



# Personal Agency at the Swedish Age of Greatness 1560–1720

Edited by  
Petri Karonen and Marko Hakanen

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Editorial Office

SKS

P.O. Box 259

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# Acknowledgements

The origin of this volume lies in the discussions inside the research project “*Personal Agency in the Age of State Building, Sweden c. 1550–1650*”, funded by the Academy of Finland (2011–2015). The aim of the project was to provide fresh insight into the state building process in Sweden in the transitional period c. 1550–1650. During those years, many far-reaching administrative reforms were carried out, and the Swedish state developed into a prime example of the early modern “power-state”. The project approached state building in early modern Sweden from the point of view of personal agency. This has long remained in the shadow of the study of structures and institutions. We believe that with this novel approach we will shed light on numerous important questions about the nature of administration and the possibilities of state formation. The emphasis on individuals also corresponds well with the the sixteenth-century reality. The powerful, all-pervasive centrally controlled structures that characterized the Swedish power state of the following century were simply not a reality in the sixteenth century. This anthology is result of those many fruitful discussions attached to the project, but also all the colleagues who were part of the projects network and those who participated the international *Agency and State Building in the 16th and 17th centuries* Conference held at University of Jyväskylä in November 2013. The editors wish to thank all the contributors for their insightful chapters, but also the diligence and forgiveness they have expressed during this long writing and editing process. It has been great privilege to work with all of you. The assembling this collected volume has also required linguistic support and we warmly thank all involved parties. The Finnish Literature Society deserves our acknowledgements for the easy and engaging cooperation. Finally, the editors would like to thank the anonymous evaluators whose remarks and suggestions have been very valuable.

