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# A Nobleman's Death. Power Struggle and Resistance in Accounts of a Political Execution in Early Modern Sweden

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## ABSTRACT

This chapter<sup>1</sup> deals with political executions of nobility as forums for resistance and power struggle in the Kingdom of Sweden in the turn of the 17th century, when Duke Charles and King Sigismund were struggling for the throne of the Kingdom. In the precarious political situation of Swedish history, the way the sentenced faced execution reflected their interpretations of honour and also their means of resistance in the theatres of power. The analysis focuses on an execution that took place in Turku, today in south western Finland, in November 1599. The death of the young Baron Johan Fleming, supporter of King Sigismund, is described and discussed in several documents. In the following, the description of his preparation for execution is analyzed as a contested process with clashing interpretations. I argue that while the processes of political execution were meant to express the power and righteousness of the ruler, they could also have an opposite effect. The spectacle of the scaffold could turn into a celebration of the person executed as a martyr, in which case the ruler initiating the execution could be seen as a tyrant.

*Artikkelissani käsittelen vapaaherra Johan Flemingin Turussa vuonna 1599 tapahtunutta teloitusta historiallisessa kontekstissaan, esimerkkinä aatelisten opposition vastarinnasta 1500-1600-lukujen Ruotsissa. Kyseisenä ajankohtana kruununperimyskamppailu johti verisiin välienselvittelyihin valtaa tavoitelleen Kaarle-herttuan sekä kruunatun kuningas Sigismundin kannattajien välillä. 1590-luvun lopussa Kaarle-herttua varmisti asemansa hallitsijana; lukuisien oikeudenkäyntien ja teloitusten avulla hän pyrki nujertamaan vastarinnan ja osoittamaan voittoisuutensa.*

*Oikeudenkäynnit ja teloitukset vallankäytön keinoina olivat kuitenkin kaksiteräinen miekka. Teloitettavat eivät alistuneet speaktaakkelin passiivisiksi kohteiksi, vaan pyrkivät*

*ylläpitämään ja tuomaan esiin omat tulkintansa, jotka jäivät elämään kirjeissä, viimeisissä puheissa ja perhepiirin muistitiedossa. Hurskaalla ja pelottomalla käytöksellään teloitettava saattoi kääntää myötätunnon puolelleen, niin että hänen kärsimyksensä rinnastuivatkin marttyyrien ja Kristuksen tuskiin. Tällöin teloitukset toimeenpannut hallitsija alkoikin näyttää tyrannilta, 1500-luvun poliittisessa keskustelussa ja propagandassa usein mainitulta hallitsijan irvikuvalta.*

*Vapaaherra Johan Fleming oli yksi kuolemaantuomituista Sigismundin kannattajista, ja hänen kuolemastaan on säilynyt useita kuvauksia. Johan Fleming oli Kaarle-herttuan sukulainen sekä tämän pahimman vastustajan, amiraali ja käskynhaltija Klaus Flemingin (k. 1597) ainoa poika. Aikalaiset näkivät nuoren miehen teloituksessa henkilökohtaisen koston piirteitä. Johan Flemingin palvelija laati teloituksesta kuvauksen, joka on tässä artikkelissa analyysin keskeisenä lähtökohtana. Kuvaus tuo hyvin esiin tulkintojen taistelun, jota tuomio- ja teloitusprosessissa käytiin hallitsijan ja hänen vastustajiensa välillä. Yksittäistä pausta tarkastellaan suhteessa aikakauden käsityksiin kunniasta ja hyvästä kuolemasta.*

## INTRODUCTION

On the second Saturday of November 1599, the people of the town of Turku were gathering on the streets and on the Town Square to witness an exceptionally impressive spectacle of execution. The young baron Johan Fleming<sup>2</sup> (1578-1599) and many other noble and common men were to be taken from the Castle of Turku to the Town Square to be beheaded there. They had been sentenced to death for having conspired and fought against Duke Charles (In Swedish, *Hertig Karl*, later King Charles IX), the pretender to the Swedish throne. It was reported that Johan Fleming faced his death bravely, taking leave of weeping girls and noble men alike, though protesting the tyranny of Duke Charles.

These executions were part of the power struggle between the followers of Duke Charles and those of King Sigismund (Vasa) of Sweden and Poland. In 1599, Duke Charles had already quite a strong foothold in the Kingdom of Sweden. King Sigismund resided principally in Poland, and thus it had fallen to his trusted men to defend the King's position in Sweden. The most powerful of these had been Baron Klaus Fleming, the father of Johan Fleming, who had been the Admiral and Steward of Finland and Livonia (then parts of the Kingdom of Sweden). In 1597, however, after Klaus Fleming suddenly died, the support for King Sigismund had begun to erode.

By the year 1599, Duke Charles won decisive battles, and in autumn, he got even with his opponents in Turku, having them sentenced to death. Most of the noblemen sentenced were executed and their property confiscated. The gutters also ran with blood in the town of Viipuri, Eastern Finland 1599, and more executions would be seen in Linköping and Stockholm between the years 1600 and 1605. Besides this, many men



Fig. 1

The year is 1599 A.D., and the whole Kingdom of Sweden is in the hands of Duke Charles. Well, not entirely! Some small parties of indomitable followers of King Sigismund of Sweden and Poland still hold out in the eastern part of the kingdom, nowadays known as Finland. However, the end is near, when the troops of Duke Charles storm the castles in Turku and Viipuri...

and even some women – among them the widow of Klaus Fleming, Ebba Stenbock – were held imprisoned for several years<sup>3</sup>.

While the trials and executions were aimed to manifest the power and righteousness of Duke Charles, not everything went according to plan. Charles' opponents would resort to both covert and open resistance<sup>4</sup>. Even in prison, they had their ways of causing disturbances among those who were loyal to Duke Charles. In vain would he try

to silence the spread of rumours and unfavourable information. Noblemen sentenced to death did not bow to their sentence. Instead, they gave final speeches in defence of themselves and their cause while standing on the place of execution. Sometimes the spectacle of execution came close to an imitation of the sufferings of Christ and Martyrs. The abovementioned Baron Johan Fleming was among those who were reported to have protested their sentence at the scaffold.

