

War Booty as Identity Markers in 17th Century Sweden Archives and libraries

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During the many wars of the 17th century, the Swedish army took a large amount of war booty. Along with the well-known pieces of fine art, it was also customary to capture whole archives and libraries. Taking war booty from the enemy was in accordance with international law at the time, for instance as proclaimed by Hugo Grotius in his classic *De jure belli ac pacis* (1625). Scholars today claim that the Swedes took booty more systematically and on a larger scale than any other European state at that time, especially when it came to archives and libraries. This paper argues that the books and documents that were taken as booty were not just used practically, as literature, by the Swedes. On a symbolic level the goods were used as identity markers, useful in the making of various identities that could be aristocratic, religious, historical or national. This took place at a time when the Swedish elite strived to reach a European cultural standard, and the paper demonstrates how political culture, objects and an elite European identity were thoroughly linked together.

The examples discussed below are all part of my dissertation project, with the working title *Archives and Libraries as Swedish War Booty During the 17th Century. Political culture, material culture and identity*.

WAR BOOTY AS IDENTITY MARKERS IN 17TH CENTURY SWEDEN ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES

The story of war booty seems to be almost as old as the history of mankind. Already in the Old Testament spoils of war are mentioned.¹ In modern times the two leaders responsible for some of the most notorious looting were probably Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler. Before the French Revolution taking booty was regarded as the winner's right in a just war, but since the end of the Napoleonic wars it has been considered a crime against international law.² Even so booty is still taken in war and armed conflicts. You can for instance buy helmets taken from the war in Iraq on Swedish web pages for 395 Swedish crowns.³

In the beginning of the 17th century, the protestant kingdom of Sweden was a poor and underdeveloped country in the European periphery. Since 1599 Sweden was in an expensive intermittent war with Poland due to the disposal of the Polish-Swedish king Sigismund III. Scholars usually consider the reign of the Swedish king Gustav II Adolph (1594-1632) to be a turning point in Swedish history. He strived to reform Sweden profoundly, and also understood the political importance of culture. The king therefore took several measures to develop a cultural policy and taking war booty was one of them.

In this era a noble person or a prince built his or her identity through their possessions, as pointed out by historians such as Peter Englund.⁴ The Swedish elite was well aware of the cultural richness on the continent, and that they themselves could not compete with European aristocracy. The scholar Erik Ringmar has stressed that Gustav Adolph invented a new and more glorious Swedish historical identity in order to gain acknowledgment both within his country and abroad. In this story the mystique Goths, most famous for conquering ancient Rome, were originally from Sweden. They derived from Noah, which made Sweden the oldest country in the world. The other cornerstone in this story was that of a Protestant Sweden, by definition opposed to the Catholic enemy king Sigismund.⁵ In the Swedish efforts to certify this identity the war booty filled several different meanings for the culturally poor state.

In the following three examples will be discussed, starting with war booty objects in general and ending with the capture of whole libraries and archives. Through these examples I want to discuss how the booty was used as objects in their new Swedish context, that on most occasions here were different institutions in Sweden. As we will see the objects were filled with different, sometimes contradicting, meanings and identities, depending on who was describing or using the goods and in what context the goods were placed.

The first example is the French embassy member Charles d'Ogier's encounter with war booty in Sweden, described by him in his diary from 1635. The first time when Ogier mentioned war booty was in association with a dinner party in a private town palace in Stockholm. This palace was recently finished and was described as the most splendid one in the Swedish capital. Here Ogier saw many excellent paintings and sculptures. All of them, he wrote, were war booty from cities that Gustav Adolph had invaded during the Thirty Years

¹ Deuteronomy 20:10-14; see Erik Norberg, "Krigets Lön/Proceeds of War" in *Krigsbyte/War Booty*, Stockholm 2007, p 72; Hugo Grotius classic *De jure belli ac pacis* from 1625 is available in several translated editions, see for instance Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of war and peace. Including the law of nature and nations*, New York 2007 (1901), p 332-333.

² Norberg 2007, p 72-76.

³ <http://www.desertrat.se/?id=6469>, 2010-10-26.

⁴ Peter Englund, *Det hotade huset. Adliga föreställningar om samhället under Stormaktstiden*, Stockholm 1989, p 79.

⁵ Erik Ringmar, *Identity, interest and action. A cultural explanation of Swedens intervention in the Thirty Years War*, Cambridge 1996, p 156-164.

