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Stepfamilies in Sweden, 1400 to 1650: the Family in Process between Bloodlines and Continuity¹

Anu Lahtinen

Introduction

Your wife will take another man
one you would never have considered
he will use all the good things
that you once gave to her

Children who were dear to you
take the red gold happily –
they rejoice in happy company
without hardships or sorrow
from your property and money
they feed themselves without agony²

A Swedish song about the transitory nature of worldly joys describes the way the survivors could forget a deceased family member and replace him with another. The song, inspired by Ecclesiastes of the Old Testament, certainly had relevance for the contemporaries. Given the mortality rates in any social strata, or in any age group in late medieval and early modern Sweden, it was very likely that spouses would be separated from each other too early by the grim reaper or that children lost one or both parents before their full age. Nevertheless, life had to go on. Contrary to the statement

made in the song, very often the property left by the deceased was not enough to guarantee a happy life, and there were good grounds for a remarriage whenever a suitable partner was available.³

However, remarriages also brought new problems, and arrangements had to be made in order to protect the interests of children from previous marriages. People were keenly aware of the fact that stepfathers or stepmothers could turn out to be cruel and abusive. While the songs and stories often focused on the cruelty of stepmothers, who only repented when the ghost of the deceased wife was brought back by the tears of her poor children,⁴ the law indicated special concern for the role of the stepfather as a possible usurper over the inheritance of his stepchildren.⁵

This chapter addresses the legal, economic and social consequences of remarriages in late medieval and early modern Sweden (including the area of present day Finland). The chapter focuses on the problems and processes related to the division of inheritance, the rights of the family of the deceased spouse and the relations between the stepparents and stepchildren. Building on my previous studies on medieval and early modern Nordic social history⁶, as sources I will use legislation, court cases, family correspondence, miscellaneous family archives, and contemporary songs. Funerary monuments, genealogies and coats of arms will also serve to enrich the analysis. Most of the sources were written in Swedish, although the legislation, for example, was also translated to Finnish in the sixteenth century. Thus we know, for example, that a step-relation was in Swedish referred to as *styv-* (Sw. *styvmoder*, *styvfader*, *styvson*, *styvdotter*) with an allusion to the family relation being incomplete. The Finnish-speaking population used a word ending *-puoli* ('half') to describe step and half-blood relationships as in *äitipuoli*, *isäpuoli*, *poikapuoli*, *tytärpuoli* for stepmother, stepfather, stepson or half-brother, stepdaughter or half-sister.⁷ In Swedish, the word *halv* or half) was used for children who shared one parent and were thus half-siblings (Sw. *halvsyskon*).

While my focus is on economic arrangements, I will also comment on the emotional bonds where possible. I will pay special attention to the volatile interplay between the judicial, economic and emotional nucleus formed by parents and their children on the one hand, the wider kin of maternal and paternal relatives on the other, with the dynamics of the stepfamily caught in the middle. As children grew up, got married or died, the family, within the household and moving beyond it, was continuously in the process of becoming something else.

The source material of the period is heavily focused on the elites of the time – the nobility and rich merchants. The best documented stepfamilies tend to come from this elite, because literate property holders such as merchants and nobles were more likely to leave traces of their financial activities and social networks. However, where possible, I will also comment on the information available from lower social strata. In the Swedish Realm encompassing parts of present-day Finland, even the elites had a relatively modest living by Western European standards, while the farmer families who constituted the majority of the population had a relatively strong position and had, for example, hereditary ownership rights over their estates. It has to be stressed that the marital strategies of merchants and nobility were not necessarily remote from those practiced by the well-to-do farmer families.

The medieval written, kingdom-wide Land Law (ca. 1351–1734) and Town Law (ca. 1350–1734) of Sweden played an important role in marital arrangements and inheritance strategies because this legislation defined proportions for surviving spouse and children. By contrast, in other European states such as the Low Countries or England, marital contracts or testamentary practices became more prominent over the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. The written law in Sweden did not cover all aspects of the society of the time. Rather, the legislation has to be seen as an incomplete

compilation of guidelines, modified by local practices, customary law and individual arrangements. Nevertheless, the legal framework - the kingdom-wide Land Laws and the Town Law of Sweden - is often referred to or implicitly applied when families rearranged guardianship and the transmission of property, lineal or acquired, from one generation to the next.

While it is important not to have naïve expectations of the coherence of systems of justice in the modern style,⁸ the legislation nevertheless played an important point of reference in the economic, social and even emotional relations of families and stepfamilies. Accordingly, I will first analyze the general conditions of male and female widowhood and remarriage. Secondly, I will go on to discuss the potentially vulnerable position of stepchildren. Thirdly, I will discuss factors that helped to keep the stepfamily together, as a unit of its own. I will end with conclusive observations on the formation and dynamics of stepfamilies in Sweden from the early fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century.

Widowhood and the Marital economy in Sweden, 1400–1650

It is easier to understand Swedish stepfamilies if one knows the legislative context. In late medieval and early modern Sweden, there was a strong tension between the interests of a person's family of birth on the one hand and the interests of the married couple and its offspring on the other. Well into the seventeenth century Swedes thought of kinship in terms of bilaterality with emphasis on the property and relationships brought to the marriage by the bride as well as the groom. Thus the lines of descent and relations established through marriage were considered important, although the male lineage became more dominant during the early modern period. Bilaterality was visible in the name-giving traditions. Children were given Christian names inherited both from the paternal and maternal ancestors. In special circumstances, even coats of arms could be inherited through the

female line.⁹ Inherited landed property was seen as the property of the family line, so if a couple died childless their estates were returned to their families of birth. A wife maintained full ownership rights to any property she might have personally inherited before or during the marriage – only it was under the administrative control of her husband.¹⁰

Given the great importance of bilaterality, the married couple and their offspring were in many ways accountable to two family groups when making important economic arrangements. At the same time, however, it was understood that through marriage the couple and their children were united by special legal, economic and emotional ties. When a stepfamily was formed, then, it was from the very beginning affected by the interests of the surviving spouse's birth family, the deceased spouse's family (former in-laws) and the immediate members of the soon-to-be stepfamily such as children of the previous marriage bed.

