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Philosophical Diplomats, Enlightened Physicians and Learned Merchants – Multiple Roles and Competing Practices in Eighteenth-Century Scandinavia

Sophie Holm & Charlotta Wolff

The eighteenth century, the latter half in particular, was a deeply formative period for science and rational world views in Sweden, a country that ceased to be an academic periphery and rapidly caught up with the scientific and literary communities on the European continent. The natural sciences were particularly appreciated for their public utility. It was an era of remarkable and rapid change in medicine, a discipline that became highly relevant also for the societal ideals and political projects of the Enlightenment. Within the sphere of diplomacy, the eighteenth century was, likewise, a transitional period during which the strong early-modern imbrication of a diplomat's public and private roles was weakened, and these tended to diverge. As for merchants in the northern Baltic, the end of the century marked the beginning of industrialisation, which emphasised the need for technological and scientific knowledge amongst businessmen and investors.¹

The studies in this chapter originate in the Academy of Finland research project (2017–2021) “Agents of Enlightenment. Changing the Minds in Eighteenth-Century Northern Europe” which addresses the reception and effects of the Enlightenment in Scandinavia and the northern Baltic area between 1740 and 1810. Emphasising the individuals and practices behind intellectual change, the project shows that concepts and issues commonly associated with the Enlightenment were much more than discursive constructions. The spread of new information, such as radical philosophy and new scientific knowledge, brought with it expectations of new practices in most spheres of the society.² These expectations and practices often conflicted with traditional role models and representations, sometimes with private interests and often with

¹ On the “scientific” eighteenth century in Sweden, see Sten Lindroth: *Svensk lärdoms historia. Frihetstiden*. Stockholm 1975; Tore Frängsmyr: *Svensk idehistoria. Bildning och vetenskap under tusen år. Del I 1000–1809*. Stockholm 2004, pp. 185–354; Mathias Persson: *Det villrådiga samhället. Kungliga Vetenskapsakademiens politiska och ekonomiska ideologi, 1739–1792*. Lund 2020; Jacob Orrje, “The Logistics of the Republic of Letters: Mercantile Undercurrents of Early Modern Scholarly Knowledge Circulation.” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 53, no. 3 (2020), pp. 351–369; on diplomacy, Hillard von Thiessen: *Diplomatie vom type ancien. Überlegungen zu einem Idealtypus des frühneuzeitlichen Gesandtschaftswesens*. In: Hillard von Thiessen / Christian Windler (eds.): *Akteure der Außenbeziehungen. Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im historischen Wandel*. Köln / Wien 2010, pp. 471–503.

² On the paradigmatic significance of the Enlightenment, see Dan Edelstein: *The Enlightenment. A Genealogy*. Chicago / London 2010, pp. 7–23; Anthony Pagden: *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters*. Oxford 2013; Stéphane Van Damme: *À toutes voiles vers la vérité. Une autre histoire de la philosophie au temps des Lumières*. Paris 2014; Antoine Lilti: *L'héritage des Lumières. Ambivalences de la modernité*. Paris 2019.

other social obligations. The agents targeted here are diplomats as transmitters of new knowledge and publications, physicians and healthcare professionals as representatives of science, civil servants in charge of new administrative practices, and merchants and tradesmen with important information networks and a keen interest in new ideas and literature. All of these groups were end-users of scientific, political and economic literature.

In her contribution, Elina Maaniitty discusses the conflicts inherent to physicians' various roles in Sweden. In the eighteenth century, the societal significance of medicine increased. Medical professionals became prominent figures that took part in public discussions on society and science. This led to medicine being seen as an essential field and physicians as people who fought epidemics with instruments and treatments as well as writings, speeches and instructions. The new status of medical expertise at the intersection of public discourse, scientific debates and administrative agendas presented physicians with an array of duties, possibilities and roles they had not had in the previous century.

Ulla Ijäs examines another group of early-modern professionals, namely merchants. Her case study looks at the literary dealings of Johan Siegfried Ignatius (1749–1831), a merchant and Danish consul in Wiborg (today Russian Vyborg), and his business partner, Bremen-born Prussian consul Johann Friedrich Hackman (1755–1807). Ignatius possessed a significant library containing about one hundred volumes of dictionaries, guidebooks for merchants, history books and legal literature. Similar books were found in Hackman's library. Alongside correspondence, printed publications were the main channels of information in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; hence, they were competitive tools. By studying the merchants' books, Ijäs traces the learned and informed merchant community, i.e. the network that transmitted information and knowledge, and discusses how this circulation of information was related to business competition.

By looking at two officials, Count Gustav Philip Creutz (1731–1785) and Gustaf Johan Ehrensvärd (1746–1783), who shared a lively interest in Enlightenment philosophy and both worked as Swedish diplomatic agents on the European continent, Charlotta Wolff examines the extent to which philosophical emancipation and radical world views conflicted with the duties of the public office. Competition here is between private and public, between pleasure and duty, and between intellectual liberty and the exercise of authority when representing the Swedish monarchy.

The intersections between a diplomat's public and private figures are also the topic of Sophie Holm's study on the criticism of Johann Albrecht von Korff's (1697–1766) actions as a Russian diplomat to the Swedish court in the 1740s. Von Korff was a freethinker and

bibliophile who had been the president of the Russian Academy of Science before his diplomatic assignments. For most of his career, he served as a diplomat in Copenhagen, where he successfully conducted a social life gravitating around freemasonry. In Stockholm, where he served for a shorter amount of time, he was criticised for his use of diplomatic methods, which targeted a broader audience. By showing that von Korff participated in activities which became common practices a couple of decades later, Holm argues that the critique emanated partly from a conflict between early-modern diplomatic norms and emerging practices within eighteenth-century diplomacy.

