

The politics of talk

Rumour and gossip in Stockholm during the struggle for succession (c.1592–1607)

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Introduction

In 1602, Stockholm's City Court (*rådstugurätt*) had the city's pillory moved to the central marketplace to the accompaniment of high-flown phrases: 'May God let law and justice be within the city and the city walls and not without, then everything will be done right, for where sins are punished, there is God honoured and praised.'[1] This demonstration of power and justice was intended to remind the Stockholmers of their role as loyal, obedient, and God-fearing subjects, and marked the end of a restless decade.

This article concentrates on the turbulent years of 1592–1607, and argues that gossip was not only an important element in social interaction, but also a form of political involvement and resistance for those without formal power. The political situation in Sweden was in turmoil in the late sixteenth century. King Johan III died in 1592, and his son Sigismund ascended to the Swedish throne. Sigismund's position was difficult, however, because through his mother, Katarina Jagellonica (Catherine Jagiellon), he had also inherited the Polish Crown in 1587, and he reigned in Poland until 1632. In Sweden he was crowned Sigismund III Vasa. His Catholicism created problems in Sweden, whose rulers had striven to consolidate the Lutheran faith. Sigismund's main opponent in Sweden was his uncle, Duke Karl. As a son of Gustav I Vasa, Karl insisted that he was the lawful successor to his brother, Johan III. He justified his claim with both political and religious arguments, and thus the ensuing conflict not only concerned the succession, but also had wider implications. This is why the struggle affected Swedish society so strongly—especially in the capital, Stockholm. In practice, Duke Karl managed to legitimize his status in 1599 and began to use the title Karl IX, but his coronation did not take place until 1607, the year that this study ends. Karl IX died in 1611 and was succeeded by his son, Gustav II Adolf (Gustavus Adolphus).

Hearsay often played a central role in various kinds of criminal cases brought before the city court, but in this article I shall concentrate on political rumours, in particular those alleging the deaths of the king and

the duke, and on the city court's repeated efforts to curb gossip-mongering. What kind of talk was labelled rumour or gossip, and who had the power to do this? Can rumour and gossip be distinguished from each other? What importance did location and time have for urban information flows? What was the informative and political significance of rumour and gossip in an early modern society?

Gossip-mongering and rumour have been popular topics in European urban history, but they have rarely been seen integral to political culture, and our knowledge of early modern Swedish cities as centres of hearsay is meagre. From the political viewpoint it is essential to separate rumour from other information, since defining rumour in early modern cities was an exercise in power and authority, and gossip-mongers were tried in the city court.

Gossip and rumour flourished in commercial cities like Stockholm. In the period considered here, however, the topics of gossip were far from the usual tittle-tattle. Where it usually concerned crime, criminals, and people living somehow on the fringes of society, in the late 1590s peopled talked about Duke Karl, Sigismund, and their supporters. Presumably, kings and their doings were a constant topic in alehouses and similar public spaces, but it has rarely left any traces in the source material. Thus this article offers a unique insight into the political rumour and gossip that circulated in Stockholm at the time.[2] The source material consists of the court records of Stockholm City Court, supplemented with the few surviving letters from the correspondence between the city court and Karl and Sigismund.[3]

After these turbulent years, very few accusations of political rumour-mongering—and none concerning kings—can be found in the sources in the first half of the seventeenth century. This is probably due to less meticulous surveillance compared with the reign of the wary Karl. But as the bureaucratization of Stockholm's city government gradually intensified, it led to a general narrowing in the possibilities of interaction between the office-holders and burghers, emphasizing patriarchal power relations. Increased moral, religious, administrative, and economic surveillance was extended to everyday life, and Stockholmers were disciplined into obedient subjects. As a result, the burghers' political importance changed notably, and all further political talk in the form of rumour and gossip completely eluded the surveillance of the city court.[4]

In the middle of this picture there is Gamla stan, the old town of Stockholm, which was the administrative, political and economic heart of the town, and at the same time also the centre of information as well as disinformation. "Stockholm från öster", *Suecia antiqua et hodierna*, första bandet, Kungliga biblioteket.

Gossip and rumour in an early modern local community

Definitions from above

This study concentrates on *political* gossip and rumour. It is quite different from gossip—and slander—among neighbours, which has been the main focus of studies of urban information flows. Various researchers have distinguished between gossip and rumour by their targets. Gossip has been described as talk that requires an intimate knowledge of the subject, whereas rumour can concern anyone or anything.[5] This view is present in modern everyday parlance, as we tend to understand rumours as presumed events on the wider stage, whether in national or local politics or public life in general, whereas gossip seems to refer to individual people and their scandalous behaviour. Even if a distinction is possible between rumour and gossip using such a definition, their functions were (and still are) essentially the same. Rumour was more likely to be political in nature, and it spread particularly fast in times of political uncertainty. It could touch upon subjects such as the struggle for power in Sweden in the late 1590s, when both Duke Karl and his nephew Sigismund claimed the Crown.[6] Another example is provided by the city of Linköping, which was restless during the 1590s, and was a hotbed of rumour.[7] Unrest easily built up and spread, and in situations which were felt to be threatening and dangerous the authorities were liable to attribute excessive significance to specific incidents.

The topics discussed and what was actually said, the relationship between the gossiper and the person gossiped about, and the fact that it all took

place out of the hearing of the subject have all been used to define gossip.[8] Nevertheless, regardless of these definitions and characterizations, it is hard to argue that gossip was a distinct form of social exchange. Gossip offered information, but it was also functional as it enabled interaction in a society in which actions were based to a great extent on trust.[9] The boundaries of gossiping were fuzzy at best, because the elements that were typical of gossip can be found in practically all forms of conversation. Moreover, the definition of gossip has rarely been questioned, and the fact that the nature of gossip is ultimately determined by the person who brands it as such has not been considered. As a subjective and cultural phenomenon, gossip might be defined as unofficial collective talk that violates the public image and reputation of an individual or a group by impugning their character or actions. This definition is even more apposite to an early modern society and community, in which communality, reputation, and honour constituted the basic norms of everyday life.[10]

Labelling talk as rumour and gossip was nevertheless an exercise in power, whether it was imposed by an individual citizen or the authorities.[11] When the city court was hunting down gossips and striving to control the flow of (mis)information, it was using its institutional and legal power to govern and police Stockholm. The community's internal order was to a great extent maintained by means of the authorities' manipulative discourse. In official meetings, the inhabitants were *ordered*, *advised*, and *persuaded* to make all kinds of sacrifices for the common good, but in return their own opportunities to express themselves were tightly restricted and controlled.[12] This was related to the idea of a harmonious urban community, in which talk needed to be controlled in order to avoid conflict. This striving to control what people said meant also policing foreigners of all kinds, who were often seen as sources of endless rumours. Gossip and rumour threatened both communal harmony and the national interest, and particularly so when the succession was in doubt.

In defining gossip, the normative context—prevailing norms and values—has often passed unnoticed, and thus temporal and spatial changes have been completely overlooked. Even if gossip itself has not altered, society, with all its formal and informal norms and values, is in constant flux.[13] The Ten Commandments and the Bible generally were the basis for interpreting gossip-mongering as evil, and religious doctrine condemned gossip and misleading stories as sinful.[14] This did not exactly equate with everyday conceptions and norms, but the religious condemnation contributed to the negative conception of gossip. Research on the phenomena of gossip and rumour, despite neglecting local communities, has drawn attention to their positive functions in society.[15]

Rumour was an instrument of social control in cities, where people lived in close proximity to one another. If a rumour concerning infanticide, for example, found its way to the city court, the authorities usually started an investigation. Unsolved crimes, like other sinful acts, would bring down God's wrath, and hence investigating and settling possible crimes was vital for the wellbeing of society. If a rumour was proved to be false, the perpetrator could be punished for defamation with a fine.[16] In addition to its informational and entertaining value, gossip had a moral and social dimension: it reminded people of the need to uphold morality in a culture where the sins of the individual were regarded as having repercussions for society as a whole.[17] Generally, interaction in an early modern society was oral, and the spoken word had a special power. Only a few people could read, and reading aloud was the way in which printed information was disseminated.[18]

The medieval City Law of King Magnus Eriksson equated gossip with defamation. It stipulated that a person who was guilty of defaming or spreading a malicious rumour about a public office-holder was to be given a harsh fine of 80 marks or be executed. In order for the culprit to be sentenced, the testimony of six good and respectable men was needed.[19] Thus a person's honour could be threatened and questioned through talk, and other members of society were needed to prove such defamations false. When persons other than office-holders were defamed and there were six witnesses to prove it, the punishment was a fine of 60 marks or whipping in a pillory followed by banishment on pain of execution. The circulating of treasonous rumours was made punishable by a royal edict in 1612 and again by the Diet of the Estates (Riksdag) in 1612. In addition, the Statutes of Örebro of 1617 prescribed the death sentence for spreading vain rumour and gossip around the country.[20]

