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### Gender division of labour in rural semi-landless households, Sweden 1800-1900

Uppenberg, Carolina; Nilsson, Malin

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landless households, Sweden 1800-1900

Carolina Uppenberg & Malin Nilsson

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC HISTORY, LUND UNIVERSITY

# The crofter is a woman:

Gender division of labour in rural semi-landless households,  
Sweden 1800-1900

*Carolina Uppenberg<sup>♣</sup>, Malin Nilsson<sup>♣</sup>*

## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the empirical question of the labour organisation and the gender division of labour in a semi-landless rural group, crofters (Swedish *torpare*), during the nineteenth century, and thereby also add to the larger question of the role of gender division of labour in the formation of a wage-dependent class. The crofters' households performed contract-defined corvée labour (unpaid duties as payment for the croft) for the landowner alongside subsistence work at their own croft. We triangulated crofters' contracts, work lists from estate archives and ethnographic questionnaires to understand the gender division of labour on the estates and at the crofts. The results show that men performed a much higher number of corvée days per year compared to women. We found a positive correlation between men's and women's corvée days, meaning that crofts with the highest number of corvée days for men also had the highest number for women. Moreover, we found that many core agricultural tasks were done by both men and women. The labour organisation, on the other hand, was clearly gendered – the role as a crofter in the sense of doing corvée labour for a landowner was primarily a male experience, while the role as a crofter in the sense of working one's own small plot of land was a female experience.

## Keywords

gender division of labour; proletarianization; semi-landless households; crofters; *torpare*; estates; Sweden; nineteenth century

**JEL code:** N53

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<sup>♣</sup> Department of Economic History and International Relations, Stockholm University, [carolina.uppenberg@ekohist.su.se](mailto:carolina.uppenberg@ekohist.su.se)

<sup>♣</sup> Department of Economic History, Lund University

## 1. Introduction, previous research and theoretical departure

The gender division and organisation of labour in rural households are conspicuously understudied, although they are key to understand the major economic changes of the nineteenth century: increased social stratification, proletarianization and the industrial revolution. The labour organisation of the rural landless or semi-landless household is pivotal, as proletarianization implies detachment from the means of production, or formation of a wage-labour force, which was done partly by a separation of home and workplace.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the empirical question of the labour organisation and the gender division of labour in a semi-landless rural group during the nineteenth century, and thereby also add to the larger question of the role of gender division of labour in the formation of a wage-dependent class. We do this through an analysis of the gendered labour organisation among the largest group of semi-landless rural inhabitants in Sweden, called crofters (Swedish: *torpare*).<sup>2</sup> The novelty of our approach is that we study the household labour organisation at two levels simultaneously: within the crofter household and between the crofter household and the estate.

To fulfil this aim, we will answer three specific questions:

1. How was work regulated in the crofter contracts in terms of gender?
2. What was the relationship between men's and women's corvée days?
3. What implications did the answers to the above questions have on the gender division of labour within the crofters' households?

Gender division of labour has been a prominent aspect of gender history since the pioneering studies devoted to women's labour in the 1970s and 1980s, with a focus on how work tasks, cultural values, economic change, and power relations have intertwined to create the positions of women and men in different historical

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<sup>1</sup> Rose (1988); Bernstein (2010); Sharpe (1999).

<sup>2</sup> We use the term crofter for the distinct, well-defined and established Swedish term *torpare*. Crofters in the Scottish settings, in the crofting counties, share the situation with their Swedish counterparts concerning the specific regulations and the relation to the land. An important difference is the demand for day labouring as rent for the Swedish crofters, while Scottish crofters did day labouring for wages. For the Swedish crofter institution, see Gadd (2011, 141–143). For the Scottish crofters, see Stewart (2005, 1–13) and Hunter (1976).

settings.<sup>3</sup> There is also a renewed interest in the field of women's work with the implementation of new methods, not the least the possibilities of creating accessible databases in the field of digital humanities.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the increased interest is also due to the theory of an industrious revolution preceding the industrial revolution, in which especially women's and children's larger labour supply account for the revolutionary changes.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, studies on rural women's labour patterns are scarce despite their vital role in the reorganisation of labour during the nineteenth century. To our knowledge, the English countryside has been subject to the most studies, while the later industrialised countries, Sweden included, have been covered much less.<sup>6</sup> Studies on England have focused on the participation of women in the rural labour force, but less attention has been paid to the internal division of labour within the households.<sup>7</sup> Among those trying to establish a connection between gender division of labour in agriculture, technology, and economic change is Keith Snell, whose argument that a decline in women's employment came with the more pronounced use of the scythe has been influential, although nuanced by others.<sup>8</sup> Joyce Burnette combines the questions in an account book-based study, which showed decreasing demand for female labour due to a structural change in agriculture that resulted in fewer cows and more sheep. This led to less work in haymaking, which was previously a seasonal peak in demand for female labour.<sup>9</sup> Pamela Sharpe has compiled research on which tasks men and women did on a

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Tilly and Scott (1978), Howell (1986), and Bennett (1988). For Sweden, see Wikander (1988) and Sommestad (1994). Ogilvie (2003) is unrivalled in depth and detail and is methodologically innovative.

<sup>4</sup> Ågren (2017b); Whittle and Hailwood (2020).

<sup>5</sup> de Vries (2008).

<sup>6</sup> Verdon (2012) is probably the most impressive, and she mourns the lack of studies in rural women's work and sees Ivy Pinchbeck's 1930 book *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution* (Pinchbeck 1969 [1930]) as a 'major piece of analysis' (p. 23). For the Swedish context it could be said that the most important work in agrarian history, the five volumes of *Det svenska jordbrukets historia*, devotes only a very few pages to women's work, lamenting the lack of empirical sources and studies on the subject (Gadd 2000, 55–58; Morell 2001, 48–53, 310–20; Myrdal 1999, 309–13). More important as a point of departure is the project *Gender and Work* at Uppsala University, focussing on specific tasks that men and women did in order to make a living, regardless of setting (urban/rural) (see Ågren (2017b)). Their results work as a recurring background to our results. However, their studies do not provide many details regarding the specific tasks in agriculture that men and women did, respectively, but rather use broader categories (see introduction and chapter 1 for methods and definitions: (Ågren (2017a); Lindström, Fiebranz, and Rydén (2017)).

<sup>7</sup> See for example Sharpe (1999, 161–67) and reviewed literature.

<sup>8</sup> Snell (1985, 15–66). See also Verdon (2012, 24–30) and cited literature, Speechley (1999).

<sup>9</sup> Burnette (1999).

large number of English farms, and she discusses the question of whether women compensated for men or complemented men's work, and our paper adds to this question.<sup>10</sup>

Other Nordic countries show more developed research on crofters, although rarely with a gender perspective on work tasks.<sup>11</sup> One exception lies in the important studies by Anna Tranberg. She found an increase in women's number of work days over the first half of the nineteenth century, which she connects to home-based textile production becoming less profitable with the large-scale introduction of cotton. Tranberg found that women in crofter families had two large areas of responsibility that they worked by piece rate, although as part of a mandatory amount of work: textile production and *graving* (digging), which was the heavy work of preparing newly laid out fields by removing stones and roots.<sup>12</sup> In Tranberg's words, the spade replaced the loom as the tool of women's work.<sup>13</sup>

Swedish studies touching upon gender division of labour in nineteenth century rural households often adopt a functionalistic gender division of work, i.e., that the farming population needed a spouse of the opposite sex in order to manage the daily chores.<sup>14</sup> The use of a theoretically grounded gender perspective of rural history, in which the gender division of labour is seen as a question of power relations, is rather rare.<sup>15</sup> Although it has been acknowledged that it was the characteristics of using the whole household that made the croft system to such a flexible institution which grew dramatically during the nineteenth century,<sup>16</sup> no study has shown an interest in the labour of crofters' wives. Moreover, a feature of women's often unpaid household labour is that it is more difficult to discern from the sources. Our study is the first attempt, to our knowledge, to systematically gather specific agricultural tasks and to relate these findings to the role of women's labour in Swedish estate agriculture.

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<sup>10</sup> Sharpe (1999, 167–72).

<sup>11</sup> See for example the overview of the rich research on Norwegian crofters in Østrem (2022), who points to the almost total lack of research on female crofters, 148–149.

<sup>12</sup> Tranberg (1990, 516–17).

<sup>13</sup> Tranberg (1990, 532).

