



# Art as a royal instrument of power in Copenhagen 1630-1800

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This article is based on talks held at the seminar *En kongelig rejse – bygninger og mennesker i magtens centrum* in Copenhagen 9-10<sup>th</sup> of September 2015 and on the seminar *The Baroque* held at Frederiksborg palace 20-21<sup>th</sup> of May 2016.

The article also presents the main topic of my PhD thesis *Da makten fikk et ansikt - Den offentlige iscenesettelsen av kongemakten i det tidlige dansk-norske eneveldet 1660-1746* that was accepted in November 2014 by The Norwegian University of Science and Technology. The focus of the thesis is the new and more individualized staging of the monarchy in the public space of the capital Copenhagen in the seventeenth and eighteenth Century. The new idea of personal rule that was introduced in renaissance Europe gave the living king and not just the office of kingship a new focus. One result of this was a reintroduction of the usage of the royal portrait in public space on a scale that had not been seen since the days of the Roman empire.

*King Christian the 5th's bust from Nørreport in Copenhagen, at the Danish military museum. Photo: Tøjhusmuseet.*

## **The introduction of the royal portrait as a public monument in Copenhagen**

It is wrong to claim that the personal staging of the monarchy in public space started after the establishment of absolutism in 1660. In fact, the builder of Frederiksborg palace, King Christian IV both introduced the royal portrait as an architectural component outside of the royal palaces, and was also the first king that decorated the capital with allegoric, sculptural monuments staging the monarchy.

On the city gate Vesterport and on the town hall of Copenhagen he placed his portrait. On the city gate, as a gilded bust draped in Roman toga, and over the main door to the town hall as a relief portrait of both him and the queen in contemporary clothes. In 1643 Christian IV also commissioned an equestrian statue of himself to be raised in Copenhagen.<sup>1</sup> The following war with Sweden imprisoned this plan to the drawing board. If this had been created it would have been one of the first equestrian statues north of the Alps.

## **The portrait of Caesar**

Interestingly, the public artistic efforts of the first

absolutist and hereditary king, Frederik III, was but a fraction of that of his elected father. The state finances were a disaster after the wars of the previous decades, and having learned by his father's mistakes King Frederik spent whatever he could spare on border fortresses and on the fortification of Copenhagen instead of blowing the artistic trumpet.

The only known public portrait of this king is a bust made by the French sculptor Francois Dieussart in the 1640's. In 1663 it was placed over the main gate of the new royal citadel in Copenhagen. Despite the fact that the bust was reused, it fitted the new image of the absolutist king perfectly. The best reference to the new system of rule was the autocratic Roman emperors of old, and the best reference to Frederic was Augustus as the ruler to whom the people had transferred all power.

While the rare usages of Roman references in public sculpture during the reign of Christian IV can be described as aspiring and fashionable, the absolutist king dressed as a Roman emperor was a contemporary parallel – the symbolism was meant to be taken literally. This was clearer explained and exemplified in other mediums than sculpture like literature, medals and coins.

The first and most literal reference to absolutist rule as a Roman „copy“ was a text tablet placed over the entrance gate to saint. Petri rectory in Copenhagen by parish priest Daniel Pfeiff at the occasion of the declaration of hereditary rule in 1660. The placing of the tablet was probably an act of opportunism and a



*Jeremias Hercules: Suverenitetsmedaljen (medal of sovereignty), Copenhagen 1660, at the National museum in Copenhagen. Photo: Daniel Johansen.*

declaration of loyalty to the new system of rule, but the language is quite clear: *“He that was elected king and lord. Now is given a new name – sole ruler. Because It (The kingdom) realized that It's happiness was dependent on imitating the romans and transfer all Its authority and might to this one man”*.<sup>2</sup>