Community, reputation, and loose talk—gossiping from below

The social nature of gossip is emphasized by the connection between rumour and gossip on the one hand and honour and defamation on the other hand. The Swedish word *rykte* means both reputation and rumour. An individual could have a 'good name and repute' ('gode nampn och rÿchte') or 'an evil reputation' ('elakt rÿchte').[21] Gossip was seen as a kind of human attribute that defined the individual: 'a disreputable maiden, called Margreta' ('een berÿcktatt piga, be:dh Margreta').[22] In contrast to a decent person, the individual who was the target of gossip was branded as suspect and dishonourable until the gossip was disproved.[23] Gossip alone sufficed to marginalize an individual in his or her community, but there was also the

reverse: being part of the gossiping group was evidence of one's acceptance, bonding, and affiliation.[24]

Even if early modern society in principle strictly disapproved of gossip, it nevertheless remained an essential element in local interaction: gossip and rumour were such important features of life that no doctrine, however normative, could hope to stop tongues from wagging. Everyday gossip and rumour-mongering filled a psychological and social need. Thus talking about one's own neighbours was hardly considered to be gossiping, but when the same individual ended up on the receiving end as the object of pejorative talk, it led to furious accusations of calumny. The household needed to be protected against rumour and gossip, because one bad member could infect the whole house.[25] Even if city dwellers were eager gossipers and rumours abounded, the city courts regarded rumour without exception as wrong and condemnable because it was seen as a direct threat to the social order. Burgomasters and magistrates considered the discussion of delicate topics (such as politics) in circumstances out of their reach and control to be a potential source of disorder. They preferred such discussions to be carried out in public and under supervision. The premodern view regarded it as a precondition of people's honour and respectability that their actions should take place in public.[26]

This emphasizes the fact that definitions of gossip and rumour fail to take changes over time and place into account. In early modern Stockholm, the authorities obviously interpreted information flows as a form of power, which could and needed to be controlled. Just as individuals' rights and duties were defined by their estate or social rank, so by the same token their access to knowledge was restricted, or at least attempts were made to control it. News became rumour in the eyes of the burgomasters and magistrates if it was communicated in undesired places and by unwanted persons. The subject matter could also be a determining factor in defining rumour, and talking about the politics of the realm or about the king was regarded as dangerous by the authorities, because such matters were not considered to be the concern of the lower orders. The ill-educated and illiterate might interpret rumours as they pleased, and this could lead to unforeseen reactions. The authorities above all wanted to obviate critical talk about those in power. Such talk called into question the powers that be, and thus could lead to disturbances or foment an already existing rebellious mood.[27]

Rumour and gossip were closely intertwined with the communication of information. Relatively few people could read or write, and oral communication was the most effective way of gaining and passing on information. The formal communication of information mainly took place in sessions of the city court or in religious services with announcements that were read

from the pulpit.[28] The informal channels of communication operated in other social situations: in the streets, ale-houses, and marketplaces.[29] The formal dissemination of information by nature travelled slowly, and often the unofficial news reached Stockholm long before 'the official truth' did. The significant role of oral communication led to difficulties in distinguishing rumour from potential facts.[30] The boundary was drawn according to the way the information was disseminated: to be regarded as truthful, the communication had to be propagated by the authorities, because all information from outside this 'official sphere' was branded as unreliable and dangerous—in other words, as rumour and gossip.[31] Officially disseminated information could also be traced back to its origins and verified. This was a world view arranged according to the ideal of order as opposed to disorder. Rumour and gossip exemplified the uncontrolled and disorganized side of the world, which needed to be curbed if chaos was to be avoided.

Rumour plays an essential role in communication: it can be interpreted as constructing order and coherence out of everyday experience by creating new meanings, and therefore as a factor in systematizing a collective perception of the world.[32] On the other hand, this means of securing social cohesion could also generate prejudices against 'outsiders', and such prejudices could be exploited—as in Stockholm, where Roman Catholics, soldiers, and foreigners were all blamed for gossiping and thus being a threat to society.[33] The social dimension of gossip is generally important: rumour and gossip communicate and preserve the morals and values of society.[34] At times of change they can also work to promote a new world view, and above all they can contribute to the demolition of an old one.[35] In any case, the Stockholmers' view in the late sixteenth century that rumour and gossip were immoral, futile, and malicious, and thus condemnable, is often to be found in modern everyday life and language.

Stockholm as the centre of the struggle for power

The Swedish capital, Stockholm, with its lively European contacts, was the centre of the country's domestic and foreign trade. King Gustav I Vasa had to some extent centralized his administration in Stockholm, and this intensified during the reigns of his sons. Central government maintained the special offices and positions that were lacking in smaller towns, which meant that sources of information were always close at hand. Stockholm grew fast in spite of recurring plagues: in the 1580s the estimated population was around 6,000–7,000, but it had doubled by the 1620s, and it continued to increase. Until the 1610s, this growth was mostly concentrated among the wealthier burghers, but there were other increasingly populous groups,

such as servants, below the burghers in the social hierarchy of the city, as well as nobles, clerics, and royal officials above them.[36]

After a few decades that were peaceful by Swedish standards, the question of the succession in the 1590s emphasized Stockholm's position in the politics of the realm. It also stirred up unsettled religious conflicts: the Reformation had been quite slow in Sweden, and in the late sixteenth century theological questions were still being discussed, with the conflict between Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism still in the balance. Johan III had steered the realm back towards Catholicism, and it was believed that his son Sigismund would bring this process to completion. The Church of Sweden, being Lutheran, naturally did not accept this. In this context, it is understandable that religion became an issue when Catholic Sigismund was confronted by Lutheran Karl, whose religious views were closer to Calvinism than anything.[37] War against Catholic rulers such as Sigismund were commonly legitimized with appeals to religion,[38] and Duke Karl, in particular, exploited religious arguments in his political machinations.

Domestic politics was in turmoil. In Stockholm, the years 1597 and 1598 were especially restless, and the city was beset with political power struggles. Karl spent long periods in Tre Kronor Castle in Stockholm, whereas Sigismund was mostly in Poland. Duke Karl was extremely well informed about sentiments and incidents in the city and the court house, and he exerted constant pressure on the city administration to take his side, while Sigismund emphasized his hereditary right to the Crown and the people's duty of loyalty to the legitimate king. In September 1597, Sigismund wrote to the city administration of Stockholm and complained about the disorder in Sweden after he had left for Poland. He accused 'restless elements' of circulating rumours that the king was indifferent to Sweden and the Swedes. It was even rumoured that Sigismund's adherents and subjects in Poland had made it impossible for him to set sail for Sweden—Sigismund could not travel, or possibly did not even want to. It was also claimed that he was completely unconcerned about his northern ancestral land and subjects.[39]

Stockholm was the focal point of the information flows. The city's proximate geographical connection with the central power enabled close communication in informal as well as formal matters. For the city administration and jurisdiction, this meant that the central government could use its officials to rule Stockholm, but it could also exploit oral and personal interaction to control minor matters without resorting to issuing written orders, as was the case in other Swedish cities. Stockholm was under constant surveillance in this restless period; even though the central government had a tight grip on Stockholm, the city had to be taken into account in politics because its economic significance was enormous.[40]

Stockholm's short-spoken court record books offer unfortunate few chances to get acquainted with arenas where political information was spread, but it is clear that matters which inflamed city dwellers, as rumours considering rulers shifted freely on streets – even on water routes – and markets out of the reach of the city court. Drawing by Lorenzo Magalotti from his Swedish journey 1674. "Mälarbåt för utfärder", Lorenzo Magalotti, *Notizie di Svezia* (1674), Uppsala universitetsbibliotek.

Despite the pressure from Duke Karl, Stockholm's leaders decided to stay loyal to the lawful king. They felt bound by the oath of allegiance they had sworn to him. Duke Karl, however, interpreted the oath differently, and explained that if the king renounced his Lutheran faith, the oath was no longer binding. Once Karl had seized power, the supporters of the legitimate king paid a high price for their loyalty, losing their offices in the city administration. Compared to losing their heads, as five noblemen did in the Linköping Bloodbath of 1600, the elders of Stockholm got off easily. Karl took an iron grip on Stockholm's administrative and judicial system as a whole.[41] It was this heated political atmosphere that probably explained the intensified political discussion, and inevitable rumour-mongering, in city, but it is also possible that office-holders were more eager to control what people said in order to avoid open conflict with Karl and to assure him of their loyalty.

