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Swedish Marriages

Customs, Legislation and Demography in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*

Christer Lundh

1. Introduction

In pre-industrial society the household was the most important institution along with the market. Both production and consumption were organised and distributed through the household, which also performed the vital function of insurance in cases of accidents and old age. To be able to form a separate household, one had to get married. Entry into marriage was, therefore, a very important undertaking encompassed by a multitude of rules and customs intended to consolidate and guarantee its status and stability. This chapter focuses on the various laws, church norms, popular customs and rites constituting the institutional context that affected, to a considerable extent, the conditions for entering into marriage in Sweden. It also provides an outline of different aspects of the history of marriage in Sweden, using as a point of departure the standard measures of international literature in historical demography.

The source material can be divided into three categories. First, marriage studies have been conducted within the legal and church history areas, based on laws, church decrees and legal usage as reflected in, for example, judgement books etc. A criticism of the sources is that they re-

* This is a slightly revised version of a paper that was presented to the EAP Nuptiality conference in The Hague 18 June 1999 (Eurasian Project of Population and Family History). The revision was done in September 1999, and no attempt has been made to update the paper after that. The research has been undertaken within the project "Age at Marriage in Sweden, 1750–1900. Trends and Regional Variations" funded by the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Science (HSFR).

flect the existing norms rather than practice. This is compensated for, to some extent, by studies of disputes and such like that provides some idea of the conduct of individuals. However, these are often related to odd events, and it is thus difficult to make an assessment of the frequency of an event.

Second, ethnologists have studied the popular marriage customs, based partly on descriptions of local peasant customs noted by contemporary writers, and also on recollections of the conditions in local areas during childhood, related subsequently in interviews carried out in the 1920s and later (referred to here as the traditional material). A criticism of the source material that can be made here is that there are rather few contemporary descriptions of marriage customs in pre-industrial Sweden.[1] The aspects of traditional material that can be criticised are; they were written afterwards, the interviewee was restricted by the interviewer's questions (and thus by mode-swings within ethnology), the descriptions were mainly of the landed farmers' traditions and not of the poor landless and the emphasis was on the existence of various traditions rather than on their frequency.

Third, demographers and historical demographers have studied the demographic aspects related to marriage, for example, the proportion who marry, age of marriage, size of the marriage field, etc. Studies have been based either on official statistics or family reconstructions. The source-criticism here is that investigations based on family reconstructions, being very time consuming, are local and restricted to short periods, while those based on official statistics can be more representative,

[1] The parish priest, Petrus Gaslander's descripton of peasant customs in the district of Västbo, Småland, in the south of Sweden during the first half of the 1700s is the oldest, more extensively published account of peasant life, and was issued for the first time in 1774, after the author's demise. Samuel Ödman's account of his childhood spent in a clergyman's household was issued in 1830 and set the pattern for the subsequent descriptions of peasant life in the nineteenth century. In 1868 the parish priest, Nils Lovén, under the pseudonym Nicolovius, published a description of peasant customs experienced during his childhood at the turn of the century in the parish of Skytt in Scania. In 1876 there was a similar account of customs in the nearby district of Ingelstad by a headmaster, Nils Bruzelius. A further description of peasant customs in the 1840s in the district of Rönneberg was provided by the teacher and writer Eva Wigström. She also participated in recording the customs in other parts of Scania (see for example Ingers 1972). Compared to the writers mentioned above, all of whom came from the educated middle class (with the possible exception of Wigström who came from a peasant home), Lars Andersson (called Lasse in Lassaberg) occupies a special position because he was an active farmer at the time he described the peasant customs. On the initiative of the ethnologist, Nils Gabriel Djurklou, he recorded his notes on peasant life in Unnaryd in Småland during the period 1870 to 1872. Lasse's notes later formed the basis for Djurklou's account of peasant customs and life in Unnaryd, published in 1874. The original manuscript by Lasse in Lassaberg was publisched in 1967 by the professor in ethnology Nils-Arvid Bringeus.

but lacking in important information, for example, age at marriage, and consequently not inductive to in-depth investigation.

The methodological approach used in this paper is to call on all three types of source-material simultaneously and, to a certain extent, pit them against one another. In this way the description of a norm or custom can be tested by the reflection of actual events witnessed in the demographic source material. Inversely, the demographic analysis can be based on knowledge of the prevailing customs and rules.

2. The Old Germanic Heritage and Development of Marriage Customs

Marriage customs in the rural areas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be traced back to the Old Germanic tradition, which was phased out by the influence of the Christian Church after the thirteenth century. The church was forced to accept the practice of deeply rooted traditional rites and at times chose to integrate them into Christian rituals. Thus, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were a number of customs and rituals that had lost their original meaning and were transformed into symbolic rites that lived on among the peasantry.

Marriage, in the Old Germanic society, was a matter between two families. The woman was powerless and married off by her guardian (*giftoman),* usually the father, and the marriage did not require her approval. At times the woman was a minor when she was married off. On the other hand, the man had authority and he himself conducted his part of the marriage arrangements, but was dependent on his relatives.[2]

The most important ceremonies to make the marriage legal were the betrothal (*fästningen),* marriage and 'the conducting to the bed' *(sängledningen)*. The young man made his proposal to the guardian who was usually the girl's father. If they could come to an agreement about the financial arrangements, a festive gathering *(fästestämman)*, where the betrothal took place, was arranged. At the betrothal meeting the suitor announced, in the presence of the guests, what wedding gifts he was going to give the guardian and the girl's closest relatives. The gift to the guardian, called the friendship gift (*vängåva, mund)*, was a remnant of the purchase price previously paid by a bridegroom for his bride. The size of the friendship gift was decreed by law and fundamental for the validity of the marriage. The friendship gift was essential to ensure that the woman was legally married and the children were the rightful

[2] Carlsson (1969), p. 9. For a more detailed description of the Old Germanic influence on the marriage customs, se Carlsson (1965–72) and Carlsson (1972).

heirs. As time went on, wedding gifts were handed directly to the bride, instead of the guardian, and constituted the wife's personal property.[3]

At the festive gathering to celebrate the betrothal, the guardian and suitor also came to an agreement on the dowry *(medgift, hemföljd)* that was to accompany the girl from her parental home. The dowry, in any case, was to consist of a feather bed, and anything else that was available; land, gold, silver, slaves, drinking-horns. The dowry was the personal property of the wife but was administered by the husband. If the couple remained childless, the dowry reverted to the wife's family. After the parties came to an agreement, the betrothal was confirmed by a handshake between the bride and groom, witnessed by a fixed number of relatives from both families, the so-called *fastar*.[4] Not complying with the betrothal agreement was offensive to the other party and his or her family, as well as highly stigmatising. The one who did not keep the betrothal promise was forced to return the betrothal and other gifts, pay a fine to the injured party, and swear that there was nothing wrong with him or her.[5]

If the parties were true to the betrothal agreement, arrangements were made for the marriage and wedding feast. The marriage, usually held in the bride's home, was a solemn ceremony in which the guardian gave away the bride to the groom. A special beer feast *(giftarölet)* was held to celebrate the occasion. The bridegroom and his retinue went to the bride's home, the ceremony was performed and the bride was given away to the groom by the guardian who read a traditional wedding speech which began, "I give you my daughter". This was followed by the transfer and escorting of the bride from the old to the new home *(brudfärden)*, carried out by a mounted retinue.[6]

The wedding feast was held in the man's home. This was where they performed 'the conducting to the bed', a symbolic rite in which the bridal couple, in the presence of the wedding guests, lay on the bed. The marriage was regarded as consummated when the bedcover was drawn over them.[7] On the day after the wedding, the husband was supposed to give his wife a morning gift *(morgongåva)*, originally a price for her virginity. This morning gift was intended to provide support in case of widowhood, especially among the rich, and was the wife's personal property.[8]

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[3] Carlsson 1969, p. 10.
[4] Carlsson 1969, p. 10–11.
[5] Carlsson 1969, p. 12.
[6] Carlsson 1969, p. 12–14.
[7] Carlsson 1969, p. 14–15, 17. Hemmer has argued strongly against this interpretation of 'the conducting to bed' (see Hemmer 1952, 1955, 1958a, 1958b, 1966).
[8] Carlsson 1969, p. 14–15, 17.

The marriage was regarded as completed when the betrothal was followed by the wedding and 'conducting to the bed'. Within the marriage both the wife and husband had personal ownership of the real property, usually land previously owned by them, the dowry, betrothal gifts and the morning gift. As regards common property, both had the right to a share, which meant that the wife owned a third while the husband owned the rest. The husband became the wife's guardian by virtue of the marriage, that is to say, he spoke on behalf of the wife and administered her property.[9]

According to studies of medieval provincial laws (*landslagarna*), that was approximately what marriage rituals were like.[10] The advent of Christianity brought a new outlook on marriage which came into conflict with the traditional marriage customs. As these were deeply rooted among the peasantry, there was discord between Christianity and worldly rights over the forms of entering into marriage throughout the medieval times until the eighteenth century. The Christian ritual became the only lawful form of marriage with the enactment of the 1734 law, but even at that time it was necessary to give the betrothal rite a special position (see below). The 1734 law, with minor changes, remained in force until 1915.[11]

In 1215 the *Laterna Synod* in Rome decreed that a Christian marriage was the obligatory form of entering into marriage, and that it0 was to be preceded by publishing of the banns *(lysning)*. Marriages entered into by any other method were regarded as secretive, so-called *Matrimonia Clandestina.* The publishing of the banns would prevent marriage between too-closely related persons and bigamy.[12]

The publishing of the banns meant that, on three Sundays in succession, at high mass and in the presence of the whole congregation, the priest announced by name the two persons who wished to marry each other. Such provisions were included in medieval legislation and remained thereafter in laws and church decrees. The publishing of the banns was, in practice, an application for a marriage licence to prevent bigamy and marriage between too-closely related persons, but was at the same time a church benediction for the contracting parties. Applying for a marriage licence also had an ecclesiastical side; the priest assessed the

[9] Carlsson 1969, p. 13, 15.
[10] The provincial laws were based on verbal traditions that were subsequently written down. Thereafter, successive new laws were passed during the medieval period.
[11] Carlsson 1969, p. 18.
[12] Hafström 1967.

contracting parties' knowledge of catechism.[13] When the catechetical hearing was over, he signed the marriage certificate, confirming that the couple's catechism was satisfactory and ready to be proclaimed in church.

It has been reported that in nineteenth century Scania banns often included codes and epithets about the man and woman, signalling their social status and conduct.[14] In Rönneberg jurisdictional district, where Sireköpinge is situated, the contemporary writer**,** Eva Wigström, noted that the priest used "*a number of qualitative words in front of the title and name, usually 'honourable, kind and well-respected homestead (or farm tenant) son N.N., and honourable and virtuous maid and homestead (or farm tenant) daughter N.N'. Widowers and independent farmers were called 'worthy of honour, wise and well-respected'. Pity the bride about whom the priest had forgotten to say 'virtuous maid'.*"[15]

Publishing of the banns did not compete with the traditional betrothal. Church decrees and laws in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries only stipulated that publishing of the banns had to precede betrothals and weddings.[16] Marriage, on the other hand, was a competing ritual which had to be held in church in ceremonial circumstances, and performed by a priest in the presence of the congregation. Consequently, the betrothals of laymen and farmers were frowned on.[17]

The gradual introduction of Christian marriages did not drive out betrothals, but became a parallel ceremony. At the start of the reformation it was still common to get married privately, without a priest, but in the 1571 church decree it was laid down that those who had become betrothed at home had to have their union sanctioned by a priest at a ceremony in front of the church door, before going off to consummate the marriage.[18] In the seventeenth century the church attempted to combine betrothal and marriage into a single ceremony to be conducted in church in the presence of the congregation, but this failed in spite of repeated attempts. The 1734 law stipulated that a Christian wedding either in church or at home preceded by the publishing of the banns was the only fully legal form of entering into marriage, and betrothal was deemed by

[13] Hilding Pleijel has pointed out that the catechetical requirement for marriage explains to a large extent the central position held by Lutheran catechism in Sweden (Pleijel 1942). In the nineteenth century when the obligatory elementary-school and confirmation preparations increased catechetical knowledge, the custom of catechetical testing declined (Bringeus 1969, p.86).
[14] Bringeus 1969, p. 88.
[15] Wigström 1985, p. 30.
[16] Bringeus 1969, p. 85.
[17] Carlsson 1969, p. 17–18.
[18] Gustafsson 1969, p. 121.

law to be a documented undertaking to marry.[19] The strong tradition of betrothal gave it far-reaching legal effects, and until 1915 the children of betrothed parents were legally equivalent to children within marriage and eligible for inheritance (see below).[20]

The choice of wedding premises varied over time and between social classes. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century rural weddings were generally held in the parish church in connection with the normal Sunday service. The marriage itself took place before the start of the service and in the presence of the whole congregation, and after the service the bridal mass was sung.[21] In the nineteenth century church marriages declined strongly and in many rural parishes there were no church marriages after 1850. Instead, people got married at home. The nobility had previously married at home and during the nineteenth century other well-off social classes took up the practice. The overcrowded and lowly-paid of the lower social groups often married in the rectory or in the church in connection with a smaller service.[22]

Many marriage customs, that owed their origin to the Old Germanic traditions, lived on long after Sweden was christianised. In a number of cases the customs had lost their legal connotation and become symbolic functions, but in other cases like, for example, the case of betrothal, the custom was so strong that the legal effects had to be retained. As has been shown, Christianisation of the country really meant that Christian marriage rituals complemented the traditional rituals.

The notes of contemporary narrators and traditional material show that marriage among the landholding rural classes in the Swedish countryside had approximately the following elements.

The young man who wanted to get married made the proposal himself or through a spokesman (see below) to the girl's guardian, usually her father, and if they were in agreement, the young couple could become betrothed. Thereafter, the couple (in certain regions the girl was represented by her father) approached the priest to have the banns published. After the catechetical hearing that prepared the young couple to receive the Blessed Sacrament at the wedding, the priest wrote out a certificate stating that the couple wished to get married. This was read out by the priest from the pulpit at high mass on three Sundays in succession. If there were no grounds for hindering the marriage, and the young couple kept to their betrothal, plans for the marriage and wedding were begun.[23]

[19] Gustafsson 1969, p. 123–124.
[20] Carlsson 1969, p. 12.
[21] Gustafsson 1969, p. 124.
[22] Gustafsson 1969, p. 124–125.
[23] Bringeus 1969, p. 85–89.

