

Court and Aristocracy in Early Modern Sweden in European Perspective

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In 1700 the aged Louis XIV reigned over about 20,000,000 subjects, of whom 260,000 were nobles, and a court of between 7,000 and 8,000.¹ At the same time the teenage king of Sweden, Charles XII, ruled over slightly more than 2,500,000 subjects, of whom at least 6,000 were nobles, and a court of about 450.² Next to the overwhelming might of France this northerly empire may appear unimpressive, but compared with Sweden a century earlier the difference is staggering. The first part of the seventeenth century had been characterised by a ruthlessly expansionist policy, and a build-up of the military and administrative machinery.

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe saw a common trend towards stronger states and larger armies, yet Sweden's expansion was remarkable and it left most of its neighbours lagging behind. The many German principalities are illustrative of the difference in scope. Peter Wilson has divided these into four categories: large, medium, small, and minor. The only territory worthy of the designation large in 1700 was, according to Wilson, the hereditary Habsburg lands of Austria. The five electorates of Brandenburg-Prussia, Bavaria, Hanover, Saxony, and the Palatinate were then medium-sized states. If Sweden is to be compared to any contemporary German states, the more important of these medium-sized electorates are probably the most appropriate. In 1700 the Elector of Brandenburg ruled over 1,500,000 subjects, or roughly half as many as Charles XII.

Even the 'medium' electorates were often on the small side. Thus the future Elector of Hanover was in 1689 the ruler of only 200,000 subjects.³ One example of what Wilson would term a small German state was the duchy of Württemberg, that had about 340,000 inhabitants in 1700.⁴ Compared to these principalities Sweden was a giant. Sweden exceeded Wilson's small German

¹ For a discussion of the aristocratic population see Mettam 1995, p.114; for a discussion of the size of the court see Knecht 1988.

² For the number of nobles in 1600 see Samuelson 1993, p.12; for the number in 1700 see Carlsson 1949, p.12. Although Elmroth's study is more recent, it does not include aristocratic women and children. Neither Carlsson nor Elmroth includes the aristocracy of Sweden's overseas provinces such as Livonia, Estonia and Pomerania, a deficiency that poses a serious obstacle to a fuller comprehension of aristocracy's rôle during Sweden's imperial experience.

³ Schnath 1976, p.414.

⁴ Wilson 1995, p.43.

principalities by the same order of magnitude as it in turn was outstripped by France or the Empire. In these circumstances it is obvious that the Swedish court was going to be different from the French or the Viennese court. The Swedish court was planned on a much smaller scale than these two giant courts of Europe.

In many ways early modern courts were the result of international trends blended with royal personality and existing traditions. As a consequence there are similarities between the Swedish court and other contemporary European courts. The structure of the Swedish court was obviously modelled upon neighbouring German courts, the French court not being as powerful an *exemplum* as the German and Imperial courts in this period. A fundamental change experienced all over Europe was the shift from peripatetic courts to sedentary courts, a development in which Sweden followed suit in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Like other royal courts the Swedish also functioned as the centre of network of patronage, the fountain of favour. Another similarity is the transition over time from payments in kind and a plethora of perks to payments in cash and curbed perks. In some ways, however, Sweden was different. Thus the English and French courts were 'top heavy', with a large number of offices suitable for noblemen and noblewomen, while the Swedish court had a much smaller top stratum. To some degree this reflected the different size of the courts and the countries in question, but even if this is taken into consideration the difference remains. Another difference was the more militaristic nature of the Swedish court. In some ways the Swedish court shared similar characteristics with the Brandenburg and Danish courts. After the mid-seventeenth century they all developed smallish, top-light courts of the old-fashioned German model. Common to these courts was that they were comparatively cheap and militarised. I have elsewhere characterised them as the martial courts of the Baltic.⁵

How did such a court as that of Sweden fulfil what is today often perceived as the crucial function of an early modern court, to provide the vital point of contact between monarch and élite? If the court succeeded in becoming the point of contact the result could be that the politically important section of society was tied to the monarch, ensuring that the court remained the centre of political activity within the realm. That would also counteract the creation of an embittered excluded opposition. Robert Bucholz has furthermore pointed to

⁵ Persson, F., *Servants of Fortune. The Swedish court between 1598 and 1721*. Lund, 1999.

the function of the court to furnish the monarch with a reasonably balanced view of the various opinions within the nobility (see for example the failure of James II).

If we accept the supposition that the court was to act as the point of contact between monarch and élite, a number of questions arise to address. To function properly such a point of contact would need to fulfil certain prerequisites. Thus if the court was to act as a point of contact between monarch and élite it had to comprise the real élite. The question is thus whether courtiers belonged to the élite or just the rank and file of the nobility. A second vital issue concerns Sweden's newly acquired empire. Did the acquisition of a number of overseas possessions change the court, and did the court act as a medium of integration within the new Swedish empire? This issue concerns the early modern European phenomenon of composite states. Could, and did, early modern courts act as a force of integration - were members of periphereal or provincial élites integrated into the court or excluded? Of course, these questions also touch upon issues such as nationalism and perception of foreigners and borders.

To complicate matters further, the élite was, in many countries, in a constant flux. Despite claims to the contrary, early modern aristocracy did not entirely consist of ancient families. New families emerged while some descended into oblivion. The nobility and the aristocracy was thus a changing group. Did the court include newly created noble families that had risen to importance and distinction?

