

The funeral stele of P.O. Brøndsted at the Copenhagen Assistens' Cemetery

by Karin Kryger

The funeral monument of Peter Oluf Brøndsted was erected in 1859, 17 years after his death, in the Assistens' Cemetery, in which many of the leading figures of Copenhagen of the early 19th Century were buried, at a grave bought in 1818, when Brøndsted's wife Frederikke Koës died the 10th of May 1818 in childbed. In 1802, the author August Hennings made an ironic note in his diary: "Yesterday I visited the cemetery for the poor, where everyone rich of spirit and money is interred".¹ An extension of the cemetery was carried out in 1805, and Brøndsted's grave is to be found here in section F nr. 2, near many graves of his contemporaries, among them the physicist H.C. Ørsted, the linguist Rasmus Rask, and Brøndsted's successor as keeper of the Royal Collection of Coins and Medals Christian Jürgensen Thomsen.

Brøndsted's monument

The tomb has a spectacular position on a corner at the crossing of two paths. A fence of iron latticework surrounds the grave, made by the Copenhagen foundry Ludvigsen & Hermann. The original latticework has disappeared, but in 2000, the fence around the grave was re-established by means of a latticework from an equivalent grave.²

The monument is a fine rectangular stele of fair, al-

most white marble (fig. 1). On the top is seen in haut-relief a powerful portrait of the deceased in profile. The head is carved almost free from the background. Brøndsted is shown as a Roman clad in a mantle. Beneath the portrait runs a decorative frieze with a meander above a palmette band, and below is a relief showing a wine jug with lilies. The monument has no plinth. The inscription on the stele runs: "Peter Oluf Brøndsted/ født den 17^{de} November 1780/ død den 26^{de} Juni 1842." and "ΟΠΟΥ ΤΟ ΠΝΕΥΜΑ ΚΥΠΙΟΥ ΕΚΕΙ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ" i.e. 2 Corinthians 3:17: "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom".

The monument was made by the sculptor H.W. Bissen who was commissioned by Brøndsted's daughters Augusta Marie Hall and Frederikke Treschow. It was placed in the cemetery around New Year 1859-60 according to correspondence between Augusta Maria Hall and H.W. Bissen and Bissen's own notes.³ It seems that the architect M.G. Bindesbøll designed the stele.

Brøndsted's plans for a monument for his wife

Brøndsted planned a monument for his wife, Frederikke, née Köes, Brøndsted, to be executed by his friend Bertel Thorvaldsen, but the plan was not realised. In 1819, when Thorvaldsen visited Copen-

1. "Ich besuchte den Armen Kirchhof vor dem Nordenthore, wo sich alle reiche an Geist und Geld begraben lassen." Bobé 1934, 67.
2. Invoice dated 13th of December 2000 in the Office of the Assistens' Cemetery.
3. KB (The Royal Library/Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen),

NKS (New Royal Collection/Ny kongelig Samling), 3341 4^o: Breve til og fra H.V. Bissen, letters from Augusta Hall (Brøndsted's daughter), the 1st of December 1859 and the 2nd of February 1860; KB, NKS 2047 2^o: H.V. Bissens Efterladte Papirer IVd, Privatøkonomi, Regnskabsbøger. See also Rostrup 1945, II, 131f.



Fig. 1. Brøndsted's funeral stele at Assistens Cemetery, Copenhagen. Photo Karin Kryger 2006.

hagen, Brøndsted and Thorvaldsen corresponded on the subject. On the 13th of July 1819 Brøndsted wrote to Thorvaldsen: “Do not forget to visit with my sister-in-law the consecrated spot at the Assistens Cemetery, a spot where my thoughts always rest with sighs and missing and yearning. You do know that you promised me a memorial for the blessed one, and you had to see the place yourself where it will stand under the beautiful trees. Go with God! and do write your dear friend *Brøndsted*.”⁴ The day before, Brøndsted wrote a similar letter to his sister in law, Marie Aagaard, telling her that Thorvaldsen had promised to erect “to the blessed a noble memorial”.⁵ On Christmas day of the same year he thanks Thorvaldsen for keeping his promise of visiting the grave and in an unfinished letter to Marie Aagaard dated the 13th of December 1819 Brøndsted says that Thorvaldsen in a short time would start his work with the monument.⁶ The 1st of January 1823 Brøndsted writes Marie Aagaard telling her that Thorvaldsen has promised to carve a bust of him but: “we agreed, on only one condition: that he was not carving my bust in marble before finishing the small monument he promised me for the consecrated spot of earth in Assistens cemetery.”⁷ The promised monument for Brøndsted’s wife seems never to have been made. At least no original monument by Thorvaldsen was erected on the “consecrated spot”. But there is a tiny

