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The power of reputation. Navigating conflicting notions of honour within the elite of Denmark-Norway, c. 1784–1814

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ABSTRACT

In the second half of the 18th century, the foundation of monarchical and aristocratic power and prestige was challenged by notions of essential equality and a transformed idea of merit. The elite continued to pursue the traditional marks of distinction, but this behaviour was often accompanied by a discourse stressing the unimportance of such vain and worldly concerns for the truly enlightened person. This article seeks firstly to demonstrate how strong, albeit increasingly ambivalent, sensitivity to such matters was, through analysis of the correspondence of a selection of elite persons. Secondly, it shows the significance of this attitude in its contemporary social and political framework, by analysing legislation concerning rank and honour. This legislation kept alive the hankering after rank, at the very same time that legal and moralizing texts were concerned with the problem of people chasing a 'false' honour. These systemic contradictions in the monarchy were reflected in the qualms experienced by its public servants on a personal level. The article argues that the public servants' doubts about their self-worth probably contributed to eroding their belief in the legitimacy of the regime.

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Introduction: monarchy and meritocracy

In the Western world, the second half of the 18th century was a period when the foundation of monarchical and aristocratic power and prestige was challenged by the notion of essential equality and a transformed idea of merit. In contrast to the older aristocratic notion of meritorious service to the person of the King by members of high-born families, this modern idea of merit was at once more individualistic and more subject to impersonal evaluation according to objective standards and procedures, like exams and routinized evaluation of professional conduct.¹ The patriotism of the late 18th century often demanded that social distinctions should be based on this individualistic merit in service of the common good.² Many of the European monarchies tried to stimulate or harness this patriotism for their own advancement, and consequently they subscribed, with more or less ambivalence, to the corresponding notion of merit. The absolutist regime in Denmark-Norway had, from its inception in 1660, embraced the principle that merit, not birth, should be the decisive factor when appointing royal officials.³ Seemingly, it was in concordance with this principle that King Frederick V's ordinance of March 31st,

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1755 declared that pre-defined social status would be ignored for the sake of the common good. The ordinance introduced a considerable freedom of expression in economic matters, and people of all stations in life, small and great, noble and common, learned and ignorant, were invited to write useful dissertations, and when judging the quality of these 'one would not pay attention to persons or estates.'⁴

The absolute monarchy was to some extent egalitarian, in the sense that it opened a window for equal opportunities. In the second half of the 18th century, it also allowed, intermittently and incompletely, more freedom of expression. Equal opportunities and freedom of expression are essential elements in modern notions of democracy.⁵ In that sense, one could say that certain aspects of the monarchy's policies paved the way for democracy.⁶ This was certainly not the intention, nor was democracy the most common term adopted by those wishing far more equality and political freedom than the monarchy was prepared to concede. But it was not absent, and it was around the time of the French Revolution that the term began to gain its modern sense.⁷ In this article, I sometimes use the word 'democratic' as an umbrella term, in order to focus on policies and the evolution of mentalities that tended to further notions of equality, broaden popular influence and enhance freedom of expression. We should, however, bear in mind that very few people in Denmark-Norway at the time, even of the progressive and liberal-minded, envisioned a democracy in the modern sense of the word. Many of them also abhorred the term itself.

In most respects, the absolute monarchy was surely very far from being conducive to democracy. It tried to exploit the old respect for noble rank for its own advantage, by creating a new rank system and a new nobility. Furthermore, the King remained the sole source of political power, even though power could in practice be exercised in his name. The political exploitation of the social hierarchy and the concentration of political power in the hands of the king were power mechanisms that reinforced each other. As long as the person of the King remained the political centre of the realm and at the heart of the system distributing rank and honour, the old ideals of social ambition continued to exercise a strong fascination on members of the elite in general and especially the royal public servants or so-called *embetsmenn*.⁸ My aim is to highlight the psychological and social aspects of dealing with the advent of stronger notions of freedom, equality and virtuous patriotism within the frame of an absolute monarchy. What was the predicament of the *embetsmenn* under these ambiguous circumstances? These people continued to pursue the traditional marks of distinction and to be very attentive of signs of approval or disapproval from superiors. Nevertheless, this behaviour was frequently accompanied by a discourse stressing the unimportance of such vain and worldly matters for the truly enlightened person. This article seeks to show how strong sensitivity to such matters was, and to place this psychological disposition into a frame that clarifies its social and political significance.

The concept of honour and its role in Danish-Norwegian historiography

An essential, but difficult concept in this context is honour. At the core is a sense of worth in oneself or others.⁹ This worth has an external aspect, but it is linked to inner qualities, the *ethos* of the honourable person. The external aspect has to do with the general opinion of others, and we may call it reputation.¹⁰ Public authorities often formalize or

try to command respect for official honour through rank orders, often accompanied by visible signs, like the ribbons of an order.

I have chosen to focus on three interconnected honour-themes. The first theme is the concern over the gap between real merit/virtue (inner qualities) and the external signs (formalized rank, honorary titles). The second theme is the potentially conflicting relationship between signs of honour given from above and the status given from peers. The social and political power of honorary signs from above was challenged by the increasing importance of what I choose to call a more democratic recognition, by a respect and a reputation that was governed by the people, so to speak. The third theme is the appearance of the idea that a man should be the sole judge of his own worth.

This article will deal mostly with the first theme. This forms the backdrop for the second theme, which appears in its full-blown version only after the era of absolutism had ended in Norway in 1814. The third theme will mainly serve as a foil to the two others. Bismarck declared himself in favour of the ideal contained in this third theme.¹¹ Even though he was of Prussian nobility, his attitude was first and foremost a reflection of the unbridled individualism that characterized 19th century bourgeois society. This ideal was not embraced by most Dano-Norwegian middle class intellectuals at the end of the 18th century.¹² They were above all concerned that the social rewards should reflect true merit. However, a radical like P.A. Heiberg came close to Bismarck's view, albeit from an opposite social and political standpoint. He wanted to cultivate in the lower classes an elevated sense of self-worth, which would make them think that 'true honour is something we can acquire on our own, and that no birth, no parchment of appointment, no patent [of nobility], no King on earth can give us.'¹³

We can consider these three themes as necessary aspects of honour in *all* honour systems: Rank in the official pecking order, consideration by others and the opinion each man holds of himself.¹⁴ What separates honour systems is that each aspect receives a different weighting in different systems. It is my contention that when the relative weight of one of these aspects changes because of cultural developments within an existing system (like increase in the importance of objective standards of meritocracy, or the ascendancy of an ideal of moral autonomy), the whole system may appear hollow, and the historical actors risk experiencing it as demeaning rather than rewarding. They will then start longing to change the system.

In a fine article about the evaluation of human worth in the early part of the absolutist era, Povl Bagge shows that the famous playwright and historian Ludvig Holberg was very much in favour of meritocracy and career possibilities for capable people like himself.¹⁵ The great writer retained, however, a deeply pessimistic idea about the potential and human worth of the great mass of ordinary people. In Holberg's mind, meritocracy and democracy were certainly not close relatives. Contempt for the common man is a main theme in Peter Henningsen's monumental work *I sansernes vold*, which is probably the most important work that has been done on rank culture and the grading and degrading of human worth in the Danish realm in the 18th century. Henningsen concentrates on peasant culture, but he situates it in the broader context of a society that meticulously graded human worth and placed the peasant close to the bottom of the hierarchy.¹⁶ Finally, it is worth mentioning the articles by Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen and Håkon Evju, as well as Sune Christian Pedersen's book about the history of the duel in Denmark.¹⁷ Olden-Jørgensen deals with the evolution of court culture. He sees the rank order system

introduced under absolutism in conjunction with the court as a power instrument in the hands of the monarch. Evju analyses the criticism of the principle of nobility in Danish periodicals in the 1790's as an indirect critique of the monarchy, which according to this view manipulated the distribution of honour according to unsound principles. In Pedersen's fascinating book, honour is a central theme, since the main motivation for duelling was the defence of honour. What is particularly interesting in this context is that Petersen highlights the dilemmas and confusion of the middle class with respect to honour towards the end of the 18th century.¹⁸

Inspired by these works, I will specifically try to probe further into the relation between the external structures and the behaviour and subjective experience of the historical actors. In his opening paragraphs, Olden-Jørgensen raises the question why people spent a lot of time, energy and money on matters concerning rank and ritual. His answer is that they did so because it mattered, and because nobody could ignore these features of early modern society.¹⁹ As historians often do, he then proceeds to the external structures, which constitute the theme for the remainder of his article. In my case, people's evaluation of how it mattered and what it felt like will be at the centre of attention. For one, I think this dimension of history has a value in its own right. Furthermore, on a collective level, the subjective experience of historical actors can have consequences for the social order, since they may sap or strengthen the cultural and political legitimacy of a political regime. From the point of view of a Norwegian historian, it is especially interesting to see if there was a lurking sense of playing a self-demeaning game, when navigating according to the logic of the rank system. The Norwegian historian Knut Dørum has pointed out that we can consider the libertarian ideas that were the foundation of the Norwegian Constitution at Eidsvoll 1814 as retrospective proof of widespread discontent with absolutism in the years 1770–1814, held in check by authoritarian means.²⁰ We are here focusing on the emotional aspect of this erosion of the sense of legitimacy and on its interplay with the evolution of the legal and social structure. We will now turn our attention to this structure.