The medal of sovereignty, made for the same occasion also presents the Roman uniform as a symbol of the new system. All the older and elected kings of the house of Oldenburg are portrayed in their contemporary clothes while Frederik III is presented as a Roman emperor. Surrounding the portraits of the kings of the electoral kingdom stands the text: *“Reges electitii ex domo oldenburgica daniaë et norvegiaë”*.<sup>3</sup> Surrounding the toga and laurel draped portrait of King Frederik stands: *“Fridericus tertius ex domo oldenb daniaë et norveg rex electitius octavus hæredit primus”*.<sup>4</sup> The same phenomenon can be seen on the coins of high value. Before 1660 the

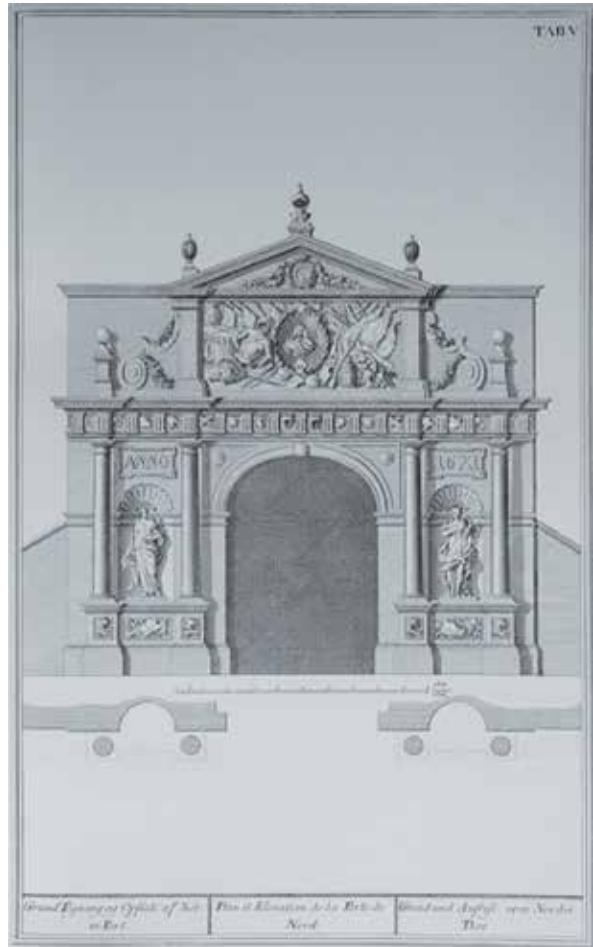
usage of toga and laurels were rare. After 1660 it became the photo presentation of the king on coinage.

Apart from the Audience house in Frederiksborg Palace the presentation of the king as Caesar in the years to come was most common on the mediums that were preserved from antiquity, such as sculpture and relief in stone and metal. More than anything the *all'antica* style became the new public image of the king. The painted portraits of the king clad in contemporary robes of state were not that easily accessible to the wider public. The king as Caesar on the other hand could be seen both on the coins in the subjects' purses, on public buildings as portrait decorations and on the statues in the public squares of the city.

The bust of King Frederik III on the citadel was the only portrait presentation of the monarchy in public space during the first decade of absolutism.

### The triumphal arch

Frederik III died in 1670 and the year after the first ceremonial inauguration of an absolutist monarch took place. In contrast to the former ceremonies of coronation this was done beyond of the public sphere, namely, in the chapel of Frederiksborg Palace where the king was anointed by the bishop primate of Denmark with only the court, the highest ranking nobles and foreign representatives present. Furthermore, the king strictly banned all public celebration connected to the act, arguing that this was a personal act of devotion.<sup>5</sup> The actual transfer of power had, after



*Nørreport in Copenhagen from Laurids de Thurahs (1706–59) Hafnia Hodierna.*

the logic of the system, happened by divine intervention when the old king died.



*Christian Nerger: King Christian the 5th's portrait on the organ prospectus in the Church of Our Savior in Copenhagen from circa 1680. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.*

The coronations had been grand public feasts where the king had led a procession from Copenhagen castle both to and from the city's cathedral. A compulsory element in the coronations of the renaissance was the raising of a temporary triumphant arch, which the king rode through as a climax of the royal procession, thus underlining the triumphant status of the role the king had just received from the estates and God.