Political rumour in Stockholm in the 1590s

'The King is dead—long live the King!'

Rumour was rife in these uncertain and unstable times,[42] and spread like wildfire in Sweden's towns. During the 1590s, it was said from time to time that Duke Karl had died, and rumours of Sigismund's death also circulated.[43] Both the political struggle for power and the uncertainty about the succession after Johan III by their very nature gave rise to the spread of informal information, gossip, and rumour. Since there was no information about the real state of affairs, every single act was interpreted as a sign, and a new story was ready to take wing.[44] In particular, there were signs, such as a letter with Duke Karl's signature but in the wrong handwriting, that were seen as denoting his death. His illegitimate son, Karl Karlsson Gyllenhielm, was also said to have been seen crying in the street, and this was interpreted as a sign of Duke Karl's death. In Stockholm, women placed wagers on the Duke's death.[45] The situation was restless both in southern Sweden and in Finland, and although Sigismund had already returned to Poland, Karl was travelling around the kingdom in order to secure his position. Uncertainty about his presence, power relations, and the situation in the other parts of the realm fuelled the rumours.

A king was God's representative on earth: he was a father, peacemaker, and lord, but also a supreme warrior, avenger, and judge of his subjects. A king was essential for the well-being of the realm, and so the succession had always to be secured in order to ensure the realm's survival. In medieval England, this problem had been solved by the judicial and political ideology of the king's two bodies. His *body natural* was physical and mortal, whereas his *body politic* was political and eternal. An interregnum was regarded as a dangerous period, so the concept of the immortal king was created. The king was also the head, and thus the responsible part, of the whole body constituted by the state. Therefore, the absence of a king could render the corporate body incomplete and incapable of action.[46] The death of a king created an extreme situation, but even the mere absence of a living king was also seen as a practical political problem, if the various powers were not clearly defined. It was also a hazardous and critical circumstance, in which the realm was vulnerable to traitors and others with evil intentions.[47]

After the death of King Johan III, the situation had been even more problematic than usual, because the succession was unsettled.[48] It was in these circumstances that Duke Karl had invited Stockholm's burgomasters, magistrates, and burghers to the royal castle in order to warn them about 'restless elements' who possibly wanted to provoke turmoil, or who

were thoughtlessly spreading inappropriate information. The city was to be controlled by curbing loose talk and behaviour. At the same time, Karl emphasized the bond between the dead king and his subjects by thanking the burghers for their loyalty, obedience, and allegiance to Johan. To seal his good relations with the City of Stockholm, and as a nominal concession, Karl promised the burghers the right to free trade. This had been a long-sought-after goal of the city's, and in this way Karl bought for himself—at least for a time—Stockholm's favour in the dispute over the succession.[49] The central government aimed to control the burghers through local office-holders and by persuasion and veiled threats. The attempt to control talk meant also police surveillance of all kinds of strangers, who were often seen as sources of rumours.

This suggests that actions of the rulers as well as those of the burgomasters and magistrates were based on the traditional idea of an ideal urban community, in which the burghers were seen as a part of a unified city corporation. The privileges of the Estates defined the burghers as the ordinary residents of Stockholm, and usually it is impossible to ascertain what this term meant when it is used in the source material. 'The burghers' were in fact an economically and socially heterogeneous group of citizens who constituted only one part of the whole urban community, and whose possibilities for political action were defined according to their status. Nevertheless, the burghers were seen as loyal subjects, and threats to the social and political order were expected not from inside but from outside the city. Often a threat took the shape of a stranger or a soldier. Their meeting in the royal castle also suggests that both the ruler and the city's office-holders relied on their patriarchal authority and the burghers' obedience, and thought that city dwellers' tongues could be controlled by such demonstrations of power.[50]

Sigismund's scope for action in the power struggle with his uncle was restricted, because as King of Poland he needed to be there for long periods. His absence from Sweden gave his opponents a much freer hand.[51] The joint absence of the putative rulers created a problematic situation more generally, too. To dispel rumours and disturbances, both Sigismund and Duke Karl wrote to inform the officers of the city administration and central government where they were and when they planned to return to Sweden,[52] but this information was probably not distributed in the local community, and the continued absence of the royal claimants led to rumours. When in 1605 Karl headed for the battlefield, a printed decree was published: the Estates were urged to be of one mind ('dhe skole wara enighe') and not to listen to traitors.[53] He delegated his legal powers to his queen, Duke Johan, and those Counsellors of State who remained in Sweden. It also announced

that he would return in three months' time.[54] Karl had taken advantage of Sigismund's absence, and he knew how important it was to prevent disturbances by securing his position as ruler and by informing his subjects of his plans. These cases are also evidence of an intentional and strategic use of the dissemination of information within the Swedish realm.

Funeral feasts and malicious talk

Duke Karl was a controversial figure, and his struggle with Sigismund made him one of the main subjects of political discussion. In Stockholm, both had their supporters, and Sigismund's adherents in particular were eager to denigrate Karl. In 1599 a servant in an alehouse called Ditleff and a couple of other men were charged with holding a funeral feast ('grafööl') for Duke Karl.[55] In court, Ditleff was asked if he knew about a rumour concerning Karl's death, but both he and one of his companions denied any knowledge of such a rumour.[56]

Only a few days later, one Jören Bähr came to the city court and charged an ex-scribe called Anders Larsson with spreading a false rumour. Larsson had gossiped about Jören Bähr and his wife, claiming that they had given a barrel of ale to the Danviken hospital so that they could drink 'funeral-ale' for Duke Karl.[57] Larsson and Jören Bähr were probably at odds with each other for other reasons too, since Bähr also accused Larsson of calling him a scoundrel. Jören Bähr defended himself by explaining that he had only donated the barrel to Danviken to give force to his prayers for his sick wife with an act of charity. It seems that Larsson had heard of Ditleff's case, and taken advantage of the situation to gain the upper hand in their dispute by impugning Bähr for arranging a 'funeral-ale'. Ditleff had appeared in court just a couple of days earlier, so undoubtedly the whole of Stockholm was talking and speculating about Karl's death and funeral feasts.[58]

Later, a cooper called Jören and some other men were indicted for drinking funeral-ale in Dirik Bökman's alehouse. Jören claimed that he had only been sitting there, but had heard some other men drinking funeral-ale for Duke Karl. He accused one Johan Bökman (who had died in the meantime), some members of the Royal Guard, and some foreign merchants' servants. Jören, however, had already told his acquaintances about the funeral-ale he had been drinking, and he was consequently arrested.[59]

Thus there were rumours of Duke Karl's death circulating in Stockholm in June 1599. The stories fed themselves, and almost any act could be interpreted as gossiping or acting on unreliable information—as Larsson found. The rumours about funeral feasts reveal that the duke's death was a hot topic amongst the local community. It is of secondary importance

whether these funeral feasts actually took place or not; society was still unmistakeably unsettled by the political furore. Faced with an incendiary political situation, the rumours and their investigation in court can to a great extent be explained by people's uncertainty about the real circumstances. Not even members of the Royal Guard knew whether Duke Karl was alive or not. Meanwhile, drinking toasts may also have been a way of articulating support for the lawful king and a protest against Duke Karl, whose ruthless politics in the 1590s were the cause of his unpopularity in Stockholm.

The city court strove to find those responsible for starting the rumours. In the late summer of 1599, Mattias Franck was brought to trial and charged with spreading rumours about Karl's death. Exceptionally, the court convened behind closed doors, and Franck was intimidated into confessing that he had meant Karl when he wrote in a letter that the death of an 'exalted person' ('ein hohe person, enn högh person') would end all of Sweden's wars.[60] Franck defended himself by saying that he had not intended any harm, but only wanted to comfort his brother-in-law that he did not need to be afraid of the 'bruit of war' ('krigzbulder'). There was no such offence under city law, so the city court sentenced him to be fined as much as Karl decided, or as much as he could afford, and then to be banished from the realm.[61]

Karl was not popular among his subjects even after he became king, which was due to his character, but probably more to economic and military reasons. His reign was characterized by continual warfare, with the concomitant imposition of taxes and the obligation to lodge soldiers, which constituted a substantial burden on his subjects.[62] In 1604, the king's representative attended Stockholm's court house in order to charge a peasant with spreading a rumour that Karl had called a place called Ärlighundret (lit. 'district of honesty') Oärlighundret ('a district of dishonesty').[63] There were several witnesses to this incident. The peasant confessed that in his foolishness he had invented the whole thing and begged for mercy. He had also been joking about other things, which in this case he probably thought would be interpreted as an extenuating circumstance. However, the court thought differently, and he was sentenced to death for defaming Karl according to Paragraph 8 of the Royal Code (*konungsbalken*).[64]

