

# VIRTUS

26 | 2019



Marie Steinrud

## The politics of presence

### Place making among the Swedish iron producers in the county of Västmanland c. 1750-1850

75

The small parish of Ramnäs, situated about 150 km from Stockholm, in the county of Västmanland, was transformed into a virtual battlefield in the decades around the turn of the nineteenth century. The ingredients of this battle consisted of rivalry, emulation, self-assertion and perhaps a pinch of jaundice. And of course money, funds and assets. No expense was spared, and the battle raged vehemently in both the profane and the sacred world. The antagonists were the two most prominent owners of the ironworks in the parish, Johan Magnus Schenström (1747-1828) and his next-door neighbour Per Reinhold Tersmeden (1751-1842). From a distance, the battle seemed to be about who was building the largest house or donated the most precious altar to the congregation. And in a way, that was exactly what was going on. However, when taking a closer look, the battle between the antagonists consisted of much more and the different layers of meanings can help us to understand how elite groups such as the nobility were formed and reformed during this period, thereby contributing to the debate on material culture and elites.

In this article, I will explore how the iron producers of Västmanland asserted their presence on the local scene in the small parish of Ramnäs, which harboured several ironworks at this time.<sup>1</sup> I will start with the two iron producers mentioned above, serving as a case study. Both individuals used the title 'brukspatron', which refers to the

---

1 The parish harboured at least six ironworks, two of them situated in the small village of Ramnäs. The others were situated in the villages of Surahammar, Lisjö, Seglingsberg and Virsbo.



Site for the two iron works in Ramnäs. To the left the Tersmeden mansion and to the right the mansion Schenström built on a hill, looking out over the site (aquarelle, Pehr Nordquist, 1792; collection Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm)

owner and manager of large-scale ironworks, a distinct elite group of a special kind of iron producers. Such individuals were also called ‘ironmasters’ and mostly lived on estates close to their ironworks, attending to the business and life on site. The iron producers are often regarded and treated in the relevant literature as a group that had similar goals and ambitions, emphasizing their roles as entrepreneurs and business owners. However, I will show that the group was more complex, which was partly related to the noble versus bourgeois status of the ironmasters.<sup>2</sup>

There are many ways to display power and presence, and I focus on two aspects. Firstly, I will study the iron producer’s use of the only public room that all social ranks of society had access to: the church. Secondly, their eagerness to build or re-

2 T. Söderberg, *Bergsmän och brukspatroner i svenskt samhällsliv* (Stockholm, 1948); S. Carlsson, *Ståndssamhälle och ståndspersoner 1700-1865: Studier rörande det svenska ståndssamhällets upplösning* (Lund, 1949) 245-247, 306-316.

build mansions close to their ironworks will be examined. These two areas represent a desire for influence in the profane as well as the sacred dimensions of parish life. My source material is varied and consists of letters, probate inventories, diaries, maps, and church and financial records.<sup>3</sup>

### The importance of iron

The county of Västmanland is a part of Bergslagen, an area of Sweden with a substantial amount of iron production since the Early Middle Ages. Iron was first made in primitive furnaces, or bloomeries, made of stone and equipped with some kind of bellows. In these furnaces bog-iron ore was melted and fused. These primitive ways of production were improved with the introduction of blast furnaces. This new technology yielded a good profit, but also needed capital expenditure. This made it more difficult for farmers who had previously owned and operated systems for producing pig iron alongside their farming activities to invest in new furnaces.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, farmers were soon driven out of the iron production market and the ironmasters took over, mostly during the eighteenth century. The ironmasters had the financial strength to bring the many small furnaces together under one owner.<sup>5</sup>

77

The eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century were the glory days of the Swedish iron industry. In the mid-eighteenth century, Sweden exported around 50,000 tonnes of iron – more than one third of the world's pig iron export. Swedish iron was considered to be of high quality. During the eighteenth century, iron made up 75 percent of all Swedish exports. At the same time, about 80 percent of iron imported into England came from Sweden.<sup>6</sup>

The success of Swedish iron depended partly on the supply of raw materials such as iron-stone, forests and water. During the sixteenth century the Swedish crown encouraged noblemen and wealthy townsmen to produce iron on a larger scale, mainly by providing them with different kinds of tax reliefs and the sole right to refine pig iron to bar iron. All this made it lucrative and desirable to own and operate ironworks. Merchants based in Stockholm owned many of the smaller ironworks in the

3 M. Steinrud, 'Per Reinhold Tersmedens Ramnäs: Bruksherrgårdens scen för statuskonsumtion och manifestation i början av 1800-talet', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 98 (2013); M. Steinrud, 'Books, wine and fine China. Consumption patterns of a Brukspatron in early nineteenth-century Sweden', in: J. Ilmakunnas and J. Stobart, ed., *A taste for luxury in early modern Europe. Display, acquisitions and boundaries* (London, 2017) 181.

4 B. Berglund, 'Det svenska bergsbrukets framväxt', in: G. Magnusson, ed., *Järnet och Sveriges medeltida modernisering* (Stockholm, 2015); G. Rydén, 'Skill and technical change in the Swedish iron industry, 1750-1860', *Technology and Culture*, 39 (1998) 383-407.

