Vestiges of Fashion in the Garbage of Copenhagen
Pockets flaps excavated from 18th-century Copenhagen

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Abstract:
Major excavations of the Metro site in Copenhagen from 2003 to 2014 have revealed a lot of garments, pieces of dress and fashionable items such as lace, shoes, wigs, ribbons, socks, etc. of the 17th and early 18th centuries. Among these discoveries, my eye was caught by quite well preserved pocket flaps brought to the Center for Textile Research at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark.
These 18th century pocket flaps are much more than just pieces of cloth. They give a narrative about the city and its citizens. They tell of tailoring, consumers, and the making of dress through taste and fashion. They address questions about gender, age, social class, and about the duration of fashion over time and place.

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Introduction

'After the discovery of an 18th-century landfill that contained a diversity of well-preserved objects discarded by Copenhageners, about 30 archaeological surveys have been conducted at a site in the north-central part of the city. This coastal district, called Frederiksstaden, is now known for its prominent mansions and the home of the Danish royal family (Amalienborg palace), but its function as a landfill is rarely mentioned as a phenomenon in stories about the area.' This method of landfill has been used until recent times in Denmark.

In her article, Vivi Lena Andersen, archaeologist and curator of the city museum in Copenhagen, argues that 'getting citizens to adapt to the new system of trash management was a long and challenging process (Andersen 2012). According to written sources, the landfill was only supposed to receive household garbage and sweepings from the city's streets, but the archaeological evidence shows that human waste from latrines was also disposed of there. Other trash items found in the landfill exhibit signs of extensive reuse before having been discarded which supports statements from other sources.' Contemporary maps show that it was filled up during the 17th and early 18th centuries. Extensive building activity in the 1970's, including the building of the Maerks International Company Headquarters, had yielded a rich collection of artefacts dating from the late 17th century to the middle of the 18th century.

Refuse Disposal in Early Eighteenth-Century Copenhagen

Frederiksstaden was established in the second half of the 18th century primarily as a residential area for nobles and merchants. In the Middle-Ages the site lay under water outside the town. In the 17th century the town fortifications were enlarged, enclosing this area. There was a great

need to dispose of everyday refuse produced by the many private households and workshops of the old city. Throughout the 17th and 18th century the number of residents of the medieval city increased continuously. The area which would become Frederiksstaden was an obvious and convenient location for urban refuse disposal. The general dating of the Frederiksstaden finds indicates that the backfilling of the area was in progress from the middle of the 17th century through the end of the 18th century, and that the most intensive activity took place in the first half of the 18th century. The refuse disposal contract of 1717 mentioned Frederiksstaden as a place to bring refuse from streets and public places all over Copenhagen, and later it was used by refuse collectors as well as residents for households' refuse (Kristensen 2014).

In 2003 the museum of Copenhagen conducted an excavation at a site on Esplanade 50 in Copenhagen, just to the south of the *Little Mermaid* and the fortification known as Kastellet, and to the north of the Royal Palace Amalienborg (fig. 1). A report made by Lene Høst-Madsen gives a complete introduction to the site and its material (Høst-Madsen 2005). The excavation of this town refuse dump in Copenhagen has recovered a remarkably rich and varied assemblage of artefacts including ceramics, glass, animal bones, feathers, textiles, gloves, woolen socks, silk stockings and shoes (fig. 2).

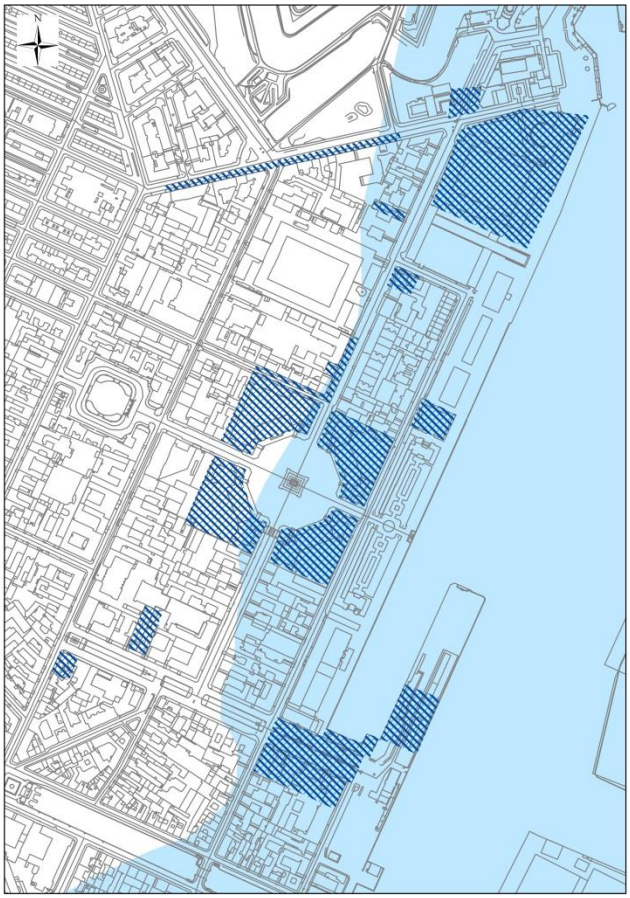

Fig. 1:
Map of excavations sites in Frederiksstaden. The Mærsk site is at the top, on the right.
Courtesy Museum of Copenhagen.