On the morning of the wedding day the young man with his retinue went to the girl's parent's home and asked to see the prospective bride. After the official showing of the bride (*skådningen*) a small meal was served, after which the whole group made their way to the church or wherever the marriage was to be held. The action in which the guardian hands the girl to the prospective bridegroom is the equivalent of the marriage rite according to the old tradition.[24] In the Swedish term *giftermål, mål* signifies the speech in the bridal home where the guardian handed over the bride to the bridegroom and his retinue.[25]

The marriage was performed by a priest and included, as mentioned earlier, two rites, the marriage itself and a benediction for the couple (*brudmässan*). After this the guests made their way to the wedding homestead which was the parental home of either the bride or bridegroom. This was decided by, among other things, access to spacious premises, because it was the custom to invite a large number of guests. Sometimes, the wedding feast was held at a neighbour's or some place specially intended for the purpose.[26] There are also narrator's reports that the first few days of the feast were usually held in the bride's home, and the following days in the home of the groom,[27] or that the feast started in the groom's home the day before the wedding and continued in the bride's home.[28] The weddings of the landless were often much simpler, and arranged and paid for by the master and mistress of the household.[29]

The festivities often lasted several days. However, according to traditional material, there were regional variations and it is probable that there was a decrease in the number of festive days over time. In the middle of the nineteenth century it was not unusual for a rural wedding in Scania to last between three and five days. The landless groups, as previously mentioned, did not hold such extravagant wedding feasts.[30]

Those present at the wedding feast were the married couple's parents, other relatives, neighbours, villagers and at times several other parishioners. The priest and parish clerk were also present. Thus, it could be a matter of a large number of guests, but not all of them were there at the same time. The close relatives, priest and parish clerk were there on the first day, and over the next few days other guests, according to how close they were to the families. At times the feast was opened to the

[24] Norlind 1919, p. 69–72.
[25] Granlund 1969, p. 134.
[26] Berg 1969, p. 184–186.
[27] Bruzelius 1976, p. 97; Nicolovius 1990, p. 144–147; Wigström 1985, p. 37.
[28] Lasse i Lassaberg 1967, p. 106; Gaslander 1982, p. 15.
[29] Berg 1969, p. 186; Näsström 1969, p. 169–179.
[30] Berg 1969.

village poor and young people, who could partake of the food and drink and join in the dancing.[31]

An important ceremony during the wedding feast was the 'conducting to the bed', which had been transformed from a heathen rite to a Christian benediction. In medieval times the Old Germanic 'conducting to the bed' had a counterpart in the Catholic Church requirement that a carnal union was necessary to validate the marriage. This was included in the general rural and town laws in medieval times, where it was decreed that the couple had to spend a night together to consummate the marriage. Such rules were gradually abolished, but 'conducting to the bed' continued as a symbolic ceremony among the peasants.[32]

Conducting to the bed always took place in the wedding home, sometimes directly after returning from church and sometimes later in the evening, for example, after dinner or during the dancing. The ceremony was symbolic and devoid of the sensual character it had had before the 1700s, and quite often there was not even a bed. The priest and parish clerk participated in the ceremony and the former said a prayer for the bridal couple and the guests sang a psalm.[33]

At the wedding feast the bridal couple were at the centre of attention, and several of the customs surrounding the wedding can be seen as intermediate rites aimed at transforming the young couple from youth status to that of adult peasant couple. In the nineteenth century there were, for example in the Scania countryside[34], special parties on the night before the wedding, when the young men of the village gathered together to celebrate the prospective bridegroom's passing over from the status of young bachelor to that of married man. These gatherings were called *utsparkningsgillen* and were the equivalent of what in modern language are called stag parties.[35] Contemporary narrators report that it was customary, during the dancing for the young unmarried men to perform a dance together with the groom, signifying his change of civil status from bachelor to married man.[36]

The wedding feast itself also had a symbolic significance. At the dinner table the seats of honour were occupied by the bridal couple as homestead farmer and wife, while their respective parents were placed as guests. This placing arrangement indicated that the bridal couple had

[31] Berg 1969.
[32] Carlsson 1969, p. 16.
[33] Gustafsson 1969, p. 122–123; Norlind 1919, p. 82–88; Nicolovius 1990; Bruzelius 1976.
[34] This custom did not seem to be especially common among the peasants in the rest of Sweden, but stag parties were held in academic circles in the towns (Hellspong,1969, p. 107–109).
[35] Hellspong 1969, p. 107–110.
[36] Nicolovius 1990, p. 140; Gaslander 1982, p. 17–18.

freed themselves from parental power and built their own independent household. The Swedish ethnologist, John Granlund, writes, "*To move the bridegroom and his bride to the homestead's seat of honour via the feast's seat of honour can be said to be the raison dêtre of the wedding rites.*"[37]

3. Marriage as an Institution

The family/household was the most important production and consumption unit in pre-industrial society. The overwhelming majority of firms were family firms, mainly family agriculture, most people shared a household with others, and the greater part of their consumption was within the household. Furthermore, in a society without a modern social welfare system, the family constituted an insurance system that was superior to market alternatives in cases of illness and old age. In cases where the family was unable to carry out this insurance function, there was a further safety net in villages and parishes, as well as the possibility that local estates and rural factories took responsibility for their employees.

Since marriage was the institutional arrangement that gave the family this stability, entry into marriage implied far-reaching consequences for the contracting parties' financial circumstances and the children's future inheritance rights. Marriage was encompassed by a number of rules intended to guarantee the validity of the union and protect it from breaking up. According to the 1734 law, both parties, by entering into marriage, had the right to a half share of the property held in common, as well as the real property acquired in the course of married life. Real property belonging to or inherited by either one before marriage was personal property and not affected by the law of widow's/widower's right to property held jointly. Children born within the marriage became legal heirs to their parents. [38]

The deeply rooted customs of betrothal meant that it was seen in law as an incomplete marriage. Betrothal signified that the couple had committed themselves in writing to marry each other, and there were legal sanctions against the violation of this undertaking. It was especially serious if the woman had become pregnant during the period of betrothal, in which case it was a prerequisite that the betrothal was completed by a legal marriage ceremony. The children of betrothed couple were given the same right of inheritance as children of a married couple. In cases where the man refused to complete the marriage by means of a cere-

[37] Granlund 1969, p. 147.
[38] *Sveriges rikes lag*, Giftermålsbalken (the marriage act), 10 chapter, §1, §2.

mony, in spite of the wife's pregnancy, the law provided for the woman to be regarded as the lawful-wedded wife with the right to her share of the property in the man's household.[39]

In the Old Germanic tradition conditions were different for the sexes within marriage. The man could have several wives, and it could well be that he had women outside the marriage (*frillor*), while adultery was not acceptable if committed by the woman. It was easy for the man to petition for divorce, and it was sufficient for him to merely inform his wife of his intention to divorce her. However, in such cases the woman's family had to be compensated.[40] The influence of Christianity on marriage customs brought with it a strengthening of the woman's position in marriage. The fidelity requirement was now extended to men and marriages became more difficult to dissolve.[41] The New Testament view that marriage was a life-long union was expressed in the words of Matteus, "*What God has brought together, let no man put asunder*".[42] The church, however, was unable to oppose divorce and was forced to compromise, but it was still generally restrictive.

During the seventeenth and nineteenth century divorce was unusual, mainly because it was opposed by both church and state. A stable household was considered to be a guarantee for people's upkeep, good morals and society's future existence. Prior to the twentieth century there were few marriages dissolved by other reasons than the decease of one or both partners. The frequency of divorce was higher in the towns, especially towards the end of the nineteenth century, but still few in number. For the country as a whole, there were, on average, as many as 5,000 married couples for every divorced couple between 1831 and 1870.[43]

By law, a marriage could be dissolved by either annulment (*återgång*) or divorce (*skillnad*). If one of the partners was deceived, the marriage could be declared null and void right from the start, after which the partners returned to the civil status held by them prior to marriage. Any children of the union were regarded as legitimate. Reasons for annulment were, among other things, bigamy, impotence, serious illness, deception, mistaken virginity of the bride, adultery before the marriage and close relationship.[44]

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[39] *Sveriges rikes lag*, Giftermålsbalken (the marriage act), 3 chapter; Ärvdabalken (the inheritence law), 8 chapter.
[40] Sjöberg 1988, p. 38; Carlsson 1972, p. 3–5.
[41] Carlsson 1969, p. 17–19.
[42] Matt 19:6.
[43] *Historisk statistik för Sverige. Del 1*, table 33.
[44] Rundquist 1985, p. 135–136. For a more detailed discription of the legislation and practice as far as divorces ar concerned, see Nylander 1961 and Sjöberg 1988.

Divorce meant a lawful dissolution of marriage. According to the 1734 law, there were only two legal reasons for divorce, adultery and voluntary abandonment. The latter could be due to a move abroad or disappearance without a trace for more than a year. If adultery or abandonment were involved, the injured party could turn to the parish priest and ask for a divorce. If admonition and mediation did not succeed in saving the marriage, the court decided on divorce and the cathedral chapter issued a writ of divorce.[45]

If there were no lawful reasons for divorce, but both partners wished to part, they could claim that there were other reasons and thereby obtain special dispensation. During the nineteenth century there was a gradual liberalisation regarding acceptable reasons. Grounds for dispensation were violence between the partners, that one of the partners had a criminal record, extravagance, drunkenness, violent disposition and madness. In 1860 it was possible to obtain a divorce on the grounds of discord, which immediately became a common reason for divorce. The procedure for this path to divorce was for the couple to approach the parish priest and church council, who carried out a long drawn out attempt at mediation. Admonition and warnings were tried, and when nothing helped they decided on a time-limited judicial separation during which the couple were not allowed to see each other. After the separation the couple could apply for a royal dispensation, which in practice was delegated to the courts.[46]

The consequences of a divorce were considerable. The process was demeaning for the partners and often led to a rearrangement on their social map. At least one of the partners lost his/her natural social network. If the cause of the divorce was adultery or abandonment, the guilty party lost the right to all or half of the property held in common and the children. In the case of adultery, the guilty party was not allowed to remarry before the injured party was dead, remarried or gave his/her consent. In the latter case, permission was also required from the government.[47]

Since society and church opposition to divorce was so strong, and the social repercussions so severe, it was avoided as much as possible, even if the union between the marriage partners was far from satisfactory. It might have been easier for the land-holding farmers in the rural areas to hold a marriage together, as they had greater resources at their disposal. If the married partners were unable to live as a couple, they could separate 'within' the marriage and live in different houses on the

[45] Sjöberg 1988, p. 47–52; Rundquist 1985, p. 136.
[46] Sjöberg 1988, p. 52; Rundquist 1985, p. 136.
[47] Rundquist 1985, p. 136–137

same property with more or less separate households. [48] The daughter of Lasse in Lassaberg, one of the narrators referred to in this chapter, describes her parent's relationship: "*It became impossible for them to share the same table, and father, on receiving his payment according to the retirement contract, moved out into the entrance hall alone, while mother was inside with the children. Father prepared his own meals. This was a case of falling out and splitting. He drank at every opportunity and kept away from home most of the time."* [49]

Marriage, according to the 1734 legislation, was based on an unequal relationship between the spouses. The man was the head of the household and the wife's guardian. This was in accordance with both the Germanic and the Christian tradition. Until the ninteenth century the Swedish church rules contained Paulus' phrase that the man should be '*the head'* of the wife.[50] Besides, he had the right to administer all the property held in common, as well as the wife's personal property. Such rules regarding the man's unrestricted right of administration could not be changed or restricted through a pre-marital settlement, or by any other means. In the nineteenth century the advent of liberalism meant that the demand for authority for women gained increased support and women's rights to work outside the home increased. In 1845 women were given equal right of inheritance and in 1863 the unmarried women were declared legally competent**.** Further reforms during the rest of the century increased women's legal status, but it was only after World War I that married women were given the right to vote and the same status in marriage as men.[51]

4. Building an Own Household

In Sweden, building an own household was expected of a married couple. This is in keeping with the requirements of the north-western household formation system.[52] As a consequence of this, young couples had to save in order to acquire a household, and the man had to have an occupation that could support a family. The expectation that marriage would result in a new household should have made marriage more difficult, but during the eighteenth and nineteenth century there were institutional arrangements which made it easier for a couple who wanted to marry, get access to land and somewhere to live, collect enough household goods and save enough to be able to arrange a wedding.

[48] Rundquist 1985, p. 135.
[49] Cited in Bringeus 1966, p.35.
[50] Hafström (1958).
[51] Lundgren 1969, p. 219–224.
[52] Hajnal 1983; Laslett 1977.

Access to land and/or living accommodation could be through inheritance from the parents to one of the partners. Before 1845 inheritance legislation meant that brothers inherited twice as much as sisters, but that the right of inheritance was equal within each sex.[53] In practice these principles were applied differently in different parts of the country. Often the eldest son was favoured in the distribution of property. Sons and daughters who were not chosen to take over the family farm were compensated with outlying land for cultivation or movable property, sometimes given in advance as a dowry. In 1845 the principle of equal inheritance rights for men and women was introduced in legislation, which meant that all the siblings had the right to an equal share of the property.[54] However, in practice one of the heirs could still be favoured by setting a low value on the property, thereby allowing the chosen one to buy out the others on favourable terms.[55]

Within the farmer class it was quite normal for parents to relinquish the farm when they were 55–60 years old, and leave it to one of the children, or even to someone outside the family. In such cases a retirement contract was signed in which the retiring couple were guaranteed accommodation and a certain amount of foodstuff and fuel per year. When the parents died, the inheritance was distributed, and one of the children took over the homestead by buying out the others.[56] The retirement institution was also practised among tenant farmers. Tenants on crown land were allowed to could make over the family farm to a chosen child in return for food and accommodation for as long as they lived, as long as they did not split the property. Tenant farmers on noble land had a weaker form of land tenure. They could retire and make over the farm to one of their children, or anybody else, but this change of tenant had to be approved of by the landlord. For both freehold and tenancy farmers the retirement institution meant that young couples who wished to marry gained access to a farm before the old couple died.

For the landless who could not expect to inherit land, the only possibility was to acquire a place on an estate in which to carry out work, or support themselves by working as farmhands or artisans. They could then obtain a crofter's holding or rent a town house or room. Legislation after the end of the eighteenth gradually became more generous towards the building of crofts and cottages, thereby increasing the possibilities of marriage for the landless. The possibility of forming an own household

[53] *Sveriges rikes lag*, Ärvdabalken (law of inheritence), 1 chapter, §1.
[54] *Sveriges rikes lag,* Ärvdabalken. (law of inheritence), 1 chapter, §1.
[55] Kjellman 1979, p. 87.
[56] For a description of the retirement contract system, see Gaunt (1983) and Åberg & Öster (1995).

was also increased by the introduction of the *statare* system[57] on the estates which provided a completely new form of housing for married workers in the rural areas.[58]

Building a new household involved heavy expenditure on furniture, kitchen utensils, equipment and other household goods. The wedding feast cost large sums of money. Therefore, there were institutional arrangements in the rural society aimed at facilitating the setting-up of new households and spreading the expenses for wedding feasts.