The king as supreme patron

With the establishment of the absolute monarchy in 1660/1661, and the subsequent edicts creating a new rank order and a new nobility the King and his political allies engineered a shrewd compromise.²¹ It secured the stability of the regime by anchoring it in existing social aspirations and ideals, while at the same time moulding and hedging these in a way that encouraged merit, diligence and loyalty in service to the King. Finally, it allowed the King to draw on a socially much broader pool of talent in his recruitment of State servants. The old birth nobility lost all political rights, but they were allowed to keep their status of nobility. The King, however, soon degraded the relative value of this status considerably in two ways: firstly, by gradually opening up the right to purchase noble land, entailing economic and judicial privileges, to non-nobles,²² and secondly, by creating a rank order where people of birth nobility without public office were relegated to the bottom, with a lot of non-noble royal servants ranking above them.²³ If the birth nobility wanted to improve their rank, they had to go into royal service or buy a title, which many of them did. The new nobility of counts and barons was created in 1671. These nobles had to be huge landowners and loyal supporters of the King. In return, they were given

administrative power, extensive privileges and high rank. In later edicts (in 1679 and 1693 and later on), the King continued to redefine and extend the concept of nobility, making it even more complex and tying it ever more closely to royal service and goodwill.²⁴ Thus, by the end of the 17th century, there was an old birth nobility, a new royal and land-owning nobility, and a service nobility. In addition, the King sold titles and nobility individually, distributed chivalric orders that gave a specific rank, and continually modified the content of the rank order itself.

In this way, the King made himself the centre of all ambitions for social recognition in the realm. By making state service and thus – at least theoretically – merit, the defining principle of rank, the monarchy efficiently weakened the old hierarchy based on birth and introduced a powerful instigation for social mobility. In combination with the finely graded hierarchy, however, this encouragement seriously exacerbated the preoccupation with honour, and the contempt for those who did not hold an official rank.²⁵

The position of the King as the by far most important source of power and honour was further strengthened later on as he gained the full right of appointment of officials.²⁶ The personal control of appointments and advancements, especially in the military, was of utmost importance for the King. To be able to follow his officers closely, he was, as of 1689, provided with the yearly *Handbook of the King*, with information about all officers, and from 1730 with annual reports of the officers' conduct.²⁷ Surely, the power of appointment could allow the King to reward diligence and talent, which he often did.²⁸ However, it also gave the King, or those who acted in his place, tremendous power of patronage and opened up the potential for favouritism. This position as the supreme benefactor in fact became even more accentuated as formal procedures for recognizing merit came into place in the course of the 18th century, since the King was the only person who remained free of any formal constraints.²⁹ The oaths of both military and civil officials stressed above all else the personal loyalty to the King and his house, and the obligation to defend absolutism.³⁰

By the end of the 18th century the Danish-Norwegian monarchy had a double character. On the one hand, it was a stable administrative state that functioned according to law and bureaucratic procedures. State appointments and advancements were regulated by exams and standards of professionalism, and by meritocratic principles like seniority. On the other hand, the state was in principle unpredictable at the top level, since the King was not bound by any laws. Crown Prince Frederick (regent from 1784) understood this better than his moralizing advisor and former tutor, Johan von Bülow, did. Bülow was shocked when Frederick in 1789 suddenly fired a high-ranking civil servant, without giving any reason. Frederick flatly dismissed Bülow's objections by remarking: 'Would you give your servant an explanation for why you sent him away?'³¹ It was this principle of the King as the supreme and unbound patron that led the most radical critics of nobility and favouritism in the 1790s to indict the absolute monarchy itself. They wanted to get rid of the clientelistic core of the monarchy and let predictable procedures of hiring, based on objective principles of merit, be binding also for the head of state. This would, in the words of Valdemar Schmettow, turn the King into 'the supreme public servant' who would 'without any trace of grace or private interest appoint [...] the most perspicacious judge, the most orderly intendant, the bravest warrior ...'³² According to the poet Ole Johan Samsøe, it was the almost exclusive dependency on royal grace that, since 1660, had

caused the Danish nobility to degenerate into useless fops whose greatest ambition was to swarm around the person of the King.³³

Speaking in terms of political sociology, what I have described so far is, firstly, the contradiction between absolute monarchy and proto-democratic ambitions, mainly in the form of the right to freedom of expression and greater equality in human worth. Secondly, there is a tension between two other principles, which can be categorized in classic Weberian terms as patrimonialism and bureaucracy.³⁴ What I will focus on in the following is not the administrative side of these principles and structures, but the subjective experience of people who had to cope with them in their lives, and who reproduced or modified them in their own psyche, through approval or protest.

The subjective experience of subjection

My main source for this twofold subjective experience is a selection of the incoming correspondence of Johan von Bülow, especially letters from correspondents in Norway.³⁵ Bülow was Lord Chamberlain from 1784 to 1793 and a powerful figure in the monarchy, since he was the person the young, ruling Crown Prince Frederick³⁶ primarily confided in. Bülow had been his preceptor since the age of five, and from 1784 the Lord Chamberlain assisted him in handling the affairs of government and virtually controlled people's access to the monarch.³⁷ These letters therefore demonstrate the workings of patron-client relations very close to the core of the system of patronage. The King (or those representing him) controlled places, honours and favours. Those who were close to the King therefore became patrons in their own right. I have also made use of the diary of Frederik Schmidt from his travels with Frederik Moltke in Germany in 1794, as well as Colonel Nicolaj Tidemand's memoirs, to shed further light on the subjective experience with the world of rank.³⁸

To be able to relate these experiences to central *topoi* among important intellectuals in the public debate, concerning subjects such as virtue, honour and nobility, I have established a small corpus of articles from *Minerva*.³⁹ In this connection it is also worth drawing attention to what was probably the most influential moralizing text in the late 18th century Danish state, namely Ove Malling's school book *Great and Good deeds of Danes, Norwegians and Holsteinians*, published in 1777.⁴⁰ This project was initiated and subsidized by the government under Ove Høegh-Guldberg's leadership. Malling's book can be seen as the most important *literary* monument to the alliance between middle class self-assertion and royalist patriotic policies, in the same way that *Indfødsretten*, the law reserving careers in state service for nationals (1776), was its most prominent legal expression.⁴¹ In his introductory address to the King, Malling praises the introduction of this law. He then rounds off by a statement that establishes an interdependence between three aspects of honour on the national level, to some extent parallel to the one I have outlined for individuals previously. Malling claims that the international repute of the nation is connected to national self-respect, which, in its turn, is connected to the nation being honoured by the King.⁴²

In order to trace the evolution of the legal and social structure, I will analyse pieces of legislation pertaining to honour, rank and order. There will thus in some sense be a division of labour between private sources focusing on individual actions and experiences on the one hand and official sources regarding the framework surrounding or

moulding this experience on the other, with the argumentative sources from *Minerva* in an intermediate position.⁴³

Between subservience and authenticity: the fear of failing your patron

Public servants formed a part of the elite that was more vulnerable to royal displeasure than the great business men of Copenhagen and eastern Norway⁴⁴ or the mighty families who owned the 700 great estates in Denmark.⁴⁵ The fear of losing the favour of the great ones, and in particular the favour of the King, must have been commonly felt within the elite, and more so the closer you came to the centre of power. In Norway, this elite also had to confront a peasantry which, contrary to the situation in Denmark, enjoyed a great degree of personal freedom. The Norwegian peasants were at the same time very conscious of their rights and proud of their reputation of loyalty to the King, whom they saw as the guarantor of these rights.

