

Introduction

This volume comprises the Acts of the international conference: *Peter Oluf Brøndsted (1780-1842) – A Danish Classicist in his European Context*, which was hosted by the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters from the 5th to the 6th of October, 2006.

Neither the topic nor the timing was fortuitous.

Peter Oluf Brøndsted was a uniquely gifted man who lived at a crucial period of Danish and European history – beset by wars, revolutions and other armed conflicts, yet also characterized by a flourishing of the arts and sciences. A charming man of the world, who spoke several languages (including Modern Greek), Brøndsted became the first Danish antiquarian (with his friend the philologist G.F. Koës) to undertake the hazardous journey to Greece at the beginning of the 19th century. And on his return, he made the Classical – and modern – civilization of Greece come alive for a spell-bound audience to his lectures on his travels, which were read at the University of Copenhagen. Moreover, he was the author of numerous scholarly publications, which cover a wide range of subjects related to Classical Antiquity, not least numismatics, archaeology and philology.

It is appropriate that the publication of these Acts coincides with the bicentennial of the National Museum of Denmark in 2007, in consideration of the important role played by Brøndsted in the formative years of this museum. As a close associate of Prince Christian Frederik, who succeeded to the Danish throne as King Christian VIII in 1839, he was appointed keeper of the Royal Cabinet of Coins and Medals, and was also instrumental in the establishment of Christian Frederik's

private collection of antiquities, mainly Greek and South Italian vases, and coins. The collection fell to the Danish state in 1851 after his death (1848), and it constitutes the core of the Collection of Classical and Near Eastern Antiquities, and the South Italian and Sicilian parts of the Royal Collection of Coins and Medals in the National Museum.

Many of Brøndsted's most vivid and interesting texts – including his travel diaries and letters – remain unpublished, and most of the scholarly treatments of his life and work are written in Danish. This is no doubt the reason why his remarkable achievements have not received the recognition they deserve at an international level. There are hopeful signs, though, that this situation is about to change. The contributions to this publication will surely play their part in bringing this about, offering as they do for the first time a rounded picture of Brøndsted in his official capacity and also as a private person. Flawed in some respects, perhaps, but always strangely fascinating.

On behalf of the National Museum of Denmark, it is a great pleasure for me to extend my sincere thanks to those who supported the Conference and its publication financially: the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, the Carlsberg Foundation, Grosserer E. Schous Legat and Advokat Axel Ernst's og frøken Alfrida Ernst's Legat til Fremme af Numismatisk Forskning i Danmark. I should also like to take the opportunity to thank all the individuals who contributed to making the Conference successful.

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Fig. 1: P.O. Brøndsted. Painting by C.A. Jensen, London 1839. Later on, this portrait of Brøndsted as a mature man was executed in three similar versions, and it was used as a model for other reproductions. (Mikala Brøndsted, cat. no. 12).