5 H. Beskow, *Bruksherrgårdar i Gästrikland* (Stockholm, 1954) 15-18.

6 G. Selling, 'Bruken som kulturmiljö', *Blad för bergshanteringens vänner*, 33 (1959) 107; C. Evans and G. Rydén, 'From Gammelbo Bruk to Calabar. Swedish iron in an expanding Atlantic economy', in: M. Naum and J. Nordin, ed., *Scandinavian colonialism and the rise of modernity. Small time agents in a global arena* (New York, 2013) 53-67.

county of Västmanland during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many of these wealthy merchants had foreign origins, with good international contacts and credit.<sup>7</sup> Before the eighteenth century owners usually did not live close to their ironworks; rather they owned works, blast furnaces and mills – and shares in them – as part of larger holdings. During the eighteenth century this changed and ironmasters owned and operated the large-scale ironworks themselves.<sup>8</sup> During the late eighteenth century, many of the ironmasters moved to Bergslagen and lived more or less permanently in mansions close to their ironworks. They kept smaller and simpler houses in cities, mainly Stockholm, to ensure connections to the centres of power and to the amenities of the country's capital city. Their country mansions were often situated in remote places, and relied on good roads, or at least a decent winter, that made it possible to travel and transport heavy goods, such as the vital charcoal and iron. Even after the opening of the Strömsholms canal, the ironworks depended heavily on good winter weather that made the use of the roads and lakes possible.<sup>9</sup> Proximity to the ironworks was important, and the owners' desire to connect themselves to their ironworks increased in the nineteenth century, at the same pace as the desire to establish a common ironmaster's identity.<sup>10</sup>

### A new old elite

Although the ironmasters of Sweden in general and in Bergslagen in particular are often treated as a uniform group, closer study shows that they were rather heterogeneous. Men and women as well as members from the nobility and gentry can be found within the group during this period.<sup>11</sup> Even if they came from different backgrounds and represented different social estates, they shared interests, illustrated by the foundation of Jernkontoret, the Swedish steel producers' association in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The ironmasters formed a special kind of culture around the ironworks and their mansions. Through marriage and inheritance they came to own shares in each other's businesses and the children took part in the practical work

7 K. Nyberg, "Jag existerar endast genom att äga kredit". Tillit, kreditvärdighet och finansiella nätverk i 1700-talets och det tidiga 1800-talets Stockholm', in: M. Berglund, ed., *Sakta vi gå genom stan. Stads-historiska studier tillägnade Lars Nilsson* (Stockholm, 2005) 196-222; cf. K. Nyberg, ed., *Kopparkungen. Handelshuset Björkman i Stockholm 1782-1824* (Stockholm, 2007).

8 K-G Hildebrand, *Fagerstabrukens historia*, part 1, Sexton- och sjuttonhundredatalen (Uppsala, 1957) 165-70.

9 M. Steinrud, 'Hemmet som scen. Brukspatron Per Reinhold Tersmeden och tingens teater', *Bergslags-historia*, 25 (2013).

10 Steinrud, 'Books, wine and fine China', 179.

11 The Swedish nobility (Swedish: adel) was historically a privileged class, whereas the gentry (bourgeois) consisted of a class of wealthy and influential citizens without privileges that came with membership of a noble family.

12 B. Boëthius and Å. Kromnow, *Jernkontorets historia. Grundläggningstiden* (Stockholm, 1947) 192-220; Hildebrand, *Fagerstabrukens historia*, 165-170.

at the ironworks from an early age.<sup>13</sup> Sons of ironmasters were often sent abroad, to Great Britain, France, Germany and the Netherlands to study iron production, making business connections and building networks they profited from later on in life.<sup>14</sup> According to previous research, the ironmasters were considered a threat to the existing class society.<sup>15</sup> The group had a distinct elite status; their shared identity was manifested in the creation of a special suit, a uniform worn by the ironmaster.<sup>16</sup>

Johan Magnus Schenström and Per Reinhold Tersmeden lived in a time when the Swedish nobility was under pressure, much like in other Northern European countries. Their privileged position, with exclusive access to a wide range of political, financial, social as well as ecclesiastical rights, was threatened. In 1866, after the reformation of the *Riksdag* of the Estates (*ståndsriksdagen*), the formal political privileges of the nobility were abolished.<sup>17</sup>

As argued by Mark Girouard, Jonathan Dewald, Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone and Angela Rundquist, the nobility during this period was forced to transform as a new society emerged.<sup>18</sup> They needed to adapt to the demands of a society built on merits rather than birth rights. Göran Norrby points out that the Swedish nobility was well able to adapt to the new social reality. Together with the emerging non-aristocratic elite they created a new identity as upper class gentry. Still, the line between those with the blue blood and those without became more rather than less evident, because of the focus on the symbolic value of the nobility.<sup>19</sup> In her research, Anne Sumner shows that while differences between noble and non-aristocratic groups seem small, a closer look reveals subtle, yet symbolically important differences, such as the incorporation of the noble family's history into the domestic architecture. Illustrating a long line of ownership, connections to the land and ruling positions were commonplace.<sup>20</sup> Johanna Ilmakunnas, in her study of the Swedish noble family von Fersen, points to the fact that the nobility was driven by values such

13 Hildebrand, *Fagerstabrukens historia*, 165-170. A similar way of raising the children into a special culture is noticed by Göran Ulväng among the owners of the mansions in Uppland. Göran Ulväng, *Herrgårdarnas historia. Arbete, liv och bebyggelse på uppländska herrgårdar* (Uppsala, 2008) 143.