Some of these issues were discussed, from various viewpoints, in the seventeenth century. In 1664 the Swedish council discussed how many Chamber Gentlemen should wait upon the then eight-year-old Charles XI. The Chancellor wanted more Chamber Gentlemen to be employed so that 'many noble people could thus be employed especially from Pomerania and other provinces to devote themselves therewith, and His Majesty to win affection'.⁶ The year before some councillors had a similar discussion that touched on how service at court could be an opportunity for young noblemen.⁷ At that time they had lauded Archduke Leopold of Austria as a prince who always

⁶ RA Rådsprotokoll vol.41a fol.42 9 March 1664 by Secretary Franc.

⁷ RA Rådsprotokoll vol.39 fol.53 12 March 1663 by Secretary Franc.

employed aristocrats of the highest descent in his household.⁸ The use of international comparisons to strengthen an argument about the court is a recurring, and telling, pattern.

These discussions thus concerned both the geographical as well as the social composition of the courtiers. The geographical ambition was to link important aristocrats from the newly acquired provinces to the court and the King. It must be borne in mind that Sweden had undergone an astounding development during the sixteenth and, more so, the seventeenth century. Not only did it comprise most of what we today call Sweden and Finland, but a Baltic empire was created through the conquest of Estonia in the late sixteenth century, of Ingria from Russia in 1617; of Livonia from Poland in 1629; half of Pomerania through the treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and parts of Denmark in 1644 and 1658. Some minor German possessions as Bremen-Verden and Zweibrücken were also ruled by the Swedish monarch. Until Livonia, Ingria, Estonia and Bremen-Verden were lost about 1720 Sweden was thus a great power in the north. Did the acquisition of these important overseas possessions change the court, and did the court act as a medium of integration within the new Swedish empire?

How did the Swedish court fulfil these functions? Some things in Sweden made things a little easier for the Swedish monarchs than for many of their colleagues. As many other kingdoms at the time, Sweden was a composite of different parts and principalities. These parts, however, did not contain any sizeable former kingdom apart from Sweden. There was no case of Bohemia or Hungary. Finland had never been an independent kingdom whereas the dukedom of Zweibrücken was a tiny German principality of little significance. It was only Pomerania that in recent time had been a more important independent Duchy. Thus there was no Swedish Portugal threatening secession.

A further difference between Sweden and many other European principalities of the time was that there was no religious split within the nobility. From the seventeenth century onwards the Swedish nobility was solidly Lutheran.⁹ Many royal counterparts faced very different prospects. The Emperor had to grapple with the fact that the nobility of many important areas, such as

⁸ Even so the role of the Imperial court as medium of integration should not be overestimated because the Habsburgs' confessional politics tended to exclude their numerous Protestant nobles - many of whom were Hungarian - from the court (Press 1991, pp.311-312).

⁹ There were, of course, the occasional aberrations who turned Catholic, Greek Orthodox or even Muslim, but they were very rare indeed and no recusants seem to have survived in Sweden.

Bohemia, were overwhelmingly Protestant; Louis XIII of France fought repeatedly against the Huguenots; the Elector of Brandenburg was Calvinist with a predominantly Lutheran nobility and James II was a catholic with a predominantly Protestant élite, just to name a few examples.

The crème de la crème?

In order to analyse the early modern Swedish court, I chose to make a prosopographical study of the noblemen and noblewomen known to have served at the Swedish court between 1598 and 1721, a group numbering some 1,900.¹⁰ Was the average courtier the same as the average Swedish aristocrat? Did the court reflect the composition of the Swedish aristocracy, or did it reflect a more, or less, élite group? David Starkey has characterised the early Tudor court as 'built on rock' because it included the leading magnates and their networks.¹¹ One way of distinguishing the élite within the nobility is through analysing landowning patterns. Of those listed as the greatest landowners in 1655 roughly forty per cent (32 of 82) had served at court.¹² Of those listed as the greatest landowners in 1697 roughly a third (15 of 47) had served at court. As it was far less than a third of the nobility that ever served at court, it is obvious that courtiers tended to come from the élite group within the nobility. The way in which the landed élite was linked to the court is also reflected in a surviving 'Generalextract' of the alienation of Crown land in Sweden, Finland, Ingria, and the county of Kexholm.¹³ The extract covers grants of land by monarchs between 1611 and 1654, and contains a total of 1,430 entries, although the total number of beneficiaries was smaller because some naturally feature in more than one entry. More than half of the larger and more attractive grants were given to people who had served at court. It should be emphasised that those serving at court were not the great landowners of today but of tomorrow. Courtiers were often young aristocrats destined for power and wealth; magnates were usually former courtiers.

Another way of determining the élite within the nobility is to study the titled nobility, a group strongly represented at court.¹⁴ In 1719 there were 1,152 aristocratic army officers of whom 175, or fifteen per cent, were titled.¹⁵ In the

¹⁰ Persson 1999.

¹¹ Starkey 1987, pp.22-3.

¹² Asker 1983, pp.163-4.

¹³ RA Reduktionskollegium Reduktionsprotokoll D IV:1 General-Extract öfver Donationerna.

¹⁴ By the titled nobility I mean those who were Counts, Countesses, Barons or Baronesses.

¹⁵ Carlsson 1949, p.71.

same year 77 aristocratic men and women served at court, of whom 36, or forty-seven per cent, were titled. Clearly, the court was distinguished by the number of titled aristocrats in service there. Naturally there were differences between officeholders, so for example Court Gentleman and Pages rarely came from the titled nobility, whereas Marshals and Chamber Gentlemen often did.