<sup>14</sup> Gadd (2011, 129–30); Winberg (1975); Dribe (2000); Lundh and Olsson (2008). An exception to the functionalistic view is presented by Irène A. Flygare (1999), who studies the gender division of labour on Swedish farms during the twentieth century; see especially pp. 180–227 for her study of the early twentieth century and findings that resemble ours.

<sup>15</sup> Whittle (2019).

<sup>16</sup> Morell (2001, 69–70).

Sweden was still heavily characterised by agriculture at the end of the nineteenth century, with 67 per cent of the population engaged in the sector in 1880.<sup>17</sup> The peasantry was divided between landed peasants and the landless population. The landed group comprised freeholders (*skattebönder*, tax-paying peasants), Crown tenants (*kronobönder*, closer to the freeholders, paying rent to the Crown), and manorial tenants (*frälsebönder*).<sup>18</sup> Within the landless groups, crofters were the largest group, followed by the poorer cottagers (*backstugusittare*) and lodgers (*in-hysesjon*).

The nineteenth century was characterised by proletarianization among the rural population. In the mid-eighteenth century, landed peasant farmers made up about 80 per cent of the rural population, while by 1850 they numbered just over 50 per cent. The period also saw a rapid population increase, so in real numbers there were about 50,000 landless households in the mid-eighteenth century, and a hundred years later this number reached almost 200,000.<sup>19</sup> This means that the experience of being part of the landless poor was widespread, and in this study, we add to an understanding of how this experience was gendered.

Crofters in the manorial economy studied here did not own their land<sup>20</sup> but formed their own households on the land of a landowner and paid rent – mostly in-kind, with the labour duties being most important. Crofters had access to a plot of land for their own use and, often, some livestock. Thus, while the crofter had agricultural work to do at home, the scale was not enough to sustain – or employ – a whole family. Bengtsson and Svensson, studying Swedish crofters' standard of living based on probate inventories for the period 1750-1900, described the overall development of crofters' living standards during the period 1750-1900 as 'proletarianization without pauperization'. They found that ownership of means of production such as livestock and tools decreased.<sup>21</sup> In relation to proletarianization, it is important to note not only the changes within the group but also the growth of the group of crofters as such. The other landless groups, cottagers, and lodgers, were much more diverse in terms of household composition.

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<sup>17</sup> Wohlin (1909, Table A).

<sup>18</sup> Gadd (2011, 121–23).

<sup>19</sup> Myrdal and Morell (2011, 286)

<sup>20</sup> For crofts on peasant farmers' land, the situation could be different. However, the vast majority of crofters were manorial crofters and it is this group that is studied here.

<sup>21</sup> Bengtsson and Svensson (2022, 59–64, quote p. 63).

Crofters were almost always married and made up a two-generation unit with only one generation of adults (over 15) in the household. The different labour relations and the inherent gendered organisation of labour make the crofter's household well suited for studying the meaning of the gender division of labour in the household for the economic development that the households were part of.

## 2. Methods and sources

To answer our questions about gender divisions of labour in the crofter household and on the estate, we used a mixed methods approach, with quantitative and qualitative analyses supporting each other. To answer the first question, how work was regulated in the crofter contracts in terms of gender, we combined descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis of tenant contracts. In order to interpret the qualitative information in the contracts, we triangulated it with ethnographic questionnaires. To answer the second question: What was the relationship between men's and women's *corvée* days; we used a standard bivariate regression analysis. For the third question: What implications did the answers to the above questions have on the gender division of labour within the crofters' households; we combined the results from the first two questions in order to understand *how much* work men and women did for the landowner, and *which tasks* they did, both for the landowner and in their own households.

### 2.1. *Tenant contracts*

The largest number of crofts were found in the manorial economies of the plains where a landowner could own several hundred crofts. In this study, we concentrated on estates in two such regions: the southernmost province *Skåne*, and the south-western province *Västergötland*. These were the main areas (together with the lake Mälaren valley close to Stockholm which we do not cover here) where proletarianization and the formation of a landless working class took place and therefore where those issues could best be studied.<sup>22</sup>

In the estate archives, the contracts between landowners and tenants are kept together, so we could not discern the crofters from the manorial tenants

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<sup>22</sup> (Gadd 2011, 121–23; 2000, 95)



(*frälsebönder*) and a few other groups beforehand. In total, we collected tenant contracts from seven different estates: three from Scania and four from the south-western part of Sweden. For south-western Sweden we looked for tenant contracts in farm archives in the regional archives. For the Scania sample, we used contracts that were previously collected and kindly made available to us by Mats Olsson.<sup>23</sup> In total, this left us with 1026 tenant contracts: 789 from Scania and 237 from south-western Sweden. With this approach, we have the advantage of analysing an overall pattern from many estates rather than taking the more common approach, as noted above, of studying only one estate or even one account book from one estate.<sup>24</sup>

As we see in Table 1, the number of contracts found varied greatly between the different dwellings. This does not reflect the number of tenants on the estates but rather what has been left in the archives.

**Table 1.** *Number of tenant contracts per estate*

Region	Estate	Number of contracts
Scania	Vittskövle	37
	Dufveke	213
	Knutstorp	539
South-western Sweden	Öj Jared	14
	Ryholm	116
	Torpa	85
	Blomberg	22
Total		1026

Source: Scania (in the Swedish National Archives in Lund (*Landsarkivet i Lund*), subsequently LLA): Vittskövle godsarkiv SE/LLA/30854 C:1a, b; Knutstorp godsarkiv SE/LLA/31031 C:1:1-5; private estate archive: Dufeke godsarkiv, Axelvold; south-western Sweden (all in the Swedish National Archives in Gothenburg (*Landsarkivet i Göteborg*), subsequently GLA): Öj Jared säteris arkiv, SE/GLA/10359/F I a/4; Ryholms gårds arkiv, GLA/C0111:1 F1:1-3; Torpa gårdsarkiv, SE/GLA/10942 FII:4, FIII:1-4; Blombergs säteris arkiv, SE/GLA/10976/ F1:1.

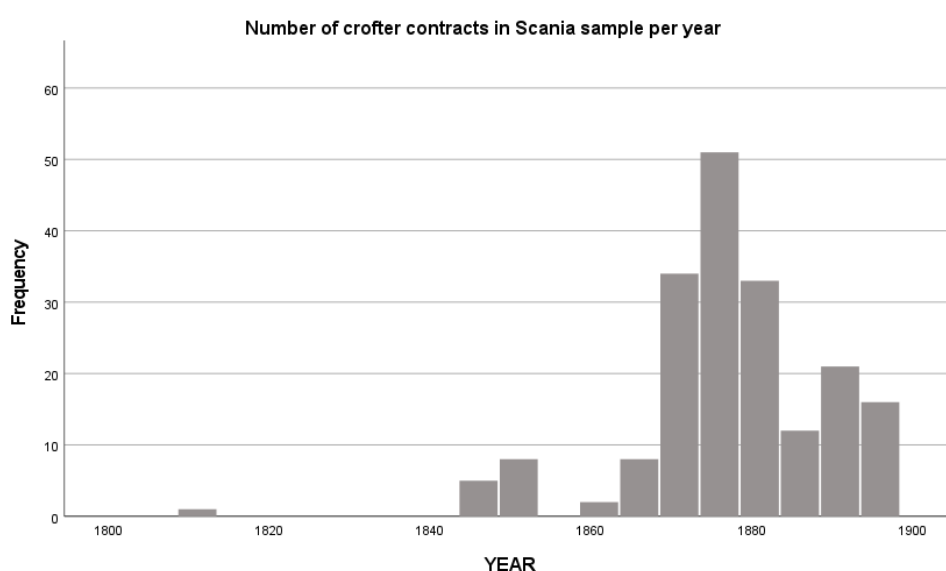
<sup>23</sup> Olsson analysed the manorial economy and the labour organisation of the estates in southern Sweden in Olsson (2002). For details regarding the estates analysed in this paper, see especially pp. 96-121 and 132-142. We used the contracts collected by Olsson in a new way, since we were interested in gender division of labour in the crofter households; Olsson was interested in the economy and labour organisation of the estates, where tenant farmers were the most important workforce of all.

<sup>24</sup> (Nyström 2003; Burnette 1999)

Of these, we found 343 crofter contracts. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, these spanned the period of approximately 1811 to 1909. Of the Scania contracts, the majority were from the latter part of the nineteenth century, which we take into consideration in our analysis.