14 M. Steinrud, 'Överstens efterföljare – friherrarna', in: M. Steinrud, F. Tersmeden, J. Tersmeden and S.-S. Tersmeden, ed., *Åtten Tersmeden genom sex århundraden* (Stockholm, 2014).

15 Carlsson, *Ståndssamhälle och ståndspersoner 1700-1865*, 245-247, 306-316.

16 C. Sahlin, *Brukspatronsuniformen och bergsmansdräkten* (Stockholm, 1928).

17 G. Norrby, *Adel i förvandling. Adliga strategier och identiteter i 1800-talets borgerliga samhälle* (Uppsala, 2005), 12-19; J. Dewald, *The European nobility 1400-1800* (Cambridge, 1996), 65-67, 69-76, 108-110; T. Nilsson, *Elitens svängrum. Första kammaren, staten och moderniseringen 1867-1886* (Stockholm, 1994).

18 M. Girouard, *Life in the English country house. A social and architectural history* (New Haven, 1980); Dewald, *The European nobility 1400-1800*; L. Stone and J.C. Fawtier Stone, *An open elite? England, 1540-1880* (Oxford, 1984); A. Rundquist, *Blått blod och liljevita händer. En etnologisk studie av aristokratiska kvinnor 1850-1900* (Stockholm, 1989).

19 Norrby, *Adel i förvandling*, 78-80, 301-305; Rundquist, *Blått blod och liljevita händer*, 30-35.

20 A. Sumner, *Borgerliga ambitioner och adliga ideal. Slott och byggherrar i Sverige kring sekelskiftet 1900* (Stockholm, 2004) 19, 331-333.



The colonel and ironmaster Per Reinhold Tersmeden (1752-1841) wearing his ironmasters uniform. The chemical symbol for iron on his collar and the Royal Order of the Sword he is wearing were both important and distinct symbols of his identity as a nobleman, a military man and a *brukspatron* (lithograph after a painting by Per Krafft, 1823)

as honour, reputation, favour, loyalty, faithfulness, generosity and descent in their consumption patterns.<sup>21</sup> Without any doubt, many of these values were crucial when the ironmasters planned and built their mansions, but many of them also expressed a will to dissociate themselves from what they considered to be a wasteful nobility, spending money they did not have and living beyond their means, juggling credits and debts. Being debt free was equal to independence for these men and women, a condition worth striving for. Differences in taste and consumption patterns within the group of ironmasters were thus noticeable.<sup>22</sup>

Most of the ironmasters were members of the non-aristocratic gentry, only the larger ironworks were owned by noblemen.<sup>23</sup> Around the year 1800, noblemen owned about 30 percent of the ironworks in the county of Västmanland.<sup>24</sup> On a national level the nobility was clearly of great importance to the ironmasters' social status, but in the local arena this was less evident. Moreover, many of the ironmasters were ennobled on the basis of their achievements in the manufacturing of iron.<sup>25</sup> Since the

21 J. Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv. Familjen von Fersens livsstil på 1770-talet* (Helsingfors, 2012) 25.

22 Steinrud, 'Books, wine and fine China', 188-189.

23 Steinrud, 'Per Reinhold Tersmedens Ramnäs', 188-189.

24 Söderberg, *Bergsmän och brukspatroner i svenskt samhällsliv, 194-197*; Carlsson, *Ståndssamhälle och ståndspersoner 1700-1865*, 53-58.

25 Cf. Hildebrand, *Fagerstabrukens historia*, 167-168.

group of ironmasters was so diverse, possible attempts to build a common identity, and ways in which they remained separate, are worth studying.

Elite consumption and rational choices for upholding social order has long interested researchers. It was Thorstein Veblen who first coined the expression ‘conspicuous consumption’, a form of ostentatious (‘luxury’) consumption aiming to secure and illustrate hierarchies in society. This form of consumption does not aim to fulfil basic human needs; rather it is a way to create and maintain cultural meaning. Veblen asserted that ‘conspicuous consumption’ was meant to maintain social relations, to show one’s position in society and to emphasize group identity.<sup>26</sup> Jan de Vries and Maxine Berg distinguish between *old* and *new* luxury. In general, old luxury is connected with the nobility, while new luxury is linked with the up-and-coming individuals who had earned their fortune rather than inherited it. Berg points out that the different groups consumed luxury in different ways. New luxury was all about commerce, utility, taste and comfort while the language of old luxury evolved around wealth, status and power.<sup>27</sup> Following the two ironmasters and their families I have chosen to study, a pattern can be observed. What seems to be a new, up-and-coming elite is really a group composed of members of an old elite, even if they were not always from the aristocracy, equipped with well-developed networks with financial strength. Still, the question of whether one was noble or not was a recurring one.

### A friend or a foe?

At the start of the nineteenth century, the wealthy and powerful nobleman and colonel Per Reinhold Tersmeden built a mansion close to his ironworks, which was one of the two largest ironworks in the parish. Tersmeden’s ironworks was called the *east*, the other the *west* works.<sup>28</sup> Tersmeden played an active role in society, both at a local and a national level. He was also a prominent member of the emerging group of Swedish ironmasters. His main interest was his business, which expanded over the years. Tersmeden started his career as an army man, reaching the rank of colonel before turning to the iron industry. He never married and had no children. Although regularly engaging in political life in Stockholm, he preferred to stay at his country estate.<sup>29</sup> He inherited the ironworks from his parents and his family constituted a long line of iron producers, owning and operating works around Sweden.