Sigismund's and Karl's struggle for power was devastating enough to remain in the collective memory of the subjects. This became evident when Countess Ebba Brahe's servant was charged in 1615 with spreading a rumour concerning the realm and the Crown. According to the rumour, the king (Sigismund) had written to his subjects from Poland.[65] The alleged letter was said to have included the following message: if the subjects still wanted Sigismund as their legally crowned monarch, he would arrive as 'a gentle King and master', but if not he would act otherwise. When the court asked

why the servant had spread such a rumour, which was harmful both to the king and the realm as a whole, as well as risking his own life, he gave the usual answer and said that he had meant no harm and was only repeating words he had heard from others. The servant left the repercussions for his deeds in the hands of God and the authorities.[66]

Countess Ebba Persdotter Brahe, a daughter of Count Per Brahe, was not just any old aristocrat: her late husband was the privy councillor and Chancellor of the Realm Erik Sparre af Rossvik. Erik Sparre had previously been out of favour with Johan III for some time, and later his loyalty to Sigismund made him an enemy of Duke Karl. Erik Sparre was the first of the Privy Councillors to leave Sweden in 1597 as a result of disturbances relating to the regime. He followed Sigismund back to Sweden the following year, and ended up in Karl's hands after the Battle of Stångebro. Erik Sparre was executed together with other councillors loyal to Sigismund in 1600 in Linköping marketplace.[67]

In the grip of rumour, threatened by foreigners

The struggle for power created a favourable climate for rumour and gossip. This indicates the fact that rumour was—at least in the eyes of the ruling group—seen to be closely connected to the lack of organization and regulation in society and the local community. In an ideal organized society, select information suitable for mere subjects was disseminated through certain channels, and the patriarchal order was maintained. Rumours called the social hierarchy created by God and the authority of the administrative and judicial systems into question.[68] Moreover, the fear of foreigners wandering around the city spreading malicious rumours became real, especially in times of war. The central authorities were afraid that spies would infiltrate the local community, and considered it crucial to control Sweden's borders and guard the gates of the city. Thus foreigners were subject to special attention from the authorities.[69] The 1590s offer a good example of how domestic politics and local disturbances were connected to foreign politics and military threats.

According to the authorities, the ideal subject did not spread rumours and gossip that questioned authority. The city court's findings emphasized the contradiction between rumour on the one hand and obedience and social harmony on the other. Rumour and loose talk ('löse tal') were connected with laxity and vagrancy, as opposed to order and honourableness. Rumours were also dangerous because they were associated with riots and conspiracies, and they were considered to be central factors in the rise and spread of social unrest.[70] For example, at the end of 1593 rumours circulated concerning a riot that was supposedly taking place.[71]

The authorities tried to avoid disturbances by tightening control.[72] This included repeated demands for obedience, attempts to control the dissemination of news, and in particular the surveillance of 'strangers' and their travel routes. Foreigners in Stockholm were required to report to the castle and present their passports and other documents. They were considered to be potentially dangerous because their intentions were unknown. The fact that they could not be identified was sufficient to brand the information they shared as unreliable and a reason to maintain a watch on their activities and talk. An outbreak of plague was naturally also a constant fear, and that played into the anxieties about conspiracies.[73]

In early modern society, group affiliation was of particular importance. It was easy for the authorities to distinguish people of the same society, but identifying strangers who came to Stockholm was more problematic. Within one's own group it was simple to find witnesses who could vouch for one's reputation and background, even if the inhabitants of larger cities did not necessarily know one another personally, but the position of outsiders was more complex. They could be asked for certificates of good standing, and they also needed passports and evidence of their occupation—especially in the case of craftsmen. This included documents testifying to their honourable background and good conduct. Partially these requirements can be traced back to the authorities' need to control the activities of individuals, but they were also due to the community's own efforts to exclude persons

The majority of foreign trade was channeled through Stockholm and tight policing of foreigners included also tradesmen from other towns and other countries. "Slottet tre kronor", *Suecia antiqua et hodierna*, första bandet, Kungliga biblioteket.

who might bring God's wrath down on the city. In this, written evidence of one's good character was essential, and any problems a foreigner experienced in acquiring or presenting such credentials were regarded with suspicion.[74]

In Stockholm, the fear of disorder spreading was more concrete than in other Swedish cities because of its high level of commercial activity. It saw plenty of both Swedish and foreign merchants from outside the city as well as other travellers, and all were considered sources of potentially disruptive rumours. It was feared that the letters and news of foreigners would 'be the occasion of ordinary men taking to violence against the lawful authorities'.[75] Thus in 1601 the Stockholmers were advised in an open session of the city court that if they heard about wicked ('ondo'), false ('lögnagtige'), or rebellious ('vproriske') news circulating among the common people, they should inform officials of the Crown or the burgomasters. The 'tidings-crows' ('tidende kråkor'), as they were called, who were responsible were to be duly punished.[76] Burghers were required on pain of a fine to be present at these meetings, where they could discuss administrative matters together with burgomasters and magistrates, even though the most important task of the meetings was to levy taxes and to announce royal orders. At the same time, these meetings were practically the only arena where the burghers could be heard on political and administrative matters, since they were usually supposed to be passive listeners unless their consent was needed.[77] Authority and official information were tightly connected to a certain place, time and source; outside the court house, news became rumour.

Ever since the early 1590s, Duke Karl had expressed the view that political disturbances and other misfortunes were a result of his subjects' disobedience of God's commandments. He was particularly concerned about offences related to the first three commandments, which concerned the veneration of God. In 1602 he stated that it was time for the authorities to start punishing pernicious persons rather than merely urging them to repent. According to Karl, the clergy were to blame for his subjects' sinfulness, and he tried to curb their power and independence. He was also eager to shift the blame onto Sigismund.[78]

In general, it was easier for him to attribute the blame to outsiders than to admit his own responsibility for the disturbances.[79] In addition to foreigners, lazy and idle people were also considered a threat to a well-ordered society. They were outside the 'social body' and so demanded extra attention from the authorities. In Stockholm, all unemployed persons were ordered to leave the city in 1601. It was believed that they were idling away their time and spreading false news and lies among the people. They were threatened with imprisonment if they returned. Moreover, citizens were to be fined for lodging them. Here, rumour and gossip were connected with the deadly sin

of sloth.[80] Vagrants and loose talk did not fit into the new world that Karl had begun to build, in which every individual was to be ever more closely integrated into the immediate family, their kin, and the community, and openness was a precondition of respectable behaviour.[81]

Rumour as an argument and instrument of politics

Rumour and gossip probably played a more important role in the political life of early modern society than the sources reveal. In the power struggles of the late sixteenth century, propaganda and intentionally spread rumours caused disturbances among the citizens of Stockholm.[82] Duke Karl was an expert in using propaganda to his own advantage, and especially in Stockholm he could also employ official channels for distributing and obtaining information since he appointed the governors of Tre Kronor Castle, which was situated just a few minutes walk from the city court. This allowed for a rapid exchange of information, and the governors of the castle were able to keep a close eye on the administration of the city. Sigismund, too, was well informed, considering that he was in Poland most of the time. For example, he used his envoy, a Pole called Samuel Laski, as an informer.[83]

Rumours could be used for circulating 'truths' adapted to certain purposes, but they could also serve as political arguments. In the spring of 1597, there was a quarrel concerning the Diet of Arboga: Duke Karl had summoned the Diet, but Sigismund ordered that no one should attend. Afterwards Karl wrote to the City Court of Stockholm, asking how those parties who did not recognize the decisions of the disputed Diet should be treated.[84] Stockholm had been loyal to King Sigismund, and Karl was indirectly accusing the city fathers of neglecting their duty. Failure to publically proclaim the Diet's decisions could be interpreted as questioning the legitimacy of this organ of government and thus as resistance to Karl.

This meeting in Arboga was problematic, and its status as a Diet was questionable. Contemporaries compared the meeting to a revolutionary measure because of its procedural irregularities, its agenda, and the lack of representation. Duke Karl had summoned the meeting to get the permission of the Estates to carry out a military expedition in the rebellious eastern part of the realm, Finland. The Council of the Realm opposed the enterprise, and King Sigismund forbade the estates to convene. With the exception of one count, the members of the Council, like most of the representatives of the Nobles and the Burghers, were conspicuously absent from the assembly in Arboga. Only the Peasants were present in force, and with their support Karl got his way. Formally, legally, and politically, however, the meeting could hardly be regarded as a session of the Diet.[85]

After the meeting in Arboga, the city fathers in Stockholm City Court declined to answer Karl's accusations of misconduct, but pleaded that these questions were 'too high for them': they were only poor subjects. They also put down their unwillingness to reply to Karl's inquiry to the false news and stories they constantly heard, and referred to the unreliability of the information available for making decisions. Ultimately, the city court was obliged to answer Karl directly. The contents of this answer have not survived, but Karl clearly rejected it and later himself chastised the burgomasters and magistrates for it. This episode also led Karl to attempt to replace Sigismund's supporters in the city administration with officials he could trust, thereby suppressing the opposition of the burgomasters and magistrates. He succeeded in doing this to some extent in 1598.[86] Obviously, the burgomasters and magistrates had been casting about for an excuse for their conduct, and settled for blaming rumour and the lack of reliable information—rumour thus proved to be significant as it could be used as an argument to support the city fathers' inactivity.