We can easily recognize these traits in the correspondence between the Lord Chamberlain at the Danish court Johan von Bülow and his compatriot chamberlain Frederick Moltke dating from 1787 to 1793.⁴⁶

Moltke was a Danish-born nobleman who spent the first 14 years of his career in the highest administrative positions in Norway, ending up as regional governor in Christiania from 1789 to 1795.⁴⁷ On returning to Denmark, he occupied even more elevated posts, receiving the title of prime minister of the council in 1810.⁴⁸ In 1814, the King was forced to discharge him, because Moltke's sympathy for the Norwegian revolt was proven to the Swedes.

The very first letter from Moltke to Bülow strikes a note which never leaves the correspondence: Giving signs of deference in the form of repeated assurances of sincere friendship and respect, accompanied with praise for real merit and contempt for base and opportunistic flatterers.

Our latest conversation – oh, you seem to have forgotten it and I shall never forget it – in the antechamber of the Crown Prince, has, if that were possible, increased the esteem in which I hold you. [...] I am sure it never occurred to you, that I seek your friendship or write to you because you hold the position you hold, because you are Lord Chamberlain and God knows, what more – no, both you and I are too proud for that, you are too proud to want a flatterer as a friend, and I am too proud to bow to one I do not respect, and how many [royal] favourites merit respect! [...] ⁴⁹

Moltke sent this first letter while he was county governor in Bratsberg, and he commented on the ongoing popular protest in the neighbouring Christiansand county. The leader of the protest movement, the farmer Christian Lofthus, had gone to Copenhagen at the head of a delegation of peasants in order to complain to the King about fraud and abuse of power on the part of local burghers and civil servants.⁵⁰ The peasants had been rather kindly received at the court. Moltke was highly critical of this audience, stating that Norwegian peasants did not appreciate the real nature of royal favour or grace, which could be given and removed at discretion and was an attribute of the King's absolute and arbitrary powers: 'People here do not see it as what it is, which is grace, but they call it weakness! [...] You would not believe the effect it has had. Trusting the good grace of the Crown Prince, they are capable of committing the greatest excesses ...'⁵¹ Moltke himself,

on the other hand, had clearly understood the basic principles governing the Danish-Norwegian monarchy, and was far from mistaking grace for rights: Everybody should surely work for the common good, but there was one single arbiter of this notion, and therefore loyalty to him had to be limitless and selfless. Self-interest and self-respect had to be promoted by parading selflessness and subservience, and even readiness to let yourself be sacrificed at any moment. Naturally, this meant running the risk of being seen as hypocritical.

In 1794, the 23 year old theologian Frederik Schmidt travelled with Mr. and Mrs. Moltke in Germany. Schmidt kept a diary of the trip.⁵² His observations about his travel companion confirms the impression of Moltke as a man who is torn between middle class ideals about genuine and jovial social relations on the one hand, and aristocratic rank-consciousness on the other.

Schmidt was born in Denmark, but grew up in Norway. In 1814 he was elected to the Constituent Assembly at Eidsvoll. According to Ludvig Daae, who reviewed an early edition of the diary in 1868, Schmidt was reputed to be a proud person with an exaggerated sense of his own self-worth and honour.⁵³ His diary is indeed quite pre-occupied with matters of rank and self-esteem, but in the spirit of a young man who was in favour of the French Revolution. He scoffs at the subservience of German inn-keepers towards Moltke, and makes a point of contrasting this with their treatment of himself.⁵⁴ He praises unassuming and friendly manners in common people and those of higher station alike.⁵⁵ He basks in the feelings of true friendship or admiration of genuine learnedness, free of concern for external status.⁵⁶ The diary is ripe with testimonies about the psychological pain inflicted upon himself by Moltke, whose behaviour towards Schmidt oscillated between friendliness and airs of superiority.⁵⁷ When Moltke rounded off their relationship by letting the young man understand that he would not be admitted in the carriage on a trip to Frankfurt, Schmidt was on the one hand disappointed because he would miss the opportunity to see many interesting places. On the other hand, he was relieved that he would not have to spend hours in a carriage with an oppressive sense of obligation towards the gracious lordship and his wife. He sees, however, in Moltke's unwillingness to bring him along 'a new proof of M's falseness and inconsistency'.⁵⁸

From 1785, another of Bülow's correspondents in Norway had made himself useful to the central authorities by informing on locals who were discontent with the government. Laurids Smith was headmaster of the cathedral school in Trondheim from 1781 to 1785.⁵⁹ He counselled the Crown Prince, through Bülow, on many matters. One of his concerns was how the authorities should deal with the song 'For Norway, fatherland of giants', which could be construed to be seditious. He had himself taken steps to combat the popularity of this song in Trondheim.⁶⁰ His letter characteristically ended with the remark that he had read that the vicar of Vejle (in Jutland) was dead. He enclosed a copy of his application for this post, and asked Bülow in the name of friendship to use his influence. Shortly thereafter, Smith in fact became vicar of Vejle.⁶¹

As in Smith's case, Frederick Moltke's letters contained information which was useful for Bülow, keeping him updated about the conditions in a remote part of the realm.⁶² At the same time, the contact with Bülow was useful for Moltke (as it was for Smith), since it provided a channel into the centre of power. This is why Moltke, along with his assurances of undying loyalty, frequently reflects on how difficult it must be for Bülow to believe him, given the obvious usefulness of this prominent friendship, and the risk that all his fine

words are mere flattery, dictated by self-interest. In this connection it is worth noting the editor Ludvig Daae's laconic remark concerning the friendship between Moltke and Bülow: Their correspondence seems to have ended after Bülow's fall from power in 1793. No letters from Moltke dating from after that time are to be found.⁶³

In a subsequent letter, the content of which is clearly meant to be conveyed to the regent, Moltke follows up on the theme of hypocrisy. He praises the Crown Prince for the firmness in his thinking, his eagerness to do good and for not letting himself be distracted by 'dishonouring prejudice and deceitful hypocrisy'. This is the reason why Moltke loves him, he assures: '... that is why he is loved by every public servant who is consumed with the ardent desire and eagerness to do good. – Let the unrighteous tremble and fall – and fear him ...'⁶⁴ According to this vision of the absolute monarchy, lack of love for the regent was conflated with lack of public virtue, and the unloving public servants formed a threat to the common good which should be purged with a form of terror. This rhetoric of monarchic loyalty is curiously parallel to the one that a few years later would be displayed in Robespierre's republic of virtue, scrutinizing the citizens for the purity of their intentions, suspecting hypocrisy everywhere.⁶⁵

One of Bülow's correspondents had already experienced a fall from power of the softer kind. Ove Høegh-Guldberg was removed from his post as head of government after the *coup d'État* perpetrated by the Crown Prince in 1784, and was appointed county governor in Aarhus in Jutland. Bülow had maintained good relations with Guldberg before 1784, but he had also ended up siding with the conspirators behind the coup that brought himself to power.⁶⁶ Guldberg vaguely referred to this situation in a letter/many letters, perhaps wishing to awaken Bülow's conscience. Guldberg also discreetly reminded Bülow of their former relationship and reiterated that Bülow's present situation was in total accordance with the wishes Guldberg always had harboured for his former protégé.⁶⁷ These rather veiled reminders of a debt of gratitude and even of betrayal were shrouded in a wealth of fervent declarations of the most sincere love and heartfelt respect for Bülow and of their unbreakable bond of mutual affection.⁶⁸ At the same time, Guldberg does address the risk of being suspected of hypocrisy and self-serving flattery, exactly like Moltke: 'I do not write you any lies or flattery, what cause would I have for it.'⁶⁹ Guldberg nevertheless made no secret of the fact that he wanted Bülow to keep him in good standing with the regent. He frequently asked permission to 'throw himself at the feet of his Royal Highness' by dint of his powerful friend at court. In fact, the rhetoric of intimate soul-gripping friendship and virtuous sensibility went hand in hand with careful pandering to royal attention and social standing. Sometimes the innermost longings of the heart and the concern for external reputation seemed to be, in Guldberg's mind, virtually inseparable. When the Crown Prince was planning to come to Aarhus on an official visit in 1787, Guldberg asked Bülow to arrange for the regent to reside in Guldberg's house: 'My house is appropriate for it, but that is not the crux of the matter: it is that my heart would otherwise suffer terribly; and my reputation in the county.'⁷⁰

