

# Preface

In 1998, the Royal Collection of Coins and Medals and the Collection of Classical and Near Eastern Antiquities hosted a conference on “Christian VIII & the National Museum”. Encouraged by the success of that venture, the organizers decided to take a new initiative, similarly centred on a pivotal figure in the formation of the two collections. Hence the idea of hosting an international symposium on Peter Oluf Brøndsted (fig. 1) was conceived, and the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters kindly adopted this topic as the theme of its international symposium, from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2006. This volume comprises the papers read at the conference and two additional contributions: the original English version of an article by Ian Jenkins, which was previously only published in French, and a catalogue by Mikala Brøndsted of the iconography of her illustrious ancestor.

The title: “*Peter Oluf Brøndsted (1780-1842) – A Danish Classicist in his European Context*” was chosen to stress the importance – as we saw it – of viewing Brøndsted’s life and scholarship against the background of the wide circle of European antiquarians, architects and intellectuals of which he was a conspicuous member. And for this reason, speakers were invited not only from Denmark, but also from some of the other European countries, with which Brøndsted was so intimately connected.

Brøndsted is primarily remembered today as the first Danish scholar to travel to the Aegean (with Georg Friederich Koës, the brother of his fiancé), and as the first Dane to carry out excavations in Greece in the winter of 1812. It is, however, also worth noting that he was among the few Europeans of his day and age who took the trouble to learn Modern Greek, and that he on his return to Copenhagen promulgated his first-hand knowledge of ancient and modern Greece to the Danish public; Brøndsted thereby paved the way for the emergence of Danish followers of the Philhel-

lenic movement, a number of which actually went to Greece to fight – and die – in the War of Liberation against the Turks from 1821 to 1832.

Danish classicists have always been aware of Brøndsted’s lasting legacy as a pioneering promoter of Greek culture in Denmark, and of his role as mentor in all matters pertaining to Antiquity to the Danish Crown Prince Christian Frederik, who succeeded to the throne of Denmark in 1839 as King Christian VIII. He was instrumental in kindling the future King’s interest in establishing a private collection of Greek and South Italian vases, ancient coins and other antiquities. The Danish state took over the collection a few years after the King’s death, and the objects are now core elements of the Royal Collection of Coins and Medals and the Collection of Classical and Near Eastern Antiquities in the National Museum of Denmark.

At an international level, on the other hand, Brøndsted’s life and work have been, if not forgotten, then at least often overlooked, which is ironic seeing that he lived a large part of his life in London, Rome and Paris, spoke numerous foreign languages with great ease, and maintained friendships with many of the leading scholars, architects and artists of Europe. Moreover, Brøndsted published his *magnum opus* in both a French and a German edition (*Voyages et Recherches dans la Grèce I-II* and *Reisen und Untersuchungen in Griechenland I-II*). These prestigious volumes certainly made an impact on the scholarly world at the time, but they are now found only in specialized libraries; while Brøndsted’s most vivid accounts of his travels in Greece – in the form of his diaries, letters and lectures – were written in Danish, and remain unpublished or inaccessible to a non-Danish speaking audience.

Moreover, no biographer has chronicled the life of Brøndsted, who from a superficial point of view re-



Fig. 1. The portrait medal by David d'Angers, 1831, reproduced mechanically by Achille Collas in a special process, which was suitable for coins and medals. (Procédé de A. Collas). (Mikala Brøndsted, cat. No. 9).

sembles the happy-go-lucky Alladin as described by the Danish poet Adam Oehlenschläger, who – like Brøndsted – embodied the first generation of the so-called Danish Golden Age in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, there was much more to him than that. The contributions to this publication reveal him as vain, loquacious, and self-centred at times, yet also exceptionally intelligent and in possession of great charm, social skills and a natural ability for self-advertisement – a cosmopolite who loved good music and was the life and soul of any party. In short: a man of many parts who almost single-handedly opened a window on the world of Greece to a captivated Danish audience.

The organizers want to join Carsten U. Larsen in offering our sincere thanks to the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, and to the foundations, which funded the conference and the publication. We are grateful to all authors who contributed to the volume and extend a special vote of thanks to Professor T.V. Buttrey, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, for not only revising and copy-editing the English texts, but also for his generous help and friendly advice.

*Bodil Bundgaard Rasmussen, Jørgen Steen Jensen,  
John Lund & Michael Märcher*