From a political viewpoint, rumour and gossip can be regarded as elements of the community's broader political culture and as a form of protest.[87] In an early modern city, the possibilities for political action varied according to a person's social and economic status, and protest could take the form of rioting, disobedience, procrastination, or absenteeism. Rumours, too, can be interpreted as protest against the political system or the authorities.[88] Sometimes rumour was a direct manifestation of protest, and spoke out about and against kings and their doings. Thus the topics of rumours could be political in nature if the discussion was about rulers and their activities; however, if the definition of 'political' is extended to refer to the methods and courses of action open to individuals without social, political, or economic power if they were to be heard in an early modern society, then both gossip and rumour can be interpreted as political.[89] The official political arenas were largely reserved for the wealthy burghers and their representatives, whereas the poorer craftsmen's voices were heard in rumours and even the occasional riot.[90] Thus gossip can be interpreted as one possibility for the political action available to people without power.[91]

Conclusion

Gossip and rumour gain their momentum from people's endless hunger for information and their need to understand and organize their world through knowledge. In the early modern era they also acquired a particular force because of the limited nature of the official information offered to the public. During the power struggle between Sigismund and Duke Karl, both

domestic and foreign politics were in turmoil, and there was a constant military threat, with the consequence that ever wilder rumours circulated throughout the realm. Karl eagerly used the uncertain situation to spread propaganda to further his own cause, but others—such as the burgomasters and magistrates of Stockholm—also used the dissemination of unreliable information as an excuse to justify their political actions.

The concepts of rumour and gossip can be seen to operate on three levels: on the Stockholmers' own level, where the definition of rumour and gossip was vague at best; on the level of the representatives of administration and justice, who were in an official position to define talk as gossip; and on the level of general norms and values, which strictly condemned loose talk. As guardians of law and justice, the burgomasters and magistrates were forced to regard as a threat all discussion, and especially political discussion, that took place in circumstances beyond their control, since it could lead to undesired expressions of opinion or to situations in which their authority was questioned, thus threatening the general order of the city. Rumour and gossip crossed the boundaries between the private and the public by bringing private issues out into the public sphere, while, correspondingly, official information was disseminated in the city's inns and streets. This was seen as hazarding the ideal community.

Rumours of drinking toasts or news of Karl's death can be interpreted as political manifestations. Stockholm, with its city authorities and burghers, supported King Sigismund and viewed Karl as an illegitimate power-seeker, and this was reflected in the rumours. Later, in the seventeenth century, the situation calmed down. Rumours about crimes or political matters such as strict new economic regulations emerged from time to time, but the king was exempt. This emphasizes the exceptional character of the 1590s, but it is also evidence of the strengthening power of royal authority and the restrictions imposed by the city administration, since it is hard to imagine that Karl's son, the great warrior king and 'Lion of the North', Gustav II Adolf, was not on everyone's lips.

Rumour and gossip were phenomena that became more prominent in times of disturbance, but equally that also constituted part of ordinary interaction in the local community. Condemning loose talk in accordance with religious norms took on new significance in the early modern Swedish realm, especially from the 1610s onwards, when the country found itself becoming a European great power: gossip and rumour became prime targets of suppression as a more ambitiously comprehensive control of peoples' lives and activities came into force. Defining and restricting rumour and gossip reflected the early modern patriarchal understanding of the world, in which every individual had his or her place in accordance with certain rights and

loyalties. Talk which questioned this order was branded as rumour or gossip. Restraining—or at least striving to control—talk was thus equated with upholding the local community, with all its norms and values.

Det politiska samtalet. Rykten och skvaller i Stockholm under tronföljdsstriden cirka 1592–1607

Vid sekelskiftet 1600 var skvaller och ryktesspridning betydelsefulla aspekter av social interaktion och fungerade också som viktiga politiska informations- och missnöjeskanaler för människor utan formell makt. Den politiska situationen i Sverige var instabil under 1590-talet eftersom både Sigismund och hertig Karl hävdade sin rätt till kronan, och oron var särskilt påtaglig i Stockholm. Skvaller och rykten florerade särskilt i handelsstäder, och under tronföljdsstriden skvallrade allmogen hellre om hertig Karl, Sigismund och deras anhängare än om vardagliga ämnen som grannar och brottslingar. För Stockholms borgmästare och råd framstod situationen som farlig på många olika sätt. I ett tidigmodernt lokalsamhälle som Stockholm var det från överhetens synvinkel ytterst viktigt att sträva efter samhällelig harmoni och ryktesspridning om tronföljden hotade både stadens inre fred och riksintresset. För att förhindra konflikter försökte borgmästare och råd kontrollera det offentliga samtalet – och särskilt främlingar sågs ofta som potentiella orosmakare. Å andra sidan var rykten och skvaller viktiga som kanske de enda informationskanalerna för allmogen eftersom få människor kunde läsa eller skriva. Officiell information spreds från predikstolen eller rådstugan, medan inofficiella nyheter fortplantade sig i sociala sammanhang; på gator, torg och krogar. Borgmästare och råd stämplade gärna information som kommunicerades på oönskade platser och av oönskade människor som skvaller och rykten. Också kommunikationens innehåll hade betydelse och samtal om riket eller kungen borde inte föras bland allmogen. Trots alla överhetens försök att tygla samtalen, skvallrade allmogen om hertig Karls och ibland till och med Sigismunds död och gravöl. Ryktenas och informationens opålitlighet innebar också möjligheter för borgmästare och råd att hävda sig gentemot kronan, vilket exempelvis skedde vid den konfliktfyllda Arboga riksdag 1597. Stadens ämbetsmän menade att felaktiga nyheter komplicerade deras beslutsfattande. Efter de turbulenta åren vid sekelskiftet 1600 försvann kungen och rikspolitiken från allmogens samtal – så vitt vi vet enligt tänkeböcker – men troligtvis var kungar och speciellt hjältar som Gustav II Adolf alltid närvarande i stadsbornas diskussioner.

Keywords: Stockholm, early modern, political culture, rumour, gossip

Notes

1 *Stockholms tänkeböcker från år 1592 utgivna av Stockholms stadsarkiv, 1592–1628*, 17 vols. [hereafter *STb*] (Stockholm 1939–98), 12 May 1602, 239, 'samma dagh restes stuponn vppå Storetorgett, som länge nogh hafuer waritt vthann stadhenn, Gudh låthe rättenn och rätuisenn wara innann stadenn och stadzens murer och iche vthom, då ghår altingh wäll till, tÿ der sÿndenn blifuer straffett, der blifuer Gudh ähratt och prisatt'; Piia Einonen, *Poliittiset areenat ja toimintatavat. Tukholman porvaristo vallan käyttäjänä ja vallankäytön kohteena n. 1592–1644* (Helsinki 2005), 136–7; see also Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford 1991), 252.

2 I have read all the court records up to 1644 and there is no evidence of rumour and gossip about any rulers after Duke Karl and Sigismund—or any other kinds of rumour with political overtones. The only example which can be compared to the rumours presented here is the 'tale' (*sagu*) of three runaway regiments in 1635 (Stockholms stadsarkiv, Stockholm (SSA), Borgmästare och råds arkiv (BRA), serie A, vol. 55, 23 June 1635); see also Arlette Farge, *Subversive Words. Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century France* (University Park/Pennsylvania 1995), 95–6; Adam Fox, 'Rumour, News and Popular Political Opinion', *Historical Journal* (1997:3), 613–19.

3 The court records are missing for the year 1598. On the court record books, see Einonen 2005, 29–34.

4 See Einonen 2005, 235.

5 Ilpo Koskinen, *Väritetty totuus juorut arkielämässä* (Helsinki 2000), 36; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven 1990), 142; see also Aaron Ben–Ze'ev, 'The Vindication of Gossip', in Robert F. Goodman & Aaron Ben–Ze'ev (eds.), *Good Gossip* (Lawrence 1994), 13–14; Elizabeth Horodowich, 'The Gossiping Tongue: Oral Networks, Public Life and Political Culture in Early Modern Venice', *Renaissance Studies* (2005:1), 23; Elisabeth Reuterswärd, *Ett massmedium för folket: Studier i de allmänna kungörelsernas funktion i 1700–talets samhälle* (Lund 2001), 23; Hans-Joachim Neubauer, *Huhu: Kuulopuheen kulttuurihistoriaa* (Jyväskylä 2004), 13–15. On the difficulties of researching rumour and gossip, see Penny Roberts, 'Arson, Conspiracy and Rumour', *Continuity & Change* (1997:12), 1, 10–11, 13; and Neubauer 2004, 12.