Bevaagenhed: yearning for the benevolent attention of your social superior

A key term in the kind of clientelistic relationship we are dealing with here is *bevaagenhed*, meaning a state of benevolent attention, which is the necessary condition for concrete favours on the part of the patron.⁷¹ To some extent, it is the contemporary version of *the*

royal gaze, but without the connotations of cold, impersonal, foucauldian control that often accompanies this concept in historical analysis.⁷² *Bevaagenhed* is infused with paternal care from the King (or another patron) and is received with filial love and loyalty. The rhetorical tokens of respect from the lower-ranking person were aiming at continuously nurturing this state of mind in the superior. Signs of this attention were on the other hand so many powerful tranquilizers, relieving anxiety and tension, for the lower ranking person. Like chemical tranquilizers, their effect rapidly faded and there was a continuous need for new injections. Frederick Moltke hardly used the term *bevaagenhed* himself, but rather spoke of friendship, since he knew Bülow personally. Still, it is the same kind of frequently renewed benevolent attention he anxiously and eagerly cultivated in his correspondent.⁷³ Frederick Julius Kaas, who at the time was a judge and who later would succeed Moltke as governor in Christiania, repeatedly made explicit use of the term in his correspondence with Bülow, as when he commented the arrival of a visitor who carried a letter of recommendation from Bülow:

Your Excellency must permit that I receive your letter not merely as a recommendation for Lt. Hoppe, but rather as a new proof of the benevolent attention (*bevaagenhed*) with which your Excellency has always honoured me, and as such, this letter must be twofold precious to me.

He immediately made use of his own interpretation by attaching a copy of an application for the position as mayor of Christiania that he had sent to the King, 'being confident in your benevolent attention', hoping that Bülow would on occasion remind the King of it.⁷⁴

As we have seen, Guldberg was no less in need of these regular injections of loving attention from above. Sometimes he even directly instructed his correspondent how to express it: 'You must, dearest Lord Chamberlain, only give me an answer of six lines to this letter, and the last line should be: I love you and I will always love you.'⁷⁵

The Norwegian historian Sverre Steen says about Christian Frederick, Danish-Norwegian Crown Prince and Norwegian rebel King in 1814, that he tended to confuse external courtesy and inner respect, and that he, like most people, loved kindness and praise, but that he was too uncritical when it came to distinguishing between flattery and sincerity.⁷⁶ Obviously, this is a very difficult task in asymmetrical relationships, and it is surely one reason why the theme of sincerity frequently returns in Moltke's and Guldberg's letters.⁷⁷ This was one of the most pressing dilemmas for the royal public servants in the Danish-Norwegian monarchy in the late Enlightenment era: Being squeezed between the *necessity* of repeatedly declaring your love and respect for your King and your patrons, and on the other the well-founded *fear* that it should all be construed as empty flattery.

External honour and true merit

As for external tokens of status conferred on Moltke himself, he was clearly conscious that they had something of the same double-edged nature. The difference was that, in his own case, he could permit himself to underline the hollowness of these signs, whereas with his superiors he had, on the contrary, to infuse the declarations of love and respect with all possible sincerity. In 1789, Moltke had become regional governor (*stiftsamtmann*) in Akershus, and was as such the most powerful civil servant in the Norwegian part of the monarchy at the time. In 1790, he carefully reminded Bülow that he was the first one in

this position not to hold 'the White Ribbon'.⁷⁸ Moltke assured him that he did not do this out of any personal vanity, for the philosopher and the virtuous citizen do not attach any importance to such matters. He only mentioned it because of the importance such honours have in the eyes of the multitude.⁷⁹

The magnate merchant Bernt Anker, held to be the richest man in Norway at the end of the 18th century, also practiced a sort of double book-keeping in questions of honour. He was not a royal servant, but he was part and parcel of an elite social milieu in Christiania where great merchants, factory owners and high-ranking civil servants mixed.⁸⁰ Anker was in general avid about official marks of distinction. In 1792, he received the elevated title of chamberlain and the symbol of the gilded key that went with it. In a letter to his cousin and agent in Copenhagen, Carsten Anker, he emphasized that enlightened people now distinguished between favours on the one hand and distinctions that were well earned on the other. He therefore instructed Carsten to spread the word that the key was completely unsolicited. To reinforce the idea that the distinction was awarded solely for reasons of merits, he asked his cousin to publish the laudatory letter that had accompanied the gilded key. He warned Carsten, however, that this initiative must in no way be traceable to Bernt Anker himself.⁸¹

The theme of duplicity and hypocrisy as opposed to authenticity and honesty runs like a thread through Moltke's letters, as it does through the whole of the late Enlightenment, most notably in the Rousseau-inspired quest for frankness and authenticity in social and political relations. Condemnation of courtly flatterers is a recurrent theme in the reflections of moralists through the ages. One probable reason, however, for the more intense preoccupation with this theme in Denmark-Norway in the second part of the eighteenth century, is the increasing pressure from the ambitious middle class. They combined demands for meritocracy with a patriotism that had a distinct anti-German and anti-aristocratic ring to it, since German-speaking aristocrats occupied a disproportionate place in the upper echelons of the administrative hierarchy. Christian VII's choice of the motto *Gloria ex amore patriae* ('glory through love of the fatherland') at his accession in 1766 can stand as a symbol of a renewed understanding between the middle classes⁸² and the monarchy. The former could turn to service for the fatherland as a source of honour and meaning, and the monarchy could tap this enthusiasm and reward it, by reserving careers in state service for its own nationals from 1776.⁸³

The safeguarding of authenticity and real virtue and merit in a world of glittering facades was a predominant concern. This way of thinking had by the end of the century also crept into the mind of members of the royal family, partly because the people itself had become less gullible and more self-conscious. At least such thoughts and attitudes were attributed to royalty in public. Herman Treschow was a Norwegian-born clergyman and professor of theology who became part of the Danish upper class and preached to royalty.⁸⁴ In his eulogy of the late Hereditary Princess Sophia Frederica⁸⁵ Treschow praised her for encouraging her children to be humble and listen to the voice of duty. She wanted them to beware of getting blinded by their own external glory and privileges, 'at a time when much of the illusion that surrounds princes is disappearing, as their way of thinking and their actions are being judged more freely.'⁸⁶ Treschow further commended the princess for her 'kind, unpretentious and unassuming' demeanour.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, there were still many, both among common people and members of the elite, who continued to attach much importance to outward tokens of honour and

respect. Shortly after the palace revolution that brought Crown Prince Frederick, and thereby Bülow, to power in 1784, the latter drew up a manuscript with the title 'Concerning the unfortunate hankering for rank and title'.⁸⁸ Bülow there describes the thirst for this external respect in the preceding years as a national misfortune, spreading like the plague and comparable to war and famine, but with more insidious consequences. He maintains that differences between social orders and grading of royal public servants according to the external signs we call rank, is indispensable as the world happens to be. He further argues that the royal public servant and the nobility needs a certain amount of fortuitous regard provided by the State, but the ordinary, working citizen has no need for this.⁸⁹ When the desire for heightened status becomes general, as had been the case in Denmark, the result is disorder and discontent, since people do not want to be what they are and only want to become something more. This leads people to mistake the essential for the contingent, the shiny appearance for the beneficial, Bülow continues. They tend to disdain their useful occupation, and 'they chase the external honour, without thinking about the true means by which it is obtained'.⁹⁰ Everybody then holds this external honour to be an absolute good, and believes this, and only this external glory in itself makes them honourable and great, and they hold in contempt those who do not have any official rank. The problem, according to Bülow, was that the multiplication of these titles made those who held them 'numerous as insects'. This in turn led to inflation, which meant that the titles were actually less respected, or even turned to ridicule.⁹¹ Bülow admitted that the monarchy had contributed to this by selling titles, thus turning virtue and the King's friendship itself into merchandise. Bülow concludes, however, on an optimistic note by relating the joy that was created in the realm when many of these 'airy beings' disappeared after the palace revolution in 1784, when the Crown Prince abolished the sale of titles.⁹²