The crofter contracts were one- to four-page documents specifying the name of the croft and the crofter as well as the duration of the contract. The contracts were signed almost universally by the male crofter. Many were pre-printed with the specifics filled in by hand. The contracts stated the number of corvée days to be performed. These days were always gendered to specify men’s days and women’s days, and sometimes also when these days were to be performed during the year. The contracts also specified a number of additional tasks to be performed and if the crofters had to make other payments in cash or in kind for the croft, as detailed below (Table 4). It is not possible to undoubtedly declare that the days specified in the contracts were actually performed as stated.<sup>25</sup> However, both the information in the lists of performed labour in the archives, as well as the fact that the contracts were carefully specified for each and every crofter, points to a situation where the demands in the contracts mirrored the real workload.

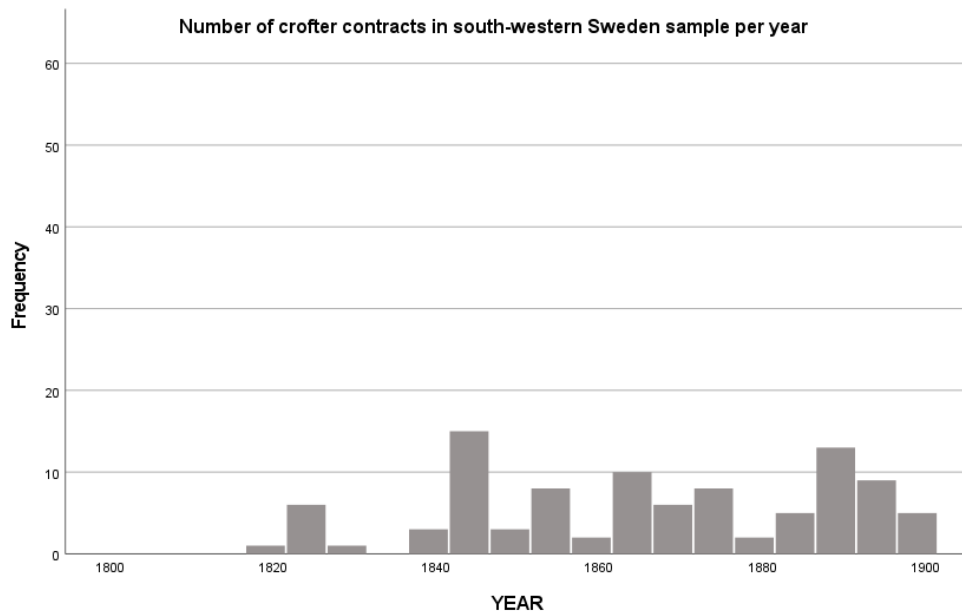
**Figure 1.** *Number of crofter contracts in the Scania sample per year*



Source: See Table 1 Scania

<sup>25</sup> See (Olsson 2002, 18, 22) for a short discussion on this.

**Figure 2.** *Number of crofter contracts in the south-western Sweden sample per year*



Source: See Table 1 south-western Sweden.

Another methodological issue for the number of corvée days is the so-called ‘extra days’ that landowners were allowed to demand, often unlimited in number. At the end of the contracts was phrasing that potentially thwarted the results, i.e., that the landowner was in a position to demand unregulated extra work days, paid in cash by the day. Clearly, it was a question of a severe imbalance of power between crofter and landowner, which is discussed elsewhere in an institutional analysis.<sup>26</sup> We handled this by comparing work lists of performed labour and contracts where possible and found that it did not alter our results. At one estate, the work lists showed that the number of extra work days amounted to less than ten per cent, often not more than three per cent of the number of specified days.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, neither the occurrence of extra days for crofters nor whether each day was actually performed, did not substantially alter the *relationship* between male and female crofters’ days, which is the focus of the research question.

<sup>26</sup> Uppenberg (2023)

<sup>27</sup> Öijared säteris arkiv D1b:1-2.

## 2.2. *Work lists and ethnographic questionnaires*

To be able to discuss the crofters' gender divisions of labour within the household and on the estates we triangulated different sources: contracts, work lists, and ethnographic questionnaires. The methodological justification of this is as follows: once we determined how the labour organisation of the crofter household's obligations towards the landowner was gendered, we used the new information on gender division of labour (found in work lists and ethnographic questionnaires) to draw conclusions about what crofters' wives did both during their *corvée* days and during their time at the croft, since we know more about the gendered nature of these tasks.

The work lists are the documentation made by the landowner over number of days used for different purposes, sometimes also specifying which worker or what group of worker (crofters, servants, tenant farmers etc.) that had contributed. We found work lists in five estate archives with varying degree of exactness. Unfortunately, we were only able to separate the *corvée* days by gender, task, and type of tenant household for Blomberg. In an additional archive, that of Råda säteri, we were able to decompose work lists by gender and task but not by type of tenant household. Råda most likely had crofters as tenants, but we were not able to find contracts.

In order to triangulate the existing lists,<sup>28</sup> we used another source, one that is well known in ethnographic historical studies<sup>29</sup> but seldom used for studying division of labour: ethnographic questionnaires gathered by the Nordiska museet, starting in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We analysed interviews emanating from our regions of interest, in total about 60 interviews from five questionnaires, each from half a page in length up to 20 pages.<sup>30</sup> They were administered to elderly people and asked about specific aspects of their lives in the second half of the nineteenth century. In general, the more specific the answers were, the more trustworthy we considered them to be. If a person answered that

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<sup>28</sup> A method suggested as especially fruitful for analysing nineteenth century rural women's work tasks by Verdon (2012, 31–39).

<sup>29</sup> Discussed thoroughly by ethnographers Bringéus (1990, 195–98); Nilsson, Waldetoft, and Westergren (2003), while historians have used them either rather uncritically or not at all.

<sup>30</sup> Nordiska museets arkiv, Nm 83 Arbetslöner (*Wages*), 128 answers, conducted 1938; Nm 3 Matberedning och måltidsseder (*Food preparation and meal customs*) 718 answers, conducted 1928; Nm 28 Skörd (*Harvest*) 422 answers, conducted 1930; Nm 8 Jordbruk (*Farming*) 120 answers, conducted 1928; Nm 21 Åkerns beredning (*Field preparation*) 564 answers, conducted 1930.

she started working as a maid after reaching the age of 12, and that her task was to feed the cows in the morning, we treated it as a trustworthy statement, while responses like ‘women took care of the livestock’ were less useful in this respect.

### 3. Results

We analysed the gender division of labour as stated in the contracts. The *corvée* days were gendered and quantified in the contracts, thus allowing a more straightforward form of analysis. These results are presented in the first and second sections. The other tasks in the contracts were not gendered beforehand, so we combined work lists and ethnographic questionnaires in order to find the gender division of labour and its implications for proletarianization. These results are discussed in the third section.

#### **3.1. *Corvée work for men and women in the contracts***

Men performed a much higher number of *corvée* days per year compared to women. On average, also counting crofts doing zero workdays, men did an average of 71 days per year, while women did three. When including only the crofts that had specified *corvée* days over zero, men did on average 103 days per year and women 13. In these households, where both men and women had specified workdays, women did, on average, about 10 per cent of the households’ total *corvée* days per year.

The contracts specified *days per week or year*, always divided between men’s work and women’s work. For men, the most common specification was the number of days during the whole year, while for women this varied between number of days per year, number of days per summer season, and number of days for a specific task, such as ‘xx days during haymaking or with flax’. However, not all contracts had specified work days. As we can see in Table 2, it varied from 45 percent in Dufveke to 100 per cent on the Blomberg estate. Almost all crofts that did not do (male) *corvée* days made cash payments instead.

*Table 2. Number of contracts with specified corvée labour*

	Number of con- tracts in sample	Number of contracts with corvée days for men		Number of con- tracts with corvée days for women	
<u>Scania</u>	N	N	%	N	%
Dufveke	11	5	45%	0	0
Knutstorp	202	123	61%	19	9%
<u>South-western</u>					
<u>Sweden</u>					
Blomberg	15	15	100%	15	100%
Ryholm	45	27	60%	27	60%
Torpa	46	35	76%	35	76%

Source: See Table 1.

However, as we can see in Table 3, the number of days they had to provide varied greatly both between and within the estates for both men and women. For men, the average varied between 66 at Torpa and 148 at Blomberg estate. At Blomberg, the days a crofter had to work varied between 312 days, meaning six days a week, i.e., all available workers, and 36 days, which meant less than one day per week. Women averaged between 8 and 29 corvée days per year, while for men, the actual number in the contracts varied quite a lot.

The contracts did not always specify when these days were to be performed. However, in the Blomberg work days list displayed in Figure 3, we can see that women's corvée days were concentrated in the summer months to a larger extent than for men. At Blomberg, female crofters seem to have been employed during harvest time. This pattern is also confirmed by the work days lists that we have from other estates. At Öijared estate, no days were registered for women during the winter months at all.