6 See Roberts 1997, 10.

7 Folke Lindberg, 'Tiden 1567–1862', in Salomon Kraft & Folke Lindberg (eds.), *Linköpings historia*, II:1 (Linköping 1946), 10, 17. In this article I use this definition of the terms 'rumour' and 'gossip', but 'gossiping' is also used here to mean the casual spread of reports about other people, and 'gossip' for a person who engages in gossip.

8 Ben-Ze'ev 1994, 16–18; Koskinen 2000, 37–42; Horodowich 2005, 23; Chris Wickham, 'Gossip and Resistance among the Medieval Peasantry', *Past & Present* (1998:160), 11; see also Jean-Noël Kapferer, *Rykten: Världens äldsta nyhetsmedium* (Stockholm 1988), 10–19.

9 Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford 2004), 55–7, 280; Alexandra Shepard, 'Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England *c.*1580–1640', *Past & Present* (2000:167), *passim*; Einonen 2005, 189–93.

10 Horodowich 2005, 23–5; see also Karin Sennefelt, *Den politiska sjukan: Dalupproret 1743 och frihetstida politisk kultur* (Hedemora 2001), 47, 53; Olli Matikainen, *Verenperijät: Väkivalta ja yhteisön murros itäisessä Suomessa 1500–1600–luvulla* (Helsinki 2002), 98–100, 111, 116–17; Neubauer 2004, 13.

11 See Max Gluckman, 'Gossip and Scandal', *Current Anthropology* (1963:3), 309.

12 See Einonen 2005, especially 118–124, 222; on the situation in Venice, see Filippo De

Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford 2008), 156.

13 Horodowich 2005, 22, 36; see also Dag Lindström, 'Oärliga mästare och kivande makar: Ett och annat om rättskipning, kriminalitet och normsystem i 1500–talets Norden', *Historisk tidskrift* (1994:4), 534–5; Pamela J. Stewart & Andrew Strathern, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors and Gossip* (Cambridge 2004), 30.

14 Gossiping is repeatedly condemned in the Bible; in fact, according to Ilpo Koskinen (2000, 12), the negative character attributed to gossip is even older than the Bible; see also Robert F. Goodman, 'Introduction', in Goodman & Ben–Ze'ev 1994, 1; Sylvia Schein, 'Used and Abused: Gossip in Medieval Society', in Goodman & Ben–Ze'ev 1994, 139.

15 See above all Goodman 1994; Ben–Ze'ev 1994; see also Capp 2004, 273.

16 See, for example, *STb* 18 September 1604, 306; Lindström 1994, 514; Capp 2004, 59–60; Stewart & Strathern 2004, 29; Horodowich 2005, 42–4; see also Farge 1995, 164–5; Niklas Ericsson, *Rätt eller fel? Moraluppfattningar i Stockholm under medeltid och vasatid* (Stockholm 2003), 98, 166–8.

17 See Pentti Renvall, *Suomalainen 1500–luvun ihminen oikeuskatsomustensa valossa* (Turku 1949), 143; Kapferer 1988, 52–7, 122–5; Krista van Vleet, 'Partial Theories', *Ethnography* (2003:4), 500, 505–10; Eva Österberg, *Folk förr: Historiska essäer* (Stockholm 1996), 140; Koskinen 2000, 118, 126; see also De Vivo 2008, 93.

18 Ulinka Rublack, *Reformation Europe* (Cambridge 2005), 46–50, 157–9; De Vivo 2008, 121 & see also 187.

19 The city law of Magnus Eriksson (MESL) (Code of the Royal Institution XII); see also Matikainen 2002, 99; Fox 1997, 599.

20 MESL (Code of the City Court XXX); Johan Schmedeman, *Kongl. Stadgar etc. 1528–1701 ang. Justitiä och Executions* ärender (Stockholm 1706), 131, 167–70; And. Anton von Stiernman, *Samling utaf kongl. bref, stadgar och förordningar angående Sveriges Rikes commerce, politie och oeconomie* (Stockholm 1747), 670–1, 709–11; Mia Korpiola, 'Swedish medieval and early modern treason legislation: A consequence of peasant uprisings?', in Kimmo Katajala (ed.), *Northern Revolts: Medieval and Early Modern Peasant Unrest in the Nordic Countries* (Helsinki 2004), 241; see also Ericsson 2003, 77. The contents of the code were almost identical for both public office-holders and others, the difference being that the latter did not risk punishment if they spread gossip.

21 Sigismund to the City Court of Stockholm, n.d. but sent September 1597, 15r–15v, Riksregistratur (RR, microfilm copies) 13, Riksarkivet (RA); *STb* 8 February 1617, 204. See *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok* (*SAOB*), s.v. 'rykte'; see also James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven 1985), 24–5.

22 *STb* 12 November 1614, 44; see also for example *STb* 7 July 1628, 75, 261 (n. 189).

23 Just as after being defamed, a person who was the object of gossip and rumour also needed to exculpate him- or herself publicly, usually in the court house, in order to establish his or her repute and honesty. See, for example, Dag Lindström, 'Våld, förtal och förlikningar i Stockholm', *Rättshistoriska studier* 14 (Stockholm 1988), 105; Lindström 1994, 514–15, 535, 540–1, 551; Matikainen 2002, 72, 96–9; Jari Eilola, *Rajapinnoilla: Sallitun ja kielletyn määritteleminen 1600–luvun jälkipuoliskon noituus- ja taikuustapauksissa* (Helsinki 2003), 262–70, 274, 294–5; Horodowich 2005, especially 42–3; see also Ben-Ze'ev 1994, 14, 22–4; Scott 1990, 142–3; Capp 2004, 60–2; Schein 1994, 152–3.

24 Gluckman 1963, 308, 313; Ben-Ze'ev 1994, 14–16; Capp 2004, 57–9, 273; Wickham 1998, 11–14; van Vleet 2003, 491–3; Stewart & Strathern 2004, 12, 31–3; Eilola 2003, 294, 299.

25 Lindström 1994, 538; Capp 2004, especially 269.

26 Roberts 1997, 10–11; Koskinen 2000, 105; Eilola 2003, 264–5; see also Robert Darnton,

The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France (New York 1996), 79; Kimmo Katajala, 'Niskurit, ryövärit ja leivätön pöytä: Talonpoikaislevottomuudet käräjäkäsittelyssä 1600–luvun lopun Karjalassa', in Sari Forsström (ed.), *Laittomuuden laitatiellä. Rikos Suomessa 1500–luvulta nykypäiviin* (Helsinki 1996), 118; Ericsson 2003, 74–5, 80–3; Jari Eilola, 'Rajojen noituus ja taikuus', in Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Raisa Maria Toivo (eds.), *Paholainen, noituus ja magia—kristinuskon kääntöpuoli: Pahuuden kuvasto vanhassa maailmassa* (Helsinki 2004), 157, 164.

27 Darnton 1996, 79, 188; Reuterswärd 2001, 22–4; Sennefelt 2001, 105–107; Horodowich 2005, 37–8; see also Schmedeman 1706, 167–72; Stewart & Strathern 2004, 38; on the fast spread of disturbances, see William H. Beik, 'Magistrates and Popular Uprisings in France before the Fronde: The Case of Toulouse', *Journal of Modern History* (1974:4), 590; see also Rublack 2005, 41; De Vivo 2008, 143.

28 Scott 1990, 144; Kapferer 1988, 14; Darnton 1996, xxii, 162; Schein 1994, 144. On the church's role in communication, see Reuterswärd 2001, especially 52–75; Peter Ericsson, *Stora nordiska kriget förklarat: Karl XII och det ideologiska tilltalet* (Uppsala 2002), 80–1. On the fact that even priests could be accused of political agitation, and the eagerness of the secular authorities to control what was said from the pulpit, see *STb* 7 August 1605, 19 December 1605, 39–40, 97–8; and Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot 1994), 77.

29 On the significance of inns as 'alternative' societies where it was possible to criticize the authorities, see Adam Fox, 'Ballads, libels and popular ridicule in Jacobean England', *Past &Present* (1994:145), 72; Fox 1997, 608; for marketplaces, see De Vivo 2008, 117–18 on the situation in Venice; see also Reuterswärd 2001, 52.

