

Summaries

Dag Lindström

From local reconciliation to administration

The council and the treasure's court in Karlstad during the 17th century

THE COUNCIL WAS THE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE, political and legal institution of Medieval and Early Modern towns. Yet, our knowledge of its work and the different matters dealt with is surprisingly vague. In this study, the records of the council in a smaller provincial town during the 17th century are analysed. The town chosen is Karlstad, founded in 1584, as one among a number of newly founded towns in Early Modern Sweden. During that same century a more effective state bureaucracy emerged. The Early Modern Swedish state has been characterized as a military state, where the military needs had first priority causing radical social changes.

In the early 17th century the council mainly dealt with criminal and civil cases. During that century the amount of civil cases increased and by the end of the century they outnumbered the criminal cases many times. Most of the civil cases concerned debts. By the end of the century the court records also includes a considerable number of registrations concerning debts, which further stresses the increasing importance of debts in 17th century Swedish towns. The number of registered criminal cases also rose, but not as much as the civil cases. More important, perhaps, is the changing structure of crime. A slight but significant shift from personal conflicts to cases concerning trade regulations and property related crimes can be noticed. The court didn't lose its importance as an arena for reconciliation. The work of the council rather became more diversified.

Previous research indicates the emergence of a more professional council. This assumption is broadly confirmed when the town council of Karlstad is analysed. The number of meetings and cases dealt with increased many times over and the main cause behind this was the growing number of administrative cases. Around 1630 they were hardly recorded at all but by the end of the century they dominated the work of the council. Many of the judicial tasks had by then also been transferred from the council to the subordinate treasurer's court. The rising emphasis on administrative obligations can quite clearly be connected with active intervention from the governor. The council not always fulfilled its tasks as the governor wished, but the intention to create a more loyal and disciplined local administration is evident.

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In spite of these changes the council nevertheless retained being an important institution for the local community, resolving conflicts and protecting the interests of the burghers. Many different actors actually used the council as a legal and administrative institution. It was also an arena where different rationalities appear. For the burgher community maintaining local order and harmony was the main issue together with the protection of the common privileges of the burghers. But they also needed good relations with country people, foreign burghers and owners of manufacturers. A second rationality aiming at economic efficiency became more manifest during the 17th century, the growing importance of cases concerning registration and payment of debts being the single most important expression. A third rationality can be connected with the Swedish military state and its efforts to mobilize men and financial resources for the military needs, which could be realized only with the support of an effective bureaucracy.

Åsa Karlsson Sjögren

Marriage and the Meaning of Gender: Sweden 1650–1800

THE PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT ARTICLE is to analyse how marriage and the meaning of gender changed in Sweden, *c.* 1650–1800. Matrimony in relation to political and civil rights is discussed, as well as the declining marriage rate and changes in both marriage legislation and marriage discourse. The article argues that during this period, men and women were individualized in relation to marriage as matrimony lost some of its legal consequences. One example in the article is that men could no longer become burghers only by marrying a burgher's daughter. It was their own merits that would give them access to some of the rights: that followed citizenship of the towns, not marriage. Also the relations within marriage changed. The husband lost some of his privileges when his spouse's responsibility for her property was legalized and when, for example, the court could appoint a guardian for him to protect her property.

The legal, judicial and in some respects also symbolic status of unmarried women and men and widows is analysed too. In the eighteenth century unmarried women for the first time could apply for a declaration of majority. According to the law, widows were entitled to possess and dispose of property unconditionally. However, the legal consequences of matrimony changed and widows lost some of their rights, for example, the right to vote. The restrictions of the widows' political influence in connection with civil and political citizenship occurred in a period when the male burghers' power and influence were increasing, at both the local and the national level. The appearance of the male citizen occurred at the expense of matrimony.

Altogether, the individualization had the result that each particular woman was to a lesser extent linked to a particular man (a father, husband or dead husband). These changes also led women, irrespective of civil status, to become more alike – as females, as one of two sexes.

