

DE TJÄNSTVILLIGA VÄNNERNAS SAMHÄLLE

Abraham Brahe och den svenska eliten 1590–1630

with an English summary

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Abstract

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This dissertation traces the culture and agency of the Swedish elite during the years 1590–1630, focusing on lived practice rather than normative texts. It examines how culturally determined ways of thinking guided actions in concrete situations, and covers various aspects such as the public and the private, favors and reciprocity, aristocratic status, office-holding, and by extension the human aspects of state formation. Bringing these different topics together creates a holistic picture that contextualizes each aspect in light of the others, and thus uncovers the interdependency between noble culture and the early state. The wide thematic scope is accomplished by focusing narrowly on one aristocratic individual and his circle of relatives, friends and associates, and by using previously under-utilized source materials such as personal correspondence.

Swedish society circa 1600 worked through honor, by the unwritten cultural expectations that made it necessary to present oneself as an obliging friend to equals, a generous master to subordinates, and a willing servant to social superiors. Every interaction – including between office-holders – was seen as a personal relationship, and exchanging friendly favors functioned as a framework for cooperation without bureaucracy. However, these expectations were flexible and could be exploited in various ways in order to get one's way and to pressure others to comply.

Additionally, a fundamental flexibility is visible in various aspects of life. Oral communication was preferred but meeting in person was not always possible, which led to a culture of proxies where one person physically stood in another's place. Time was not planned in detail, and explicitly stated dates for meetings were no more than guidelines. High office-holders usually had to juggle their time and efforts between several different offices, as well as their economic and familial duties. A nobleman had obligations to many people, and the state as such was not necessarily the top priority.

Keywords: cultural history, public/private, friendship, reciprocity, political culture, nobility, microhistory, Abraham Brahe, Sweden, 16th century, 17th century, early modern