A triumphal arch was also raised in Copenhagen in 1671, but not a temporary one and the king never rode through it on his way back from anointment ceremony at Frederiksborg. The northern gate of the city, Nørreport, was rebuilt in the shape of a triumphal arch, drawn by the architect Lambert van Haven. Like the western gate it got a portrait bust of the king, in this case Christian V, as a Roman emperor. The new aspect of the northern gate was two elements. First of all the whole composition was a celebration of the king. Flanking the gate, in niches there were colossal statues of his incarnated devices, Pietas and Justitia. Over the king's portrait bust, stood his crowned monogram, and surrounding the portrait, an aura of weaponry and all other elements of war. The king was presented as both virtuous and ruthless. A fitting combination for a combined celebratory monument and a fortress gate.

Secondly, it was rebuilt in the shape of a triumphal arch. This followed the contemporary French manner of rebuilding the gates of the cities into permanent triumphal arches celebrating the ruler through signs and symbols. This practise accelerated after Louis

XIV came of age and took up absolute rule. Like his Danish cousin, he refused any public celebrations to mark him taking up office, and he reduced the traditional travels of praise through the kingdom that had been the practice since the Middle Ages. Instead of the king entering the greater French cities through temporary triumphal arches, most of the cities lost the actual royal presence and got new permanent monuments where they could witness the triumph and glory of the monarchy in stone, covered with references to the king they never saw again. This became even more evident when King Louis moved the court to Versailles in 1682. He visited Paris for the last time in 1687.<sup>6</sup>

The case of Copenhagen and its triumphal arch was different. First of all this did not establish a practice that spread across the kingdom. In contrast to France, the monumental, permanent elevation of the king and the public usage of his portrait were exclusive to Copenhagen. Secondly, the citizens saw their living king often and not just his elevated image. In fact, Christian V liked walking around in the city talking to the shopkeepers, craftsmen and citizens of his capital. He also travelled around in his kingdoms. The arch of Nørreport underlined a distance not to the living king but to the creation of his office and the confirming and exclusive ceremonies connected to this. The arch can be seen as a reference to the arches from the coronation feasts of the electoral kingdom. The symbolism is the same; the triumphant element is the creation of a king. But this is not an arch for the

king to pass through surrounded by trumpeters and cheering crowds. The portrait in the arch underlines this as a monument about the creation of Christian V as king. An invisible act not influenced by noble councilmen or bishops, but through divine intervention. The ceremony of anointment was, as the monument Nørreport, a vindication of something that had already happened.

### **The divine king**

The second step upwards both in public royal elevation and the usage of portrait sculpture was the building of the parish church of Our Saviour in Christianshavn, Copenhagen, in the 1680's. A poem by the poet and priest Thomas Kingo has been associated with this particular initiative. In the poem the king promises God to build him a temple of magnificence if he returns from the Scanian wars.<sup>7</sup> In 1682 the war had ended and Christian V initiated the building of this grand parish church with Lambert van Haven as its architect. But a legitimate question is if the church of Our Saviour is dedicated to God or to the holy office of kingship. The church was planned as the first parish church in the Nordic countries with the sanctity of monarchy as its main theme. The king's portrait was placed at the centre of the massive oak organ screen. The monumental frame around the royal portrait consists of statues of the incarnated cardinal virtues and the devices of the king. Every organ pipe bears the inscription „Jahve and C5 Gloria“, angels point towards the top which

is the monumental crowned monogram of the king, and the whole organ is carried by elephants, the symbols of the highest royal order of Denmark; the order of the elephant. But the elevation continues through the church. The roof is decorated with the crossed monograms of Christian V and the royal crest. The altarpiece was originally planned by Nicodemus Tessin topped with a gigantic crown, an unmistakable royal reference, but the crown rotted away because of the many delays with the building of the church and the altarpiece was put up without the planned top.<sup>8</sup> The incarnated devices of King Christian V also flank the central motif of the altarpiece, which is Christ in Gethsemane. The art historians Hugo and Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen have described even this scene as a royal reference. In this case the parallel between the solitude sacrifice of Christ and that of the king.<sup>9</sup>