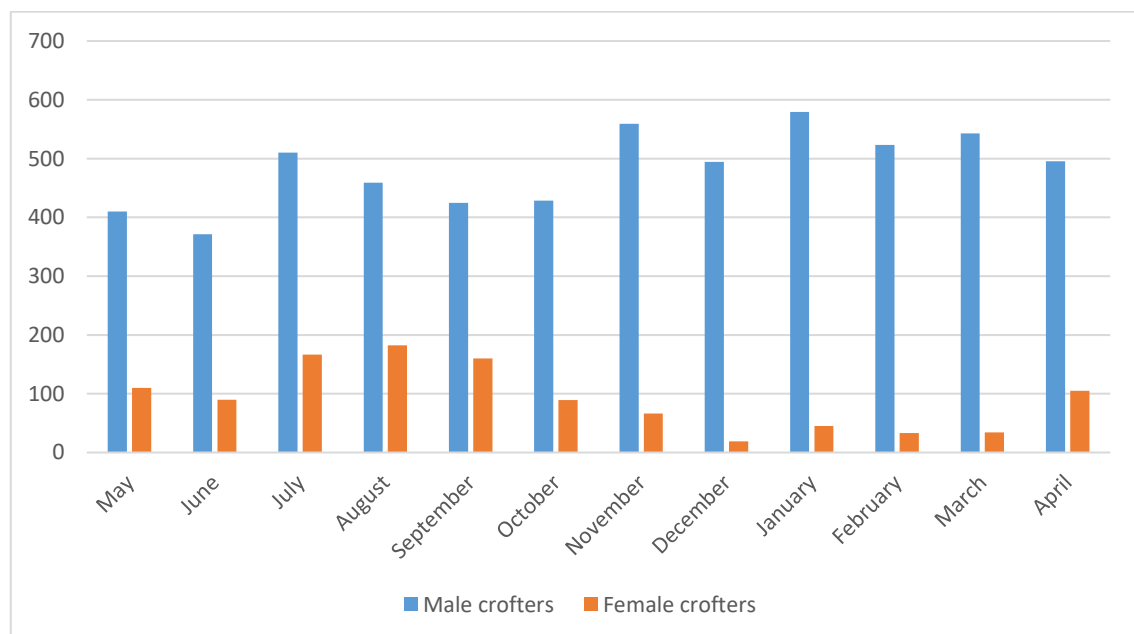
**Table 3.** Number of corvée days to be done each year for men and women in contracts per region and estate

Region	Estate	Gender	N	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
<u>Scania</u>	Dufveke	Men	5	48	156	103	104	48	42
		Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Knutstorp	Men	123	10	212	98	84	52	44
		Women	19	3	20	12	12	20	6
<u>South- western</u>	Blomberg	Men	15	36	312	148	156	156	60
		Women	15	20	40	29	30	30	5
<u>Sweden</u>	Ryholm	Men	45	26	312	140	130	104	63
		Women	27	4	30	12	10	8	7
	Torpa	Men	46	15	156	66	52	52	30
		Women	35	3	12	8	7	6	2

Source: See Table 1.

Note: Only contracts with corvée days over 0 included for both men and women.

**Figure 3.** Total amount of corvée days performed by crofters according to work days list for Blomberg estate from May 1872 to April 1873



Source: Blombergs säteris arkiv, SE/GLA/10976/ G5a:1.

Two important results were found here. Firstly, there were large differences between the number of work days done by men and women. We will discuss the implications of this further, but at this stage we can conclude that the experiences of being a male crofter and a female crofter were totally different. If one is interested only in the total workload for the household, as in most previous research, this will not become visible. However, if instead we analyse this with an understanding of intra-household power relations, this finding is of huge importance.

Secondly, the variance both *between* and *within* estates concerning the number of days crofters worked points to a flexible system where the large estates used the labour of their subservient households in carefully designated ways. The function of the crofter household as a flexible provider of labour, as discussed in the introduction in relation to the manorial economy at large, also meant that the internal division of labour in the crofter household needed to adapt to rather different terms, and that flexibility was to a large extent borne by the crofter household.

### **3.2. *The relationship between men's and women's corvée days***

While it is known that both men and women did corvée days, no studies have calculated the number of days or the relationship between men's and women's days decomposed per household. This also provides insights into a core question about gender division of labour, i.e., if women's work *complemented* or *compensated* men's work.<sup>31</sup> That is, were the tasks so distinct that they could only be completed by a specific gender, so that a landowner had to get a man to do some tasks and a woman to do other tasks and could not exchange them, or could many days done by men decrease the need for women's days? In practical reality, it was probably somewhere in between, with some tasks heavily gendered and others less so, so that men and women both complemented and compensated each other's efforts. Nonetheless, this question is in dire need of more empirical evidence, which we provide here.

Our analysis of the relationship between men's and women's corvée days showed a positive relationship, as shown by the correlation plot and fitted regression line

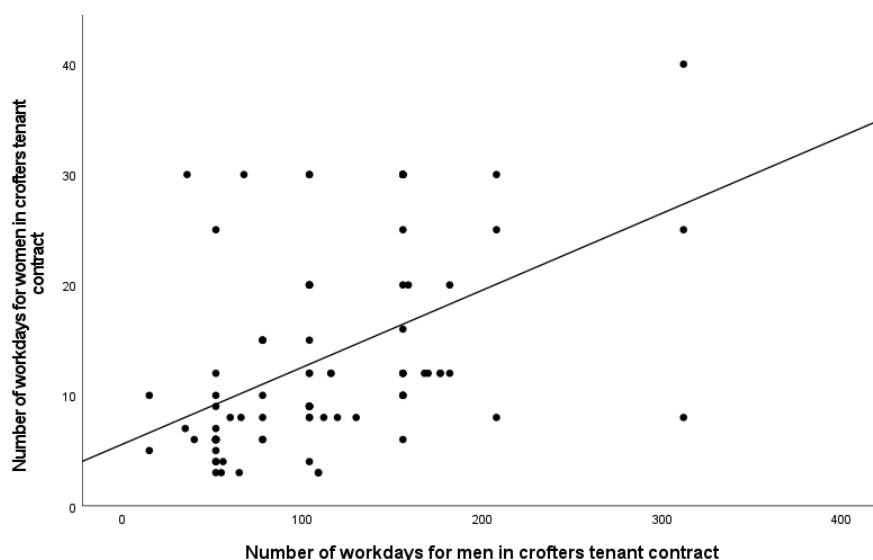
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<sup>31</sup> See for example Sharpe (1999, 167–68), who discusses this question.



in Figure 4. The positive relationship was statistically stable with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.46 and a p-value of <0.001.

**Figure 4.** Correlation plot between number of corvée days specified for women and men in contracts



Source: See Table 1.

Note: Only contracts with corvée days for women >0 included.

Crofts with the highest number of specified corvée days for men in the contracts also had the highest number of female corvée days in the contracts. This points to a gender division of labour *regarding crofts* in which female crofters' work on the estate complemented rather than compensated male crofters' work.

When this result is analysed along with the first question about the number of days crofters worked for the landowner, an interesting pattern appears. We take as our starting point that a semi-landless crofter household could neither afford nor socially legitimise any other situation than one in which both men and women did productive labour for the survival of the household all their available time, as long as they could find work. With this in mind, the division of corvée labour also gives us the other side of the coin, i.e., the work in the crofter household. With our approach of studying household labour organisation at two levels simultaneously, we found that if men did two or three days a week of corvée labour, a common workload as shown in Table 3, and women only did a fraction of

this, we could conclude that women did much more of the work in the crofter household. This, in turn, meant that the complementary gender division of crofters' labour on the estate was combined with a compensatory gender division of labour in the crofter household, since women needed to do what their crofter husbands or sons did not have time to do because of the landowner's demands. This is further illuminated by the following section, in which the gender division of labour *on the estates* proves to be much less distinct than is implicated by the allocation of the corvée days. Thus, if we see the crofter as the corvée labourer, he was a man. But if we see the crofter as working in a small, semi-landless household with various tasks including cultivating a small plot of land, the crofter was a woman.

However, the contracted work days were not the only work that crofters did. This is seen in the number of days worked: only a minority of the male crofters did corvée days every day, and among women, corvée days were a minor part of a work year. It is also visible in the contracts, in which a large number of specified tasks were stipulated, tasks to which we now turn in order to reveal who probably did these tasks and what implications this gendering had on the labour organisation at the crofts.