The dowry functioned as the parents' financial help to the children. Traditional material abounds with accounts of how parents, from the time their children were very young, saved for their future weddings. In the nineteenth century it was common to agree on the dowry at the time of the proposal or some point prior to the wedding, and hand over the gift during the wedding feast.[59]

The fact that the dowry as an institution had been regulated by legislation since medieval times must have contributed to its being so deeply rooted in the population. The law regarded dowry as an old heritage, but no details were mentioned as to what it should be. However, a practice developed that seemed to have been followed in most parts of the country. The most usual gifts were cows, made-up beds, bedding, linen and money. In Scania cows as dowry were less common, while chests with bedding, linen and money were the most popular items.[60]

The dowry was a voluntary gift from the parents and the children could not make any lawful demands to receive one. It would appear though that it had become a widespread custom among rural people in the whole country, and a part of the parents' property was transferred to the children when they married. Parents appeared to have had the objective of compensating those children who were not likely to inherit the family homestead. An investigation in Norrland[61] and Gotland[62] shows that sons were given dowries as often as daughters. If this was true for the whole country, it could be said that the dowry fulfilled a compensatory function. Sons and daughters, who did not expect to receive land after distribution of the inheritance, received compensation in the form

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[57] The *statare system* was a special employment form at the estates, in which married agricultural workers were contracted to work on a yearly basis for payment partly in cash and partly in kind (dwellings, provisions).
[58] Lundh 1999a.
[59] Kjellman 1979, p. 86.
[60] Kjellman 1979, p. 88–90.
[61] Norrland is Sweden's largest region, located approximately 200 kilometres north of Stockholm and nortwards, and covering more than two thirds of the total area of the country.
[62] Gotland is situated in the Baltic Sea, approximately 200 kilometers south of Stockholm.

of personal property within the framework of the dowry institution. The common belief, that dowries were given mainly to daughters, would thus be based on the fact that daughters inherited the parental homestead less often than sons, and were therefore compensated by means of dowries.[63]

Another institution, involving gifts to facilitate the setting-up of households, was the custom that relatives, neighbours and villagers, who attended the wedding feast, usually gave gifts. The actual giving of gifts took place during or after the dinner, when a bowl or plate was sent round among the guests so that they could leave their gifts. The most common gift was money, but in Scania it was common to give household utensils and silver or pewter goods. In central Sweden it was usual for guests, at the time of the gift-giving ceremony, to promise to give a gift at a later juncture (*lova-till-bos*), and in Central Norrland the custom was that relatives, who lived a long distance away and could not attend, sent money to the bridal couple (*sändningsgåvor*).[64]

The institution of wedding gifts was built on a mutual giving of gifts within the family and village, and the ceremony, where gifts were handed over, took place in the presence of all the guests. The procedure varied in different parts of the country, from the simple handing over of the gift, to the announcement of the donor's name and value of the gift in the presence of all the wedding guests. In central Norrland , in addition to this, a thorough record of the donor and value of the gift was kept.[65] In general, it would appear that there was considerable social pressure on the recipients to reciprocate when other villagers got married. The Norrland custom of thoroughly recording the value of the gift must have emphasised the duty to reciprocate and implies that wedding gifts were significant for setting-up households in that region.

Ethnological research has shown that different types of gifts were supplements to each other in a way that was in line with the social structure. In turn, this can be related to the various cultural zones that are said to distinguish the north from the south of Sweden.[66] The south of Sweden was richer than the north and the social gaps larger. In the south there were well-off farmers, while the north had small farmers and fewer social differences. There were no manorial estates and large lan-

[63] Kjellman 1979, p. 88, 95.
[64] Kjellman 1979, p. 20–40.
[65] Kjellman 1979, p. 22.
[66] Bringeus divides Sweden into two dominant cultural zones; Northern Sweden, which is Norrland, including Dalarna, and Southern Sweden which is the rest. The border, which is along the Dala river, corresponds to the old shack line. (Bringeus 1978).

dless groups like in the south. This, in combination with cultural differences, left its mark on the institution of gifts.[67]

In southern Sweden, especially on the island of Gotland, the dowry was a financially significant social institution with consequences for family affairs. The institution of wooer's proxy and parent-controlled marriage involved large dowries, and was therefore more prevalent in southern Sweden. Behind this was the fact that there were well-to-do rural families in the south who wanted to transfer their wealth in this way. There were smaller dowry undertakings even among the small farmers in the north and the landless in the south.[68]

In lower Norrland the institution of wedding gifts was given a prominent position, thus signifying the lesser importance of dowries. It was difficult for the relatively poor small farmers to give their children enough to get married and start a new household, so much depended on the combined efforts of relatives, neighbours and parishioners. The system was characterised by the announcing of the name of the donor and value of the gift, the keeping of thorough records of these and the sending of gifts from far-away places. In this system, the element of reciprocity was prominent. In southern Sweden and other regions of Norrland this element of 'repayment' although basically present, was not quite so clear and immediate.[69]

In the south, where the landless groups were larger, young people from landless homes could take advantage of alternative sources of help to make household setting-up easier. The bridal round *(fästmögången)* was held in connection with the wedding, and performed by women who went to the local homesteads and begged for contributions to the new household. The usual gifts were wool and linen. In order to distinguish themselves from ordinary beggars, the women would dress well and act according to a ritual. The male equivalent, the seed begging (*sädestiggeriet*), was not geographically widespread.[70]

It can be said that the bridal round and the seed begging was a type of begging accepted by society since it was done with the intention of facilitating the formation of a household for landless groups in the rural areas. This type of gift-giving constituted a form of compensation for the less well-off who lacked dowries and wedding gifts. These two types of begging were unusual in Norrland, where wedding gifts and sent gifts were more widespread and could be enjoyed by all.[71] The reciprocity of

[67] Kjellman 1979, p. 132–134.
[68] Kjellman 1979, p. 132–134.
[69] Kjellman 1979, p. 132–134.
[70] Kjellman 1979, p. 105–125.
[71] Kjellman 1979, p. 132–134.

this custom is obvious from a narrator's report of the traditions in a district in Småland in southern Sweden in the eighteenth century:

> *"This custom is now not as widely used, as in days of old, especially in the western outskirts of the district. Those who asked for, and received this form of support, were considered to be obliged to give in return as long as they were engaged in farming. Those who neither requested nor needed this support were free of this shameless but respectable form of begging."*[72]

A further considerable expense was the wedding feast itself. The costs consisted of wages foregone during the planning and feast itself, and the expense of obtaining food and drink, cooking, serving and entertainment for a large number of people. Traditional notes say that a wedding could sometimes attract as many as several hundred guests. Since the feast in the rural homestead went on for a few days, at times a week, the number of lost working days was large for both the organisers and participants. This explains why weddings were often held in the winter months and seldom in the summer and harvest periods.

The costs of the wedding feast were shared among the guests by virtue of the fact that they, except for the priest and parish clerk, were expected to contribute with food and drink, which they took to the wedding or sent in advance (*förning*). Each district had strict rules with regard to how much food and drink each guest had to provide, but the general requirement was bread, butter and cheese. It was also common to send malt in good time to be used in brewing beer for the wedding feast.[73] Eva Wigström, the contemporary writer from Rönneberg district, in which the parish of Sireköpinge is situated, describes the food provided by the guests themselves:

> *"Ham, salted or smoked,was boiled or baked together with a large piece of salted beef, a whole salt, prune-filled goose, two fresh suckling pigs and two hens, ducks or chickens. All of these, and at times even more, were put in a large grill pan of shining tin and great pratice was needed to manage to arrange this paramide in a proper way since everything was boiling hot. The large, even joints were put in the bottom, and, to fill the spaces beside the solitary goose, one had to put in a veal or mutton leg, in case one was not fortunate enough to have two geese. On this base, the pigs were laid beautifully on their knees and bore the weight of the chickens above them. The whole was supported with meat forks and such like until it was cold and was so well put together that it could be*

[72] Gaslander 1982, p. 11–12.
[73] Berg 1969, p. 182–183.

transported without damage. The visible bones of the ham, goose and chickens were decorated with white, crisp paper, and a garland of long wheat rusks, held together with strong thread, surrounded the whole like a fringe. This roast and a couple of the thick rye wheat breads were called simple or half 'förning'. To make this a whole 'förning' required a sponge cake, baked with two score eggs, sugar and wheatflour, sweat but still dry as sawdust, as well as sixty to seventy almond patties and wafers or crullers. These cakes on their own made up a simple 'förning'."[74]

The provision of food by the guests made the wedding feast less of a financial burden for the married couple (or their parents) than it would otherwise have been. It was also common for the guests to contribute to other costs during the wedding feast, for example, with money for the musicians, maids and cooks. Wigström maintains, in the account of wedding customs in the Rönneberg district, that the wedding could even have become profitable for the bridal couple when one took into account the wedding gifts, food provided by the guests and money for the personnel at the wedding feast.[75]

5. Choice of Partner

According to the 1734 law, no one could be forced into marriage, and this applied to both men and women.[76] This was an expression of the gradual influence of Christianity on legislation. In the Old Germanic tradition there were incidences of the abduction and purchase of brides, as well as marrying-off of under-aged girls. The spread of Christianity meant that women began to be seen as individuals with their own worth, and that marriage was a voluntary union.

On the other hand, the 1734 law included provisions that gave parents the power to influence their children's choice of partner.[77] As has been mentioned, unmarried women had no authority, but were placed under a guardian, normally her father, who acted on her behalf in marriage negotiations. The institution of guardian is a reflection of the fact that marriage was not only a matter for the young couple, but also dependent on the older generation, in particular in so far as the woman was concerned. The law also gave the parents the right to disinherit their unmarried daughters if they married against the will of the parents. Even sons and daughters, who were widowed, could, if they married against

[74] Wigström 1985, p. 31–32.
[75] Wigström 1985, p. 37.
[76] *Sveriges rikes lag*, Giftobalken (the marriage act), 1 chapter, 5§.
[77] *Sveriges rikes lag*, Giftobalken (the marriage act), 1 chapter, 2§.

the will of their parents, be disinherited, given that they were part of the parents' household, and it could be interpreted that they refused to obey because of their disdain and contempt for the parents.[78]

Legislation thus made it possible for marriages based on love, but at the same time it made it possible for parents, by virtue of their involvement in the marriage negotiations and their right to disinherit children who did not obey, to influence the choice of marriage partner. Ethnological researchers have made attempts to obtain a picture of how this worked in practice, by studying traditional notes on the subject.

In older ethnological literature, which mainly dealt with the landholding farmers' customs, emphasis was laid on the parents' influence on the children's marriage, and mention was even made of a 'parental-power marriage system'.[79] People were reluctant to see the homestead passed on to someone outside the family, and wanted instead to increase its size by fusion with another homestead, as a result of marriage. An advanced expression for this sort of economic planning in connection with marriage was, among other things, the so-called sibling-exchange system, in which two siblings of one family married two siblings of another.[80]

Traditional material and contemporary narrators provide vivid accounts of parental power over the children's choice of marriage partner. As mentioned, it was mainly a matter of marriage strategies among the wealthy farmers in south and central Sweden. The contemporary narrators point out that these farmers endeavoured to marry off their children to their equals, that is to say, within the same social group. Wealth, an esteemed family and social status were qualities that were decisive in the choice of marriage partner, not passion or love. [81] Nicolovius reported from the district of Skytt in Scania at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

> *"Similarity of wealth, but not the way of thinking or opinion, was the basis for marriage unions among farmers' families at the time. Beauty and grace were the least important in making their choice. These concepts did not even have corresponding words in the language of the farmers, and even now /published 1868/, when the word 'charming' is used, I hear of a charming horse and even a charming pig, but, so far, never a charming girl."* [82]

[78] *Sveriges rikes lag*, Giftobalken (the marriage act), 6 chapter, 1–2§§.
[79] Rob. K Wikman, quoted in Granlund 1969, p. 134.
[80] Andersson 1969, p. 53; Jansson 1955.
[81] Wigström 1985, p. 27–28; Bruzelius 1976, p. 34; Nicolovius 1990, p. 121–122.
[82] Nicolovius 1990, p. 121–122.

Marriage is presented by the contemporary narrators as a financial affair, even though it was not openly admitted, and the proposal as a negotiation in accordance with laid-down rules. [83] Bruzelius writes about Ingelstad district in Scania: "*In the marriage settlement the most important question was always, 'What will you give the girl?' More than one proposal came to an abrupt end at the mere question, because the father-in-law refused to hand over the oxen demanded by the son-in-law"*.[84] Lasse in Lassaberg gives a picturesque description of how the proposal was prepared by both sets of parents, without the participation and at times without even the knowledge of the children:

> "*I mentioned that the parents had to choose a partner for their child. They then discussed whether it would be a good idea to get the child to N which was in possession of a good 'wurnad' (by wurnad was meant a good and suitable dwelling). If the parents agreed, the father of the child, on a Sunday, armed with a bottle of schnapps, took the father or guardian of the child, who was the potential marriage partner, aside and together they had what was called in bygone days a drink while at church ('kyrkesup'), but no attempt was made to discuss the marriage. If nothing was heard for several Sundays after this initial approach, it was concluded that 'the fish had not taken the hook'. But if the other party reciprocated on a following Sunday by bearing with him similar refreshment, there was joy on the part of those who had made the initial approach. Still, not a word was mentioned about the marriage plans. It was now the turn of the womenfolk. On the next Sunday, the wife of the initiator baked bread with pretzels and wafers, which she took to church to offer the wife of the other man. If this was reciprocated with similar fare on the following Sunday, then there were good prospects in sight. It was expected that the initiator would then carry what was called in days of old his hip-flask ('lommeknirka') to church and again approach the other. When this was concluded, 'the boil finally burst'. Thereafter, the one who began said, 'So brother, let's have it done with. I shall begin by telling you what my wife and I have discussed during the long winter nights. We have on both sides, you and I, marriageable children. Would you consider taking my son N. as a son-in-law at your place, or would you like your daughter N. to move in with us?*

[83] Wigström 1985, p. 29; Bruzelius 1976, p. 34.
[84] Bruzelius 1976, p. 34.

We have good accommodation in both places that the young will find comfortable.' The other then answers in this fashion, 'How strange that we in both places should have such similar thoughts. My wife and I have discussed the matter at some length, but we have always considered the old adage that says 'it is too low a manger for such a large horse'. Anyway, I thank you for the offer. I can assure you that when I get home and tell my wife about it she will clap her hands with joy that everything has gone like we thought and talked about.' Then the latter speaker produces his hip-flask and they again take a swig to confirm the proposal. Finally the one says to the other, 'When we get home we shall tell our children about this, but otherwise remain silent in the meantime.' Since the congregation noticed that certain persons approached each other, stood aside and talked, they guessed right away that it was a matter of marriage. Thus, the general public got to know about the union before the marriage partners themselves." [85]

The contemporary narrators compare the peasants' mode of conduct, when choosing a marriage partner for their children, with that of the higher social classes and their efforts to retain or extend the family property. Whenever these efforts came into conflict with the youngsters' love for someone other than the intended partner or a lack of affection for the chosen one, the parents tried to impose their will and often succeeded. [86] If the opposition was too great from one of the marriage partners, it was possible, within the framework of the marriage agreement between the two families, to bring about a change so that a brother or sister was offered as a partner instead. However, fathers often forced their daughters to marry against their will. [87] *"Like Denmark has its legends about locked-up maidens",* Wigström reports, "*the Scanian rural people had theirs about girls who by force had to marry the men chosen for them by their parents and relatives."* [88]

Parents did not have the same jurisdiction to force their sons into marriage, and traditional material shows that there were instances when boys refused to follow their parents' directions. Lasse in Lassaberg writes*, "In my neighbourhood there was a man who, in the manner described above, carried out a proposal on behalf of his son. When he got home and told his son about it, the latter replied, 'If you have proposed to the girl, then take her yourself'. The father's face fell and he had to*

[85] Lasse in Lassaberg 1967, p. 104–105.
[86] Wigström 1985, p. 28; Bruzelius 1976, p. 34.
[87] Lasse i Lassaberg 1967, p. 105.
[88] Wigström 1985, p. 27.

get in touch with the other contracting party in order to pull out of the agreement." [89]

More recent research has, however, noted that there had been both parental-controlled marriages of convenience and purely love-marriages, and associated the extent of parental influence with financial and ownership factors.[90] The use of parental-power to influence the children's choice of marriage partner was most evident among the bourgeoisie and farmers, that is, among the landed groups where the children's marriages had an effect on the transfer of resources between generations, and the organisation of security in old age for the parents. Here, it was also a question of groups with property, where a threat to inheritance had real significance. For the landless in the rural areas, the parents' influence on the children's choice of marriage was smaller.[91]

Traditional material has also shown that parents' influence on the children's marriage was greater in the south of Sweden than in the north, and this, in turn, is regarded as being due to the different social structures. In the south, as mentioned, the social differences were large and the farmers with considerable land assets gave their daughters large dowries, which is why they had reason to try and get their children to avoid marrying the 'wrong' partner. In the north, the social structure was more even, which reduced the need for strong parental influence on the choice of marriage partner.[92]

As we have seen, ethnological studies based on traditional material emphasise that the farmers tried to prevent their children from 'marrying beneath them', that is, marrying someone from a landless background.[93] Even contemporary descriptions of the peasants call attention to the fact that the children of landed farmers usually married their equals.[94] Historical-demographical studies confirm this picture. Winberg shows, in a study of Dala parish in western Sweden in 1850, that about 80 percent of the married men and women who came from farm homesteads married someone from the same social group, thus giving support to the

[89] Lasse i Lassaberg 1967, p. 105.
[90] Löfgren 1969, Kjellman 1979
[91] Andersson 1969, p. 53.
[92] Löfgren 1969, p. 35–36.
[93] Löfgren 1969, p. 35–36.
[94] Wigström 1985, p. 27–29; Nicolovius 1990, p. 121; Bruzelis 1976, p. 34.

