

# RE-EXAM: Copenhagen Past and Present

## Introduction

As a foreigner in Copenhagen, there has been various aspects of Copenhagen that seemed interesting for me to discover. Among them, the architecture and layout of Copenhagen seemed to stand out to me. The architectural landscape of Copenhagen, characterized by its mix of royal palaces, military fortifications and churches reflected the nation's rich history and evolving socio-political landscape. From fortifications to renaissance palaces, the city serves as a testament to Denmark's power struggles between the monarch, nobility and clergy and transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional democracy. One of the most striking aspects has been the architectural legacy left by the era of absolute rule. From the grandeur of Christiansborg Palace to the strategic significance of Kastellet, Copenhagen's environs reflect the power dynamics and aspirations of its monarchs. The meticulous reconstruction efforts and the establishment of districts like Frederiksstaden also manifests as the monarch's desire to assert its authority and leave a lasting imprint on the cityscape. Moreover, I noticed that the large majority of churches in Copenhagen are Protestant. Copenhagen's religious landscape surely tells a compelling story of transformation. The prevalence of Protestant churches echoes the great shift brought about by the European Reformation started by figures like Martin Luther. The rejection of Catholic traditions and the rise of Lutheranism underlines Copenhagen's embrace of new religious ideologies and its transition from centuries-old ecclesiastical norms to newfound Protestantism. Lastly, from my time in Copenhagen I felt the degree of freedom and openness in the city, particularly when it comes to advertisements and publications. This owes to the abolition of censorship laws in Denmark during the 19th century. The event marked a significant turning point in Copenhagen's press history. Prior to this, strict censorship regulations constrained journalistic expression and stifled dissenting voices. However, the rise of liberal movements and the push for constitutional reforms precipitated a paradigm shift towards greater press freedom and political transparency. In summary, all of these aspects and history in royal and military architecture, religion and freedom and openness shaped the interesting city to me, that is Copenhagen.

## Discussion

Discovering the architecture built during the era of absolute rule in Copenhagen has been particularly intriguing for me as a foreigner. The historical context behind these architectures unveils a narrative of monarchy's supremacy and control over the nation. During the era of absolute rule in Copenhagen, significant transformations altered the landscape with prominent examples such as Christiansborg Palace and Frederiksstaden. These architectural marvels were instrumental in showcasing the monarchy's supremacy and control over the nation as they capture the attention of ordinary Copenhageners with their imposing scale and majestic architecture (Aarhus Universitet, n.d.). Copenhagen Castle, once the primary residence of the monarch during the absolute rule period, possessed an antiquated medieval design that failed to embody the authority of the absolute ruler. Recognizing the necessity for modernization, Frederik IV initiated a comprehensive reconstruction project for Copenhagen Castle which included the addition of a new archive building and the Red Building for central administration. Subsequently, under the reign of Christian VI, Copenhagen Castle was razed to make room for Christiansborg Palace (Aarhus Universitet, n.d.). Completed in 1740 and embellished over the following decade, the palace featured private quarters for the monarch and queen, as well as accommodations for courtiers arranged according to their estate and rank, mirroring European architectural models. The close proximity of the king's living quarters, administrative offices, and social spaces emphasized the intimate relationship between the monarchy and the state. Despite suffering a devastating fire in 1794, Christiansborg Palace was reconstructed and renovated by 1828, reaffirming its significance as a seat of royal power. Moreover, the establishment of Frederiksstaden, a new district characterized by expansive thoroughfares and stately mansions was an octagonal courtyard adorned with an equestrian statue of Frederik V sculpted by Jacques-François-Joseph Saly. Constructed in 1748, the district comprised four palaces, each commissioned by different members of the nobility who lent their names to these architectural marvels (Aarhus Universitet, n.d.). In the aftermath of the fire at Christiansborg Palace, two of these palaces became permanent residences for the royal family, solidifying Amalienborg as a distinguished royal abode. For the citizens of Copenhagen, the imposing structures erected during the era of absolute rule served as tangible manifestations of the monarchy's dominance and splendor. Edifices like Christiansborg Palace functioned as symbolic representations of royal authority that evoked awe and admiration from ordinary Copenhageners who witnessed the city's metamorphosis. The aim of these architectural wonders to instil a sense of pride and allegiance among the populace resulted in their creation that remained to this day an elegant standing proof of monarchic history in Copenhagen.