Tersmeden’s antagonist was Johan Magnus Schenström. Schenström also came from a long line of ironworks’ owners and grew up in the nearby town of Västerås,

26 T. Veblen, *The theory of the leisure class. An economic study in the evolution of institutions* (New York, 1899).

27 M. Berg, *Luxury and pleasure in eighteenth-century England* (Oxford, 2005), 21-45; J. de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution. Consumer behaviour and the household economy, 1650 to the present* (Cambridge, 2008) 44-50, 70.

28 Steinrud, ‘Per Reinhold Tersmedens Ramnäs’.

29 Selling, ‘Bruken som kulturmiljö’.

in a family of merchants. He was engaged in the family business from an early age, but was also involved in the town council. Receiving citizenship at 21, Schenström was appointed mayor of Västerås at 29.<sup>30</sup> He was the nephew of the previous owner of the west works, and moved to the parish and took over the family estate in 1777. Schenström was active in the parish for over 50 years, was married twice and had ten children.<sup>31</sup>

The ironworks of Tersmeden and Schenström were almost similar in size, with the same forging rights.<sup>32</sup> In terms of their social lives, they however differed considerably. From the cradle to the grave, Schenström moved in distinctly bourgeois circles. He married women from the same social position as himself and out of his ten surviving children, only two married into the lower nobility. The eight sons all held typically bourgeois occupations such as tradesmen and lawyers. People he surrounded himself with, both in formal and informal relationships, were mostly distinctively bourgeois.<sup>33</sup> Schenström was wealthy when he passed away, but his fortune was similar to that of his peers.<sup>34</sup> Tersmeden, on the other hand, surrounded himself with noble peers. His close friends were all noble ironmasters running estates close to the parish of Ramnäs and his siblings mostly married members of the lower nobility. Tersmeden's older brother was made a baron and his son was his uncle's designated heir. When Tersmeden passed away, he was extremely wealthy.<sup>35</sup>

In his letters, Tersmeden rarely mentions his neighbours, except for those occasions when he plans the increasingly expensive donations to the church or home improvements.<sup>36</sup> He never seemed to socialize, but the letters reveal that other fami-

82

30 Hülphers genealogier, vol. 3, 154-155, Västerås stadsbibliotek (Västerås city library); K. A. Kson Leijonhufvud, *Ny svensk släktbok* (Stockholm, 1906), 134.

31 His first wife was Anna Margareta Steinholz (1752-1799) and the second was Kristina Gran (1770-1831), in her third marriage. C.M. Carlsson, 'Ståndssamhällets fall speglad i folkräkningsblanketter', in: A. Sandén & E. Elgån, ed., *Kunskapens tider: Historiska perspektiv på kunskapssamhället* (Stockholm, 2016) 96-109.

32 The Swedish Board of Mines (*Bergskollegium*), a government agency active in the years 1637-1857, with the commission to guide and control the mining industry and metal processing in Sweden. By granting forging rights the iron production was controlled. Ramnäs had in the beginning of the nineteenth century permission to produce just over 300 tonnes iron, while the largest ironworks of Sweden, such as Gimo, had 430 tonnes, Österby just under 630 and Leufsta almost 1200. Ramnäs ironworks were not the largest in Sweden, but still a force to be reckoned with. E. Lindberg, 'Förteckning över svenska bruksägare 1695-1844', *Historiska institutionen*, Uppsala universitet, 2009.

33 Västerås Domkyrkoförsamling, Ala:4-5a, C:4-6; Ramnäs församling, Al:5-8, C: 1-2; Snevringe häradsrätt, Fl:3, Uppsala landsarkiv (Uppsala Regional Archive). See also Hülphers genealogier, vol. 3, 154-155, Västerås stadsbibliotek.

34 See for example probate inventories for Anders Barchæus d.1792 and Gabriel Timm d. 1793 (Gamla Norbergs bergslags häradsrätt Fl:3), Anders Timm d. 1819 (Fl: 11) and Isak Törngren d. 1816 (Snevringe häradsrätt Fl:11) all at Uppsala landsarkiv (Uppsala Regional Archive). All owners of ironworks in the close area of Ramnäs during the period in focus.

35 Probate inventory of Per Reinhold Tersmeden, Svea hovrätts arkiv, Elxb:266, Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archives).

36 Letters to F. Tersmeden, U. and K. von Troil and M. Wählin, Tersmedenska släktarkivet, Riksarkivet and in

ly members did. Tersmeden's orphaned nieces and nephews regularly came to visit, and they socialized with the Schenström children.<sup>37</sup> Church records show that none of the seven children born at the west ironworks had neighbours as their godparent. Instead, Schenström appointed other ironmasters from nearby ironworks or, most commonly, his own relatives.<sup>38</sup> When Schenström passed away his probate inventory shows that Tersmeden had bought a couple of his debts from the former's creditors.<sup>39</sup> Whether this was an act of goodness or a way to start the process of incorporating the west ironworks into his own, is hard to say. After the death of Schenström, his widow sold the ironworks to Tersmeden, who bought it using a straw buyer to hide the fact that he was the real buyer, which indicates that the relationship between the two families was complicated.<sup>40</sup>