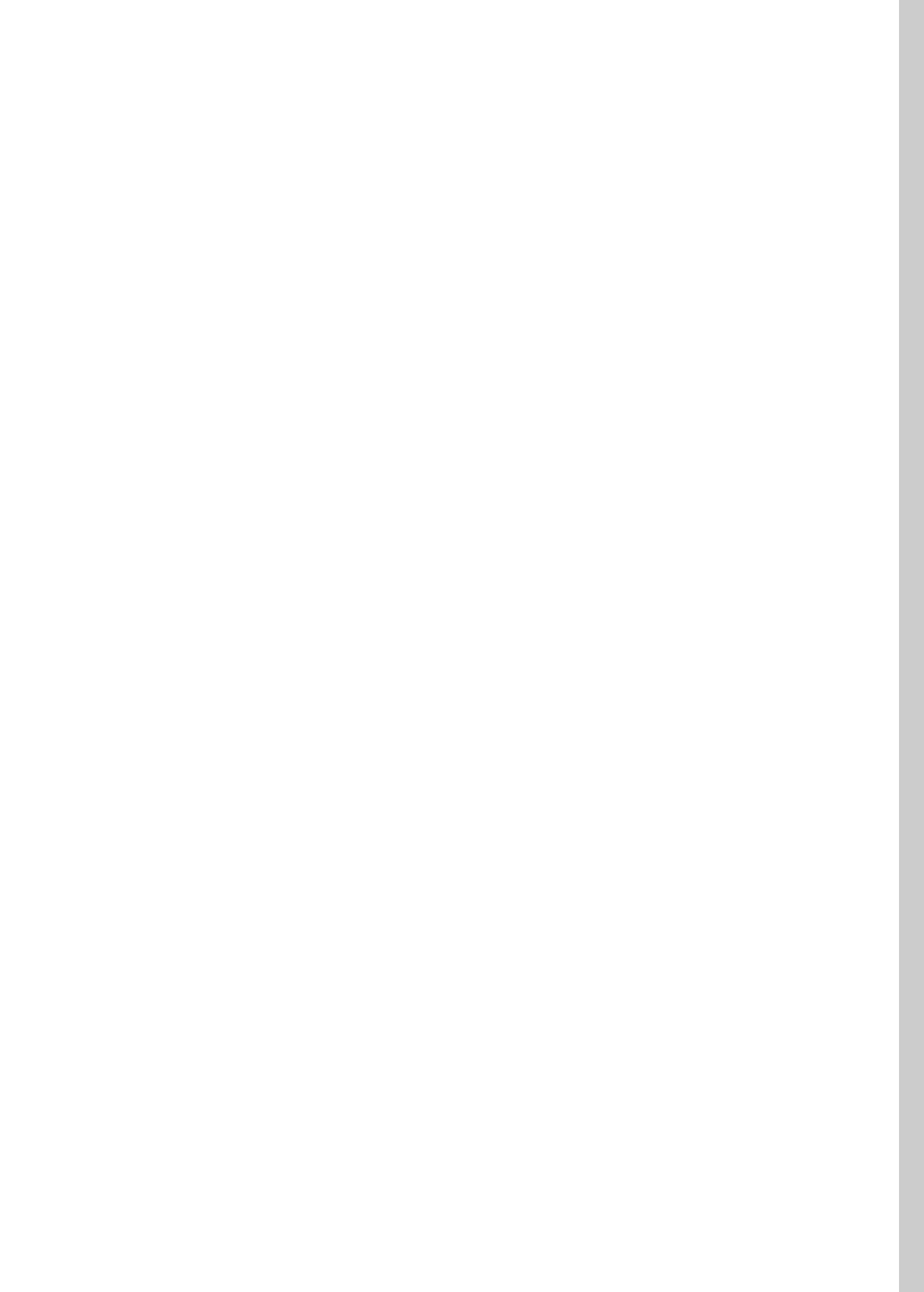


# Chronology of Swedish History

- 1397 Kalmar Union was established
- 1442 The Country Law of Christopher
- 1477 Uppsala University founded
- 1520 Stockholm Bloodbath
- 1521 Gustavus Vasa to the Protector of the Realm (*Riksföreståndare*)
- 1523 Gustavus Vasa declared as the King of Sweden (to 1560)
- 1523 Sweden's declaration of independence from Kalmar Union
- 1527 The Diet at Västerås opened the door to the Reformation
- 1527 The church comes under the authority of monarchy
- 1542 Dacke War (uprising) (to 1543)
- 1544 Hereditary kingship
- 1554 Russo-Swedish War (to 1557)
- 1557 Treaty of Novgorod
- 1560 Eric XIV of Sweden (to 1568)
- 1561 Eric XIV introduce new noble titles: Count (*Greve*) and Baron (*Friherre*)
- 1563 Northern Seven Years' War (to 1570)
- 1567 Sture murders
- 1568 John III of Sweden (to 1592)
- 1569 The nobility becomes hereditary
- 1570 Treaty of Stettin
- 1571 The Church Ordinance (*Kyrkoording*) confirms Protestant organization
- 1592 Sigismund of Poland as King of Sweden (to 1599, dethroned)
- 1592 Duke Charles to the protector of the Realm (to 1604)
- 1595 Treaty of Teusina
- 1596 Cudgel War (uprising) (to 1597)
- 1597 Duke Charles rebels against the King
- 1599 King Sigismund is declared deposed
- 1600 Polish War (to 1629)
- 1607 Charles IX (to 1611)
- 1610 Ingrian War (to 1617)
- 1611 Gustavus Adolphus (to 1632) gives a charter of guarantees