Military fortifications such as Kastellet, which I fortunately visited is a star-shaped fortress that symbolize Denmark's historical emphasis on defense and sovereignty. Constructed in the 17th century, Kastellet stands as a testament to Copenhagen's strategic

significance and military prowess during tumultuous times. Its preservation amidst urban expansion showed Denmark's respect for its martial legacy and commitment to historical continuity. It also ties in with Danish history, particularly the monarchy and the wars that the Danish kingdom were involved in. As the Duke of Holstein, the Danish Kings faced significant challenges arising from the complex history of the region (Langen & Stjernfelt, 2022). In the centuries before, the duchy of Sleswick-Holstein had experienced fragmentation among various inheritance lines, leading to crucial parts of Holstein falling outside Danish sovereignty and instead coming under the authority of the Duke of Gottorp, who resided in Kiel. Through marriages, certain territories had become subject to the control of the Russian Czar. Another portion of Holstein was governed jointly by the Danish King and the Duke of Gottorp, further complicating the territorial landscape with disjointed fragments. This historical division presented considerable problems for the Danish government as the Duke of Gottorp had the freedom to form alliances with foreign powers, including Denmark's arch-enemy, Sweden. The Danish King that was involved in the thirty year's war, Christian IV embarked on the mission to modernize the deteriorating medieval fortifications of Copenhagen (Skaarup et al., 1998). In the process, the construction of Kastellet was ordered to deter enemies from conquering the city. Not too long after, Denmark encountered a near existential threat in 1658 when the advancing Swedish army from Holstein crossed the frozen Belts from the west and captured all of Zealand except for the fortified Copenhagen that King Frederick III fiercely defended (Langen & Stjernfelt, 2022). The humiliating Peace at Roskilde in the same year led to Denmark losing its ancient territories east of the Oresund strait, including the provinces of Scania, Halland, and Blekinge, except for the island of Bornholm. Despite subsequent attempts to recapture lost territories, notably during the Great Northern War in the early eighteenth century, tensions persisted between Denmark-Norway and Sweden-Finland well into the latter half of the century. However, due to the wars and tension with Sweden, the Kastellet was greatly expanded and became the military landmark that people came to know today.

In Copenhagen, one can see that most churches are Protestant and I found it interesting. The prevalence of Protestant churches reflects a natural progression in the religious history of the city, deeply intertwined with the broader European Reformation that unfolded in the early 16th century. 1517, Martin Luther's critique of the practices and doctrines of the Catholic Church marked a pivotal moment that challenged the religious authority of the catholic clergy and the advent of Protestantism in Europe (Aarhus Universitet, n.d.). This event known as the Reformation initiated a period of religious turmoil and paved the way for a transformation in Christian practices and beliefs. Luther's publication of the ninety-five theses in Wittenberg triggered a division within the established church, as his criticisms of indulgences and the outbreak of the German Peasants' War from 1524–1526 formed a profound challenge to the Catholic Church. Luther's writings alongside those of other reformers disseminated rapidly across Europe thanks to the printing press advocated for the direct relationship between individuals and God without the need for ecclesiastical mediation. Central to the Reformation was the rejection of the church's role as an intermediary with reformers emphasizing salvation and

grace as solely within the domain of God (Aarhus Universitet, n.d.). In this way, Luther and his followers rendered practices such as indulgences, monasticism, pilgrimage, and saint worship as human inventions. The emphasis shifted towards faith over deeds and advocated for the direct access to God's word through translated Bibles and vernacular sermons. Luther also challenged the celibacy requirement for priests and emphasized obedience to secular authorities appointed by God. Despite initial denouncements from figures like Frederik I, Lutheranism gained traction across Jutland by 1526, with Christian, Frederik I's son, imposing evangelical services and abolishing celibacy in Haderslev between 1526 and 1528. In urban centers like Viborg and Malmö, the influence of Lutheranism was evident as reformers like Johannite monk Hans Tausen preached according to Lutheran principles, leading to the closure of monasteries and the marriage of pastors. Danish reformers drew inspiration from Luther and other reformation movements, advocating for societal reform guided by biblical principles (Aarhus Universitet, n.d.). The tumultuous period of the Reformation culminated in a Lutheran reformation imposed from above by Christian III that was backed by military support, he imprisoned Catholic bishops and declared himself the head of the church in a treaty signed on October 30, 1536. The drafting of the Reformation ordinance in 1537, which served as the church's constitution for approximately 150 years, further institutionalized Protestantism as the dominant religious force in Copenhagen. In brief, Copenhagen's transition to Protestantism was shaped by the broader currents of the European Reformation and the local efforts of Danish reformers. The city's religious landscape reflects the enduring legacy of Lutheranism and the profound impact of the Reformation on the cultural, social, and religious aspects of Copenhagen.