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Inga Floto
A Modern Death

IN 1955 THE BRITISH ANTHROPOLOGIST, Geoffrey Gorer, published his famous article on "The Pornography of Death", in which he argued that a new attitude toward death characterized the Twentieth Century, death had become *taboo*. He pointed, among other things, to the growing secularization of Western society, and lower mortality and better medical treatment resulting in most people dying in hospitals instead of at home, as possible explanations. His short article sparked a virtual boom in death studies in various fields including history, a boom that is still very much alive and to which the present paper is a contribution. One way to look for changing attitudes toward death in a society is to analyze the methods chosen for the execution of criminals. Beginning in the late Eighteenth Century the death penalty underwent a process of modernization which can be read as the breakthrough for a modern attitude toward death. Two examples are analyzed to substantiate this point: The introduction of the guillotine during the French Revolution and the 'privatization' of the British executions in 1868.

The guillotine introduced the quick and painless death as an ideal, at the same time the guillotine represented a death untouched by any human hand reflecting a new aversion to death. Furthermore, the guillotine established a new technological approach to death, and this new way of killing people caused an intense physiological and purely secular debate on the character of this extremely speedy way of dying thereby changing the discourse on death. The 'privatization' of English executions in 1868, i.e. the removal of executions from the public sphere, represents the logical fulfillment of the process initiated by the introduction of the guillotine. The mere sight of the infliction of violent death, of death itself, had become repulsive to the governing elite. Death had become *taboo*, and public executions had become pornography.

Cecilia Riving

The “Angel-Maker” from Helsingborg

A Micro-Historical Study of Foster-Care in Sweden in the First Decades of the Twentieth Century

A COURT CASE FROM HELSINGBORG is the basis for a study of Swedish foster-care in the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1917 Hilda Nilsson was found guilty of seven murders and one manslaughter, and she was sentenced to be executed in accordance with current legislation. All the victims had been foster-children with the woman, who had undertaken to look after the children after concluding private agreements with their mothers. For each child the woman received a certain payment which was to cover expenses for care and upbringing. By killing the infants entrusted to her care, Hilda Nilsson was able to make a financial profit, and the court found that this was the motive for the crimes.

Fostering children was a widespread phenomenon in the early twentieth century. A micro-historical study of the case from Helsingborg highlights the living conditions and patterns of thought that lay behind the virtual industry of foster-care that grew up. Swedish foster-care has previously been the subject of some research, but mostly as broad surveys. The micro-study instead shows foster-care in its concrete application. The social conditions that drove people to give away their children or to take in children are analysed from a social and cultural perspective, taking into account material, economic, and judicial factors as well as the more general values and norm systems maintained by the surrounding community.

Previous research has often held up foster-care as a mainly economic activity, with the children regarded almost as a commodity. The case of Hilda Nilsson is an eloquent example of this: the financial profit was the only motive for the woman's decision to take in foster-children. On several occasions, two women served as go-betweens in the transfer of the children, making a profit for themselves in this way. The system of boarding out children could obviously be exploited for economic purposes, which indicates that the new legislation on foster-children that came into force in 1902 was in many respects ineffective, as has previously been claimed.

The study also confirms that in 1917 it still involved considerable social and economic difficulties to be an unmarried mother. All the children that were left in the care of Hilda Nilsson were born out of wedlock. On the other hand, an analysis of the biological mothers' attitudes to the children they gave away has yielded results which differ from those obtai-

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ned in other research, where mothers are often depicted as being completely indifferent to the fate of their children. Instead, the micro-analysis shows several mothers who were profoundly concerned about the well-being of their children. The picture of the fathers of these illegitimate children also needs to be qualified, since it turns out that they did not all try to evade responsibility for their children. The fact remains, however, that it was still perfectly possible for them to do so, and that the mother was often left with the entire social and economic responsibility. Foster-children and their care was essentially a sphere of female responsibility.

Translation: Alan Crozier