The possession of titles was not the only distinction between different groups within the aristocracy. Of the total 1,251 male courtiers in the later Vasa period (1598-1660), 413 can be identified as coming from old nobility: 16 were third generation aristocrats; 52 were second generation aristocrats; and 12 were first generation aristocrats. Within the same 1,251 there were only 4 commoners, and 754 whose parentage is not readily identifiable, most of whom seem to have been foreigners. The absence of the new nobility reflects the fact that creations were only really made in any numbers starting in the 1640s, so the second generation only began to grow up during the 1650s. If the late Vasa court proved to be dominated by old families and, above all, by foreigners, the creation of large numbers of nobles from the 1640s onwards had a profound impact on the Caroline court.¹⁶ Of the 518 male courtiers of the Caroline period (1661 to 1721), more than half came from the newly created nobility. Turning to specific groups of courtiers, we find for example that a majority (57 %) of the Caroline Chamber Gentlemen belonged to the old nobility, and while only 6 % were third-generation aristocrats, 29 % were second-generation aristocrats. The Caroline Court Gentlemen were different because a majority of them were second-generation aristocrats.

The education of the courtiers also reveals important differences. Of the male Caroline courtiers who served between 1661 and 1721, 30 % had at some time matriculated at a university. The differences between offices are striking, as 62 % of the Chamber Gentlemen matriculated, compared with 47 % of the Court Gentlemen and only 13 % of the Pages.¹⁷ A somewhat surprising effect was that noblemen of the second generation, that is sons of ennobled men, were always better educated than members of the old nobility. The best-educated group was the Caroline Chamber Gentlemen who were second-generation nobles, of whom 23 out of a total of 32 had been to a university. Obviously the second-generation aristocrats were sons of successful, and often ambitious, parents who tried hard to make their offspring successful. Interestingly, the third-generation

¹⁶ I have here taken the 'old nobility' to mean families who had been noble for at least four generations.

¹⁷ The figure for the Pages includes those who matriculated after leaving court service.

aristocrats were usually not very well educated. Of the 53 Caroline male courtiers belonging to this group, only 8 had been to a university. It seems as if they had adopted an aristocratic lifestyle in which formal education played a minor rôle.

Thus it may be seen that the Chamber Gentlemen formed an élite within the ranks of courtiers by virtue of being titled, well-educated Swedes. Service as a Swedish courtier was however not completely confined to a self-perpetuating élite, but instead was open to the offspring of the most successful members of the new nobility. Not everyone at court belonged to the élite within the aristocracy. Through luck, skill, and connections some of the ordinary nobility managed to rise through court service, yet the court aristocracy formed the more titled and better-educated élite within the Swedish nobility.

Foreigners

To turn to the court's possible rôle as a medium of integration, it may be seen to be especially pertinent because the Swedish empire grew in leaps and bounds in the first decades of the seventeenth century. At the beginning of the century this was reflected in the fact that many courtiers came from the overseas possessions, as well as Germany in general. Elton, Starkey and others have emphasised how early modern courts functioned as means of integration by containing members of élites from all over the realm. In this way the number of noblemen who were not just dissatisfied but who felt completely excluded from influence was kept down. In a Swedish context it can be noted that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a number of Swedish rebellions were led by nobles, indeed the Vasa dynasty was founded on one such in the 1520s, while the seventeenth century saw no noble uprisings comparable to the *Fronde* in France and the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution in England. Does this mean that the Swedish court fulfilled its function as point of contact between monarch and nobility?

One element of uncertainty in the figures for the first half of the period (1598 to 1660) is the sheer number of courtiers of foreign extraction at the Swedish court.¹⁸ In the course of these sixty-three years 1,251 noblemen served at the Swedish court of whom, as stated, 413 can be identified as belonging to old noble families. This leaves 754 who have proven impossible to identify thus far,

¹⁸ How to define foreigners is not always easy. The most simple, and for my purposes useful, way is to say that a foreigner was someone who had been born outside the areas ruled by the Swedish monarch and whose family lived outside these areas.

the majority of whom seem to have been foreigners of German extraction if one can take their names to be a reasonable indication of origin. The impression that the Swedish court was at times more German than Swedish is borne out by the fact that in about 1650 a fourth of Queen Christina's courtiers came from the overseas dominions of Livonia, Estonia, Pomerania and Bremen-Verden. This was to change, for a process of Swedification set in in the mid-seventeenth century. The higher the office, the more likely it was that the officeholder would be Swedish. Of the Caroline courtiers, both male and female, who served between 1661 and 1721, 70 % came from families introduced at the Swedish House of Nobles (*riddarhuset*). 'Being introduced' meant that a family had been approved by and registered with the Swedish House of Nobles and also had the right to be represented at Diets. Membership in the House of Nobles, being introduced, thus indicates that a family had more than just a passing Swedish link and that it was to some degree integrated into the formal political system. Of the Chamber Gentlemen, 88 % had such a background compared with 74 % of the Court Gentlemen and 62 % of the Pages. Thus 65 % of the courtiers who served Charles XI came from families introduced at the Swedish House of Nobles, which can be compared with 46 % in his father's time. The number of aristocrats belonging to 'introduced' families at court continued to rise (Table 1), squeezing out the foreigners. In the reigns of Charles XII and Ulrika Eleonora the total remained a steady 79 %. Noblemen from Sweden's overseas provinces of Pomerania, Estonia, Livonia, and Bremen-Verden gradually lost ground at court.

