

Abstract

Catharina Andersson, *Kloster och aristokrati. Nunnor, munkar och gåvor i det svenska samhället till 1300-talets mitt*. Avhandlingar från Historiska institutionen i Göteborg 49 (Göteborg 2006). 436 pages. Written in Swedish with an English summary (*Monasticism and Aristocracy. Nuns, Monks and Gifts in Swedish Society until the Middle of the Fourteenth Century*).

The purpose of this dissertation is to show how medieval monasticism contributed to the maintenance of certain fundamental structures in medieval society, particularly those related to gender and class. With regards to theory, the analysis takes its starting point in works dealing with gender structures and in the field of research that deals with *gift-giving* as a social phenomenon.

The source-materials consist mainly of charters which were drawn up to confirm an entrance-donation to a monastic institution which normally consisted of land. These sources indicate that it was more common among the aristocratic families to place a daughter in a monastic institution than a son. The main problem has therefore been to analyse this discrepancy in order to reveal its underlying causes when it comes to basic gender structures in society.

The decision to place one's daughter in a monastery has been explained by earlier scholarship usually with reference to pure economic motives. In this dissertation it is stressed that such explanations are partly anachronistic and underestimate the non-measurable advantages a daughter in a convent would have had, religious as well as social. In this thesis the latter in particular are discussed and the daughter is considered to be part of the donation to the convent. In addition, in Sweden, daughters had a legal right of inheritance. It has therefore been stressed that the entrance-donation, similar to the dowry, should be understood in relation to women's right of inheritance, rather than exploring which alternative constituted the smallest expense for the daughter's family.

Regarding the absence of "entering sons" into monastic life, it is stressed that this reflects a society where male aristocratic gender ideals – owning property, chivalry, being one's own guardian – stood in sharp contrast to the monk's expected life of poverty and obedience. Moreover, the Cistercians houses, at least in theory, emphasized ideals far from the aristocratic man's ordinary life, i. e. manual labour. It is therefore also suggested that aristocratic men entered a monastery to a large extent as theologically educated men. Furthermore, all sons, not only the first born, had inheritance rights. A group of landless aristocratic sons in need of alternative life courses, for instance within the monastic field, never arose. To sum up, the pure monastic life challenged the aristocratic man to a greater extent than it challenged the aristocratic woman, with regards to both his identity as a man as well as an aristocrat.

Keywords: monasticism, aristocracy, gender, donations, gifts, giftgiving, nuns, monks, Cistercians, medieval Sweden, charters, diplomas, lifecycle, masculinity