

Abstract

Peter Olausson, *Gillbergaknaparna. En studie i den svenske storböndens habitus ca 1750–1850*. Avhandlingar från Historiska institutionen i Göteborg 51 (Göteborg 2007), 372 pages. Written in Swedish with an English Summary (*Gillbergaknaparna. A Study in the Habitus of the Swedish Big Farmers ca 1750–1850*). ISBN 91 88614 67 0; ISSN 1100-6781.

This is a study about the *big farmers* (storbönderna) in Sweden. They play their part in every historical investigation that deals with the older agrarian culture – but who were they? The purpose of this dissertation is to identify this social group as an entity during a period of about one hundred years, from 1750 to 1850. Often the big farmers and the local political elite of farmers were the same individuals and households. The matching between the two subgroups has though not been absolute. The prominent local farmer politician hasn't necessarily been part of the wealthiest group among the farmers of the local society – although this combination between political and economical success has been rather common.

The dissertation is based on a case study, with the parish of Gillberga, in the western part of the region of Värmland, in focus. The study consists of a study of local politics during four different periods and of a cohort study of the most successful farmer households in the area during these periods. Demography, social networks, economy, local political activity and cultural profile are some of the studied areas. The results have been analysed by using Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *capital* and *habitus* and of the concept of *reach* (räckhåll), introduced by the human geographer Torsten Hägerstrand. The collective biography of the social group is presented in the dissertation.

The main results can be summarised in seven parts.

1. The local elite of farmers has been a local phenomenon. The success in the economic and/or locally political fields has mainly been based on the social capital of the households and their mutual networks.
2. The patriarchal and hierarchal system for societal relations has gained the rise of "*farmer chiefs*" (herrebönder, bondehövdingar) and cleared their path for influence over the collective of local people. The structure has minimised the social tensions inside the framework of the local society.
3. The big farmer has been a masculine defined concept. In the local political field, male gender has been a necessary postulation for influence and powerful positions, though widows as landowners formally had the right to participate.
4. To maintain the position of the household, the big farmers had to be active enterprisers and entrepreneurs. The constance of their social positions demanded a continual adaptation to changing economical and political postulations.
5. The big farmers constructed marriage liaisons and supported each others prestige through symbolic actions as sponsorship and wardship. In that way, they created an exclusivity, that estranged them not least from the growing group of unpropertied people.
6. The big farmers represented mainly themselves. They could mobilise local country people in particular local political questions, but argued seldom for a mutual political agenda. First with the liberal break-through around 1840, the big farmers became politically more active and reached higher political levels.
7. The big farmers thought, acted and behaved rationally from the given conditions of their time and their cultural environment. They were future-sighted without any great visions, they were focused on profit and results, for the benefit of themselves and for the benefit of the local society.

The big farmers in Gillberga and in Sweden were in both positive and negative ways important actors in the shaping of what was their future and what has come to be our contemporary, everyday reality. As a group, they contributed considerably to the later industrialisation process in the Swedish society. This has parallels in other countries all over Western Europe.

Key-words: big farmers, social differentiation, local politics, habitus, Gillberga, Värmland.