4. “Glem ikke med min Svigerinde at besøge det indviiede Sted paa Assistenzkirkegaarden ved hvilket min Tanke allerideligst dvæler med Suk og Savn og Forlængsel. Du veed at Du har lovet mig en Mindesteen over den Velsignede; og Du maatte selv see Stedet hvor den skal staae under de smukke Træer. Rejs nu med Gud! og skriv til Din trofaste Ven *Brøndsted*.” Thorvaldsen’s Museum, Thorvaldsen’s archive, Brøndsted to Thorvaldsen, the 13th of July 1819. I am grateful to Ernst Jonas Bencard, Thorvaldsen’s Museum, for finding this and other relevant letters in Thorvaldsen’s archive for me. The correspondence of the memorial between Thorvaldsen and Brøndsted is mentioned and cited in Andersen 2005, 78

5. Sass 1963-1965, II, 87.

6. Thorvaldsens Museum, Thorvaldsen’s Archive; Sass 1963, II, 88.

7. “Ikkun om én Betingelse ere vi blevne enige om: at han ei maa udføre min Buste i Marmor inden det lille Monument han har lovet mig til den inviede Jordplet paa Assitenskirkegaarden er ganske færdig”, Sass 1963-1965, II, 87.



Fig. 2. M.G. Bindesbøll. Sketch for a funeral stele for P.O. Brøndsted ca. 1856. Art Library of Denmark, Collection of Architectural drawings.

possibility that Thorvaldsen actually did make a relief for Brøndsted, a relief, which the architect Bindesbøll perhaps intended to use for the monument of Brøndsted, for which he made sketches many years later. In the end, a small monument for Brøndsted's wife Frederikke actually was erected, but it was not an original work by Thorvaldsen. Old photographs of Brøndsted's grave show a small tablet for Frederikke Brøndsted - born Koës - with Thorvaldsen's very popular relief *Night carrying her children Sleep and Death* in biscuit leaning towards Brøndsted's stele.

M.G. Bindesbøll's sketches for Brøndsted's monument

The architect M.G. Bindesbøll worked many years later on a project for Brøndsted's monument. One of his drawings shows the design of the stele with a portrait (fig. 2), and two sketches show a relief with small cupids or genii in a boat (fig. 3-4). It even appears that Bindesbøll had some influence on the appearance of the finished stele, and one of the drawings dated 1856 might show a certain disappointment, as he has written, "Brundsted has landed at Bissen" (fig. 3).⁸ Now, Bindesbøll was an architect and art-craft artist, he was *not* a sculptor. Thorvaldsen did actually make small reliefs with cupids in a boat and also Cupid and Psyche in a boat. Do the drawings of Bindesbøll from 1856 showing small cupids reflect a plan of a monument with a relief by Thorvaldsen? In an undated letter to H.W. Bissen, Bindesbøll argues that the "antique fragments" of Brøndsted, which were placed at Bissen's atelier, should be moved to Thorvaldsen's Museum.⁹ Has this idea of Bindesbøll regarding Brøndsted's "antique fragments" anything to do with the plans of erecting a monument for Brøndsted? Was it a relief of Thorvaldsen or rather an antique relief, which Bindesbøll at first considered placing on Brøndsted's funeral stele?¹⁰

8. "Brundsted han er gaaet i Land til Bissen".

9. KB, NKS 3341 4^o: Breve til og fra H.V. Bissen.

10. This "antique fragment" of Brøndsted from Bissen's atelier has

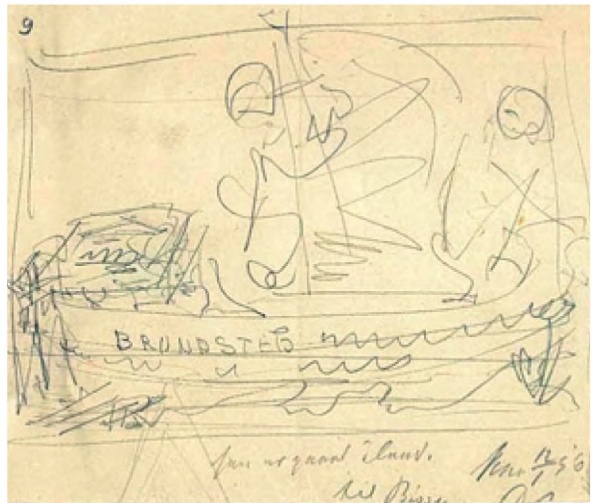


Fig. 3. M.G. Bindesbøll. Sketch of a relief showing cupids in a boat. Signed and dated 1856. Art Library of Denmark, Collection of Architectural drawings.