In this chapter, I am going to analyze the circumstances of the execution of Johan Fleming and his companions in misfortune as a forum for power struggle and resistance. My main focus is on the account of Johan Bertilsson, Johan Fleming's servant. Soon after the execution, he wrote a lengthy description of the events to the grieving mother of Johan, Baroness Ebba Stenbock, who was still imprisoned by Duke Charles. The description of the death of Johan Fleming was structured to emphasize the bravery of the young man. It gives an interesting impression about the way the prosecutors and the sentenced were trying to define or redefine the spectacle of execution<sup>5</sup>. Other available sources and eyewitness accounts help to contextualize Johan Bertilsson's report.

The surviving documents do not necessarily give the 'real' course of events, nor is my main focus on reconstructing what 'really' happened. Rather, I am interested in how the death of a nobleman is described in the accounts and how the abovementioned power struggles and tactics of resistance can be seen to emerge during the preparation for and during the spectacle of execution. What kind of degrading means were described as having been used against the sentenced, and how were they seen to react to or reject the role of offenders that had been imposed on them? And how did these observations relate to the contemporary ideals of honour and dignified death?

This topic has not been very much analyzed in the context of 16th-century Sweden. The executions in Finland in 1599 have been most closely studied in the 1930s by a Finnish historian, Eric Anthoni<sup>6</sup>. When discussing executions in the early modern period in general, it is fruitful to take into consideration the studies of, for example, Richard van Dülmen, who has analysed the "theatralisation" of public executions<sup>7</sup>. It has also become customary to refer to the analyses of Foucault, whose texts about the spectacle of the scaffold have become famous<sup>8</sup>. As Foucault observed, the sentenced one was often expected to legitimize the sentence by confessing her or his guilt in the procession and at the scaffold. The resignation of the doomed was a sign that even she or he acquiesced to the regime<sup>9</sup>. Executions manifested the ability and right of the regime to exert power over its subjects.

While the observations of Foucault offer an interesting framework for analyzing executions, they have been nuanced and modified by several scholars. Margarita Stocker, for example, has pointed out the fundamental role of religious ideals in Renaissance punishment and execution processes, an aspect neglected by Foucault<sup>10</sup>. This religious framework could also offer room for alternative interpretations and definitions of the

process. The mildness and forbearance of the sentenced could make the execution spectacle look like a *Via Crucis*, an imitation of Christ and the Martyrs, which might undermine the political aims of the regime. According to Stocker, though, martyrdom was lamented only when there were political reasons for doing so. Otherwise, the excessiveness of suffering, though evoking sympathy, could be seen as appropriate and confirming martyrdom<sup>11</sup>. The people of the pre-modern times had faith in life hereafter and trusted that a innocent person who was executed would be rewarded for eternity<sup>12</sup>.

In this analysis, then, resistance against the ruler is seen as a way of using contemporary rhetoric to define and defend the honour of the sentenced. In a sensitive political situation like the one in Sweden in 1599, the sentenced person could win the sympathies of the crowd, and there was a danger that the regent would be seen as a tyrant – the monstrous character haunting the political rhetoric of the 16th century. In particular, Duke Charles risked being compared to the most prominent tyrant figure of 16th-century Swedish political rhetoric, “King Christian the Tyrant” (in Swedish *Kristian Tyrann*). This was the nickname given to King Christian II of Denmark and Sweden, who in 1520 had several Swedish noblemen executed in order to keep Danish rule over Sweden. As the executions in 1520 resulted in a revolt against and the dethroning of Christian, the comparison was very harmful for Duke Charles. He needed to mobilise his own supporters to argue that his was the right cause<sup>13</sup>. The abovementioned clashes of interpretation are discussed in the following, when the accounts of the executions in the year 1599 are analysed.

## THE SENTENCED

Already in the autumn of 1597, Duke Charles had come to Finland to vanquish his opposition. Soon after he had returned to Sweden, however, the supporters of King Sigismund got the upper hand over Turku Castle, one of the important centres of power. Duke Charles had to fight many battles in the different areas of the kingdom. In autumn 1599, it was time to break the newly strengthened resistance in the area of Finland. First, Duke Charles took over the Town of Turku, and soon the Castle had to surrender.

It was merely a coincidence that Baron Johan Fleming was among those who were sentenced. Since 1597, he had mostly been in Poland, serving King Sigismund as one of his chamberlains. In 1599, however, Johan Fleming came to Finland to see if he could get some economic help for his mother and sisters, who were still imprisoned in Stockholm. It was at this time that he was persuaded to stay in Finland by the supporters of King Sigismund. The idea seems to have been that the young man was a precious token of the prevailing influence of the King. Perhaps some saw him as a representative of the legacy of his late father<sup>14</sup>. During the defence of the Turku Castle, however, Johan Fleming had no official position in the administration of or over the military forces in the area of Finland. Arvid Stålbarm was the actual Governor over the area of Finland,

though Johan signed some important documents with him. The young Baron also corresponded with the troops of the King, asking for reinforcements<sup>15</sup>.