Fig. 2:
Excavations at Esplanade 50 in Copenhagen, 2003.
Image by Vivi Lena Andersen, Museum of Copenhagen.

The Many Lives of Dress

'The material contains thousands of dress parts including coarse knitted socks, fine silk stockings, gloves and shoes made of leather and textiles, a pair of coarsely woven male trousers, hats made of felt or leather or knitted, wigs of human hair.' As Lene Høst-Madsen states in her report, 'the study of this material should expand our understanding of the dress codes of rich and poor in 18th century-Copenhagen (Høst-Madsen 2005).' Some of the items show signs of secondary use and recycling. The author of the archeological report enumerates examples of such reuse: 'the human hair from the wigs had apparently been cut off before the rest was thrown away; probably because the hair could be used for new wigs. A child's sock was made of different knitted pieces that probably came from the better parts of other worn-out socks. Parts of the brims of two of the hats have been cut away.'

Fig. 3-4:
Pocket Flap (1690-1760), Esplanade Excavations, Centre for Textile Research, University of Copenhagen.
Images by Charlotte Rimstad.

What happened to wigs may be similar to what happened to the pocket flaps. The cutting out of pocket flaps may reveal the many lives of one garment, or may reveal a tailoring activity in the city (fig. 3-5). Lene Høst-Madsen states that 'the material seems to have been dumped in the period 1750-60. However, many individual items can be dated to the early years of the 18th century even of the 17th century. Since these older items were often found with the mid-18th century material, they must have been old when discarded' (Høst-Madsen 2005).' According to Høst-Madsen, the finds can be divided into three categories: household debris such as food waste, ceramics, dress parts and refuse from latrines; production waste from butchery, a faience factory, wig makers and tailors; military refuse such as uniform parts, bullets etc.

Fig. 5:
Pocket Flap (1690-1760), Esplanade Excavations, Centre for Textile Research, University of Copenhagen.
Image by Charlotte Rimstad.

Fashion and Taste

This urban excavation site revealed more than 45 pocket flaps. 45 were examined and studied through illustrations and examples of existing dress by a student in archaeology at the University of Copenhagen (Tastesen 2015). For this BA project, the student aimed to establish a chronology of these pocket flaps by organizing them in a typology from 1690 to 1790, sorting them by size and shape. Her research question was: does a Nordic pocket flap exist? She was not able to conclude that one Nordic type emerged in her database. One difficulty with her method of classification was that the size of pocket flaps varies as they can either be from a waistcoat (smaller) or a coat (larger); thus it was not possible to use size as selective criteria.
In the 18th century, changes of fashion could be expressed by variations in the shape of sleeves and very often by the pockets (lower, higher, bigger, smaller, straight, vertical, horizontal, etc.). (Andersen 1977) Indeed the famous French court journal *The Mercure Galant*, from 1670 to 1715, which reported regularly on fashion, enumerates more than 20 different types, shapes or alterations of pocket flaps over the period (Thépaut-Cabasset 2010).

In the 1690s male apparel was long and narrow, the coat was single-breasted but only buttoned at the waist, the pockets were set low and had large flaps, cuffs were so deep that they had to be buttoned to the sleeves, and breeches were hidden by the coat and long waistcoat (fig. 6-7). The same has to be noticed for female attire too.

In the 1720s the skirt of the coat was flared, pockets are high up, and the waistcoat is short revealing the breeches. Later on 1750-60s male attire were elegant, the skirts of the coat and waistcoat were stiffened with horsehair or by other women's hooped skirts, the pocket flaps were smaller and placed at the waist.

Fig. 6-7:
American, John (left) and Pierre (right) Van Cortlandt, ca. 1731. © Brooklyn Museum, Dick S. Ramsay Fund, 41.152 and 41.151. Photos: Brooklyn Museum (CC BY 3.0).

Conclusion

The most interesting aspect of this study for me is to see how these fragments of dress relate to the story of Copenhagen as it becomes a European capital; how intimately the lives of its inhabitants are reflected through these pocket flaps; and how much pocket flaps may reveal about art and craft, dress making, fashion and commerce within the urban context and landscape.

These pieces of discarded clothing are key objects in which we can envisage how cities developed in Europe at the turn of the 18th century into modern cities and metropolises. In this way these pocket flaps remain powerful vestiges of fashion over centuries.

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