War. The Swedes, Ogier claimed, had no previous record of spending their money on such things.⁶

Shortly after this dinner party Ogier got a chance to see the Royal Treasury. Here his escorts showed him the so-called “Trollhornet”, which was a black, crooked horn that a Swedish knight supposedly once had taken from the devil. Ogier noticed that this object had been well preserved by the Swedes. He looked upon it closely and concluded that the black horn was just a model for a drinking horn, and if it hadn’t been so dirty and dusty he would have wanted to try it. Then Ogier looked at the war booty. It was with explicit bitterness that the Catholic Ogier watched the crucifixes of solid gold, chalices, bishop rods and other liturgical objects decorated with jewels that the Swedes had robbed from German churches. This was the only time when Ogier used the word “robbed” in his journal.⁷

The object that touched him the most was a two-foot long crucifix that was exquisitely made and had a piece of the True Cross in it. It was because of this that Ogier could not help himself, but he had to lean forward and kiss the cross. The reaction from the Swedes was brutal, they all bursted into laughter. In Ogier’s opinion these were the same people who recently had treated the devils drinking horn with great respect, just as if they had more respect for the devil than for Jesus Christ. For a moment Ogier wanted to ask the Swedes if he could have the crucifix, but then he changed his mind thinking that it would have been inappropriate.⁸

What can Ogier’s story tell us then? It appears that he chose to see the devils drinking horn as an object with a practical meaning in order to patronize the Swedes. For him they were primitive savages. For the Swedes on the other hand, the drinking horn was an important piece because of its connection with the oldest part of Swedish history.

The presence of church objects in the Swedish Royal Treasury made Ogier bitter and emotional. For him those objects were religious symbols that the Swedes never should have taken. In this context the objects became symbols for Swedish wealth and their victories in war. The Ogier diary clearly shows that objects can have different and contradicting meanings, depending on who is reading them and in which context they are placed.

The second example concerns the many Jesuit Libraries that were taken by the Swedes. In particular the library in Braunsberg (or Braniewo in polish) that was of great symbolic meaning for king Gustav Adolph. The Jesuit College there had been a centre for the Counter-Reformation since the mid 16th Century, with Sweden as its target. Gustav Adolph had forbidden all kinds of connections with the Jesuit schools, and a Swede that went to Braunsberg could be charged for high treason and be sentenced to death. Sometime during the Swedish invasion of Prussia in 1626 the decision was taken to eliminate all Jesuit libraries encountered by the Swedish army.⁹ Gustav Adolph wanted to hurt the ones that he described as “The Offspring of Vipers”.¹⁰ Today you can still find the remains from around 30 Jesuit

⁶ At this point I am using a translation of Ogier from Latin to Swedish, see Sigurd Hallberg, *Från Sveriges Storhetstid. Charles Ogiers dagbok under ambassaden i Sverige 1634–1635*, Stockholm 1914, p 106. In the dissertation however will I use the Latin original, to avoid obvious dependence.

⁷ Hallberg 1914, p 107–109, quote from p 109. I am here depending on Hallbergs translation from Latin to Swedish.

⁸ Hallberg 1914, p 109.

⁹ Jakub Z Lichanski, “The Book Collection of the Jesuit College in Braniewo. History and Description”, *The Catalogue of the Book Collection of the Jesuit College in Braniewo held in the University Library in Uppsala*, vol 1-3, Michal Spandowski and Slawomir Szyller (editors), Warszawa and Uppsala 2007, p 41, 45.

¹⁰ Cited through Lars Munkhammar, “Böcker som krigsbyte”, in *Krigsbyten i svenska samlingar*, Stockholm 2007, p 37.

libraries in public Swedish collections.¹¹

In Braunsberg the Swedes did not just take the books, but also all sorts of objects like accounts, chalices and other church adornments that were packed together with the library and shipped off to Sweden. In Stockholm the Braunsberg books were registered, before the booty was donated to the newly founded University Library in Uppsala.¹² This register generally follows an old medieval system where the books were organised after the four faculties Law, Medicine, Philosophy and Theology. The only aberration is the Theology section where the Swedes seem to have copied the Jesuit system in some ways, but with a few “Protestant” modifications. For instance the Swedes put the bibles first, and they also created their own category for “Papist church books”, by which they meant liturgical books such as Missals and Graduals. These books were of no practical use for a protestant, but they were kept anyway.¹³

In Uppsala University Library the same system for organizing the books was used. The Jesuit system was a modern one that the Swedes gladly took over. It is therefore clear that the captured objects affected the Swedes. Scholars have stressed that many of the books that came from the Jesuits hardly had a function to fill in Sweden since they were “Catholic” school books. This may be true in some cases but I believe that one should not be too preoccupied with the books as reading and learning material. A 17th century library was supposed to reflect universal knowledge. And as mentioned above, the things that you owned showed the world who you were. That is why a grand state had to have a grand library.

The Jesuits were of great cultural importance in the early 17th century Europe. The conclusion here is that Gustav Adolph may have hated the order as a political opponent but at the same time he must have desired their knowledge. When he captured their libraries he conquered their learning. Instead of burning the valuable books, he had them sent to Sweden. In Sweden the knowledge of the Jesuit Order became Swedish knowledge. Their refined technology for registering books was used because it was clever and modern. In Uppsala, Swedens first university library, the Jesuit books stood on the shelves as symbols of Swedish learning. The provenances were not erased, and even the unread books became symbols for conquered knowledge. The learned Jesuit Order identity was in this way taken over by the Swedes.