This is the only example of a total royal decoration program of a parish church in Denmark. King Frederik IV's royal chapel in Copenhagen Castle, from the 1720's, had an altarpiece with the king's laurel draped portrait placed in between the holy ghost and the resurrection, which today can be seen in the Church of The Holy Ghost in Copenhagen, but that is the only example we have of a usage of royal portraits and symbols in such a close context to the sacred image from Denmark of the baroque era.

### **The statue of Caesar**

The next step in the Roman elevation of the monarch was the raising of the first equestrian statue in the



*The present equestrian statue, at Kongens Nytorv in Copenhagen, is made by Einar Utzon-Frank (1888-1955) in the period 1938-1946. The Photo is of Abraham-César Lamoureux's original statue from circa 1680, which is located at the Royal Lapidary on Slotsholmen in Copenhagen. Kongernes Lapidarium i Christian den 4.'s Bryghus. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.*

Nordic countries. After the Scanian wars had ended, Christian V initiated the erection of an equestrian statue of himself. The devastated state finances after the war did not allow a costly bronze monument, so the rider was cast in gilded lead. The artist was the Frenchman Abraham-César Lamoureux who worked on the monument over a period of ten years. The project was initiated in 1683. Descriptions by Nic-

odemus Tessin the younger from 1687 point to a war monument with four chained slaves surrounding the mounted king.<sup>10</sup> Tessin probably saw a test composition of figures because the final solution was four virtues surrounding the king. The virtues were not finished before the late 1690's but the rider was solemnly unveiled in 1688. Medals and prints were made of the monument and its unveiling was marked by Erik Pontoppidan in his history of Copenhagen, as one of the most important dates in the city's history equalled with the founding of Christianshavn and the battle of Copenhagen in 1659.<sup>11</sup> It has to be pointed out that this was, also in a Northern-European perspective, an early equestrian statue. When it was unveiled in 1688 there were two equestrian statues in England, one in Scotland and two in France, both in Paris. In the German territories the only ones existing were the thirteenth century statues of Otto the Great. In the Netherlands, in Poland and in Sweden there was none.

The rider could have been inspired by both Pierre II Biards equestrian statue of Louis XIII on the present Place Vosges in Paris from 1639 and by Gian Lorenzo Bernini's statue of Louis XIV from 1665-80. The reason is the particular Roman uniform of the king which both of these equestrian statues have. The king sits on horseback with no stirrups in the traditional Roman manner. He wears a laurel crowned helmet, Roman uniform and holds a command staff in his right hand. In contrast to the northern gate the virtues flanking him are not his devices, but histo-

ric figures symbolizing different virtues. On the one side sat Queen Artemisia and Alexander the Great, symbolizing glory and heroism. On the other side Hercules and Minerva, symbolizing strength and wisdom. Under the horse a fifth symbolic figure was placed, namely the incarnated jealousy.

If the observations of Tessin were correct the statue was originally planned as a war monument. The symbol of the king and Denmark's resurrection as a military power after the Scanian war. Denmark lost its Baltic hegemony to Sweden during the 30 Years' War, but militarily won the Scanian war. Due to a Swedish-French alliance the peace was dictated from Paris and Denmark was forced to withdraw without any real gain. Presenting the war as a decisive victory was therefore not unproblematic.