Marital law focused on economic consequences – after all, many economic arrangements were at stake: transfer of property, the division or annexation of the property of the married couple, and finally the position of children or relatives as heirs or supporters of their elderly parents. This is why Amy Louise Erickson has suggested the term 'marital economy' best describes the system of the distribution of couple's wealth, the contribution of labour of each partner, and accumulation of property in medieval and early modern societies in the northwest of Europe.¹¹

It was characteristic of the Swedish law that instead of individual marital contracts or testaments, the property of the spouses and their offspring was divided in fixed proportions as defined in *Giftobalken* and *Ärvdabalken*, Chapters for Marriage and Inheritance. Whether one had to divide the accrued property between spouses, an inheritance between the surviving spouse and the offspring, or an inheritance between children, the basic principle for the countryside – the majority

of the population – was that women were entitled to one half of the amount allotted to men. For example, a wife had a right to one third of the accrued property against the two thirds that belonged to her husband or, after his death, to the children. In towns, the division of inheritance was fifty – fifty between male and female heirs.¹²

The one third – two thirds rule and full rights on inherited property applied also in division of inheritance between children in rural areas: a daughter was to inherit one third against the two thirds inherited by a son. If children from different marriages survived their parents, they could inherit from each other, provided that the deceased sibling did not have offspring of her or his own. Full siblings received three-fourths and half-siblings one fourth of the estate of the deceased sibling.¹³ In late medieval and early modern legislation, women inherited both landed property and movables. While the practices could vary and one can easily understand that in an ordinary farmer's household any inherited lot might be very small, the practice of fixed, compulsory proportions was at the core of the marital economy rights during the marriage – and after the marriage ended in death these rights continued into the division of property. The eldest son could buy the proportions of others, when it came to the estate, and other rearrangements could change the way the property was distributed. In the seventeenth century, a system of entail estates (*fidei commissa*) was introduced, with preference for the male line.¹⁴ However, this did not annul the old principle and practice of the fixed proportions and the relatively strong proprietary rights of the offspring and other relatives. For example, only one-tenth of one's inherited (landed) property could be bequeathed away in a testament.¹⁵ A more detailed testamentary legislation only took form in the late seventeenth century.¹⁶ Protecting these rights and compulsory proportions also played an important part when remarriages took place and stepfamilies were formed.

A new marriage – threat or a promise?

As the consequences of widowhood and widowerhood were somewhat different, so were the consequences of remarriage for men and women. For a man, losing a wife could of course be very devastating; nevertheless, becoming a widower did not change his legal status. For a widow, however, losing her husband meant a bigger change. While wives kept their ownership rights to their inherited property through the marriage, they were under the *målsmanskap* of their husbands. *Målsmanskap* was not exactly the same as the guardianship of an unmarried woman, but the husbands were considered the primary representatives of a household in matters related to landed property transactions, legal issues or other settlements outside the household. As a widow, a woman was entitled to administer her own property and to be a guardian of her minor children – preferably aided by her relatives. Even during the marriage, a woman had the potential capacity for representing the household, in cases it was not in conflict with the interests and honour of her husband.¹⁷ When the husband died, a widow became the head of the household – until she remarried.

As a widow, a woman had legal authority over her children and the property of the family, whether she wanted to or not; in a new marriage, however, she was expected to lean on her husband and to subordinate herself to her new spouse. This transition from widow to second-time wife can be clearly seen in the documents, where a widow appears to the court after the death of her husband, takes care of economic arrangements begun by the late husband, and then remarries and is replaced in official documents by her new husband. Depending on the point of view, then, remarriage for a widow meant some loss of legal autonomy, or, on the bright side, re-entering a kind of relationship that offered protection.¹⁸ Some widows explicitly refused to remarry because they did not want to lose their autonomy; this stance seems to imply an awareness of the shortcomings of a new marriage.¹⁹ The Town Law gave somewhat different guidelines, as it left open the possibility that a

woman could remarry yet continue to manage the portion inherited by her children.²⁰ Unfortunately, very little is known about whether this really happened in practice. While townswomen were to some extent more active in business-driven towns, only some such as the wealthy widow Valborg Innama, continued to engage in the family economy and business after remarriage.²¹

For many, a new marriage was not a simple matter of individual choice. It is the generally accepted impression that remarriage was most common in lower social strata, where the labour of a spouse was often in dire need on small farms and where dynastic strategies or lack of suitable spouses were not an obstacle.²² Until the late sixteenth century, noblemen could keep sexual partners or a cohabiting servant without severe legal consequences, reducing the interest of male nobles for new marriages. Because these relationships were extramarital, any illegitimate half-siblings did not belong to the lineage. The children born outside of marriage did not usually interfere with the inheritance of their legitimate brothers and sisters, although some provisions needed to be made for their care. They might live in the same household, but their training and marriages were more modest, so these relations were different from those shared by legitimate half-siblings. In some cases, one can see important emotional ties and mutual support between legitimate and illegitimate children.²³

While legislation, property records and court cases offer justifications for remarriages, the sources are less explicit when it comes to emotional justifications for a new marriage. In contemporary sayings, widowhood was most often presented as a sorrowful phase of life with an emphasis on the vulnerable position of a lonely woman. Widowerhood was also presented as a sorrowful state,²⁴ but it was not considered to dominate a man's life quite in the same way. In seventeenth-century songs, the lonely widow was compared to a turtledove, a bird that was supposed to stay alone to mourn its dead mate.²⁵ However, some letters and autobiographical poems shed light on the emotional

struggles and joys of widowhood and finding a new love. Christina Regina von Birchenbaum, widow of a cavalryman of the Thirty Years War, wrote an autobiographical poem in the mid-seventeenth century in which she contemplated the love and grief that she had felt in her life. It was, of course, an idealized representation of her emotions, but still it offers an example of how people could verbalize widowhood and new love:

Time has been spent in sorrow
 now for nineteen years,
 as I have been a widow
 crying many tears,

But now I find myself changed,
 since two years ago,
 as my heart has been captured
 by a young nobleman

With all my heart
 I've been fond of him,
 I have loved him the deepest I could
 – yes, like my own soul.²⁶

Although the descriptions of emotions are scarce, sometimes when they are referred to they are very intense. In the mid-1590s, nobleman Åke Örnflykt complained to the cathedral chapter of Uppsala that his elderly father Bengt Örnflykt, a widower, led an unchaste life with his housekeeper. The son was equally horrified when the couple, uneven in age and social status, instead of getting

separated, announced plans to marry. A young stepmother of common birth, with the capacity of giving birth to new heirs, was not a happy prospect. The housekeeper of Bengt Örnflykt, however, when summoned to the cathedral chapter, declared that if she and Bengt would be separated, she would either kill herself or follow Bengt wherever he might go. They eventually got married, and Bengt and his sons managed to bring about reconciliation within the family. According to genealogical tables, there was at least one son born in this *mésalliance*.²⁷

Rearranging the family

When a new marriage was decided upon, there were no legal obligations to consult the family, provided that the inherited property had been divided and that the children of the widow or widower had no disputes about it. However, for many it was natural to ask the opinion of their near relatives. In upper social strata, widowers are known to have consulted their relatives in the search for suitable wives who could be considered worthy of the lineage.²⁸ As was seen in the case of Bengt Örnflykt, the family members could also speak their minds on the topic, even protesting to the cathedral court if needed. To protect the rights of inheritance of the stepchildren and their kin before a remarriage, children's proportions of property had to be separated from the surviving parent's estate.²⁹ This process of separating the property was also in the interests of the wider family network, because its members could in certain situations become the heirs of the children.

Remarriage had different consequences for infant, minor and adult stepchildren. An adult child merely faced the nuisance of having to accept a new 'mother' or 'father' and possibly the threat of new heirs to be born. However, infants, minors and unmarried daughters depended on the goodwill of the parent and stepparent. The goodwill of the stepfather was viewed with particularly doubtful eyes, for example, the Land Law warned against letting a stepfather sleep in the same bed with little stepchildren. According to the Land Law, it was understandable that a mother sometimes

accidentally suffocated her child when sleeping together, and thus, if this kind of accident happened, a mother could still inherit from the dead child. However, more doubts were directed against a stepfather: ‘a mother must be careful not to put her child to bed with its stepfather. [When] a child dies on the side of its stepfather if so happens, the mother loses her inheritance’.³⁰ For older stepdaughters, there were some tragic cases of sexual assaults by the stepfather, known from the upper social strata, although the cases of abuse were silenced and charges dropped.³¹

The wider family network was often activated upon remarriage. Although it is not explicitly stipulated in the law, in practice it seems that when a noble widow remarried, the inherited property of minor children was often transferred to the administration of the paternal relatives, although the children might live with their mother. In other words, although the mother of the children was still alive, if she remarried the same principle was followed as when both parents had died: a close male relative was found to represent the interests of the children. As the mother was expected to obey her new husband, her capacity to protect the interests of her own children could be questioned.

According to the law, a relative other than the father or mother was expected to give a yearly report about the property and income belonging to the children.³² The guardian was expected to take care of the property for the benefit of the minor. Any alienation of a child’s inherited landed property could be invalidated after the minor had grown up or, in the case of daughters, married.³³

Lady Lucia Skälge, likely born in the early 1420s, was one of the fatherless children whose paternal family took on her guardianship when her widowed mother decided to remarry. Lucia belonged to a notable family, apparently with origins in a wealthy fifteenth-century merchant family.³⁴ When her mother remarried, Lucia’s inherited property was placed under the guardianship of Henrik Svärd, who was her relative, probably a paternal cousin, and a counsellor of the King. According to her own report, Lucia even lived in the home of her father’s relatives, and she was married to her

guardian's brother-in-law. Svärd only had the right to manage Lucia's inherited property and to protect her interests. This became necessary, for example, when Lucia's stepfather pawned an inherited estate of his wife, in order to get some ready money. The estate was later redeemed by Henrik Svärd, and purchased by Lucia's bridegroom (Svärd's brother-in-law) to her again.³⁵ The recovery of the estate can be seen as part of the strategy of keeping the family wealth in a small family group with mutual interests.

In practice, it seems that other guardians, paternal or maternal, were not automatically to be trusted much more than the stepfathers. Court cases offer many examples of close relatives who usurped the property of their wards.³⁶ Noble Anna Fleming (ca. 1563 – d. before 1608), born from a marriage between a nobleman Joakim Fleming and Agda, a merchant's daughter. Agda had been the mistress of King Eric XIV of Sweden, and her marriage into the Fleming family became a source of shame. Their daughter Anna was taken care of by her uncle, admiral Klas Fleming (d. 1597). However, it seems that her guardian uncle was more interested in her inherited property than her well-being. Despite his promises to 'take care of her as if I was her father and not just an uncle'³⁷ – an expression that in itself shows the awareness of the difference – he used Anna Fleming's possessions as if they were his own, without keeping the required accounts of the annual income of her landed property.³⁸ Other examples of guardians³⁹ seem to suggest that children who were to be saved from the despotism of a stepfather might end up having their rights infringed by their own kin. While the system of guardianship claimed to protect the interests of minors, their property easily became a tool in the hands of unscrupulous male relatives; and although the defect was well known, little was done to fix it.⁴⁰

Even the relations between the stepmother and stepchildren could be tense. Sources reveal bitter inheritance disputes between widowed stepmothers and their stepchildren, especially because

remarriage patterns show that a stepmother was likely to be younger than her husband and often closer to the age of her new stepchildren.⁴¹ However, in comparison to the potential abuses of a stepfather, the stepmother was usually seen as only a minor threat to the immediate wellbeing of her stepchildren or perhaps even a positive presence. At least in noble families it seems that while children of a widower might have been sent to female relatives to be nursed and brought up, once their father remarried, the children were brought back to their father's household to be educated and taken care of by the stepmother.