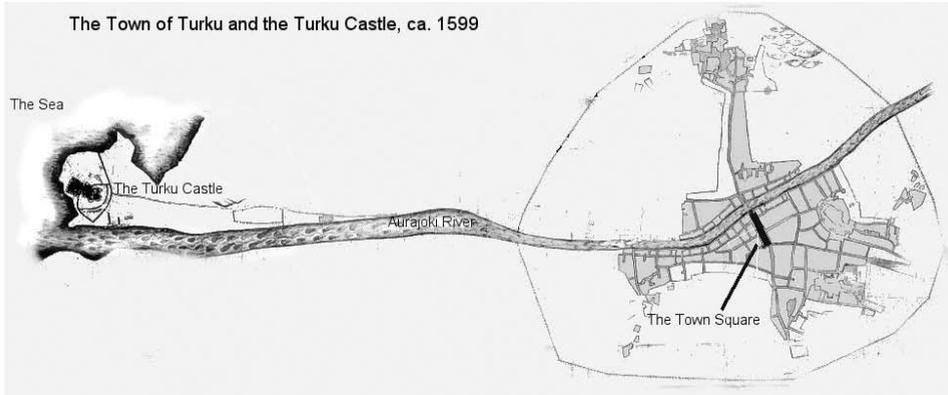


Fig. 2  
Turku Castle and the Town of Turku as situated by the river Aurajoki.  
The figure is based on a map drawn in the 1630s; there are no earlier maps available.

After the Castle had surrendered and the most prominent men arrested, a provisional court of justice started its work. The public play started, as the prisoners were held in Turku Castle and had to walk several kilometres to the centre of the town as a public spectacle. The experiences of the arrested were later described by Arvid Stålar, one of the sentenced, and the only one to be reprieved, of reasons unknown. In his own account to the mother of Johan Fleming, Baroness Ebba, Arvid Stålar also commented on the way the trial had been set up and how they had been brought through the town:

When we first were taken to be questioned at the Turku Town Hall, we had to go between hundreds of foot soldiers [...] while flutes and drums were being played. [...] I am fifty years old, but never did I hear such a way to deliver a sentence: the crimes of the others were not examined, only my offence against His Princely Grace. To carry out my sentence the others had to die as well, despite my humble plea [...] that I might die for all of them, because I had had the highest order in Finland. In the Town Hall, they promised to do so, but another day His Princely Grace had a Circle<sup>16</sup> formed outside the Castle. A lot of people were gathered, of nobility and military, and also towns-people, priests and yeomanry. There our death sentence was read to us [...] we were all kneeling [...]. So help me God, as this is all true; we were exposed to many other spectacles as well<sup>17</sup>.

The word 'spectacle' (in Swedish, *spektakel*) is illustrative of what was going on. Having taken the town and castle of Turku in his hands, Duke Charles was eager to express his power and to impress the local inhabitants. Those who might still doubt his authority were to be shown that it was futile and fatal to try to fight him.

There were, however, severe obstacles working against the aspirations of Duke Charles. True, the sentenced were declared guilty of treason and sentenced to death. However, there were plenty of people in Turku and elsewhere in the kingdom who were ready to see Duke Charles as more guilty of treason for his plots against King Sigismund. The crowd that was gathered to witness the spectacles and executions was not categorically on the side of the new, self-appointed ruler. And the sentenced ones were certainly not willing to remain meek victims in the hands of their prosecutors.

The fate of the young Johan Fleming was seen as especially problematic by his contemporaries<sup>18</sup>. There was little doubt that the sentences were formulated in accordance with the demands of Duke Charles, and many felt that the most serious crime of Johan Fleming was his descent – the fact that he was the son of his father, the bitterest opponent of Duke Charles. Indeed, in 1602 Duke Charles gave an indirect vindication of the same reasoning in a letter in which he mentioned that “the son followed in his father’s footsteps and might have fulfilled [his plans], had he lived longer”<sup>19</sup>.

The opponents of Duke Charles made the most of the problems connected to the guilt of Johan Fleming, describing him as a young man who had “hardly even used a firearm against His Princely Grace [Duke Charles] and his people”<sup>20</sup>. They were also quick to note that Duke Charles and Johan Fleming’s mother, Ebba Stenbock, were cousins. In the rhetoric of the supporters of King Sigismund, Duke Charles’ execution of his relatives was presented as a villainy even exceeding the deeds of the abovementioned King Christian the Tyrant in the 1520s<sup>21</sup>. Thus, his death and the way it was vindicated and described was a politically sensitive and contested topic, open to clashing interpretations.

### ASPIRING FOR *MORS BEATA*

After the sentence had been given, Johan Fleming and his fellow sufferers had only a couple of days to prepare themselves – down to the practical details, such as ordering boards for their own coffins. This was the point where Johan’s servant, the abovementioned Johan Bertilsson began the description of the death of his master: the moment when Johan Fleming learnt the date of his execution and begun his efforts to secure a dignified death, despite the death sentence. The servant, presenting himself as a faithful companion, describes himself running on different errands for his master, who was kept imprisoned in the Turku Castle until the execution day. After describing some efforts to ask for mercy, the description focuses on the final preparations of Johan Fleming, culminating in the procession: the walk to the town, the arrival at the Town Square, the final speech of the sentenced Baron, and the moment of death.

The account of the death of Johan Fleming is not a formal obituary. In many ways, however, it reminds one of contemporary obituaries in the way it discusses the dignified way of dying. As Göran Stenberg and Liisa Lagerstam have observed, descriptions of early modern death often followed the medieval tradition of *mors beata*, the ideal and

a conventional description of death. In accordance with this tradition, the dying person is expected to excel in *ars moriendi*, the art of dying, by accepting her or his death, turning to the afterlife supported by pious prayers, bidding her or his fellow creatures farewell and finally departing in God's grace. After the moment of death, an honourable burial was also an essential part of a good death<sup>22</sup>. Even more generally, anthropologists have observed the importance of "a good death" in different societies; it is important for those left behind and for the dying one to "pass peacefully away", in harmony with God and the world<sup>23</sup>.

Sometimes the circumstances – sudden illnesses, warfare, executions – prevented people from thoroughly following the course of an ideal death. However, they were described as trying to do their best, and there were standards even for a violent or a sudden death<sup>24</sup>. When Baron Klaus Fleming himself had died in 1597, it had been an unexpected event, possibly from food poisoning, and many things had been left unsettled; the old man had not had a chance to say farewell to his family. Sudden as the death was, it was, nevertheless, described in the terms of *mors beata*, beautiful death, by his widow Ebba Stenbock, who emphasised the pious resignation of her dying husband (as described by the servants who witnessed the death)<sup>25</sup>.

