

# A Royal Ménage à Trois and its Historical Consequences

## The purpose

This open philately exhibit tells a story that revolves around three historical personalities, whose lives were joined together in a tragic scenario full of secrets, lies, intrigues, and romance. The very sad, yet passionate and romantic story takes place during the reign of Christian VII (1749-1808), ruler of Denmark and Norway from 1766 to 1808. The story starts in 1743, when Christian's father, King Frederik V (1723-1766) married Christian's mother. In 1766, Christian became King and married the British Princess Caroline Matilda (1751-1775). Despite of the mentally ill King's lack of interest in his wife, the Queen bore of a son, later to become Frederik VI (1768-1839). Very soon, the third wheel in Denmark's most famous ménage à trois appeared - the charismatic ladies' man and skilful doctor, Johann Friedrich Struensee (1737-1772) - a man with modern ideas of enlightenment and whose influence on the King made him the *de facto* regent of Denmark. Had the feelings between Struensee and the young and neglected Queen not developed into love, the establishment would have had much more difficulties putting such an abrupt end to Struensee's political career. Because of the forbidden affair, Struensee was beheaded, the Queen was exiled, and Denmark was returned to the dark ages. However, Struensee's influence on the young Crown Prince Frederik had left lasting impressions on his mind and soul, and with him, Struensee's ideas of enlightenment with all its reforms finally came to Denmark.

## The plan

The exhibit is structured into 11 logically connected chapters:

- Chapter 1: Christian's birth, youth, and upbringing.
- Chapter 2: Frederik V dies and Christian becomes King Christian VII.
- Chapter 3: Christian marries Caroline Matilda.
- Chapter 4: Christian meets Struensee and employs him as his personal physician.
- Chapter 5: The ménage à trois starts.
- Chapter 6: Struensee becomes the unofficial ruler and reforms the state of Denmark.
- Chapter 7: Struensee has powerful enemies who spread evil rumours.
- Chapter 8: The fall and arrest of Struensee and Caroline Matilda.
- Chapter 9: Struensee is executed and Caroline Matilda is expelled from Denmark.
- Chapter 10: Denmark returns to the dark ages.
- Chapter 11: Frederik VI reintroduces Struensee's reforms and the enlightenment finally reaches Denmark.

## Importance and rarity

The present exhibit includes a large number of rare and historically important original 18th and 19th century documents directly related to the story told. Likewise, the exhibit includes a significant number of original letters sent to and from several of the involved key characters. These letters are very important to the story because the addresses include the titles and positions of the involved people and, thus, represent the most direct way one can document their positions in the government and society at the time. These letters also, in many cases, include content and the personal hand-written signatures of the involved people. These signatures mostly represent very important and rare autographs. Both of the original newspapers and several of the original printed degrees shown are actually postal items, since they were sent through the mail as is (on some of the decrees, hand-written notations prove that these were sent through the post repeatedly in order to be read out in public at one or more churches and/or at local courts). Likewise, the royal letters shown are important royal free franks, where the seal represented the official indication of the sender's free frank privileges.



As a King, Christian enjoyed free frank privileges.  
*Royal letter with the personal seal and signature of Christian VII sent 23/Jan/1801 to Maximilian Franz, who was the Archbishop and Elector Spiritual of Cologne, Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, and the last child of the Habsburg ruler of Austria Maria Theresa and her husband, Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor. It was addressed to Cologne, but redirected to Vienna.*



*Rate: Royal Free Frank. Marked "P" for "Portofrei" [Postage free] when redirected from Cologne to Vienna.*



## Choice of material

Most of the non-philatelic items in the present exhibit represent original contemporary 18th-19th century material. When choosing the non-contemporaneous stamps and other postal material, care was taken to find items with the most authentic relation to the story. Superior quality of the items and the closest possible relation between the material and the story has been the paramount choice criteria throughout.

## Presentation

On pages, where the format of the important items means that the order in which the text should be read could be unclear, numbers in special brackets {1}, {2}, {3}, and so on indicates the order in which the texts should be read. The storyline text is in normal font, the philatelic text is in *italics*. "...“ at the end of the storyline text indicates that the text continues under the following item. "...“ at the beginning of the storyline text indicates that it is a continuation of a text initiated under the preceding item.

## Literature: personal study and research

Numerous excellent books have been written about the Struensee affair. The historical information in this exhibit comes from reading many of these books (e.g. "Doktor Struensee. Rebell von oben" by Poul Barz, "Johann Friedrich Struensee" by Udo Grashoff, "The Trial of Count Struensee, Late Prime Minister to the King of Denmark, Before the Royal Commission of Inquisition, at Copenhagen. Translated from the Danish and German originals" by J. F. Struensee), and from personal study and research in a complete collection of all the original documents present in the Royal Danish Archives related to the affair, which have been compiled and transcribed by the Danish historian, Holger Hansen and published 1916-1923 as a scientific source collection (3 volumes). In addition, the exhibitor possesses a substantial collection of the key documents as contemporary originals.

*The 1:1 scan shows Christian's original handwritten signature from the letter and the reduced copy shows the royal seal located on the back of the royal letter shown above.*