We can trace the life trajectories of marriage remarriage, orphanhood, and the residence of children in several *personalia* – a separate part of the Protestant funeral sermon describing the life of the deceased from birth and family background to the circumstances of death – written about a group of noblewomen who suffered a shipwreck and drowned in 1651 off Stockholm.⁴² In the core of the group was the noble Elena Bielke, then aged 59. Elena, childless and twice a widow, had been taking care of her stepchildren, the children from one of the previous marriages of her late husband, Admiral Klas Fleming (d. 1644). At the time of shipwreck, Elena was in the company of her unmarried stepdaughter Anna, as well as the wife of her stepson, and two of their daughters, and yet another orphaned girl, Märta Silfversparre, who was the cousin of Elena's stepchildren. When the first wife of Klas Fleming died, the widower sent his daughter Anna to the family of her cousin, the aforementioned Märta Silfversparre. Anna returned to her father's household when Klas Fleming married her stepmother Elena and it seems the young adult stepdaughter continued under 'her highly esteemed stepmother's motherly care', (Sw. *hennes högtärade Styvmoders Moderliga åhåga*) after the death of her father. Later, when the parents of Märta Silfversparre died, she too, came to stay at Klas Fleming's and later Elena Bielke's household.⁴³

Among the nobility, sending girls out to female relatives was a common practice reflecting the importance of female guidance. The children themselves might, of course, feel differently about it. The Baroness Agneta Horn (1628–1672) recorded the hard-handed treatment that she experienced as a child and a teenager from both servants and female relatives. When her father remarried, she felt neglected and shunned by her stepmother. According to her memoirs, nothing could replace the tender care of her own mother, the way she remembered it from her early childhood.⁴⁴ Other sources do not precisely confirm the picture painted by Agneta Horn thus the tone of her memoirs was probably affected by the dispute over inheritance between Agneta, her stepmother and her stepsiblings.⁴⁵

One big family, nevertheless?

While the legislation and most detailed legal cases often report suspicions and conflicts, it is important to take into account that good stepfamily relations tend to leave less documentation. However, the documents also show stepparents taking care of the property and hereditary rights of their stepchildren, and vice versa – adult stepchildren defending their stepparents' claims for inheritance at local courts. This is especially documented in towns and is understandable given the fact that in many cases, members of merchant families were living in different towns around the Baltic Sea, and needed each other's help in taking care of their interests in other towns.⁴⁶ Therefore, For example, in the 1420s Thorer Petersson left the town of Turku to Tallinn (then Reval) to claim the inheritance of his stepson Andreas from his paternal grandmother. Andreas, the stepson, was in Flanders and could not travel to Tallinn.⁴⁷

While the legislation made it clear that the property of stepparents and stepchildren should be kept apart, some cultural and symbolic practices such as name-giving and forms of addressing suggest a more inclusive concept of family and kin that helped create cohesion in blending a stepfamily

together. The Nordic medieval and early modern name-giving tradition put emphasis on the continuity of the family, hence children were often given the names of their deceased grandparents and grand-grandparents – from the paternal and maternal sides alike. As the genealogies are often deficient and there is not sufficient information about all children, their names or their year of birth, it is difficult to say how systematic the arrangement was. Nevertheless, in many families, one can see a relatively strong pattern of giving the names of grandparents to the grandchildren.

An interesting exception occurs in cases of remarriage for the benefit of joining the members of a stepfamily together: The first daughter of a remarried widower was named after the deceased wife, and the first son of a remarried widow was named after the deceased husband. In the same vein, a son or a daughter whose mother had died in childbirth was often given the name of the deceased parent. Thus, for example, when Johan Fleming (d. after 1517) was joined in marriage with his second wife (whose name is not certain), their son was called Peder Fleming after the previous spouse of the new wife. Later, when Johan's daughter, Birgitta Fleming (d. before or in 1570) became a widow after the death of her first husband Magnus Balk (d. after 1528), she remarried Torsten Ram (d. ca. 1550). Birgitta named the son of her second marriage Magnus, a name that does not seem to have appeared in the family lines of his parents. Some researchers have made a connection between the practice of name-giving and possible earlier beliefs in transmigration of souls, while others have rather seen it as a way of honouring the deceased family members.⁴⁸ Whatever the origins of the practice, it created a bond between the former spouse and the first-born of the new spouse as well as any brothers and sisters from the previous marriage who were suddenly welcoming a new half-sibling as well as adjusting to a stepparent. Naming practices suggest that the memory of the deceased spouse lived on in the stepfamily.