Even in the case of Johan Fleming, the focus was on the transition to the eternity, from practical details of the funeral to the mental and spiritual preparations, described by the servant:

His late lamented Lordship answered that he was compliant and would prepare himself. Immediately, he sent for the Reverend Master Grels at Turku, so that he would be so kind and come on Saturday morning and listen to His Lordship's confession, and to give His Lordship the true passport, that is, the Body and Blood of Holy Christ, on his way to the hereafter where His Lordship now had to go [...]<sup>26</sup>.

The resignation did not mean that the sentenced had accepted the decision of the earthly court; rather, it meant that he accepted his fate as decreed by God and turned to the priest for solace and guidance. It was typical that the sentenced tried to send encouraging messages and tokens to their families. Johan Fleming sent a ring to his mother with assurances of his bravery:

I went willingly and happily. As a man who has worked hard all day is willing to go to rest, so am I willing to go to my death, which I trust and know will not be a death but an end to all my sorrow and trouble, and an entrance to the true happiness, where I hope my Dear Mother will meet me again. For I know that there cannot be any particular happiness for me in this world anymore. And I ask you to take the note that I wrote, and to take it to my Dear Mother, and take this Ring too; I have nothing else now that I have in my power to send to her. And tell her that I entrusted her to God Almighty, I hope He will be the consolation for my Heart's Dear Mother with her cross<sup>27</sup>.

Bravely as Johan Fleming was reported to have thought of his death, it was tough to be aware that the male side of the family would become extinct with him. In his letter to his

mother, Johan Fleming expressed hopes that his half-brother, the illegitimate son Olof, could inherit the name and the coat of arms of the Fleming family. Hoping to thwart the plans of Duke Charles to extinguish the family, Johan Fleming asked his mother to do what she could for this. Olof, however, was also sentenced to death and executed<sup>28</sup>.

When it came to the practical details of execution, there were also matters of honour and discretion to be considered<sup>29</sup>. In the account, long sections were devoted to the fate of Johan Fleming's clothes. The executioner had a right to take the clothes of the beheaded, apparently as a compensation for his work. This, however, was shameful for the sentenced, and Johan Fleming, apparently referring to a local habit, was afraid that the executioner would then parade in his clothes during carnivalesque festivities, thus disgracing his family and relatives<sup>30</sup>:

So it must be as it is, and I surrender myself to God Almighty, but [...] it is the last request that I make [...] that the executioner would not lay hands on my clothes, and that my head and my corpse would be saved from having to suffer an indignity [in Swedish, *spektakel*] after my death<sup>31</sup>.

In the end, Johan Fleming received the confirmation that his body would not be desecrated, and he arranged a tip in gold to compensate the economic loss the executor would suffer, not getting his valuable clothing. Moreover, a special carpet was arranged for at the scaffold, "the one that Lady Elin has promised I should die on"<sup>32</sup>. It might be daring to suggest that resistance was the main objective in the efforts of Johan Fleming and his nearest servants to assure a dignified death. It can be argued, however, that these efforts worked against the objective of Duke Charles to show that his opponents were thoroughly criminal and deserving of their sentences. In that sense, these deeds were a part of resistance against the interpretation of guilt.

## SPECTACLE, OR, THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Finally, and most distinctly, the honour and dignity of the sentenced were to be tested in the spectacle at the scaffold. The execution of the sentence was a lengthy process. The sentenced ones – ten noblemen and an unknown number of common men – were taken from the Castle of Turku, and they had to walk in procession a few kilometres to the Town Square. There, they would be beheaded by the sword – the way of dying that was perceived to be least humiliating<sup>33</sup>. Johan Fleming was the first to go. Unlike common criminals who were hanged outside the town area, on a special hill for the gallows, Johan Fleming and his fellow sufferers would face their death in the town centre, as a special spectacle and warning for everyone.

On their way, those sentenced prayed and were consoled by priests. Johan Bertilsson seems to have referred to the usual images of innocent death when emphasizing Johan's bravery and the impression he made on others. It was also important to take leave of those to be left behind, and

Then he walked a good way further, consoling himself with the Word of God, and where the Priest could not console him, there he consoled the Priest, so that even though it was tragic and more than sorrowful that it would so happen, still the consolation that he got himself and gave to others was very worthy to listen to. This consolation he gave both in Swedish, German, Latin and Italian; I could not comprehend all of it. And all whom he met and who saw him, he greeted with a happy tone and voice: "Farewell all my good friends and all honest people, and be there someone whom I have offended in any way, I am asking for your Friendship", so that all who heard it, cried and lamented because of his innocent death<sup>34</sup>.

Later on, Johan Fleming was described saying farewell to ladies and young maids, described all crying and lamenting. According to the servant, the young Baron waved his hand to them and entrusted them to God Almighty in a friendly way. The presentation given by the servant, then, was that of an innocent man who left the world cheerfully. This can be seen to reflect the aspirations of the sentenced to show piety and self-command, thus protesting against the justification of the sentence. In the words of Margarita Stocker, the sentenced were "aware that to bear it with fortitude would confirm their sanctification"<sup>35</sup>.

