

---

**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**Neville, Kristoffer. The Art and Culture of Scandinavian  
Central Europe, 1550–1720**

Tomasz Grusiecki

---

Volume 43, Number 2, Spring 2020

Transformative Translations in Early Modern Britain and France  
Traductions transformatives dans la première modernité française et  
britannique

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1072223ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i2.34862>

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this review

Grusiecki, T. (2020). Review of [Neville, Kristoffer. The Art and Culture of  
Scandinavian Central Europe, 1550–1720]. *Renaissance and Reformation /  
Renaissance et Réforme*, 43(2), 399–401. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i2.34862>

**Neville, Kristoffer.**

***The Art and Culture of Scandinavian Central Europe, 1550–1720.***

University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019. Pp. xvi, 221 + 80 b/w and colour ill., 2 maps. ISBN 978-0-271-08225-7 (hardcover) US\$89.95.

Kristoffer Neville's book is the most recent attempt to introduce the uninitiated English reader to the still largely unknown visual arts of early modern Denmark and Sweden. Partly a synthesis, partly a scholarly monograph, *The Art and Culture of Scandinavian Central Europe* serves chiefly as a survey of painting, sculpture, and architecture commissioned by the royalty and the elites in the orbit of Danish and Swedish courts. But, as the title makes manifest, the book is simultaneously an attempt to reconceptualize sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scandinavian contributions to European culture. Rather than frame them as distinct features on the Continent's artistic map—imitative, underdeveloped, and interesting only to a specialist—Neville proposes that Denmark and Sweden be considered part of central Europe, an area of long-standing interest in art history, loosely synonymous with the Holy Roman Empire and its eastern European allies, famous for its artistically significant courts and free cities such as Nuremberg, Augsburg, Dresden, Munich, Vienna, and Berlin. In this respect, the study is a welcome complement to Eberhard Hempel's (1965) and Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann's (1995) classical surveys of central European art and architecture.

Certainly, Neville has good reasons to argue that Stockholm and Copenhagen were an integral part of the central European framework of peer courts keeping a close eye on one another for appropriate modes of dynastic representation, and as such should be included in the art-historical accounts of the region. The two Scandinavian monarchs were in fact princes of the empire: the king of Denmark as duke of Holstein (1474–1864), and the king of Sweden as duke of Pomerania (1648–1814). Both kings were involved in imperial politics, at times acting as leaders for Protestant states. This political involvement translated into competition for prestige and distinction among the Scandinavian and central European courts, leading to many commissions that, although Netherlandish, Italian, or French in their stylistic references, nonetheless felt local to the princes; after all—as Neville asserts—they were an outcome of ongoing artistic dialogue that spanned the region.

The book's seven chapters tell this story of the Nordic kingdoms' integration into central European culture. Chapter 1 on Gothicism in Germania is particularly convincing. Before the idea of "Scandinavia" became common in the later eighteenth century, Denmark and Sweden had been an essential part of Germanic culture. German was used interchangeably with Danish and Swedish at the Nordic courts, and both Danish and Swedish royalties traced their ancestry to the Goths, an ancient Germanic people mentioned by venerable classical authorities, including Tacitus and Jordanes. But scholars elsewhere, too, argued that the Goths were local to their respective communities. For example, Johannes Micraelius contended that the Goths' origins were in Pomerania; Philipp Clüver, that their homeland was in Prussia; and the pro-Habsburg Wolfgang Lazius, that the emperor, too, had a valid claim to a Gothic lineage. Neville reads this competitive antiquarianism as evidence that representations of Nordic kings as Goths must be understood not as a specifically Scandinavian trait but rather as a manifestation of the region's shared history with central Europe. Chapter 2 continues in this vein, examining the role of the Danish court in the emergence of the Lutheran palace chapel. Neville emphasizes the connections between Danish and German ruling families, and the similarities between the tombs in Hillerød, Næstved, Roskilde, Uppsala, Schleswig, Königsberg, Freiberg, and Innsbruck, likely conceived in dialogue between Scandinavian and central European patrons. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the patronage of Frederik II and Christian IV, both of whom supported well-travelled artists working throughout northern Europe: Johan Gregor van der Schardt, Melchior Lorck, Adriaen de Vries, Jacob van Doortd, and others. As the Danish kings made use of these men's abilities, they took part in the continuous reformulation of the artistic heritage they shared with their German peers.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 move the reader from Denmark to Sweden, which by 1648 had become the new hegemon in the Baltic region. Although this half of the book is not as focused on comparative material as the parts on Denmark, Neville still makes a consistent effort to demonstrate how Gustaf II Adolf, Christina, Carl X Gustaf, Hedwig Eleonora, Carl XI, Carl XII, and their courtiers understood their larger artistic and architectural projects within a framework of central European peer courts. For example, Drottningholm Palace, designed by Nicodemus Tessin the Elder (from Stralsund in Pomerania), became the regional standard of excellence, and the designs for the royal

palace complex in Stockholm by Tessin's son, Nicodemus the Younger, served as models for central European palaces, particularly in Berlin and Dresden, where the electors of Brandenburg and Saxony had recently become kings in Prussia and Poland-Lithuania, and looked for new abodes that would be readily recognizable as royal residences. Even the Karlskirche in the imperial Vienna might have derived from Tessin's drawing for the Caroline dynastic church in Stockholm. Although no linear trajectory of influence can be traced, these stylistic reverberations imply that the Swedish monarchs were fully integrated into central European artistic life, and often played leading roles.

The point that early modern Scandinavia should be considered part of central Europe might feel counterintuitive, especially as we have inherited the Romantic idea of the region as quintessentially different from Germany—a somewhat exotic, dreamy “North.” But even though by the mid-nineteenth century both Holstein and Pomerania had been lost to Prussia, links between Scandinavia and Germany did not disappear and were present, among others, in the art of the quintessentially “German” painter Caspar David Friedrich. Born in 1774 in Greifswald, then still the capital of Swedish Pomerania, he studied painting in Copenhagen, and later moved to Dresden—then one of the cultural capitals of the German world. He never forgot, however, about his place of birth. His transcultural life, Neville claims, reminds us that artistic dialogue between early modern Scandinavia and Germany does not fall within the ambit of cultural exchange; these were not two substantially distinct cultures, but a considerably shared, interconnected cultural realm that provided a common frame of reference for artists and patrons.

*The Art and Culture of Scandinavian Central Europe* is a must-read for all historians of European art and culture. Neville has written a useful book that not only serves as an introduction to the cultural landscape of a lesser-known region, but also demonstrates that differences between works produced in Copenhagen and Stockholm on the one hand, and the Holy Roman Empire on the other, were no more significant than those between Berlin, Dresden, and Munich. His book will be an invaluable survey of this often-overlooked corner of Europe for years to come.

TOMASZ GRUSIECKI  
Boise State University