Table 1. The social origin of spouses in Dala parish 1850.

		The husband's social origin		N
		Peasant	Non-peasant	
The wife's social origin	Peasant	160	46	206
	Non-peasant	33	39	72
N		193	85	278

Source: Winberg 1977, p 253.

postulation in ethnological literature. On the other hand, the investigation shows that about 20 percent of those who came from farm homesteads had, in fact, 'married beneath them' (see table 1).[95] During the latter half of the nineteenth century there was extensive growth of the landless groups. It has been shown that this growth was not due to higher fertility among the landless than among the landed, but to an increased social movement downwards.[96] It is probable that in this process there was an increase in the proportion of marriages between farmers' children and those from the landless. It can also be expected that marriage across social boundaries were more common in areas with early proletarisation, like, for example in western Scania.

Considering that 'marrying beneath them' was strongly resisted by the children of farmers, the increased proletarization of the rural areas should have resulted in the alternative strategy of remaining in the parental home and postponing marriage, or abstaining completely. Such a tendency has been observed in research into the age when children moved away from home and the pattern of social mobility.[97]

6. Proposals and Pre-nuptial Relations

Even in such cases where the influence of parents on the children's choice of marriage partner was very large, it was unlikely that a couple got married without ever having met before. Young people met both at work as servants and in groups when not at work. On Sundays the young people went to church together with their families, where they

[95] Winberg 1977, p. 262.
[96] Winberg 1977, p. 261–262; Lundh 1999b.
[97] Dribe 1997; Dribe 1998; Lundh 1999b.

could get a glimpse of other boys and girls in the parish. On Saturday and Sunday evenings social get-togethers and dances were organised, which was easier in the summer when it was possible to be outdoors. Young people also met in the market squares of the towns and at the annual spring and autumn fairs, as well as at other festive occasions in the village. The usual meeting-places were the more important festive occasions when families gathered together, or at weddings and funerals when a large number were invited. On such occasions the young formed a group of their own, and traditional material reports that, due to a lack of space, it was a common occurrence for the youngsters, both boys and girls, to sleep on the floor together. This was called 'to sleep in bundle' *(syskonbädd)* and the Swedish term implies that sleeping together on the floor at that time did not have the sexual connotation it has today.[98] On the other hand, the young people who were attracted to each other would have had an opportunity to get to know each other a little better.

In the north, where class differences and parents' influence on marriage were smaller, "bundling" was common, not only on special occasions but as the normal form of pre-marital contact with boys and girls *(nattfrieri)*. On Saturday and Sunday evenings the unmarried boys gathered together and went around the farms visiting the girls in their homes. The latter, expecting the boys, went to bed and let the boys in. Then followed a short conversation at the bedside, and after various couples were formed, the crowd moved on, leaving a boy with each girl. The custom thus meant that the boys became the girls' bed-mates for some hours or for the the night. Their conduct was highly ritualised, and, though they lay in the same bed, they were fully-dressed. The night was spent talking and getting to know each other. If they liked each other, a firmer relationship could develop, leading to a proper proposal of betrothal and marriage.[99]

The custom of bundling did not mean that the boys and girls had sexual relations on the first night. In general, it was a means for young people to meet in private.[100] On the other hand, the pairing-off during bundling could develop into pre-marital unions. A survey by Sweden Statistics reveals that in 1911 over 70 percent of all the women, who got married in the areas where bundling was practised, were pregnant at their weddings, while the corresponding proportion for the whole country as a whole was 30 percent.[101] The large proportion of pregnant brides does not necessarily have to be linked with the night of bundling, but

[98] Hellsvik 1968, p. 67.
[99] Löfgren 1969, p. 29–30.
[100] Hellsvik 1968, p. 66–67.
[101] *Statistiska Meddelanden,* 1914, p. 74–78.

may be seen generally as an expression of the fact that, as parental power was lower in the north, 'betrothal children' were more common. Furthermore, within the bundling belt, there were certain districts that were characterised by sexual abstinence before marriage. A study carried out in a parish in Västerbotten[102], where bundling was practised, shows, for example, that, over a period of 15 years at the end of the nineteenth century, only one child was born out-of-wedlock.[103]

In the south there were more formalised proposals, with introductory negotiations between the couple's families and thereafter an official proposal through the wooer's proxy. But, here as well, sexual relations could be started during the betrothal. The very fact, that legislation protected betrothed women and their children against breach of promise, is an indication that this phenomenon was so widespread that it needed to be taken up in legislation.

The Christian moral was strongly negative towards pre-marital sexual relations. Wigström says, in her notes on peasant customs in Rönneberg district, that the farmers regarded it a terrible disgrace for the bride to be pregnant. The church showed its displeasure by performing a special ceremony in cases where the woman was pregnant or had already given birth.[104] On the other hand, the church and the secular authorities had to compromise and accept pre-marital pregnancies, as long as marriage was to follow. Even pre-marital births could be accepted, provided the couple married later. There were, of course, circumstances that could hinder a quick marriage, e.g., the harvest had to be saved, or wedding preparations had to be made. Wigström reports that the farmers had a split attitude to young people having sex before marriage, due to a combination of pragmatism and Christian morals. In cases where the contracting parties were not particularly interested in entering into a marriage planned by their parents, the latter turned a blind eye to the young enjoying more intimate relations in the hope that they would eventually lead to marriage. In cases where the relatives approved of a betrothal, it was acceptable for the couple to enter into a sexual relationship.[105]

A more serious view was taken of sexual relations that crossed over class boundaries, with no intention of marriage or without marriage being the actual result. The rural society, including the church and congregation, was very intolerant when it came to unmarried mothers and illegitimate children.[106] Even if a pre- marital union did not result in pregnancy, there were serious repercussions for a farmer's son who seduced

[102] In north–eastern Norrland.
[103] Ragnar Jirlow, quoted in Hellsvik 1968, p. 67.
[104] Wigström 1985, p. 30.
[105] Wigström 1985, p. 28–30.
[106] Löfgren 1969, p. 37–38; Frykman 1993; Cronberg 1997.

a servant girl, or for a farmer's daughter who gave herself to a farmhand. This behaviour drastically lowered their prospects in the marriage market. Wigström writes:

> *"The youth who was known to have seduced a servant girl had difficulties finding a girl to marry among his peers. If he were brave enough to marry the seduced girl, he was left 'standing outside the village', meaning that he was partly ostracised by his peers. The mere suspicion, that a farmer's daughter of esteemed descent had set her heart on a servant boy, cast a shadow on her reputation. Besides, not even the voluntary loss of her honour ensured that she would get her intended if he belonged to the servant class. The parents were prepared to take desperate measures to prevent such a union, and preferred to quietly offer her to some poor farmer's son or ruined widower, who in return for a cash sum took her as his wife, with or without her consent."* [107]

The national population statistics show that the proportion of children born out-of-wedlock was small in the middle of the eighteenth century, roughly 2.5 percent of all births. From the end of the eighteenth century there was an increase that continued during the whole of the nineteenth century to about 10 percent at the turn of the century, due to industrialisation, urbanisation and the advent of new, modern living patterns.[108] The phenomenon of moving in together and starting a family without getting married was especially common in the larger cities and was accordingly called "Stockholm marriage".[109]

An investigation carried out in four parishes in Scania shows that few children were born out-of-wedlock. In the eighteenth century, no more than 2–3 percent were born out-of-wedlock, a share that increased during the nineteenth century to 6–7 percent (see table 2). This means that the Scanian figures were roughly in line with the national average and trend.

A particular study of out-of-wedlock first-born children in the four Scanian parishes gives a picture of the pre-marital sexual pattern. By following the mother's life courses over the years following the birth,

[107] Wigström 1985, p. 27.
[108] *Historisk statistik,* del 1, tab 37.
[109] Matovic 1984.

Table 2. The proportion of children, born out-of-wedlock in four Scanian parishes.

		N
1700–1749	2.3	926
1750–1799	3.1	2,485
1800–1849	6.2	2,981
1850–1894	7.3	3,669

Source: Family reconstitutions from parish records for, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge. The Scanian Demographic Database.

Table 3. The proportion of out-of-wed-lock first births that led to marriage in the parish of residence in four Scanian parishes, 1650–1894.

	Percent
1650–99	70
1700–49	63
1750–99	65
1800–49	24
1850–94	18

Source: Family reconstitutions from parish records for, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge. The Scanian Demographic Database.

one can see how common it was for the out-of-wedlock birth to lead to marriage, or how common it was for the child to remain illegitimate and perhaps even have illegitimate siblings.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries an out-of-wedlock first birth led, on average, to marriage in the parish in two out of three cases (see table 3). Furthermore, if one takes into account the fact that some parishioners moved out of the parish in order to get married, the share should have been somewhat higher. In the nineteenth century the share of first births that led to marriage in the same parish was somewhat lower, about 20 percent. This lower share is partly explained by

Table 4. The proportion of first-born children of parents who get married, divided according to whether the birth was before or after the marriage, in four Scanian parishes.

	A Before marriage	B 0–8 month after marriage	C (=A+B)	N
1650–99	3.6	0	3.6	165
1700–49	2.9	1.0	3.8	208
1750–99	3.4	3.4	4.9	350
1800–49	5.6	3.3	8.9	573
1850–94	11.5	3.3	14.8	546

Source: *Family reconstitutions from parish records for, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge. The Scanian Demographic Database.*

the fact that it gradually became more common in the nineteenth century for out-of-wedlock births to lead to single mothers living with illegitimate children, or couples moving in together and building families without an official marriage. However, the lower share was also very likely due to the increase in migration in the nineteenth century, which must have meant that significantly more moved out of the parish and married somewhere else after having given birth to an out-of-wedlock first born child.

In summary this study shows that the number of out-of-wedlock births was low and that the out-of-wedlock first-born child usually led to marriage later. In all cases where the priest noted in the birth records that the child was born of bethroted parents, the commitment was completed when the parents married each other a short time later. The example shows that the betrothal had a strong sense of commitment for the contracting parties. In the nineteenth century, the number of out-of-wedlock children increased, and the number of cases in which an out-of-wedlock first birth was not followed by marriage also increased.

If one studies the first-born illegitimate children of parents who later got married, one finds that pre-marital sexual relations were not particularly common. The large majority waited until they were married. The survey referred to above, carried out by Statistics Sweden, showed, as previously mentioned, that, in 1911, 30 percent of the women were pregnant when they got married, which must be regarded as a significant

Table 5. The proportion of first-born children, born out-of-wedlock, of parents who later get married, divided according to the time between birth and marriage.

	Parents get married		N
	within 6 months	within 12 months	
1650–99	50	67	6
1700–49	76	100	6
1750–99	83	100	12
1800–49	75	88	32
1850–94	72	70	63

Source: Family reconstitutions from parish records for, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge. The Scanian Demographic Database.

proportion. Table 4 shows that the proportion in Scanian parishes was considerably lower during the latter half of the nineteenth century.[110] Even if one cannot disregard the possibility of a quick change in the behavioural pattern in the decades just before the turn of the century, one can probably draw the conclusion that pre-marital relationships were more uncommon in Scania than in the north.

According to table 4 the proportion of children born before marriage during the seventeenth and eighteenth century was about 4 percent, and increased to 15 percent in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This increase over time reinforces the impression that, over the course of the twentieth century, people began to regard the formalities surrounding the building of a family less seriously. What really lay behind the changed attitude is difficult to ascertain. It could have been either that marriage plans were made only after the woman became pregnant, or diminished motivation to wait for sex until marriage was definitely decided upon.

Table 4 also shows that about two-thirds of the children conceived before marriage were born before the wedding. This implies that couples did not go to any great lengths to get married before the birth of the child, and the latter was acceptable provided it was followed by marriage. In general there was only a short period of time between the birth of the child and marriage. According to table 5, practically all the parents got married within a year, and the majority within 6 months. In certain cases it could have been that such practical things as saving the harvest or making preparations for the wedding contributed to the delay.

[110] *Statistiska Meddelanden,* 1914, p. 74–78.

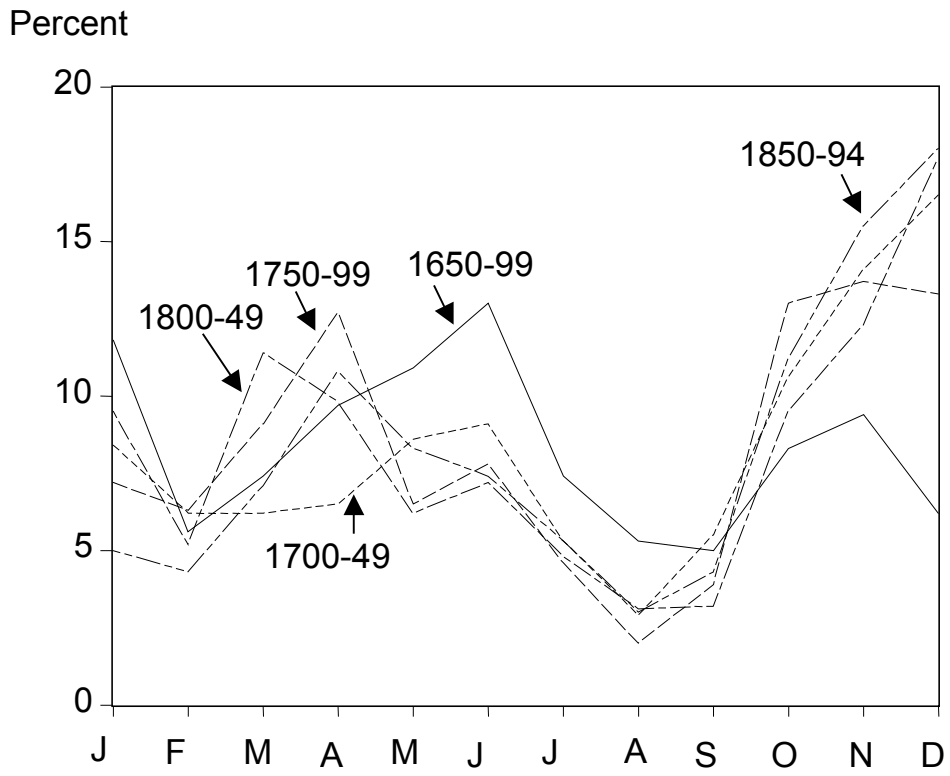

Figure 1. Distribution, by month, of marriages in four Scanian parishes, 1650–1894.