Finally, having come to the scaffold, Johan Fleming also wanted to give a farewell speech – a classical moment of resistance for the sentenced<sup>36</sup>. In the description given by the servant, he was presented as comparing the severity of the unjust worldly regime to the mercy and justness of the heavenly regime, his contempt to the former and his humbleness towards the latter:

You noble high-born Lords, noble high-born men, and you honest manly warriors, noble and common, lay and learned, all who are here present: I let you amicably know that from the worldly point of view, I know myself to be innocent and I shall guiltless face this death of mine. In the spiritual sense, however, and in front of God, I confess myself to be a serious and grave sinner, well deserving this death, even eternal death; and may God deliver with His righteous sentence to me. It is my hope and firm belief, however, that my God shall have mercy on me, so that in this death He shall give me a true forgiveness, and open the door to an eternal life and joy to me. But in the worldly sense, I know myself to be innocent in front of God and the whole world. And there is no other reason to [my death] but the desire and aspiration of His Princely Grace to see this [Fleming] family become extinct, which is the real reason for the resolution that has now been made according to the will of His Princely Grace<sup>37</sup>.

This was definitely not in harmony with the plans of the judges; these were the final words of a martyr with a cause. This having been said, it must be pointed out that the words of Johan Fleming were not benevolently listened to by everybody. The speech caused even hostile unrest in the crowd, and some people were shouting that the young man should be taken back and given a more severe sentence for his words.

Johan Fleming is quoted to have said, however, "No, no one shall take me in anymore, for I have come out once and I will never go in again. I am here because I am willing to die, and I entrust myself to God Almighty, who is the righteous Judge"<sup>38</sup>. With these words, again, the sentenced person was described claiming agency in the situation and gaining the approval of the audience. They were reported to have bid farewell of each

other in friendly terms, and after this there was only the final preparation to be done, in accordance with the Christian tradition and with remembrance towards the poor who were to be remembered in funeral:

Then the Master shouted to Johan Johansson [another servant] and me, and ordered us to arrange it so that the poor would be given something. We said: "Yes". Then he ripped his shirt down [...]. When he fell on his knees, he said: "O Lord Jesus Christ, take my spirit and soul". Then he took a look backwards, and when he saw that the executioner was ready, he turned his face [...] and closed his eyes. Then they started to sing: "Now pray we all God, the Comforter"<sup>39</sup>, and so he died. May God Almighty take His Lordship's soul. Amen<sup>40</sup>.

## THE AFTERLIFE

Even after the death of Johan Fleming, his reputation lived on, and not in the way Duke Charles (now King Charles IX of Sweden) might have preferred. The ambiguity that was connected to the death sentence of Johan Fleming may have been the reason for the Duke's willingness to spare Johan Fleming's corpse from being placed on display – the fate that was reserved for the others executed, nobles and common alike. Even the contemporaries pointed out that Johan Fleming was granted an honourable burial soon after his death. According to the registry of the Turku Cathedral, all the bells of the church were played in his funeral<sup>41</sup>. It was a special sign of grace that his body was not put on display and that a full-scale funeral was allowed<sup>42</sup>. The body of the young Baron, had it been placed in public display, might have given cause to too many references to tyranny and ruthless behaviour towards his close relatives, accusations that have been already referred to and that were used against Duke Charles in the correspondence between his opponents.

Indeed, the executions were used against "the Ruthless Duke Charles" (in Swedish, *den omilde hertig Karl*). They had been an ambiguous solution, and during the next decades, family of Johan Fleming played a part in the further development of his reputation as an innocent, brave young man. Johan Bertilsson sent his account and the last letters of Johan Fleming to the grieving mother, and the documents were saved by Johan Fleming's sister, Katarina Fleming, who later seems to have given them to a chronicler to use. Using these sources, the Swedish chroniclers, though often in principle favourable to Duke Charles – or in any case, unwilling to offend the royal family – were nevertheless uneasy when discussing the justification of the death of Johan Fleming<sup>43</sup>.

In the 17th century, the famous historian Johannes Messenius showed his sympathy to the young Baron, in several occasions noting that Johan Fleming in practice died because of the deeds of his father. In the following quote of his rhymed chronicle, Messenius described the events of the year 1599 in a way that seem to imply sympathies for the executed. Not only is Johan Fleming pitied. The heads of those who had been executed in Viborg are reported to have sung a victorious hymn by Martin Luther.

The next year to the Finns arrives  
 the Duke, arranging such a fight,  
 that many heroes loose their lives there;  
 (namely, by the sword of executioner,  
 God knows if they deserved that death!  
 Because of his father[’s deeds]  
 Lord Johan Fleming died in Turku,  
 and many of his relatives;  
 In Viipuri there happens a miracle:  
 A song is sung by the heads  
 of those who had had to die:  
 “And take they our life,  
 goods, fame, child and wife,  
 Let these all be gone,  
 they yet have nothing won;  
 The Kingdom ours remaineth”).  
 Other Finns, each and everyone  
 noblemen, merchants, and priests  
 bought their lives with money<sup>44</sup>.