Public monuments and art were also complicated matters in seventeenth century Europe. One of Sweden's demands after the war of 1658 was the destruction of the tapestries made for Frederiksborg Palace commemorating the victories over Sweden during the Kalmar-war in the beginning of the 1600's. The artworks were considered a humiliation of Sweden. Furthermore, a conflict erupted in the aftermath of the Scanian wars. In Paris Louis XIV erected a monument, centred with a statue of himself with the chained powers of Europe kneeling around the king, commemorating France's victory after the peace of Nijmegen in 1679, that among other things dictated the peace terms between Denmark and Sweden. On a medallion close to the monument, Sweden was

presented scraping and bowing towards Louis XIV receiving the terms of the peace. This led to a diplomatic incident between France and Sweden.<sup>12</sup> The possible change of figures on the sides of the rider can have a political explanation connected to this. The alternative with virtues was more neutral and still elevating enough. The king was still victorious but in this case over the virtues of the world.

### **The king's portrait on facades**

The next step in the public usage of royal portraiture was the establishment of the practice of using the portrait of the king as a marker of public buildings. The first example was typically enough also introduced by Christian IV with the formerly mentioned portraits of the king and queen over the entrance to Copenhagen town hall. This type of façade decoration was reintroduced at the end of the reign of Christian V when the newly founded Borchs student collegium in 1697 placed a great bust of the king in the gable of the collegium building. It burnt in 1728 and the bust was destroyed. When Elers student collegium opened in 1703 the gate was topped with a portrait medallion of King Frederik IV. This was the beginning of a new and vivid practice in the first half of the 1700's, but it was not a Danish invention of any sort. The usage of the royal portrait on the facades of university buildings started in England during the Tudor period, and after having won the throne King Henry IV of France initiated a grand campaign throughout France where the new king's portrait was

placed on the facades of town halls, courthouses, hospitals and university buildings. This continued as a practice during the reign of Louis XIII and, together with all other forms of propaganda, exploded during the reign of Louis XIV. Strangely enough, there are almost no examples of this type of portrait-usage in the German territories or in Sweden from the seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

The most monumental example of this usage of the royal portrait was the gable decoration of the chancellery building by Copenhagen Castle. When the original draft was presented to King Frederik IV it was of much more modest dimensions, and only with the royal monogram placed in the centre. In his revision, the king ordered the architect to increase the dimensions of the gable, place his portrait and the royal crest in the centre and surround this with a gigantic aura representing all different aspects of the state.<sup>13</sup> The result was something of an absolutist peacock with a royal aura presenting military, agriculture, the postal system, education, trade and many other aspects of governance.

The decoration of the chancellery building is a good example of the change in focus at the turn of the century. While the monuments erected over Christian V were expounding the king through heroic and pious virtues and with clear references to power and might, the context of most public royal portraits in the first half of the eighteenth century was that of usefulness. Seen from another perspective one can also view this as more and more complex and prac-

tical propaganda. The king as a symbol of the state could represent almost everything. After the town hall of Copenhagen burnt down in 1728 the new building was to be given a new royal decoration. The final result, after some years, was the combined portrait and crest of King Christian VI flanked by the incarnations of justice and concordance. When the custom house of Copenhagen was built in 1733 Minerva and Neptune flanked the royal portrait of Christian VI. When the navy got a new base in Copenhagen, the symbols surrounding the portrait bust of Christian VI were once again those of war and the king was draped as Caesar. Not unnatural symbols for the different functions the institutions represented, but also clear signs that the system was willing to elevate itself through all aspects of the state. This orientation away from virtues and towards the more bureaucratic elements of the state in royal propaganda, began in France in the 1690's. After a revision of the way Louis XIV was presented, the council of art decided to change the focus from the abstract to the concrete, from the allegoric to the simple. The symbol of the king as Sol in Victus – the unconquered sun – was seldom used after this and the new rhetoric presented statistics; how many Huguenots had the king converted to Catholicism, how many fortresses in the east had the king stormed, how many churches had he built.<sup>14</sup>

### **The King's Copenhagen**

After 1740 the tradition of decorating the facades of public buildings with royal portraits faded away.