30 See, for example, *STb* 28 July 1599, 324 concerning rumours about Karl ceding border areas to a Russian prince; Scott 1990, 144–5; Richard Cust, 'News and Politics in early seventeenth-century England', *Past &Present* (1986:112), 65–6; Kapferer 1988, 13, 20–2, 58–60; Ben-Ze'ev 1994, 23; Farge 1995, 25–6, 33; Roberts 1997, 11, 13; Fox 1997, 598; Neubauer 2004, 93; De Vivo 2008, 91, 190.

31 Kapferer 1988, 15; Stewart & Strathern 2004, 45; Einonen 2005, 224; see also Schmedeman 1706, 167–72.

32 Kapferer 1988, 51–2, 125; van Vleet 2003, 492.

33 Capp 2004, 59; Stewart & Strathern 2004, 46–8; see also Wickham 1998, 11.

34 Gluckman 1963, especially 308; see also Wickham 1998, 11–12. The leading social anthropologist Max Gluckman is one of the most cited researchers on the subject of gossip, and has drawn attention to its social significance in particular.

35 Kapferer 1988, 52.

36 Lars Ericson, *Borgare och byråkrater: Omvandlingen av Stockholms stadsförvaltning 1599–1637* (Stockholm 1988), 43; Einonen 2005, 39–40; on the roles of the capital and provincial cities in information networks, see also Cust 1986, 69–70; and Fox 1997, 605–607.

37 Martti Takala, *Lex Dei—Lex Politica Dei. Lex Politica Dei -teos ja Kaarle IX:n lainsäädäntö* (Helsinki 1993), 165–74.

38 Johan Holm, *Konstruktionen av en stormakt: Kungamakt, skattebönder och statsbildning 1595 till 1640* (Stockholm 2007), 49.

39 Sigismund to the City Court of Stockholm, n.d. but sent September 1597, 15r–15v, RR13, RA; Robert Sandberg, *I slottets skugga: Stockholm och kronan 1599–1620* (Stockholm 1991), 189; Lars Ericson, 'Mellan två eldar: Stockholms borgmästare och råd i kampen mellan Sigismund och hertig Karl, 1594–1599', in Peeter Mark (ed.), *Studier och handlingar rörande Stockholms historia VII* (Stockholm 1994), 15; see, for example, Duke Karl to Axel Ryning, 26 February 1598, 85v–86r, RR14, RA, a letter that illustrates how well informed Duke Karl was about the situation in Stockholm.

40 Einonen 2005, 302.
41 Helge Almquist, *Bidrag till kännedomen om striden mellan konung Sigismund och hertig Karl 1598–1599* (Gothenburg 1916), *passim*; Ericson 1988, 112–14; Sandberg 1991, 189, 225–8; Ericson 1994, *passim*; Einonen 2005, 19.
42 Scott 1990, 144; Stewart & Strathern 2004, 4–5; William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France. State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge 1988), 190; Roberts 1997, 12; see also Carl Crispi Sjödén, *Stockholms borgerskap under sturetiden med särskild hänsyn till dess politiska ställning* (Stockholm 1950), for example 57–8, 64, 151; Matikainen 2002, 132.
43 *STb* 30 April 1599, 263; see also Fox 1997, 613–14. There is no direct reference to rumours concerning Sigismund's alleged death in the court record books, but they do mention that that stories of his death were circulating (*STb* 30 July and 1 August 1599, 330, 335). See also Farge 1995, 151; Ericsson 2002, 47; Neubauer 2004, 70; Mirkka Lappalainen, *Susimessu: 1590–luvun sisällissota Ruotsissa ja Suomessa* (Helsinki 2009), 208. According to Peter Burke (1994, 154, 155), direct criticism of a reigning king or rumours concerning him was rare, although indirect criticism was more frequent.
44 On the lack and scarcity of information, see, for example, Ericsson 2002, 47; see also Roberts 1997, 12; Fox 1997, 613; Lappalainen 2009, 81, 120–1, 152; Eva Österberg, *Kolonisation och kriser: Bebyggelse, skattetryck, odling och agrarstruktur i västra Värmland ca 1300–1600* (Lund 1977), 248–9, who interprets the general turmoil of the 1590s as the result of the political situation, economic depression, and the shortage of grain.
45 *STb* 28 July 1599, 30 July 1599, 1 August 1599, 323–6, 340–1; *Svenskt biografiskt handlexikon* (*SBH*) (1906) 426–7; Lars-Olof Larsson, *Arvet efter Gustav Vasa: En berättelse om fyra kungar och ett rike* (Stockholm 2005), 389; see also Farge 1995, 26. On women, 'gossips' and 'gossip networks', see Capp 2004, especially 51–5, 273; Schein 1994, 138; Horodowich 2005, 25–8; Steve Hindle, 'The Shaming of Margaret Knowsley: Gossip, Gender and the Experience of Authority in Early Modern England', *Continuity & Change* (1994:3), 393, 407–409; De Vivo 2008, 117. On the interpretations attached to signs, see Matikainen 2002, 120; Eilola 2003, 106–107.
46 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton 1997), 4–5, 273, 312–17; Cecilia Nordberg, 'Guds ställföreträdare förmedlad: Kungen i kröningspredikan från Gustav I till Karl XIV Johan', in Peter Ericson (ed.), *Gud, konung och undersåtar. Politisk predikan i Sverige under tidigmodern tid* (Uppsala 2007), 15; see also Cust 1986, 78–9.
47 In 1601 Duke Karl was almost constantly on campaign in Livonia, and in the general assemblies in the court house of Stockholm it was suggested that the city guard should be strengthened because the duke was not in Sweden. Karl had been away for some time, so probably there were some other reasons for this debate (*STb* 16 November 1601, 145; see also, for example, *STb* 20 January 1602, 185; Larsson 2005, 397). Earlier, in 1592, after the death of Johan III, Karl had remarked of the king's death that 'Such situations sometimes cause dangers and general disturbances' (*STb* 21 December 1592, 99–100). See also, for example, Sigismund to the City Court of Stockholm, n.d. but sent September 1597, 15r–15v, RR13, RA.
48 Kantorowicz 1997, 330.
49 *STb* 17 December 1592, 99–100, 'vm nogot hordes, att nogra orolige menniskior, wille sigh nogot obeståndh eller oroo forestage, eller nogra aff misförståndh, eller och af ondsko nogot ohöfueligit taall vtförde, att man skulle sådant med beskedenheet afstelle'.
50 Einonen 2005, 152, 272, 275.
51 Sandberg 1991, 50–2; Petri Karonen, *Pohjoinen suurvalta. Ruotsi ja Suomi 1521–1809* (Porvoo 1999), 103–105; see also Larsson 2005, 348–50.

52 Sigismund to the City Court of Stockholm, n.d, 15r–15v, RR13, RA; Karl to the Counsellor of Chambers, 23 October 1601, 215v–216r, RR16, RA; Karl to the Governors of Stockholm, 23 October 1601, 216r–216v, RR16, RA; *STb* 17 August 1601, 87–8; Sjödén 1950, 57; Almquist 1916, 30; see also Nils Ahnlund, 'Ståndriksdagens utdaning 1592–1672', in Nils Edén (ed.), *Sveriges riksdag: Historisk och statsvetenskaplig framställning: Förra avdelningen, riksdagens historia intill 1865*, iii: *Ståndriksdagens utdaning 1592–1672* (Stockholm 1933), 133; Lappalainen 2009, 43, 51.

53 *STb* 28 August 1605, 51; Einonen 2005, 85.

54 *STb* 28 August 1605, 51.

55 *Gravöl* (funeral-ale or arval-ale) referred to both the funeral feast and the funeral ale consumed at it, and was an old Nordic custom of watching over the deceased. See Ebbe Schön, *De döda återvänder: Folktro om tillvarons gränsland* (Stockholm 2000), 76; *SAOB*, s.v. 'gravöl'. On making toasts, see also E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York 1993), 67–8. In other places there were rumours of people drinking toasts with an executioner (Matikainen 2002, 69).

56 *STb* 2 June 1599, 282; see also *STb* 4 June 1599, 285; Ericson 1994, 53. A rumour concerning Karl's death had been mentioned once before (*STb* 30 April 1599, 263); see also Lindström 1988, 100–101; Farge 1995, 25–6, 63; Burke 1994, 122–3.

57 In the seventeenth century, Danviken was a hospital, including patients with mental illnesses and venereal diseases, but at the same time it was a children's home and a hospice for widows, soldiers, and the elderly. See, for example, *STb* 23 November 1603, 158; see also Ericson 1988, 240–3.