The lines given in parenthesis were later crossed out. Messenius may have felt that they reflected too clearly the unfavourable sentiments and stories of resistance that were still circulating among the people in the kingdom. In another description, “oral stories” were referred to as a source of false information, and it was noted that “there are still many in our fatherland Sweden who condemn his case only following their affections and judge the opponents [of Johan Fleming] totally unjustly”<sup>45</sup>. All in all, it seems that the resistance of the sentenced – or, rather, accounts of resistance – succeeded in making a strong impact on the contemporaries and the future world. Though not successful in invalidating the death sentence, the descriptions of the fate of Johan Fleming can be seen to have worked as an annoying element of resistance against the efforts of Duke Charles to consolidate his image as a thoroughly righteous ruler over the Kingdom of Sweden.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> My work for this study has been supported by the Cllohres Network (<http://www.clohres.net>) and the project “Politics of Brothers, Neighbours and Friends – Political Culture and Strategies of Influence in Early Modern Sweden (c. 1500-1700)” funded by the Academy of Finland. For the background of the Fleming family, see A. Lahtinen, “*A knight from Flanders*.” *Noble Migration and Integration in the North in the Late Middle Ages*, in A.K. Isaacs (ed.), *Immigration and Emigration in Historical Perspective*, Pisa 2007, pp. 79-92; the English summary in A. Lahtinen, *Sopeutuivat, neuvottelevat, kapinalliset. Naiset toimijoina Flemingin sukupiirissä 1470-1620*, Helsinki 2008, pp. 223-233. The original Swedish in the correspondence has been translated into English by the author. In translations, orthography and grammar have been modernised. I would like to thank the Cllohres group and the Seminar for Early Modern Studies at the University of Turku for valuable comments.
- <sup>2</sup> To avoid confusion, I have given the family names of historical persons throughout the chapter. It should be noted, however, that family names were not regularly used by Swedish nobility in the 16th century. Johan Fleming wrote his name “Johan Fleming”, but Arvid of the Stålar family, for example, referred to himself as Arvid Eriksson, “son of Arvid”. In the same way, Lady Ebba of the Stenbock family, would write her own name “Ebba Gustafsdotter”, i.e. “Ebba, daughter of Gustaf [Stenbock]”. Aristocrats were also often addressed with the simple combination of their title and their Christian name (“Lady Ebba”, for example). Only in the late 16th century did it become common to use family names based on a family’s coat of arms, such as Stålar (“arm of iron”). This practice and its variations are too complicated to be satisfactorily applied in a short text. I have, however, kept to the early modern custom that married women never took the surname or the coat of arms of their husbands. Throughout their lives, they would use the coat of arms of their fathers in their seals; likewise, they would always give either their patronymic or their father’s surname when writing their names.
- <sup>3</sup> About the course of events and Ebba Stenbock, see A. Lahtinen, “*There’s No Friend like a Sister*.” *Sisterly Relations and the Rhetoric of Sisterhood in the Correspondence of the Aristocratic Stenbock Sisters*, in A. Korhonen, K. Lowe (eds.), *The Trouble with Ribs: Women, Men and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Helsinki 2007, pp. 194-196. Online publication, available at [http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/e-series/volumes/volume\\_2/](http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/e-series/volumes/volume_2/), accessed on 12 December 2008.
- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, Lahtinen, *Sopeutuivat, neuvottelevat, kapinalliset* cit., pp. 53, 104-109, 151-152.
- <sup>5</sup> A copy of the account and letters connected to it survive in a document called “Convol. IV”, in the collection *Acta Historica 1599*, National Archives of Finland. Published in S. Loenbom (ed.), *Anecdoter om namnkunniga och märkvärldiga svenska män I:1*, Stockholm 1770, pp. 8-37. In the following, I am referring to the published version of this document.
- <sup>6</sup> E. Anthoni, *En relation om händelserna i Finland 1599 och Arnold J. Messenii Commentaria*, in “Historisk tidskrift för Finland”, 1934, 19, pp. 168-182; Id., *Huru har den tyska relationen om hertig Carls fälttåg till Finland år 1599 tillkommit?*, in “Historisk tidskrift för Finland”, 1935, 20, pp. 183-189; Id., *Till avvecklingen av konflikten mellan hertig Carl och Finland I. Konflikten uppkomst och hertigens seger*, Helsinki 1935; Id., *Konflikten mellan Hertig Carl och Finland II. Avvecklingen och försoningen*, Helsinki 1937; Id., *Johan Claesson Flemings död. En källkritisk studie*, in “Historisk tidskrift för Finland”, 1938, 23, pp. 89-101. See also K.G. Leinberg (ed.), *Berättelse huruledes Herr Claes Flemmings Son Johan Flemming på Åbo Slott bleff fången, sedan anklagad, dömd och tillika med flere aftifwad på Åbo Tärng then 10 November år 1599*, in “Historiallinen Arkisto”, 1903, 18, pp. 374-386.
- <sup>7</sup> In German *Theatralisierung der öffentlichen Srafen*, in R. van Dülmen, *Theater des Schreckens. Gerichtspraxis und Strafrituale in der frühen Neuzeit*, Munich 1988, pp. 182-183.
- <sup>8</sup> M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris 1975, pp. 47-49, 51-57.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.
- <sup>10</sup> M. Stocker, *Judith: Sexual warrior, women and power in western culture*, Yale 1998, pp. 95-102, 106.

- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-101, 105-108. See also Dülmen, *Theater des Schreckens* cit., pp. 161-162; H. Klemettilä, *Epitomes of Evil. Representations of Executioners in Northern France and the Low Countries in the Late Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2006, pp. 31-33, 50-51, 56.
- <sup>12</sup> Klemettilä, *Epitomes of Evil* cit., p. 31.
- <sup>13</sup> K. Johansson, *Den farliga historien*, in L. Lönnroth, S. Delblanc (eds.), *Den Svenska Litteraturen. Från forntid till frihetstid (800-1718)*, Stockholm 1987, p. 154. As an example of the rhetoric in practice, see Henrik Huggut to King Sigismund, 8 December 1599, *Acta Historica 1599*, National Archives of Finland; T. Berg (ed.), *Hertigh Carls Slaktarebenck*, Stockholm 1915, p. 27.
- <sup>14</sup> Loenbom (ed.), *Anecdoter* cit., pp. 12-15; Lahtinen, “*There’s No Friend like a Sister*” cit., pp. 194-198.
- <sup>15</sup> Correspondence from the time of the siege survives in *Acta Historica 1599*, National Archives of Finland; see also E. Anthoni, *Johan Claesson Flemings död. En källkritisk studie*, in “Historisk tidskrift för Finland”, 1938, 23, pp. 100-101.
- <sup>16</sup> The Circle, in Swedish *Ring*en, a circle formed by soldiers around the scaffold or a provisory execution place. See *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok*, <http://g3.spraakdata.gu.se/saob/> for the word *ring*.
- <sup>17</sup> “*När wi blefwe förde först til Förhör på Åbo Rådstugu, då måste wi gå genom fyra Fännikor Knechtar [...] med Pipor och Trummor. [...] Jag är femtio år, men aldrig hörde jag så Dom fällas: Det bleficke ransakat de andras gärningar, allena min Brått emot H.F. Nåde. Därmed skulle och de andra dö: oansedt jag ödmjukeligen bad, [...] att jag måtte dö för dem alla, efter jag hafwer betjänt den högsta befallningen i Finland. De läfwade på Rådhuset begå det: men andra dagen lätt H.F. Nåde slå en Ring utan för Slottet, där mycket folk woro tillhopa Adel och Krigs-folk, Borgare, Präster och Bönder. [...] wi stodo alla på knä, [...] så hjälpe mig GUD, som detta är alt i Sanning, med mycken annan spectakel med oss blef drefwen*”. Arvid Eriksson’s letter to Ebba Stenbock, *Strödda historiska samlingar 18*, National Archives of Sweden; see also Loenbom (ed.), *Anecdoter* cit., pp. 34-37.
- <sup>18</sup> Anthoni, *Johan Claesson Flemings död* cit., pp. 89-101.
- <sup>19</sup> “*Sonnen efterföljde Faderrens footspår, och them tillewentyrs wäll hadhe vpfyllt, huar han hadhe länger fått leffwe*”, open letter by Duke Charles, Stockholm 5 November 1602, published in E.J. Waaranen (ed.), *Handlingar upplysande Finlands historia under Karl IX:s tid I (1600-1602)*, Helsingfors 1863, pp. 368-369.
- <sup>20</sup> In Swedish “*näpelig spändt en Bössa emot H.F. Nåde och hans Folk*”, Arvid Stålarms to Ebba Stenbock in 1599, *Strödda historiska handlingar 18*, National Archives of Sweden, published in Loenbom (ed.), *Anecdoter* cit., pp. 34-37. Cf., however, a critical point is given by Anthoni in *Johan Claesson Flemings död* cit., pp. 100-101; Jörgen Farensbach to Johan Fleming, 28 July 1599, *Kopiokirja 1592-1601* [A Book of Copied Records, 1592-1601], National Archives of Finland, p. 205.
- <sup>21</sup> Henrik Huggut to King Sigismund, 8 December 1599, *Acta Historica 1599*, National Archives of Finland; Berg (ed.), *Hertigh Carls Slaktarebenck* cit., pp. 27-29.
- <sup>22</sup> G. Stenberg, *Döden dikterar. En studie av likpredikningar och gravtal från 1600-och 1700-talen*, Stockholm 1998, pp. 145-150; L. Lagerstam, *A Noble Life. The Cultural Biography of Gabriel Kurck (1630-1712)*, Helsinki 2007, pp. 195-202.
- <sup>23</sup> U.-M. Peltonen, *Muistin paikat. Vuoden 1918 sisällissodan muistamisesta ja unohtamisesta*, Helsinki 2003, pp. 68-70 and passim.
- <sup>24</sup> See also Dülmen, *Theater des Schreckens* cit., pp. 161-179.
- <sup>25</sup> Lahtinen, “*There’s no Friend like a Sister*” cit., pp. 194-195.
- <sup>26</sup> “*swarade H. Herredöme salige, att han war wällwillig därtill och wille bereda sig, sände och strax efter M. Grels Kyrkoherde i Åbo, att han skulle göra wäl och om Lördagen bittida komma och böra H. H:s Skriftermål, och till att meddela H. Herd. det rätta wäge-passet, som war Christi hekga Lekamen och blod, till den långa wägen som H. Herd. gå skulle [...]*”. Loenbom (ed.), *Anecdoter* cit., p. 20.