Most European states in the early modern period were composite states, consisting of several kingdoms, duchies, principalities or other units. The importance of keeping provincial élites reasonably happy were driven home forcefully by a number of rebellions. Examples of ruling provincial élites successfully rebelling are Portugal in 1640 and the Netherlands in the 1570s. The Bohemian rebellion of 1618 may have failed but it was not a thing with which any ruler wanted to be confronted. Thus a number of rulers tried to use their courts as means of integration. Philip II of Spain used the court to integrate noblemen from various parts of his dominions in the 1580s.¹⁹ If the king estranged possible supporters he, in the words of Robert Bucholz, failed to provide 'a home and source of inspiration for his supporters'. At the court of

¹⁹ Rodriguez-Salgado 1991.

Queen Anne almost no Scots served and, according to Bucholz, 'the result was obviously as damaging to local interests as it was to the Queen's'.²⁰

The attitude towards provincials or foreigners often differed between monarch and élite. In 1631 Gustavus Adolphus had encouraged the recruitment of Pomeranian aristocrats to his court, writing 'if you could get any German noblemen, which We do not doubt could be achieved, since in Pomerania there are whole droves of middle-aged men and other noblemen who would willingly serve these days ...if you instead could use the Swedes to other ends than to go and waste their time at court, it would be very well'.²¹ This attitude probably reflects Swedish plans, soon to be realised, to seize Pomerania. Such uncomplicated attitudes towards foreign courtiers were doomed to change. Indeed, within a few years the Swedish council was worrying about the predominance of Germans at the Queen Dowager Maria Eleonora's court. Interestingly enough, the Swedish councillors make international comparisons to drive home their point.

'We must find it suspect that Her Majesty has no-one Swedish in her court *nisi janitores* ...They are such that if they were in power, we could ask for none worse. In France this is not so; all the officers are French. England is the same and also Spain. They may be good enough, but since Her Majesty cannot tolerate any Swede, they also come from places that could be held in suspicion'.²²

This xenophobia was obvious to the observer who wrote that Chief Chamber Gentleman Count Königsmarck was greatly loved by the King but was persecuted by the young domestic aristocracy because of his foreign extraction, as was usual in Sweden.²³

International comparisons were used again during the diet of 1668 when it was discussed whether foreigners were to be tolerated among 'those People who daily attend on, and pass the most time with, his majesty'. Some discussants held the view that only Swedes be allowed to wait on the King. By way of a warning, it was pointed out that 'whilst Queen Christina was under the surveillance of the princess [her aunt Princess Catharina] and of Swedish people, she was good, but we all well know what occurred once Frenchmen and

²⁰ Bucholz 1993, p.100.

²¹ RA Riksregistraturet, Gustavus Adolphus to Johan Sparre, Hall 13 September 1631.

²² Council minutes 26 January 1639, printed in Kullberg et al. 1895, vol.7 pp.441-2.

²³ Simon de Petkum to Christian V, Stockholm 31 January 1672, printed in Fryxell 1836, p.221.

other strangers began to surround her'. The Speaker of the House of Nobles warned in his address that this discussion concerned 'a Most Delicate Matter' and must be kept absolutely confidential. He also added that Germans from lands under Swedish rule should be allowed to wait on the King. Against this it was claimed that the Romans, for all their foreign possessions, had never permitted foreigners to attend the Emperor.²⁴

The presence of complete foreigners is a fact that fits badly with the idea of the court as an instrument of integration. Why waste places at court on noblemen who had no political clout of their own within the country? It must be borne in mind that the number of foreigners at court was in no way insignificant. Thus, I have calculated that of Queen Christina's noble courtiers about 40% seems to have been of foreign extraction. A number of these courtiers can be explained in various ways. Some were obviously refugees for political or religious reasons such as a number of Scots during the 1640s.²⁵ Other foreigners may reflect territorial aspirations at the time. A couple of probable Russians, or possibly Poles, turn up at the time when the younger brother of Gustavus Adolphus was one of the contenders of the throne of Muscovy.²⁶ Perhaps the presence at the court of Gustavus Adolphus of members of important German families such as Schulenburg from Brandenburg and Zerotin from Bohemia also indicated wider political ambitions?²⁷

Most foreigners were, however, apparently unremarkable German noblemen who stayed in Sweden for a few years and then returned to Germany. Albrecht von Konow from Brandenburg seems to be a typical case in question. He first served in the Hungarian cavalry; then in Denmark after which stay he served at the Swedish court for two years and later he served in Holstein. It seems probable that many of the Germans at the Swedish court were people similar to von Konow - wandering mercenary types who tried to make their luck where they could find it.

²⁴ Diet minutes 1 August 1668, Taube and Bergh 1893, vol.10 p.287. Even so, it should be noted that the same diet featured the German-born Court Marshal Lützow who 'has now been among us for so many years, that he well can count as a Swede'.

²⁵ One of which, Sir William Bellendine, succeeded in upsetting the English republican ambassador to Sweden who was very afraid of being assassinated by exiled royalist Scots in Sweden.

²⁶ Possible Russians were Iwan Jackaulewitz, Wassili Jackaulewitz, and Ignatius Kutzin who all served as Court Gentlemen in 1610.

²⁷ Albrecht von Schulenburg (Stablemaster 1632-3) and Johann Herman von Zerotin (Chamber Gentleman 1628-9).