In reality, there was no complete break with former practices in the wake of the power shift, at least not when it came to the sale of titles of nobility. There was a certain slowdown at the end of the 18th century, but, as had been the case ever since 1670, noble status and titles continued to be merchandise, through sale and taxation, even after Frederick had become King in 1808.⁹³ Conversely, when Guldberg was still in power he had been as concerned as Bülow about the social confusion which resulted from the hankering for rank, and his edicts from 1783, restricting luxury among peasants, can be seen in this light.⁹⁴

The starting point for the evolution towards hankering for rank came with the creation of a new rank order and a new nobility in the wake of the introduction of absolutism. At least as far as the elite was concerned, this undermined the whole principle of a relatively stable social order based on four main pillars: nobility, clergy, urban elite and peasantry. Many other statesmen and writers besides Bülow had been concerned about the negative social and economic effects of the preoccupation with rank.⁹⁵ One of the threats was against meritocracy itself, in demeaning offices and honours that should be bestowed upon the meritorious alone. Bülow bitterly remarked that 'people who hardly know that Denmark and Norway each have their own statute book become counsellors of justice'.⁹⁶ The government had tried to cope with this problem already in the edict on rank from 1693, by introducing a distinction between real and honorary office titles. For instance, 'Our real counsellors of justice' were ranked in the fourth class and 'titular counsellors of justice' in the fifth class of the ranking system, thus rendering the finely graded hierarchy

even more complex.⁹⁷ After having become King in 1808, Bülow's former pupil issued a new edict on rank, more fitting to 'the spirit of our age'. He simplified the system, sharpened the distinction between real and honorary titles and strengthened the links to meritocracy, claiming that rank in the future should be as a rule be connected to offices and be joined to them in right proportion to their importance and significance.⁹⁸ He also reformed the order of 'Dannebrog', which previously had been reserved for members of the nobility, so that it could be accorded 'without consideration for rank'.⁹⁹

According to Nicolaj Tidemand (whose testimony we will return to below), the good idea of reforming the order of Dannebrog was quickly prostituted, since the members of the newly created general staff and their clients were included among those who were rewarded with this new mark of distinction, irrespective of their merits. Many of these were incompetent or even criminal, according to Tidemand. He claims that this caused the order of Dannebrog to fall into public disrepute, from which it never recovered.¹⁰⁰

The policies of the government and of kings and regents personally was to no small extent to blame for the undermining of the 'honour' value of titles. One part of the problem was the above mentioned sale of titles or other proceedings that converted wealth into the appearances of honour.¹⁰¹ Another was the personal interest and initiative the Danish-Norwegian kings and regents continued to show when it came to appointments and distribution of honours, regardless of their involvement in other aspects of the government of the realm. This meant that connections at the court and personal supplications addressed directly to the King could sometimes be decisive factors of employment, instead of the more objective and professional evaluations of the applicants made by the bureaucracy.¹⁰² As shown earlier, Bülow's correspondent Frederick Julius Kaas had made use of this direct channel, as had Laurids Smith. This seems to have been a wise course of action, since they both obtained the desired positions shortly afterwards, and Smith did so without the required degree.¹⁰³ Kaas not only got the position, but also the honorary title of chamberlain.¹⁰⁴

In Nicolaj Tidemand's account of his service in the Dano-Norwegian Army, the ruling Crown Prince and later King, Frederick VI, does not appear as a force for opening up career for talents. Tidemand was no doubt an honest and competent officer, probably too honest for his own good. His greatest achievement was the considerable improvements of the important coastal fortifications at Samsø, protecting the strait *Storebælt*.¹⁰⁵ This also caused him his greatest despair when he at first, instead of being rewarded, fell victim to the intrigues of count Danneskiold-Samsøe, lord of the fortified island. The count had consistently obstructed Tidemand's efforts, and worked his connections at court to accuse him and sully his reputation in the eyes of the King, who lent an ear to the accusers.

For most of the time, Tidemand was personally in favour with Frederick, in whose regiment he was employed from 1788. He was nevertheless very critical about Frederick's rule. Incompetence, favouritism, base intrigues, fawning, an inflated importance of rank and prickly notions of honour flourished, at the expense of honesty and merit.¹⁰⁶ Frederick's part in this stemmed in particular from his tendency to focus on the external aspects in both political and military matters, while ignoring the essential matters.¹⁰⁷ He also surrounded himself with people of the same mind. Tidemand characterizes Frederick's well-known love of parades, uniforms and shining buttons as 'the polishing system', which through his example pervaded the whole army.¹⁰⁸

In 1812 Tidemand was himself awarded with the order of Dannebrog.¹⁰⁹ He appreciated the King's good will, but he did not feel that this could compensate for the injustice Frederick had allowed him to suffer at the hands of Danneskiold-Samsøe. Tidemand's sense of honour and justice was doubly hurt by the necessity of suppressing his anger at this treatment for the sake of his family. He was denied the path of justice, and was forced to seek redress by appealing to the King's grace.¹¹⁰ In his memoirs, Tidemand describes the power of courtly flatterers and reveals his disgust for the workings of royal grace. This is a direct reversal of the tone and content of Moltke's subservient letters to Bülow, especially his declaration of love for the Crown Prince and the defence of the royal sovereignty, exercised through grace.¹¹¹ On a deeper level, however, the two sources can be interpreted as different expressions of an increasing unease with the existing social and political arrangements.

Frederick VI was indeed interested in reforming the system of reward through honour. But his reforms in this area seem to have been superficial and inefficient, causing more irritation than contentment among those who disliked the power of court intrigues¹¹² or wished for honourable rewards to be accorded to people of merit and virtue.¹¹³ The contradictory policies of the absolutist government in matters of honour and rank are also shown by the fact that the government continued on the one hand to use ennoblement as the utmost sign of royal pleasure and give preference for the highest positions in the State to this estate. On the other hand, it was courting popularity among the middle classes by allowing or even encouraging harsh criticism of the nobility.¹¹⁴

The reputation of power: the king's concern for his own and his servant's honour

Naturally, the power of reputation was intimately linked with the reputation of power. The very first article of the Danish and Norwegian Laws of Christian V, from 1683 and 1687 respectively, demanded that all subjects 'hold and respect the King as the most outstanding and highest head on earth, superior to all human laws'.¹¹⁵ Another article specifies that 'Whoever dishonourably blames the King or the Queen [...] has forfeited honour, life and property, his right hand should be cut off while he is still alive. The body quartered and put on the wheel, and the head and the hand put on a stake.'¹¹⁶

The edict of 27 September 1799 effectively ended the era of (relative) liberty of the press in Denmark-Norway, by strengthening the supervision of printed material, reiterating stern legislation and enforcing stricter punishment for transgressions.¹¹⁷ In the preamble, the edict is said to be motivated by the desire to set barriers for the freedom of the press, lest it should 'degenerate into unbridled insolence', and the defence of honour, be it of royalty, authorities or ordinary citizens, was a prime concern. However, in the article concerning the defence of the honour of royal persons (art. 4) there is an interesting development, compared with the formulation in the above cited Danish law from 1683. Article 4 in the edict starts by stating that the King, for his part, rises above personal insults against himself, and that he knows that the other members of the royal family think the same way. However, he must, as legislator, uphold penalties for such crimes, and the penalty was banishment, from three years to life. First of all, this was very far from the barbaric punishment ordained in the Danish law, which had been put to use against the usurper Johan Struensee and his friend Enevold Brandt less than 30 years earlier. In

addition, the formulation betrays a way of thinking which is fundamentally different from the one operating in the law of 1683/1687. In the Danish law, there was no hint of a distinction between the personal and the public, or between inner self-respect and an external, socially and politically motivated honour. In 1683, insults against royalty was sacrilege, no discussion. In 1799, on the other hand, the King no longer thought in the manner of an absolute monarch of the era of the Sun King, for whom external qualities unequivocally reflected internal ones. On the contrary, the 1799 edict implicitly distinguished, in the same way as Moltke when asking for the white ribbon, between genuine respect and self-respect on the one hand and a purely external honour (or insult in this case). The latter was really without consequence for the enlightened man,¹¹⁸ but it still had to be taken into account for social and political reasons. A similar distinction operates when Bülow deplores that so many people 'chase the external honour, without thinking about the true means by which it is obtained'. Bülow also describes the official honour bestowed upon public servants as necessary, but uses terms like accidental, fortuitous and external to characterize it. In the same vein as there had been, literally speaking, both counsellors of justice and *real* counsellors of justice in the rank order since 1693, one was now very conscious that there was honour and there was *real* honour.