Aside from the grand buildings, another thing that has been interesting to me a foreigner is the freedom and openness in the city. This manifested itself in the form of press and advertisements. I have seen with my eyes something that would not be seen in my home country, an advertisement for a strip club. The historical reason for this freedom and openness can be traced back to 1849 when the introduction of a new constitution paved the way for the abolition of censorship laws and the establishment of a free press in Denmark (Aarhus Universitet, n.d.). This transformative moment empowered journalists and media outlets to challenge authority, hold government officials accountable and engage in robust public debate. Copenhagen gradually emerged as a hub of journalistic activity with newspapers and periodicals playing a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and political discourse. Stepping back to the reign of King Christian VII marked by his mental afflictions, further underscored the vulnerabilities of absolute rule, particularly in matters of succession and regency, Christian VII's erratic behavior and the instability it introduced to the royal court highlighted the fragility of a system centralized around a single individual (Langen & Stjernfelt, 2022). In those periods Copenhagen experienced tumultuous political dynamics, with the ascension of the young German physician Johann Friedrich Struensee to power in 1768. Struensee's rise to prominence was facilitated by his appointment as the personal physician to King Christian VII and his subsequent involvement with Queen Matilda (Langen & Stjernfelt, 2022). Struensee's tenure as de facto ruler of Denmark from 1770 to 1772 was characterized by a flurry of legislative reforms aimed at modernizing Danish society. One of

the most significant reforms introduced by Struensee was the Press Freedom Ordinance of 14 September, 1770. This ordinance represented a groundbreaking departure from the stringent censorship laws that had governed the Danish press under King Christian V's Danish Law of 1683 (Langen & Stjernfelt, 2022). The Press Freedom Ordinance heralded a new era of journalistic liberty, abolishing the requirement for prior approval from the Academic Council of the University of Copenhagen before publications could be circulated. This marked a profound shift in power dynamics and paved the way for a vibrant media landscape characterized by diverse viewpoints and unrestricted public discourse that was not unlike modern times. The Ordinance expressed the Enlightenment ideals of truth-seeking and impartial inquiry and envisioned public sphere where citizens could freely challenge abuses and prejudices (Langen & Stjernfelt, 2022). Despite Struensee's subsequent downfall and execution in 1772, the legacy of press freedom endured in Copenhagen. The post-Struensee government, while cautious of the destabilizing effects of unrestricted press, refrained from reinstating pre-print censorship. As such, the advent of press freedom in Copenhagen in 1770 represented a watershed moment in Danish history, catalyzing vibrant public discourse and fostering intellectual exchange. While subsequent attempts were made to curtail press freedom, its enduring impact reshaped the media landscape and contributed to the vibrancy of Danish society. Press freedom has remained to be a cornerstone of democratic governance in Copenhagen that reflects the city's commitment to open dialogue and free expression as observed.

## Conclusion

Copenhagen stands as a captivating source of history, culture, and progress that offers diverse experiences. As I delved into the city's architectural landscape, I took my time to admire the elegance and significance of its royal palaces, military fortifications, and churches. The era of absolute rule left an indelible mark on Copenhagen, with structures like Christiansborg Palace and Frederiksstenen serving as tangible reminders of the monarchy's supremacy and aspirations. These architectural marvels not only reflect the power dynamics of their time but also symbolize the city's enduring resilience and evolution. Furthermore, exploring military fortifications like Kastellet provided insights into Denmark's historical emphasis on defence and sovereignty, underscoring the nation's commitment to safeguarding its borders amidst geopolitical challenges and conflicts. The religious landscape of Copenhagen showcases the transformation of Copenhagen religiously. From Martin Luther's critique of Catholic doctrines to the institutionalization of Lutheranism under Christian III, Copenhagen's transition to Protestantism reflects broader currents of religious reform and societal change. Moreover, the city's commitment to freedom and openness marked by the abolition of censorship laws in 1849 represents a watershed moment in Denmark's journey in achieving freedom and openness. The legacy of press freedom pioneered by figures like Johann Friedrich Struensee shaped Copenhagen's vibrant media landscape and fostered a culture of open dialogue and intellectual exchange. In essence, Copenhagen's past and present intertwine to create a captivating narrative of resilience, innovation and cultural diversity that left an indelible impression on all who have the privilege to explore its streets and landmarks.

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