Despite claims in the council and the diet the Swedish court was not unique in its presence of a large group of courtiers of foreign extraction. Joachim Lampe has shown how the Hanoverian courtiers in the 1690s were usually not indigenous, but often French and Italian.²⁸ Aloys Winterling has pointed to a similar situation at the Electoral court at Cologne, where there were few indigenous courtiers.²⁹

Unlike Hanover or Cologne, however, in Sweden the number of foreign courtiers dwindled fast during the seventeenth century. The Swedish Civil War of the 1590s had clearly illustrated how an absentee King was weakened by not having a proper Swedish court while his rival, Duke Charles, used his court fully to create and strengthen his affinity. Through the intricate web of early modern patronage, success could attract local magnates and their affinities in different parts of the country to the royal cause. If courtiers were nonentities, the mere creatures of the monarch, they could not provide the necessary support in the form of a strong local standing and networks of influence. Charles IX's later court was flawed by the presence of too many foreigners and the absence of much of the Swedish nobility. He managed to oust his nephew, King Sigismund, but his rule proved to be somewhat confused and disorderly. Foreigners, such as Germans or Spaniards, did not offer the same ready-made affinities but instead had to be made powerful. Some of the foreigners at court in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century managed to rise to power, but the vast majority of foreign courtiers seem to have played only a small part in Sweden, and then to have left the country.

Vacancies

Ronald Asch has described how the few openings at court in England in the 1630s disappointed members of the aristocracy who aspired to court offices.³⁰ In Sweden a similar situation occurred during the Caroline epoch. In order to produce enough future councillors, Governors, Field Marshals, and the like it was necessary for the court to pull in a sufficient number of people. This was not the case during the Caroline period, when the court did not recruit enough new noblemen to be able to keep its previous rôle as the nursery of councillors and Governors. This is shown by the number of appointments to the post of Chamber Gentleman (Table 2), Court Gentleman (Table 3) and Page (Table 4) in

²⁸ Lampe, J., *Aristokratie, Hofadel und Staatspatriziat in Kurhannover*. 2 vols. Göttingen, 1963.

²⁹ Winterling 1986.

³⁰ Asch 1993.

the Caroline period; as may be seen, the trend was particularly marked for the Court Gentlemen as a result of the low turnover in this post. The lack of new vacancies at court led to a low input that could not but result in a low output, and instead of being twenty-three-year-olds taking their first steps on the career ladder, Court Gentlemen and Chamber Gentlemen were now often long-serving men in their forties and fifties with wives and children.

If we study the number of courtiers appointed each year the trend is clear. After 1680 the number of openings at court for aristocrats decreased dramatically, as is shown by the total number of appointments to the post Court Gentleman (Table 5) and Chamber Gentleman (Table 6). Only the number of vacancies for Pages (Table 4) remained more or less unchanged, as by necessity they would automatically leave service in their early twenties at the latest. The court's increasing internal recruitment brought with it great stability - or petrification. Courtiers stayed ever longer at court, and in the latter half of the century the offices of Court Gentleman and Chamber Gentleman became life-time jobs.

Service at court had traditionally been a spring-board, the first step in the career of a young nobleman, but under Charles XI (1660-1697) this changed and the Court Gentlemen began to serve for longer and longer periods. At the beginning of the period (1611 to 1660) ninety per cent of the Court Gentlemen served for less than five years. Tables 7, 8 and 9 show this clearly, in increasing detail, starting with total length of service for all courtiers throughout the period (Table 7), then total length of service for the Court Gentlemen throughout the period (Table 8), and finally a comparison of the total length of service of Queen Christina's and Queen Ulrika Eleonora's courtiers. It should be stressed that it is the total length of court service that is shown in these tables; hence the apparent paradox that a majority of Queen Ulrika Eleonora's courtiers, who only reigned from 1718 to 1720, served for more than fifteen years.

All these tables illustrate a clear trend - the court aged. The courtiers served for longer and longer periods, a fact that holds good for all categories of noble courtiers. The Court Gentlemen who served during the second half of the period (1661 to 1721) stayed at court for a much longer time than their predecessors had done, for about a third served as Court Gentlemen for ten years or more. The Chamber Gentlemen also served for longer periods and were increasingly older when appointed. Christina's Chamber Gentlemen were

on average twenty-three when they began in service, while Charles X Gustav's were twenty-six. During the Caroline period a newly appointed Chamber Gentleman was on average twenty-nine years old. Consequently the nature of the offices of Court Gentleman and Chamber Gentleman changed. New courtiers were still young, although the average age for a newly appointed Court Gentleman rose by four years from twenty-one years (1633-60) to twenty-five years (1661-1721). The major change was that courtiers stayed at court much longer, a fact reflected in the pattern of marriages. During the first half of the seventeenth century almost no Court Gentlemen were married, whereas Caroline courtiers were often married and had children.

Did the Caroline monarchs try to counteract this fossilisation of their courts? It is an important question, as on it hinged the court's ability to attract the nobility, and the size of the court naturally had a bearing on this. Here the overall size of the court is only part of the answer, to be further qualified with information on where the emphasis of the court lay. Ordinary noble households were often top-light, that is to say that the superstructure of a household that had aristocratic servants in higher offices was much smaller than the number of people who worked in the kitchens, stables and bakeries. Early modern royal courts, however, were not normal households and because of the emphasis placed on splendour were inclined to be top-heavy. This could not but have far-reaching ramifications for the potential of the court to function as a point of contact. If there were many offices suitable for aristocrats available it was easier to build up connections with many different families and provinces. Thus it is unsurprising that many early modern courts tended to be top-heavy. The growth experienced by seventeenth-century courts was usually to be found within the top ranks. At the Bavarian court the number of Chamber Gentlemen (*Kämmerer*) increased rapidly: in 1615 there were 12 Chamber Gentlemen, in 1667 there were 130, and in 1738 there were 236.³¹ At the Imperial court the number of Chamber Gentlemen increased from around 10 in the sixteenth century to 95 in 1633 and 423 in 1705.³² It can be noted that the size of the courts of Denmark and some German Electorates and their ratio of noble to non-noble staff were also similar to Sweden's. At the Prussian court of 1697 about 350 people served out of whom 60 or 70 were nobles.³³ The

³¹ Klingensmith 1993, p.148.

