Representational culture in Denmark
and Sweden until 1800

Unlike their western European and Mediterranean neighbors during the
Baroque age, Scandinavian countries were not descendents of the classical antiquity of Rome
or Greece; they belonged to the entirely different ethnic group of the barbarians.
Furthermore, they were restricted in having immediate contact with the cultural makeup of
classicism by geographical factors, since they inhabited the farthest north section of the
European continent. Realizing the validity of classical historical background for maintaining
a respectable and competitive political image, however, the kings and central governments of
Denmark and Sweden therefore directed their financial and creative resources towards
adopting the regal and imperial visions of the classical tradition by copying the stylistic aspects
of Roman and Greek cultures in the sphere of the arts and architecture, thus adapting their
genuine background to a picturesque shell image mirroring the ancients. This phenomenon
in representational culture (rather than presentational, since every ruler claiming international
authority is concerned with presenting an image which would fit the international political
landscape most effectively) was particularly pronounced in Denmark and Sweden during the
1600s to 1800s, as traced step by step by Neil Kent in his “Regal and Imperial Vision.”
The art and architectural vision proves to have moved along the general line of appropriating
basic and idealized classical symbolism. The transformations in representational culture
occur with the different rulers coming to power, each carrying their own goals and governing
ethics and therefore adapting their own visions to, even though still abiding by, the firmly
established practice of borrowing Greek and Roman ideals.

The Scandinavian royals and the artists and architects who worked for their
interests often engaged in the practice of traveling to the kingdoms of England, France, to
Italy and other European countries of classical heritage, from where they adopted, and