- 1612 Axel Oxenstierna appointed as Lord High Chancellor of Sweden (*rikskanslern*) (to 1654)
- 1611 All of the high posts in civil administration guaranteed to the nobility by privileges
- 1614 The Svea Court of Appeal (*Svea hovrätt*) founded
- 1617 Treaty of Stolbovo
- 1617 Swedish Diet Act (*riksdagsordningen*) was given to regulate the Diet (the Riksdag)
- 1618 Thirty Years' War (to 1648)
- 1623 The Turku Court of Appeal (*Åbo hovrätt*) founded
- 1626 The House of Nobility ordinance
- 1629 Armistice of Altmark
- 1632 Gustavus Adolphus dies at battle of Lützen
- 1632 Regency (*Förmyndarregering*) (to 1644)
- 1634 The Instrument of Government, The Göta Court of Appeal (*Göta hovrätt*) founded
- 1635 The instruction for county governors (*Landshövdingeinstruktionen*)
- 1640 Academy of Turku is founded
- 1644 Christina of Sweden is proclaimed of age on her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and becomes Queen of Sweden
- 1648 Peace of Westphalia
- 1654 Queen Christina abdicate the throne
- 1654 Charles X Gustav (to 1660)
- 1655 Second Northern War (to 1661)
- 1658 Treaty of Roskilde
- 1660 Treaty of Oliva
- 1660 Treaty of Copenhagen
- 1660 Regency (*Förmyndarregering*) (to 1672)
- 1661 Treaty of Kardis
- 1668 Riksbank, first national bank in the world
- 1672 Charles XI (to 1697) is declared of age
- 1674 Scanian War (to 1679)
- 1680 The Great Reduction
- 1681 The Council of the Realm (*Riksrådet*) becomes Royal Council (*Kungligt råd*)
- 1696 The Great Famine in Finland, Norrland and in the Baltic Region
- 1697 Charles XII (to 1718) declared of age
- 1700 The Great Northern War (to 1721)
- 1709 Swedish army is defeated in Poltava
- 1720 Treaty of Frederiksborg
- 1721 Treaty of Nystad





# Approaches and Perspectives I



PETRI KARONEN

Ⓘ <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6090-5504>

MARKO HAKANEN

Ⓘ <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4214-960X>

## Personal Agency and State Building in Sweden (1560–1720)

### *Structures, institutions and personal agency*

Who took care of the civil administration and ecclesiastical tasks in the kingdom of Sweden in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? What kind of agency they performed in their official duties? What was the significance of the personal agency of officials in their usually unrewarding position between the government and local communities? In this book, early modern state building in Sweden is studied particularly from the point of view of personal agency and collective biography. This brings a new personal level to the much debated state building process, which has so far been mainly studied from a structural perspective. Macro-level studies have forgotten the practical significance of persons as agents, a factor which offers the opportunity to see the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century reality from a new point of view.

In this period, the realm of Sweden saw significant progress in various areas of social activity. The major reason for this was simply the demands of wartime, which had forced the country into developing its activities. Practically speaking, Sweden was on a continuous war footing from 1560 to 1721, which in a country with poor resources and a small population caused a significant need for development. The whole of Swedish society had been harnessed to support the preparation for war and engagement in it and to a lesser extent the transition from war to peace. War, together with its after- and side-effects, was a significant factor in the formation of society and political life right up to the mid-eighteenth century.

Our study deals with an era when centralized states of a new kind began to emerge in Europe. Internationally, the case of early modern Sweden is especially interesting as the state building process at the beginning of the seventeenth century transformed a locally dispersed and sparsely populated area into a strongly centralized absolute monarchy that possessed an overseas empire in Europe.<sup>1</sup> The Swedish state building process began in the sixteenth century, although the major structural changes were not implemented until the next century. The administrative system was mostly in place by the beginning of eighteenth century, when Sweden's position as a great European power collapsed as a result of the Great Northern War (1700–1721).