58 *STb* 4 June 1599, 6 June 1599, 283, 290–1. In the following year, one Jören Bähr slandered a tax collector (*STb* 1 September 1600, 110–111)—in all probability the same Jören Bähr who was sentenced to death by the king for practising Catholicism (Judgements of the Svea Court of Appeal, 2 September 1624, Strödda historiska handlingar, vol. 23, RA).

59 *STb* 18 June 1599, 305; see also MESL, 41 (Marriage Code VII). Toasts were sometimes a form of protest. In 1600, a man was charged with drinking a toast to a burgomaster, whom he pronounced a scoundrel and a thief (*STb* 10 November 1600, 19 November 1600, 26 November 1600, 129, 136–7, 150). He was also accused of spreading a rumour that the burgomaster had failed to keep order in the city ('hann hafuer låtidh gå orden här i stadenn') (*STb* 19 November 1600, 136).

60 *STb* 30 July 1599, 330.

61 *STb* 1 August 1599, 334–6; see also *STb* 30 July 1599, 330–1.

62 See, for example, Einonen 2005, 122–3, 126, 130–7; Sandberg 1991, 285–330.

63 This was clearly a play on a name of a Swedish jurisdictional district, although the actual place cannot be identified—there were several names which could be twisted in this way.

64 *STb* 18 August 1604, 288–9; see also Renvall 1949, 164–5; Korpiola 2004, 228. In 1606, a woman testified that a bailiff called Gregorius had defamed the king in his hired man's hearing, calling the monarch a 'bottomless hole of money': 'här lägz myckit peninger vpå det måtte ware enn tusennde diäfle hop medh peninger som konungen lägger på aldrigh bliffuer han fuller medh peninger' (*STb* 20 October 1606, 173).

65 It is interesting that Sigismund was still referred to as the king even after he had been in Poland for a long time.

66 *STb* 22 November 1615, 169–70, 'frw Jbba s: her Erich Sparres, effterlåtnee enkia' (see *SBL*, s.v. 'Erik Sparre', Bo Eriksson Janbrink, <http://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/6186>); see also Lindberg 1946, 17–18; Katajala 1996, 117; Stewart & Strathern 2004, 179–80. On the punishment for gossiping, see Schmedeman 1706, 167–72.

67 On previous disputes between Duke Karl and Erik Sparre, see Gustaf Elgenstierna,

Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor med tillägg och rättelser utgivna av Gustaf Elgenstierna, 9 vols (Stockholm 1925–36), vii 409–410; see also Larsson 2005, 291–3, 336, 347, 349–50, 353, 367–8, 376–80; Takala 1993, 164; Holm 2007, 184–5, 198–200, 202; Lappalainen 2009, 55–6, 59–63, 101, 124–5, 129, 204–5, 238, 260; on Ebba Brahe, see Elgenstierna 1925, i. 555.

68 See Beik 1974, 589–90; Kapferer 1988, 32–3; Neubauer 2004, 102.

69 Roberts 1997, 12; Larsson 2005, 405; see also Schmedeman 1706, 167–72; Stewart & Strathern, 191. There were, for example, rumours of miscreants who had been hired to burn down Stockholm when the merchants had gone to market out of the city. These rumours led to a tightening of security (Sjödén 1950, 139–40).

70 See Beik 1974, 604–5; Lindström 1988, 101; Darnton 1996, 188; Roberts 1997, 14–24.

71 *STb* 31 December 1593, 185–6, see also 182–3. The Statutes of Örebro (1617) also stipulated the death sentence or whipping in a pillory followed by banishment for causing disturbances by spreading rumours (lies) (Schmedeman 1706, 167–72).

72 See Beik 1974, 590; Beik 1988, 189–90.

73 Fox 1997, 603; Stewart & Strathern, 47; Einonen 2005, 231–5, see also 88–92; Schmedeman 1706, 167–72; Roberts 1997, 17; Matikainen 2002, 72–3.

74 Capp 2004, 57–9, 267–73; Eilola 2003, 262–5, 294; Piia Einonen, 'Herroista narreiksi. Raadin kunnian määrittely osana kaupunkihallinnon uudistuspyrkimyksiä ja vallan demonstroimista 1600–luvun alkupuolen Tukholmassa', in Jari Eilola (ed.), *Sietämättömät ja täydellinen maailma. Kirjoituksia suvaitsemattomuudesta* (Jyväskylä 2003), 96–8; Einonen 2005, 79–81, 88–92, 233. Individuals who stuck out from the crowd for one reason or another were overrepresented in the court records. They possessed characteristics that were considered pernicious, and which ultimately marginalized them in the local community.

75 *STb* 29 May 1622, 38–9, 'sådane främmande kunne några finnes, som medh schälmerij och hemblige prachtiker umgå, såsom och föra patenter och andre tijender ibland gemene man, som dem till orolighet emot sin laglige öfwerhet kunne förorsaka'; *SAOB*, s.v. 'patent'; see also Fox 1997, 606–9.

76 *STb* 17 August 1601, 88.

77 Einonen 2005, 98–108.

78 Takala 1993, 167–74.

79 Kapferer 1988, 28; see also Stewart & Strathern 2004, 29, 191.

80 *STb* 16 November 1601, 145, 'då skole dhe blifue *förde och satte på de rum, att the* intett sielf skole rådhe sigh'; *SAOB*, s.v. 'råda'; see Koskinen 2000, 14; Eilola 2003, 195; Rublack 2005, 41.

81 See Eilola 2004, 159–61.

82 Sjödén 1950, 101–103, 114, 117–19; see also Almquist 1916, *passim* on rumours in Europe concerning the situation in Sweden; and Lars Ericson, 'Stockholm och pamflettstriden mellan Sigismund och hertig Karl 1602', *Sankt Eriks årsbok* 1984, *passim*, on propaganda in Sweden and Europe.

83 Ericson 1994, *passim*; on letters circulating in Sweden and Finland see, for example, *STb* 6 June 1599, 28 July 1599, 30 July 1599, 1 August 1599, 288–9, 323–6, 330–1, 334–43; see *STb* 4 August 1599, 346–51; Almquist 1916, 30; Larsson 2005, 361–2, 365–6, 369; and on Laski, see Lappalainen 2009, 226–7, 229, 234–5; Valentin Groebner, *Liquid Assets, Dangerous Gifts. Presents and Politics at the End of the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia 2002), 44, notes that disinformation was spread on purpose in the form of rumours.

84 *STb* 23 May 1597, 125–6; *STb* 23 July 1597, 145–6; Ericson 1994, 21–6; Holm 2007, 184–5, 196–205; see also Cust 1986, 72; De Vivo 2008, 192–3.

85 Einonen 2005, 236; Lappalainen 2009, 196–202.

86 *STb* 23 May 1597, 125–6; *STb* 23 July 1597, 145–6; *SAOB*, s.v. 'enfaldighet' and 'nödig'; Ericson 1994, 24–6, 40–8. Ericson (1994, 52–5) refers to Sigismund's supporter, Burgomaster Lars Eriksson, as spreading a rumour about Karl's death in 1601, but this can not be verified from the source that Ericson relies on (*STb* 20 April 1601, 27–8). Instead, Lars Eriksson's son, Erik Larsson, was the accused (*STb* 30 April 1599, 263; see also Einonen 2005, 132–5); *STb* 2 June 1599, 4 June 1599, 282, where another Lars Eriksson was charged with drinking funeral-ale for Duke Karl.

87 Stewart & Strathern 2004, 168; see also Horodowich 2005, 35–7; Beik 1974, 600; Darnton 1996, 188; Katajala 1996, 101–2; Österberg 1996, 118–21. On the topics of gossip and motives for gossiping, see Koskinen 2000, 26–34. Satirical ballads can be regarded as analogous to rumour and gossip (Einonen 2005, 226); see also Cust 1986, 66–9; Fox 1997, 611, 617–9; Darnton 1996, 159, 162.

88 Einonen 2005, 202–270; see also Goodman 1994, 5; Kapferer 1988, 200; Einonen 2003, 89–95.

89 Scott 1985, xvii, 25, 27, 282–4; Kapferer 1988, 200; Burke 1994, 109; Horodowich 2005, 35–7; Sennefelt 2001, 46–7; Wickham 1998, 14–5, 18–9; Hindle 1994, 393.

90 On the social and economic backgrounds of politically active burghers, see Ericson 1988, 121–7; Einonen 2005, 109–113.

91 Gluckman 1963, 309; Goodman 1994, 3, 5; Ben-Ze'ev 1994, 23; Stewart & Strathern 2004, 33, 46, 182; see also Capp 2004, 275; Scott 1990, 136–8, 186–7; Wickham 1998, 18.