- <sup>27</sup> “säg att jag gärna och gladelig gick härtil, lika som en Man den där hela dagen hafwer arbetat gärna will gå till hwila, så gärna will och jag gå till denna min Död, hwilket jag stadelig tror och wet att det icke skall wara någon Död, utan en ända på all min Jämmer och Wedermöda, och såsom en ingång till den rätta glädjen, där jag och förhoppas, att min Morkiär skall finna mig igen, ty i denna Werlden wet jag att ingen glädje kan synnerlig wara mera till förmedandes: Och begärer jag att du tager den Sedeln til dig som jag skref, och för den til min Morkiär, och denna Ringen för och dit, jag har nu intet annat i mitt Wäld det jag kan sända henne, och säg att jag befalte henne den Alsmächtige GUD i wäld, Han förhoppas jag skall wara min H.K. Morkiärs tröst uti hennes korss”. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> For other examples for pious preparation for the execution, see, for example, the account of the death of the Connétable de St. Pol (Louis de Luxembourg) in Paris in 1475. B. de Mandrot (ed.), *Journal de Jean de Roje connu sous le nom de Chronique scandaleuse, 1460-1483*, t. I, Paris 1894, pp. 350-366. Senior Researcher Fellow Hannele Klemetilä has kindly informed me of this case.
- <sup>30</sup> G. Gerward, *Majgrevefesten. En kulturhistorisk analys*, Stockholm 1996, pp. 50-54.
- <sup>31</sup> “så må det då blifwa som det är, jag befaller mig den Alsmächtige GUD i wäld, dock [...] det är den sista bönen, som jag beder [...] att Bödelen icke måtte beställa något med mina kläder, och att med mitt hufuud eller kropp icke måtte blifwa brukat något spectakel efter min död”. Loenbom (ed.), *Anecdoter cit.*, p. 27.
- <sup>32</sup> “må det Tapetet wara tillstådes, som Fru Elin hafwer läfivat at jag skulle lijda uppå”. *Ibid.*, p. 29. “Lady Elin” was probably Elin Fleming, the wife of Arvid Stålarin.
- <sup>33</sup> Klemetilä, *Epitomes of Evil cit.*, p. 26.
- <sup>34</sup> “Så gick han än ett godt stycke fram och tröstade sig med GUDs Ord [...] och hwad icke Prästen kunde trösta honom, så tröstade han Prästen, så att ändock det war bedröfwertigit och mer än sorgeligit, att så skulle tillgå, doch war hans tröst som han sig sjelf och andra med tröstade ganska hugnelig att höra uppå, som han både på Swenska, Tyska, Latin och Italienska framförde, hwilket jag alt icke förstod. Och alla de honom mötte och sågo på honom, ropade han till med glad stämman och röst: farer wäl alla mina goda Wänner och alt ärligt Folk, och året någon den jag i någre mätto förtörnet hafwer, så beder jag om Wänskap, så att alle de det hörde, greto och jämrade sig öfwer hans oskyldiga Död”. Loenbom (ed.), *Anecdoter cit.*, p. 28.
- <sup>35</sup> Stocker, *Judtih cit.*, p. 98.
- <sup>36</sup> See also the reports of last speeches of those executed in the Civil War 1918 in Finland, as analysed by Peltonen, *Muistin paikat cit.*, pp. 48-60.
- <sup>37</sup> “J ädle Wälborne Herrar, Ädle Wälbördige Män, så och i ärlige Manhaftige Krigsmän, Adel och Oadel, Lekte och Lärde, så många som här tillstådes äro, jag låter eder alla wänligen förnimma, att till denna min Död, som jag här lida skall, wet jag mig uti werldslig mätto wara oskyldig, men uti andelig mätto och för GUD, bekänner jag mig en stor och grof Syndare, och denna döden wäl förtjänt hafwa, och än den ewiga döden, där GUD skulle straffa efter sin rättfärdiga Dom. Men jag förhoppas och tror stadelig, att min Gud skall wara mig så nådig, att han med denna Döden skall draga mig till en sann syndabot, och öppna för mig dören till ett ewigt Lif och Glädje. Men i werldslig mätto, wet jag mig för GUD och all Werlden oskyldig, och war ingen annan orsak därtill, utan den åstundan och trängtan son H.F. Nåde hafwer haft, till att utrota detta Slägtet, är den rätta orsaken därtill, hwilket och nu efter H.F. Nådes wilja gått är”. Loenbom (ed.), *Anecdoter cit.*, pp. 31-32.
- <sup>38</sup> “nej, ingen skall föra mig nu mera in igen, ty jag hafwer en gång gått ut, jag will nu aldrig mera gå in igen, jag är här för jag will här dö, och befaller GUD Alsmächtig, som är en rättwis Domare”. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
- <sup>39</sup> *Nu bedje wi den Helge And* (presently modernized into *O helge Ande, dig vi ber*), a Swedish translation of the German hymn *Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist*, published by Martin Luther.
- <sup>40</sup> “Därmed ropade Herren till Johan Joenson och mig, och befalte oss det wi skulle så laga, att de fattiga skulle något gifwas; wi sade: ja. Därmed ref han sin skjorta ned, och wille falla på knä något nära in på ändan:

*Då sade jag, kära Herre, stiger litet mera tillbaka. Han sade ja, och gjorde så. När han föll på knä sade han: HERre JESU Christe anamma min anda och själ. Säg sig så litet tillbaka, och när han såg den andra wara redo, wände han sitt ansigte rätt före, och blundade till med ögonen: så begynte de sjunga. Nu bedje wi den Helge And, och så led han af. GUD den Aldrahögste anamme hans Herredömes Själ. Amen".* Loenbom (ed.), *Anecdoter* cit., p. 34.

- <sup>41</sup> R. Hausen (ed.), *Bidrag till Åbo stads historia I*, Helsinki 1884, p. 156.
- <sup>42</sup> Dülmen, *Theater des Schreckens* cit., p. 139; Klemettilä, *Epitomes of Evil* cit., pp. 46-47.
- <sup>43</sup> "Convol. IV", in collection *Acta Historica 1599*, National Archives of Finland; Anthoni, *Johan Claesson Flemings död* cit., pp. 89-101; Id., *En relation om händelserna i Finland* cit., pp. 168-182; Id., *Huru har den tyska relationen...* cit., pp. 183-189; Leinberg (ed.), *Berättelse* cit., p. 374-386.
- <sup>44</sup> "Åbret ther näst kommer till them / Fursten, och hölt thär sådant kiff, / At mången hält mester sitt lif; / (Förnembligen af bödels Swerdb, / (256) Gudh wet hwem thär af dödde wärdh! / För sin fader Skull så do / Her Jahan flemmingh i Åbo, / Af hans förwanter mangen mehr; / Ett wundertekn i Wiborgh sker, / Af theras hudfwid hörs then Sångh / Som thär lede nu dödzens twångh: / Röfua the oss ifrå / wärt lif godz och så, / hafua sigh thet bort, the winna icke stort, / Gudz rijke wij wäl behålla:) / Så iagh för migh beskrefuet fan, / Och så berättar, thär hwar man: / Andra finnar hwar och en mäst, / Adel, bonde, borgare, präst, / Medh peningar löste sitt lif." The heads were quoting the hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God - Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott*, by Martin Luther. In German, the quoted lines read as follows: "Nehmen sie den Leib, Gut, Ehr', Kind und Weib: Lass fahren dahin, Sie haben's kein'n Gewinn, Das Reich muss uns doch bleiben". M. Linna, H. Lönnroth (eds.), *Suomen riimikronikka*, Helsinki 2004, pp. 121-123; 255-257; M. Linna, J. Lagerstedt, E. Palmén (eds.), *Suomen, Liivinmaan ja Kuurinmaan vaiheita sekä tuntemattoman tekijän Suomen kronikka*, Helsinki 1988, p. 94.
- <sup>45</sup> "Ty ännu många i wärt Fädernesland Swerige finnes som af enskiljt theras egen Affection dömma om hans Sak, och gifua hans wederpant aldeled orätt", Leinberg (ed.), *Berättelse* cit., p. 386.

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