The four studies presented in this section highlight *Konkurrenz* both as competition and co-existence. A co-existence of parallel, equally important roles amongst civil servants is illustrated in Maaniitty's study of Swedish physicians. Maaniitty argues that the new status of medical science, with its new duties and roles, resulted in physicians encountering more diverse expectations. The new roles and expectations could prove troublesome to combine, which added to the already ethically and emotionally demanding nature of the profession. Physicians were increasingly expected to act as mediators of knowledge, and several medical books aimed at the general public were published. Another role with growing importance was that of a scientist. Being an expert became an increasingly significant aspect of the physician's professional identity.

Parallel roles had the potential of creating micro-conflicts. Wolff and Holm highlight diplomats with potentially conflicting private and public profiles. In Creutz's case, the tension between a personal interest for philosophy and the official duties of the diplomatic mission was obvious. The materialist ambassador with republican leanings was, after all, the head of the Swedish Lutheran embassy congregation in Paris. As for Ehrensvärd, literary and philosophical interests somewhat interfered with his exercise of public authority during his short term as a theatre director. Likewise, von Korff's personal interests in philosophical literature introduced him to the mechanisms of clandestine debates, which, when transferred to his diplomatic methods, made him break away from the ideal of diplomatic prudence and discretion. Holm stresses the importance of political context as a premise for a conflict to rise. In Sweden, von Korff faced expectations to support an anti-French faction, but eventually, he faced a pro-French government, which created a diplomatically hostile environment for him.

For the most part, however, the studied agents managed their multiple roles more or less successfully. Maaniitty shows how physicians lived up to the multiple expectations they faced, and Ijäs points to the merchants' skilful adaptation to the needs and opportunities of trade, often compatible with their personal interests. Wolff illustrates how Creutz successfully kept the

spheres of his public and private lives apart, retiring at times to the woods near Paris for some privacy with his closest friends and to escape the protocol and surveillance linked to diplomatic representation. As for Ehrensvärd's brief diplomatic mission to Berlin, literature, arts and correspondence became his consolations in an uninspiring environment. It is clear that while von Korff took advantage of conflicts, Creutz and Ehrensvärd avoided them at all costs; the men preferred to take the toll personally than to let down their master and king. As former courtiers, both men were skilled at maintaining a balance between their public role and their private passions, and they were aware of the limits of their freedom and their margin of manoeuvre.

Maaniitty and Ijäs stress the importance of collegiality and cooperation alongside possible competition. When discussing how the multiple roles and expectations of eighteenth-century Swedish physicians are to be understood, Maaniitty concludes that collegiality is a more fruitful theme than professional rivalry. In the early professionalisation of Swedish medicine, increased collegiality had a defining role. Ijäs shows that merchants, in their turn, gained a business advantage by assimilating a vast knowledge of various subjects, mainly in languages, politics and legislation, history, and geography. Through family ties, the studied merchants established a direct connection to one of the main book-selling houses in Germany, thus making cooperation between the merchants at the local and international levels essential. Ijäs argues that the benefits of cooperation exceeded its competitive downsides. Spreading valid information benefited the entire merchant community, and it was not in their mutual interest to hinder the wider circulation of knowledge.

A final observation concerns book collections as manifestations of the multiple roles and sometimes competing personal interests of the officeholders. Von Korff, Creutz, Ehrensvärd, Ignatius and Hackman all had important personal libraries, and they also became nodes in literary networks and transmitters of literary novelties. Their role as diplomats and merchants with privileged access to information, to high society, and to borderless commercial or learned networks, made them particularly suited for such a role. Hackman's book purchase networks reveal his key role in book distribution in the Eastern Baltic. Von Korff and Creutz were not only literary travellers, but they also travelled with their book collections and opened them to visitors, which can be seen as a way of propagating new ideas and ideals. Their books were representative of eighteenth-century literary culture in the sense that history, belles-lettres, dramatic literature and philosophy stood side by side with more practical writings on history, memoirs, laws, treaties, economics and dictionaries. These were not competing fields, but they were complementary. If the libraries reflected the professional careers of the studied agents to

some extent, they were also sources of joy and peace of mind. In that sense, the balance between competing priorities in life and between public duties and private pleasures can also be found in the contents of the collections.

To conclude, these studies show that the literary and scientific practices of the age of Enlightenment, including personal networking, correspondence and acting as a literary or philosophical agent while serving a sovereign, also had an impact outside literary and scientific circles, sometimes in a rather concrete way. This is most obvious in the case of the physicians, whose roles and tasks became those of someone who should enlighten the public and advocate for public health strategies. Also, with the increased volume of publications and literary distribution, the acquisition and dissemination of scholarly, philosophical and practical knowledge become competitive tools for the merchants. As for diplomats engaged in the dissemination of clandestine, philosophical or political information, they were faced with the choice of clearly separating their public and private figures or trying to merge the two into a political tool. Here, the choices diverged, as clearly shown in the cases of von Korff and Creutz. For both, however, as for the merchants and physicians, their books and readings, as well as the learned culture of the age of Enlightenment more generally, provided concepts and means to position themselves with regard to the evolving, multiple and shifting expectations of their professional and intellectual environment.