### A tug war of a small parish church

Religion was an integral part of society and the church was one of the few public rooms available to all residents and a natural and obvious meeting place. The *kyrkogångsplikt*, literally 'church going duty', was related to the public's obligation to attend the weekly High Mass and to attend the parish catechetical meetings. From the pulpit in the church news was spread and decrees from the king were announced to the population, which made the church a centre of information and state control over the population, especially in rural areas.<sup>41</sup> The church was also a social space, where people met and caught up on the latest news and gossip. Here, members from various social layers of society mixed and the church room itself became a reflection of the parishes' social space.<sup>42</sup>

The geographical, social and political centrality of the church in the village made it interesting for old as well as new elites to display their status and presence by ostentatiously attending sermons and by donating objects to the church.<sup>43</sup> Just like

---

Tersmeden-Eketräska samlingen, Uppsala universitetsbibliotek (Uppsala University Library). See also the letter to K. von Troil, n. d. prob. early 1810, Tersmedenska släktarkivet, Riksarkivet. The Schenström and Tersmeden families each have extensive family archives. However, the fact that the collection of letters written by Tersmeden is far greater than that of his neighbour, causes a research bias.

37 A.E. Jansson, *En bok om Ramnäs bruk* (Stockholm, 1951) 150-154.

38 Ramnäs församling, C:2, Uppsala landsarkiv.

39 Snevringe häradsrätt, FII:13, Uppsala landsarkiv.

40 Jansson, *En bok om Ramnäs bruk*, 113-114.

41 B. Gustafsson, *Kyrkoliv och samhällsklass i Sverige omkring 1880. En kyrkohistorisk-sociologisk undersökning* (Stockholm, 1950) 36-39. O. Bexell, 'När vardagslivet profanerade gudstjänsten. Kyrkomötesdebatten om kungörelseläsningen i högmässan', *Årsbok för svenskt gudstjänstliv*, 84 (2009) 26-30.

42 M. Steinrud, *Den dolda offentligheten. Kvinnlighetens sfärer i 1800-talet högreståndskultur* (Stockholm, 2008) 204-208; P. Ullgren, *Lantadel. Adliga godsägare i Östergötland och Skåne vid 1600-talets slut* (Lund, 2004) 13. A. Sandén, 'Kyrkan, kvinnorna och hierarkiernas dynamik', *Historisk tidskrift*, 126 (2006) 648-651.

43 Steinrud, 'Makt och status i Ramnäs kyrka'; G. Andersson, 'Att pränta in sitt namn. Arbogaeliten i kyrkorummet 1650-1750', *Årsbok, Hembygdsföreningen Arboga minne* (2003) 10-14.

members of local elites everywhere in Europe, both Schenström and Tersmeden tried to acquire one of the seats in the pews as close to the altar or the pulpit as possible. These prominent seats clarified the connections between elite families and sacral power. Since the eyes of the members of the congregation were expected to rest on the priest in the pulpit or at the altar, the people seated close to them were also visible.<sup>44</sup> The importance of surrounding oneself with other members of the elite cannot be underestimated.<sup>45</sup>

In the small parish church in Ramnäs, the noble family sat closest to the sacral power, namely in front of the altar and so close to the pulpit that the pews were more or less placed under it.<sup>46</sup> The church became a battle scene for the two elite families in the parish during the late eighteenth century. It all started with Tersmeden donating money and objects to the church, which began the transformation from a fairly ordinary parish church with a painted ceiling to a frugally decorated church with a Gustavian interior, the Swedish equivalent of neoclassicism. Neither epitaphs nor paintings decorated the whitewashed walls.<sup>47</sup> Earlier signs of elite families were more or less removed from the interior, leaving the church like a blank canvas and making the objects that remained ever more important.

This renovation spurred Schenström into action. He wanted to match the lavish gift of Tersmeden, and an altar was soon donated to the church. The Schenström family had previously donated a red velvet chasuble with gold ornaments, a costly gift adorned with the donor's name, embroidered in gold.<sup>48</sup> Every time the priest used the chasuble, the parish was reminded of the goodwill and kindness, but above all of the power of the donor. Not everyone had the means to donate such items.<sup>49</sup> The contest between the two families continued with Tersmeden donating a number of smaller items, such as textiles and objects for the communion, which led to the donation of the altar cloth and decorations from Schenström. The Tersmeden household responded by providing the congregation with a new pulpit, decorated with the Agnus Dei – the Lamb of God – which was placed close to the Tersmeden family pews.

44 J. Peters, 'Der Platz in der Kirsche. Über soziales Rangdenken im Spätfeudalismus', *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde und Kulturgeschichte* (1985) 80-81; A. Bugge Amundsen, "'Det talende rom". Kirkehus og adelskultur på 1600- og 1700-tallet', in: L. Roede, M. Bing & E. Johnsen, ed., *Slik vil vi bo. Hjem og bolig gjennom 500 år* (Oslo, 1998) 18-19; J. Samuelson, 'Om adelns symboliska representation i kyrkorna', in: C. Kjellson, S. Olofsson & P. Sörlin, ed., *Blickar bakåt. Elva uppsatser om ett förgånget nu* (Härnösand, 2004) 85, 97; Andersson, 'Att pränta in sitt namn', 14-16; K. Wirilander, *Herrskapsfolk. Ståndspersoner i Finland 1721-1870* (Stockholm, 1982) 76-78. cf. C. P. Graves, 'Social space in the English medieval parish church', *Economy and Society*, 18 (1989).

