

# Temarecension: Reformation in Sweden and Denmark

Reformation i två riken. Reformationens historia och historiografi  
i Sverige och Danmark

*Kajsa Brilkman, Morten Fink-Jensen & Hanne Sanders (red.)*

Makadam förlag, 2019, 302 s.

Reformationen i Lund-Malmö-Köpenhamn

*Anders Jarlert (red.)*

Lunds universitets kyrkohistoriska arkiv, 2019, 160 s.

Leading historians of the Reformation in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway have compiled two anthologies that examine and augment the decades-long cultural-historical turn in research on the Nordic Reformations. Lacking an easy definition, cultural history encompasses many different methodologies and addresses a broad spectrum of questions, many of which are addressed in these anthologies. This essay will examine two major themes that run through many of the articles in the two anthologies: continuity and discontinuity with the pre-Reformation era as well as communal reformation.

## Continuities and Discontinuities

*Reformation i två riken* opens with four historiographical essays. The first one, by Martin Berntson, examines the Swedish kingdom's Reformation in the context of church history. The article provides a useful genealogy of professors of church history and practical theology at the universities of Uppsala and Lund as well as their scholarly offspring. From the nineteenth century until the 1960s, these scholars emphasized theological, legal, and liturgical questions. Already starting in the 1960s, Reformation studies began to be increasingly informed by socio-economic questions followed by cultural-historical ones in the 1980s. These turns were in part advanced by scholars not trained in church history entering into the field of Reformation history.

Berntson argues persuasively that scholars understood the Swedish

kingdom's Reformation as a protracted process long before the term "long Reformation" entered international scholarship. He himself argues for an understanding of the Reformation as a long process of negotiation among the church's various stakeholders in his examination of Danish monasteries in an article in *Lund-Malmö-Köpenhamn*. Like in his work on monasteries in the Swedish kingdom during the sixteenth century, Berntson charts a long and deliberate process of phasing out the monasteries in the Danish kingdom. Monastic institutions could not be dissolved immediately without causing social instability. The nobility needed time to find other institutions that would train its girls in domestic tasks. Many of the monks had nowhere else to go. The last nunnery in Denmark did not cease operations until 1621. In respect to the three cities studied in *Lund-Malmö-Köpenhamn*, Berntson explains that the monasteries in Lund survived longer than in the other two cities due to stronger support among the city's burghers for their continuation and the presence of the archiepiscopal seat in the city.

The second historiographical essay in *Reformation i två riken*, by Hanne Sanders, focuses on scholarship since the 1980s concerning the Reformation and religion in Sweden 1520–1720. Like Berntson, Sanders argues for an understanding of the Reformation's medieval continuities and specifically cites the works of two of the contributors to the anthology: Per Stobaeus and Gabriela Bjarne Larsson. Per Stobaeus's article examines documents written by witnesses of the early Reformation, such as Peder Månsson's letter from Rome to the Vadstena monastery in 1518 and a report by a Dominican prior based in Lübeck to King Gustav Vasa in 1523. Stobaeus demonstrates that information concerning Luther's reform movement reached many people even before Gustav Vasa became king. Stobaeus outlines the precarious nature of Gustav's rule during the 1520s. Peasants, such as those in the community of Fornåsa studied in the article, associated the implementation of church reform with their loss of leverage vis-à-vis the nobility in disputes over land as a result of the Västerås *riksdag* of 1527 concerning the confiscation of church lands. Stobaeus makes two useful conclusions. First, any kind of reformation leading to a break from Rome was not inevitable. Well into the 1530s, the office of archbishop of Uppsala was claimed by three different men, two of whom had been consecrated by the pope. Second, the use of the terms "Catholic" and "Lutheran" to describe aspects of the church during the 1520s and 1530s does little justice to the multiplicity of reform ideas that circulated in Sweden. One can easily extend this conclusion to the entire sixteenth century.