The King could declare himself to be above accidental occasional personal insults. However, he could not afford to ignore public opinion. In the case of his public servants, he was concerned about their reputation. The King protected their honour with penal provisions, the most drastic in the law from 1683/1687 being the death penalty against those who wrote or published anonymous insults against persons of authority.¹¹⁹ In the law there are also other provisions concerning the defence of the honour of royal officials and (supported with lesser penalties) the honour of ordinary citizens.¹²⁰ The kind of honour mentioned in the Danish law is thus mainly something which was given, protected and withdrawn from above. It was derived, so to speak, from the honour of the King. At the same time, however, there was a link between this concept and a more democratic kind of honour, which one might call reputation. By reputation in the sense I am using it here I mean public opinion pertaining to particular persons.¹²¹ As such, it could not be under total control by the authorities, and its power therefore had to be taken into account by the monarchy. Thus, judges and other persons of authority who were sued in cases where their honour, good name, rumour and sincerity were at stake, were not allowed to exercise their office before they had cleansed their name.¹²² This power of reputation in the 'democratic' sense (as defined above) was taken into account in the 1799 edict on the freedom of the press. In the long article 10, precise definitions and instructions are given on how accusations and insults against public servants and bodies of authority should be dealt with. The King (i.e. the Crown Prince or the government) should be informed about such accusations in important cases and, if necessary, he would order an investigation to establish whether the accusations were warranted or not. The law further made it obligatory for all public servants who were accused of unjust conduct in office to cleanse their name in court. In article 11, this obligation was also put into effect for offensive accusations against the purely private character and actions of public servants, 'since it is urgent for us and for the common good that the reputation of our public servants is without blemish.' In a subsequent special instruction to all high-ranking authorities it is specified that insults against public servants may not, in contrast to defamation cases between private citizens, be settled in the newly established

conciliatory commissions. They must be brought to trial in the ordinary courts. One reason is that, in a procedure of conciliation, a dishonest public servant might free himself from truthful accusations through bribery.¹²³ In an instruction from 1806, the King requires to be personally informed when any of his public servants or persons with an honorary rank or title suffer a court verdict that is liable to 'partly or wholly entail the loss of respect of his fellow citizens.'¹²⁴ Concern for the reputation of public servants constituted a channel of influence from below. For the monarchy, this was hardly the motivation. In addition to the need for royal power to have servants who were respected, the government was probably mainly motivated by a desire to control them.

Conclusion and postlude: monarchical honour versus democratic reputation

In the late 18th century, one thus clearly distinguished between the external attributes of honour and the true, inner qualities, which command respect. As ruling Crown Prince and as King, Frederick VI did make some efforts to renovate the rank system and supervise the reputation of his public servants. His counsellor Bülow's manuscript on rank can be read as an encouragement for more intensified efforts in the same direction. The aim of these efforts was to bridge the gap between external honour and real merit. In this endeavour, Crown Prince Frederick considered the information that was provided by the potentially democratic phenomenon of reputation. The concern for the common good that once motivated piecemeal introduction of freedom of the press from the middle of the 18th century was still present in the edict that seriously restrained this freedom. The usefulness of the freedom of expression was given as the reason why one abstained from the reintroduction of pre-publication censorship.¹²⁵ Still, in the absolutist system, the usefulness of criticism of power clearly stopped at the threshold of the King's cabinet.¹²⁶

Absolutism wanted to stimulate true merit and virtue, but at the same time, this system of government underpinned a social world where royal public servants easily turned to self-serving cultivation of patronage to advance their career and improve their rank. The government therefore ran the risk of promoting people, especially at the top, whose main attribute was cultivating powerful friends. This was also ultimately a threat to the legitimacy of the regime in a relatively enlightened public. The government also risked undermining the self-worth, and in fact the honour, of those who were capable and civic-minded professionals. The co-existence of lofty ideals and grovelling rhetoric may have caused few qualms in a person as profoundly conservative as Guldberg. For a relatively liberal-minded person like Frederik Moltke, it was probably a different story, reflected in a much more tormented concern about sincerity in his correspondence. An important cultural driver for change in this connection was the immensely influential Kantian idea that moral behaviour was anchored in the human capacity for autonomy and thus moral self-governance.¹²⁷

Norway after 1814 was, when it came to internal matters, an almost fully independent state and a constitutional monarchy, in personal union with Sweden. Freedom of expression (at least in print) was written into the Norwegian constitution in article 100. The traditional loyalty to the King was transferred to the new ruler in Stockholm, but fearless opposition to the government's will was now by many openly considered a political virtue. This also meant that the tokens of respect given from above could in some cases be construed as downright dishonouring, as so many signs of treason against a national and

libertarian, or in modern terms ‘democratic’, spirit. Conversely, a fall from royal grace could be a reason for democratic respect.

In the 1820s, the fiercely oppositional publication *Nationalbladet* (*the National newspaper*) was run by the Hielm brothers. The most perspicacious and acerbic of them, Jonas Anton Hielm, always stayed anonymous when contributing, for the good reason that he held the position of attorney general. The journal was prosecuted in several defamation cases initiated by the government. J.A. Hielm’s identity was revealed. The cases temporarily ruined him, and he lost his job as well as his friendship with his brother.¹²⁸

He was nevertheless elected member of the Norwegian parliament in both 1830, 1833 and later on, and became an emblem of freedom for the opposition. The oppositional newspaper *Statsborgeren* (*The Citizen*) welcomed him back into parliament in 1833 in the following terms:

He does not enter the Hall of parliament as a robber of the firmament! His chest is not resplendent with Swedish stars,¹²⁹ tinsel boasting about gallant acts that Norway does not acknowledge.¹³⁰ He doth not drag along a gilded key to the antechamber of sycophants¹³¹; but the entire confidence of thousands of his fellow citizens accompanies him into the free halls of Norway’s parliament.¹³²

The old ostentatious signs of honour from above have in this vision not only lost their positive power – they have become downright degrading. Conversely, real honour manifests itself externally as the confidence of equals who freely choose their representatives. This is also part of the story of the power of reputation, but it is a different chapter.

The people I have been studying here, were indeed concerned about being virtuous and serving the common good. However, the supreme arbiter of the common good was the King, or those who ruled in his name. He was also at the centre of a state that in many respects had become an impersonal machinery, guided by meritocratic principles of recruitment and advancement. At its core it remained, however, deeply dependent on the person of the King. He distributed honours, favours and places within a very hierarchical frame, and this system enhanced feelings of subservience upwards and of contempt downwards. The psychology of hankering after rank increasingly clashed with the more egalitarian notions of the new public sphere and the new conception of the state, based on individualistic merit in service of the common good. The tone of the correspondence of a person like Frederik Moltke suggests that this conflict was experienced as self-demeaning. In Nikolaj Tidemand’s account it was denounced as such in unequivocal terms. If this feeling was widespread, it probably paved the way for embracing a different system of honour, more based on the recognition of peers.

Notes

1. Smith, *The Culture of Merit*.
2. The most famous articulation of this principle is in art. 1 of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789. For statements supporting this view in Denmark-Norway see for instance Veia, *Likhetsideen i Norge*, especially 13, 14, 29, 30; Damsholt, *Fædrelandskærlighed og borgerdyd*, esp. 109–111; Engelhardt, *Borgerskab og fællesskab*, esp. chapter 17; and Evju, “Et spørgsmål om ære.”
3. This was promised in the 1661 privileges to the estates, see Lind, “Military and Absolutism,” 224.