Source: Family reconstitutions from parish records for Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge. The Scanian Demographic Database.

That the time gap between birth of the child and marriage of the parents tended to increase during the nineteenth century only reflects the tendencies mentioned above.

One aspect of pre-marital relations is the social structure. Winberg's previously mentioned investigation of Dala in western Sweden, covering the period 1776–1830, shows that pre-marital relations (in reality conceptions) were more common among the landless than the farmers. While about 35 percent of farmer-couples had children eight months or earlier after the wedding, the corresponding figure for the landless was 47 percent.[111] On the other hand, it was uncommon for children to be born before the wedding (2–3 percent) for both groups, which distinguishes the area from Scania. This can be interpreted as the result of either making strenuous efforts to expedite the wedding when the woman became pregnant, or waiting to have sex until a definite decision to get married was made.

[111] Winberg 1977, p. 309.

In a survey done in Everöd in the south of Scania, Cronberg shows that the social group-specific differences in pre-marriage fertility were even greater in this area. During the period 1770–1879 it was relatively uncommon that the peasant woman was pregnant at the marriage or had already given birth. This was the case in only 16 percent of the marriages. A detailed investigation also showed that, in a large number of these marriages, it was a case of widows remarrying. Since widows lacked a guardian and had already had a family, their sexual behaviour was hardly representative of young unmarried daughters in the country homesteads. In so far as the landless were concerned, sexual relations before marriage were more prevalent. In about half of the marriages the woman was either pregnant or had already had a child. Based on this and other qualitative material, Cronberg maintains that the landless had a freer sex life and this often incurred a serious risk for the women.[112] However, even in Scania, the woman becoming pregnant was a reason for marriage, but, unlike western Sweden, custom did not demand that this was to take place before giving birth. Marriage could wait until after the baby was born.

In general, weddings were planned for the more important holidays, Christmas, New Year, Easter and Midsummer when the family got together anyway. (See figure 1). On the other hand, the harvesting period was avoided, as all the available manpower was needed in the fields and it was impossible to put aside time for the many marriage preparations. As shown in figure 1, August and September were the least popular wedding months. In other respects there was a shifting over time in the choice of wedding month. In the seventeenth century midsummer was the most important period for weddings. Over the next centuries the number of summer weddings decreased, and more weddings took place in late autumn, in connection with the New Year celebrations and Easter in the spring. While more than half the weddings were held in the first half of the year, the opposite became the custom from the beginning of the eighteenth century. The changes in the choice of wedding month correspond, to a large degree, with another local study in Scania.[113]

7. The Marriage Field

Traditional material often maintained that the marriage field was very limited in the old peasant society. Combined with the fact that landed farmers and other well-off groups were not inclined to seeing their children marry someone from the lower social groups, this contributed to

[112] Cronberg 1997, p. 195–198.
[113] Jeansson & Kindblom 1968, p. 38–39.

widespread cross-marriage between families. It was said that, in certain villages, everyone was related to everyone after hundreds of years of intermarriage. In a description, based on such material, of conditions in northwest Scania, it was said:

> *"Normally, our contracting parties are from the same or neighbouring villages. Since their forefathers, generation after generation, had married in the same manner, the consequence is degeneration that, unfortunately, can be traced back to numerous relatives."*[114]

This is probably an exaggerated picture due to the inherent weakness of traditional material in that it reported the event rather than its frequency, and that its main point of departure was the landed farmers' situation. A more modulated picture is obtained by studying demographic source material. The marriage registers contained the contracting parties' current addresses, and the catechetical meeting journals noted their places of birth. This makes it possible to study the extent of the area over which young men and women sought potential marriage partners.

Local studies show that the marriage field was actually strictly limited to the local and neighbouring parishes. In larger parishes the proportion of marriages in which both partners were born in the parish was very high, 70 to 80 percent, while the proportion, for obvious reasons, was smaller in smaller parishes. Counted in kilometres though, the marriage field was equally large, and comprised an area extending about 20 kilometres from the village. [115]

Several local studies show that the marriage field was extended over time. A study of conditions in south-east Scania shows that the marriage field for farmers was more limited than for the landless groups.[116] This was probably due to differences in the groups' labour markets. The farmers were tied to their farms, while the landless lived a more roving life, moving between different employers. If this is correct, the extension, over time, of the marriage field can probably be attributed to the social diversification and growth of the rural lower classes.

An institution that affected the marriage field, and counteracted the risk of inbreeding, was the service system. During a period in life, from confirmation to marriage, it was normal for the young people to work as servants in other households. In the eighteenth and first half of the

[114] Nilsson 1950, p. 1.
[115] Granlund 1957; Hvarfner 1961; Hansen 1977; Sandberg 1952; Jeansson & Kindblom 1968; Kvillner 1969.
[116] Hansen 1977.

Table 6. Birth-places of men and women who entered into marriage in four Scanian parishes.

Birthplace	1700–49	1750–99	1800–49	1850–94
BOTH				
in the parish	(100)	51	31	14
within 17 km^2 radius*	(100)	88	81	79
N	2	49	464	273
THE MAN				
a) in the parish	(100)	74	50	43
b) in a neighbouring parish	(–)	9	18	24
c) within 17 km^2 radius (except a and b)	(–)	12	19	21
a+b+c	(100)	95	87	88
N	12	89	524	384
THE WOMAN				
a) in the parish	(100)	77	60	57
b) in a neighbouring parish	(–)	10	16	16
c) within 17 km^2 radius (except a and b)	(–)	11	16	19
a+b+c	(100)	97	91	92
N	21	105	548	488

* including within the parish.

Source: Family reconstitutions from parish records for, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge. The Scanian Demographic Database.

nineteenth century the system was widespread and comprised youngsters from both landed and landless families. Towards the end of the nineteenth century it became less common for young people from landed families to work as servants, and farm-hands and maids were gradually replaced by sons and daughters living at home or wage labourers.[117] In study by Lundh it is suggested that the marriage field was approximately equivalent to the local labour market.[118] According to his interpretation, an important element of the service system was that it offered the youngsters an opportunity to seek a partner suitable for marriage, away from the parental home and the parents' direct supervision.

[117] Lundh 1999b.
[118] Lundh 1999a.

Table 7. Birth-places of women who married men born in one of the four Scanian parishes

Birthplace	1700–49	1750–99	1800–49	1850–94
a) in the parish	(100)	78	60	44
b) in a neighbouring parish	(–)	6	20	18
c) within 17 km^2 radius (except a and b)	(–)	9	15	27
a+b+c	(100)	94	95	89
N	2	32	241	89

Source: Family reconstitutions from parish records for, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge. The Scanian Demographic Database.

Table 8. Birth-places of men who married women born in one of the four Scanian parishes.

Birthplace	1700–49	1750–99	1800–49	1850–94
a) in the parish	(100)	71	53	32
b) in a neighbouring parish	(–)	9	19	27
c) within 17 km^2 radius (except a and b)	(–)	11	16	28
a+b+c	(100)	91	88	87
N	2	35	273	124

Source: Family reconstitutions from parish records for, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge. The Scanian Demographic Database.

A study of the marriage field in the four Scanian parishes shows that the marriage field was rather limited in older times.[119] As table 6 shows, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, every other marriage was entered into by men and women from the parish in which they married. Seventyfour percent of the men and 77 percent of the women came from the parish in which they married, which implies that only about a fourth of those who married were born outside the marriage parish. Tables 6

[119] The four parishes are Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge situated in western Scania in the south of Sweden. The data comes from *The Scanian Demographic Database*, which is a collaborative project between the Provincial Archives in Lund and the Research Group in Population Economics at the Department in Economic History, Lund University.

and 7 show that about 80 percent of the men who married in their birth parishes did so to women who were also born in the same parish. The corresponding figure for women is 70 percent. This can be interpreted to mean that the local labour market extended to the limits of its own parish. Another, not necessarily exclusive, interpretation is that parental power was so great that marriages were arranged between neighbouring families, even though the children, at the time, were outside the parish engaged in work as servants. Parental power can be traced back to the fact that the proportion of landed farmers, at that time, was still high in the parishes.

The marriage field grew remarkably during the course of the nineteenth century. At the same time as the proportion of both partners born in the same parish decreased to 14 percent in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the proportion of marriages, with one partner born outside the marriage parish, increased (see table 6). In the period 1850–94, 57 percent of the men and 43 percent of the women were born outside the parish. As can be seen in table 7, of the women who married in their birth parish, the proportion that married men born in the same parish had almost halved since the eighteenth century. For the corresponding group of men the decrease was even greater (see table 8).

The extension of the marriage field probably reflected the extension of the local labour market. Concurrently with the growth of the proportion of landless groups in the rural areas, the short-distance labour migration also increased. One can also imagine that the special labour market for servants was extended at the same time. It should be noted, however, that it was still a matter of a very localised labour market, and only a few ventured longer distances to look for work.[120] A consequence of this was that the marriage field was also limited to the nearby parishes with whom there was a migration exchange. As can be seen in table 6, at the end of the nineteenth century, the men and women born further than 20 kilometres from the parish in which they married still represented no more than a tenth. In 79 percent of the marriages in which both the man and woman's birth-places were known, both were born in such a limited area. Tables 6 and 7 show that, of the men and women who married in their birth-parishes, about 90 percent married a partner from within a radius of 1.7 km during the period 1750–1894.

[120] Lundh 1996; Lundh 1999b; Dribe 1995; Martinius 1967.

8. The Proportion of Never Married

Complete information on the Swedish population by sex, age and marital status is available in the census of 1870 and in all censuses after that. The main problem of the censuses prior to 1870 is that information on age, sex and marital status is never presented together. However, at the beginning of the century, the Swedish demographer Gustav Sundbärg reconstructed yearly population tables containing these variables for the entire period 1750–1900 by using censuses and other official statistics. These tables, in which the entire Swedish population is divided by sex (men, women), age (5 year groups) and marital status (never married, married, widowed/divorced) can be used for calculations of the proportion of never married.[121]

Official statistics on marriages by sex, age and marital status are available from 1861 and onwards. The official figures for the period 1861–1879 were revised by Sundbärg at the turn of the century. From these vital statistics, ages at first marriage can be calculated at the national level from 1861 and onwards.[122] For periods prior to 1861, calculations of ages at marriage in Sweden usually have been based on family reconstitutions. One attempt has also been made to calculate average age at first marriage by indirect methods from census data on marital status by age.[123]

Sweden was one of the countries used by Hajnal as an example of the Western European Marriage Pattern around 1900. Here Hajnal relied on the Swedish official statistics. For the discussion of the marriage pattern during the centuries prior to 1900, Hajnal did not refer to Sweden at all. Most Swedish family reconstitutions were made after 1965 when Hajnal published his article and Hajnal were probably not aware of the existence of Sundbärg's reconstruction of the Swedish population by age, sex and marital status for the period 1750–1900.

In 1900, the year representing Hajnal's point of reference, 13.5 percent of men and 19.4 percent of women in the age group 45–49 were never married in Sweden. Compared to Eastern Europe the proportion of never married was large, making Sweden well suited for inclusion in the Western European pattern of marriage. As can be seen in table 9, the proportion of never married men and women (aged 45–49 years) was equally large in the four Scanian parishes from the 1830s to the 1860s.

[121] Sundbärg 1907a.
[122] Sundbärg 1907b; *Historisk statistik för Sverige. Del 1,* Comments to table 31.
[123] Lundh 1997.

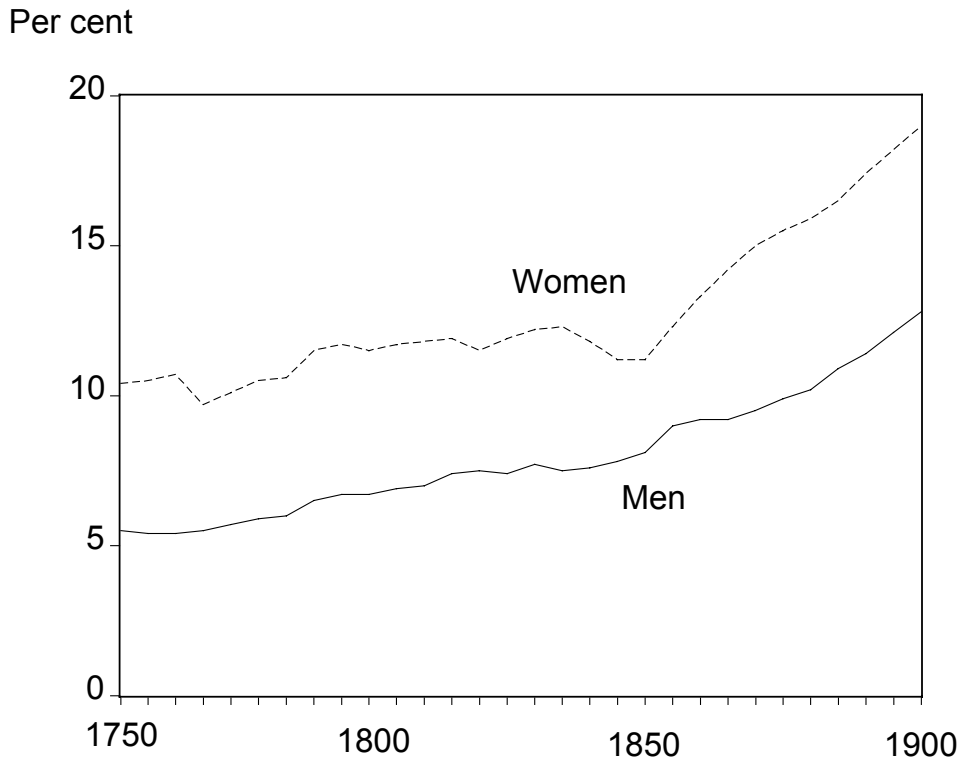

Figure 2: Proportion of never married men and women aged 45–49 in Sweden 1750–1900.

Source: Sundbärg, G., Fortsatta bidrag till en svensk befolkningsstatistik för åren 1750–1900. I–IV. *Statistisk tidskrift*, häfte 139. 1907.

How far back did this pattern go and were there any tendencies to change? Can one find support for the idea of a transition from an earlier traditional marriage pattern?

Figure 2 shows that the proportion of never married increased continuously between 1750 and 1900. This was also the case for all age groups.[124] The unit of measurement used by Hajnal, i.e., proportions of never married in the age group 45–49, was as little as 5.5 percent for men in 1750. The proportion of women never married in the same age group was larger, nearly 10 percent. For both men and women this meant that the proportion of never married doubled between 1750 and 1900. The low proportion of never married men in 1750 is on the same level as the figures for several countries used by Hajnal to illustrate the East European pattern, e.g., Greece (9 percent), Hungary (5 percent) and Rumania (5 percent). In most East European and Non-European coun-

[124] Lundh 1997, appendicies 1 and 2.