Another way of creating cohesion within a stepfamily was through forms of address that underlined close family ties. Notions of sisterhood and brotherhood or paternal and maternal relations were not limited to biological or genealogical terms.⁴⁹ It was customary in contemporary correspondence to address mothers, stepmothers and mothers-in-law as 'Dear Mother', and stepchildren as 'dear children', as is apparent in the correspondence of the Vasa family.⁵⁰ For example, when Harald and Anna, people of low nobility at Germundö estate on the Åland Isles, gave a document on the inheritance of their children, both the daughters born in their marriage and the one born in Anna's first marriage were addressed as 'our dear daughter' (Sw. *vår kära dotter*).⁵¹ Likewise, when noble Birgitta Tre Rosor in 1561 agreed on a division of inheritance with the children of her stepsister, her action towards the step-nieces was described as 'sisterly goodwill' (Sw. *systerlig god benägenhet*).⁵² Sisterly and brotherly terms, supported by notions of friendship, implied a closeness that was associated both with family relationships and with people who shared a relatively similar, if not entirely equal, social status: noble 'sisters' or 'brothers' were all well-born, even though some of them may have had a higher status than others. This practice was also known at least in merchant and cleric families and families of civil servants. The use of nuclear family terms as synonyms for other near relations in the society often means that a researcher has to be very careful when trying to find out whether people in question were united by ties of consanguinity, by marriage as in-laws or step relations - or were social peers.⁵³

The significance of the same social status for the choice of rhetoric is illustrated by the fact that while stepbrothers and stepsisters as well as in-laws were included among the sisters and brothers, children of illegitimate birth were excluded from the sisterly and brotherly networks. Even if the illegitimate children had been acknowledged by their noble fathers, they were not referred to as 'sisters' or 'brothers' by their legitimate half-sisters or half-brothers. Rather, they were merely accepted as trusted servants of the household.⁵⁴

The phases of family to stepfamily from the elite to the middling classes can be traced in funerary monuments, epitaph paintings or the composition of coats of arms in churches across Sweden and present day Finland. The monument for the grave of King Gustavus I presented two of his wives side-by-side with him, while the childless third marriage and the Queen Dowager were omitted. In the stained glass window at the church of Askainen in present day Western Finland, noble Klas Hermansson Fleming (d. 1616) had his coats of arms represented in the window along with the coats of arms of his both wives. Later on, his son Henrik Fleming donated some pulpits for local churches adorned with the coats of arms of his two wives, although, his epitaph and tomb only present his first wife and the offspring from the first marriage.⁵⁵

Among the few surviving portraits of the early modern period, one can observe a tendency to include the entire family group, living and dead, in these epitaphs for a church setting. Epitaphs illustrating the family connections had become common in Western Europe already in the fifteenth century, although these commemorative portraits were a new phenomenon in early seventeenth-century Sweden.⁵⁶ Depicting first and second wives and the children from the respective marriages in Swedish family portraits seems to have gained popularity during the latter part of the seventeenth century. More unusually, the epitaph of Kirsten Jensdotter in 1668 [figure 1.x] displays her successive husbands with the children of the first and second marriages beside each father.⁵⁷ As Tuija Tuhkanen has noted for Sweden and Lyndan Warner for elsewhere in Europe, in the visual representations even after the Reformation the dead had a place among the living, although the connection between life and the hereafter had changed in the shift from Catholicism.⁵⁸ This way of portraying the family by showing all its phases in one view has been referred to as ‘family fiction’, because the epitaphs and other family portraits present a family in a form that had never existed.⁵⁹ Information in epitaphs is not always easy to interpret. In several cases, there is no certain

information about the identity of the family members, nor is there a central figure to anchor the family, so it is unclear if the main figures represent consecutive spouses or several couples – siblings with their spouses.⁶⁰

Even more epitaph portraits depicting successive wives and children within a blended family are preserved from the latter half of the seventeenth century.⁶¹ The presentations of family were even updated, for example, with a cross to mark the family members who had died, or to insert the portrait of a new second wife and stepmother. A pair of seventeenth-century epitaphs, originally located in Lohtaja Church, Ostrobothnia, depict two generations of the Granberg family. The earlier painting presents the Minister (Sw. *kyrkoherde*) Laurentius Matthiae Granberg (1582-1637) with his family, the later portrait depicting his son Ericus Laurentii Granberg (1620-1687), likewise a Minister in the Lohtaja parish. In Ericus' epitaph his first wife Elisabet (1630-1673) and his second wife Susanna (b. 1645, married in 1674) are presented side by side. It appears that Susanna's picture has been added at a later date. The painting identifies each family member with every name carefully noted in vertical lines above each figure. The sons are presented on the left in two rows, while the daughters stand in one row on the right side of the cross. On both the male and female sides of the epitaph portrait some names appear twice (Laurentius, Ericus, Beata), which indicates that the first bearer of the name had died.

<Insert Figure 3.1 Ericus Granberg family epitaph, 1670. Painting on wood, 182 x 130 cm. National Board of Antiquities, Finland. Photo: National Board of Antiquities.

The epitaph allows the viewer to follow the practice of inheriting of first names from one generation to another such as the sons named Laurentius after their paternal grandfather. While a detailed genealogy does not survive, the names of the sons seem to indicate that the boys in the first row

were likely to have been born in the first marriage. The second last son in the first row, Gustavus, is mentioned having been born in 1656, when Elisabet was still alive. On the left side, the last and presumably youngest son on the first row has been given the name Joseph - the name of the first wife's father. In the second row, following the logic of namegiving, at least the three sons on the left have been born in the second marriage because two sons, for example, were named Nicolaus – the name of the second wife's father. Thus, at least the two Nicolaus and one Henrik between them could be the offspring of Laurentius and Susanna. Both Joseph and Nicolaus are names that have previously been alien to the Granberg family. More specific to stepfamily cohesion and the continuities from the first family to the remarriage, the first wife Elisabet, seems to be followed by one daughter (second from right) with a variation (Elsa) on the name Elisabeth, thus the daughter could be the namesake of the first wife.