³² Ehalt 1980, p.39.

³³ Breysig 1895, pp.551-4.

Hanoverian court of 1696 displays a similar picture of a court of 306 of whom about 67 were nobles.³⁴

Behind these figures lurks a device used to swell the number of aristocrats serving at court; in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it became common to use a system where courtiers served according to rotas, such as a quarter every year. This system was already in practice at the Burgundian court in the fifteenth century, and it became increasingly common all over Europe in the following centuries.³⁵ Compared with the Bavarian or Imperial courts, the Swedish court was top-light. It did not introduce the rota system properly until the eighteenth century. Shorter rotas, arranged by day or week, tied courtiers to their posts far more, even though they might be allowed to take leave to visit spas or look after their estates and domestic affairs. A surviving attendance list from 1670-71 illustrates how the duty roster worked at that time. The Chamber Gentlemen waited upon the King in twos for two days and were then relieved by a new duo. The Court Gentlemen also served in two-day shifts, and there were always two on duty at any one time, but they were not paired so there was a shift change every day. Because of the limited number of Chamber Gentlemen and Court Gentlemen the roster meant that everyone would be on duty for about two days every week. The Pages were on duty in twos for a day each about twice a week.

For nobles with estates to run, legal cases to attend to, and family events to be present at, such regular attendance necessitated frequent leave, and indeed it appears to have been fairly easy to get leave.³⁶ Even so, it was tempting to skip attendance. Court servants absenting themselves evidently posed a problem that could prove especially embarrassing at important events. In 1717 it was noted that many courtiers had absented themselves and stayed in countryside so that the conscientious courtiers had to work even harder.³⁷ In the 1660s it was proposed that the Chamber Gentlemen should serve on a quarterly basis to increase the number of noblemen at court, but this was voted down in the council.³⁸ A quarterly attendance system was finally up and running in the 1720s. At the beginning of each year an annual duty roster was drawn up and

³⁴ Schnath 1976, p.383.

³⁵ Paravicini 1991, pp.78-9.

³⁶ For example, Court Gentleman Lawe Beck not appear to have had any serious problems in getting leave for a couple of months to attend personal affairs in the south of Sweden (UUB E 530 Bref till Bengt Rosenhane, Lawe Beck to Bengt Rosenhane, Andrarum 4 November 1672).

³⁷ SLA Riksmarskalksämberet E 1:2 fols.553-7.

³⁸ RA Rådsprotokoll vol.39 fol.53 12 March 1663 by Secretary Franc .

circulated to every Chamber Gentleman and Court Gentleman, all of whom would be scheduled for duty for a certain number of days in each quarter.³⁹

In the event, the practice of appointing unsalaried Court Gentleman and Chamber Gentlemen increased rapidly after the death of Charles XII in 1718.⁴⁰ All fifteen Court Gentlemen appointed in between 1719 and 1721 were unsalaried. Of the twenty-three who were made Chamber Gentlemen only two received salaries as Chamber Gentlemen. It important to emphasise that unsalaried Court Gentlemen and Chamber Gentlemen normally saw active service at court, and had to attend the monarch three months a year.⁴¹ Originally it was planned that the unsalaried courtiers would finally receive salaries 'in order', as and when vacancies occurred, but this could not be put into effect because the number of new unsalaried courtiers multiplied quickly.

At the same time the number of veterans in court service increased dramatically. During the 1620s and 1630s only two noblemen began at court who were to serve for more than ten years, and the 1630s and 1640s were characterised by a certain turbulence. When Queen Christina abdicated in 1654 she had only four noblemen left who had served at her court for ten years or more.⁴² During the period 1615 to 1675 there were usually around five noblemen at court who had served for ten years or more, although in some years in the 1640s there was no-one at court who had served that long. This all changed under Charles XI (1660-97). From the 1670s onwards the group of veterans increased rapidly, and from 1680 onwards numbered between fifteen and twenty. A further steep increase at the beginning of the 'Age of Liberty' in the 1720s because the court was ageing rapidly. It was about this period that a courtier later noted in his diary that 'among our court adventures in Sweden can be reckoned that at the same time the Court Stable Master had no hands, the Court Painter was blind, the Master of the King's music was deaf, and the Dancing Master had a limp'.⁴³

Conclusion

³⁹ SLA Riksmarskalksämberet B 1:9 1736 fols.2-4.

⁴⁰ SLA Hovkontoret Brevbok 1732 'Förteckning på de kongl maj:tz hufBetiente hwilcka sedan 1719 åhrs början hafwa bekommit Characterer, doch uthan någon löns äthniutande wid kongl hafstaten'.

⁴¹ SLA Riksmarskalksämberet B 1:9 1736 fols.2-5.

⁴² The four in question were Erik von der Linde, Harald Oxe, Wilhelm Taube, and Matthias Palbitzki.

⁴³ KB L 82:1:4 Åkerödagbok fol.615 31 May 1758.