4. Feldbæk, *Nærhed og adskillelse 1720–1814*, 218.
5. There are many opinions about the meaning of democracy, but the most current definitions contain these elements: Government by the people, based on political equality between sane adult citizens, normally made operative through elections and representation. Another element is restraint on state power through a constitution and separation of powers. A final criterion is the existence of a free public sphere and of certain inviolable rights for each individual. See for instance Midgaard and Rasch, *Demokrati*.
6. See Bregnsbo, "Denmark 1848: Political Transition and Civil War," 117–118. The coming of a more democratic public sphere is described, partly as a social reality, partly as a normative ideal, in Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and in Seip "Teorien om det opinionsstyrte enevælde" *mainly* as a normative ideal (applying to Denmark-Norway). This public sphere was not democratic in the sense of allowing formal political rights tending towards a government of the people. Many middle class writers, however, considered the relative liberty of the press in the period 1784–1799 as a perfect substitute for formal political rights. This is the reason why some of them, rather naively, welcomed the French Revolution as an achievement, which gave the French the same blessings as the inhabitants of the Danish realm already enjoyed (See Holm, *Den offentlige mening*, 84ff, esp. 90). August Hennings saw a democratic quality in the principle of meritocracy, and this is what he refers to when he, in 1790, characterized true monarchy as 'democratic' ("Historisk moralsk Skildring af Hofholdningerne," 225).
7. Formerly it had mainly been a learned term denoting the Athenian democracy, and to the extent it was used to describe contemporary arrangements it most often referred to *direct* democracy, as in Switzerland. Robespierre's famous speech on 5 February 1794 marks an important turning point in the use of the word, since he made true democracy dependent on representation. However, it was precisely the association with Robespierre and the terror that henceforth made the term 'democracy' odious to many, including people who had sympathized with the 1789-revolution. See Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, vol. 1, *The Challenge*, 13–20.
8. I have in the following chosen the somewhat rare English term (*royal*) *public servant* to denote *embetsmann* (German: Beamte). The term *civil servant* would not cover it adequately, since an *embetsmann* could in fact be either a civil servant, a clergyman or a military officer. The decisive distinction between an *embetsmann* and a lower-ranking public servant was that the former was appointed directly by the King.
9. Frank Stewart chooses to define honour as a right; 'the right to be treated as having a certain worth.' Stewart, *Honour*, 21.
10. See Zunkel, "Ehre," in particular 17–23.
11. The idea was most famously expressed in a speech in 1881: 'Meine Herren, meine Ehre steht in niemands Hand als in meiner eigenen, und man kann mich damit nicht überhaufen; die eigene, die ich in meinem Herzen trage, genügt mir vollständig.' Cited by Stewart, *Honour*, 52, note 67.
12. Peter Collett expressly denounces it: 'determined indifference towards all unfavourable rumours concerning ourselves [is] an indifference and coldness towards our moral purpose, which is highly reproachable.' Collett "Betragtninger over Straffe," 158.
13. Cited by Holm, *Den offentlige mening*, 113.
14. Cunningham, *Modern Honour*, 12.
15. Bagge, "Bidrag til den sociale menneskevurderings historie..."
16. Henningsen, *I sansernens vold*. See also Henningsen, "Den bestandige maskerade."
17. Olden-Jørgensen, "State Ceremonial, Court Culture"; Evju, "Et spørgsmål om ære"; and Pedersen, *På liv og død*.
18. Pedersen, *På liv og død*, 123, 12–128, 132–134 og 190–194.
19. Olden-Jørgensen, "State Ceremonial, Court Culture," 66.
20. Dørum, "Borgerlig offentlighed og regimekritikk," 535–537.
21. For a good overview of these reforms, see Dyrvik, *Truede tvillingriker 1648–1720*, 157–170.

22. Dyrvik, *Truede tvillingriker 1648–1720*, 158.
23. *Rangforordningen*, 25. maj 1671.
24. See above note 22, 159.
25. Henningsen, *I sansernes vold*, Vol. 1, 315.
26. Gøbel, *De styrede rigerne*, 103; and Jensen, *Udnævnelsesretten*.
27. Lind, "Den dansk-norske hær," 53.
28. Jensen, *Udnævnelsesretten*, 279.
29. Lind, "Den dansk-norske hær," 60.
30. Lind, "Den dansk-norske hær," 63; and Gøbel, *De styrede rigerne*, 75, See Rian, *Sensuren i Danmark-Norge*, 117 for a transcription of the oath from 1778, reproduced in Gøbel.
31. Engberg, *Den standhaftige tinsoldat*, 120.
32. Cited after Evju, "Et spørgsmål om ære," 338.
33. Samsøe, "Endnu et Par Ord om Adel," esp. 277 and 282.
34. Weber, *Politisk sociologi*, 58ff og 98ff.
35. Daae, *Af Bülow's papirer*; Bang, *Breve fra Guldberg*; Clausen and Rist *Fra hoffet og byen*; and Smith, *Fortrolige brev* (these are also printed in Daae).
36. The Crown Prince Frederick ruled in the name of his insane father King Christian VII from 1784 to 1808, when he himself became King under the name Frederick VI.
37. See Holm, *Styrelse og reformer* (1907), 4; and Holm, "Johan Bülow's forhold."
38. Schmidt, *Dagbøger 1794–1814*; and Tidemand *Optegnelser*.
39. See reference list: Anonymous (2x), Birckner, Collett, Hennings, Samsøe. The choice of these articles is based on Evju's and Pedersen's work and on the index of *Minerva* published by Rasmus Nyerup, keyword 'Ære' (honour).
40. Malling, *Store og gode Handlinger*. For an account of the making and reception of the book, see Feldbæk, *Et yndigt land*, 291–294. Astonishingly, this book, describing great military heroism, was also published in English in 1807, under the title mentioned above. This is the same year the English attacked Denmark-Norway and took its fleet.
41. See Feldbæk, *Fædreland og modersmål*, 182–218.
42. Malling, *Store og gode Handlinger*, 4 (separate pagination at the beginning).
43. Even though such a differentiation needs to be modified, in view of the semi-public nature letter writing could have in the 18th and early 19th centuries, there was still a very wide gap between the function and tone of a letter and a legal text. See Pedersen, "Postal Censorship," 79.
44. For the most important part of the last group, see Collett and Frydenlund, *Christianias handelspatrisiat*.
45. Feldbæk, *Danmarks økonomiske historie 1500–1840*, 65.
46. Daae, *Bülow's papirer*.
47. On Moltke's life, see Bull et al., *Norsk Biografisk Leksikon*, vol. IX (1940).
48. The position was surely honourable, but not of any political consequence, as Frederick VI at the time ruled without the council, through his cabinet.
49. Letter from Moltke to Bülow, 16 January 1787, in Daae, *Bülow's papirer*, 18–19.
50. Fiskaa, "Lofthusreisinga."
51. Daae, *Bülow's papirer*, 19–20.
52. Schmidt, *Dagbøger 1794–1814*.
53. Daae, [Review of] *Schmidts Dagbøger*.
54. Schmidt, *Dagbøger 1794–1814*, 11; 13; 14; 22.
55. Schmidt, *Dagbøger 1794–1814*, 9; 46; 50.
56. Schmidt, *Dagbøger 1794–1814*, 7; 24; 33; 53.
57. Schmidt, *Dagbøger 1794–1814*, 12–13; 21; 31; 44–45; 48.
58. Schmidt, *Dagbøger 1794–1814*, 47–48.
59. Jon Ansteinsson's introduction in Smith, *Fortrolige brev*, 5.
60. Smith, *Fortrolige brev*, 65.
61. Ansteinsson's introduction in Smith, *Fortrolige brev*, 10.