From the point of view of state building, the sixteenth century was indeed chronologically a long one, and consequently the studies in this collection analyze the so-called “long great power period”, which in the case of this work embraces approximately the years 1560–1721. Many of the events connected with the development of Sweden’s external position took place in this period, but most importantly it was then that the central organizations and their individual actors that were crucial for the development of the state assumed their forms and functionalities. Concomitantly, many far-reaching administrative reforms were carried out during those years, and the Swedish state developed into a prime example of the early modern “power-state”. The time period chosen here does not follow the usual timelines, which have generally emphasized the sovereignty of the Swedish Crown and Gustavus Vasa’s (1496–1560) rise to power in the 1520s.<sup>2</sup>

The chosen period does not, however, undermine the important steps taken by Gustavus Vasa. Among other things, he recruited several experts from Germany who were crucial in the formation period of the administration in the 1530s. However, radical changes were not implemented until after 1560, which is also the starting point for this study. Thorough-going reforms in central and local government, state finances, the Church and everyday life likewise took place only in the latter half of the sixteenth century. This era of change continued into the seventeenth century.

This book’s emphasis on individuals also corresponds well with the early modern reality. The powerful, all-pervasive centrally controlled structures that characterized the Swedish power state of the following century simply did not exist in the sixteenth century. The administration of the state lay in the execution of various tasks that the king delegated to his followers, and the most important posts, such as the lordship of castles and the government of territories were reserved for members of the nobility.

During its time as a great power, Sweden was internally relatively peaceful, which gave it a competitive advantage over its neighbors with their greater resources. It was important for the unity of the Swedish realm that the position of the monarch was strong and that there were only a few truly powerful noble families in the country. Thus the ruler was able control the activities of the nobles and to regulate the successful development of the small towns by granting special rights (privileges). Noble privileges were important for many of those groups of office-holders who occupy a central place in this volume. Common (non-noble) servants of the Crown also received strong backing for their activities through authorizations and directions issued by the ruler, although no group could base its actions on such normative texts alone.

Significant changes took place in the administrative system of the Swedish realm during the period studied in this work. Figure 1 shows the main features of these organizational changes: local and intermediary administration was mainly developed in the sixteenth century, while in the first decades of the seventeenth century the focus shifted to reinforcing the central administration.<sup>3</sup> The centralized system was also preserved in the period known as the Age of Liberty (1718–1772) that followed the Age of Absolutism (1680–1718), although in practice the focus of power

and political activity shifted significantly to the ruling estates and the Diet (which was composed of the representatives of the four estates: the Nobles, the Clergy, the Burghers and the Peasants). Even so, the organizations and practices in the central administration that had prevailed in the Age of Absolutism survived in the Age of Liberty. An illustrative example with regard to the distribution of resources is the Office of State (*Statskontoret*), which from the very outset was a monocratic agency, i.e. one in which the decisions were made by one state official. Previously the collegial system of governance had been adhered to according to the principle that no-one should be able to take decisions alone.<sup>4</sup>

In the latter half of the sixteenth century and the early decades of the seventeenth, an administrative organization that worked well considering the conditions of the time was created in the capital, Stockholm. It was based on a system of collegiums (central agencies). The system was specifically designed to operate in wartime and to serve the needs of war. Sweden was forced by the continual wars to transform itself into a new kind of state, one that could exploit its scarce material resources. In practice, the state extended its strict control throughout the whole of society. This intensification of administration and control considerably increased the number of offices and administrative units. A concentrated, relatively simple and clear structure ensured what was for the period an effective communication of information and orders from the summit of government down to the remote regions and back. Taken as a whole, the system was in its time the most efficient in Europe. Later the Swedish model was copied in both Denmark and Russia. In the mid-seventeenth century there were about 700 civil service posts (including those of officials serving in castles), while around 1730 the number of posts was about one thousand.<sup>5</sup>

The reorganization of the position of the Church had occupied a central position in the foundations of Gustavus Vasa's state structure. In Sweden, the ecclesiastical administration had been established according to the Roman Catholic model as an independent concentration of power that enjoyed special rights in the secular sphere as well: for example, the bishops held a strong position in the Council of the Realm (*Riksrådet*). The heavy debts of the Swedish Crown and the huge property of the Church enticed Gustavus Vasa first into reforming the organizational and economic structure of the Church and subsequently into extending these reforms into a full-scale reformation. The Diet of 1527 opened the door to the Reformation, and a large part of the Church's property was transferred to the Crown and the nobles who supported the King. The political power of the Church was crushed, and there was a swift shift to a Lutheran people's church with the King at its head. Naturally, ties with the Vatican were broken. The bishops were ejected from the Council of the Realm, which became mainly the seat of the King's noble advisers.<sup>6</sup>