45 Wirilander, *Herrskapsfolk*, 76.

46 Ramnäs församling, N:1, church inventory 1696-1877, Uppsala landsarkiv.

47 Ibidem.

48 Ibidem.

49 Steinrud, 'Makt och status i Ramnäs kyrka'; J. Samuelson, 'Om adelns symboliska representation i kyrkorna',

This socio-cultural battle between the two families ended with Tersmeden donating an organ made by the famous organ maker Pehr Zacharias Strand (1797-1844) and money for a stand, where the organ was placed. In a letter to his nephew he recalled the event when the organ was inaugurated. The priest thanked the donor, without mentioning his name, which was not necessary since his identity was already known.<sup>50</sup> Schenström, on the other hand, was more articulate about his gifts by decorating objects with his name, as in the case of the red chasuble. The role of a donor to the church was also exclusive since only a small part of the congregation could muster up the financial resources to donate items of this calibre. Every time a donated object was used, the donor and his, in this case, existence and elite status was brought to the fore for the congregation.<sup>51</sup>

### Building a mansion

Moving more or less permanently from larger cities, such as Stockholm or even Gothenburg, set new demands on the housing situation. Not many of the ironmasters estates were equipped with a mansion during the eighteenth century. On the basis of twenty-two ironmasters' houses from the early eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century, it is evident that the vast majority were built during the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the ironworks' golden age.<sup>52</sup> Gudrun Andersson shows in her study of the elite in the Swedish town of Arboga that they often 'built' themselves into society through their houses.<sup>53</sup> This metaphor can also be used to describe the building frenzy of the Swedish ironmasters in this part of Sweden. Spending considerable amounts of money on new houses, parks and gardens can also be seen as an investment in the company, the family and the social fabric of society.<sup>54</sup> In letters ironmasters express their eagerness to create a house for themselves and their families. The new mansions were often built close to or on the sites where older houses had been situated. Various older houses were renovated in order to fit the demands of the new owners.

The vast majority of the mansions were built or rebuilt during the latter part of the eighteenth century, but the site of the ironworks was an ever-changing environment, always adapting to the needs of the ironworks. The desire to place the new houses close to or on the site of the old house can be understood as a way of connecting the new owners to the history of the place and to show that, even if the ironmas-

50 Letter from P.R. Tersmeden to W.F. Tersmeden, 2/12 1833, Tersmeden-Eketräska samlingen, Uppsala universitetets bibliotek.

51 Samuelson, 'Om adelns symboliska representation i kyrkorna', 85, 97-98; R. Dürr, 'Private Ohrenbeichte im öffentlichen Kirchenraum', in: S. Rau and G. Schwerhoff, ed, *Zwischen Gotteshaus und Taverne. Öffentliche Räume in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Cologne-Weimar-Vienna, 2004) 383-411.

52 Steinrud, 'Per Reinhold Tersmedens Ramnäs'.

53 G. Andersson, *Stadens dignitärer. Den lokala elitens status- och maktmanifestation i Arboga 1650-1770* (Stockholm, 2009) 112; J. Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv*, 296-298.

54 Steinrud, 'Per Reinhold Tersmedens Ramnäs'.



View over Lisjö ironmasters mansion in the parish of Ramnäs, 1773 (oil painting, *anonymus*; collection *Jernkontoret, Stockholm*)

ters were new to the place and parish, they belonged to a long line of elite families living in that area.<sup>55</sup>

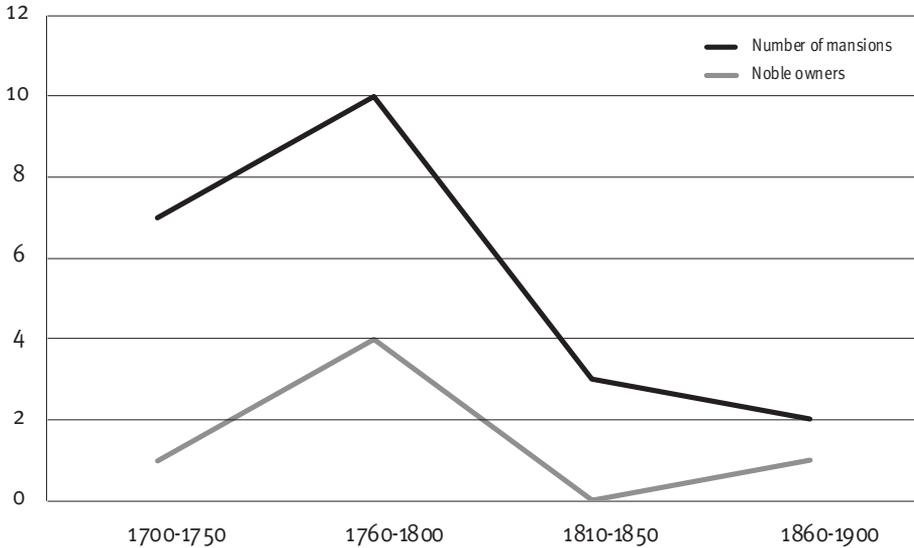
The table shows that noble owners were responsible for approximately one third of the twenty-two mansions that were built during this period, which concurs with previous research about the amount of noble owners in this area. The study also shows that newly constructed houses were generally built on two occasions: when a new owner entered the local scene intending to permanently live on site, or when a new generation took over an ironworks. Many mansions were built during this relatively short period; when it was decided to restore rather than build, ironmasters spent considerable sums on restoring and upgrading.