62. Bülow remained personally eager for information from well-connected people even after his fall from power in 1793 and pursued a copious correspondence to that effect. See Clausen and Rist, *Fra Hoffet og Byen*.
63. Daae, *Bülows papirer*, 18.
64. Letter from Moltke to Bülow, Christianssand, 3 June 1788, in Daae, *Bülows papirer*, 21.
65. Gueniffey, "Robespierre," 254–255.
66. Engberg, *Den standhaftige tinsoldat*, s. 91.
67. Bang, *Breve fra Guldberg*, 8, 9 and 12.
68. A telling sample of this profuse and incantatory manner of address is to be found in Guldberg's letter of farewell on leaving Copenhagen in June 1784: 'I have been here in sincere friendship for you: my soul is convinced that you feel the same for me [...] my gratitude is devoted to you and my friendship is a certain thing for you: it has, I know it has, some value in your soul, it will always be at work there, your heart will always meet mine. Absence has no effect on righteous souls. Now, however, my farewell, and my farewell to you, my friend: it is tender, because I love you... [God bless you, etc.] This is all I wish, and it comes (do believe it) entirely from my heart.' Bang, *Breve fra Guldberg*, 3–4.
69. Bang, *Breve fra Guldberg*, 21.
70. Bang, *Breve fra Guldberg*, 22–23.
71. See Zunkel, "Ehre. Reputation," 20: '...seit dem Absolutismus... Der Hofman suchte seine Ehre in seines Fürsten Gnade und Gewogenheit.'
72. The concept of *the royal gaze* is central to the analysis of the relation between the King and the nobles in Smith, *Culture of Merit*, and in that context it has much of the quality of *bevaagenhed* attached to it. However, in Smith's subsequent analysis of the rise of the impersonal state (ch. 6) the concept comes to denote a considerably less heart-warming panoptical scrutiny.
73. 'Write quickly to your friend, my anxiety is proportional to my limitless friendship,' letter from Moltke 1792, in Daae, *Bülows papirer*, 82. See also 43–45, where a pause in the correspondence from Bülow is interpreted as the most frightening sign of displeasure or disinterest. When the longed-for letter from Bülow at last arrives, Moltke explodes in euphoria: 'I shall never forget the pleasant feeling on receiving your letter.' (1790).
74. Letter from Kaas 1792, in Daae, *Bülows papirer*, 115–116.
75. Letter from Guldberg, 22 June 1784, in Bang, *Breve fra Guldberg*, 5. See also *ibid.*, 3.
76. Steen, *Det frie Norge*, 35.
77. See for instance the letter from 24 July 1790, where Moltke expresses scruples about coming to Copenhagen to show his respect on the occasion of the marriage of Crown Prince Frederick; '...the Prince as well as yourself are probably long since tired of hearing the same language, the same wish coming from hypocrites and patriots alike'. He maintains the hope however, that Bülow will know how to distinguish him (Moltke) from 'those [...] vile flatterers'. Daae, *Bülows papirer*, 33.
78. One of the highest degrees of the order of *Dannebrog*.
79. Daae, *Bülows papirer*, 30.
80. See Collett and Frydenlund, *Christianias handelspatrisiat*.
81. Davidsen, *Bernt Anker i nytt lys*, 16.
82. When I am referring to *middle class* and especially *middle class intellectuals* in the following, I am using it mainly as a political category. A noble like August Hennings is a middle class intellectual, because of his condemnation of aristocratic lifestyle and ideals.
83. See above, note 41.
84. https://biografiskeleksikon.lex.dk/Herman_Treschow, online 05.07.2020.
85. Spouse of the King's half-brother Frederick.
86. Treschow, *Træk af Arve-Prindsesse Sophie Friderik*, 13.
87. Treschow, *Træk af Arve-Prindsesse Sophie Friderik*, 15 ('nedladende, jevn og borgerlig').
88. Bülow, *Om Rang og Tittelsyge*.
89. Bülow, *Rang og Tittelsyge*, 1–3.
90. Bülow, *Rang og Tittelsyge*, 6 (erroneously marked 5).

91. August Hennings actually sees the inflation of titles and external signs of honour as a good thing, since it weakens the negative effects of an ineradicable prejudice – i.e. the hankering for rank – by making it common (“Historisk moralsk Skildring af Hofholdningerne,” 229).
92. Bülow, *Rang og Tittelsyge*, 16 (erroneously marked 15).
93. Fabritius, *Danmarks Riges Adel*, 55–56, 58 and 60. In fact, 60% of all titles conferred between 1670 and 1839 were sold. See also Bartholdy, “Sammenhængen med privilegier og rang,” 628; and Henningsen, *I sansernes vold.*, vol 1, 312–314.
94. Henningsen, *I sansernes vold*, Vol. 1, 309 and 357–359.
95. Henningsen, *I sansernes vold*, Vol. 1, 307–310.
96. Bülow, *Rang og Tittelsyge*, 10 (erroneously marked 9).
97. ‘Forordning om Rangen 11.2.1693’.
98. Sprauten, “Du som er blant Kronede...,” 267.
99. Bartholdy, “Sammenhængen med privilegier og rang,” 632. See also Stevnsborg, *Kongeriget Danmarks ordener*, 22.
100. Tidemand, *Optegnelser*. 89–92. I have not found statements that either corroborates or undermines this opinion.
101. This problem is addressed by those debating honour in *Minerva* in the 1790s. See for instance Birkner, “Svar paa det Spørgsmaal,” 32. In Anonymous, “Om Følelse for Ære,” 278, the author compares the traffic in titles to the pope’s infamous trade in letters of indulgence.
102. This was the case even under the indolent and politically indifferent Frederick V. See Holm, *Danmark-Norges historie under Frederik V*, part II (1898), 6.
103. Jon Ansteinson’s introduction in Smith, *Fortrolige brev*, 10.
104. Daae, *Bülow’s papirer*, 114.
105. Bricka, *Dansk biografisk Lexicon*, vol. 17, 393; and Tidemand *Optegnelser*, 100–101.
106. Tidemand *Optegnelser*, 32–39; 41–44; 48–50; 60; 64; 71. Tidemand remarks (87) that the government of the insane Christian VII was wiser than that of his successor. Frederick’s biographer Jens Engberg approvingly cites Tidemand’s judgements (*Den standhaftige tinsoldat*, 497).
107. Tidemand *Optegnelser*, 42; 79; 82; 103–104.
108. Tidemand *Optegnelser*, 23–25 and 78.
109. Tidemand *Optegnelser*, 111.
110. Tidemand *Optegnelser*, 98–102.
111. See above, notes 64 and 51, respectively.
112. Hennings, “Historisk moralsk Skildring af Hofholdningerne,” 114.
113. Birkner, “Svar paa det Spørgsmaal,” 32; 34; 40–41; and Anonymous, “Brev om Adelskabets Ophævelse i Frankerig,” 318.
114. Evju, “Et spørgsmål om ære,” 329–330.
115. *Kong Christian den femtis danske lov*, book 1, ch.1, art.1.
116. *Ibid.*, book 6, ch. 4, art. 1.
117. *Forordning [om] Trykkefrihedens Grændser*. See also Rian, *Sensuren i Danmark-Norge*, 185–193.
118. Cf. Bismarck’s attitude 80 years later, mentioned above.
119. *Kong Christian den femtis danske lov*, book 6, ch.21, art.8.
120. *Ibid.*, book 6, ch.4, art.18 and the whole of ch.21.
121. In Zunkel, “Ehre. Reputation”, reputation refers to the external as opposed to the internal worth. In this context, I am thus using the word reputation to describe a more specific type of external worth, connected to the judgement of public opinion.
122. *Ibid.*, book 1, ch.5, art.2, and book 3, ch.4, art.4.
123. “Circulaire av 24 December [1799]”, in Wessel Berg, *Kongelige Rescripter*, 216.
124. “Canc. Circul. ang. indberetning fra Retterne, naar Rangs- eller Embeds-Personer ved Dom tabe borgerlig Agtelse [1 April 1806]” in Wessel Berg, *Kongelige Rescripter*, 580.
125. *Edict [about] the freedom of the press*, preamble.
126. The first article of the edict on the freedom of the press prescribes the death penalty to whoever publishes opinions to the effect that the form of government should be changed or

that the King's orders should be disobeyed. The second article punishes with banishment whoever criticizes or insults the constitution or the government, in general or with respect to particular actions.

127. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, 6.
128. Bull et al., *Norsk Biografisk Leksikon*, vol. VI (1934), 99–109.
129. Referring to the Swedish order of the North Star.
130. For context, see Steen, *Det frie Norge. På fallittens rand*, 75–76.
131. Symbol of the dignity of chamberlain in the Danish State.
132. Cited after Schnitler, *Slegten fra 1814*, 436.

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