



Christopher Pihl, *Arbete: Skillnadskapande och försörjning i 1500-talets Sverige* (Studia Historica Upsaliensia 246), Uppsala Universitet: Uppsala 2012. 261 pp.

Work, Work and Work

In his dissertation, Christopher Pihl seizes upon a topic of high importance: how work creates differences. Pihl's study links to economic history, family history, as well as to gender history. Although Pihl concentrates on the sixteenth-century Swedish realm, the question is relevant for other historical periods as well as for our time. As Pihl argues, work must be seen as an important basis for early modern society. Yet according to him it is still a relatively unstudied field, especially as regards the meaning of work for individuals and its functioning in constructing differences. To choose work as a research object is a highly ambitious task, precisely because work is connected to various themes and can be examined from many perspectives. On the other hand, the chosen approach, examining work from various angles, is one of the main achievements of the study. Moreover, Pihl's study offers a historical perspective for today's discussion about gender inequality in working life. Even in the Nordic countries, which in global scale are considered extremely equal in terms of gender, the question about gender inequality in work pops up regularly.

The author declares that the scope of the study is to examine work as an idea and a practice that creates and reinforces power relations and differences between individuals. He also investigates what significance work had for individuals and society. Pihl operates with two main questions, which at first sound simple: why someone did what he or she did (*varför gjorde vem vad*) and what impact this had for the individual and the society. However, it soon becomes clear that we are dealing with a complex matter. The starting point of the study is the notion that work, especially the differences and categories that are created through work, are a fundamental aspect of society's hierarchical structure. According to Pihl, the early modern social order has been mainly studied through normative source material, religious and legal texts, whereas fewer studies have focused on the practices through which social order was created, expressed and contested. While I do agree with Pihl, it must be pointed out that for example recent Finnish scholarship has examined such practices. In her work *Witchcraft and Gender* (2008), Raisa Maria Toivo has shown how the patriarchal order

presented in Martin Luther's influential *Table of Duties* was contested in rural courtrooms. Toivo discusses how gendered division of work and household leadership was taken for granted but often negotiated by the contemporaries as part and parcel of household survival strategies. Additionally, Tiina Miettinen has shown in her dissertation *Ihanteista irrallaan* (2012), on unmarried women in the Finnish countryside, how gender roles and social order could be flexible. The latter is unfortunately only available in Finnish, although it has an English summary.

The Little Difference

In the introduction, which Pihl insightfully has titled 'Work and difference' (*Arbete och skillnadskapande*), the main concepts, theoretical framework and previous scholarship are discussed. A geographically oriented reader like myself would have required a clear definition already at the beginning of the focus of the study. The broad introduction about work in general in early modern Europe misleadingly awakens hopes for a broader examination in the dissertation itself. Yet Pihl focuses on the countryside, royal manor houses and castles, and relegates cities to a more marginal role. This choice is natural, of course, since it would be impossible to focus on it all in one study. Nevertheless, more precise references already at the beginning would help the reader to place Pihl's study in the right context. After the introduction, the dissertation is divided into five main chapters (chs. 2–6) and a concluding discussion. Each of these chapters discusses work from a different angle.

Pihl starts by examining division of work in chapter two. One of the most interesting findings of this chapter is that several professions within food production were not strictly gendered, but were carried out by both men and women. In the fields of butchery, brewing and baking men and women performed similar tasks. Intriguingly, differences can be found in *where* the production was carried out: for example, within the crown's organization, baking was female coded whereas in the cities both sexes could earn their living from bakery. Yet Pihl concludes that in general artisanal work was men's domain. Conversely the evidence from late medieval and early modern cities around the Baltic Sea suggests that gendered division of work among the craft organizations was not as strict as Pihl and previous studies have presented. For example in Stockholm masons, shoemakers and coppersmiths granted widows a right to continue their profession after the husband had died. Further research should be done to investigate and explain these differences.

The third chapter focuses on the organization of work. According to Pihl, gender was a primary foundation for division of work in early modern society. However, it was not the concrete tasks and work itself that created and resulted in gendered division of work but rather the circumstances: the size of the organization (in Pihl's case a manor or a castle) and the grade of specialization were decisive factors. The finding that men often undertook what has traditionally been seen as women's work is intriguing. Therefore, men's work on royal estates can be characterized as flexible – an attribute usually given to women's work. Furthermore, the bigger the organization the smaller the

flexibility of women's work: in smaller manors or castles men often performed 'women's' tasks. The English brewing trade has been often used as an example of how specialization and larger scale of production often led to the masculinization of the trade and the exclusion of women. In the High Middle Ages, ale brewing was household-based and dominated by women. By the beginning of the early modern period large scale industrial beer brewing had replaced traditional ale brewing, and women had lost their prominent position within the trade. According to Pihl, a similar development can be observed in Sweden. At first, brewing in Sweden was done within the household, and it was strongly female-coded work. When the trade began to specialize, brewing was done by professionals, both by men and women. In the second phase of specialization, brewing became strongly a male-coded work, with regulated training and strong professional identity. This development was of course not always chronological, but tied together with changes in the size of the organization and scale of the production. Similar pattern was to be observed among textile trades and gardening. The extensive comparison to England and Germany in this section was fascinating, and one only wished that there had been more such discussions. Indeed, a minor shortcoming of the study is that comparisons to other parts of Europe are often rather brief.