Another attempt to bridge the medieval era with the Reformation era is Gabriela Bjarne Larsson's article on donations to the church by the burghers of Stockholm. Most of the scholarship concerning the reclaiming of

donated church lands after the meeting of the *Västerås riksdag* in 1527 has focused on the nobility. Larsson points out that starting in the 1480s, rules were established in Stockholm that allowed burghers to make donations of real estate to the church in a way that they and their heirs maintained the right to reclaim the property under certain conditions. These rules were maintained into the Reformation era with the king acting in place of the various ecclesiastical donees.

Another argument against an abrupt break with the medieval era is Mari Eyice's article on the history of feelings during the sixteenth-century Reformation in the Swedish kingdom. This article makes a persuasive argument against the widespread conclusion that Lutheran reform created a new form of Christianity bereft of the emotion of its medieval forerunner. Informed by scholarship on the history of feelings, Eyice makes this argument by reading some of the canonical books of the sixteenth-century Reformation—the postils of Olaus and Laurentius Petri. The argument is not only persuasive but also serves as a model example of how primary sources, regardless of how many times they have been studied, can always yield new insights. Another argument against Reformation as pure reason is advanced by Göran Malmstedt. Like Mari Eyice, he too understands Olaus Petri as a premodern figure. Just as it is difficult to apply the terms “Catholic” and “Lutheran” to the period, the terms “modern” and “premodern” also defy easy definition. In investigating Olaus Petri's writings concerning eschatology and omens, Malmstedt identifies many aspects of his writing that challenge the understanding of him as a dry rational scholar.

More on the side of discontinuity we find Steffie Schmidt's article comparing Johannes Bugenhagen's activity as an advisor to King Christian III to Georg Norman's tenure as King Gustav Vasa's advisor. The article addresses one of the themes in cultural history touched upon in these anthologies—cultural transfer. In comparing the two Germans, Schmidt makes a persuasive argument that Bugenhagen was more successful in bringing the Danish church more in line with the Reformations in Lutheran Germany. Norman not only served the king in ecclesiastical matters but also in diplomacy and civil administration. He remained in his position longer than other Germans serving the mercurial king.

The third historiographical essay, by Morten Fink-Jensen, examines Danish scholarship on the Reformation. Fink-Jensen creates a very useful survey of a field consisting of many scholars by dividing the field in four ways. First, he examines the tension within church history between theology and history, after which he turns to the question of Luther among church historians and to what extent the reformers of the Danish church in the years 1517–1537 can be called Lutheran. An example of the hesitancy of some scholars to

refer to reformers in this period as Lutheran is an article in *Lund-Malmö-Köpenhamn* by Rasmus H. C. Dreyer about Malmö's leading reformer Claus Mortensen. Dreyer sees Mortensen like he sees other reformers from the period, such as Hans Tausen, who were more in the tradition of Biblical humanism and read Luther through Zwingli. Morten Fink-Jensen then turns to what he calls general history (*almenhistorie*) or those who have studied the Reformation outside of the discipline of church history. Here, he outlines two major developments: the study of the Reformation as politics followed by the cultural-historical turn.

The question of continuity versus discontinuity is addressed in material cultural terms in Laura Katrine Skinnebach's article on Jørgen Rosenkrantz's transformation of the Hornslet Church. This article raises a broad issue not yet addressed systematically by the scholarship in respect to the Reformations in Europe's far north: although royal reform allowed for nobles and urban burghers to reclaim property and although Lutheran theology rejected the efficacy of work such as donations to the church in order to achieve salvation, people with means still invested resources in churches.