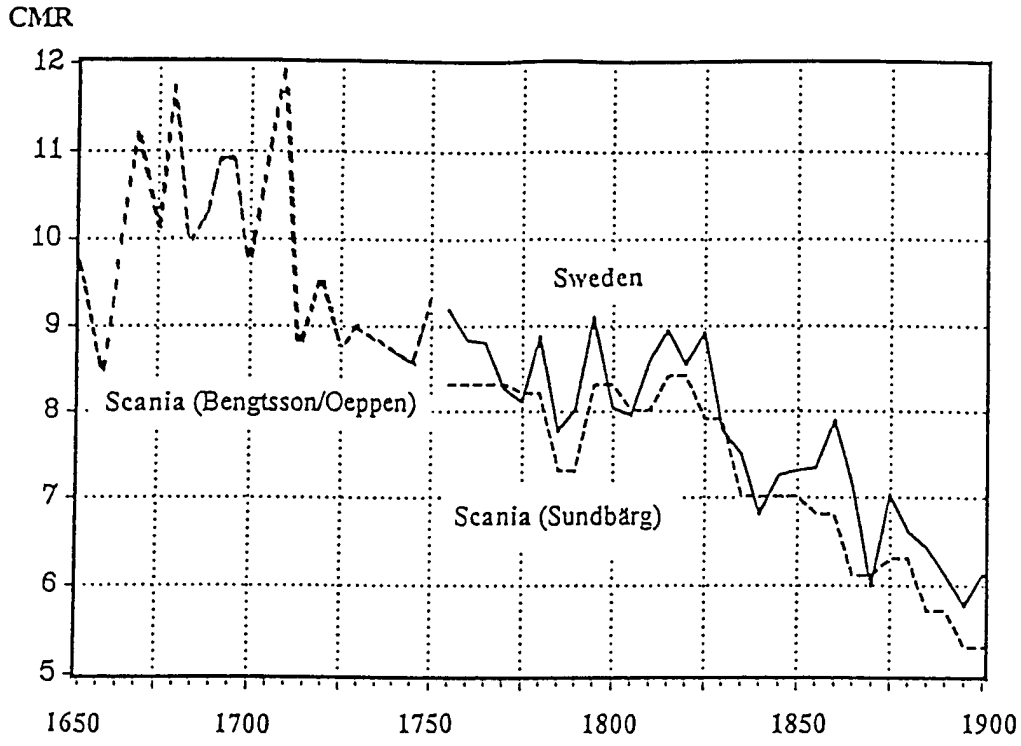

Figure 3: Crude marriage rates 1650 – 1900.

Source: Historisk statistik för Sverige. Del 1. Befolkning. Andra upplagan. 1720–1967. Stockholm 1969. Table 28; Sundbärg, G, *Emigrationsutredningen. Bilaga V* (1910), Table 31; Bengtsson, T & Oeppen, J, *A Reconstruction of the Population of Scania 1650–1760*, Lund Papers in Economic History, No. 32 1993, Figure 7.

tries, however, the proportion of never married men was lower in 1900 than it was in Sweden in 1750. Even though the proportion of never married women in Sweden was considerably smaller in 1750 than in 1900, the level was significantly higher than for those countries in Eastern Europe and outside Europe referred to by Hajnal. The Swedish proportion of 10 percent never married women in the age group 45–49 must then be set against a level varying between 0 and 4 percent.

Unfortunately it is not possible to follow the proportion of never married in the age group 45–49 further back than 1750. The question is whether the trend in 1750–1900 also characterised the centuries before 1750. There are some signs that point to this. Bengtsson and Oeppen, with the help of inverse projection, have reconstructed the population for a number of parishes in Scania from the middle of the seventeenth century, making it possible to calculate crude marriage rates for the period before 1750 (see figure 3). Bengtsson/Oeppen's series of crude

Table 9: The proportion of never married men and women in four Scanian parishes 1830–1865.

	Men	Women
1830–39	19.6	17.9
1840–49	11.1	9.7
1850–59	10.1	13.8
1860–69	7.6	14.8

Source: Family reconstitutions from parish records for, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge. The Scanian Demographic Database.

marriage rates show that marriage frequency declined since the late seventeenth century.[125] Since the age structure was quite stable, the decline in the crude marriage rate between 1650 and 1900 points to the fact that the proportion of never married probably increased from as early as the middle of the seventeenth century.

It can be said that the trend of increasing numbers of never married in Sweden was due to several conditions. Given the limited development of productivity, the population increase after the middle eighteenth century should have contributed to increasing the competition for the limited resources, which in turn should have made it more difficult to build a new household. For the children of land-holding farmers, this would have meant that they were confronted by a choice between accepting a lower status than their parents in order to marry and build a household, moving away from home or remaining in the parental home without marrying. Studies have shown that farmers' sons and above all farmers' daughters remained in the parental home to a greater extent than before, so that their numbers increased during the second half of the nineteenth century. [126] At the same time as the population pressure increased the competition among those who wanted to start a household, the economic structural transformation worked in the opposite direction. Industrialisation and urbanisation meant that new occupations and housing forms were created for single people, in addition to the traditional employment as a farmhand and a maid in farmer households and estates. Thereby, the economic change contributed to increasing the possibility of choosing a

[125] Bengtsson and Oeppen feel that the results are less certain for the period 1650–1680 (Bengtsson & Oeppen 1993).
[126] Lundh 1999b.

life without marriage when the competition for land and housing, intended for married couples with families, increased.

However, the economic structural transformation also increased the possibility of getting married for the landless groups in the countryside. The commercialisation of agriculture involved the creation of new types of jobs and dwellings for landless married couples, and thereby increasing the possibility of getting married. In this way, too, the economic transformation to some extent neutralised the effects of the population pressure in the marriage market. In Scania, this process of economic transformation was early and exhaustive. Therefore, as can be seen in table 9, the proportion of never married fell for both sexes in the period 1830–1869.[127]

9. Ages at First Marriage

Let us now turn to the age at first marriage, the second unit of measurement used by Hajnal to characterise the marriage patterns. In the law of 1734, it was stated that the minimum age was 20 years for men and 15 for women who wanted to get married. In the nineteenth century the minimum ages was raised to 21 and 17 respectively.[128] Wigström, the narrator of Rönneberg district, claims that the peasants regarded early marriages as desirable, partly because they wanted to avoid that their sons and daughters experienced pre-nuptial sexual relations. Another motive was the desire to reduce the number of unmarried daughters living in the parental home.[129]

From 1861, when official statistics started to contain vital statistics on marriage by sex, age and marital status, till 1900, the average age at first marriage for men did not change at all, while for women it decreased somewhat. (See table 10.) For the period before 1861, we get two different pictures of how the long-term average marriage ages developed, depending on whether it is calculated as an arithmetic mean based on family reconstitutions or indirectly as a singulate mean age at marriage from proportions never married reported in the censuses.[130]

Let us first deal with the picture obtained if one proceeds from the calculations of the marriage age carried out in investigations based on

[127] For a further discussion of the divergence of the Scanian marriage pattern from the national average, see section 9 and 10 below.
[128] *Sveriges rikes lag*, Giftermålsbalken (the marriage act), 1 chapter.
[129] Wigström 1985, p. 27–28.
[130] Not than the singulate mean age at marriage is not an arithmetic mean but a different measure.

Table 10: Mean age at first marriage in Sweden 1861–1990.

	Men	Women
1861/1870	28.8	27.1
1871/1880	28.8	27.1
1881/1890	28.5	26.8
1891/1900	28.8	26.8

Note that the ages of marriage for the period 1861–1879 are calculated from Sundbärg's revision of the official figures.

Source: Historisk statistik för Sverige. Del 1. Befolkning. Andra upplagan. 1720–1967. Stockholm 1969. Table 32.

family reconstitutions.[131] When one arranges the results of Swedish investigations carried out chronologically, one gets a rough picture of the manner in which age at marriage might have developed. In figure 4 the results of different local studies have been referred to the actual period without paying attention to the size of the parishes under study etc. Results from different part-periods for one and the same parish have also been included in the figure.

The trend seen in figure 4 is that the marriage age of men declined between the beginning of the seventeenth century and the 1860s, while it is doubtful if a corresponding development applied to women. The mean age of men at first marriage declined from over 30 years to about 28 years, while the mean marriage age of women was quite stable, about 26 years. Apart from the problem of method, in which all the investigations were given equal importance, it is a shortcoming that the picture of the trend in average marriage age in figure 4 is based on parish information for limited part-periods in different parts of the country. The majority of parishes in the seventeenth century were situated in Central Sweden, whereas most of the parishes in the nineteenth century were in southern Sweden. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the tendency of declining marriage ages was a development or was due to regional differences.

[131] A few investigations are based on marriage age information from marriage registers, so that family reconstructions were not necessary. Apart from such exceptions it is necessary in Sweden, as in other countries, to carry out family reconstructions to calculate the age at marriage.

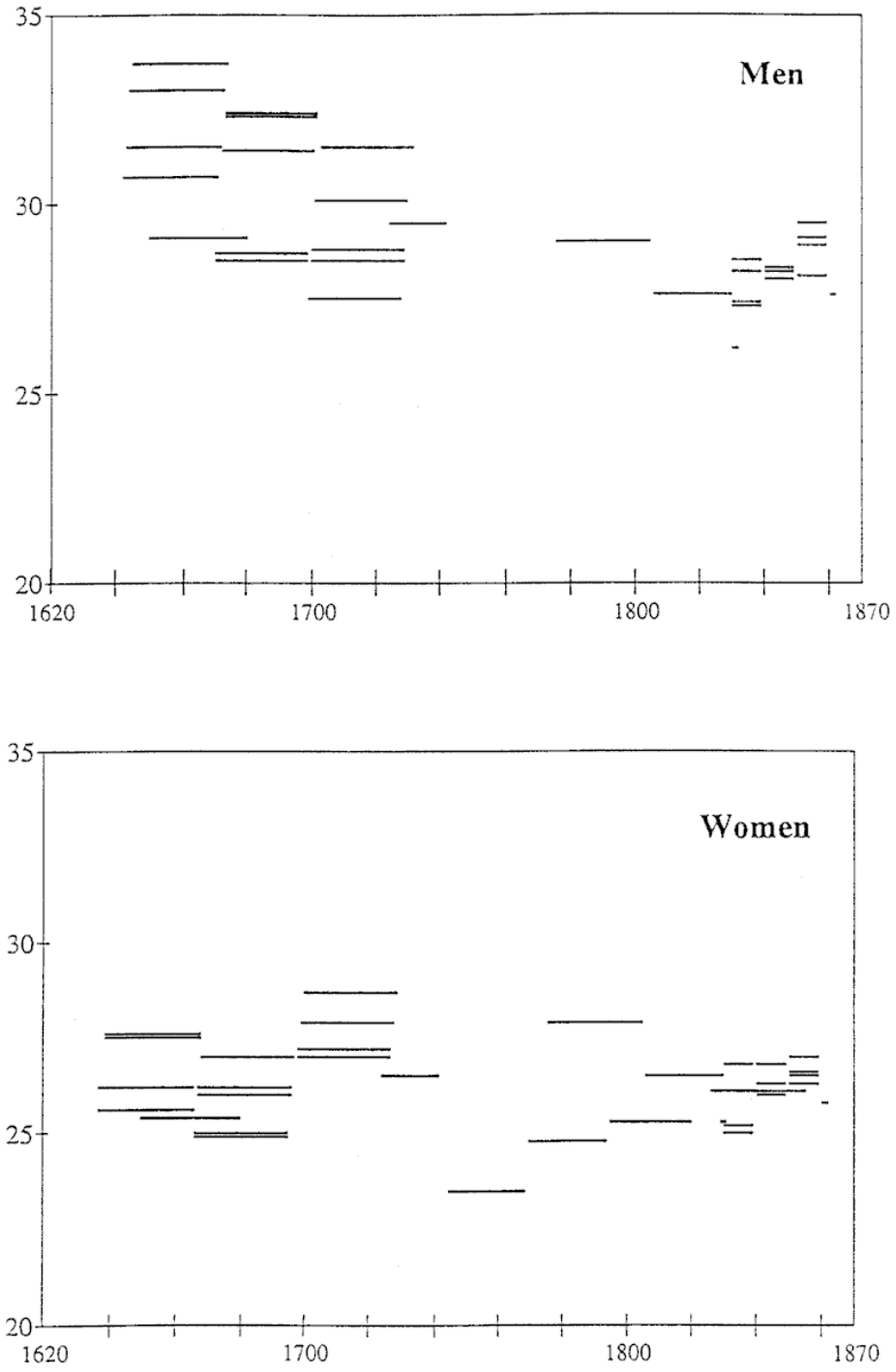

Figure 4: Mean age at first marriage in Sweden 1620–1870, according to local family reconstitutions.

*Source:*Lundh, C, *Giftermålsmönster i Sverige före det industriella genombrottet.* Lund Papers in Economic History, No. 33. Lund 1993.

Table 11: Mean age at first marriage in seven Scanian parishes 1646–1860.

	Age	N
MEN		
1646–1750	34.3	239
1751–1810	32.2	372
1811–1860	29.3	687
WOMEN		
1646–1750	29.1	216
1751–1810	27.7	384
1811–1860	26.8	1,014

Source: Family reconstitutions from parish records for Ekeby, Frillestad, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge, Sireköpinge and Stenestad. The Scanian Demographic Database.

My own investigation of the age at first marriage in seven parishes in Scania[132] between 1646 and 1860, however, makes it possible to eliminate regional differences as the reason for the decline in the marriage age. Table 11 shows that, in the seven Scanian parishes, the marriage age declined sharply for both men and women. For both sexes, the age at first marriage during the period 1811–1860 is at about the same level as the figures in the national statistics for Sweden as a whole during the period 1861–1870. (See table 11.) However, the high marriage age during the first period is striking, particularly for men.

Thus, the trend of declining age at first marriage seems to be clear As can be seen in table 12, this decline was the result of a lower proportion that married when older than (at least) 40. Apart from that, the proportion of marrying young people (15–19) also declined. Along with the decrease in marriage age, the deviation from the mean age at marriage diminished. During the period 1646–1750 about 60 percent of the men and 70 percent of the women who married in the seven Scanian parishes were aged 20–34. For the period 1811–1860 the corresponding figures exceeded 80 percent for men and 85 percent for women.

[132] The parishes are Ekeby, Frillestad, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge, Sireköpinge, and Stenestad. The data come from *The Scanian Demographic Database*.

Table 12: Age distribution of men and women marrying for the first time in seven Scanian parishes 1646–1860. (Percent.)

Age	1646–1750	1751–1810	1811–1860
Men			
14–19	3.3	2.7	0.6
20–24	15.9	14.8	17.0
25–29	27.6	31.2	44.0
30–34	18.8	23.9	19.9
35–39	10.9	12.4	9.9
40–45	7.1	6.5	4.1
45–w	16.3	8.7	4.5
Women			
14–19	9.3	7.3	7.2
20–24	27.8	30.7	36.8
25–29	26.4	33.1	33.6
30–34	19.0	15.9	15.3
35–39	6.0	9.1	3.8
40–44	6.0	1.6	1.6
45–w	5.6	2.4	1.7

Source: Family reconstitutions from parish records for Ekeby, Frillestad, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge, Sireköpinge and Stenestad. The Scanian Demographic Database.