To function as the point of contact the presence of important members of the élite was vital to early modern European courts. This paper has been devoted to the question whether the Swedish court between 1598 and 1721 functioned as a point of contact between monarch and élite, and my answers were sought in an analysis of the people who served at court. It is obvious that these were issues hotly discussed at the time. Views normally clashed on the subject of courtiers from newly created noble families or foreigners. Members of the old aristocracy usually tried to exclude the new aristocracy whereas indigenous nobility tried to exclude foreigners and the elite from more peripheral dominions. No matter what, the composition of the court was going to distress members of the nobility, although for different reasons.

One example is how the aristocratic councillors who ruled Sweden during the minority of the young King in the 1660s tried to exclude newly created or lower nobility. The councillors worried that other court offices would develop in the same direction as the Pages and Court Gentlemen, offices that had declined socially. The councillors from the high nobility thus remained adamant that Chamber Gentlemen should always come from the very cream of the aristocracy. That Chamber Gentlemen, unlike Court Gentlemen and Pages, should be recruited from the top stratum of the nobility was a view expressed at a council meeting in 1660.⁴⁴ This view was also propped up by international comparisons. The old councillor count Per Brahe claimed that 'In Germany as well as in Poland, a Chamber Gentleman is a highly respected man, as was the case in this country under Gustavus Adolphus, who was attended on by noble, old, and well-travelled Gentlemen'. Per Brahe returned to his theme in 1666 when a member of an old but minor aristocratic family, was appointed Chamber Gentleman. Brahe reacted with distaste, and claimed that Chamber Gentlemen should be descended from the most noble families only.⁴⁵

This reveals the huge importance early modern society attached to noble birth and titles. It also indicates the tensions within the nobility, and how counts and barons tended to look down their noses on other noblemen, especially newly created ones. To make the court shine it should be adorned by scions of the most illustrious houses. Some monarchs shared the attitude that counts and barons were preferable as courtiers. At the beginning of the 1650s Queen Christina thus tried to upgrade Chamber Pages by employing a whole new

⁴⁴ RA Rådsprotokoll 26 June 1660 by Secretary Franc.

⁴⁵ RA Rådsprotokoll 6 July 1666 by Secretary Franc.

batch who were counts and barons. At the same time some of the former Pages (nobles themselves) were instead appointed Valets to the Queen. In the 1660s the noble minded councillors again tried to upgrade the office of Valet by deciding that whenever a vacancy occurred it would be filled by a nobleman.⁴⁶ This was never put into practice.

In contrast to these aristocratic efforts, the Caroline monarchs had widened the point of contact by appointing sons of influential *parvenus* to court offices. At the beginning of the 1720s the King was strongly advised to keep the old nobility down as much as possible and to make sure 'that courtiers and the Queen's Maids of Honour were not always replaced by children of these families', thus widening the base of the court.⁴⁷ This widening of the court as a point of contact had already been initiated in 1719 by the introduction on a grand scale of unsalaried courtiers, with its concomitant influx of new blood into the court environment. The strengthening of the new families meant that the old houses were pushed back. The only unassailable stronghold of the old titled nobility was the women serving at court. In 1716 the great favourite of Princess Ulrika Eleonora, Emerentia von Düben, was promoted by the King to be Chamber Maid instead of Chamberer.⁴⁸ Although she and her brothers had been ennobled in 1707, and one of her brothers was Court Marshal and the other Chamber Gentleman, Düben's new colleagues considered her extraction as too base for a Chamber Maid. Her appointment 'is taken so ill by the other maids of Honr, who are of the best familys of the Kingdom, that they talk of quitting Her Royal Highnesse's service'.⁴⁹

In most European kingdoms and principalities the court grew in the seventeenth century; the organisation of the Swedish court remained stable and the staff remained stable too. Though there is a gulf between the tottering, confused and civil-war ridden Sweden of 1600 and the well-ordered absolute monarchy of one of Europe's great powers of 1700, this was not something that left its mark on the court. Many petty German princes let their courts expand, but Sweden remained conservative. The Swedish court was comparatively small. It could not have absorbed a very large section of the nobility. In 1600 there were about 550 Swedish aristocrats over the age of twenty. About 110 noblemen served at court at the time, many of whom were foreigners. Thus,

⁴⁶ RA Rådsprotokoll 27 February 1665 by Secretary Franc.

⁴⁷ Valentin 1915, p.169.

⁴⁸ SLA Hovförtäringräkenskaper Kungl. Maj:ts hov 1716 I A:155 fol.957.

⁴⁹ PRO SP95/22 report from Robert Jackson, Stockholm 25 September 1716.

between ten and twenty per cent of the Swedish nobility served at court. Moreover, this figure decreased steadily in the course of the seventeenth century. In 1650 there were about 1,000 male aristocrats over twenty years of age. In 1700 there were about 2,500 noblemen over twenty years of age.⁵⁰ At that time only about forty adult noblemen served at court. Thus the court at this time only absorbed about one and a half per cent of the nobility. It appears that Swedish developments run contrary to common European trends. For example, Bernd Wunder is very clear in his statement that absolutism brought a greatly enlarged royal household.⁵¹ Lawrence Stone also claims that 'the most striking feature of the great nation states of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the enormous expansion of the Court and the central administration'.⁵² Paradoxically, in Sweden the number of court offices for aristocrats were more numerous during the reigns of Charles IX (Lord Protector 1599-1604, King 1604-11) and Fredrik I (1720-51) than during the reigns of Charles XI (1660-97) and Charles XII (1697-1718). Indeed, the number of noble court offices increased after the end in 1718 of strong personal rule.