In the period studied here, the bishops were appointed by the ruler. However, the bishops who were in charge of dioceses still possessed considerable power, for example in choosing their direct subordinates. The cathedral chapter (*consistorium ecclesiasticum*) was the highest administrative organ in the diocese and it possessed judicial power all in

cases that came under the jurisdiction of the Church. In the early part of the period under investigation here, the cathedral chapters were for the most part mainly stooges of the bishops, but the situation changed before the mid-seventeenth century, when the collegial system that prevailed in the state administration was adopted by the Church as well. The cathedral chapters had considerable power in the appointment of clergymen for the parishes, especially if the diocese was a consistorial one, when the choice of a clergyman was jointly made by the chapter and the parishioners. In patronage parishes, on the other hand, the appointment was entrusted to a leading local noble, and in royal parishes to the ruler alone. In any case, the Church continued, despite the Reformation, to hold a significant position in the local community and also to wield some administrative and judicial power.<sup>7</sup>

In the short run, the Reformation weakened the educational system, which had been administered by the Church, but by the seventeenth century it had become necessary to develop education at all levels and to provide resources for it. The ever-expanding realm, the continuous warring, the growing bureaucratic machinery and the concomitantly intensifying control at all levels of society required a constant supply of educated new clergymen to communicate the official message and political education of the Crown to all subjects in every corner of the realm. The pressure gradually pushed the educational system throughout the country into reform and expansion with the aim of producing professional officials in both ecclesiastical and secular administration.

In Sweden and Finland, we cannot speak of the profession of civil servant until the nineteenth century, when the criteria pertaining to the qualifications for a civil servant were defined.<sup>8</sup> Even so, many of the groups and persons studied in this work are called civil servants, functionaries or officials because the functions and limits of their work were defined in official guidelines.<sup>9</sup>

The administrative changes that began in earnest in Sweden in the early seventeenth century meant an increase in bureaucracy and a change in the position of functionaries. Their activities started to be governed by official rules, and attention began to be paid to their qualifications. However, through the awarding of privileges accorded to the nobility, the highest posts passed over to that estate, whose members had previously sought above all to pursue a military career. Thus in 1569 John III (1537–1592) awarded considerable advantages to the higher nobility in particular, but at the same time the members of this estate were required not only to engage in military service but also to take a greater part in administration both in the royal court and in the provinces. Subsequently, in 1611, 1612 and 1617, Gustavus Adolphus (1594–1632) promised that all the “high posts” (*höga ämbeten*) would remain in the hands of the nobility and that many other duties should also preferably (*hållst af*) be entrusted to nobles. The Instrument of Government 1634 (*regeringsform*), which was of central importance in the administrative reorganization of the realm, marked off a large number of posts in central and local government and in the judiciary



*Personal Agency at the Swedish Age of Greatness 1560-1720* provides fresh insights into the state-building process in Sweden. During this transitional period, many far-reaching administrative reforms were carried out, and the Swedish state developed into a prime example of the 'power-state'.

In early modern studies, agency has long remained in the shadow of the study of structures and institutions. State building in Sweden was a more diversified and personalized process than has previously been assumed. Numerous individuals were also important actors in the process, and that development itself was not straightforward progression at the macro-level but was intertwined with lower-level actors.

Editors of the anthology are Dr. Petri Karonen, Professor of Finnish history at the University of Jyväskylä and Dr. Marko Hakanen, Research Fellow of Finnish History at the University of Jyväskylä.



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