These are the general circumstances surrounding the building of ironmasters mansions in this period.<sup>56</sup> But how did ironmasters decide how to build what? The area

55 G. Sellings, *Svenska herrgårdshem under 1700-talet. Arkitektur och inredning 1700-1780* (Stockholm, 1937) 164-166, 334; G. Andersson, 'Makt och prakt. Rumsliga arrangemang kring Arbogas politiska elit', *Årsbok. Hembygdsföreningen Arboga minne* (2004), 37.

56 G. Ulväng, 'Herrgårdsbyggandet i Mälardalen under 1700- och 1800-talet: när, var och av vem?', *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift*, 60 (2010) 40-43.

NUMBER OF MANSIONS BUILT IN THE COUNTY OF VÄSTMANLAND AND THE NUMBER OF NOBLE OWNERS, 1700-1900



87

where the twenty-two mansions were situated is comparatively small and the distances between the grand houses are short. Furniture, household items and textiles showed their identity, status and ambitions.<sup>57</sup> In the preserved source material, mainly consisting of letters, a fairly uniform picture emerges. Most commonly, other iron producers' houses nearby were used as models when planning a new house.

Schenström built a mansion during the 1760s, consisting of four wings, facing the canal. His closest neighbour was Tersmeden, who at that time owned a mansion that probably had been built around 1700. The mansions were situated not more than a stone's throw from each other. The Schenström family provides an example of one of the few iron producers who distanced themselves from the other iron producers when planning and building their mansion. In a letter to his nephew and heir, Schenström explains the situation, pointing to the fact that, even though there existed many models he could follow, he wanted something completely different. He could not settle for a house similar to the others being under construction at that time. He wanted to 'rise above' his neighbours, to be able to 'view the landscape'.<sup>58</sup> The fact that his nearest neighbour's mansion was situated on a slope towards the

<sup>57</sup> Steinrud, 'Per Reinhold Tersmedens Ramnäs'.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from J. Schenström to J. M. Schenström, n.d. [before 1762], Västerås stadsarkiv (Västerås City Archives).

Strömsholms canal may have played a part in his decision to place his mansion on a hill and to equip it with more floors than any of the neighbouring mansions. He could now, literally, look down on Tersmeden and the east ironworks. Evidently, his desire to compete with his neighbours guided his thoughts on the design of the manor. Vebben calls this ‘propensity for emulation’, and in this case it was expressed in financial competition and ostentatious consumption.

Per Reinhold Tersmeden owned two mansions in the parish of Ramnäs, about six kilometres apart. One was situated close to the site of the ironworks and the other in more rural settings, close to a small forest lake. Soon after his mother’s death, he started to rebuild the old mansion on the site of the ironworks, and early in 1800 he was ready to move in.<sup>59</sup> His main influence in this endeavour was one of his neighbours in the parish of Svanå, the Posse family.<sup>60</sup> Posse spent most of his time as an ironmaster at Svanå and both father and son developed a friendship with Tersmeden and they spent long hours hunting in the forests of Bergslagen and discussing different ways of improving the iron industry.<sup>61</sup> They both had a background in the army and were both noble. When Tersmeden started his building project, he modelled his house – both the exterior and the interior – after buildings at Svanå and never mentions other ironmasters or neighbours. Throughout his life, he repeatedly returned to Svanå and the Posse family for inspiration.<sup>62</sup>

The buildings often carried inscriptions on the façades, reminding the audience of the owner and in this way they consolidated their presence and their position as a member of the elite. Both houses on opposite sides of the canal had inscriptions, those of Schenström consisting of two sentences, one in Latin and the other in Swedish, both referring to the glory of God. For those who were not trained in foreign languages, the sentence in Latin connected the commissioner to education and knowledge, traditional elite qualities. On the other side of the canal, Tersmeden added an inscription in golden letters, over the main entrance, visible for anyone passing by. The inscription, ‘Grundlagdt af P. R. Tersmeden’ (‘founded by P. R. Tersmeden’), also laid claim to a distinguished position or an elite status.<sup>63</sup> Even when not being there in person, the inscription consolidated Tersmeden’s position and presence.

The ironmasters’ mansions had to suit the needs and demands of the ironmasters and their families, but it was also an environment filled with symbolism and as such it was in need of an audience. In line with the work of Anna Maria Åström, the man-

59 Steinrud, ‘Per Reinhold Tersmedens Ramnäs’.

60 Letter from P.R. Tersmeden to K. von Troil, n.d. (March) 1823, Tersmeden-Eketräska samlingen, Uppsala universitetsbibliotek.

61 Letter from P.R. Tersmeden to H.A. Tersmeden, midsummer 1832, Tersmedenska släktarkivet, Riksarkivet; letter to W.F. Tersmeden, n.d. (August) 1828, Tersmedenska släktarkivet, Riksarkivet.

62 Steinrud, ‘Books, wine and fine China’.

63 Jansson, *En bok om Ramnäs bruk*, 147-152.



*GRUNDLAGDT AF P.R. TERSMEDEN 1801* ('Founded by P.R. Tersmeden in 1801') in gold letters above the entrance to the Tersmeden mansion. The inscription refers not only to the mansion but to the surrounding site as well (*photo by the author*)

sions and their environment can be viewed as symbols.<sup>64</sup> Studying the ironmasters eagerness to build, a picture emerges of everyday life of the people living in the houses and how they shaped and re-shaped their existence. The ironmasters' mansions, with gardens and parks (at this time preferably in an English style), formed an important part of their elite identity.<sup>65</sup> The grand houses were an excellent way to display and illuminate social order and hierarchies.<sup>66</sup>

64 A.-M. Åström, "Sockenboarne" *Herrgårdskultur i Savolax 1790-1850*, SLS 585 (Helsingfors, 1993) 205; N. A. Bringéus, 'Människan och föremålen', in: A. Arvidsson et al., ed., *Människor och föremål. Etnologer om materiell kultur* (Stockholm, 1990) 18.

