY-NC-ND.

ABSTRACT

The Norwegian *Arbeidernes leksikon*, “Workers’ Encyclopedia,” was published in six volumes from 1931–1936. It was inspired by *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, explicitly aimed at working-class readers, and establishing an alternative to the hegemonic bourgeoisie discourse. The editors and many of the contributors belonged to the Communist Party of Norway (NKP) and the independent communist intellectual organization Mot Dag (“Towards Dawn”). This article investigates the reception and representation of the ancient world in *Arbeidernes leksikon* based on selected articles through the lens of narrative theory. Classical education was traditionally the domain of the upper classes. It is argued that the *Workers’ Encyclopedia* demonstrates that reorienting the reception of ancient history was considered essential both to rewrite history according to Marxist doctrine and to establish workers’ culture as a full-fledged alternative to its bourgeoisie counterpart. In the *Workers’ Encyclopedia*, the classical past is celebrated not for its empires and rulers but for the effort of the masses and their struggle for freedom.

KEYWORDS: book history, classical reception, encyclopedias, counter-culture, historical narratives

Klasična antika v norveški *Delavski enciklopediji* (1931–1936)

IZVLEČEK

Norveška *Delavska enciklopedija*, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, je med letoma 1931–1936 izšla v šestih zvezkih. Zgledovala se je po Veliki sovjetski enciklopediji, ki je bila izrecno namenjena bralcem iz delavskega razreda in je predstavljala alternativo prevladujočemu meščanskemu diskurzu. Njeni uredniki in številni sodelavci so pripadali Komunistični partiji Norveške (NKP) in neodvisni komunistični intelektualni organizaciji Mot Dag (»Proti zori«). Članek skozi prizmo teorije pripovedi na podlagi izbranih člankov raziskuje recepcijo in reprezentacijo antičnega sveta, kot ga slika *Arbeidernes leksikon*. Klasična izobrazba je bila tradicionalno domena višjih slojev. Članek *Delavsko enciklopedijo* predstavi kot dokaz, da je bila preusmeritev recepcije pri antični zgodovini bistvena tako za reinterpretacijo zgodovine v skladu z marksistično doktrino kot za vzpostavitev delavske kulture kot polnopravne alternative svoji meščanski vzporednici. *Delavska enciklopedija* klasične preteklosti ni vrednotila zaradi imperijev in vladarjev, temveč zaradi prizadevanja množic in njihovega boja za svobodo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: zgodovina knjige, klasična recepcija, enciklopedije, protikultura, zgodovinske pripovedi