Fig. 4. M.G. Bindesbøll. Sketch of a relief showing cupids in a boat. Art Library of Denmark, Collection of Architectural drawings.

One of Bindesbøll's sketches shows a rectangular stele with a portrait on the upper part and is in fact rather similar to Bissen's stele. In spite of Bindesbøll's perhaps slightly frustrated note on the drawing, he seems to have designed the form and perhaps the decorations of the stele.

The two other sketches for Brøndsted's monument

not been identified. Bindesbøll died the 14th of July 1856 (note by editor).

show cupids on a boat. As Bindsbøll himself was not a sculptor, the sketches may show a relief, which Brøndsted's daughters wanted to have placed on the monument, which he was designing. But which relief is in question? It does not seem to be a relief of Thorvaldsen, as none of Thorvaldsen's reliefs looks quite as the reliefs on Bindsbøll's sketches. In the search to identify the motif of Bindsbøll's drawings a monument in Holmen's Cemetery at Copenhagen might be helpful. It was erected for the numismatist and keeper of Christian VIII's private collections, Captain in the navy Christian Tuxen Falbe and his daughter J. Trepka, both of whom died in 1849. This monument has reliefs by the sculptor G. C. Freund, a nephew of the well-known Danish sculptor H.E. Freund.¹¹ In the top are two portraits of father and daughter and below a relief of a boat with cupids (fig. 5). G.C. Freund's relief takes its inspiration from the Roman funeral monument of Naevolia Tyche's in *Via dei Sepolcri, Pompeii* dated to the 1st century AD.¹² The question is: did Thorvaldsen make a relief for Brøndsted with the same motive? Did Brøndsted own an antique relief similar to Naevolia Tyche's? Or was Freund's relief with the boat and the cupids originally meant for Brøndsted's monument? As the family preferred the portrait of Bissen, might he have used the relief for Falbe's monument instead? Does Bindsbøll's remark on Brøndsted having landed at Bissen refer to the fact that the sisters had chosen a stele with a portrait by Bissen and not a stele with a relief of Freund? Perhaps it has nothing to do with his own frustration, in not having the commission? The latter solution might be likely, as Bindsbøll's sketch with the portrait stele, as mentioned above, is very like the one, which was actually carved,¹³ and thus there seems no reason for Bindsbøll to regret the choice by Brøndsted's daughters.



Fig. 5. C.G. Freund. Cupids in a boat. Relief on the monument of Christian Falbe, Holmens Cemetery Copenhagen. Photo, the author 2006.

There is, however, no correspondence left between Bindsbøll and the Brøndsted sisters, which can illuminate Bindsbøll's role in the monument.

The monument

The monument is first mentioned in Bissen's papers in a letter from Augusta Maria Hall dated the 5th of July 1858. It is completed on the 1st of December, as Augusta Maria Hall writes Bissen about the deed to the grave, which she has to receive from her brother George before the monument can be placed. On the 2nd of February she has been told that the monument has been erected, and she asks Bissen what she and her sister owe him for "the wonderful bust from your artistic hand". In Bissen's papers there is an undated entry noting that the price is 180 rigsdaler and that he had received 132 rigsdaler. The 20th of March Mrs. Hall writes Bissen from her and her husband's house, the

11. I am grateful to curator John Lund, the National Museum of Denmark. During the excursion of the Brøndsted's seminar to the Assistants' Cemetery, where I showed copies of the drawings, he reminded me of the relief on Falbe's monument. The monument is ascribed to G.C. Freund in Werner 1912, 31.

12. Curator Jan Stubbe Østergaard, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek has

identified G.C. Freund's inspiration, for which I am much obliged.

13. Bentsen 1942, 205-06. Bentsen is not aware of H.W. Bissen's role in the monument. Rostrup 1945 does not know or ignores Bindsbøll's drawings for Brøndsted's stele.