If the picture of marriage age changes presented by family reconstitutions is correct, the Western European pattern with high marriage ages was established in Sweden in the seventeenth century. However, it is still possible that the tendency to declining marriage ages was a regional feature of Western Scania or Southern Sweden and not characteristic for Sweden as a whole. Therefore a more cautious interpretation is that the Western European Marriage Pattern was already dominant in the seventeenth century and that the high marriage age has prevailed since then.

A quite different picture is obtained if the average age at first marriage is indirectly calculated from the population distributed by sex, age and marital status. This approach, useful when data on age at marriage is lacking but data on proportions of married by certain ages is available, was used by Hajnal in the early 1950s.[133]

[133] Hajnal 1953.

Table 13: Singulate mean age at first marriage in Sweden 1751–1900.

	Men	Women
1751–1800	27.2	25.7
1801–1850	27.5	25.9
1851–1900	28.3	26.2

Source: Sundbärg, G., Fortsatta bidrag till en svensk befolkningsstatistik för åren 1750–1900. I–IV. *Statistisk tidskrift*, häfte 139. 1907.

Calculations of the "singulate mean age at (first) marriage" for the period 1751–1900 based on Sundbärg's reconstruction of the Swedish population by sex, age and marital status give a quite different trend from the one in the calculations based on family reconstitutions. As can be seen in table 13, both for men and women the trend is increasing age at first marriage for the period 1751–1900. One possible explanation to the opposite long-term trends in marriage age of the Scanian parishes referred to above to the national figures of the singulate mean age at first marriage is that there are regional patterns and development that deviate from the national average.

Calculation of regional ages at first marriage from the official statistics is possible only for the twentieth century. In the period 1901–1910 mean age at first marriage was quite high in all parts of Sweden, both in urban and rural areas. Thus, there is no reason to believe that there were parts of Sweden that were not characterised by the Western European Marriage Pattern. On the other hand, there were regional variations of about plus/minus five percent from the national average, and these regional deviations were the same for both men and women. With regional variations of this magnitude, one can not exclude the possibility that regional marriage ages sometimes developed in a different way from the trends in the singulate mean age at first marriage at the national level.[134]

In an article in 1996, Haines drew the attention to the occurrence of long cycles of nuptiality in northern America between 1800 and the present.[135] I myself have also found long cycles in the ages of first marriage

[134] *SOS Befolkningsrörelsen. Översikt för åren 1901–1910,* table 17–18.
[135] Haines 1996.

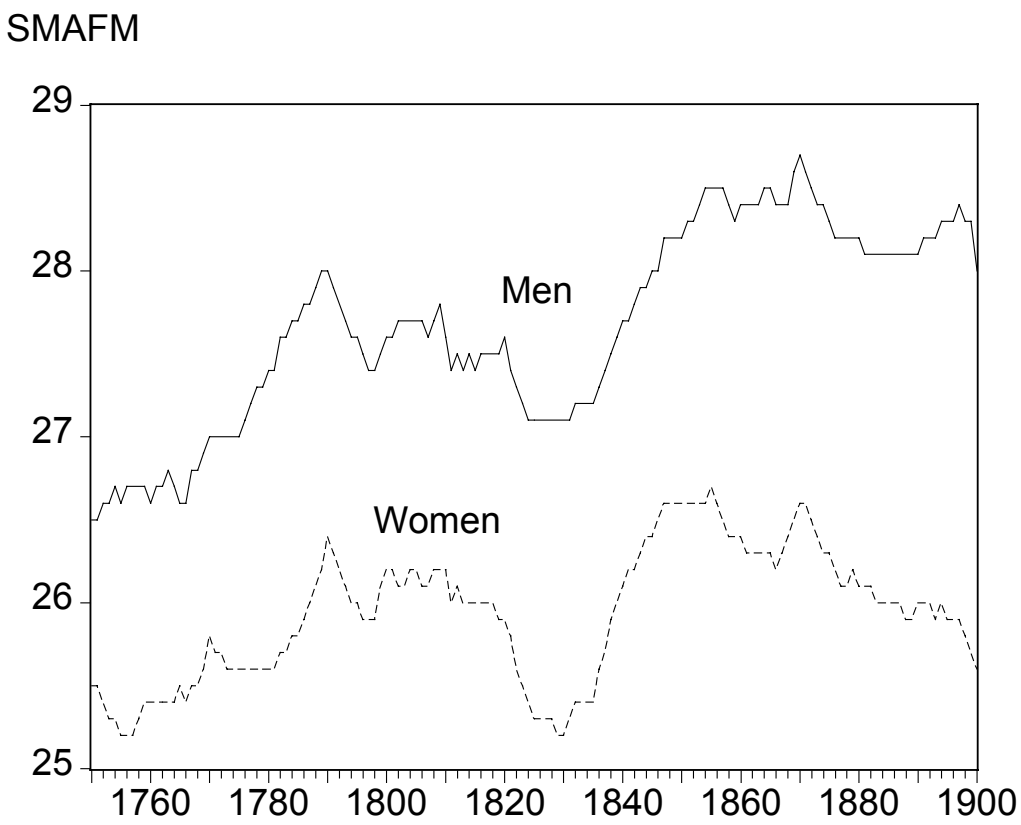

Figure 5: Singulate mean age at first marriage in Sweden 1751–1900.

Source: Sundbärg, G., Fortsatta bidrag till en svensk befolkningsstatistik för åren 1750–1900. I–IV. *Statistisk tidskrift*, häfte 139. 1907.

in Sweden between 1750 and present times.[136] Here we shall only deal with the period prior to the twentieth century.

From the calculations of the singulate mean age at first marriage for Sweden in the period 1751–1900, it is clear that the period can be divided into four sub-periods. (See figure 5.) There seem to be two sub-periods of considerable increase in the marriage age (1750s–1790s and 1830s–1870s) and two sub-periods of decrease or stagnation (1790s–1830s, 1870s–1890s).

How reliable then are these results? The pattern of the sub-period 1870s–1890s is approximately in accordance with what we know from the official statistics (see table 1). The increasing trend for the entire period 1750–1900 and the existence of four sub-periods are further confirmed when using alternative indirect methods to calculate the average age at first marriage from data on population by sex, age and marital status.

[136] Lundh 1997.

Figure 6: Mean age at first marriage in seven Scanian parishes in 1700/05–1890/94.

Source: Family reconstitutions in Ekeby, Frillestad, Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge, Sireköpinge and Stenestad parishes, The Scanian Demographic Database, Lund.

Even more, when calculating the yearly mean age at first marriage in the seven Scanian parishes, a cyclic pattern appears. (See figure 6.) However, the correspondence between the sexes is not quite complete. Men and women experienced the same development of the ages at marriage up till the 1840s. There were two sub-periods of decrease (1700s–1750s and 1800s–1840s) and one sub-period of increase/stagnation (1750s–1800s). From the 1840s, men's age at first marriage decreased while the women's increased.

The main demographic methods to calculate the average age at first marriage, i.e. from family reconstitutions and indirectly from the censuses, are applicable only to periods with parish records or censuses. In Sweden this means that they are useful from the seventeenth century and onwards. For the time prior to that, there are only scattered data on the age at marriage. The miracle collections of Stockholm indicate for instance a much lower age at marriage in the early fifteenth century, but

the number of observations are too few to form a base for any generalisations.[137]

In conclusion, it is clear that the Western European Marriage Pattern was predominant in Sweden from the seventeenth century and onwards. There might have been a transition from a traditional marriage pattern to the Western European Marriage Pattern during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but much more data must be presented to support this hypothesis. From the end of the seventeenth century the proportions of never marrying people increased in Sweden. The ages at first marriage at a national level seem to have experienced a corresponding increase 1750–1900, while there were regional deviations from this general pattern. It is also clear that there were long cycles of nuptiality both at the national level and in Scania.

10. Social Differences in the Ages at First Marriage

Family reconstitutions for different parts of Sweden show that there were considerable differences in the average age at first marriage between the social groups. However, the character of such differences varies in different studies.[138] A study of the ages of first marriage by social status in four of the Scanian parishes (Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge, Sireköpinge), shows that men were usually older than women at marriage, but the age difference was larger for peasants than for the semi-landless and landless. In the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century peasant men and women were older than marrying couples of non-peasant social status. (See figure 7 and 8.)

However, in the second half of the nineteenth century a substantial decrease in the mean age at first marriage of non-peasants occurred. For women this drop was two or three years and for men it was no less than four or five years. As can be seen in Figure 8, the mean age at first marriage of non-peasants was even below the average marriage ages of peasants in the late nineteenth century.

The decrease in the mean age at first marriage of the non-peasant group reflected the social transformation in the countryside. Population pressure and the commercialisation of agriculture gave rise to new employment and housing forms for married people, such as crofters, cottagers and *statare.* In this way, the access to marriage for landless people increased, and they could marry at younger ages without having to work as servants while waiting for a chance to marry.

[137] Myrdal & Bäärenhielm 1994, p. 19–20.
[138] Lundh 1993.

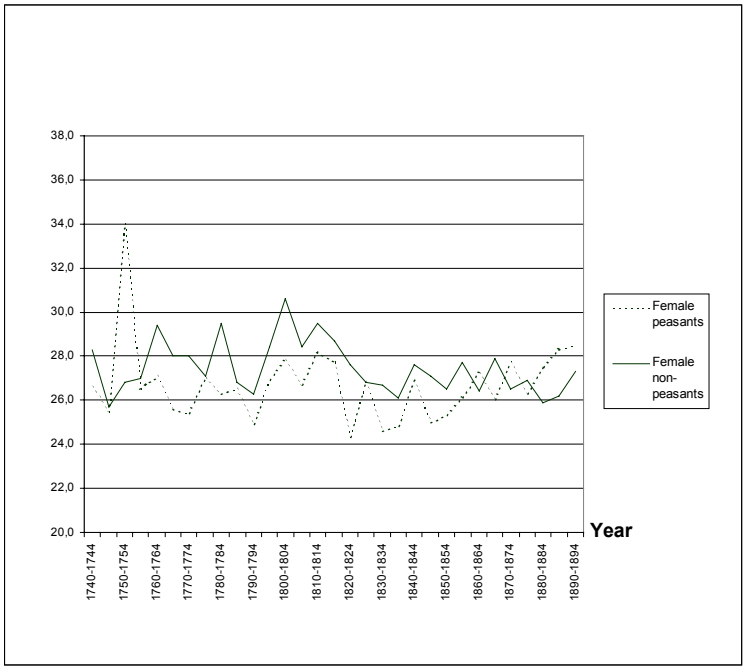

Figure 7: Mean age at first marriage by social group in four Scanian parishes in 1700/05–1890/94. Women.

Source: Family reconstitutions in Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge parishes, The Scanian Demographic Database, Lund.

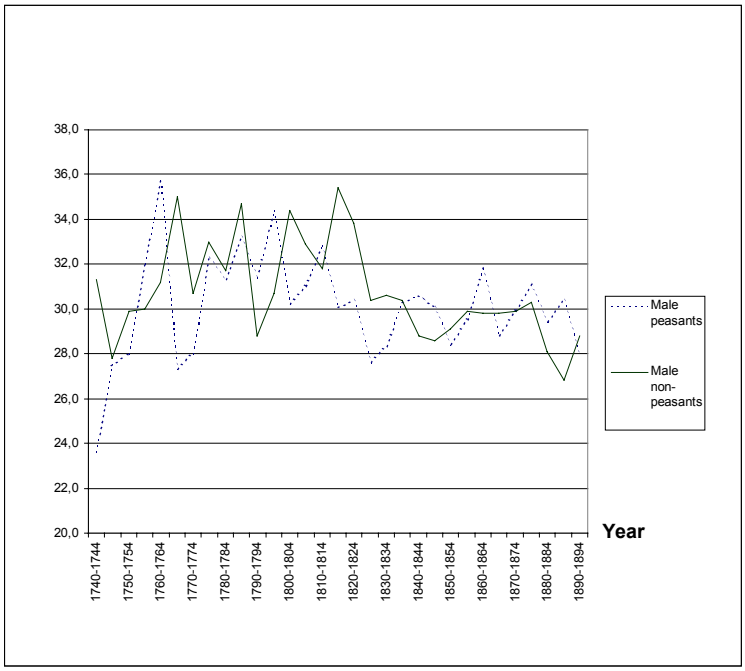

Figure 8: Mean age at first marriage by social group in four Scanian parishes in 1700/05–1890/94. Men.

Source: Family reconstitutions in Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge parishes, The Scanian Demographic Database, Lund.

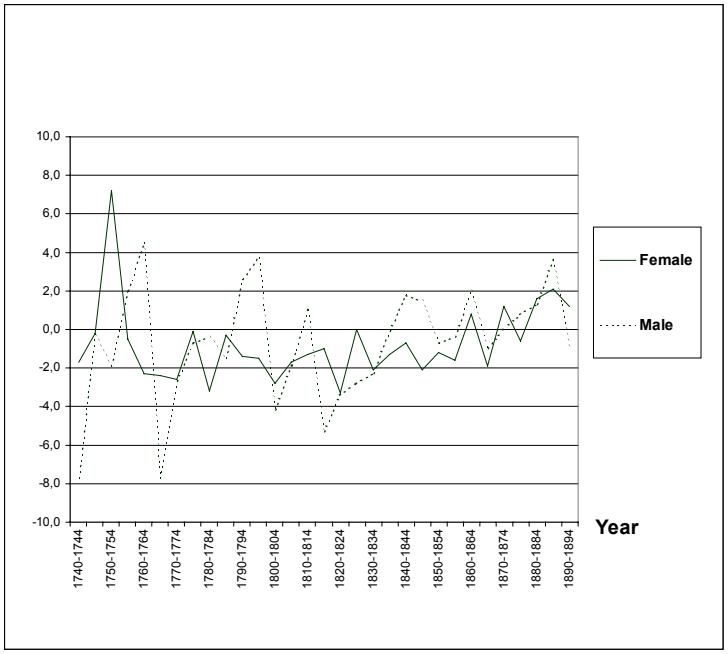

Figure 9: Age difference at first marriage between peasants and non-peasants in four Scanian parishes in 1700/05–1890/94.

Source: Family reconstitutions in Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge parishes, The Scanian Demographic Database, Lund.