In the fourth main chapter, Pihl discusses supervision of work. According to him, official power and responsibility was incorporated in men, especially the bailiff. In principle, the ideal image of the household prevailed: the husband as the head of the household to whom wife and children were subordinated. However, as Pihl points out, the distribution of power and responsibilities was not always clear cut, and women also held important positions in the crown's castles and manors. The fifth chapter is devoted to linguistic analyses. It examines the terminology used by contemporaries when they described work and various professions. Historians often pay a lot of attention to defining the concepts they use, but they often overlook the 'simple' words. Yet it is these simple everyday words that shape our thoughts and understanding of the surrounding world. In his detailed inquiry of terms and names in original sources, Pihl reveals how men's and women's work were described differently in the crown's account books. Men were listed in the accounts by their profession whereas women were first listed under the heading 'womenfolk' and thereafter marked with indication of their profession. Hence, gender was the decisive category, not work. Furthermore, according to Pihl, this suggests that men were identified according to their work. Thus, men had a stronger work identity. On the other hand, Pihl argues that when women were listed individually, their work was described as accurately as men's. Pihl's findings provide a good starting point for future comparative studies about work identities.

The last main chapter focuses on wages and labour markets. Whether similar wages paid for similar work and what kind of labour markets there were are some of the most intriguing questions of this chapter. And indeed, whether similar wages are paid for similar work is one of the central questions in present-day discussions about gendered division of work. According to Pihl's results, the differences between men's and women's wages were small among the low-paid workers on the crown's estates. However, men usually earned more when both

forms of salary, money and goods, were counted together. For well-paid employees, on the other hand, the differences were significant. For example the highest-paid man, usually the bailiff, earned twice as much as the highest-paid woman, the housekeeper (*fataburshustrun*). Thus, within the crown's organization, there were only few possibilities for women to find a well-paid job. Yet, if we examine a particular trade like brewing where men and women performed similar tasks, the above-presented image changes. If both sexes did the same work in the same context, the size of the organization and the grade of specialization being the same, then men and women received same wages. However, as Pihl argues, men and women seldom performed similar tasks in similar contexts. An interesting, although difficult undertaking would be to conduct a larger comparison of wages in cities to test whether this notion holds true in urban environment.

In the past decades the changes in the labour market have been subject to ongoing debate in Finland. Employment periods have become shorter and the labour market more flexible and fragmented. For many workers this equals stress and uncertainty. However, this phenomenon is not new, as Pihl's study clearly demonstrates. In sixteenth-century Sweden, the majority of employees at crown's estates worked approximately 1,6 years in their posts. This can partly be explained by the nature of the work. Firstly, castles and manors employed many young unmarried people as farmhands and maids. This is typical of the so-called Western European marriage pattern in which young people worked as servants before marrying in their mid-twenties. Secondly, the estates of the crown offered a lot of part time and seasonal work, for example during large construction projects. Yet, the majority of those who stayed longer in their post seldom stayed for decades. Employees who worked for longer periods usually had a leading post like that of bailiff, but even their employment periods lasted approximately 3,5 years. This suggests mobility of workforce. Furthermore, Pihl's finding about how the crown actively tried to attract foreign workers in order to benefit from the newest innovations is also significant. This raises a counterpoint since the early modern period has been seen to have been dominated by protectionist ideas and policies. Labour markets and the mobility of workforce are certainly fertile topics for further research; both of them still rather unexplored in the Baltic Sea region. The reader is delighted to discover that Pihl summarizes his central arguments at the end of each main chapter.

Historians' Work

In addition to Pihl several scholars have pointed out that work is often invisible in the sources. Examining work in premodern societies has proved to be a difficult task. Pihl's main sources are the crown's account books which have been preserved fairly well. The various account books of the Swedish crown have the advantage that they contain a good cross-section of the society and enable an examination into the meaning of work to individuals. Source criticism is carefully conducted, and the main manors and castles are presented in a table. At this point, a map would have illustrated the geographical coverage for an international audience. The detailed linguistic analysis carried out through the book is a

substantial merit of the study. In fact, it is somewhat peculiar that the linguistic method is not highlighted in the introduction, while it is widely discussed in one of the main chapters. On the whole, the strengths of the book lie elsewhere than in an innovative use of theory or methodology. In general, Pihl's arguments are well grounded and the reader is convinced. However, in some parts, defining attributes would have been necessary.

While it is clear that the dissertation is directed to an academic audience, a non-native speaker also finds the text nonetheless easy to read. Furthermore, this lucidity has been accomplished without compromising the requirements of a scientific text. This is a goal most of us professional historians aim at, but only few achieve.

Pihl's study deepens our understanding of how the construction of differences, power and work were connected to each other in early modern society. The theme is topical, since work and the ability to work are fundamental to any society. Thus, work and profession shape individual identity as Pihl shows. Although he partly follows in the footsteps of women's and gender history pioneers, his study provides a more nuanced picture than the traditional patriarchal view of sixteenth-century society. Pihl's study on work clearly has its place in the 'basic reading' list of medieval and early modern historians. Whether or not one agrees with Pihl's arguments, his extensive study on work intensifies our understanding of sixteenth-century society. Thus, it provides a historical perspective for a critical examination of work creates differences and upholds power relations also in modern society and what effects this has on individuals trying to earn their living.

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