Ny Bakkegaard, that he will receive the money as soon as she is able to go to town. The sum was apparently the balance of 48 rigsdaler.¹⁴

The portrait

The portrait on Brøndsted's funeral stele seems to have been based partly on a painted portrait by C.A. Jensen, partly on a portrait medallion by the French sculptor David d'Angers (1788-1856). Augusta Marie Hall asks Bissen in a letter dated the 5th of June 1858 if he will return the "small" portrait of her father by C.A. Jensen, if he does not need it any more. As the painting is called "small", it must be either a painting from 1837, where Brøndsted is seen partly in profile or one from 1839, where he is seen en face.¹⁵ Both measure approximately 27 x 20,5 cm. The latter, which was in the ownership of Frederikke Treschow, the younger daughter of Brøndsted, is known in several replicas and it is known that Augusta Maria liked it very much, as she chose it as the source of the portrait in Brøndsted's posthumous publication *Travels in Greece*.¹⁶ In 1831, David d'Angers made a very powerful relief-medallion of Brøndsted, which Bissen probably also had at his disposal when carving the portrait of Brøndsted.¹⁷ At least Bissen's portrait shows dependence on David's portrait, even though Bissen's portrait shows Brøndsted at a more mature age. One copy which is still in the ownership of the family might be the one Bissen used for his portrait.¹⁸ Another is in the National Museum of Denmark, bought in 1935 in Paris

from a Russian refugee.¹⁹ David's portrait of Brøndsted is more detailed than that by Bissen, and David's handling of the hair seems more natural, where Bissen's portrait seems somewhat abstract, which might be intentional, as Bissen portrayed a dead man, regarded as a hero by his daughters, but David portrayed a living man at his best age. Bissen was inspired in his composition and the set-up of the portrait by his teacher, H.E. Freund's portrait of Friederikke Bruun in the cemetery of the Copenhagen St Petri Church. The fleshy portrait of Brøndsted is like that of Friederikke Bruun, in very high relief, standing almost free from the background, and the mantle, which gives the composition gravity downwards, does have close reference to the portrait of Friederikke Brun.²⁰ The portrait on the monument, alas, is not so sharp in its contours, as 150 years of rain and pollutions has watered down Brøndsted's face (fig. 1). Older photos show clearer forms than we today can recognise (fig. 6). Bissen made two replicas of the portrait in marble, now probably in the ownership of descendants in Norway and Sweden,²¹ and at least one copy in plaster, which formerly was in the ownership of the University of Copenhagen.²² Present whereabouts unknown.

The ornaments

The stele has fine classical decorations of a Greek key and palmettos dividing the upper part with the portrait from the lower part with the inscription. Beneath the inscription is a Greek wine jug, a *œnochoe*, with three

14. KB, NKS, 3341 4^o: Breve til og fra H.V. Bissen, letters from A.M. Hall; KB, NKS; 2047 2^o: H.V. Bissens efterladte papirer, IIIa: Vedr. Forsendelser og materialer and IVd: Privatøkonomi, Regnskabsbøger. "deilige Büste fra Deres kunstneriske Haand".

15. Schultz 1932, cat. no. 306, 328ff.; cf. M. Brøndsted, cat. 11 seq., 20 and others.

16. King Christian VIII mentions in his diary, the 21st of April 1844: "Mrs. Hall showed to me a portrait of Brøndsted very like, painted by Jensen, which belongs to her sister F. Treschow. It is going to be engraved in copper and will ornate his lithography...". "Fru Hall viste mig i dag et meget lignend[e] Portrait af

Brøndsted, malet af Jensen, som tilhører hendes Søster F. Treschow, og som skal stikkes i Kobber og Pryde hans Littographie;..." Christian VIII 1943-1995, IV, 2, 463.

17. See the article by Mikala Brøndsted in this publication, no. 8.

18. Information provided by Jan Brøndsted.

19. The National Museum of Denmark, The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Register of Purchases, 1842.

20. Rostrup 1945, I, 419.

21. Rostrup 1945, II, 131.

22. Bissen received 6 rigsdaler for the copy in plaster. KB, NKS, 2047 2^o: H.V. Bissens efterladte papirer, IIIa: Vedr. Forsendelser og Materiale.



Fig. 6. P.O. Brøndsted's funeral stele. Photo, early 20th century. The Royal Library, Copenhagen.

lilies (fig. 1). The motive seems somehow unclassical in spite of the Greek wine jug. The jug might refer to Brøndsted's work as an archaeologist. But what do the lilies mean? The lilies are in Christianity a symbol of purity and innocence, virtues which normally are ascribed to women, especially the Virgin Mary. It may

seem very odd that a monument for a male is decorated with symbols, which have allusions to female virtues. The two sisters, however, perhaps also thought lovingly of their mother, when they raised the monument to their beloved father and hero.