Thus, the deviations in long-term trend in the mean age at first marriage between the four Scanian parishes and Sweden as a whole might be explained by the fact that the process of social diversification started earlier and was much more profound in Scania than in Sweden in general. In 1800, the proportion of peasants in the agricultural population was 71 percent for Sweden as a whole, while it was 56 percent in Malmoe County and 54 percent in the four Scanian parishes that form base for the calculations in Figures 7–9. In 1890, the nation-wide proportion of peasants in the agrarian population was 67 percent, while it was 53 percent in Malmoe County and no more than 38 percent in the four parishes.[139]

11. Marriages and Economic Change

In this section, reference is made to studies of the influence of economic change on marriages at the aggregate level. Olsson studied the influence on the number of marriages in 26–37 Scanian parishes in 1651–1855 of short-term variations in the number of deaths and in the rye prices. He found a positive effect of deaths with one or two year lag. In the two-

[139] Lundh 1999b.

year period following a rise in the number of deaths, the number of marriages increased by 37 percent of the number who had died. One interpretation of this is that in a society characterised by population pressure and scarce resources, deaths made new marriages possible.[140]

Olsson also found a negative influence on marriages of rye prices with a one-year lag. A rise in prices with one percent led to a drop in the number of marriages by 0.15 percent. As rye prices were used as a (reverse) proxy of real wages, the interpretation was that the timing of marriage to considerable extent was dependent on changes in the standard of living. Finally Olsson found a negative influence on the number of marriages of the number of marriages the previous year. His suggested explanation of this was that marriage was costly not only for the marrying couple but also for entire families. Many marriages in one year therefore might have reduced the possibilities of many marriages also the following year.[141]

Lundh studied the influence on the "singulate mean age at first marriage" in Sweden in 1750–1900 of demographic and economic factors like (logged) real wages of farm labourers, the proportion of people aged 20–29 as a percentage of the total population, the male-to-female ratio and the age specific mortality of men over 50 years. For both men and women he found a strong negative effect of real wages with a one-year lag on the average marriage ages and a positive effect of the proportion of people aged 20–29. The mortality of men over 50 year did not seem to influence the mean age at first marriage and the coefficients were not statistically significant. The male-to-female ratio had no significant influence on men's mean age at first marriage, but a negative effect on women's.[142]

The interpretation of the results was that the scarcity of resources in the nineteenth century contributed to a marriage pattern in which the male marriage ages were determined by real wages and demographic conditions while the marriage ages of women was also influenced by the marriage ages of men. It was the man who were going to be the head of household after the wedding and therefore the average male marriage ages were sensitive to the possibilities of young men to achieve land, job and dwellings. Real wage increases facilitated this and increased crowding made it more difficult. As far as women were concerned, they, too, were influenced by economic change and by the general crowding, but this influence might have been indirect which the possible influence of male singulate mean age at first marriage on female singulate mean

[140] Olsson 1998.
[141] Olsson 1998.
[142] Lundh 1998.

age at first marriage indicates. Squeezes in the marriage market and changes in the sex ratio might have had a more direct influence on women. One possible reason why one cannot find this pattern in the eighteenth century might be the structural male deficit.[143]

Lundh also argued that the influence of real wages on the average marriage ages must be put into its temporal context. In the entire period people corresponded to rising real wages by advancing their marriages, and vice versa. However, the interpretation of this influence is probably somewhat different for the former and later parts of the period.[144]

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, society was characterised by scarce resources that prevented young people who wanted to marry to actually do so. These economic limitations on marriage could be interpreted as a long-term Malthusian preventive check. A rise in the standard of living (i.e. the real wages) increased the possibilities of getting married and some people took the chance as it appeared.[145]

In the nineteenth century, the influence of the standard of living (expressed by real wages) on the marriage ages still remains. (Even in modern times, the standard of living is influencing the timing of marriage.) But in the nineteenth century and especially in the second part, the influence of real wages on the average marriage ages should not only be interpreted as the influence of the level of standard of living. Real wages also reflected the dynamic process of economic transformation including changes in technology and organisation. Therefore, the negative influence of real wages on marriage ages should also be interpreted as the influence of the structural change in economy and society's modernisation in general.[146]

12. Remarriages

In pre-industrial Sweden, the number of divorces were very few, but remarriage was quite common, especially for men. Every fifth or sixth man who married in the early nineteenth century was a widower who remarried. The official statistics of remarriage go back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the trend of a decline in the proportion of those remarrying is evident for both men and women. The proportion of men remarrying decreased from 17 percent in 1802/10 to 10 percent in 1881/90. The corresponding decrease for women was from 13 percent to

[143] Lundh 1998.
[144] Lundh 1998.
[145] Lundh 1998.
[146] Lundh 1998.

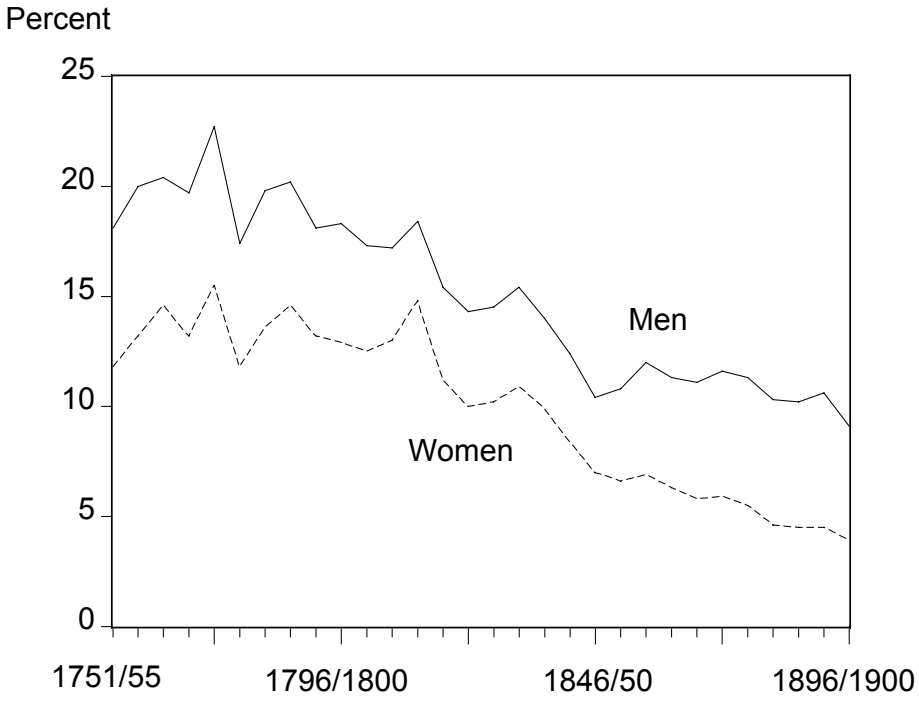

Figure 10. The percentage of remarriages among all marriages in Sweden 1751–1900.

Source: Sundbärg, G., Fortsatta bidrag till en svensk befolkningsstatistik för åren 1750–1900. V. *Statistisk tidskrift*, häfte 143. 1907, p. 211.

4 percent. Calculations of the number of remarriages in 1751–1800 made by Sundbärg suggest that the decline in the proportion of remarrying men started already in the eighteenth century, while the corresponding proportion of women seemed to be stable before the early nineteenth century. (See figure 8.)[147]

Since the number of divorces was so few, the reason for remarrying was nearly always the death of a spouse. High adult mortality has consequently been pointed out as one prerequisite for the large number of remarriages in past times.[148] Given this, the drop in the proportion of remarriages in the nineteenth century to a large extent can be explained by a corresponding decrease in adult mortality. The crude death rates for all age groups 25–59 years dropped from a rather high level in the eighteenth century, with a peak around 1800, and continued to fall throughout the nineteenth century. This must have meant a dramatic change in

[147] *Historisk statistik för Sverige. Del 1,* table 30 and 32; Sundbärg 1907b, p. 209–210.
[148] Åkerman 1981, p. 164.

Table 14. The crude marriage rate by civil status in Sweden 1861–1900.

	Men		Women	
	Bachelors	Widowers	Spinsters	Widows
1861/65	75.6	87.6	85.0	34.7
1866/70	64.8	71.8	72.4	26.6
1871/75	78.3	86.2	85.0	32.2
1876/80	72.3	82.3	80.9	30.8
1881/85	71.0	74.4	77.3	27.0
1886/90	67.8	72.4	74.9	26.1
1891/95	66.3	72.1	72.9	25.4
1896/1900	67.6	68.9	77.0	25.0

Note: Bachelors 20–50 years, spinsters 20–45 years, widowers 15–65 years, widows 15–55 years.

Source: Sundbärg, G., Fortsatta bidrag till en svensk befolkningsstatistik för åren 1750–1900. V. *Statistisk tidskrift*, häfte 143. 1907, p. 231–233.

the marriage market, since less widows/-ers acted to find someone to remarry.[149]

However, it is probable that the decrease in the proportion of remarriages also was the result of other changes than the decline in adult mortality. The crude marriage rate by civil status, which is possible to calculate only from the 1860s and onwards, indicates that the propensity to remarry declined in the last four decades of the nineteenth century. (See table 14.) This indicates that there were other processes than the fall in adult mortality going on that contributed to the decline in remarriages.

Another prerequisite was that remarriage was excepted by the church and by the secular authorities in Sweden. However, a period of mourning after the decease of the spouse was compulsory. According to the 1686 Church Law, the man had to wait for six months and the woman a year before remarrying. The longer mourning period for women was to avoid the risk of a woman remarrying and giving birth to a child by her late husband.[150]

[149] Lundh 1999c.
[150] Gaunt 1983, p. 185.

Table 15. Age difference at remarriage between the groom and the bride in four Scanian parishes 1740–1894.

Man's age compared to woman's age	Widower/Spinster	Bachelor/Widow	Widower/Widow
More than 21 years older	25.0	0.0	10.1
16–20 years older	13.0	0.8	11.6
11–15 years older	20.4	4.0	8.7
6–10 years older	15.7	14.5	26.1
0–5 years older	16.7	13.7	18.1
0–5 years younger	4.6	19.4	9.4
6–10 years younger	1.9	21.8	11.6
11–15 years younger	2.8	15.3	1.4
16–20 years younger	0.0	5.6	2.9
More than 21 years younger	0.0	4.8	0.0

Source: Family reconstitutions in Hög, Kävlinge, Halmstad and Sireköpinge parishes, The Scanian Demographic Database, Lund.

In the four Scanian parishes of Halmstad, Hög, Kävlinge and Sireköpinge, 2,686 weddings occurred in the period 1740–1894. In 82 percent of the weddings non of the parties had been married before, and in 2 percent both parties remarried. In 8 percent of the weddings a widow married a single man and in another 8 percent a widower married a single women.[151]

Remarriage normally took place shortly after the death of the spouse. From 1740 to 1894 about 80 percent of the remarriages in the four Scanian parishes took place within two calendar years after the death of the spouse. A mourning period of more than four years was represented by less than 10 percent of the cases.[152]

The average age at remarriage was 35 for women and 39 for men with very large deviations from the mean. The age at the second or higher marriage was ranging from 19 to 76. Sometimes the age gap between the spouses was very large.

Of course it was of great importance to the ages at marriage which one of the parties that remarried. When a widower remarried a spinster, he was usually older than the bride. As can be seen in table 15, only in 10 percent of such cases was the widower younger than the wife. In about 60 percent of the cases, the widower was more than ten years older than the bride. The reverse age pattern characterised the unions between widows and bachelors. In two out of three cases the widow was older than the groom, but the age difference was not as big as in marriages between widowers and spinsters. The age gap was nevertheless impressing. In almost 50 percent of the cases, the widow was more than six years older than the bridegroom. In those cases where a widow and a widower married each other, the man was usually older than the women but the age gap was not that big. In 65 percent of the cases, the age difference was less than ten years in either direction.

Concerning the social status of the families that were formed by marriages where at least one of the couple was remarrying, 43 percent were peasants and 57 percent were of non-peasant status. [153] This tells us that remarriage was a common institution that affected all social groups in the rural society.

Given prerequisites such as the high adult mortality and the socially accepted remarriage institution, the question still arises: Why did people remarry to such a great extent and so quickly after losing a partner? Apart from the purely emotional aspect, that is to seek comfort and find love when a life partner has passed away, one can point to economic cir-

[151] Lundh 1999c.
[152] Lundh 1999c.
[153] Lundh 1999c.

cumstances. Production within agriculture was based on the household with both men and women contributing. The death of either of the spouses meant a disaster to the surviving members of the household. To remarry was a way to secure the continued existence of the household. The farmer needed a wife to take care of the woman's work, family and cooking, while the woman needed a man to look after the man's work and be the family head. This also applied to other occupations such as fishermen and artisans.

But households of different social group probably were affected in a different way by the death of a spouse. The risk of extinction of the household was higher for poor and landless people than for the rich and landholding groups. Peasant widows or widowers had some alternatives to remarriage. They could retire closing a retirement contract or hiring a farmhand or a maid to proceed with the work duties of the deceased spouse. But these alternatives generally meant a lowering of the standard of living, since the retirement contracts were stingy and servants in general were less responsible and dedicated than farmer couples and also had less authority in managing the farm. To a woman married to a tenant farmer, a crofter or a cottar, the death of the head of the household could jeopardize the housing contract. At the risk of being forced to move out and to have to rely on poor relief, the widow could choose remarriage as a way to get a new man that could close a new work and housing contract.

Among the land-holding farmers, remarriage was a threat to the children of the previous marriage, in particular when the new spouse was very young, which meant that the children's possibilities of taking over the farm were pushed further forward in time. Even when it came to other legal claims, the children were put at a disadvantage and were forced to leave home earlier. There are many examples of how the society and younger people tried to prevent the remarriage of the older generation, especially when it came to widows. The retirement contract could, for example, include a clause withdrawing the allowance paid to a widow if she remarried. The widow's legal status was improved in the nineteenth century, the intention being to make remarriage less urgent. Widows could be the heads of households and run farms, engage in other financial activities and participate in other decision-making organisations exactly like men. In these and other ways, there were efforts to make the status of widow an acceptable phase of a woman's life.[154]

Since there was a small number of widows and widowers, and they quickly remarried, there were not many of them in the local marriage market at the same time. Consequently the probability of widows and

[154] Gaunt 1983, p. 178–181.

widowers remarrying among themselves was relatively small, and many married a considerably younger person who had not been married previously. For younger people marriage to a widow or widower was a possible path to a career in a world full of hard competition and limited resources required for access to marriage. Marrying someone who had already built a household, had access to housing and perhaps land or other financial source, was easier than having to accumulate the resources needed for these things on one's own. A farmhand could, for example, gradually take over the duties of the deceased farmer, and after a while marry the widow and gain access to the farm. If the age difference was large enough, he could, after the death of the ageing widow, remarry a younger woman, for example a maid or housekeeper, who could then follow the same career pattern.[155] Marriage to a widow or widower was probably the most important form of social mobility upwards in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[156]

A special sort of career through marriage to a widow was common for priests. The institution of preservation of the priest's widow was intended to protect the country people from being over-burdened when a priest died, leaving a widow, several children and a large property. The institution meant that a young, unmarried and newly qualified priest was given preference over older and more qualified married colleagues when the position, left vacant by the death of the incumbent priest, was to be filled. This was done provided he married his predecessor's widow and accepted responsibility for the children of her previous marriage. A variation of this was that the young unmarried priest, at the same time as taking up the position of the deceased priest, instead married the predecessor's daughter and allowed the widow to remain in the household for the rest of her life. The institution of preservation was spread throughout the whole country in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A study carried out in Växjö diocese in the south of Sweden shows that between a fourth and a third of vicar appointments were carried out through the institution of preservation. The modernisation of society, breakthrough of liberalism and breaking-up of the strict social hierarchy eroded this custom in the nineteenth century. The development of new promotion systems for priests and the start of widows' pensions decreased the financial hardships that were the reasons behind the institution of preservation, and the custom disappeared during the latter half of the nineteenth century.[157]

[155] Lundh 1999c.
[156] Lundh 1999b.
[157] Gaunt 1983, p. 182–184; Hernroth 1985, p. 84, 98–105.

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