In her summation of the current state of the scholarship, Kajsa Brillman focuses on how the scholarship in Scandinavia concerning the Reformation has become more internationalized. However, it is important to point out that internationalization was not something totally lost on scholars before the age of the internet, digital photography, and inexpensive air travel. The older scholarship examining, for example, liturgical questions rested on a strong understanding of scholarship produced outside of the Nordic region. Much of the recent internationalization of historical scholarship as a whole in the Nordic countries has consisted of scholars opening themselves up to scholarship from outside the region and presenting their research results in international forums. Scholars not based in *Norden* are often ignored. In recent decades, the mastery of relevant languages such as German, Latin, and French has declined among Nordic scholars. The Reformations in Denmark and Sweden as defined today occurred in much larger kingdoms that ranged from Greenland to Finland. With changes in borders between the Nordic countries since the sixteenth century, many leaders of the Reformation in the region can be considered transnational figures based on current frames of reference. The case of Malmö's reformer Claus Mortensen as a transnational figure is covered in an article by Anders Jarlert in *Lund-Malmö-Köpenhamn*. Similarly, Carsten Bach-Nielsen examines various Luther anniversaries in 1617 as national and transnational events.

## The Communal Reformation

The articles in *Lund-Malmö-Köpenhamn* illuminate discontinuities with the medieval era brought about by the Reformation. Compared to other historiographies, the body of scholarship on the Reformation in the Nordic region contains few studies of the communal Reformation. Tarald Rasmussen's contribution to the anthology demonstrates how the Reformation changed the ecclesiastical topography in the Nordic region by examining the three ecclesiastical centers in the Scandinavian medieval church: Nidaros, Lund, and Uppsala. Of the three, Nidaros experienced the greatest decrease in status, losing its position as the undisputed capital of the Norwegian church. In Denmark, Lund lost its leading status to Copenhagen, the rising new center of the Reformation church. Uppsala's status as the seat of the Swedish kingdom's church did not change with the Reformation, but Gustav Vasa's manipulation of his kingdom's diocesan structure weakened Uppsala's status compared to its previous position.

Gunilla Gardelin in *Lund-Malmö-Köpenhamn* outlines the stripping of materials from churches in Lund to construct buildings such as Malmö Castle. These kinds of confiscations occurred elsewhere in Europe's far north. For example, King Gustav Vasa ordered the stripping of building materials from Dominican monasteries in Turku and Vyborg for fortifying castles in Kastelholm and Vyborg.

Several of the articles tackle the question of why Malmö was a center of the more radical reformation in the kingdom of Denmark. Anders Reismert in an article presents five convincing reasons why Malmö served as a vanguard of the Reformation in the Kingdom of Denmark. First, it served as a major center of trade for the German Hanseatic League. It has been well-documented how German merchants brought Reformation ideas with them to various ports in Scandinavia. Second, on the threshold of the Reformation, archiepiscopal governance was weakened by a power struggle over the successor of Archbishop Gunnar Birgersen. This power struggle and other challenges to archiepiscopal authority are investigated in greater detail in an article by Jeppe Büchert Netterstrøm. A third factor was the existence of vibrant schools such as Malmö's Latin school that trained young boys in the spirit of humanism. Fourth, the Reformation had strong support from the city government. Lastly, Malmö had two printing presses. In her examination of divorce in Malmö, Sinikka Neuhaus reveals that these presses in the years 1528–1530 produced more texts than presses in Copenhagen. Many of these publications influenced the transformation in the population's thinking that divorce was not a sacrament and a matter for temporal power.

Ole Peter Grell gives a short but meaty account of the Reformation in Malmö. The city's magistracy led by Mayor Jørgen Koch recruited the preachers Claus Mortensen, Frants Vormodsen, and Peder Laurentsen. The Malmö reformers had a major impact on the Danish Reformation from 1528 until 1533. Their participation in the creation of the *Confessio Hafniensis* in 1530 was the high-water mark of their influence. However, they had very limited impact on the foundational document that replaced it—the Lutheran Church Order of 1537. Grell raises a larger question that merits investigation on a larger scale: to what extent did the Reformation in the cities impact the larger Reformations in the Nordic countries?

Both books offer stimulating insights into the Reformations in Sweden and Denmark and the historiographies of the Reformation. The current cultural-historical turn has now been around for over a generation. Perhaps it is time to return to topics left behind, such as theology, liturgy, and the political history of the Reformation?

*Jason Lavery*