

Kronborg (Denmark)

No 696rev

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Kronborg Castle
<i>Location</i>	Helsingør, Island of Sjaelland
<i>State Party</i>	Denmark
<i>Date</i>	30 September 1993

Justification by State Party

For many centuries Kronborg Castle controlled the entrance to the Baltic, and the duties charged on ships passing through the Sound constituted a considerable source of income for Denmark. It was also the place where the Danish kings could display their power through splendid architecture.

The present castle was built in 1574-85 by Frederik II. It is a unique artistic achievement and an outstanding example of a building complex in a unique setting. The castle played a significant role in the history of the region. It also has an important associative value, since it was the setting for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

[**Note** The State Party does not make any proposals in the nomination dossier concerning the criteria under which it considers this property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List.]

History and Description

History

After he began to levy duty on ships passing through the Sound between Sjaelland and Skåne around 1425, King Erik of Pomerania built a castle known as *Krogen* on the site occupied today by Kronborg. It was in 1574 that King Frederik II of Denmark used this site for the construction of his palace, to the designs of the architect Hans van Paeschen. It was given the name of Kronborg three years later, when the Flemish architect, Anthonis van Opbergen from Malines, was instructed to carry out a thorough restoration and enlargement of the palace. The original structure, in red brick with sandstone courses and window framing, was entirely clad in sandstone from the neighbourhood of Hålsingborg and from Gotland, the red-tiled roof being covered with copper. This work was complete by 1585. One of the new elements added at this time was a capacious banqueting hall, which was used for balls and theatrical performances. It is known that a troupe of English players, several of whom later acted with William Shakespeare, spent some time at the Danish court during this period, and it is not inconceivable that the dramatist learned something of life at "Elsinore" from them.

On 25 September 1629 Kronborg was devastated by fire, only the walls being left standing. Christian IV immediately commissioned the Surveyor General, Hans van Steenwinckel the Younger, to carry out the restoration of the castle, which largely conformed with its original appearance. From 1658 to 1660 Kronborg was occupied by the Swedes, and was subjected to heavy bombardment and looting.

Under Frederik III and Christian V large fortifications were built, including the ornate *Kronværk* (Crownwork) Gate. The outer defensive works were considerably enlarged under Frederik IV, and the castle itself underwent substantial restoration and alteration. In 1785 it passed to the military, being used as a barracks until 1922. During this period the chapel was decorated in 1838-43 by the architect, M G Bindesbøll, and between 1866 and 1897 restoration of the exterior was carried out by Surveyor-General Professor Meldahl, one of whose successors, Surveyor-General Magdahl Neilsen, was responsible for the restoration of the interior in 1924-32.

Description

The oldest part of Kronborg Castle consists of the two lower floors on the eastern end of the North Wing, which formed part of Erik of Pomerania's Krogen castle. The medieval brickwork here extends well into the present-day third storey. Frederik II's palace was based on this relatively modest structure. The North Wing was extended and joined to the old banqueting hall on the west, which was divided up to become the kitchen, brewhouse, and guest chambers. To the south a medieval brick house was converted into an imposing royal chapel. The result was a three-sided complex of two-storey buildings; there appear to have been no buildings on the east side, overlooking the Sound, which was closed only by the earlier curtain wall.

With the king's abrupt change of plan in 1577, a magnificent banqueting hall was built on the south, joined to the North Wing by a new three-storey suite of rooms with a regular courtyard facade. The lofty Trumpeter's Tower, whose weather-vane stands 57m above the level of the courtyard, was added on the south side. At the same time a third storey was added to the buildings on the other three sides.

Following the disastrous fire of 1629 the castle was reconstructed almost exactly as it had been before. The result is a Renaissance palace that reflects the piecemeal nature of its construction, with only the west wing having a facade designed as an integrated whole.

The interior of the castle presents the same heterogeneity of style and layout as the exterior. The Chapel, which was the only building not to have been ravaged by fire in 1629, preserves its original altar, gallery, and pews, with fine carvings and painted panels.

The North Wing, now a three-storey building faced with sandstone, has the Royal Apartments on its second storey. Although the layout of rooms is much as it was at the time of Frederik II, the decoration dates mainly from the 17th and 18th centuries.

The top floor of the East Wing was arranged as a long gallery in 1583, to enable the Queen to reach the Banqueting Hall in the South Wing. The latter appears originally to have been divided into two levels at its east end, presumably providing a gallery, which has been removed. In its original form the Banqueting Hall had a magnificently carved and gilded

ceiling and its walls were hung with tapestries. After the fire of 1629 it was rebuilt, to a greater height but less lavishly decorated. Only fourteen of the tapestries, prepared for the north wall and depicting Danish kings, have survived; of these seven are on display at Kronborg, the remainder being in the National Museum in Copenhagen.

Other important components of the Kronborg complex are the Little Hall in the West Wing, the so-called "Scottish Suite" in the West Wing, and Frederik V's apartments on the top floor of the North Wing.