The Swedish court was transformed into an increasingly closed system during the second half of the seventeenth century. Instead of attracting nobles from the outside, courtiers were increasingly recruited from existing court families. The Caroline court was exclusive, in the sense that outsiders stood very little chance of getting office. As courtiers stayed in office for longer and longer periods, few vacancies were created, and when vacancies finally occurred they were usually filled by members of existing court families, thus further accentuating internal recruitment. Evidently existing family ties to court were extremely important. During the seventeenth century competition stiffened considerably. More contacts were needed, as were more sophisticated stratagems. One sign of the increasing difficulty of getting court office is that bribes were used to further advancements. Even the best-connected young hopefuls had to struggle in order to get an office.

At the same time, court service became increasingly aristocratic. In the reign of Charles IX not every Page was of strictly aristocratic birth. Under Gustavus Adolphus the chance for non-nobles to serve in the same offices as nobles vanished, and from then on the offices of Court Marshal, Chamber Gentleman, Court Gentleman and Page were reserved solely for people of aristocratic birth.

⁵⁰ Elmroth 1981, p.42.

⁵¹ Wunder 1981.

⁵² Stone 1967, p.183.

Non-noble court servants might be ennobled, but they could not follow the same career track as nobles to become Court Gentlemen or Chamber Gentlemen. This development is pronounced in Charles XII's reign when a very small number of non-aristocrats actually managed to procure top aristocratic offices. However, the men in question belonged to non-aristocratic families long established at court, and were all without exception extremely well-connected. Together with a number of recently created court families they dominated the court.

This had far-reaching implications for the ability of the court to act as a point of contact for the rapidly increasing Swedish aristocracy, let alone for Sweden's newly acquired imperial possessions. In a matter of a few decades following 1660 the court became ossified. Another fundamental change was that at the beginning of the seventeenth century the nobility of the Baltic provinces of Estonia and Livonia were well represented at court. In this period the court can be seen as the mirror of the country, a means of integrating the élites of the new provinces into Sweden. This trend peaked under Queen Christina, a quarter of whose courtiers came from the Baltic provinces and Swedish Pomerania. The Caroline court was gradually Swedified and demilitarised in the second half of the seventeenth century. At an increasingly Swedish court, even Swedish subjects from Livonia and Estonia lost ground. In the three decades of absolutism, only two foreign aristocrats, both Austrian, were appointed to Swedish court offices.⁵³ Even though Charles XII was abroad campaigning for more than a decade he did not recruit foreign courtiers (apart from menial, non-noble court servants). Compared to some contemporary German courts, this national character is remarkable.

It was not only in its ostracism of the aristocracy from the Baltic provinces and abroad that the Caroline court failed as point of contact where the late Vasa court had succeeded. The Caroline court closed itself off from the élite within Sweden itself. A few leading courtiers tried to counteract this, but even they were part of the overall process because of their preference for recruiting courtiers from families already firmly established at court. This exclusivity did not mean that ancient noble houses enjoyed a monopoly on service at the Swedish court, unlike the French court where for some offices the candidate had to prove his noble lineage going back generations. It is true that on the

⁵³ Count Otto Ludwig Ehrenreich von Rindsmaul (Page 1706-08, Court Gentleman 1708-11, Chamber Gentleman 1711-26) was a Protestant refugee; it should be noted that the second Austrian, Josepha Pflugk (Court Maid extraordinary 1708-11, Court Maid 1712-33), had a Swedish step-father.

surface the Swedish court became increasingly aristocratic, since more courtiers were titled and almost no courtiers were of the dubious noble status that had sometimes been the case at the early seventeenth-century court. However, it was not the old nobility that benefited, for it was the sons and grandsons of newly created noblemen who were to take over the Caroline court, and by the end of the period even the highest court offices were held by members of this new, and often titled, nobility. Only the noblewomen serving at court resisted this development, as a few old noble families managed to monopolise the female offices so that at the Caroline court practically every noble Court Maid both possessed a title and had relatives who were in service, or had served, at court.

Caroline courtiers, both men and women, shared the fact that they usually came from families with existing court connections. Another major change that ran alongside the problem of the court becoming increasingly inbred, was the transformation of court offices from springboards for aristocratic youths to life-time jobs. This change meant that fewer noblemen and noblewomen served at the Caroline court than the late Vasa court, and that fewer members of the élite experienced court service. In this way the late Caroline court had closed itself to much of the outside world. The problems of exclusion are obvious, but inclusion had had its own problems too. Allowing foreigners or Baltic Germans to hold office bred ill feeling among Swedes, while the old nobility disliked it when members of the new nobility were given higher court offices.

Under such circumstances, could the court act as the point of contact between monarch and élite? To some extent the *nouveau riche* Caroline courtiers reflected the new Swedish élite of the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, but the overall coverage decreased as the nobility grew apace, while there were very few openings at court. This both impeded the performance of duties and encumbered the court's function as a point of contact between monarch and élite. The monarch in reality barred most members of the élite from court service, as a concerned courtier lamented in 1716.⁵⁴ The intense competition and altered nature of court service combined to exclude newcomers, a quandary captured in a complaint from 1713 that noted that deserving candidates could not be employed 'since no-one is inclined to die off'.⁵⁵ It was only with the adaption in 1719 of a common European practice,

⁵⁴ KB Ep.T.4 Nicodemus Tessin to Salomon Cronhielm, Stockholm 22 February 1716, copy.

⁵⁵ Casten Feif to Nicodemus Tessin, Timurtasch 17 July 1713, printed in Anderson 1859, vol.1 pp.172-3.

the appointing of unsalaried courtiers, that the Swedish court could break away from its fossilised *sonderweg*.

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