### **3.3. *Work tasks for men and women in contracts***

The contracts specified many tasks that the crofters had to do outside of the corvée days. Variation was great, some crofters had to do many of these tasks, other were more uncommon. The occurrence of tasks in the crofter contracts are listed in Table 4, in order to triangulate our different sources: contracts, work lists, and ethnographic questionnaires, to discuss the extent to which we are able to state a gendering of these tasks.

The most useful list for finding the gendered structure of certain tasks came from the Blomberg estate. Figure 5 shows the gender division of labour regarding certain tasks, and the total number of work days allocated to each task. The workers doing these tasks are not separated by category, i.e., crofter, tenant farmer or other, but show the gendering of tasks. The list has been condensed for

the sake of overview, and a few categories only done by men but consisting of rather few days in total, such as collecting ice, tending swines and wood craft have been erased.

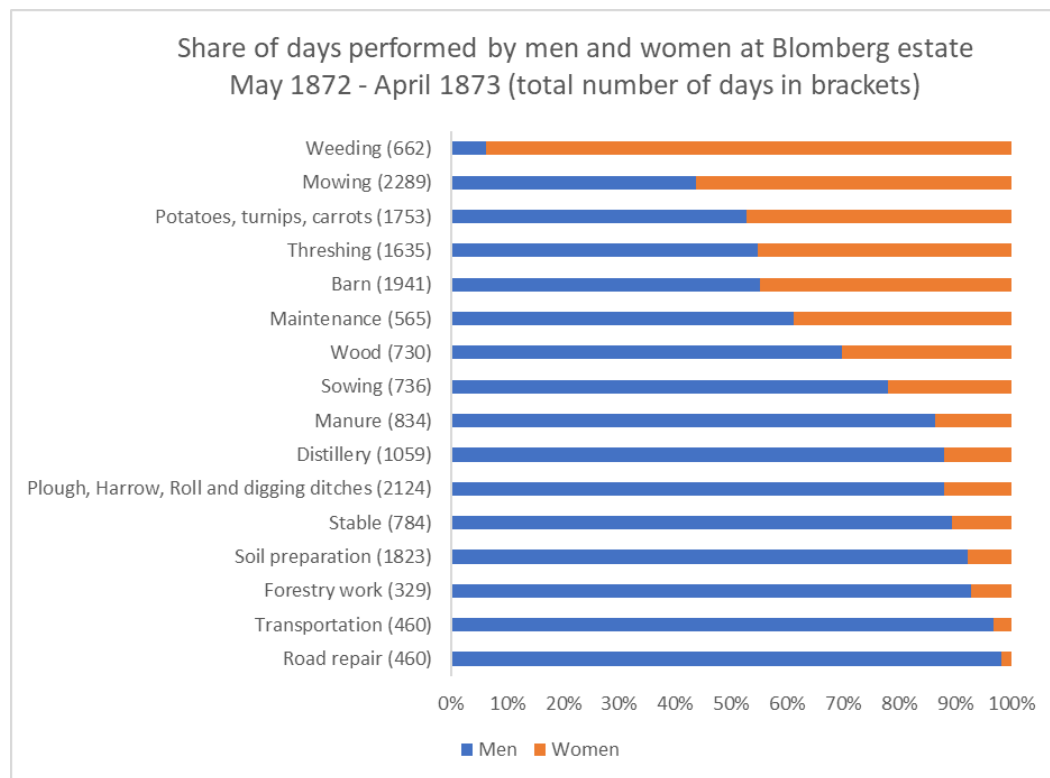
*Table 4. Work tasks in the crofter contracts*

Work specified in the contract outside of corvée days			
Farming	Transportation	Payments in kind	Other
Harvest hay	Transporting post	Spin flax (by type and weight)	Put out gravel
Bring in hay	Transporting mill stone	Pick pine cones (in bushels)	Brickwork
All spring seed	Transporting manure (sometimes in number of days)	Pick lingonberries, wild strawberries, cloudberries (quantity specified in contract)	Guard a gate Guard a garden
All fall seed	Unspecified transportation (number of transports/days)	Cereals	Forestry
	Unspecified transportation (in Swedish miles)	Wooden products	Beat hunting (days in beat)
		Butter, eggs	Brick laying
		Sand	Clear cow path

Source: see Table 1.

Figure 5 shows that few tasks were done only by men, and these tasks did not make up a very large proportion of the total number of days. On the other hand, the tasks done mostly by women were large in terms of days used, pointing to a well-known pattern regarding women's work: that less fine-grained descriptions are used for women's work. Among the tasks that were done by 40-60 per cent of each sex, as well as those done mostly by women, we find the core agricultural tasks of haymaking, harvesting, preparing the fields, threshing, and weeding the fields of potatoes and grain. Ploughing, transportation, forest work, and sowing were to a larger extent done by men. It is interesting to note that the same pattern that Anna Tranberg found – that women were doing the heavy manual work of picking over and preparing the fields – was found also here, while less manual and less heavy work like transportation duties, taking care of horses and pigs, and handicrafts were done more by men.

*Figure 5. Share of days performed by men and women at Blomberg estate*



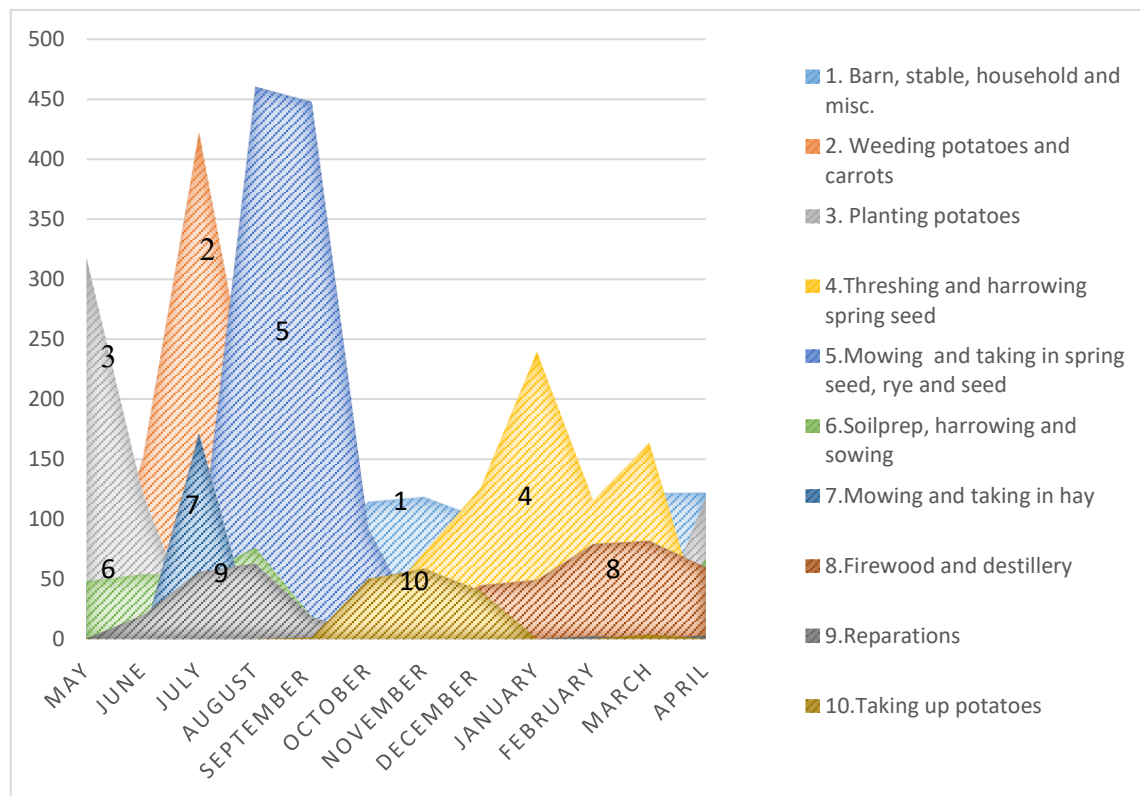
Source: Blombergs säteris arkiv, SE/GLA/10976/G 5 A/1.

In Figure 6 where we can see how the days worked by all women workers were distributed over the year. We can see that there was a clear seasonality to the different tasks. As expected, we can see sharp labour demand peaks for women around the harvest in the fall. We can also see sharp peaks for potatoe planting in the spring and weeding potatoes and carrots in June, supporting previous studies that emphasis how local labour market demand is central for understanding women's labour market participation. We can also see that the actual demand for female labour around harvesting hay is relatively small, possibly supporting previous research where demand for female labour declines when the scythe is introduced. In south-western Sweden, the main transition to scythe from sickle had been made hundred years earlier, although, as discussed below regarding the ethnographic questionnaires, the transition was not complete.<sup>32</sup>

It is important to note that crofters' wives (women crofters in Figure 7) made up only a small proportion of the women in these lists; the larger share was made up of female day labourers, as shown in Figure 7.