<Insert Figure 3.2 Gregorius Clementis Finno family epitaph, 1640. Painting on wood. 133 x 122 cm. Rauma Church. Photo: Art historian, PhD Tuija Tuhkanen. >

The epitaph of Gregorius Clementis Finno (1538-1639), painted in 1640, presents the Minister of the Town of Rauma (kneeling closest to the cross), his two wives Karin (d. 1614), and Elisabet (d. 1665), and the children born of the two marriages. The painting was commissioned by Carl (Carolus) Finno, organist and alderman, a son from the first marriage bed: he is supposedly the man pictured next to Gregorius Clementis. Tuija Tuhkanen has suggested that including the deceased and living family members placed an emphasis on the life course of the male head of the household at the center of the family relations.⁶² These portraits provided a way for a priest to present himself and his family as an example of pious family life on the show in the church. Thus the prominent display of stepfamilies and half-siblings makes these epitaphs of particular interest as a promoted or respectable model of the Nordic family in the 1600s.

Conclusions

In late medieval and early modern Sweden, notions of stepfamilies were rich with many kinds of fears and expectations. While consanguinity or family blood lines were given a special meaning in legal, economic and emotional terms, stepfathers, stepmothers and stepchildren were placed somewhere in between mothers, fathers, siblings and more distant kin. Rhetorically, in letters, they could be referred to and especially addressed to with same kind of forms as blood relatives or close in-laws. In epitaphs and compositions of coats of arms half-siblings could exist side-by-side in a same group. In legal terms, however, stepfamily members were kept apart. The interests of the wider kin group in enforcing the bilateral rights of mother and father to inherited property created a special tension in the economic management of the property that belonged to members of the stepfamily. While in practice the maternal and paternal relatives assigned guardianship could end up being as abusive as stepparents or worse, the traditions of bilateral kinship gave preference to these blood ties instead of allowing the merging of the stepfamily into a more cohesive unit.

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² ‘hustrwn tager en annan mann / then thw aldrigh tänchte / alt tedh godha brwkar han / som thw henne skänchte // Barnen som tich wåro kär / taga guldit rödha / – glädhas ok medh them glader är / vtan sorgh ok mödha / aff titt godz och peningar / haffwa the sin födho’. Song (in Swedish) ‘Om werldenes ostadighedh’, Stjerneldska handskriften, UUB E133; in Adolf Noreen and Anders Grape, eds., *1500- och 1600-talens visböcker*, vol. 3 (Uppsala: Akademiska boktryckeriet Edv. Berling, 1916–1925), 115–117.

³ Johanna Andersson Raeder, *Hellre hustru än änka. Äktenskapets ekonomiska betydelse för frälsekvinnor i senmedeltidens Sverige* (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 2011).

⁴ See, for example, Adolf Noreen and J. A. Lundell, eds, *1500- och 1600-talens visböcker*, vol. 2 (Uppsala: Akademiska boktryckeriet Edv. Berling, 1900–1915), 285–286, 288–289; Marko Lamberg, *Päätön ritari. Kauhutarinoita keskiajalta* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura, 2013), 199–203.

⁵ *Giftobalken*, Sections 15–21 (‘Chapter on Marriage’), and *Ärvdabalken* (‘Chapter on Inheritance’), King Christofer’s Land Law (1442). I have used the relevant Land Law and Town Law legislation available in modern editions: *Magnus Erikssons landslag i nusvensk tolkning* [King Magnus Eriksson’s Land Law, mid-fourteenth century to 1734], trans. and ed. Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén (Lund: Institutet för rätthistorisk forskning, 1962); *Magnus Erikssons stadslag i nusvensk tolkning* [King Magnus Eriksson’s Town Law, mid-fourteenth century to 1734], trans. and ed. Åke Holmbäck & Elias Wessén (Lund: Institutet för rätthistorisk forskning 1966); *Kuningas Kristoferin maanlaki 1442* [King Christofer’s Land Law, amended version of the previous Land Law, 1442–1734], trans. and ed. Martti Ulkuniemi (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1978).

⁶ Anu Lahtinen, *Anpassning, förhandling, motstånd. Kvinnliga aktörer i släkten Fleming 1470–1620*, (Helsingfors – Stockholm: Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland – Bokförlaget Atlantis, 2009); Anu Lahtinen, ‘The Marriage Process in the Light of Family Correspondence: A Comparative Perspective on the Swedish Evidence’, in Mia Korpiola, ed., *Regional Variations in Matrimonial Law and Custom in Europe, 1150–1600* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 251–73; Anu Lahtinen, ‘Prolonged Noble Property Disputes in the Svea Court of Appeal: Case Studies from the Early Years’, in Mia Korpiola ed., *The Svea Court of Appeal in the Early Modern Period: Historical Reinterpretations and New Perspectives* (Stockholm: Institutet för rätthistorisk forskning, 2014), 124–53.

⁷ See the Finnish sixteenth-century translation of the Land Law, *Talonpoikain laki. Kuningas Kristofferin maanlain suomennos (1442) Caloniuksen kopion mukaisena*, ed. Esko Koivusalo (Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura, 2005), 54–55.

⁸ About the varying practices of the legal system during the period see Mia Korpiola, ‘General Background: From Judicial Crisis to Judicial Revolution through the Svea Court of Appeal?’, in Korpiola ed., *Svea Court*, 23–47.

⁹ Anu Lahtinen, ‘“A knight from Flanders”. Noble Migration and Integration in the North in the Late Middle Ages’, in Ann Katherine Isaacs & Hálfdanarson Guðmundur, eds, *Immigration and Emigration in Historical Perspective* (Pisa University Press, 2007) 79–92, 84–86; Andersson Raeder, *Hellre hustru än änka*, 56–57.

¹⁰ MEL, *Giftobalken*, sections 9–10; MEST, *Giftobalken*, sections 8–9; KrL, *Giftobalken*, sections 9–10.