My third and last example concerns an archive. In 1621 the Swedes invaded the town of Mitau (or Jelgava lettish) in today’s Latvia. Then the city belonged to the region of Livonia, which since the Middle Ages had been a base for the Livonian Knight Order. The last Order Master in Mitau was forced to seek protection from Poland in the 1560s, an event that marked the end of the Livonian Order state. About 60 years later, when the Swedes invaded Livonia, they came across the old archive of the Order Masters. The whole archive, along with other booty, was packed in boxes and bins and shipped to Sweden.¹⁴

In Sweden the archive was thoroughly read through by the first archive secretary, Peder Månsson Utter. The knowledge that came to the Swedes with this archive must not be underestimated. Here the Swedes had hundreds of years of correspondence between the Order Masters, Popes, the Emperor, Bishops and the kings of Denmark and Poland – among others. The sources also speak about documents concerning the election of king in Poland, information about the enemy that surely was interesting for the Swedish king. In the archive one also finds acts regarding confederations, peace agreements, alliances, negotiations and different settlements between Sweden, Denmark and the Livonian Order Masters. In

¹¹ Otto Walde, *Storhetstidens litterära krigsbyten I*, 1916, p 18.

¹² U272 and U273, Uppsala University Library.

¹³ U 273, Uppsala University Library; Gert Hornwall, ”Uppsala universitetsbiblioteks äldsta uppställnings- och klassifikationssystem”, *Nordisk tidskrift för Bok- och biblioteksväsen*, 56:1969, p 185, 187.

¹⁴ Walde 1916, p 50–51.

particular the Swedes were interested in acts regarding Swedish Estonia that the Swedes had controlled since the fall of the Livonian Order in 1560s. Gustav Adolph literally told secretary Utter to read the acts from Mitau and try to find arguments to support the Swedish cause in Livonia.¹⁵ The archive itself can be considered as a symbol of the Livonian geography that Sweden controlled fully from 1621. If one were in possession of the acts regarding an area and its history one were also in control of that area.

After the inventory the archive of the Livonian Order Masters was incorporated with the Swedish National Archives. The National Archives were just about to become a proper institution, as a part of Gustav Adolph's efforts to create a Swedish state. It was only in 1620 that the historical national archives were separated from the daily court office. This overlaps Gustav Adolph's ambition to emphasize a more grand Swedish historical identity. In 1626 it was declared that the activity of the National Archives was to include searching for old acts associated with the history of the Swedish state. The secretaries should try to buy or copy acts that were found in the homes of private persons and their search were supposed to be conducted in the entire country. The head archive secretary was also in charge of writing Sweden's history. When these collected acts, together with the captured ones, such as those discussed from Mitau, were moved to the National Archives they became a part of Swedish history. They could serve as Swedish identity markers in both negotiations and history writing. With the help of foreign archives the glorious Swedish identity could be clarified, an identity that was supposed to last in a European context.

To sum up one might ask how effective the invention of a new Swedish identity had been without precious objects? The Swedes collected objects within their own country and they took war booty in order to clarify the story of their greatness against their European competitors. The history told was given authenticity through objects. The art, archives and libraries became national symbols of the Swedish state, and of the true faith. The objects were displayed in their new context for foreign visitors. Church objects or books associated with a Catholic identity were not destroyed, but incorporated with Swedish collections and, as shown here filled with new, non-religious meanings.

Even though it was legal take war booty the diary of the French Catholic Charles d'Ogier shows us that the custom was not carried out deprived of all controversy. For the Swedes the booty actually constituted a crucial part of these (sometimes) newly constructed Swedish national collections. The objects were therefore central parts of a bigger tale where the Swedish state tried to dominate others states, by taking over their geography and their cultural objects in order to matter. By imitating the culture of the great powers of Europe, Sweden strove to be internationally recognised and prove itself as an important kingdom.

The final words will go to Charles d'Ogier, who recognised the irony of fate in this history of war booty. The German princes and emperors, he wrote, had collected treasures for 800 years and given rich gifts to the churches, which they treated with reverence and respect. And then it only took the Swedes one day to take it all away.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Walde 1916, p 337 f; for letters concerning the archive see Peder Månsson Utter to Axel Oxenstierna 16220802, 16220923 and 16221004, E 746 The Oxenstierna Collection, The Swedish national archives Marieberg; for a register of the archive see Tillminnes hwad som iagh af dhe Mithowske handlinger hafwe inlaggt, Förteckning A: 2 1622, Uppställningsförteckningar och inventarier 1618-1627, The National Archives Office Archive, D II b a, The Swedish National Archives Marieberg.

¹⁶ Hallberg 1914, p 109.

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