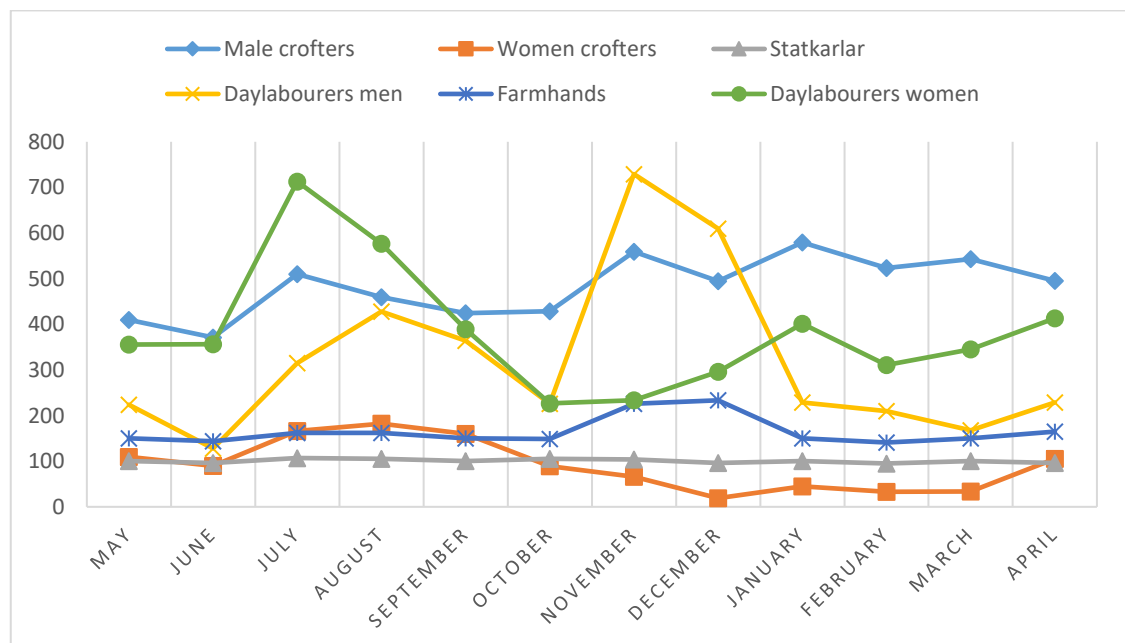
<sup>32</sup> Palm, Lennart Andersson, Gadd, Carl-Johan & Nyström, Lars (1998) p. 98 and 162.

**Figure 6.** Days worked by all women worker in different categories over the year at Blomberg estate May 1872 to April 1873



Source: Blombergs säteris arkiv, SE/GLA/10976/G 5 A/1.

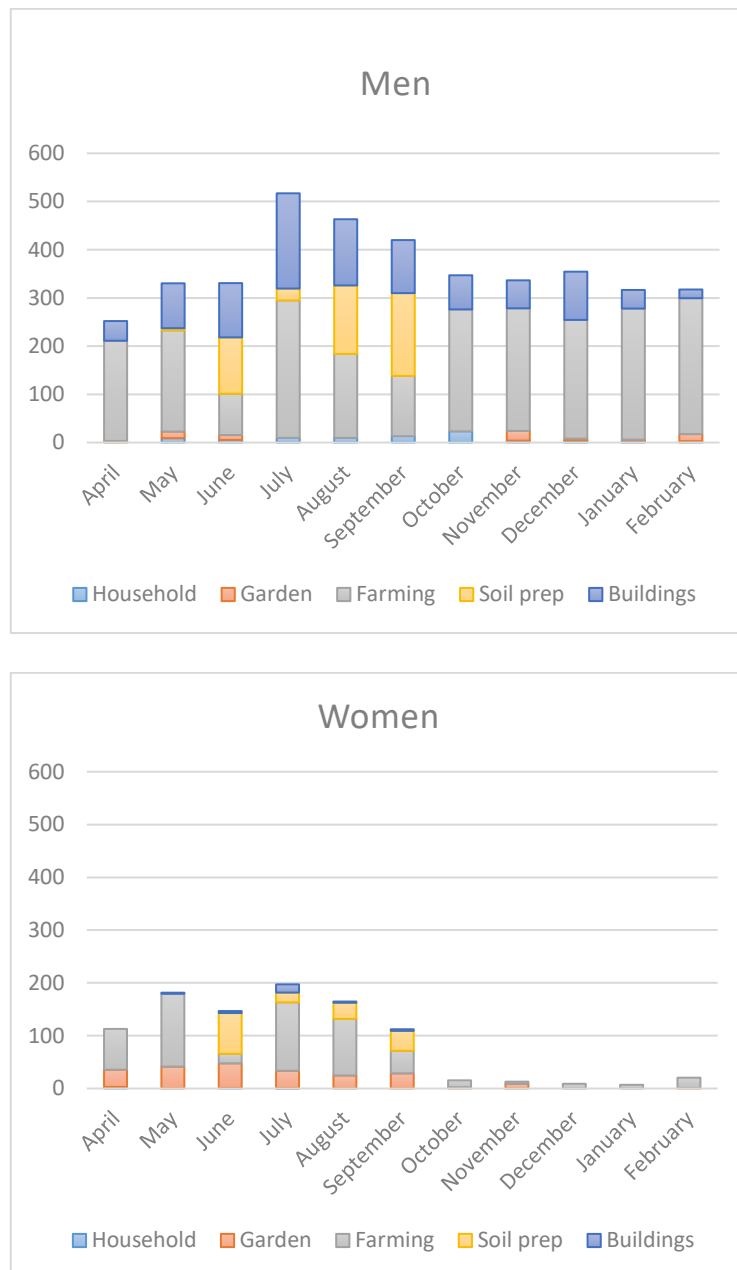
**Figure 7.** Days worked from May 1872 to April 1873 at Blomberg estate per gender and type of worker



Source: Blombergs säteris arkiv, SE/GLA/10976/G 5 A/1.

For the Råda estate, we cannot separate the female crofters from other types of workers. However, we can see that with regard to the gender division of labour on the estate, we can also see that women participated to a large extent in farming and soil preparation.

**Figure 8.** Number of workdays by all tenants at the Råda estate from April 1868 to February 1869 by type of work



Source: Råda säteris arkiv, Dagsverksjournaler m.m. SE/GLA/10095/DII:1.

From the Torpa estate, we found a compilation of women's tasks for the period 1865-1866 listing the following work: wash, mangle, slaughter, scrub, set potatoes, pick potatoes, garden, haymaking, dress flax, wash sheep, cut sheep, thin out turnips, pick turnips, sieve seeds and grain, cut clover, and pick lingonberries.<sup>33</sup> We now turn to the ethnographic questionnaires in order to triangulate the data from the work lists and to discuss tasks that are not mentioned in the estate archives but that obviously needed to be performed.

### *Haymaking, harvesting and threshing*

Not surprisingly, haymaking and harvesting were the most obvious seasonal work peaks found in the work lists, and these could be understood as demanding all available labour. In the contracts and work lists, it was often specified that more work was demanded during these times, or that women's work days were to be used then. In the work lists, it is uniformly the case that women's work days took place during the summer season, from May to October. Haymaking and harvesting were also potential sources of conflict or dissatisfaction between crofter and landowner. Since the very weather-dependent task of haymaking and harvesting had to be done during a few weeks or even a few critical days, the crofters' and tenant farmers' own fields and the landowners' fields were to be harvested at the same time – and of course, the landowners' fields were prioritised. This meant that crofters and tenant farmers had to leave their crops in the fields on good weather days in order to work for the landowner, only to find their own crops destroyed by rain the next day, as vividly described in the questionnaires.<sup>34</sup>

Men, women, and children worked together in the fields, including servants, crofters, and tenant farmers.<sup>35</sup> The traditional division between women using the sickle and men using the scythe is clear in the questionnaires, but this was definitively not uniformly so.<sup>36</sup> As seen in figures 5 and 6 most tasks are described for both men and women, such as the actual cutting and gathering of the crops,

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<sup>33</sup> Torpa gårdssarkiv, D3:2 Dagsverkesjournal 1860–1865.