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- ¹¹ Amy Louise Erickson, 'The Marital Economy in Comparative Perspective', in Maria Ågren and Amy Louise Erickson, eds. *The Marital Economy in Scandinavia and Britain 1400–1900* (Hants: Ashgate, 2005), 4–5.
- ¹² MEST, *Giftobalken*, section 5; *Ärdvabalken*, sections 1–2, 9–10.
- ¹³ MEL, *Ärvidabalken*, section 8; MEST, *Ärvidabalken*, section 7; KrL, *Ärvidabalken*, section 9.
- ¹⁴ Lahtinen, *Anpassning*, 132–33.
- ¹⁵ Kyrkobalken [Chapter on the Church] in Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén, eds, *Upplandslagen* [Law of Uppland], (Uppsala, 1933), 23.
- ¹⁶ Elsa Trolle Önnerfors, *Justitia et Prudentia: Rättsbildning genom rättstillämpning: Svea hovrätt och testamentsmålen 1640–1690* (Stockholm: Institutet för rätthistorisk forskning, 2014), 194–95.
- ¹⁷ Lahtinen, *Anpassning*, 24–33, 46–50, 62–78.
- ¹⁸ Anu Lahtinen, 'Gender and Continuity: Women, Men and Landed Property in Medieval Finland', in Anu Lahtinen and Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen, eds, *History and Change*, (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2004), 32–43, 39–41.
- ¹⁹ Jan Samuelson, 'En god och förnuftig matmoder. Adelskvinnor under stormaktsväldet', in Eva Österberg, ed., *Jämmerdal och fröjdesal. Kvinnor i stormaktstidens Sverige* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 1997), 287–304, 289, 299.
- ²⁰ MEST, *Giftobalken*, section 11.
- ²¹ Aulis Oja 'Valpuri Innamaa. 'Turkulainen suurporvari 1500-luvulla'', *Varsinais-Suomen Maakuntakirja* 6 (1937), 94–110; Anu Lahtinen, 'Is she that special? The Long History of Business Women as Unlikely Heroic Entrepreneurs', in Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen and Jarna Heinonen, eds, *Women in Business Families: From Past to Present*, forthcoming 2017.
- ²² David Gaunt, *Familjeliv i Norden* (Malmö: Gidlunds, 1983), 174–85.
- ²³ On legitimate and illegitimate half-siblings in this *Stepfamilies* collection, see ch. 4 by Anna Bellavitis on early modern Venice and ch. 5 by Grace Coolidge on the early modern Spanish nobility; Lahtinen, *Anpassning*, 194–201; Mia Korpiola, '"Kyrkotukt för hela folket: hertig Gustafs av Saxen 'horerij' och luthersk kyrkodisciplin i Sverige på 1500- och 1600-talen', in Jukka Kekkonen, et al., eds, *Norden, rätten, historia. Festskrift till Lars Björne* (Helsinki: Suomalainen lakimiesyhdistys, 2004), 65–99.
- ²⁴ The painting presenting Gabriel Kurck in his widowerhood (ca. 1680), see Liisa Lagerstam, *A Noble Life. The Cultural Biography of Gabriel Kurck (1630-1712)* (Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 2007), 196–201.
- ²⁵ Noreen and Grape, eds, *1500- och 1600-*, 3:194; word 'turturduva', *Svenska Akademiens ordbok* (Lund: Svenska Akademiens ordboksredaktion, 1883–) <http://www.saob.se/> (accessed 10 July 2016).

²⁶ ‘Alt i then sorg förflutit, / haa nu fult nitton år, / som iagh een änckiä sutit, / och fält mång modigh tåår, / -- Behändt iag dock befinner, / nu för tu år igen, / mit hiärta öffwervinner, / een ädel vngerswän, / -- / Innerst aff hiärtansz grunde, / iag honom vnte wäll, / thet högsta som iag kundhe, / ia som min egen siäl’, Noreen and Grape, eds, *1500- och 1600-*, 3: 190, 193.

²⁷ The case of Bengt Örnflycht, 28 May 1595, 11 September 1595, 23 September 1595, 2 March 1596, 15 September 1596, Uppsala domkapitlets protokoll 1593–1608, Uppsala domkapitels arkiv A I:1, Landsarkivet i Uppsala. I would like to thank professor Mia Korpiola for pointing out the case to me. About the family Örnflycht, see Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor med tillägg och rättelser I-IX* (Stockholm: Kungliga boktryckeriet P.A. Norstedt & Söners Förlag, 1925–1936), 219–20.

²⁸ Tönne Eriksson (Tott)’s letter to Axel Eriksson Bielke, dated ‘Väsby S. Peders afton’ 1557, Adliga ätten Bielke vol. 1, Bielkesamlingen E 1985, National Archives of Sweden (hereafter NAS).

²⁹ MEL, *Giftobalken*, sections 16–17; MEST, *Giftobalken*, sections 12–13; KrL, *Giftobalken*, sections 16–17.

³⁰ KrL, *Ärvdabalken*, section 12, 2§. Similar statute is given earlier in MEL, *Edsöresbalken*, section 34. If an infant (or a child of any age without offspring) died after its father had died, the surviving mother would usually inherit from the child, including its paternal inheritance.

³¹ *Diplomatarium Fennicum* (DF) (Helsinki: National Archives of Finland, 2016), document number 4527.

<http://df.narc.fi> (accessed 10 July 2016); John E. Roos, ed., *Iivar Flemingin maakirja – Ivar Flemings jordebok* (Helsinki: Valtionarkisto, 1958), 31.

³² MEL, *Giftobalken*, sections 21–22; MEST, *Giftobalken*, sections 15–16; KrL, *Giftobalken*, sections 20–21.

³³ KrL, *Jordabalken*, section 18.

³⁴ Birgit Klockars, *I Nådens dal. Klosterfolk och andra c. 1440 – 1590* (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1979), 99.