*The pediment decoration from Kriegers custom house. After the building was torn down in 1891, the relief was placed in a wall in Ny Toldbodgade, where it still is today. Photo: Daniel Johansen.*

To explain this change one has to look at the greater picture. In the 1740's the palace of Christiansborg was completed. In the following decade the new part of the capital named after King Frederik V, Frederiksstadten, was laid out in eastern Copenhagen. The centre focus of this was Amalienborg Square with the new bronze equestrian statue of Frederik V by Jacques-François-Joseph Saly. The work on the statue was started in the 1750's but was not completed before 1771. It quite quickly, in contrast to the lead statue of Christian V, became renowned throughout Europe because of its artistic quality.

After the unveiling of Saly's statue of Frederik V, no other absolutist monarch was publicly portrayed in the capital. There is no known contemporary portrait in the public space of Copenhagen of Christian VII, Frederik VI or Christian VIII. This was not be-

cause the usage of royal statues and public portraits fell out of fashion in Europe. The Swedes did not produce their first royal statue before the Danes had put up their last. In both France and England royal sculpture was flourishing. After Napoleon took control of France his portrait was used on public buildings in the manner of Louis XIV.

The last question has to be, why did the usage of royal portraits stop? One possible explanation can be the new monumental frame around the monarch. The new palace of Christiansborg, Frederikstaden, with its monumental square, architecture and the equestrian statue finally gave the monarchy a representative frame that would strengthen its reputation internationally. The marginal decoration of public buildings and gates with the royal portrait was no longer necessary to elevate the king in the eyes of his subjects and foreign representatives.

#### **Notes:**

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2. Olden Jørgensen, Sebastian: *Poesi og politik - Lejlighedsdigtningen ved enevældens indførelse 1660*, (Forum for renæssancestudier 8), Museum Tusulanums Forlag, København. 1996: 52.
3. „Valgkonger av Danmark og Norge av huset Oldenburg“.
4. „Frederik III. Den åttende valgkonge og første arvekonge av huset Oldenburg over Danmark og Norge“.
5. Møller, Anders Monrad: *Enevældens kroninger – Syv sal-*

- vinger – Ceremoniellet, teksterne og musikken*, Forlaget Falcon, København 2012: 25.
6. Burke, Peter, *The fabrication of Louis XIV*, Yale University Press, London 1992: 155.
  7. Nielsen, Erik A.: *Thomas Kingo – Barok, enevælde, kristendom*, Gyldendal dansk forlag, København 2010: 192.
  8. Steenberg, Jan: *Danmarks kirker, København bd. 2, Nationalmuseet og G. E. C. Gads Forlag*, København 1960–65: 508.
  9. Johannsen, Birgitte Bøggild og Johannsen, Hugo: *Ny Dansk Kunsthistorie*, bd. 2 – *Kongens kunst*, Kunstbogklubben, København 1993: 198.
  10. „...die zoclen vor den Sclaven gar zu niedrig und klein, undt die Modelaturen am Piedestal gar zu zart (sic!)“ Tessin, Nicodemus d.y: *Studieresor i Danmark, Tyskland, Holland, Frankrike och Italien: anteckningar, bref och ritningar*, utgitt av Osvald Sirén, Nordstedt forlag, Stockholm 1914: 65.
  11. Pontoppidan, Erik: *Den Kongelige Residens-Stad Kiøbenhavn*, faksimile, Rosenkilde og Bagger, København 1973, original trykket hos Andreas Hartvig Godiche, Kiøbenhavn 1760: 344.
  12. Burke 1992: 169.
  13. Feldbæk, Ole og Raabyemagle, Hanne: *Den røde Bygning – Frederik den Fjerdes Kancellibygning gennem 275 år*, Finansministeriet, København 1996: 68.
  14. Burke 1992: 131.
- Feldbæk, Ole og Raabyemagle, Hanne: *Den røde Bygning – Frederik den Fjerdes Kancellibygning gennem 275 år*, Finansministeriet, København 1996.
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#### **Litterature:**

Burke, Peter, *The fabrication of Louis XIV*, Yale University Press, London 1992.