<sup>34</sup> Nm 83: EU 25706; Nm 28: EU 1853.

<sup>35</sup> Nm 3 EU 267; Nm 28: EU 1459, EU 1486, EU1971, EU1732; Nm 83: EU 16497, EU 11757, EU 12016.

<sup>36</sup> Nm 3: EU 274; Nm 28: EU 1459, EU1971, EU 1486; Nm 83: EU 16599.

binding it together, and transporting it when dry.<sup>37</sup> Only women and children were described as collecting the remainders that did not fit into the bindings.<sup>38</sup>

This tells us two things: that women were part of the core agricultural work and that women's work was used as a flexible and varied source of labour. We want to analyse this from the perspective of the women themselves, as the total structure of what men and women did for the landowner calls for a gendered analysis of the experience of being a crofter. This means that being a male crofter was a very different experience from being a crofter's wife. Men worked during the whole year for the landowner, while women had demanding work peaks and slack periods, and thus needed to even this out themselves. Although difficult to estimate, it also calls for an understanding of women having to work harder since they were called to work when the workload was extremely pressing. This is partly true for the group of crofters and tenant farmers as a whole, as their work days were always used when the need was pressing, but they were not required during slack periods. But this was an even stronger tendency for women.

Threshing was one of the most one-sided male tasks found in the questionnaires, but this task was also mentioned as being done by women.<sup>39</sup> Threshing was often done early in the morning by male servants, sometimes referred to as 'crack-of-dawn-threshing' (*ottetröskning*).<sup>40</sup> In the work lists, it is clear that threshing could be done by women too, although more often by men. This suggests that female crofters could do the threshing at the croft since they were not so frequently required by the estate.

### *Peat and manure spreading*

A very physically demanding task was taking up peat, which was used primarily as fuel. Peat was often part of the contract with crofters, meaning that the crofters could, using their own labour, take peat from the landowner's peat bog for household use as well as for the landowner's use. They started by cutting large blocks that were then flattened and laid to dry, a procedure that demanded turning the

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<sup>37</sup> Nm 3: EU 267; Nm 28: EU 1486, EU 1971; Nm 83: EU 8141, EU 16497.

<sup>38</sup> Nm 28: EU 1459, EU 1732; Nm 83: EU 16599.

<sup>39</sup> Nm 3: EU 239, EU 267; Nm 28 EU 1971; Nm 83: EU 11929, EU 11943, EU 16497, EU 16599, EU 12352.

<sup>40</sup> Nm 3: EU 272, EU 286; Nm 28 EU 1971; Nm 83: EU 25706.



heavy peat. Many of the people answering the questionnaires stated that men usually cut the peat and women worked with the drying.<sup>41</sup> Although more typically men's work, it was clearly done by women too.

Manure handling was often part of the contract, sometimes specified as piecework for covering a specific field. In the work lists, manure handling made up a rather large proportion of the days. On the Blomberg estate, as shown in Figure 5, a large share of the work with manure was done by men; however, the preparation of the manure was to a large extent done by women, while manure spreading was done by men.<sup>42</sup> In the questionnaires, manure transporting and spreading was described as being performed by men and women together.<sup>43</sup>

### *Potatoes*

Tasks related to potatoes, which previous literature often understood as a task for women and children, were instead described as an all-gender, all-age tasks in the questionnaires; this was also supported by the work lists.<sup>44</sup> When potatoes were to be picked, men, women, and children of both sexes needed to work. In the work list from the Blomberg estate, it is clear that the more manual the task, the larger the share of women. Picking over the potato field by hand was the most one-sided female-gendered task in the work list, with about 95 per cent of the days being performed by women. On the other hand, earthing up potatoes and picking over them with a hoe was likewise clearly gendered towards men. Potato planting was done equally by men and women, and while both harrowing and ploughing the potato field and picking potatoes was done by both men and women, a larger share was done by men. From the rather clear pattern of the ethnographic questionnaires, we can conclude that potato picking was a work peak that included labour from male crofters and their wives and children, as well as male and female servants. Moreover, it is very likely that the potatoes planted at the croft were picked by the female crofter and children.

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<sup>41</sup> Nm 83: EU 11943, EU 16497, EU 16706, EU 16599, EU 11757, EU 12110.

<sup>42</sup> Blombergs säteris arkiv, SE/GLA/10976/G 5 A/1.

<sup>43</sup> Nm 21: EU 1095, EU 1217, EU 1228, EU 1549, EU 1720, EU 1735; Nm 83: EU 8141.

<sup>44</sup> Nm 3: EU 239; Nm 28: EU 1486, EU 1971; Nm 83 EU 12347, EU 16706, EU 11757, EU 11929, EU 16497.

## *Transportation*

Many contracts contained quite a heavy burden of transportation. This could be specified in number of days, as in day-long trips; for a certain distance; or with a certain purpose such as transporting a specified amount of iron, wheat, etc. Often the requirements were carefully specified – for example, how heavy the cargo should be on the way back, if the crofter or tenant farmer could sit on the wagon or needed to walk beside it, etc. This was also found in the work lists, where transporting products from a distillery was separate from transporting cheese, herring, grain to the mill, etc. As found in the Blomberg work list, transportation was done almost entirely by men.

Transportation work is discussed in the Gender and Work project carried out at Uppsala University as an example of how hierarchies played out as different objects were transported. For the verbs ‘carrying’ and ‘fetching’, women did about the same amount of work as men, while for ‘driving’ and ‘freighting’, women only did eight and four per cent, respectively, of those tasks. The type of transportation, i.e., carrying and fetching, is not visible in our sources since it was not specified in the contracts or in the work lists – although it is probably safe to assume that a fair share of the work done during a *corvée* labour day consisted of these tasks. Also, delivering all the products that the household had to bring to the landowner consisted of a large amount of carrying or fetching, although this was not specified in our sources. Regarding driving and freighting, which is what the transportation duties in our sources consisted of, men dominated, especially in the transportation of iron. Iron transports were the longest trips in our sources, thus they required the most working time. Transportation of travellers and post, which was often part of the contracted duties in our sources, were more of a collective duty that had to be performed, with the households taking turns. In the Gender and Work project’s findings, these types of transportation were done by subservient people, i.e., they were delegated by the head of household to someone who could be spared at the moment the task arose, which often meant servants and/or younger persons, perhaps children in tenant farmers’ or crofters’ households.<sup>45</sup> We can therefore assume that longer transports, especially of iron, were done by

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<sup>45</sup> Hassan Jansson, Fiebranz & Östman (2017, 128–35).

men, while the other tasks could be understood as a shared burden for the household. This conclusion is also strengthened by the ethnographic questionnaires, which revealed that transportation to the mill, for example, was done by men, women, servants, and masters, sometimes with the help of children, although mostly by men.<sup>46</sup> Taking grain to the mill was described as a rather pleasant task, since it included time waiting with others, meaning time for drinking, playing cards, and just chatting.<sup>47</sup> This finding also underlines the pattern found regarding, for example, potatoes, i.e., that the more manual the work, the more likely it was done by women, while transportation with a wagon and draught animal was done by men. Other examples of work involving manual transportation, i.e., ‘carrying’ or ‘fetching’, included collecting pinecones, picking berries, and delivering chickens and feathers. These tasks were seldom described in the work lists but, as we found in the Torpa estate archive, they were typically done by women.

*Spinning, milking, preparing food, and mending clothes – heavily female-gendered tasks*

With the use of ethnographic questionnaires, we were able to confirm some of the evidence found scattered in the estate archives. Spinning was uniformly described as women’s work and was most often described as a task done by all women of the household: mistress, maids, girls, and older women. There is no mention of spinning being done by men, but they could help out by carding the tow. When a delivery was due, meeting the contracted amount could be quite stressful, so the men had to help out. What is also interesting about spinning is that it was done in the evenings.<sup>48</sup> It was probably the most clearly gendered task that was part of the crofters’ contracts, but it could only be done when everything else for the day was finished. Weaving, while not a task mentioned by crofters as payment for the croft but still necessary for the household, was also described as women’s work, with men helping out.<sup>49</sup> Many of the contracts did include spinning duties, and they were often defined as in Tranberg’s study, where the raw material was collected

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<sup>46</sup> Nm 3: EU 193, EU 202, EU 264, EU 272, EU 274, EU 258.

<sup>47</sup> Nm 3: EU 274.

<sup>48</sup> Nm 3: EU 239, EU 268; Nm 83: EU 5621, EU 8141, EU 11929, EU 16599, EU 12339, EU 14617, EU 25706.