Access to the castle is through the main gateway in the North Wing, below the King's Chamber. Outside this is the Dark Gate, spanning the inner moat and protected by a jutting ravelin.

To the west of the whole enclosure is the Crownwork, consisting of three bastions between two curtains (banks) behind a wide ditch. A wooden bridge leads from the Württemberg ravelin to the Crownwork Gate, a fine Baroque structure, through the middle of the north curtain.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Kronborg Castle and its surrounding fortifications are national property. The Town Plan (*Kommuneplan*) of the municipality of Helsingør regulates the main structure for the development of the town and the framework for the Local Plan.

The Castle and all its surrounding structures are listed and strongly protected under the Preservation of Buildings Act.

Management

The Castle and its fortifications are managed by the Agency for Royal Palaces and Government Property (*Slots- og Ejendomsstyrelsen*) of the Ministry of Housing. All work is directed by the Buildings Division of the Agency. Decisions require the approval of the Advisory Board (*Bygningsplejerådet*), which is composed of specialists in different fields of restoration and conservation.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Conservation and restoration projects have been carried out on a number of occasions over the past century, especially following the vacating of the monument by the military in 1928. Since that time regular inspection has been carried out by the responsible government agency.

At the time of the original nomination in 1993/94, the area between the old town of Helsingør and the Castle was occupied by the buildings and installations of a former shipyard which had recently closed down. On the recommendation of ICOMOS, the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee, at its 18th Session in Paris in July 1994, deferred further consideration of this nomination until a satisfactory programme had been adopted by the Danish authorities for the removal of the major part of the disused shipyard and the landscaping of the area.

A working group under the chairmanship of the State Antiquary (*Rigsantikvar*), Professor Olaf Olsen, was set up

by the Danish authorities, charged with finding a solution to the problems of the setting and landscaping of the monument. Following the production of its report in 1997, a Master Plan was drawn up for the removal of the derelict buildings and the landscaping of the area between the monument and the town of Helsingør. This has now been put into effect and action taken as recommended by the working group.

The original ICOMOS evaluation in 1994 commented that, whilst the interiors of the buildings were impeccably maintained, the exteriors were in need of further restoration. The sandstone walls would benefit from careful light cleaning to remove slight vegetational intrusions and black deposits from earlier industrial pollution. A more serious problem was presented by the massive brick revetments, where there was considerable vegetational growth; re-pointing was also urgently needed over much of the structures.

As part of the Master Plan, attention is now being paid to these conservation problems as a matter of urgency and considerable progress has been made.

Authenticity

The author of an important work on Kronborg Castle wrote: "There is unlikely to be a single piece of sandstone on the courtyard facades which has not been changed or renewed in connection with one of the many repairs to the fabric. Therefore, some caution is called for when considering the authenticity of the facades. On the other hand, the unbelievable steadfastness with which this great monument has been preserved is even more impressive considering the time span of four hundred years. Old pictures and quantities of records demonstrate the care taken every time something had to be renewed. Few castles are as exposed to the elements as Kronborg."

This is an admirable definition of authenticity as it relates to historic buildings, especially those that have been in public or institutional use over a long time-span. Pains have clearly been taken to ensure authenticity in design, materials, and workmanship by successive government agencies since the 17th century.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

The 1993 nomination was submitted to an expert in Renaissance castles, who considered it to be among the best examples of its type. The property was visited in April 1994 by an ICOMOS expert mission, which was concerned about the state of conservation on the exterior walls and revetments (see above).

The report of the working group and information supplied by the Danish authorities has been studied by ICOMOS, which is satisfied that State Party has taken full account of the comments made at that time.

Qualities

Kronborg is an excellent and well preserved example of a Renaissance castle. Other examples of this type exist elsewhere in Europe; however, Kronborg is of special significance by virtue of its location, which has an exceptional value in strategic, commercial, and symbolic

terms. It is a symbol of the kingdom of Denmark, built to impress and to assert Danish control over ships passing through the very important seaway between the North Sea and the Baltic. It is also relevant to mention the fact it is the "Elsinore" of *Hamlet*, the most celebrated of Shakespeare's tragedies.

Comparative analysis

Kronborg Castle is not unique: there are many contemporary Renaissance castles and palaces in Europe, such as those in the Loire Valley and in central Europe. However, its symbolic and strategic importance (see "Qualities" above) endows it with special significance which transcends its significance in purely art-historical terms.

Brief description

Located on a strategically important site commanding the Sound, the stretch of water between Denmark and Sweden, the Royal castle at Kronborg is of immense symbolic value to the Danish people and played a key role in the history of northern Europe in the 16th–18th centuries. Work began on the construction of this outstanding Renaissance castle in 1574, and its defences were reinforced in accordance with the military architecture of the period in the late 17th century. It has survived intact up to the present day.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *critèrion iv*:

Critèrion iv Kronborg Castle is an outstanding example of the Renaissance castle, and one which played a highly significant role in the history of this region of northern Europe.

ICOMOS, September 2000