65 B. Lönnqvist, ed., *Finländskt herrgårdsliv. En etnologisk studie över Karsby gård i Tenala, ca 1800-1970*, SLS 480 (Helsingfors 1978); M. Venborg Pedersen, *Duke. Manifestations of aristocracy in the duchy of Augustenborg 1700-1850* (Köpenhamn, 1999). Cf. Åström, 'Sockenboarne', 25-33; Stone and J.C. Fawtier Stone, *An open elite?*, 343-348; Ulväng, *Herrgårdarnas historia*, 160, 186-196.

66 Selling, *Svenska herrgårdshem*, 164-166, 334; G. Andersson, 'Makt och prakt.' 37.



The great salon at the Tersmeden mansion, probably late nineteenth century (*unknown photographer; collection Jernkontoret, Stockholm*)

Social life was practiced within the setting of the mansions, which formed a meeting place, for local peers as well as members of the local gentry, such as the parish priest and the local doctor. When other elite groups entered the scene, it became important to visualize one's social position in society. During the 1840s, the daughter of the nephew of Tersmeden celebrated her wedding on the estate. The festivities, to which also Schenström was invited, lasted for almost a week. The main dance was held in the great salon at the Tersmeden mansion. A young relative described in his diary how this dance was organized: a rope was drawn across the salon dividing it into two halves, one for the nobility, the other for the rest of the guests. What the relative thought about the arrangement is not known, but he ends his description with many exclamation marks.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Steinrud, *Den dolda offentligheten*, 76-78; E. af Edholm, *Svunna dagar. Ur förste hovmarskalken Erik af Edholms dagböcker. Tidsbilder från 1800-talet, part I: Upplevelser under Karl XIV Johans och Oskar I:s tid* (Stockholm, 1944) 91.

### Towards a new elite?

The constant competition between Schenström and Tersmeden ended abruptly when Schenström died in 1828 and Tersmeden bought the Schenström part of the iron-works at Ramnäs. In a letter to his nephew he states, with some satisfaction, that he could now look out over the parish and was master in all directions.<sup>68</sup> At first glance, there are hardly any differences between the non-noble and noble iron producers. Both groups acted as an elite, took part in building projects and controlled the parish church. The emerging group of ironmasters was a distinct elite with both cultural and financial power. To what extent did they form a new elite group? Common goals and characteristics can be discovered, such as the will to put the business and its needs first, which in some ways can be said to compete with the ideals of being a nobleman, as Johanna Ilmakunnas has pointed out. Yet, this case study has also shown that there were in fact distinct differences between a bourgeois iron producer and a noble one. Whereas Tersmeden turned to his noble peers for inspiration when planning his mansion, Schenström aspired to 'new luxury', which is in line with the studies of Berg and De Vries. When donating money and objects to the church, Tersmeden did not need his name to be made public, using his family's history as an asset, connecting them to the parish and to the iron industry to legitimize their presence as an elite. Schenström publicly showcased his status, which after all he had not inherited but instead needed to claim and emphasize.

91

---

68 Letter from P.R. Tersmeden to W.F. Tersmeden, u.d. [probably July] 1834, Tersmeden-Eketräska samlingen, Uppsala universitetsbibliotek.

**Marie Steinrud**

## The politics of presence

Place making among the Swedish iron producers in the county of Västmanland  
c. 1750-1850

92

Studies have shown that the nobility and the up and coming bourgeois elite acted somewhat differently when manifesting power and status. This article presents a case study research of owners of ironworks in the parish of Ramnäs, situated about 150 kilometers north west of Stockholm, to examine the way in which they manifested their power and status. The study will add to the debate on elites and material culture, but also to the question how elite groups were formed and reshaped during this period. The article will present two case studies on the interference of a nobleman and a member of the bourgeois elite with the renovation of the parish church and the (re)building of their own houses.

---

**Marie Steinrud** works as a cultural historian at Stockholm University and Nordiska museet. Her publications include a wide range of journal articles and book chapters on micro history and cultural history, manifestations of power, elite status and identities, elite women's lives and experiences in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Sweden, as well as ideals of and ideas on masculinity within nineteenth-century upper-class culture.

Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender studies, Stockholm University, SE-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden – Marie.Steinrud@etnologi.su.se

Houses divided? Noble familial and class connections during the Age of Revolution and Napoleon

9

*Mary K. Robinson*

'Le mariage m'a toujours fait peur.' Ongehuwde adellijke vrouwen in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw

27

*Evelyn Ligtenberg*

Steekpenning of welkomstgeschenk? De strijd voor eerherstel van Gerrit Burchard en Adolf Hendrik van Rechteren

55

*Michel Hoenderboom*

The politics of presence. Place making among the Swedish iron producers in the county of Västmanland ca. 1750-1850

75

*Marie Steinrud*

De Belgische orangistische adel, deel II. De rol van de adel in het Belgisch orangisme (1830-1850)

93

*Els Witte*