<sup>49</sup> Nm 3: EU 239; Nm 83: EU 8141, EU 11929, EU 16599, EU 12036.

from the estate and returned after spinning without payment or ‘spinning as before’ paid in cash as decided upon by the land owner. The importance of rural women, and especially landless or semi-landless rural women, in the expansion of textile production is also of great interest in the study of proletarianization.<sup>50</sup>

Milking was uniformly described as women’s work, as was making butter and cheese from the milk.<sup>51</sup> While crofters could keep cows themselves, usually no more than two or three, the bulk of milking labour was done on the estates, typically by specifically appointed maids. However, sometimes the questionnaire responses described how milking was an opportunity for crofters’ wives to earn cash wages.<sup>52</sup> Although milking was hard work, it made a difference for the household if the wife could take it on, since it meant cash payments. We did not encounter a duty to milk cows in the crofters’ contracts, so when it was performed by crofters, it was probably as extra days for payment. Since it was an everyday task, it needed to be done by people in physical proximity to the cow sheds, which usually was not the case with crofters.

All work with clothing was described as women’s work: sewing, knitting, mending, and washing.<sup>53</sup> Food preparation and cooking stands out as a ‘silent’ task. Although we know that it had to be done, and done every day, and that people were aware of that when planning work, who did the actual work has not been described. In contracts, food was almost always mentioned, since the work days were specified either as including food or that the crofter had to bring his or her own food, with the latter clearly dominating. This meant that the crofter had to bring food for the whole day in order to perform the task specified in the contract. Even in the questionnaire devoted to ‘Food preparation and meal customs’, there were few responses about the people actually preparing the meals. The answers were very detailed regarding both what the food was and how it was prepared – but not who made it. But when it was mentioned, it was always women.<sup>54</sup> A more visible task relating to food was that of delivering food to people whose work

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<sup>50</sup> Honeyman and Goodman (1991, 613–14).

<sup>51</sup> Nm 3: EU 239, EU 268, EU 272, EU 287, EU 286; Nm 83: EU 8153, EU 11943, EU 16564, EU 11965, EU 12016, EU 25706.

<sup>52</sup> Nm 83: EU 11943.

<sup>53</sup> Nm 3: EU 196, EU 239; Nm 83: EU 5621, EU 8141, EU 16564, EU 16599, EU 5495, EU 11757, EU 12016, EU 12036, EU 40861.

<sup>54</sup> Nm 3: EU 193, EU 202, EU 212, EU 239, EU 268, EU 287, EU 264, EU 267, EU 269, EU 272, EU 273, EU 274, EU 276; Nm 83: EU 16706, EU 25706.

days were spent away from the house. For example, delivering food to threshers, peat workers, or people digging ditches was described as women's or children's work.<sup>55</sup>

### **3.4. *Work tasks – conclusions***

We are able to go back to the list of tasks that crofters had to do according to their contracts and analyse it along with tasks necessary for the survival of the crofter household. The tasks listed under 'farming' in Table 4 could be done by both men and women, and if men were called to do farming work as *corvée* labour for the landowner, women were probably left with these tasks at the croft. One of the most time-consuming tasks besides the *corvée* days was transportation, which we found was done primarily by men. This, like the *corvée* days, kept the male crofter away from the croft and left the female crofter responsible for the daily chores of both agriculture and taking care of the small livestock that most crofters had. Spinning was probably done by women, in the evenings and possibly with the help of daughters. Apart from the collection and delivery of the raw and spun material, this task was done at the croft. Other tasks that were asked for as payment for the croft, such as berry picking and provision of eggs, were also likely considered female tasks; intense but not long-lasting work. The tasks listed in 'other' mostly included what has been shown to be male work, which also probably kept men away from the croft for shorter or longer periods of time.<sup>56</sup>

We have two clear findings in this article: female crofters did very few *corvée* days compared to male crofters, and both men and women did most of the tasks of pre-industrial agriculture. So, how could this be explained in terms of proletarianization? Nothing prevented land owners from demanding more female *corvée* days, and the estates apparently made use of female workers, but they did not take them from the crofter households. This, coupled with the second part, that women did almost all tasks that men did, gives us a result where female crofters were more useful for landowners at the crofts. Besides the agricultural chores, it was directly productive in producing all that was needed for both the subsistence of the crofter household and for the estate economy. Furthermore, the gendered

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<sup>55</sup> Nm 3: EU 239, EU 268, EU 272, EU 273, EU 274; Nm 28: EU 1971; Nm 83: EU 11943, EU 15877, EU 16706, EU 16564, EU 16599, EU 12097, EU 12328.

<sup>56</sup> Nm 3: EU202; Nm 83: EU 25706.

experience of proletarianization points to a situation in which men worked more as wage labourers while women were managing the crofts.

#### 4. Discussion

We analysed contracts between crofter households and landowners, together with work lists from estates and ethnographic material, with the aim to contribute to the empirical question of the labour organisation and the gender division of labour in a semi-landless rural group during the nineteenth century, and thereby also add to the larger question of the role of gender division of labour in the formation of a wage-dependent class. We reached three main findings that contribute to our understanding of both the crofter institution and rural labour organisation, and to the question of gender division of labour. Firstly, we found that the number of corvée labour days varied greatly between and within each estate, but that a uniform pattern emerges in which women did many fewer work days compared to men. Most men spent two or three corvée days working for the landowner every week, while few women worked even one corvée day every month. While men's work was more intense during the summer, it was continuous throughout the whole year. Women's corvée work was concentrated in the summer months and, especially, the hay harvest. This is, to our knowledge, the first comprehensive analysis of the relationship between men's corvée labour and women's corvée labour in the Swedish manorial economy.

Secondly, we investigated the correlation between men's and women's work days and found a clear positive correlation: In the contracts that had specified corvée days for women, we could see a pattern in which crofts that had a high number of corvée days for men also had a high number of corvée days for women. This indicates that men's and women's days were not exchangeable. For example, the crofts did not usually exchange a male corvée day for two women's days. This relationship is strong although the number of days varies greatly.

Thirdly, we found that the contracts also contained long lists of specified work – unlike the corvée labour days, which were usually specified only as a particular number of days. This work was specified by task, by units to deliver, or by time (for example, a number of one-day transportation duties). These tasks were not gendered in the contracts, meaning that we cannot know who in the household

performed the transportation duties, the spinning, the picking of berries, or the fencing. In order to understand more of the gender division of labour for the specified work tasks, we also analysed ethnographic sources. This, in combination with evidence from work lists, has shown that the gender division of labour was not as strict as one might have assumed. Thus, the contracts we studied produced a slightly paradoxical result for the crofts with *corvée* labour in their contracts. They showed a relatively strict spatial gender division of labour since men did much more work for the landowner than women, while the gender division of labour regarding tasks does not seem as strict. We now turn to our third question, which addresses the implications for intra-household gender division of labour.

From our study, we can say that proletarianization of the rural population in nineteenth century Sweden did not have the same outcomes for men and women and thus it changed the gender division of labour. For a large number of men who became crofters after marriage, much of their year was spent working on someone else's land. Marriage did not, as it often did before the nineteenth century, mark a drastic shift from service to having one's own farm. For women, marrying and becoming a crofter to a large extent meant working in their own households. They did spend time working for the estate, but to a much lesser extent than men. Instead, women were to varying extents left to manage the crofts on their own.

Through our interest in women's work, we have provided a unique mapping of how the crofter institution was constructed with regard to gender. However, our results also have implications for the understanding of the proletarianization process. Men and women had very different roles in the crofter institution, since women did many fewer *corvée* labour days than men, meaning that most tasks could be done by men and the female labour force was only used by the landowner at certain peak periods. *Corvée* labour for the landowner was not gendered in a way that meant men did certain things and women did certain things, since women did so few days. Our ethnographic material further underlined this picture – most tasks could be done by both men and women, although a few were mostly reserved for men or women. The labour organisation, on the other hand, was much more clearly gendered. Men did *corvée* labour for the landowner, while women did something else – which for now we assume to be work at the croft.

This means that the role as a crofter in the sense of doing *corvée* labour for a land-owner was a male experience, while a crofter in the sense of working one's own small plot of land and keeping the household together was a female experience.

The labour organisation of the crofter institution was much more heavily gendered than the actual work tasks, and this has important implications for our understanding of both the crofter institution and the gap between the male and the female crofter, and for our understanding of the formation of a wage-labour class. While crofter women increasingly took up a 'maid-of-all-work' position, crofter men learned to behave as wage workers – although with agrarian labour.



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