³⁵ DF 3494, 3658; Kaarlo Blomstedt, ‘Horn-suvun alkuhistoria. Piirteitä Suomen aateliston oloista keskiajan loppupuolella’, *Historiallinen arkisto* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1918), 83.

³⁶ Mia Korpiola, *Between Betrothal and Bedding: Marriage Formation in Sweden 1200–1600* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 175–79, 294–96; Lahtinen, ‘Prolonged Noble Property Disputes’, 124–53.

³⁷ Klaus Fleming to Duke Charles, 26 May 1595, Kopiokirja 1592–1601 (‘Gottlundska kopieboken’), National Archives of Finland (hereafter NAF), 70, 42–44.

³⁸ Lahtinen, *Anpassning*, 176–177.

³⁹ Lahtinen, ‘Prolonged Noble Property Disputes’, 124–153.

⁴⁰ Korpiola, *Between Betrothal*, 175–179, 294–296.

⁴¹ Andersson Raeder, *Hellre hustru än änka*, 61–62, 78–87, 137–138, in the English summary 144–45.

⁴² About *personalia* see Volker Leppin, ‘Preparing for Death. From the Late Medieval *ars moriendi* to the Lutheran Funeral Sermon’, in Tarald Rasmussen and Jon Øygarden Flaeten, eds, *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 9–23.

⁴³ See *personalia* of the members of the Fleming family in Skoklostersamlingen I: 74, NAS; Olavus Laurelius, *Christelighe Lijkpredikningar* (Västerås, 1656), 196–203 (page numbers according to those written in the margins of the copy preserved at the Royal Library of Sweden); Elgenstierna, *Svenska adelns*, II, 740, 743; Elgenstierna, *Svenska adelns*, VII, 210–211.

⁴⁴ Agneta Horn, *Agneta Horns leverne* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag AB, 1961).

⁴⁵ Eva Hættner Aurelius, ‘Inför faderns lag. Om Agneta Horn’, in Elisabeth Møller Jensen, et al., eds, *I Guds namn. Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria 1000–1800* (Höganäs: Förlags AB Wiken, 1993), 267–276.

⁴⁶ DF 1424, 1866, 1867, 1892, 2079, 2248, 3412, 3598, 3810, 3882, 3883, 3924, 4155, 4443, 4668.

⁴⁷ DF 1866.

⁴⁸ Astrid Sondén, ‘Den bundna namngivningen’, *Släkt och hävd* 2 (1959): 270–273; Lahtinen, *Anpassning*, Appendices (*Bilagor*) 1–6.

⁴⁹ Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender & Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 207–208.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Queen Dowager Katarina to Countess Cecilia Stenbock, 4 December 1597, Skoklostersamlingen II:5, NAS; Duke Charles to Queen Dowager Katarina, Nyköping 1 November 1599, Hertig Karls Registratur, NAS; Lahtinen, *Anpassning*, 119–129.

⁵¹ Reinhold Hausen, ‘Germundö säteri och dess ägare’, in *Åland* 7 (1926), 26–27.

⁵² Confirmation of the 1561 agreement, dated 14 Feb 1575, filed in the volume of Lars Fleming, Biografica, NAS.

⁵³ See the collection of Henrik Henriksson Kupiainen, Biografica, NAF; discussion on the wider practice, Anu Lahtinen, ‘“There’s No Friend like a Sister”: Sisterly Relations and the Rhetoric of Sisterhood in the Correspondence of the Aristocratic Stenbock Sisters’, in Anu Korhonen and Kate Lowe, eds, *The Trouble with Ribs: Women, Men and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, (Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 2007), 180–203, 186–189; Lahtinen, *Anpassning*, 119–127.

⁵⁴ Lahtinen, *Anpassning*, 194–201.

⁵⁵ Tuija Tuhkanen, *Kirkon kaunistukseksi ja lahjoittajan kunniaksi. Henrik Flemingin lahjoitukset Suomen kirkoissa* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura, 2008).

⁵⁶ Tuija Tuhkanen, '*In memoriam sui et suorum posuit*': *Lahjoittajien muistokuvat Suomen kirkoissa 1400-luvulta 1700-luvun lopulle* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 2005), 174; Peter Gillgren, *Gåva och själ. Epitafiemåleriet under stormakstiden* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 1995), 139–141; Karin Sidén, 'Familjeporträtt i 1600-talets Sverige', in Görvel Cavalli-Björkman *et al.*, eds. *Ansikte mot ansikte. Porträtt från fem sekel*. (Nationalmuseum – Bokförlaget Atlantis, 2001), 59–62. Lyndan Warner has discussed the relatively rare appearances of husbands, see Lyndan Warner, 'Remembering the Mother, Presenting the Stepmother: Portraits of the Early Modern Family in Northern Europe', *Early Modern Women. An Interdisciplinary Journal* (6) 2011: 93–125, 103.

⁵⁷ For further discussion of this epitaph painting see, Lyndan Warner, Introduction, 000-000, figure 1.x; Warner, Visual Culture, 000.

⁵⁸ Tuhkanen, '*In memoriam*', 216–230; Warner, 'Remembering the Mother', 101.

⁵⁹ Warner, 'Remembering the Mother', 104, 106.

⁶⁰ Tuhkanen, '*In memoriam*', 172–178, 232, 240–242, 248–250, Tuhkanen, 'Pyhän Ristin kirkon epitafit', 204–217.

⁶¹ Tuhkanen, '*In memoriam*', 224–232, 241.

⁶² Tuhkanen, '*In memoriam*', 174, 236–242; Tuija Tuhkanen, 'Pyhän Ristin kirkon epitafit', in Anu Lahtinen and Miia Ijäs, eds, *Risti ja lounatuuli. Rauman seurakunnan historia keskiajalta vuoteen 1640* (Rauma & Helsinki: Rauman seurakunta & Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura, 2015), 210–213.